



Nordic Culture Fund *Strategy* *2026–2030*

**NORDISK
KULTURFOND**



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Culture shapes the future of the Nordics

Art and culture are fundamental to our ability to understand, develop and imagine the world. They open up spaces for experimentation and dialogue, and connect us with each other and the world around us. The power of art and culture lies in their ability to create meaning, think beyond the established, and find a language for what has not yet been articulated.

We are driven by the conviction that cultural cooperation is key to co-creating solutions to shared challenges and developing societies that are open, inquisitive and democratic. Our work is based on decades of commitment to a free and independent cultural life in the Nordic Region. Today, we carry this commitment forward with a renewed recognition of the role of art and culture in a rapidly changing world.

With a proactive approach and global outlook, we act as a catalyst for collaborations that dare to take new paths and explore interfaces. We believe in the power of community, and insist on launching initiatives that go far beyond the familiar. With connections that transcend geographical boundaries and disciplines, we create spaces for shared learning and development.

A free and diverse artistic and cultural landscape is a fundamental prerequisite for our common future: A future rooted in coexistence throughout the entire extent of the Nordic cultural landscape – from indigenous traditions in the circumpolar North to practices and expressions introduced by new voices.

Nordic identity is something that is constantly being negotiated, and it is in art and culture that this conversation takes place – because it is through art and culture that we will shape the future of the Nordic Region.

Our mandate

The Nordic Culture Fund was founded in 1966 as part of the formalisation of the Nordic cooperation. The Fund's activities are regulated by a special intergovernmental agreement – the *Agreement on a Nordic Cultural Fund*, which has been ratified by all the Nordic countries. Under this agreement, the fundamental task of the Fund is to promote Nordic cultural cooperation to its full extent, both within and outside the Nordic Region.

The background to the establishment of the Fund may be traced to the years following the end of World War II. At that time, it was clear that the path to peaceful and stable societies lay in investment in cultural cooperation across national borders. Against this background, the Fund assumed a key role in the official Nordic cooperation and has since held a central position as one of the official collaborative bodies within the Nordic cooperation, alongside the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The Fund is an independent body and may be considered a public actor with independent funds, whose practice does not derive from directly politically-controlled decisions. The Fund is managed by an independent board and is the first joint Nordic cooperation body to have supranational decision-making authority. The intention has always been to guarantee the greatest possible freedom of action and flexibility in the Fund's operations, as well as to ensure that the Fund's decisions would not be subject to review by national interests.

By virtue of its independent status, the Fund enjoys unique freedom of action in the field of cultural policy. This enables the Fund to act proactively, launch its own initiatives and engage in new policy areas across national borders.

The Fund's grant is financed from the budget of the Nordic Council of Ministers, as approved by the Nordic Council. Under its agreement, the Fund may also receive other financing for its purposes.

Our aim

The strategy builds on the Nordic Culture Fund's historical mandate and illuminates the way forward via three main directions. It is designed to be a dynamic tool that provides clear direction while securing the ability to navigate in changing contexts – with a clear understanding of our role in broader developments, and in close interaction with other actors.

The strategy builds upon on a central recognition: *In the current political, cultural and societal landscape, it is no longer sufficient simply to respond to change. We must be proactive and actively shape sustainable structures and collaborations that will ensure a vibrant, dynamic and resilient artistic and cultural life going forward. At the same time, it is necessary to update and renew our understanding of the role of culture, both as a fundamental infrastructure and as a transformative force in society. By developing and investing in the cultural ecosystem, we are at the same time preparing society for the future: Art, culture and society are inextricably linked.*

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This insight is shared globally. Ever more actors are now being brought together to secure a clearer integration of culture into the global agenda for sustainable development after 2030, on the basis of the role of culture as a global public good. Culture, essential both for society, the economy and the sustainability of the planet, is also a sector that requires long-term financial frameworks and international cooperation and coordination. These ambitions are further supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers' Vision 2030, which sets out ambitious goals for promoting art and culture as drivers of social and environmental sustainability.

In this context, the Nordic countries have an opportunity to take the lead and place culture at the centre of our joint efforts to shape a sustainable and inclusive future. It is through the creative and unifying power of art and culture that the Nordic Region will remain a region in constant flux: relevant, exploratory and visionary in a changing world.

Our role

Today, the Nordic Culture Fund acts as a funding body, network builder, strategic partner and catalyst for new initiatives. During the strategy period, we will continue to further develop our overall portfolio to fulfil the commitment inherent in the Fund's mandate and position in the official Nordic cooperation.

We regard the world of art and culture as an ecosystem – a dynamic network of relationships between practitioners, projects, technological platforms, institutions, funding providers and

the wider community. Our work takes its point of departure in an understanding of the Fund's special role in this interaction. The Nordic Culture Fund must be an innovative and agile actor that explores interfaces and fosters development through experiments and collaborations. We see ourselves as a complementary partner in spaces and areas where there is a need for initiatives that others do not take.

The official Nordic cooperation was established to rebuild trust, common values and cohesion after conflict. Sixty years after the establishment of the Fund, these fundamental ideas are increasingly relevant. Here, the Nordic Culture Fund bears a historic responsibility to ensure that art, culture and cross-border cooperation can continue to act as a driving force for critical reflection, dialogue and our collective imagination.

OUR MISSION

Culture shapes the future of the Nordics

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Culture as the driving force
for an innovative and
forward-looking Nordic Region

Cooperating for a dynamic
cultural ecosystem

Knowledge and insight
across borders

INSTRUMENTS

Subsidies

Networks and meeting places

Knowledge and cultural
policy development

Partnerships

Communication

Culture as the driving force
for an innovative and
forward-looking Nordic Region

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Our directions

In the following, we present the strategic directions that will form the framework for the Fund's work during the strategy period.

The work is based on an extensive process of analysis, in which we have collated the work of recent years and strengthened our understanding of the trends and dynamics that are shaping the art and cultural landscape – both in the Nordic Region and globally.

This work has been qualified through an active dialogue with a wide range of actors and key persons in our Nordic and international network.

Culture as the driving force for an innovative and forward-looking Nordic Region

What we see

In a rapidly changing global landscape, art and culture are vital to discovering new ways of understanding and developing our societies. There is a growing need for approaches that recognise artists and cultural actors as strategic resources in societal development and as key voices in international cooperation. This also calls for a renewed focus on safeguarding the freedom of art and culture and their capacity to create communities and spaces where the future can be shaped and negotiated. In this context, Nordic cultural cooperation can take the lead and serve as a dynamic platform for new perspectives and partnerships—driven by dialogue, trust, and mutual understanding across borders.

Our efforts

We will promote the cross-cutting role of culture in society, based on the field's independent value and agency. Our work is based on the premise that the Nordic region is continuously shaped and renewed through exchange and dialogue with the wider world.

We will contribute to nuanced conversations about culture and society and strengthen engagement in frameworks promoting artistic freedom of expression and cultural rights

We engage in global agendas and act as a link between international organisations, decision levels and the operating field of arts and culture

We will create new possibilities for Nordic cultural cooperation and pave the way for the cultural diplomacy of the future in a dynamic international context

We will explore the potential of cross-cutting collaborative formats that experiment with the transformative power of art

← Artist: Bryndís Björnsdóttir. From “Enter Woodland Spirits – rediscovering the ecological heritage in the Nordic-Baltic region” (Project support 2024). Photographer: Taavi Piibemann

Cooperating to build a dynamic cultural ecosystem

What we see

There is a need to rethink existing funding models and structures in order to unlock the full potential of culture in society. This calls for a broader range of actors and funding bodies to adopt a holistic perspective, grounded in a deeper understanding of the relationships and dynamics that shape the arts and cultural sector. Across several Nordic countries, there is a shared recognition that financial frameworks for arts and culture will need to evolve in the years ahead, with greater emphasis on cooperation and coordination. In this context, Nordic and international collaboration is becoming increasingly important—not only in strengthening artistic networks and fostering new organisation forms, but also in developing shared approaches to structural change.

Our efforts

We will develop the role of the Fund as a catalyst for new connections and collaborations. Our efforts will be based on a holistic approach, with a renewed balance between agility and long-term focus.

We will further develop existing programmes and create new formats so that we can continue to grasp new trends and inspire others

We will facilitate new connections at Nordic level and help more actors to join forces on common solutions

We will initiate and engage in concrete pilot projects as a strategic tool for policy development and structural change

By virtue of our position at the intersection of private/philanthropic foundations and public support structures, we will explore broader forms of cooperation and funding models within the Nordic cultural cooperation

Knowledge and insight across borders

What we see

There is much to indicate that future cultural policies will need to look increasingly beyond national and sectoral boundaries. This will require a greater capacity to navigate a complex landscape of actors and to act effectively in changing contexts. At the same time, social, technological, and environmental transformations are challenging many of the assumptions and concepts that have long formed the inherent grammar of cultural policy in the Nordic countries. Going forward, knowledge-based idea development and active exchange across borders will be essential to ensuring dynamic and responsive cultural policy development.

Our efforts

During the strategy period, we will further develop the role of the Fund as a player for strengthened analysis, insight and knowledge in both Nordic and international contexts.

We will promote a systemic understanding of challenges and opportunities by linking actors across the bounds of national, sectoral and institutional divides

We will include analysis of trends and tendencies in the work and systematise methods for knowledge-driven development of new initiatives

We will explore the potential of co-creative approaches to knowledge and ways to contribute to the knowledge production of others

We will explore opportunities to monitor or support relevant research which can contribute to new knowledge across national borders

Our portfolio/ instruments

The strategy will be operationalised through our portfolio of initiatives and instruments. These continue and build upon the Fund's development in recent years and reflect a holistic and proactive approach to the development of art and cultural life in the Nordic Region.

The instruments are mutually interdependent and will form a foundation for further concretisation of the distribution and use of the Fund's resources during the strategy period.

Subsidies

Networks and meeting places

Knowledge and cultural
policy development

Partnerships

Communication

Subsidies/Support

The provision of financial support has been one of the Fund's core tasks since its inception. The Fund operates on the basis of a differentiated funding framework that includes both our broad programmes (currently Opstart and Project Support) as well as specific forms of support linked to the Fund's thematic initiatives, developmental efforts and partnerships.

The Fund works with a trust-based and risk willing approach and contributes often to the establishment and development phases of new artistic and cultural initiatives and networks. The aim is to ensure consistency across the board and obtain relevant knowledge and insights as a basis for the ongoing adjustment and development of both existing and future forms of support.

Partnerships

The Fund's work with partnerships includes strategic collaborations with other organisations and actors – including foundations, international organisations and cultural authorities – on specific initiatives that are relevant to the strategy, knowledge building and cultural policy development work of the Fund.

Partnerships contribute to a dynamic interaction between practice, knowledge and policy development, and thus encompass the potential for structural change and long-term development in the field of arts and culture.

Networking and meeting places

Networking and relationship building are essential in order to ensure that the work of the Fund is rooted in the artistic and cultural life of the Nordic Region. In connection with the Fund's latest thematic initiatives, in particular, considerable experience has been garnered on how artistic networks function as spaces for experimentation, joint learning and long-term development.

In addition to the networking that takes place naturally through the Fund's grants, the Fund itself acts as a facilitator and strategic link between the various actors in the field of arts and culture.

The Fund's own involvement in various international and Nordic networks and meeting places helps to secure the Fund's legitimacy, and forms the basis for new strategic collaborations and partnerships.

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Knowledge and cultural policy development

The Nordic Culture Fund plays a strategic role in the cultural policy landscape in both a Nordic and an international context. This position stems from the Fund's autonomous role and anchoring in the intersection between political structures and performing arts and cultural environments.

Cultural policy is understood here in a broad sense as a means of helping to shape the function and structural conditions of art and culture in society. The close contact of the Nordic Culture Fund with various sectoral experts, Nordic knowledge environments, the practicing field of arts and culture and political actors provides an opportunity to produce, collect and disseminate relevant and qualitative knowledge about the dynamics and challenges in the sector.

As an intergovernmental body, the Fund acts in close dialogue with international organisations and orientates itself to broader European and global agendas in the field of culture.

Communication

Communication is a cross-cutting initiative in the strategic work of the Fund. The communication work helps to strengthen the legitimacy of the Fund and secure it a relevant position in relation to both key stakeholders and the wider world.

The Fund communicates on a daily basis with a wide range of stakeholders, from applicants to international organisations and partners. In this area, it is important that the Fund both ensures a coherent narrative across its various initiatives and actively takes into account the needs of stakeholders when planning its communication activities.

The communication work of the Nordic Culture Fund is based on an independent communication strategy which in the coming period will be further developed in order to create clarity about the Fund's overall position and thereby ensure direction and progress in the implementation of the overall strategy.

Organisation and administration

The strategic work, administration and activities of the Nordic Culture Fund are based on the three component parts of the organisation: the board of directors, the Fund's management and staff (Fund Team), and its art and culture experts.

We are constantly working to optimise the interaction between the Fund's governing parts, regulations and administrative processes, so that our work can remain transparent, up-to-date and efficient. It is therefore also an active choice in the Fund's strategic development work to secure and develop a well-functioning organisational and administrative foundation that supports accurate decision-making and gives the Fund legitimacy. Diversity is sought in the composition of the Fund's board, staff and expert group in terms of gender as well as cultural, social, linguistic, geographical and generational background.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Fund's supreme authority is its board of directors. The thirteen members of the board are appointed by the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers for two-year terms. The board's composition is distinct from that of all other cooperation bodies and institutions within the official Nordic cooperation in that it includes both politicians and civil servants. The board of directors appoints the Fund's director.

MANAGEMENT AND STAFF OF THE FUND

The work and staff of the Fund are managed by a director. The staff of the Fund implement and develop its strategy and operations, including all

aspects of the Fund linked to strategy, development, application processing, partnerships and networks, as well as the cooperation with the board and experts. The Fund is based in Nordic House in Copenhagen, where the secretariats for the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council are also located.

EXPERTS

The Nordic Culture Fund makes use of experts to evaluate applications and provide the Fund with a starting point for artistic and cultural qualities and other assessments of cultural policy. The role and composition of the expert group is continuously assessed in relation to the development of the Fund's support programmes, applications received, and the needs and new trends in the world of arts and culture.

FINANCES AND BUDGET

The Nordic Culture Fund's grant is financed from the budget of the Nordic Council of Ministers, which is approved by the Nordic Council. The Fund's budget is adopted by the Nordic Ministers for Cooperation, but forms part of the budget of the Nordic Ministers for Culture. Under its agreement, the Fund may also receive other financing for its purposes. The activities and administration of the Nordic Culture Fund are monitored and audited by Rigsrevisionen (the Danish National Audit Office). The board approves the Fund's annual report and accounts. The accounts and the granting of exemption from liability for the board are given final approval by the Nordic Council at its annual autumn session.

→ From the exhibition "Desde la Ceguera at Centro de Cultura Digital", Mexico City, 2023. By Ghost Agency – Fostering Digital Sanctuaries (Globus FORWARD 2024). Photographer: Daniela Torib



