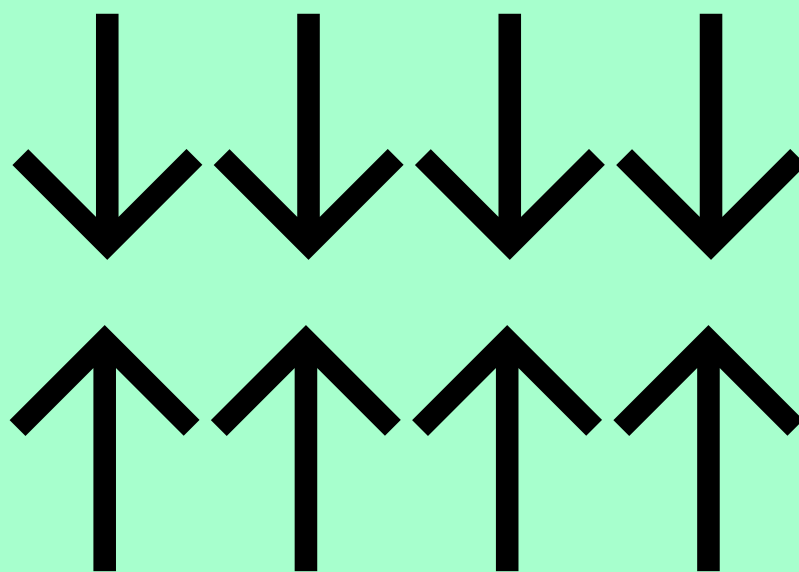




Upstarts Host Guidelines 2026



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TBWA Ireland

Overview

The ICAD Upstarts Programme helps to unearth and prepare emerging creative talent for a successful career in the creative industry, regardless of their background. At its heart Upstarts is a social good collaboration between ICAD, our programme partners and members that fosters, supports and provides a pathway to the creative sector.

Why Host for ICAD Upstarts?

As a Host Agency or Studio, you'll collaborate with ICAD to deliver a programme that has helped to shape the Irish creative industry for 20 years. Setting and hosting an Upstarts brief offers significant benefits:

Identify Emerging Talent:

Get a first look at promising art directors, copywriters, and designers.

Showcase Your Business:

Introduce emerging creatives to your agency/studio environment and promote your work and culture directly to potential future employees.

Fresh Perspectives:

Expose your team to new ideas and the energy of emerging creatives.

Elevate Your Social Credentials:

Showcase your agency/studio's commitment to supporting the next generation of creatives and the industry as a whole.

Team Development:

Provide opportunities for your creative team to appraise, provide feedback, and engage with fresh talent.

Contribute to Diversity & Inclusion:

Play a direct role in fostering a more diverse and equitable creative sector.

The Upstarts programme is mutually beneficial, serving hosts, mentors, and Upstarts in equal measure.

What's Involved?

We aim to make hosting an Upstarts session a rewarding and manageable experience. Here's what we ask of our Host Agencies/Studios:

Set One Creative Brief:

Develop one real-world style brief for either the Advertising (art directors and copywriters) or Design stream.

The brief should be challenging yet achievable within a one-week turnaround. (Further guidance in Section 4)

Host One Evening Session:

Dedicate one evening (typically 2-2.5 hours) to host the Upstarts.

During this session, Upstarts will present their responses to your brief.

Your Role: Crafting the Experience

Provide a Suitable Space:

Offer a comfortable and appropriate environment for presentations and discussions for approximately 10-16 Upstarts per stream, plus your own team members.

Ensure Relevant Team Attendance:

Have senior and relevant creative team members present to listen to presentations, provide feedback, and engage with the Upstarts.

Give Constructive Feedback:

Offer insightful, constructive, and encouraging feedback on the work presented.

As a Host, you are central to a key component of the Upstarts programme. Your main roles involve:

A. Crafting an Engaging Brief:

- ↳ Design a brief that simulates a real-world creative challenge but is not a live project.
- ↳ It should be single-minded, allowing for interpretation and diverse creative solutions.
- ↳ Ensure it's challenging but achievable within the one-week timeframe.
- ↳ Clearly outline deliverables and expectations
- ↳ ICAD will review all briefs in advance of the programme to ensure there isn't cross-over

B. Facilitating an Inspiring Session:

- ↳ Welcome the Upstarts and briefly introduce your agency/studio and the team members present.
- ↳ Manage the flow of presentations.
- ↳ Facilitate constructive feedback and Q&A period after presentations.
- ↳ Optionally, include a brief studio tour or a more informal chat if time allows.

C. Providing Developmental Feedback:

This is a cornerstone of the learning experience. Feedback should be:

- ↳ Constructive: Focus on what worked, what could be improved, and how.
- ↳ Encouraging: Acknowledge effort and good thinking, even if execution varies.
- ↳ Honest: Provide genuine insights that will help the Upstarts develop.
- ↳ Specific: Refer to particular aspects of their concept, execution, or presentation.

Making Your Hosted Session a Success: Best Practices

Before the Session:

To ensure your hosted session is impactful and runs smoothly:

Brief Your Internal Team:

Ensure all participating staff understand the Upstarts programme, the brief they set, and their role during the feedback session. Emphasise a supportive and constructive tone.

Prepare Your Space:

Check AV equipment, seating arrangements, and ensure the environment is welcoming.

Review the Brief:

Re-familiarise your team with the brief to ensure feedback is relevant.

During the Session:

Create a Welcoming Atmosphere:

Make Upstarts feel comfortable. An informal introduction can ease nerves.

Manage Time Effectively:

Allocate fair presentation and feedback time for each Upstart. ICAD can advise on numbers and timings.

Diverse Feedback Perspectives:

If possible, have a couple of different team members offer feedback to provide a broader range of insights.

Focus on Process and Outcome:

Discuss not just the final work, but also the thinking and approach behind it.

Encourage Questions:

Allow time for Upstarts to ask your team about their work, the industry, or agency life.

After the Session:

(Optional) Provide any summary thoughts or commendations to ICAD to pass on.

ICAD Support

ICAD is committed to supporting Host Agencies/Studios throughout the process:

Logistical Management:

ICAD manages all primary logistics, including Upstart communication, scheduling, and general coordination.

Brief Guidance

We can offer advice or examples for crafting your brief.

Ongoing Communication

We will liaise with you to confirm dates, provide Upstart numbers, and answer any queries.

Troubleshooting

If any issues arise, ICAD is available to help find solutions.

Programme Schedule:

A full programme schedule will be provided by ICAD, giving you oversight and allowing for advance planning.

Fostering an Inclusive and Diverse Environment

ICAD and our programme partners are profoundly committed to enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion within the creative industries. As a Host Agency/Studio, you play an important part:

Be Mindful in Your Brief

Design inclusive briefs that reflect a variety of perspectives and actively avoid stereotypes.

Showcase Diverse Role Models

Having a diverse range of your own team members involved in the session can be inspiring for Upstarts.

Create a Welcoming Space

Ensure your agency/studio environment and the tone of the session are welcoming to individuals from all backgrounds.

Inclusive Feedback

Be mindful of providing feedback that is culturally sensitive and constructive for all participants.

Your participation helps provide a tangible pathway into the creative industries for individuals from marginalised and underrepresented communities.

Programme Donation

In previous years, to fund the programme, Upstarts had to pay a course fee to participate. Since 2024, all of our host agencies and studios generously made a voluntary contribution of €250, which along with our partners enabled us to remove the course fees and reduce financial barriers to participation.

To keep Upstarts accessible to all, we invite our 2026 Hosts to also make a suggested contribution of €250, which offsets the direct costs of one participant – allowing us to keep Upstarts a free programme.

StartUp

In 2025, ICAD introduced a Residency programme, a six-month paid position within ICAD that further prepares and upskills one Upstart for a career in the creative industries. The resident collaborates with ICAD's Executive and Management Boards to help deliver ICAD's programmes while leading ICAD's design - gaining wide exposure for their work.

To expand and scale this successful programme, we are inviting our host partners to join and support our new StartUp initiative. StartUp provides short-term (up to three-month) placements for Upstarts in our host agencies and studios. Running in conjunction with the programme, the initiative enables Upstarts to gain real-world experience, build professional connections, and augment their CVs and portfolios, ultimately enhancing their prospects at a vital stage of their careers.

If you're interested in providing a StartUp placement in your organisation, please indicate it in your application and we'll be in touch.

Contact Us

To apply to be a host please fill out this [form](#).

If you have any questions, concerns, or require support at any stage, please do not hesitate to contact ICAD. For any queries, please email: info@icad.ie

Thanks

We extend our heartfelt thanks to our partners for their invaluable support in fostering creative talent and helping retain it within the Irish creative industries. Their commitment also enables us to introduce more diversity into the industry, which is proven to enhance creative outputs and benefit the sector as a whole. Together, through the programme, we are building a more vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable future where Irish creativity flourishes.

Producing Partner

core

Core is Ireland's largest marketing communications company. We collaborate across multiple Practices, working towards a single purpose, to expand the possibilities of what brands can achieve. By truly embracing collaboration, sharing ideas freely and empowering one another, we create work that is more powerful and transformative than our individual efforts can ever be.

Programme Partner

TBWA\Ireland

TBWA\ Ireland, is over 100 ambitious people who believe in creating a total brand world for their equally ambitious clients. Backed by a network of over 11,100 people, we use Disruption® to connect a brand's total ecosystem. All with the ambition to go beyond just saying things, to doing and making amazing things, every day. Because we believe our best work is always ahead of us.

Diversity Partner

DesignOpp

DesignOpp is a not-for-profit initiative championing diversity in Irish design, so People of Colour can fulfill their creative potential. Our goal is to provide more opportunities, diversify education and create a welcoming community for Creatives of Colour.