4 Co-productions and Visiting Companies

1 Introduction

Many productions are partnerships between two or more theatres or companies. Usually there is a 'lead producer' responsible for leading the production and making (or commissioning) the show. But the nature and role of co-production partners varies widely.

Some do no more than invest money. Others take an active role in decision-making, or take on some of the responsibilities of putting the production together and touring it. Some are involved in regular co-productions with partners they know well, and whose values they share. Others are ad hoc partners who don't know the co-producers well, and have different priorities for the production.

To co-produce a sustainable production to Theatre Green Book standards requires sensitivity, flexibility, and good communication.

2 Starting Out

At the outset of a project, it is essential to agree the sustainability ambition of the production. This should be written into partnership agreements wherever possible.

Inducting new partners into the Theatre Green Book and its standards will ensure that everyone fully understands the parameters that will govern the production, and any costs resulting. It's also an opportunity to share Theatre Green Book principles with your partners.

Agree early how the production's green credentials will be used as part of marketing and communicating the show.

3 Responsibilities

An early step is to determine who will be responsible for ensuring, and demonstrating to partners, that the production meets its Theatre Green Book standard. This will normally be the lead producer. However, other partners may be more experienced in green production – in which case they may have a defined role as sustainability advisers or champions.

Identify who will have responsibility for completing the Production Calculator and other measurements (eg travel and waste).

A meeting between heads of production of the main partners will allow them to identify specific expertise in different areas which might help the team achieve the most sustainable outcomes.

Just as important is to identify who will have responsibility for disposing of the production after the tour is over.

4 Planning for Sustainability

Co-production partners have the opportunity to pool resources for reuse and recycling, and make them available to the creative team. Technical resources at each receiving venue should be collated and shared, to give the producing and creative team all the information they need to plan the most sustainable tour.

For touring shows, try to plan the tour to minimise travel. At an early stage, the partners should consider how best to reduce the set, equipment and people that will need to tour. Considerations will include the size and construction of the set, the use of local tech equipment and staff etc. An early priority is to define a realistic but clear haulage limit for the tour, and make sure this is fully understood by all.

Establish a haulage limit (e.g. two transit vans). While working on the design, the team should make sure they develop and record a plan for disposal or storage of all materials after the tour.

5 Working Sustainably

Discuss and agree how you can use virtual tools and written technical specifications to minimise travel to venues. Agree your travel and accommodation policy between all co-producers to standardise expectation about train travel, car sharing and accommodation.

In rehearsing and running the production, make everyone involved aware of the Theatre Green Book standard you are working towards, even if they haven't been involved in the development stage.

When it comes to the actual tour, look for opportunities to minimise show-running consumables, or to buy sustainably in bulk, to service the entire run.

6 Opportunities

A co-production s a ready-made sharing network to spread best practice and expertise.

If you are initiating a co-production, you may decide to require that any partners joining should have reached a certain Theatre Green Book level – or have plans to do so. If you are joining a co-production, you may be able to lobby for the production to be made to Theatre Green Book standards, and to introduce other partners to sustainable working.

In working with receiving venues, you have an opportunity to influence venues in how they manage operations such as marketing and catering. Agree with venues a set of basic requirements and recommendations – for example, making sure they inform audiences about sustainable travel options.

If you share values, that will be an opportunity to help them on their own transition. You may not have that kind of influence – but there will always be opportunities to encourage more sustainable working.

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