

Making Theatre in a Time of Climate Crisis

The Asks

Setting the Scene

This document outlines 'asks' to enable an early-stage conversation between Artistic Directors/Producers and Directors about how each can support the other to make environmentally responsible theatre, using the Theatre Green Book. The focus of this document is on supporting directors in creative leadership, through practical action. It brings together suggestions by directors attending the National Theatres' conference 'Making Theatre in a Time of Climate Crisis', 29th September 2023.

As recommended by the Theatre Green Book, the most effective way to avoid environmental harm when making theatre is to 'design out' negative impacts as part of the creative process. These 'asks' aim to facilitate the conversations needed to make this possible. They take the form of 'asks' rather than demands, in recognition that:

- There's no 'perfect' action, or one-size-fits-all solution, and therefore no 'rule' that applies in each situation
- Working together to build new processes is essential to create the new working models that we need for a just transition
- Attention to specifics is crucial – the process must be discussed and tailored to the needs, capacities and ambitions of the specific practitioners involved
- The sector is in a period of transition, where we are each having to learn different ways of working
- The most effective way to ensure a production is environmentally responsible is to embed attention to the context of climate crisis in the creative process from the start

As 'asks' these conversation pointers do not presume the power to achieve all that is asked for, but offer areas of focus for a collaborative conversation. Working within the currently possible, these 'asks' invite multiple small-scale changes to existing practices. However, by enabling more connected, attentive and collaborative ways of theatre-making, these changes anticipate the radical system change needed to create a just and environmentally respectful society.

ASKS

Director to the Artistic Director/Producer: in order to be empowered to make an environmentally responsible production, I ask:

1. That the parent company/theatre embeds environmentally responsible decision-making across all its activities – eg front of house / operations / participation / audience development / finances - as well as in the shows it is presenting.
2. That staff time and budget is allocated specifically to support transition to environmentally responsible practice.
3. That the environmental parameters expected (e.g. which *Green Book* standard) are clearly stated, and understood/committed to by everyone working on the production, both staff and freelancers.

Artistic Director/Producer to the Director: in order to ensure that your production meets the theatre's standards for environmental responsibility, I ask that you:

1. Lead your creative and production team on environmental responsibility, to set the example and leave room and time for responsible decisions.
2. Commit to realising the production within the environmentally responsible parameters which have been agreed on, and be prepared to go back to the drawing board if this is starting to look impossible.

What does this mean in practice?

What follows is a menu of more detailed asks, condensed from all the 'asks' submitted by directors attending the conference, Making Theatre in a Time of Climate Crisis.

ASKS: Director to Artistic Director/Producer

Can you bring freelancers into the conversation around environmental responsibility and listen to their/our expertise and know-how?

Can you ensure environmental responsibility is foregrounded as a value across all areas of your work?

Can environmental responsibility be enabled by your inhouse team being trained in carbon literacy?

Can you ensure the additional workload of learning, training and research for a just transition is recognised and equitably distributed?

Can we plan for much longer lead-in-times: with a sufficient gap between any call out/application process/commission and the start of rehearsals to allow for an environmentally responsible creative process?

Can we explore how the themes I want to engage with relate to the context of climate crisis?

If appropriate, can time be ring-fenced for research and development early in the process, so that creativity can lead the climate agenda?

Can you support me in putting together a production team who have the tools/skills needed in the production team to anticipate climate impacts?

Can you give me and the design team early detailed access to resources you already have available, in time to influence the design process?

Can we arrange a rehearsal and tech schedule suited to the (access/care) needs of this particular team?

Can you lead the conversation in environmental responsibility with your staff team and my production team, so that as a freelancer, I'm not alone in highlighting these questions?

Can you, as artistic director/producer, publicly celebrate the production's efforts to avoid negative climate impact, whilst not expecting perfection?

Asks: Artistic Director/Producer to Director

Can we talk before the start of the creative process (and not only when the need is urgent) about what support you need to make an environmentally responsible production and meet the Green Book Standard expected?

Can you familiarise yourself with the ways in which this theatre/ venue/ company is already undertaking environmentally responsible action?

Can you empower the designer/design team to engage with the reusable resources we have to hand at the very start of the creative process?

Can the design process focus on 'designing out' harmful environmental impacts, as per the *Theatre Green Book: Productions*

Can you give time and permission for members of the team to share and use their climate know-how, and explore alternative options when potential environmental impacts emerge?

Can you support our aim of enabling environmental **and** social equity ensuring your team is composed of practitioners from a wide range of backgrounds, and that their lived experience is valued? (*ie shifting practice towards attention to context and interdependency, and away from an extractive mentality*)

Can we ensure transparency and continuous communication throughout the production process to avoid emergency decision-making where possible?

Can you support the design team by familiarising yourself with Green Book standards, and endorsing environmental parameters in all design and production meetings?

Can you commit to attending a green debrief and sharing your experiences, with (delete according to context) staff/freelancers/ future production teams/the company/the sector/the public?