

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. We recognise the transformative power of the arts to shift narratives, grow confidence, spark leadership, foster healing, and create new futures.

This is a living document, shaped by the values, experiences and practices of the creative spaces and people who make up this Network. The Network welcomes Creative Spaces with diverse governance, operational and business models, recognising that communities organise in many ways to sustain creative access and leadership.

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. Creative Spaces play an essential role in supporting mental wellbeing, social connection, resilience and community belonging.

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

Manakitanga

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

Ōritetanga

We uphold the mana of all by removing systemic barriers and ensuring everyone has fair, meaningful opportunities to participate.

Mana Auaha

We uphold each person's mana and creative freedom, practising this with care and respect for the tapu and wellbeing of others so creativity can flourish safely for all.

Kotahitanga

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

Tautoko

We stand alongside others, advocating for them, uplifting their mana, and contributing to collective wellbeing.

Whanaungatanga

We nurture relationships built on trust, belonging, and shared experience, recognising the time and care it takes to grow strong communities.

3. Our commitments

These commitments anchor all our values: Manakitanga, Equity, Mana Auaha, Kotahitanga, Tautoko and Whanaungatanga.

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. We honour different organisational structures and approaches, ensuring that membership and support materials are inclusive of varied governance and business models.

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

To center 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 "Ōritetanga".

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 “**Mana Auaha**” and “**Whanaungatanga**”.

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 “**Ōritetanga**” 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 “**Manakitanga**” and “**Mana Auaha**”.

To create conditions for flourishing

Creative participation supports mental health, builds confidence, and strengthens social connection. 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 “**Manakitanga**” and “**Whanaungatanga**”.

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 “**Kotahitanga**” and “**Tautoko**”.

To use creativity as a force for change

The arts don’t just reflect our communities; they transform them. Through creative practice we challenge inequity, deepen connection, build wellbeing, and imagine new possibilities.