

Creative Spaces Network: our guiding principles

This document expresses the shared commitment of the Creative Spaces Network, facilitated by Arts Access Aotearoa. The Network believes the arts are for everyone: a right, not a privilege. Our work is guided by equity, inclusion and a belief in the power of the arts to support wellbeing, connection and social change.

This is a living document, shaped by the values, experiences and practices of the creative spaces and people who make up this Network.

1. Our mission

Arts Access Aotearoa supports a national network of inclusive, accessible community-based creative spaces across Aotearoa. These are places where people facing barriers to participation can create art and engage in creative activities such as visual arts, theatre, dance, music, circus, film and creative writing.

The Network's mission is to uphold the right of every person to access, participate in and lead creative experiences, particularly people who have been excluded due to disability, mental distress, age, cultural isolation or other systemic barriers.

2. Our values

Care and dignity

We welcome all people with warmth and respect, nurturing environments where everyone's mana is upheld.

Equity in action

We actively work to remove systemic barriers so that everyone has fair and meaningful opportunities to participate.

Artistic freedom

We uphold the right of every person to explore and express their creativity freely, without censorship or imposed standards.

United in purpose

We are stronger together, connected through shared values, mutual support and a commitment to collective impact.

Trusting and reciprocal relationships

We prioritise relationships rooted in trust, mutual support and the time it takes to grow together.

3. Our commitments

These commitments anchor all our values: Care and dignity, Equity in action, Artistic freedom, United in purpose, and Trusting and reciprocal relationships.

This is a practice led by te Tiriti o Waitangi

To uphold te Tiriti o Waitangi

The Creative Spaces Network honours te Tiriti o Waitangi as foundational to our work. We uphold mātauranga and tikanga Māori and commit to partnership, protection and participation.

When we make the arts truly accessible, we don't just invite more people in: we reshape the space so that everyone belongs.

To centre equity, not charity

We're not "giving access". We're dismantling systems that exclude. Real access means rethinking power and building spaces that welcome everyone. This is "Equity in action".

To listen to lived experience

We follow the leadership of people with lived experience, including people who are disabled, Deaf, neurodivergent, Māori, Pacific, LGBTQIA+, youth, migrant and from other marginalised communities. True inclusion is co-designed.

This reflects "Artistic freedom" and "Trusting and reciprocal relationships".

To remove barriers deliberately

We actively identify and remove financial, sensory, cultural, emotional and systemic barriers. When someone isn't participating, we ask: what needs to change?

This puts "Equity in action" into practice.

To protect the right to creative expression

Creative freedom belongs to everybody” mind, identity and voice. We create spaces free from judgement, harm and erasure.

This reflects “Care and dignity”, and “Artistic freedom”.

To create conditions for flourishing

Inclusion is only the beginning. We foster spaces where people can connect, grow, lead and feel joy. Places where art becomes a home, a platform, a mirror and a megaphone.

This reflects “Care and dignity” and “Trusting and reciprocal relationships”.

To strengthen collective power

We are a Network of creative spaces across Aotearoa. Together, we amplify voices, share knowledge, and protect each other’s right to thrive creatively.

This is “United in purpose”.

To use creativity as a force for change

The arts have the power to shift narratives and challenge injustice. Through creative expression, we imagine and build new possibilities.

This reflects “Artistic freedom” and “United in purpose”.

(Concepts for consideration)

Manaaki - hospitality

Kotahitanga - unity

Tautoko - support

Ki te powhiri me te whakaae ki nga tangata katoa –to welcome and accept everyone