VOICEs of VOICE: The Manifesto & Condensed Recommendations

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Drawing upon 43 interviews which asked for direct messages to the EU and commissioning bodies, this is a team manifesto and series of recommendations in synopsis form. The Digital Platform will share Living Publication, to which all are encouraged to join the conversation.

Art is a way of knowing informed by intuition, feeling, resilience, care. Art provides a mirror in a polycrisis. Without it, the human species as knowing, caring, informed and sensitively tuned beings will perish. Art is the residue of a more serious conversation: it speaks in its own forms: music, lyric, poetic, visual, olfactory, tactile. Feeling is not a lesser form of knowing. It is often the only form of knowing that moves people to act - that shifts a perception, that breaks open a fixed idea, that allows the layers of a wicked problem to reveal themselves. Art sits with complexity. It holds it, makes it liveable, makes it shareable, makes it survivable.

Art is an infrastructure. It is the oldest technology we have for making sense of the world, for connecting human beings to one another and to the living systems they are part of. As long as there have been cave paintings, people communicated through movement before they communicated in words. This is what we must protect. The arts hold what data, technology and machines cannot. Now more than ever - in the age of artificial intelligence, in the age of data extraction and algorithmic decision-making - the genuine human connection that art makes possible is irreplaceable. Art moves human beings in ways that data and machines cannot, through grief, joy, and the complexity of what it means to belong somewhere, or to be excluded.

We as artists are: researchers, activists, theorists and makers and doers with excellent scientific outputs making lasting impacts. We are deeply concerned about what happens when only a select few people are shaping our technological futures/ We need artists, creative thinkers, scientists, historians, social scientists - all of us - at the table where these decisions are being made. We need to apply inclusive methods to ensure that the fullest range of human diversity is at the table, using all forms of human expression including the arts themselves as the languages that can not be replaced or 'modelled.'

Artists are generators of knowledge. There is an infinity symbol between art and research - between making and understanding, between knowing and doing. Artists work scientifically, but they are not bound to scientific rules; they can implement fiction and imagination. They can use their own intuition, which does not 'come from nowhere' but which is impossible to capture purely in words or numbers and equations. Artists are not bound to specific methodologies, which means they can iterate, they can move, they can be agile and develop novel approaches that emerge over time and in context. This is the kind of flexible non-linear thinking we need most urgently right now.

Artists are shapeshifters. We traverse modes of thinking and ways of being that challenge the structures that currently exist, and simultaneously, we bring our ways of knowing and ways of expressing what we know, which are exactly what those structures need. Interconnectedness is core to the arts. The great moments in human history have emerged from and been expressed through the arts.' The arts support our emotional and spiritual lives. They are foundational - not supplementary, not optional, and thus should not the first thing to be cut when purse strings and timelines are tight. They keep us healthy, and well, and kind, productive, and potent.

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There are many arts methodologies that draw upon centuries of human experience of trying to work out what our place in the world is, how to communicate with each other and how to be ethical: what it means to be individuals in relation to one another. These methodologies build imagination, connect us, make us stronger and more likely to survive and thrive.

Art has impact. It raises awareness, fosters collaboration, and drives innovation that is both practical and culturally resonant.' Artist-led projects create equidistant environments where people can engage in constructive dialogue across difference, free from disciplinary silos. It does not express a way of 'thinking outside the box' because it does not recognise the need for boxes. Art traverses, connects and makes the world feel closer, with shared ideas becoming more possible to enact. The Arts help communities stay alive, to question established mores and ensure that democracy stays grounded in real people. This is how we respond to ecological crisis, to cultural fracture, to war, and to the climate crisis we are all living inside of right now.

Art must, therefore, be properly resourced, properly valued, and properly led.

We, the Voices of VOICE, call for systems that intervene before failure occurs, not after - trusting our expertise to shape solutions from the outset, with resourcing that matches the time and scale given to other forms of research. We advocate for evaluation frameworks that honour work whose effects unfold over years, over decades, over lifetimes, rather than demanding immediate, visible outcomes. We seek genuine partnership - built-in from the start, sustained through fair pay that reflects our labour, and supported by clear pathways for continuation.

We ask to be recognised as what we are: essential infrastructure for a functional society. We state our right to be paid for our work accordingly, Proper, sustainable and longitudinal funding of the Arts overall, and of individual artists as active productive contributors to a balanced functioning society. We state our aim to work together with policy makers to design funding structures and research and innovation actions that enable rather than extract from the Arts, Design and Culture.

Recommendations to the European Commission and other Commissioning Bodies as a direct call from the VOICEs of VOICE stakeholders, offered as acts of care for the arts, for the communities that artists work with, and for the funders and commissioning bodies participating in supporting these forms of artist-led innovations and impacts.

The recommendations are drawn from the VOICEs of VOICE Living Publication, which asks the European Commission and other funding bodies to listen to the voices of artists in order to develop future funding and policies and to ensure the future of artist-led research projects and artistic practices.

1. Listen to artists and invite us to the table as decision-makers: Artists find ways to explore new ideas in new ways. We should be recognised as stakeholders, executors of problem-solving, and autonomous agents of change - not brought in after decisions have already been made. Artists and creative thinkers should be an integral part of the design process for policies, technologies, and social futures, particularly in relation to AI and Climate.

2. Ensure equity, diversity and inclusion around the table: The future must be co-designed with communities that are equity-deserving and rights-seeking - with people from different backgrounds, with people living with disabilities, with elders, with children, with those who have historically been excluded

from these conversations. Expanding the range of voices that are part of the process is key for both arts funding and the wider futures that art is shaping.

3. Pay fairly for the arts and creative labour: Do not instrumentalise artists. Pay us better and recognise our catalytic thinking as the skilled, essential professional labour it is. It is unfair to expect art to solve huge problems without properly financing the time, resources and labour which are mobilised for other similar types of research. Correcting the current disparity would rebalance the research ecosystem.

4. Fund artists directly and as lead researchers in our own right: Create more opportunities for artists to apply for and lead research projects independently, and not only in partnership with academic or scientific institutions. Artists generate different types of knowledge and should be funded appropriately with appropriate mechanisms for reporting and impact assessment.

5. Reduce bureaucratic barriers and simplify funding application processes: Funding systems are highly bureaucratic, and require full communication in words and numbers only, which can exclude the very artists they are designed to support. Mechanisms should enable rather than obstruct. Reducing the competitive pressure and administrative burden by providing opportunities to show what we know and can contribute in images, sounds and other appropriate means of expression would replace the emphasis on using the 'right administrative language' as the current primary criterion for access.

6. Shift from outcome-orientation to process-orientation in funding criteria: The effect of artistic work can be slower, as it does not always produce immediately visible outcomes. The longer-term effects - on communities, on perceptions, on wellbeing, on collective capacity - are far more significant than any within a project deliverable timeframe. Develop alternative assessment frameworks that value process, relationships, and slower forms of impact.

7. Recognise art as essential infrastructure, necessary for a full human experience: Artistic practice is essential infrastructure for societal change, for democracy, for community cohesion, for ecological action, for human health and wellbeing. Fund it accordingly and consistently.

8. Invest in sustained, long-term artistic engagement with communities: Support and foster sustained, long-term artistic engagement with communities. Meaningful community engagement is essential to socially engaged art. Artists should work with communities as active partners, taking the time to understand local contexts, build trust, and co-create work that reflects community knowledge, priorities, and aspirations. Sustained involvement strengthens relationships, supports shared ownership, and enables more relevant and lasting outcomes.

9. Support capacity-building for all stakeholders including funders and commissioners, to understand the full breadth of what art is and does: Art is more than exhibitions and performances. It is grafting a tree, stitching fabric, a soundwalk, a conversation circle, a fermentation vat, a community mapping exercise. Funders and commissioners need deeper understandings of the diversity of artistic practices to support investing wisely in it.

10. Embed artists in interdisciplinary and scientific research projects from the outset: Art creates equidistant environments for dialogue across disciplines. Embedding artists in scientific and technological projects, as equal partners, generates new knowledge, new questions, and better outcomes. This should become standard practice in EU-funded research.

11. Protect data sovereignty and creators' rights in the age ubiquitous of AI: The European Commission must continue to defend data sovereignty and set best practice around how data is used and how AI is governed, specifically in relation to cultural production and creators' rights. Artists need to be able to use AI while retaining control over how it is used. The intellectual property of artists must be protected against aspects such as the large-scale appropriation currently being perpetuated by online and AI systems.

12. Bring artists into the conversation about AI and technological futures, with urgency: The people currently shaping our AI futures are more often those with strong engineering capability who may have limited understanding of human experience in its full breadth and diversity. Artists, humanities scholars, social scientists, historians, and communities must be embedded in these conversations now, before the contingencies of the few today become the locked-in structures of tomorrow.

13. Explore inclusive economic models that create shared and lasting value: Develop inclusive economic models that generate and distribute long-term value across the artistic ecosystem, benefiting artists, communities and society. Approaches such as shared ownership, community investment, endowments and basic incomes for artists, can strengthen collective resilience, support continuity, and ensure that the social, cultural, and economic value created through artistic work is sustained and shared more widely.

14. Maintain dialogue with artists to recognise and capture outcomes beyond contractual outputs: Artists often generate valuable outcomes beyond those defined as contractual deliverables and milestones, including new knowledge, relationships, methods, capacities, opportunities, and unexpected forms of social or cultural impact. Funding and evaluation frameworks should recognise, document, and value these emergent contributions, allowing projects to respond to new possibilities and ensuring that their wider results are not overlooked. The most valuable outcomes are often the ones that were not in the original proposal.

15. Synchronise requirements across countries and create more flexible, collaborative funding structures: When funding cross-European or international projects, ensure that requirements across partner countries are genuinely aligned and that flexibility is built in to respond to what arises. Collaboration across difference requires structures that support it.

And finally, the VOICE consortium itself would add a last recommendation based on the findings of VOICE and also based on decades of experience leading other EU and global arts-led research and innovation actions:

16. Invite artist-researchers with expertise in working as independent artists and also within universities and creative industry or policy contexts to co-design future programmes. By listening to diverse voices including those with lived experience at the intersection of art and research, we strengthen the community as a whole and deepen our pool of communication methods, with positive impact across the sectors.

Our joint aim is that our manifesto and recommendations will be read and considered in the context of the needs and opportunities for the creative industries over time, and that they may be integrated into the thinking of relevant commissioners and policy makers. We offer these voices and their insights and perspectives as prompts for integrated, systemic engagement with the arts as foundational to human culture, and we propose that artistic methods are necessary (not decorative or additional, but central in

importance and not replaceable by AI). We invite discourse and further engagement as this summary document, and the full discussions shared in our Living Publication on the digital platform, will grow over time. We particularly invite commissioners, policy makers and reviewers to listen to the voices of the key stakeholders of the projects which they support - the artists, consortia members and broader networks of eco-social practice, inclusive design, and artist-led innovation: **the VOICEs of VOICE.**

These recommendations have already begun to inform dialogue with policy and funding stakeholders. The VOICE Manifesto and condensed recommendations were presented and discussed at the **Knowledge Valorisation in Action: from Results to Policy** event in Brussels on 8 October 2026, organised by the European Research Executive Agency (REA) in cooperation with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD). This provided an important opportunity to bring the voices and recommendations emerging from VOICE directly into a European-level discussion on how research and innovation results can inform policy and future actions. The VOICE consortium welcomes the continuation of this dialogue with policymakers, funders and commissioners beyond the lifetime of the project.

For more information please visit:

https://www.voice-community.eu/

For any questions related to Voices of VOICE please contact:

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