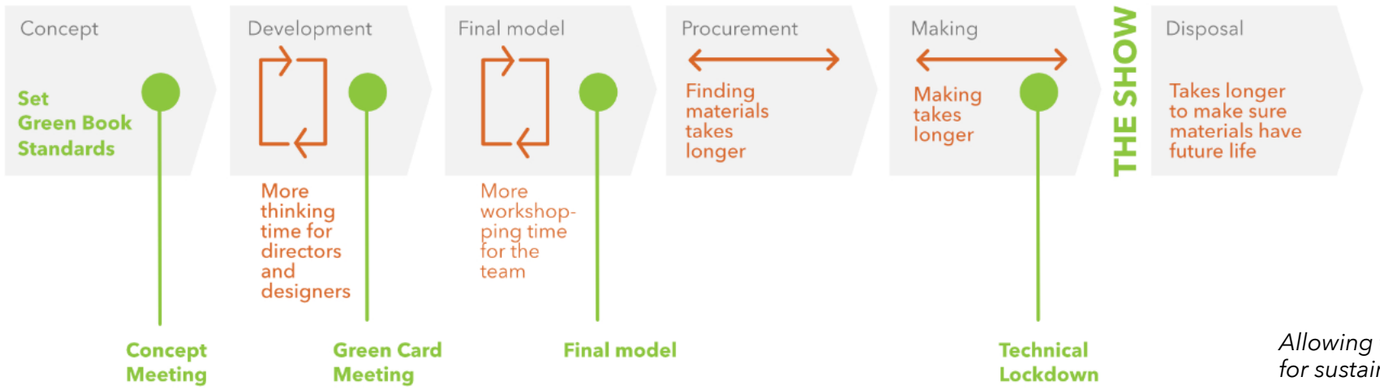
3 Planning a Sustainable Production



Allowing time : scheduling for sustainability

1 Key Principles

Planning a show sustainably means:

- Setting a clear sustainability target at the outset.
- Setting up the team, budget and schedule to support sustainable working.
- Giving everyone the tools they need to achieve a sustainable outcome.

2 Communications

Setting a standard

The Green Book sets three clear standards: Basic, Intermediate and Advanced. The Standards define actions for each. The Theatre Green Book standards enable you to set a clear goal for each production, which defines what everyone needs to do, and will be increasingly familiar to all theatre-makers.

Theatres new to sustainability sometimes aim too high, demoralising the whole team. It's good to start with Basic, so everyone has a chance to learn. It can even be helpful to carry out assessments of some past productions, to discover how sustainable you already are.

The Invitation

It's essential to define the sustainability standard with the first invitation to team members, explain what it means and how they will be supported. Introduce it later, and sustainability will appear restrictive. Include it from the start, and it will be built into creative thinking from the outset. Before anyone starts work, they need to understand the parameters they're working within, and the values they're being asked to share.

Artistic Directors have a vital role to play in making the sustainability standard a clear part of the invitation, and then holding creative teams to achieving it.

You'll only achieve a sustainable result if everyone fully understands the part they need to play. Whenever team members are invited, induct them in how the Theatre Green Book works, and the responsibility they have for helping deliver the show as sustainably as possible.

Freelancers

Regular teams will soon become familiar with the Theatre Green Book. Freelancers may be new to it, and to your processes. Give them the support they need – including climate literacy training – to deliver what you ask. Meanwhile, freelancers can influence the transition by asking theatres whether they're using the Theatre Green Book, and what systems they have in place – or even insisting on a Theatre Green Book standard in their contract riders. It's hard to change organisations from the outside, but theatre depends on freelancers, and their influence and expertise is vital.

Appointments

Sustainable working needs teams to be appointed early, so makers can help achieve creative ideas in sustainable ways.

Contract Riders, or Green Production Agreements, help make your values clear, and help the team to collaborate in achieving a given target. Contracts with suppliers and makers should reference the same standard.

Go to the Toolkit for sample wordings.

Collaborative Working

Sustainable theatre-making needs teams to collaborate. Where possible, makers and suppliers should join early meetings to offer suggestions and workshop solutions. Directors and designers need to respond flexibly, to make space for sustainable thinking. Producers must foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust across the whole team.

Sustainability needs to be a constant refrain, but two key meetings will embed sustainable practice:

- A sustainability meeting at concept stage integrates sustainable thinking from the outset.
- Later, the White Card model can be the focus of a meeting where the whole team audits design against Theatre Green Book targets, workshops options, and agrees actions.

Go to the Toolkit for more on meeting, sharing and reviewing.

3 Schedules and Budgets

Schedules

Sustainability takes time. Schedules need to allow it.

Time spent at concept stage refines thinking and avoids late change. Designers need time to explore creative solutions – it might include trips to your store or meeting other designers who are working in the same season to explore shared design elements. Achieving sustainability requires iterative conversations among the team. Even ordering second-hand costumes takes longer than buying online.

Commissioning Multiple Shows and Seasons

Whenever shows can be commissioned together as a series or season, they can share resources and reuse components.

Consecutive shows might share the same floor. Lighting and technical set-ups can be retained. Props and set components can be shared. Designers working together can swap information and access the same recycled materials.

The result can be significant savings in materials and energy, along with the costs and emissions associated with remaking, rigging and transporting components. Deliveries can serve more than one show at the same time.

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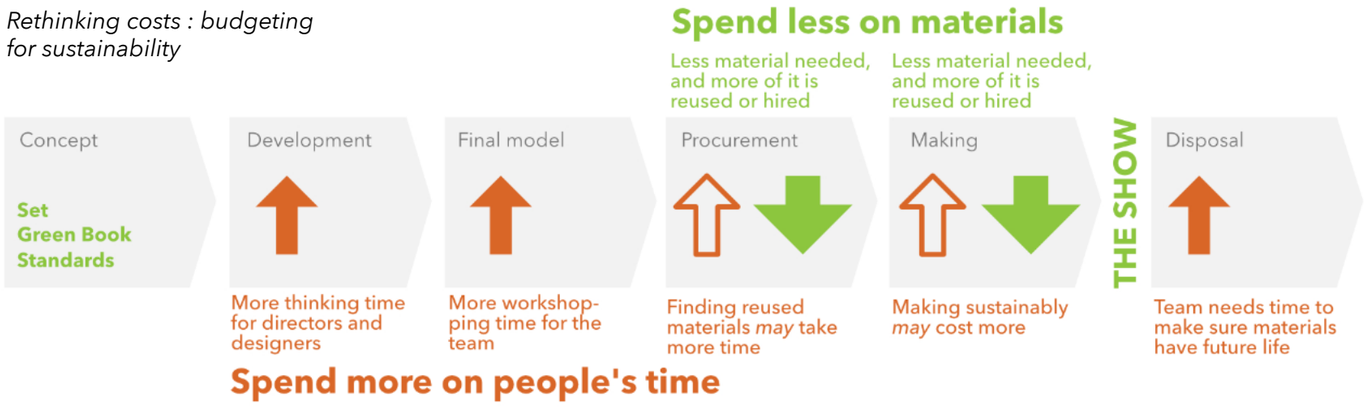

Schedules need rethinking to allow sustainable practice. *See diagram on previous page and go to the Toolkit for more information.*

Budgets

Budgets need to reflect the same shift, buying extra time from designers and makers for the collaborative conversation sustainability needs.

Purchase costs will change. A new set made with sustainably-sourced materials may cost more. Made with reused components and recycled materials, it can cost less.

Show budgets, like schedules, need to change shape. *See diagram above and go to the Toolkit for more information.*

4 Tools and Methods

Information

Theatre-makers need the right tools to reach sustainable outcomes.

Producers can help freelancers with information about in-house and local resources. They can encourage different production teams to share components, materials, floors, equipment and ideas. Theatre's strong networks are an essential resource for sustainability. *Go to the Toolkit for a checklist of information to provide.*

Space and Storage

Being able to recycle and reuse most effectively will require more space. When a production has reached the end of its life, space is needed to break the elements down and to remove fixings – glue, nails – so that it can be reused or recycled. You may need to rethink how you use your workshop or back of house to do this and find storage for the elements which can be reused in another production. There are good examples of companies coming together to share stores for mutual benefit.

Intellectual Property

Designers may rightly be concerned that their designs will be reused without permission. It's important they have the chance to define elements of the design which they see as protected (for example, a bespoke staircase or sculptural set). These elements can be defined individually, while leaving generic components (standard windows and doors, masking, floor textures) and materials to be reused freely.

Evaluating

The Productions Calculator helps you evaluate the sustainability of each production. It gives you checklists for the three Theatre Green Book standards: Basic, Intermediate and Advanced. Excel worksheets help assess how much of your sets and scenery, props and costumes are reused / recycled based on weight.

Measuring a production isn't an exact science, and production teams are always short of time. Don't get lost in too much detail. Use common sense to guide decisions. The Production Calculator is not a perfect system but a tool to help you think more sustainably, and record how your practice is changing.

Go to Productions Resources for the Production Calculator.

Sharing and Training

Sustainability will become easier as the sector's climate literacy continues to develop. Theatre-makers will learn by trialling and sharing, so it's essential, after a show, to review outcomes and share honestly what worked, and what didn't.

Making work sustainably can be something to share with audiences, as well, who increasingly expect sustainable practice.

By gathering data, Producers can lay the ground for carbon budgeting. They can support staff and freelancers with training.

Go to the Toolkit for information on carbon literacy training, and on reviewing and sharing outcomes.

5 After the Show

Long-running Productions

A production which runs for a long time, or is often revived, is more sustainable than the same show made for a few performances only. The same material is being shared across more dates and a bigger audience.

Because it's usually impossible to know how long a production will last, the Theatre Green Book doesn't currently make allowance for the benefit of long-running shows. Instead, it focuses on making each production as sustainably as possible. But we'll continue to work on a methodology to balance environmental impact against the size of audience and the time a production lasts.

The End of the Show

A sustainable show doesn't end on the closing night. Returning materials and components, costumes and props to further use is every bit as important as procuring them sustainably in the first place.

Producers need sustainable disposal systems and protocols. Online theatre networks can help. Good relationships with local second-hand shops, community centres, other theatres and prop stores will help make sure materials have an afterlife – and nothing ends up in the skip.

6 Additional Benefits

Sustainable practice doesn't only benefit the environment. It can help theatre-makers and their communities:

- Working collaboratively improves working culture for everybody.
- Working collectively brings more diverse talent into the industry.
- Working locally connects theatre to communities.
- Managing resources proactively reduces costs.

Outdoor and Site Specific Shows

Outdoor and site specific shows can be extremely sustainable. They may need minimal lighting and set, for example.

They also impose specific challenges, like how to provide power sustainably, set up dressing room facilities etc. In some natural locations it's important to check the show doesn't harm wildlife.

Go to the Toolkit for more guidance.

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