

**London Playwrights' Workshop**

# **The Self-Producing Handbook**

**A GUIDE TO  
PRODUCING YOUR  
OWN WORK**



**LONDON**  
playwrights

# The Self Producing Handbook

## LONDON PLAYWRIGHTS' WORKSHOP

### Contributors:

Kimberley Andrews, George Bailey , Jennifer Cerys, Matthew Gabrielli, Jane Ryan. *With special thanks to: A. C. Smith.*

Copyright of London Playwrights' Workshop 2019. All rights reserved.

Not for distribution.

Intended for London Playwrights' Workshop members only.

*[Whilst we are happy for you to use this book with your creative team, we ask that you do not share it beyond this with those who are not LPW members. Please bear in mind that we are a non-profit company, with the sole aim of supporting new playwrights and we rely on revenue from memberships to keep our organisation running].*

# Contents.

Introduction.....	4
1. What sort of project will you produce?.....	5
2. Finding a venue .....	17
3. Budgeting.....	37
4. Fundraising.....	46
5. Building your creative team.....	56
6. Rehearsals.....	63
7. Marketing.....	74
8. Timeline checklist.....	89
9. The performance day.....	92
10. Follow-up.....	96
11. Afterword.....	98

# Introduction.

As playwrights, we all know that feeling of excitement when we finish a new piece of work. But what to do next with it? We optimistically submit it to literary departments or theatre companies, only to be faced with an agonising wait for a response. Then, when we finally hear back, it's often a disappointing 'no', usually in the form of a generic email which offers no indication of where we went 'wrong'.

The fact is, those rejections (and long waits) are usually out of your hands. Literary departments receive a ridiculously high number of submissions each year and have very little resources to work with new writers. So, rather than putting all your faith into a system that is stretched, why not take action? Of course, you should absolutely keep submitting to theatres (you've got to be in it to win it, right?) but there's no reason why you should let those 'no's' eat away at your confidence and dictate the future of your work. With a bit of determination and (we won't lie) a lot of hard work, you *can* get your work on stage - without waiting for a 'yes' from someone else!

Self-producing can seem daunting, but with the right knowledge and some careful planning it's totally possible - and we want to empower you to do it! We've put together this handbook, based on our own experiences, to take you through the process of producing your own show, from planning to budgeting to promoting and everything in between.

Whilst it's not definitive and we know others might have a different way of working, we hope you'll benefit from the experiences we'll be sharing with you in this guide - and that it supports you in getting your project off the ground. Even if you've produced work before, you can use this guide to help you to get organised for your next project. Good luck!

# 1.

## What kind of production?

The first step in your self-producing project is to decide what kind of thing you're going to produce, and on what sort of scale. This will largely depend on your budget, timescale and level of commitment. However, there are other factors to consider including what you'd like to get out of the process: for example, if you're hoping to get some feedback on a few scenes, you might decide to produce a scratch night. Or, if you have a polished, full length play at the ready - you might want to go big and produce a four-week run!

In this section, we're going to give you a run-down of the different types of producing projects, along with a few things you should consider. Don't forget, there's nothing wrong with starting out small and developing your project into something bigger once you've dipped your toe in the water - often a small scale project can help you find support in developing your work further.

Just to note, the definitions below are just to give you an idea of the type of things you can produce, but there are no hard and fast rules. You might decide to try something which is a combination of a few of these types of production. The great thing about self-producing is that the power is in your hands - our biggest tip is to make sure you work within your means (time, money and commitment), but other than that, it's up to you!

## A rehearsed reading

In a rehearsed reading, your play will be read aloud by actors in front of an audience. Actors will rehearse beforehand, usually with a director, so although they won't move around the stage, they will act out your lines with an informed view. In the grand scheme of self-producing, rehearsed readings are relatively easy to organise so this is a good place to start if you're a beginner.

### For you if...

- ★ You want to get feedback from actors as there is usually a chance to have a discussion on your play during the rehearsal period.
- ★ You want to be able to hear your play aloud, in full (several times if you're present during rehearsals).
- ★ You want to invite an audience who will get to see your play in its entirety.
- ★ You don't have a traditional theatre space available - because they don't require props or tech, readings can take place in pubs, your living room, anywhere!
- ★ You want to dip your toe in the water and gain some self-producing experience.

### Things to consider

- Tickets for rehearsed readings tend to be free or of little charge, so you may not make any money back to cover your costs.
- Paying actors and a director for their time, plus hiring space can quickly add up, unless you can find people to help you for free.
- The actors will be reading, so you don't get the same effect as seeing the play fully 'up on its' feet'.

## A Showcase/ Scratch night

A showcase is (usually) one performance of extracts of work from a number of writers. It's a great way to test out your work in front of an audience without the commitment of a larger project - plus you can usually split the production costs with other writers.

A showcase is often, but not always, performed as a 'script-in-hand'\* or as a rehearsed reading\*, which works well if you don't have the budget for lots of rehearsal time.

Scratch nights are similar to showcases but tend to have a more experimental feel, showing work in progress rather than excerpts of polished pieces. Often, there will be time at the end for discussion/ feedback on the work.

*\*Script in hand: actors read from scripts but have usually had some rehearsal and move around the stage as they act out the scenes.*

*\*Rehearsed reading: actors will sit and read your play, although they will have rehearsed/ read through it beforehand.*

### For you if...

- ★ You want to share the workload and split the costs with other writers so the financial risk is low.
- ★ You want to use the opportunity to invite industry professionals, such as agents, who may then ask to see more of your work.
- ★ You're just starting out and are nervous about taking on a bigger project or going it alone.
- ★ You want to test your work on an audience or get some feedback.

## Things to consider...

- You won't get to experience of seeing your whole play up on stage.
- You may not cover your costs, so be prepared not to see a return on any money you put in.
- Producing a showcase can get complicated quite quickly! You'll need to consider whether you need several directors, whether you'll be able to use the same actors for each play, and how rehearsal space and time will be shared. It's nothing that a bit of organisation can't overcome, but it can be challenging.
- You need to be sure that the other writers you work with are as committed as you are - otherwise you might end up doing the bulk of the producing work, which is effort you could have spent on your own writing!

## A festival

A festival is a series of performances which take place over a weekend or a few days. It's like a scaled up version of a showcase, but since it takes place over a longer period of time, plays can usually be performed in full, rather than as extracts. Festivals often have a theme or reason for taking place from the more specific (eg, plays on the theme of identity) to the more general (eg, plays by new writers).



## For you if...

- ★ You want to split the production costs with other writers.
- ★ You want to see your work on stage without the commitment of a longer run.
- ★ You want to work with like-minded creatives, and network - festivals have a good buzz for meeting new people.

## Things to consider...

- You'll need to be able to hire a space for a decent length of time.
- Like a showcase, the logistics of casting and rehearsal space can soon get complicated.
- You'll need to work hard on the marketing to get audiences for all of the shows.
- The workload can be demanding, so consider your reasons for producing a festival. If you want to show work on a particular theme or address a social issue or inequality with theatre, then this is great. But, if your focus is on furthering your own writing, then consider whether this is the best use of your energy..
- The cost of producing a festival can be high, so you'll need to consider whether you can obtain adequate funding.

## A one-off performance (or short run)

This one is fairly self-explanatory! It is possible to hire a venue for 1 or 2 performances which not only helps you cut down the cost but also means you don't have to worry about selling lots of tickets, as you would to fill a longer run. There are also plenty of theatres out there which run

co-producing schemes on this model, meaning that they would do some of the producing work for you (more on this later!)

## For you if...

- ★ You want the experience of seeing your whole play on stage.
- ★ You don't have the funding for a longer run.
- ★ You want to keep your marketing campaign minimal (after all, if you're doing a one-off performance at all small venue, you'll only have to sell 50-ish tickets to fill the place up).
- ★ You want to gain the full experience of producing your own show, without the commitment of a longer run.
- ★ You want the chance to invite industry professionals to see your work.

## Things to consider

- Unless you're doing your one-off performance as a rehearsed reading/ script in hand, you'll need a considerable rehearsal period, and this can become costly.
- It might be considered a lot of work for one night, and it can be disappointing if industry professionals you wanted there can't make the date.
- You would be unlikely to cover your costs from box office alone, so make sure you can afford to put the money up.
- There are really good opportunities to co-produce projects like this, so do some research before going it alone!

## **A full production (usually 3 weeks or more)**

Full productions can run for durations of a couple of weeks to a few months (longer if you become super successful!). It goes without saying that producing a full run is a huge project, so it's worth making sure you're ready and can commit before you start.

### **For you if...**

- ★ You have a polished play that is ready to go (and you've had feedback from others who agree).
- ★ You have tested out your work in a rehearsed reading/ showcase environment first.
- ★ You have adequate funding.
- ★ You have experience in producing, or you have a director or co-producer on board who has.
- ★ You have plenty of time and commitment to give to the project.

### **Things to consider...**

- Are you really ready for this? Self-producing a longer run is a big project and you'll need to make sure you are really ready to give it a go.
- You'll need money or some kind funding secured.
- You'll also need a killer marketing plan.

→ That said, once you've done a project like this successfully, you can rest in the knowledge that you are now a professionally produced writer and you can do it all again!

## **Still not sure what kind of project to produce?**

*Check out our tips to help you decide.*

### **Start small**

If this is your first foray into self-producing, start with something like a reading, or showcase, where you can work with others.

### **Consider your aims**

If you desperately want to see your play in its entirety, seeing it as an excerpt in a showcase isn't going to cut the mustard. Likewise, if you want to get feedback on an early draft, a scratch night is all you need. Consider what you want from the experience and let that inform your decisions.

### **What can you afford?**

Ultimately, the scale of your project will depend on how much money you have, or how much support you can secure in kind. Be realistic about this, because whilst it's an amazing experience to have your work produced, it's not necessary to bankrupt yourself in the process!

### **Get advice**

Talk to people who have done this before, what challenges did they face with their projects? Are these things you'd be able to overcome?

**Do some research**

Are there people out there you could work with? What do other people's marketing campaigns look like? Go along to different types of projects, where do you see the value for you as a writer?

**Questions to think about before you start...**

Don't worry if the answers to these questions provoke more questions or you're not sure of some of the answers yet! This is intended as a starting point and to get you thinking about how to approach your project!

**What are your aims?**

---

---

---

**What are you hoping to get out of the project?**

---

---

---

**What type of project are you going to produce and how long will the run be? *Showcase/ reading etc, one or two nights.***

---

---

**Is your play really ready to be produced? Do you need further feedback?**

---

---

**What is your budget?**

**Will you need to apply for funding?**

---

**Do you have people in mind who you'd like to work with?**

---

**What are your main concerns about self-producing?**

---

---

---

---

**What do you think your strengths will be?**

---

---

---

---

**Notes (any further things you need to think about before you start)**

---

---

---



## 2.

# Finding a venue.

So you've decided what kind of project you're going to produce and given some consideration to the challenges you might you might face along the way, now it's time to find somewhere to put your show on!

You might already have a venue in mind, somewhere you've seen a play before, or somewhere your friends have had work produced. Or you might be open to finding somewhere completely new. Either way, you'll need to do plenty of research to make sure your chosen venue is completely right for you.

In this section, we'll cover the things you'll need to consider when finding a venue, as well as how to approach theatres about your project - and we've also included a list of fringe venues which you can use as a starting point.

### **Initial things to consider when choosing a venue...**

**Why do you want to put your show on at this venue? *Is it the best place for your work?***

**Do they produce work that is similar to your style artistically?**

**How much does it cost to hire? *Can you afford it?***

**Is the size of the theatre right? *Both in terms of the stage and how many tickets you'll need to sell?***

**Do they work on the scale you're looking for? *Do they hire their venue for one-off performances or longer runs only?***

**Does it have good transport links? *Do you think your audience will be able to make it their easily? Will it be easy for you to get there?***

**If you've been to the venue before, did you like it? *Was the atmosphere good?***

## Research

*Take some time to research some venues, either by visiting their website, or better still paying them a visit. Write down the pros and cons of each. Use your research to come up with a shortlist of venues to approach.*

<i>Pros</i>	<i>Cons</i>
<i>Eg, close to the tube. Produces comedy.</i>	<i>Eg, tricky to get to. More expensive than most.</i>

## Shortlist of venues:

1.

2.

3.

## List of fringe venues in London

**(This list is definitely not exhaustive but includes theatres which we know are generally open to self-produced projects or have an interest in new writing, use it as a starting point!)**

- ★ Hope Theatre
- ★ Bread & Roses Theatre
- ★ Rosemary Branch Theatre
- ★ Hen & Chickens Theatre Bar
- ★ Theatre503
- ★ Park Theatre
- ★ Old Red Lion, Islington
- ★ The Space Theatre
- ★ Bunker theatre
- ★ The London Theatre
- ★ The Finborough Theatre
- ★ Theatre Deli Studios
- ★ Tristan Bates
- ★ The Lion and Unicorn
- ★ Southwark Playhouse
- ★ New Wimbledon Theatre
- ★ The Yard Theatre
- ★ The Courtyard Theatre
- ★ The Vaults

## Other possibilities.

It's worth bearing in mind that you don't have to use a traditional theatre space. Rehearsed readings for example, work well in bars or cafes - and community centres or function rooms double up as excellent performance spaces.

However, if you're not using a traditional theatre, you will need to check that your venue is insured for public performances and if it isn't, you may need to purchase something called public liability insurance.

Check with your venue first, who should be able to guide you. If not, a quick google search will bring up lots of insurance companies who specialise in performance. The cost of insurance will vary greatly depending on the type of venue you are using, how many people will be coming - and whether you will be doing anything dangerous! So, it's worth checking this out at the beginning so that you can factor it into your budget.

Traditional theatre spaces tend to have their own insurance, but of course, it's always a good idea to confirm this.

## How to approach your chosen venue.

If you're producing the show completely by yourself (ie, not expecting the venue to have any creative involvement), then it might seem strange that you need to pitch your project and convince them to let you hire their venue. After all, you'll be paying good money for it, right?

Well, true. But, theatres will want to maintain or build their good reputation so they're going to want to be sure that the quality of the work meets their standards. They'll also want to be confident that you're going to deliver the project in the way you say you will and that your play fits in with their artistic ethos.

For this reason, many fringe venues offer co-producing models, where they will do some of the producing for you (we'll cover this later on).

Either way, you'll need to make a good impression and be able to pitch your project with confidence.

You should be able to find all the information about hiring a venue from their website, but if you do have a mutual connection, perhaps a friend knows the theatre manager, then it's a good idea to get in touch that way - at least then, you will have someone vouching for you from the off set.

## **Introductory emails.**

Once you've figured out who you need to email about hiring your venue, you'll need to make that first contact. This is your first impression, so make sure your initial email is confident, concise and professional.

### **What to include:**

- ★ Introduce yourself – briefly, in a sentence or two!
- ★ Introduce your project – pitch it in a sentence if possible!
- ★ Explain why your project is a good fit for their venue

- ★ Give details of other people involved in the project, especially if you've got someone on board who's worked on something notable!
- ★ Details of any funding you've got – if appropriate.
- ★ Ask about possible dates – (we'd suggest working at least 3 months in advance to make sure you have time to market and prepare for your show).
- ★ Suggest meeting up to discuss the project/ booking (it's worth pushing for this because you'll want to explore the venue as well as ask questions about the contract).

## Sample initial emails.

As a guide, here are some examples of introductory emails we have sent out before. We've blanked out the names for privacy but we hope these might give you an idea of the different tones you might use for making initial contact.

### Sample 1: Someone you know

*This is an email sent to a friend who worked at a theatre who was contacted to see if she could help with booking space there.*

*Subject: Booking space at [REDACTED]*

Hi [REDACTED] -

I hope you had a great holiday!

I'm emailing because I'm trying to set up a showcase and would love to do it at [REDACTED] - I was wondering if you'd be happy to help me approach them about it because you already have some contacts there?

A few of us from our writing group were asked to write some short plays which were performed by MA students. Given that these will be rehearsed and ready to go, it seems like a great opportunity to transfer these to another space to give them another showing. For the showing, we'll add a third piece written by '**mutual contact**' that will be rehearsed for this performance.

We already have director attached - [REDACTED] who I think you know because they directed '**mutual contact's**' play in Edinburgh last year.

So really, we've got the package put together, we just need the space. The three pieces together should run at just over an hour. Ideally, I think we'd like to book a theatre for one evening, perhaps at the beginning of May?

[REDACTED] would be my top pick given their new writing reputation and the feel of the space, which is why I wanted to enlist your help in approaching them.

Let me know if you'd be up for helping to negotiate this, and regardless let's find a time to get together for a catchup soon!

Best wishes and speak soon,

[REDACTED]



## Sample 2: Someone you don't know

*This is an email sent to a theatre manager, enquiring about booking the space.*

*Subject: Theatre Hire*

Dear [REDACTED]

I am writing to enquire about hiring your studio space for my new play for two performances some time during June or July.

I have previously had work produced at [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] - and have produced my own work at [REDACTED] (you can read the reviews here *link*).

I am particularly interested in your venue because I have seen some really exciting theatre here in recent months and I feel my play would fit in with the style of work you often produce.

My play is a two-hander about a mother and daughter who are coming to terms with the effects of domestic abuse, and it explores themes of social injustice, poverty and politics. It has already received a rehearsed reading at [REDACTED] scratch night and received some promising feedback.

The director attached is [REDACTED], who has worked with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

It would be great if we could set up a meeting with you regarding this and in the meantime, I would be happy to send you the script?

Best wishes,

[REDACTED]

## A quick note on...EXPERIENCE

If you're reading these sample emails and feeling put off because you haven't got any experience to refer to, then don't! You have to start somewhere and whilst we would recommend taking on manageable projects at first, we've also known writers who have pulled off some seemingly impossible challenges when it comes to self-producing.

As long as you're not taking on something which might be detrimental to your life (for example a project which is going to plunge you into debt), then we say 'go for it'. You'll be surprised at what you can pull off with a little determination and learning on the job is a great way to become a better producer.

That said, if we could only give you one tip, we'd say to work hard on building your network *before* embarking on a project. You can't make theatre on your own: whether it's a director, co-producer, actors, audience members, or even someone just to give you advice - you need people to make a piece of theatre happen. And often, at times when you are lacking experience, those people can lend you some of theirs!

You can build your network in a number of ways - joining a course or a writers' group is a good place to start; as is volunteering at a theatre. Applying to take part in scratch nights or new writing events is also a good idea before you embark on going it alone (as you probably already know, you can find lots of these kind of opportunities listed on London Playwrights' Blog).

## Meeting with the Theatre.

Hopefully, your contact with your chosen venue has resulted in a meeting with the theatre manager (or the person who deals with hires/programming). So, how will you approach it? In the meeting, you'll not only need to pitch your project, but you'll also need to learn the in's and out's of what you're signing up for.

In this section, we're going to cover what *you* need to cover in the meeting. Of course, theatres tend to be friendly places so there's no need to go in there like you're auditioning for *The Apprentice*, but you will need to be professional and most importantly, you'll need to find out vital information that you'll need to get your project off the ground.

In short, you'll need to do two things: pitch and interrogate...in the friendliest possible way, of course.

## Pitching.

As you probably already know, pitching can take many different forms from casual conversations to one-page outlines and beyond. but for now,

let's focus on pitching to the theatre manager (or person in charge of hiring).

### **In your pitch, you'll need to:**

- Outline your project in a confident and passionate way.
- Convince them that your play is right for their venue.
- Give them confidence in your ability to deliver the project.

### **Make sure your pitch covers three main points:**

1. Who you are
2. What your project is
3. Why it's important now

## **Pitch template**

Preparation is key! Use the template below to form an outline of what you're going to say. We'd then recommend practising in front of someone or even just a mirror beforehand; sure, you may feel a little silly doing this but it will give you confidence - and even the most high profile public speakers do this (or so we've heard!)

Of course, you won't be delivering your pitch in one continuous speech, hopefully it will turn out to be a nice, easy conversation - but cementing what you want to say in your own mind beforehand will help you to focus on getting your best points across.

## Template.

Who are you? *(tell them a bit about yourself and your achievements to date)*

What's the project? *(a play, reading, etc)*

What's the play about? *(sum it up in a couple of concise sentences, but be confident enough about your idea to answer any questions which may be fired at you afterwards!)*

Why did you write the play? *(there's no need to get carried away here, but show them that you're passionate about your idea and why you're connected to and invested in it).*

If you are organising a showcase or festival, tell them a bit about the plays included and what brings them together for this event?

Why is your project right for the theatre?

How are you going to deliver it? Do you have a creative team attached? (outline your best qualities and don't be afraid to name drop!)

Are you asking them for anything? For example, a discount or to pay for the hire from the Box Office revenue rather than paying in advance?

Are there any facts and figures you'll need to remember? (such as the number of performances, any funding you've secured, dates you had in mind?)

## **Pitching tips.**

- ★ Don't be too modest. Did you write a play? Then you're a playwright. It doesn't matter if you've got a day-job, are nervous about your producing skills or are nervous about meeting with the theatre -

focus on showing off the skills you do have and convincing everyone that you are great!

- ★ Relax. The theatre manager is a human being just like you. And you've already got something in common, since you're both into making theatre!
- ★ Don't waffle. No need to tell them your life story or a blow by blow account of your play. Give them a few interesting nuggets and they'll likely ask you a few questions in return - which is a thousand times less awkward than you reliving that dream you had in 2004 which formed the inspiration for your play!
- ★ You've got nothing to lose. If they decide not to go ahead with your project, then you're probably not a good fit for each other and in the long run it will be for the best. Just give it your best shot!
- ★ Don't over promise. Whilst it's a great idea to promote yourself in the best light possible, don't tell them you can deliver things which aren't confirmed - such as funding or collaborators. Be honest, or it can backfire later.

## **Interrogate.**

You're going to be parting with cash, definitely some sweat, and possibly some tears to get this show up and running. So, you need to make sure that you know exactly what you're signing up for and that it will work for you and your project.

We'd advise preparing plenty of questions and don't be afraid to write down the answers - after all, which writers don't carry a snazzy notebook around with them at all times? And more to the point, taking a few notes shows you're organised and serious about what you're doing.

Below we've provided a list of things you might want to ask the theatre, but these questions will vary depending on the type and scale of your project, so take some time before your meeting to decide what you need to know. And remember, there's no such thing as a stupid question, particularly if you're new to this, so don't be afraid to ask things which might seem minor.

## 10 things to ask the Theatre

1. How much? How much? How much?! *What does the venue charge for hire and do they take anything from your box office takings?*
2. Is any rehearsal space included? *We wouldn't hold your breath for anything more than a couple of hours on performance night, but hey, you can ask...*
3. Do I need to bring any staff with me, such as a tech or someone to manage the door?
4. What's available in terms of lighting, sound and set? *Will I need to pay a technician fee for this support?*
5. Are there any rules and regulations about the space? *including get-in and get out times*
6. Is any marketing included? *Eg, will my show be listed on your website? What marketing will they expect you to do on your own – create Facebook group, provide flyers, etc?*
7. How many seats are there? *And are all of them for sale or are some of them reserved for production/theatre staff?*
8. Do they offer any discounts/ help for new writers? *Eg, could they give you a slot at a reduced rate for a time when they are unlikely to get another booking?*



9. Is there a space behind the stage for the actors to wait and to put props? *Will it be possible to visit with the director to see what this space looks like?*
10. Can I have a contract, please? *Ok, so the answer to some of the above questions will be in the contract but always worth double checking that the details match up. Make sure you get any arrangements you've agreed in writing.*

**Top tip.**

It's good to be flexible where you can, such as performance dates. But do work within your means. Even if you really like a venue, if they only do 3 week runs and you wanted 1 or they are really too expensive – then don't do it!

**Case study.****“When a deal seems to good to be true”**

*By Kimberley Andrews*

The first time I attempted to produce my own play was just after graduating and although I had a director on board, we were both pretty new to the idea of producing a show - we'd worked in groups to produce showcases during our MA, but had never gone it alone in a professional venue.

We approached a small fringe theatre who we knew were interested in new writing and sent them a copy of my script. Our budget was tiny, so we asked them if they offered any deals for new writers. They mentioned that they mostly programmed in 3 to 4 week runs, but sometimes they had gaps in their scheduling - a week or a few days here and there which they were open to offering new writers a deal on. After all, the theatre would be

sitting empty on these days and more experienced theatre companies tended to book for longer amounts of time.

We attended a meeting at the theatre and they offered us a deal: we could hire the theatre for no upfront cost and simply pay them from the Box Office takings later. This was exciting! But there was a catch - : we'd need to provide the theatre with a cheque for the full hire fee, which they'd cash in if we didn't make enough money from ticket sales.

The problem with this was that it still meant us risking the full cost of hiring the theatre, something which we just couldn't afford. It was also presented to us as a fantastic deal, when actually, we were being charged the full hire rate, we were just not required to pay upfront.

We totally understood that small theatres are also strapped for cash and just don't have the means to offer their space out for free. That's fair enough, but we were left a little miffed by the promise of a good deal, we also felt we were being given the hard sell at the meeting - something which wasn't ideal since we were just out of uni and had no spare cash whatsoever!

I guess the lesson learned was that if a deal sounds too good to be true, it usually is. Also, that it's so important to follow your instincts and avoid the temptation of signing up to something you can't afford. It was very tempting to hand over that cheque at the promise of having my play on for a few nights at a London Theatre - but if we'd not been able to draw in the audiences, we would have been seriously out of pocket later on.

## Co-producing.

We've already mentioned co-producing in the guide and you've probably come across the term when looking at playwriting opportunities. So what is it? And what should you look out for?

In short, co-producing is exactly as it sounds: you team up with others to produce your work - and there are plenty of new writing theatres/ companies who work on this model. So, rather than taking a script and doing all the producing work, or simply hiring out their theatre for others to produce their work in - they meet somewhere in the middle. This might mean they offer you space and dramaturgical support, or they help you with casting, or marketing. In return, they'll take some, or perhaps all of the box office revenue.

Co-producing can be a great way forward for those new to self-producing, or those without the money to put into creating their own show. Not only can you limit financial risk, but you can also benefit from the experience of others and the network they might have.

That said, there are a couple of things to look out for. You need to check what kind of deal is on the table and whether it is actually beneficial for you. For example, if you're expected to put up some cash but you won't be getting a split of the box office takings, you'll want to find out why.

Thankfully, most co-producing models are run by people with an interest in new writing and passion for making theatre, and are therefore run with integrity. But it's really important to understand the finer details and weigh everything up before you start. Likewise, it's important to understand what you'll be expected to deliver and whether you can do it.

We have on occasion come across companies who produce new writing on a commercial basis, charging writers for producing their work as 'a service'. Whilst this is perfectly legal, it's worth bearing in mind that these companies are operating as a commercial venture and this may or may not match up with the interests of the writer. Some of these companies ask for a large payment upfront so we'd strongly recommend scrutinizing the details and getting some advice from others before signing up for something like this.

## 3.

# Budgeting.

Unless you've got an endless supply of cash, budgeting is going to be up there at the top of your priorities list when it comes to producing your work. The cost of putting on a show can vary wildly depending on different factors - such as technical requirements, audience numbers, and rehearsal time. If there's one thing we've learned over time is that costs can easily spiral out of control. So, it's super important to have a budget plan from the outset of your project and of course, stick to it! We'd also recommend have a contingency buffer, 10 percent or so of your total budget to allow for unexpected costs.

We've included some sample budgets below but it should be said that as costs can vary so much, these shouldn't be seen so much as a benchmark, more a starting point for you to get an idea of the types of things you'll be having to pay for.

### Sample budget 1.

#### Simple - one night showcase at fringe venue.

<b>Expenditure</b>	
Theatre hire (1 night)	£280
Rehearsal space	£0 (were able to use our university)
Actors	£0 (student actors took part for free)

Costume and props	£112
Printing (scripts and programmes)	£30
<b>Total</b>	£422
<b>Income</b>	
Writer contributions - split cost of venue hire between 5 writers	£280
Ticket sales	54 tickets at £6 each = £378
Total	£658
Income - Expenditure	£236

*Note: we split the £236 'profit' between the writers and performers, which meant the writers got a little bit of the money they put in back.*

## **Sample budget 2.**

### **More complex - a weeklong festival of new writing (script in hand performances).**

EXPENDITURE		
<i>Production Costs</i>		
Rehearsal space	£600	5 scripts x 1 day @ £120/day
Studio Theatre (perf. space)	£875	5-night run @ £175/night
Ushers	£500	5 nights @ £100/night
Technician	£200	Set up and take down
Script Printing	£270	5 scripts x 8 copies @ £6.75
Insurance	£220	
Programme printing	£125	5 readings @ £25
Awards for writers	£305	5 x engraved pen @ £61

Front of House/box office	£600	5 x 2 persons @ £60
<i>Marketing</i>		
Marketing & PR	£400	
Website design and build	£500	
Website domain registration	£9	For 12 months
Website hosting	£140	For 12 months
Flyer, poster, & invite design	£75	
Printing - flyers	£51	Quote for 1000 flyers
Printing - posters	£20	Quote for 25 posters
<i>Salaries</i>		
Festival manager	£1,200	10 days work @ £120/day
Fundraising manager	£600	5 days work @ £120/day
Marketing & social media	£600	5 days work @ £120/day
Directors	£1,200	5 x 2 days @ £120/day
Actors	£4,050	5 x 6 actors x 1.5 days @ £90/day
<i>Subtotal</i>	£12,540	
<i>Contingency @ 10%</i>	£1,254	
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>£13,794</b>	

INCOME		
<i>Secured income - cash</i>		
Private donation	£700	
<i>Secured income - in kind</i>		
Rehearsal space	£600	
Studio Theatre (perf. space)	£875	
Script Printing	£100	
Awards for writers	£305	
Front of House	£600	
Website hosting	£140	Provided by
<i>Expected income</i>		
Box office sales	£300	15 seats @ £4 for 5 performances
<i>Fundraising target</i>	<i>£10,174</i>	
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>£13,794</b>	



## Expenditure sheet

Here is a list of the things you can expect to pay for when producing your own show. Of course, there may be more expenses which come your way so we've left some blank spaces at the end for you to fill in.

<b><u>Expenditure</u></b>	
<i>Production Costs</i>	
Rehearsal space	
Studio Theatre (perf. space)	
Ushers	
Technician	
Script Printing	
Insurance	
Programme printing	
Costume and props	
Front of House/box office	
<i>Marketing &amp; PR</i>	
Website design and build	
Website domain registration	
Website hosting	
Flyer, poster, & invite design	

Printing - flyers
Printing - posters
<i>Salaries</i>
Producers
Fundraising manager
Marketing & social media
Directors
Actors
Technical staff
Ushers
Designer

## Income sheet

Here is a list of places where you might be able to secure income.

Remember, if any of the things on this list are 'predicted', such as box office takings, you'll need to have a back up plan in place to make sure you can cover your expenses if things don't go to plan.

<b>Income</b>	
Ticket sales	
Donations	
Funding (such as Arts Council or from a Crowdfunding campaign)	
Income secured in kind (such as free rehearsal space or printing)	
Money you can invest yourself	

## Salaries.

You might have noticed a crucial difference in the two budget sheets: in the larger scale production, everyone was paid a salary for their time; unlike the showcase, where everyone got a share of the very small profit at the end - which didn't even come close to compensating them for their time and effort!

We believe that everyone should be paid a fair wage for their time and it's a real issue within theatre that this isn't always the case.

That said, something we know all too well as playwrights, is that some projects just wouldn't happen without people working on a voluntary basis. This is particularly true of small scale events such as readings or showcases. Our stance on this is that if everyone is being treated fairly and absolutely *no one* at all is making money from the project, then sometimes working for free is necessary in order to get work developed. It's not ideal of course, but as creatives, sometimes we just want our work to be seen - and that can mean working for free at times.

If people are working for free on your project, however, you'll need to be thoughtful about the demands you make on their time and energy. You'll also need to make sure that the project is mutually beneficial for all involved: perhaps your director is just starting out and wants experience of directing a play on their own, or your actors are students who need to build their CV. Either way, the relationship should be collaborative and appreciative and you'll need to factor in that people have other commitments (such as paid work!).

If a small amount of profit is likely to be made from your project, then we'd recommend working on a profit-share basis. Even if this ends up being a token amount of money after being split amongst the team, it is better than one person making money off the back of other people's time.

If you are running anything bigger than a reading or showcase, then paying your team is absolutely essential (unless perhaps you are working on an amateur production, which is different as any profit made is likely to be put back into the company to fund future productions).

**There are clear guidelines on how much creatives should be paid here:**

- ★ Equity ([www.equity.org.uk](http://www.equity.org.uk))
- ★ ITC ([www.itc-arts.org/rates-of-pay](http://www.itc-arts.org/rates-of-pay))
- ★ UK Theatre ([www.uktheatre.org](http://www.uktheatre.org))
- ★ Writers Guild of Great Britain ([www.writersguild.org.uk](http://www.writersguild.org.uk))

## 4.

# Fundraising.

Now you have an idea of budget, you'll likely need to raise some funds before your project can go ahead. Securing funding can be a difficult process and is definitely a project in itself.

For smaller scale productions, it might be that you can invest all of the money yourself (or chip in with your other collaborators). But do bear in mind that it can be difficult to break even, particularly if your show is only running for a short time, as the number of tickets you can sell will be limited. So as we've said before, only put in what you can afford to 'lose' (of course, 'lose' isn't quite the right word, since you'll be gaining a lot from the experience, but still, that won't pay your bills if you bankrupt yourself to get your show on!) .

It might be that you can also secure some support in kind, such as rehearsal space or printing - these things can add up so it's worth trying your best to get whatever you can for free. Just be reasonable about what you're asking for!

## Other possibilities.

### Foundations & grants

There are foundations and grants out there which support artists in their work. Applying for these can be a long and competitive process but it's a

good idea to do some research to see if you might be eligible for some help

### **Where to find more information on foundations and grants:**

- ★ London Playwrights' Blog (we list these in the Opportunities section of our Blog as and when we find them).
- ★ Grants Online ([Grantsonline.org.uk](http://Grantsonline.org.uk))
- ★ Arts Council Jobs ([Artsjobs.org.uk](http://Artsjobs.org.uk))

### **Sponsorship**

Sometimes businesses or organisations might be willing to offer some financial support in return for some advertising in your marketing materials. You're likely to get more success this way by applying to companies you have a connection with, or perhaps local businesses who would see the value in you advertising for them.

### **Crowdfunding**

Crowdfunding is another option, where you set up an online fundraising page to raise money for your project. There are different platforms available to do this and they vary in what percentage they take and what you get in return. You'll need to put in some effort marketing wise and be willing to ask your network for donations in order to run a successful crowdfunding campaign.

### **Some popular choices for Crowdfunding theatre projects are:**

- ★ Kickstarter ([kickstarter.com](http://kickstarter.com))

- ★ Gofundme (gofundme.com)
- ★ Crowdfunder (crowdfunder.co.uk)

### **Things you need to set up a Crowdfunding campaign:**

- A video of you talking about your production and a marketing image.
- A write up of your campaign, outlining why you need funding.
- Strong social media presence throughout campaign.
- Reward structure for different tiers of support (remember to budget for shipping if you're sending physical things).
- Post updates along the way about your campaign
- 'Launch' people – people who can donate to your campaign at the beginning, to give it a boost and to encourage others to do the same.
- Your 'rescue' backup – the people who can give at the end to help you reach your goal.

## **Arts Council Funding.**

*You'll most likely have heard about projects supported by funding from the Arts Council. The process of applying can definitely seem overwhelming, so we asked Matthew Gabrielli, who has extensive experience in Arts marketing and fundraising to write the following chapter.*

### **Arts Council Funding Guide by Matthew Gabrielli**

#### **Introduction**

Arts Council England is a government-funded body dedicated to promoting the arts, including theatre. Arts Council England support a number of different artists in a number of different ways. Between 2018 and 2022, they will invest £1.45 billion of public money from government and an estimated £860 million from the National Lottery to help create



exciting artistic experiences for as many people as possible across England. ACE support artists and arts organisations in a number of different ways for the purpose of this guide, I've decided to focus on the process where an emerging writer is most likely to engage with the funding body- National Lottery Projects Grants (under 15k). This guide is written from the point of view of an emerging writer who is completing their own application without the aid of a producer. Whether you're wanting to do some research and development, organise a tour or do a 4 week run at a London theatre there are some basic principles to writing a successful funding bid which are important to bear in mind.

ACE get a lot of applications and they're going to be judging your application on a number of things: artistic quality, value for money and impact. Artistic quality will be judged on how clearly you describe your idea and the proven track record of yourself, your collaborators and partners. Value for money will be based on how well your budget stacks up and if it feels like the project is doable, and impact will be asking 'who benefits from this art?'

### **★ Top Tip**

***ACE funding can be very time consuming and the online portal Grantium can be confusing for a first time user - I strongly recommend you create your application in a word document and an Excel spreadsheet and then copy and paste the information into Grantium. Included with this is a blank template for National Lottery Project Grants 2019. Computers crash, always back up your work.***

### **The Idea**

This might seem obvious but you'd be amazed how many people fall at the first hurdle, firstly, what is your idea? If it's a play, great, but what it's about? Where will it be performed? Is this a one of performance? Or perhaps it's a

tour? Why does this piece of theatre need to be made now and why is ACE the best organisation to fund it? You'll be asked to describe your idea in 500 characters or less, so start thinking from the start how you can clearly describe what it is you want to do.

Will ACE fund it? ACE project grants has eligibility quiz are their website: follow the link to complete it:

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/arts-council-national-lottery-project-grants/my-project-ready>

### ★ Top Tip

***For better or worse Grantium counts the number of characters you use not the number of words, think about how you can abbreviate long titles '&' is your best friend.***

### Artists

For the sake of a Project Grant an artist is anyone who is going to be paid on the project, how many people are going to be involved in your budget what are their jobs? Actors, Director, Stage Manager etc. There will be 2 options on the form: 'confirmed' and 'expected', the more artists you have 'confirmed' at the start of the ACE application, the stronger it's going to be. As this is your first ACE application it might be wise to try and approach some artists who have more experience than you, their experience will help make your application look stronger.

### Audience

It's fairly obvious what the role of the audience is in the project, but you'll need an idea of who you'd like to target. Perhaps your plays' subject matter will attract a certain type of audience member. Maybe you'll be performing your work in a library or other community setting and therefore might be able to reach audiences who don't normally go to the theatre due to

financial, geographical or social barriers. You'll also be asked about online audiences, so think about your online presence, how could you increase numbers? Perhaps you have a large twitter following? Or maybe you'll write a blog about the process? Whilst it's good to think of ways of connecting with online audiences, make sure this is in line with the rest of the project. There are lots of great arts projects competing for funding and knowing who your audience is and how you are going to reach them is really important if you want your application to stand out.

**★ Top Tip**

***You'll be asked to provide estimated figures for how many audiences members you think will attend, a good rule of thumb would be 60% of your venues capacity.***

**Participants**

Participants are members of the public who will be taking a more active role in your project than audiences but won't be paid. For example, your project might be focused around working with members of the public with lots of interactive opportunities for people to get involved. But what if it's not? It's still worth thinking creatively about how you might involve members of the public. You might want to run a workshop passing on knowledge and experience from the project. If your project is responding to a particular issue, maybe you'll interview members of the public affected by this issue to inform your writing.

**★ Top Tip**

***Participation will fit into some projects better than others but if you can think of a creative way to engage more members of the public your application will be all the stronger for it.***

## Budget

The good news is if you're successful ACE will fund your project, the bad news they'll only fund 90% of it. You'll need to raise 10% of the funds via other sources; most theatre projects will attempt to do this via box office takings, but you'll have to calculate how much to charge for tickets and take the capacity of the venue into account (being careful not to price yourself out of the market). Depending on the nature of your project you might be able to apply to other funders, such as charitable trusts or local councils.

In terms of working out how much your budget is: be honest and be realistic - a common mistake is that people will try and cut the budget down by not paying themselves or not paying themselves enough. ACE want to support artists, so be realistic with the costs. Sometimes this might mean having honest conversations with yourself, perhaps you need to cut that state of the art laser show and that cast of 12 is going to be 3 actors doubling up.

In terms of paying people ITC Rates card is a good place to start (<https://www.itc-arts.org/rates-of-pay>). Partners are also an important allies to help make your budget add up.

### ★ Top Tip

**Download my budget spreadsheet from the London Playwrights' website ([www.londonplaywrights.org](http://www.londonplaywrights.org), under the resources/**

***self-producing heading) to help you manage your incoming and outgoing expenses.***

## **Partners**

At this point you might be feeling a little overwhelmed. If the act of writing can be lonely, the act of filling in ACE application can be lonely *and* intimidating. So now seems like a good time to talk about partners. Partners in most theatre projects are likely to be venues such as theatres or art centres. Have a think about organisations you already have relationships with. Finding the right partner takes time - arts organisations are made up of small busy teams, so be polite, be patient. Also think outside the box, if you can't get a foot in the door at the big NPO regional theatre in the city centre. Have a look at what other organisations might be able to support your project, think libraries, universities and museums - these are all possible partners who might be able to offer you in kind support.

### **★ Top Tip**

***When approaching venues. research is key, think about tailoring your project to fit in with the organisation you're approaching.***

## **In Kind Support**

Support in kind means a non-cash contribution to your project, such as materials or services that are provided free of charge or at a reduced rate. This can contribute to the success of your project, and shows support for your work.

**What you can include as in kind support:**

Activities, materials, or services that:

- Are needed for the project;
- You would otherwise have to pay for; and
- Don't already belong to you.

## **Examples**

- Materials needed to create or present the work (for example, fabric, paint, metal, frames, projectors, cabinets or speakers)
- Equipment that you would normally have to hire for a fee (for example, instruments, vehicles, PA, or IT systems)
- Use of a space that you would normally have to hire for a fee (for example, studio, office, rehearsal, or exhibition space)
- Specialist support (for example, from a mentor, consultant, business advisor and fundraiser) provided for free or for a reduced fee. This would only be seen as appropriate if the specialist has decided that they want to offer their time as support in kind.
- Marketing and promotional support (for example, website development, printing, digital marketing)
- Filming, photography, documenting and so on
- Reduced rates
- Volunteer time (where opportunities to volunteer benefit the volunteers as well as you)

### **★ Top Tip**

***You cannot include as support in kind:***

- ***Activities, materials or services that are provided before a decision on your application has been made.***
- ***Cash donations (these should come under project income)***

## **Timeline**

Now you've got everything you need for your project you'll need to draw up a timeline. You'll need to decide how long your project will take to complete, try breaking down the project into different activities – how long will each activity take and which member of your team will be responsible for completing each task.

As with budgets, always be honest and realistic about how long it will take to complete each activity, there is no point overworking yourself or not giving yourself enough time because ultimately the project will suffer as a result.

The secret to a successful project is taking the time to plan. It's a good idea to use a S.W.O.T analysis: strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Strengths and weaknesses are internal (things you can control), opportunities and threats are external (out of your control).

**★ Top Tip**

***The second sheet of the budget spreadsheet download is a timeline sheet which you can use to track activities and tasks.***

**Seek advice**

Arts Council England are here to help you, you can seek advice either by contacting their helpline on [0845 300 6200](tel:08453006200) or [0161 934 4317](tel:01619344317) or by email on [enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk). You might also want to try and get a meeting with a team member from your region ACE break down regions as London, South East, South West, Midlands and North. Good luck!

**★ Top tip**

*If you want to get a further idea of the application process, download a copy of the Arts Council National Lottery Project Grants Under £15,000 application template, again from the self-producing section of the London Playwrights' website.*

## 5.

# Building your creative team

Once you've got your funding organised, you'll need to find people to bring your show to life - from a creative team to help you get things up and running to performers.

In truth, when self-producing, you often end up taking on additional production roles yourself. In an ideal world you'd be able to pay others to do your tech, costume or stage management but when you're working on a shoestring budget, you usually end up doing this yourself. Whilst this can be challenging, the experience only empowers you more - after all, if you know you're capable of taking on other roles, you know you can self-produce again without breaking the bank.

**Here is a list of some of the roles you'll need to consider:**

**Stage manager** - someone to ensure everything is as it should be in the space during rehearsals and performances.

**Tech/ lighting** - someone to operate any technical equipment and lighting

**Costume** - someone to plan and source costumes

**Props** - someone to plan and source props; and to ensure they are set in the right places on performance night

**Ushers** - people to direct the audience



**Marketing** - someone to plan and execute your advertising campaign

Obviously, it would be preferential to get trained people in to take on these roles but if you strive for perfection, you might find it tricky to get your show off the ground. In your first few projects, crack on with these roles yourself and hopefully you'll work up to being able to afford additional team members on future projects.

## **Working with a Director.**

Having a director on board is essential. Whilst lots of writers are also skilled in (and partial to) directing, it certainly isn't a given. We'd say that if you don't have any experience in this field, it's a tricky one to pull off. Having a skilled director on board gives your project coherence and as a playwright, you'll learn a lot about your work from seeing how a director interprets it from the page to the stage.

When looking for a director, you'll need to make sure you're on the same page about things. For example, if you want some input in the rehearsal room, you'll need to make that clear. You should also discuss the play beforehand to make sure their creative vision isn't completely at odds with yours. That said, we'd always recommend being open to new creative interpretations and you should always let the director do their job and direct!

### **How to find a director**

- ★ We know we keep mentioning your 'network' but finding a director based on recommendation or a connection, is ideal.

- ★ Go to fringe shows and make a note of the director's name; if you like their work, contact them later.
- ★ Advertise on Arts Jobs or similar

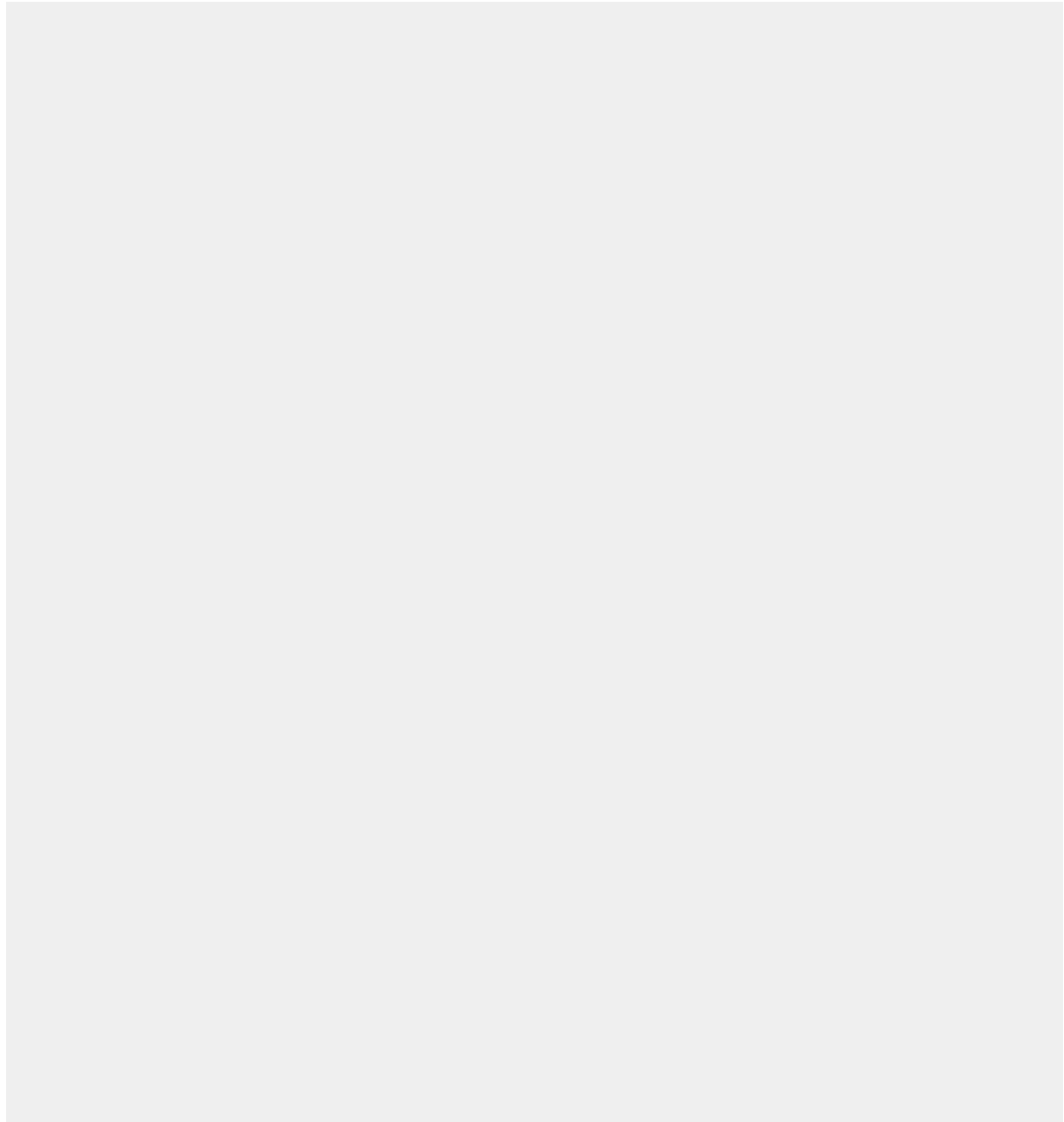
## **Casting.**

Before you start, it's really important to define your relationship with your director (unless of course, it's you!). Will they be taking responsibility for casting? How much input will you have?

If you're working alongside the director on this, sit down together and decide what your casting priorities are (Eg; accurate ages, being able to do a specific accent, play multiple roles etc). Always remember that your casting requirements will be heavily affected by the type of project you're producing. For example, if you're producing a showcase, where the actors will have to play the multiple roles required for each piece, you can't expect them to be 'spot on' for every aspect of every role! Likewise, if you're not paying people, you'll have to abandon some of the finer details in favour of people who are willing and able to help you out.

### **List of casting priorities.**

*Jot down a list of your priorities for casting and then number them in order of importance.*



## **Where to find actors.**

- ★ Networking (attend a writers group, go to your friends' readings etc)

- ★ Approach drama schools and ask them to put a call out (but don't expect much luck in term time!).
- ★ Put out ads on casting websites such as Mandy, Spotlight or Arts Jobs.
- ★ Use social media (put a call out in your own network and ask people to share or post in acting groups or the Playwriting UK Group of Facebook or Twitter).

## **Auditions.**

If you're putting up an advert for actors rather than working by recommendation, you're going to want to do some sort of screening – even if it's just a read through of a couple of scenes of your play. If you're planning on formal auditions, you'll need to hire appropriate space, so don't forget to include this in your budget.

Do bear in mind that if you're asking people to work for free, formal auditions aren't usually appropriate. It's about making it clear that your auditions are a mutual thing to see whether they're a good fit for your role, rather than you assessing their talent. Do remember that if people are working for free, they are doing you a favour so asking them to learn and perform a Shakespeare speech isn't really fair

## **Casting tips.**

- ★ Start building your network now. Having a few actors in your network will not only make casting easier but also help you in an emergency, such as if someone drops out!

- ★ Think twice about producing a piece with a large cast if you're on a tight budget or have little time. Employing a large cast can be costly and working out your rehearsal schedule will be more complex.
- ★ Make sure your work is at its' best before you send it out so that you attract the right people to your work.
- ★ Be realistic: if your play is very long, think about producing a reading or extracts - unless you have the time and money to rehearse.
- ★ Don't get too hung up on 'perfect' casting, especially if you're organising a reading or showcase - the main thing is that it happens!
- ★ Be flexible and reasonable about the amount of time you are expecting from people.
- ★ Try and have a contingency plan in case someone drops out.

## 6.

# Rehearsals.

So you've got your team in place and it's time to start rehearsing! Exactly how much time should you spend on it? And how should you approach the rehearsal process to get the most out of it?

How many rehearsals you have will depend on two things: time and money. You'll always wish you could rehearse that little bit more, who doesn't want their show to be perfect? But unless you've got free flowing cash and an abundance of time, you're going to have to make do with what you can afford.

On the flip side, you don't need to over-rehearse. As long as you've planned for adequate rehearsal time for people to feel confident in what they're doing, you don't need to overcook it - a little bit of nervous energy can be a good thing!

### **Tips**

- Work around people's commitments - especially if you're not paying them for their time.
- Consider the cost of rehearsal space, it can quickly add up.
- Talk to your director (they'll probably have a good idea of how much rehearsal time you need).
- Don't expect it to be easy: you're likely to wish you had more time but it's how productive you are in rehearsals that really counts.

## **Actor availability and finding space.**

You'll need to work on these two things concurrently. Start checking availability for rehearsal spaces whilst working out when your actors and team are available.

If you're paying everyone or working on a larger scale project, you should advise on a proposed rehearsal period from the outset so that people can plan to be free for the work. That said, people still have other commitments so you will need to work around these. Things can be trickier if no one is being paid, since day-jobs and responsibilities will need need be prioritised.

**Tip:** Set up a Doodle poll ([www.doodle.com](http://www.doodle.com)) to get everyone's availability in one place before you start.

## **Finding space.**

There are lots of places to rehearse in London but whilst there are many reasonably priced places out there, it can still add up if you're working on a tight budget.

Unfortunately, your performance venue is unlikely to offer rehearsal space beyond a technical run through on the day, so it's whilst it's worth checking on this, you should expect to have to find additional space.

If you're outside London and there aren't many purpose built rehearsal spaces near you, or you want to try and save money - try thinking outside the box: community centres, pub function rooms or even living rooms can be fine as rehearsal spaces!

**Tip:** Tutti ([www.tuttispace.com](http://www.tuttispace.com)) is a fantastic website which helps creatives find cheap rehearsal space in London.

**Here are some rehearsal spaces we have used:**

- ★ Theatre Deli Studios
- ★ The Rag Factory
- ★ Chisenhale Dance Studios
- ★ The Nursery Theatre
- ★ The Old Diorama
- ★ RADA Studios



## The rehearsal schedule.

Once you've booked the space, your next step will be to come up with a schedule for your rehearsals - working around the space you have and the availability of your actors.

### Sample rehearsal plan

#### Step 1: note down which actors are available on dates space is booked

Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
					10am-1pm Dan Kim Gloria Adam Tim
6-9pm Dan	6-9pm Dan	6-9pm Gloria	6-9pm Adam	6-9pm Gloria	2pm-5pm Kim

Kim	Kim Gloria Adam Tim	Kim	Tim Dan	Dan	Gloria
-----	------------------------------	-----	------------	-----	--------

**Step 2: List your scenes (or if it's a showcase, each piece or excerpt) and the actors needed for each one.**

**For example:**

Scene 1: Kim and Gloria

Scene 2: Adam, Tim and Dan

Scene 3: Gloria, Kim

Scene 4: Dan, Kim

Scene 5: Dan, Kim, Gloria, Adam and Tim

**Step 3: Decide which scene to work on in each rehearsal by matching up each scene with actor availability.**

**Tip:** Don't expect to work in chronological order and try to minimise the time people spend waiting around by grouping scenes together if you can!

**Rehearsal schedule**

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
					10am-1pm

10-1pm  Dan Gloria Adam Tim  (initial read-thro ugh. Director is standing in for Kim)					Dan Kim Gloria Adam Tim (Scene 4)  (Scene 2)  (run through of whole thing)
6-9pm  (Scene 4) Dan Kim	6-9pm  (Scene 5) Dan Kim Gloria Adam Tim	6-9pm  (Scene 1 & Scene 3) Gloria Kim	6-9pm  Scene 2 and extract from sc.5) Adam Tim Dan	6-9pm  Gloria Dan	2pm-5pm  (Scene 1& 3) Kim Gloria

### Tips for the first rehearsal or initial read through:

- Try to get the whole cast there if possible in the first rehearsal to read the play aloud (if you can't, consider getting a friend to stand in so you can get a sense of the whole play read aloud).

- Do your prep beforehand (print off scripts and chat with the director).
- Be open to questions and willing to make small edits if necessary (don't forget to take notes).

### **What to do in rehearsals...**

- Let the director direct!
- Improve your writing (make a note of things which don't work as well or aren't easily understood).
- Be diplomatic (if there's something you're not sure of, talk to the director during the break; avoid disrupting the rehearsals if possible)
- Make yourself useful: compile a props list etc
- Stay calm! It's normal to feel nervous or self-conscious when hearing your work aloud for the first time, or if things don't run smoothly in rehearsal - but it will be fine!
- Unless it's been agreed by the whole company, don't present new drafts of your work once rehearsals have begun. Whilst the odd thing may crop up, your work should have been edited prior to rehearsals!

### **Case study**

#### **“what to do when things go wrong”.**

Kimberley Andrews

Invariably, somewhere during the self-producing process something will go wrong!

A while back, I produced a small showcase to present the work of a writers' group. No one was being paid and in fact, the writers were all chipping in to support the show so that they could invite industry people to come in and see their work.

We found actors who we knew through mutual connections; they were recent graduates and open to building their CV whilst looking for paid work. They were great, and everything was running smoothly.

Until - two of the actors dropped out just a week before the show. To be fair, they both had their reasons: one of them got offered paid work that they just couldn't afford to refuse and another had some personal problems.

We were cutting it fine to replace the actors and have them rehearse and we ended up being in a mad panic, wondering if the show could go ahead. We ended up replacing one of the pieces in the showcase with a monologue performed one of the writers and then, at the last minute, we found another actor who was willing to step in at short notice.

All was well in the end but it taught us a couple of things. Firstly, cheesy as it sounds, the show must go on! Whether it's replacing a piece in a showcase or getting up on stage yourself, if you've booked a venue and sold tickets, you need to put a show on. Secondly, having a solid network is so important as it means you'll have people who are willing to step in and save the day if things go wrong.

## Technical requirements and rehearsals

How elaborate your technical requirements are will depend on the scale of your project. In general, we'd recommend keeping things as simple as possible, because the more things you have going on - the more chance there is of something going wrong! Also, unless you have professionals onboard to run the tech stuff for you, you'll be making your life a lot harder by shoehorning in a range of technical requirements - not to mention the additional costs involved.

Often venues will prefer (or even insist) that you hire their tech people, particularly when it comes to lighting because the equipment is so expensive - they want to be sure that it's all in safe hands! So bear this in mind when budgeting.

In general, see technical additions, such as light and music as a bonus to be used sparingly. Creating fringe theatre is not the time to experiment with Hollywood-esque special effects!

### **Lighting:**

- ★ Check with the venue about whether they will allow you to change their lighting set up.
- ★ Check whether you need to hire their lighting technician.
- ★ Less is more - a couple of lighting states is generally enough for a small scale production.
- ★ You'll need to provide a script for the lighting technician that is marked up with their lighting cues.

### **Sound effects/ music**

- ★ Whilst sound effects and music can help create the atmosphere, avoid over complicating things by adding too many effects.
- ★ Again, check with your venue about any equipment they have and whether you are allowed to use it.
- ★ You'll also need to provide a script for the sound person marked up with their cues.
- ★ Check with your venue, but you will generally need a licence to play music. More information can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/licence-to-play-live-or-recorded-music>

### **Props and health and safety**

- ★ Theatres have strict fire regulations and you'll no doubt be briefed on how this affects what type of props you can use.
- ★ Do check everything with your venue before the performance to avoid any unexpected restrictions when it is already too late to find alternative!

## **The tech rehearsal**

Prior to your performance, either on the day or just before, you'll have a technical run through in your venue. This is your chance to run through the technical requirements and practise them with the cues in your piece.

The tech run is not a chance to rehearse the performance itself. You can expect a lot of stopping and starting, going back over certain points , or skimming past the scenes which have no technical requirements. Tech rehearsals can be lengthy and tiring whilst your team works hard to get things right ready for the performance, so leave any creative feedback at the door and be on hand to step in and help with anything that is needed.



# 7.

## Marketing Strategy

*We asked Jennifer Cerys from Lemon House Theatre to take you through the process of marketing a show when you are self-producing.*

### **How to market your show when self-producing**

By Jennifer Cerys

Self-producing usually means you're taking on more than one role. Maybe you've written the script, or are acting in the show, or are even doing some of the tech as well. Though no matter how much prep you do, a show isn't complete until there's an audience there for actors to play off – but how do you get those audiences in? Especially if you have a limited marketing budget?

I recently co-produced the plays *Different Sand & Willow* at The Bunker Theatre, which ran for four days as part of their B-Sides season, and marketing while juggling the many other hats of a self-producer was one of the biggest challenges. But we finished the run having learnt a lot, and definitely preparing us for our next show! Here's some of the tips I picked up:

### **1. Decide who your audience are**

This doesn't have to be as specific as targeting a particular age group, or those with a certain interest. It's just a good idea to figure out the different possible ways an audience could find your shows.

Early on, myself and co-producer Samia looked at where we thought our audience would come from and how to reach that audience. Based off previous shows, and the limited length of the run, we estimated that 25% of our audience members would be friends of the cast and crew involved in the show, 25% would come through The Bunker and the other 50% would come through our press and outreach. Working this out made it easier to decide where to put our focus with marketing.

### **2. Plan how to reach that audience**

There's no single marketing tool you can use to reach every possible audience member, so it's good to look at these groups you've divided your audience into and then figure out how to reach each one.

For those who are friends and family, it's worth sitting down with the cast and creatives involved in the show early on and chat to them about your marketing strategy – as well as ask them for advice! Sending them rehearsal images and links to press coverage to share on social media is a great way to get your cast to spread the word without putting too much pressure on them to be responsible for marketing.

Then, for reaching the audience who will come through the venue (in our case, The Bunker), set up a meeting with their Marketing Manager once you've been confirmed for their season, and ask what information you can provide them with so that they can support the show. This may be dropping flyers or posters off at the venue, sending them images for their newsletter, or even just tagging them in on social media. It's good to know what they can offer and how you can facilitate that.

The biggest chunk of your audience will most likely be coming from the outreach and marketing you're doing and will take up the most work, so...

### **3. ...Remember that marketing doesn't just mean press**

I estimated that 50% of our audience will find the show through our own marketing, which is the largest and most important part. Having a good press release and sending this out to local news sites and theatre related sites is vital, but marketing isn't just about how good your press release is.

*Different Sand* told the story of two British-Algerian sisters, and *Willow* of a queer couple breaking up, so myself and the other co-producer Samia knew early on we wanted to reach out to an Algerian and Queer audience as we had created these shows for those audiences.

To do this, outreach became a much bigger part of our marketing strategy than press. I contacted queer groups on the MeetUp site (which is an online platform where those with similar interests can get in contact and hang out), offering to host MeetUps at the show, and we reached out to community centres, other theatre collectives, and even university societies. It's about figuring out where your audience is and introducing yourself to them.

#### **4. But don't forget about press either!**

Make sure you're contacting press at least two weeks before you *think* you should. You're going to have to follow up (and keep following up!) on all the emails you're sending, so give yourself enough time to do this.

And press doesn't just have to mean big national papers, you're actually more likely to get an audience by contacting smaller press sites that resonate more with the themes of your show.

Connection is a really big part of marketing your show; when you're reaching out to press, say why you want coverage in this particular outlet – is it because it's a queer publication and your show features queer characters? Is it because it's the local paper where the theatre is based? Or is it because you read a particular article on this site you loved? Try not to send generic 'Hi there' emails.

## 5. Think in groups

Selling tickets was definitely one of our biggest challenges from doing the *Different Sand & Willow* double bill, as these were our first full length productions as [Lemon House Theatre](#), so we couldn't attract audiences from our reputation alone.

This meant we looked into ways to reach out to organisations that could bring along groups – such as the MeetUps groups, or local youth groups, or even contacting charities that could share it round with their teams. We set up discount codes for tickets that we offered these groups, to provide an incentive for big groups booking together.

When we first got confirmed for The Bunker's season, we were excited but also knew that selling tickets for a four-day-run when you're a new theatre company would be one of our biggest challenges – especially as we're unfunded. So we started marketing early, and had a shared Google Drive of people and places we could contact - which made it much easier when seeing how much coverage we had so far, who we needed to follow up with, and contacts we could build on.

Though we secured some good features on the BBC, LondonLive and DIVA magazine, we got to two weeks before the shows and the ticket sales were... not the best. And that's when we set up the discount code for groups, and started contacting other theatre companies for tweet swaps (where you tweet about their show and they tweet about yours in return), and spent the remaining amount we had budgeted for marketing (which was tiny to begin with!) on running adverts in queer publications.

It's about knowing the audience you want to appeal to, and how to reach them – which can mean everything from sending a press release to BBC London to sending a DM to a small art collective on Instagram who may be interested in your show.

Marketing when you're self-producing is about planning ahead, but as with everything in theatre, lots happens last minute! So when you're manically refreshing that ticket sales site, remember that people buy tickets to fringe plays right up to (and including) the day of the show – so keep promoting, sending those emails and dropping off those flyers!

## **Marketing plan.**

*What are your aims? Why are you putting on this show? What do you hope to get out of it?*

*Who do you want to come? Compile a list here.*

How will reach the people you want to be in your audience?

## **Branding checklist.**

To market your show, you'll need to create marketing materials and branding. Here's what you'll need:

- ❑ **Project title**

*(name of the play unless you are putting on a showcase or a sketch show, in which case you'll need an umbrella name for the whole show)*

- ❑ **Company name**

*(It's useful to have a company name even if you are not setting up an actual business as it creates a brand you can draw upon if you decide to produce more shows in the future).*

- ❑ **Promotional image**

*(use a design website such as Canva or Photoshop.. Or create your own photo. This image can then be used on e-flyers, social media etc).*

### ☐ **Logline**

*(One catchy sentence summing up the essence of the show)*

### ☐ **Blurb**

*(Approx 3 sentences with a more detailed description of your show – without giving too much away!)*

## **Outreach.**

It goes without saying that you'll need to let people know about your show!

You might want to send a group email to your contacts containing details for your show - such as an e-flyer using your image, logline and details for your booking tickets. .

If you're contacting industry professionals to invite them though, do make it personal! Don't shy away from inviting agents and the like to your production, this is a great opportunity to build your network and promote yourself so do make sure you put it to good use, after all, you've put a lot of hard work in to make it happen!

## **Industry outreach suggestions.**

### **'New Writing' Theatres**



- ★ Royal Court
- ★ Soho Theatre
- ★ Finborough Theatre
- ★ Theatre503
- ★ National Theatre Studio
- ★ HighTide
- ★ Paines Plough
- ★ Bush Theatre
- ★ Theatre Royal Stratford East
- ★ Hampstead Theatre
- ★ Gate Theatre
- ★ Lion and Unicorn
- ★ Lyric Hammersmith

### **Writers' Agencies:**

- |                    |                           |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| ★ Casarotto Ramsay | ★ David Higham Associates |
| ★ Curtis Brown     | ★ Knight Hall Agency      |
| ★ Independent      | ★ Alan Brodie             |
| ★ The Agency       | ★ United Agents           |
| ★ Troika           | ★ Artists' Partnership    |
| ★ Blake Friedmann  | ★ Berlin Associates       |

### **Reviewers**

- |                               |                   |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| ★ National papers             | ★ Nick Hern Books |
| ★ Radio                       | ★ Oberon          |
| ★ Industry sources - examples | ★ Methuen         |
| ○ A Younger Theatre           |                   |
| ○ The Stage                   |                   |

**Tip:**

Keep a spreadsheet of these contacts – you'll need it to keep track, and can reuse it!

Example:

Name	Organisation	Contact Email	Email sent	RSVP	Followup

**Sample industry outreach email.**

Dear [REDACTED]

I hope you are well.

I am writing in regards to inviting you to a festival that I am co-producing in July at CentrE17 with The Search For Blue Collective.

This will be a week-long festival called *Hello, My Name Is...* featuring 3 bold and urgent new plays from female theatre makers. If you are interested, please let me know and it would be great if you could come along to one or all of the productions. I have attached the press sheet with more information of the plays, please let me know if you are interested and I can put your name down on our guest list.

I would also like to invite you to our Networking Night we are having on Saturday 6th July where we will also be holding a panel talk about reaching out and diversifying your audience. The details are as follows

*Hello, My Name Is...* Theatre Festival Networking Night

The CentrE17

1 Church Hill, Walthamstow, London E17 3AB

06/07/2019

15:00pm - 17:00pm

Thank you for reading and please let me know if you are interested.

Have a lovely day.

Warmly,



## **Social media campaign.**

Unless you've been hiding under a rock for the last few years, you'll know that social media is essential for promoting a show! Whether you're a scrolling addict or a don't do Twitter kind of person, if you want to draw in audiences from wide and far, you're going to have to step up your social media presence.

In this section, we'll take you through the steps required to run a successful social media campaign.

Consistency and regularity are key with social media, there's no point spending the time setting it all up, if you're not going to be consistent with updates. If you're really not comfortable with it, consider asking someone who is to help you, but really, there's no need to shy away from it and being able to run a social media campaign will definitely be beneficial in future projects.

## Facebook

- ❑ Set up a page for your company
- ❑ Create an event for your show and invite people
- ❑ Use the page to update and remind people to book their tickets
- ❑ Add co-hosts to the page event where possible (including the venue, actors, director, etc.) and encourage them to invite friends to the event.
- ❑ Post videos and create albums of any images you may have.
- ❑ Invite friends to an event around 2 weeks prior to an event so they know it's coming up shortly.

## Twitter

- ❑ Depending on how long the show is on for, you may want to consider setting up a separate Twitter account for your show or company.
- ❑ Research other similar companies to yours or with similar shows, then contact them to potentially share each other's posts and write tweets about each other's shows.
- ❑ Tag the venue as much as possible to get them to retweet to their audience.
- ❑ Try and use hashtags - come up with a catchy one that people can then use in their posts relating to your show.
- ❑ Update your bio with details and include the ticket link in the website section.
- ❑ Pin a tweet with all of the show details and information (including the ticket link) potentially with some artwork or images to the top of your profile so it's always visible.
- ❑ Use images, video and eye-catching artwork where possible!
- ❑ Encourage audience members to share their thoughts and reactions of the show on Twitter afterwards. If you have some very enthusiastic audience members, you could film them on your phone just saying what they thought of the show for you to then share on your channels as a VoxPop (works well in the early stages of a run).

## **Instagram**

- ❑ Set up a page for your company
- ❑ In your bio, add a link to buying tickets for your show.

- ❑ Like Twitter, follow other companies or people with similar interests and engage with them where you can.
- ❑ Post regular updates in the form of photos - of the rehearsal process for example.
- ❑ Encourage people to come and see the play through posting eye catching photos or videos.
- ❑ As with Twitter , use appropriate hashtags.

## **Flyers/ posters**

In this day and age, flyers might seem outdated but there is still a place for them. Visit any theatre foyer or bar (or local libraries etc) and you'll still find piles of flyers just waiting to be taken and read on the train home, or stuck to a fridge. And what about the posters that catch your eye on local notice boards?

Albeit, sometimes flyers are shoved in the bottom of handbags never to see the light of day again and that's rubbish for both your budget and the environment. So for a one-off show or reading, you'd be better off sticking with e-flyers for your social media campaign. For longer runs, we'd recommend getting a small amount of flyers and/or posters printed - and as there are a wide range of cheap, printing companies out there, and you'll be creating a flyer to use online anyway, it won't take up a lot of extra time or money to get them made.

## Tips for creating a flyer

- ★ Lots of cheap printing companies can be found online, save on delivery charges by ordering well in advance.
- ★ You can design your own flyers at [canva.com](https://www.canva.com), which is a free design site.
- ★ You can find images and photos to use at Flickr Commons – make sure you check the licensed so they are cleared for commercial use, and take care to credit appropriately.

## What to include on your flyer (both e-flyer & paper)

- ★ An eye-catching image
- ★ Your logo
- ★ Title of show
- ★ Logline (optional)
- ★ Details of time, place, how to get there
- ★ Ticket price and how to book (website & phone)

## Creating a programme

One last bit of marketing material you'll need to include is a programme, to give out to your audience on the big night itself. These are particularly important in showcases or festivals, as they will provide information for industry professionals in the audience. Also, they provide a great

opportunity to make sure everyone is credited for their work and to thank those who have helped you out along the way!

### **What to include:**

- ★ Details of the show: title, date, venue.
- ★ Credits for everyone who has worked on the show.
- ★ Bio's for those involved.
- ★ Links to your website/Facebook Page.
- ★ Personal thanks to people who have helped you.

## **8.**

# **Timeline checklist.**

As you've probably gathered so far, there's a lot to do when it comes to self-producing. We thought it would be useful to provide a guide to when you should be thinking about getting certain jobs done. It should be said though that these timings are a guide and can totally be compressed if you're working to a tighter deadline!

## **Countdown to opening night...**

### **Six months before**

- Pick project (& deal with any rights issues)



- Create theatre company name
- Approach director
- Create budget
- Approach theatres to book space

### **Five months before**

- Create promo image for show
- Announce show online / begin building awareness
- Think about other networks to promote play
- Fundraising efforts
- Find other members of the creative team (i.e, Designer)

### **Three months before**

- Look into/book rehearsal space
- Create marketing plan
- Design flyers / posters
- Set up social media page

### **Two months before**

- Print flyers (& start handing them out – the sooner the better)
- Casting
- Press release (if relevant)
- Organise photographer for production photos
- Create Facebook event

### **Six weeks before**

- Invite theatres & agents (industry outreach)
- Social media activity
- Create rehearsal schedule

- Invite reviewers
- Posters and flyers in venue

### **Four weeks before**

- Rehearsals
- Source props/costumes
- Get bios & info for programme

### **Three weeks before**

- Follow-up with emails to industry people that haven't responded
- Source music or sound cues for show
- Social media push

### **Two weeks before**

- Create and print programme
- Big publicity push

### **Week of the performance/ opening night**

- Send reminder to industry people who are coming
- Send reminder to industry people who haven't responded
- Chase reviewers
- Get any thank you presents (as needed)
- Write thank yous (as needed)
- Tweet / promote good feedback & reviews

### **Afterwards**

- Send follow-up emails to thank people who came (industry & friends)
- Pay invoices (as appropriate)

## 9.

# Performance day/ opening night

Whether it's a rehearsed reading, a festival or the opening night of a longer run, the big day will bring a mixture of emotions, challenges as well as hopefully, a lot of excitement. We hope that we can give you a few tips to help you get organised for the final hurdle and hopefully enjoy the event that you've worked so hard to achieve.

## Dress rehearsals

If you've not already done so, your performance day might include a dress rehearsal. This is a chance to put everything together for a dry run and for the director to give any last minute notes. We'd recommend leaving this to the director and if you do chip in, keeping your comments constructive. After all, any major issues should have been ironed out before this stage and the dress run should be about making sure everyone knows what they are doing and to tune those finer details.

## How to help the performance day run smoothly

- ★ Write a list of everything you need to bring with you from props to programmes.
- ★ Make a plan for the day, ensuring everyone gets an appropriate break.
- ★ Make sure there are options nearby for people to grab some food during their breaks (feel free to provide cake!)
- ★ Be positive - there's no point getting hung up on small things at this stage.
- ★ Make sure everyone in your team knows what time they should be there and where the venue is.
- ★ Make sure your phone is fully charged in case anyone needs to contact you (for example if a cast member is going to be late). Save all your team's and your contact at the theatres details beforehand.
- ★ Be prepared to be flexible and offer help where needed. If a prop breaks, run out and get a new one or offer a creative alternative.






## 10.

# Followup.

Hopefully, watching the performance turns out to be an unforgettable experience, where you watch all your hard work pay off. You're almost done, but there are a few things you should do afterwards...

### Immediately after the show

- ★ Stick to the rules of your contract in terms of clearing away the space and tidying up.
- ★ Say thank you to everyone involved.
- ★ Head out to the bar and get chatting to the audience - use it as an opportunity to say thanks, get feedback and (yep, we're going to say it again) **build your network**.

## Later

- ★ Follow up with industry contacts, thanking them for seeing your show and letting them know you'd be up them reading more of your work.
- ★ Say thanks on social media and update your followers on how it all went.
- ★ Send thanks to those who supported you along the way.
- ★ If you used a Crowdfunding campaign, send out rewards as promised.
- ★ Reflect on the experience and what a great job you've done - and plan your next project. Ok, it might take a while to get to this point, but you will!



# 11.

## Afterword.

We hope you found this guide useful and that it encourages you to produce your own work. As playwrights ourselves, we know how demoralising it can be to write plays that no one ever sees, and we've seen first hand how hard it is for new writers to get their foot in the door somewhere new. We want to change this, and create a more accessible world for writers - and we think empowering you to go out there and put your own work on is a great place to start.

If you're still unsure about getting your first project off the ground, we'd definitely recommend applying for scratch nights or opportunities to work with new writing companies - that way, you'll get to see how producing for the fringe, a tight budget really works. From there, you can build your network (sorry), to a point where self-producing feels like less of a challenge. Of course, it's always going to be hard work and require a lot of determination, but it's definitely worth it to get your work up on stage!



## **Thank you for supporting London Playwrights' Workshop**

*Your support is vital in keeping our organisation going and means we can continue in our work to support the next generation of playwrights. Over the last few years, we have listed thousands of opportunities for writers and are continually creating new resources to help emerging writers to develop their work and to promote a more level playing field.*

*As a non-profit, all revenue goes into the running of our organisation and directly into helping us to support emerging writers in London and beyond; the more support we get, the more we can we do.*

*If you'd like to know more about our work, or would like to get involved, or if you have any suggestions for fundraising, sponsorships or would like to make a donation, please email contact [@londonplaywrightsblog.com](mailto:contact@londonplaywrightsblog.com)*

