



An Introduction to the Seven Ecostage Principles

The Ecostage initiative and its Seven Principles seek to articulate and identify key ideas that we can all use, and steps we can take to contribute towards regenerative cultures. Using them from the early stages of a production's decision-making process can have significant effects on a project's environmental impact.

Regenerative cultures consciously develop the conditions that promote the ongoing renewal and restoration of natural resources, consider the wide-scale and long-term implications of practices and systems on human and non-human communities, and promote justice, equitability, compassion and cooperation in order to create the conditions for more resilience, diversity and thriving for all.

Make considered, ethical and sustainable choices - do it from the outset

About this Guide

We have put this guide together to bring the Seven Ecostage Principles to life. Sustainable approaches are here to stay. How can we get involved, have fun and make a positive contribution?

Our work is inspired and gathered from many sources, including ecology, indigenous and local knowledge, activist movements, ecoscenography,

Processwork, mindfulness practices, cradle-to-cradle production models, and art and theatre exercises. As the authors are UK-based practitioners, examples are mainly drawn from their own experiences of UK organisations, projects and initiatives.

The Seven Principles are intended to support and enliven personal practices and projects at all stages of the process.

Here are some useful ideas, examples, provocations, exercises, team games, actions, things to consider and practical steps to take that place ecological thinking at the heart of creative practices.

This is a living document and we welcome all suggestions and feedback.

Start new conversations, take next steps and work together for a greener future.

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1. Implement the 7 Rs

Principle: Sustainability

Embed ecological thinking and the 7 Rs - Reuse, Refuse, Reduce, Recycle, Rethink, Reimagine and Regenerate - from the outset

Start thinking about the potentiality with the 7 Rs from the start of the project and add a green rider to contracts. Conversations about sustainability from the beginning of the project cannot be overemphasised. With planning and teamwork, anything is possible.

Invite a cross-section from different departments to harness collective wisdom from the group.

First steps - green card stage:

Include a green card design meeting. This is like a white card meeting, where a proposed design can be looked at early in the process to assess budget, practicality and safety, and make changes before anything is fixed or significant money is spent. A green card meeting also looks at the project's environmental sustainability. Sometimes one meeting covers everything; sometimes green and white card meetings are separate.

The 7 Rs are a useful guide, checklist and set of steps that offer an implementable path from often simple basic actions that can minimise our environmental impacts, to a more visionary approach that brings creative opportunities and wider outcomes with net positive impact.

From this perspective, the creative and production process can be seen as a regenerative act, with each aspect and step impacting and building on the next.

Sustainable practices, actions and outcomes can often come with a feel-good factor.

Provocations to explore the 7 Rs as part of planning conversations and the green card stage:

- What different ways can the project incorporate the 7 Rs?
- What might stop you? Include feelings as well as practical actions.
- What are you passionate about in relation to the topic, and how can you champion this more?
- How can you, the team and the project accentuate the possibilities within a sustainable path approach? It is often said 'necessity is the mother of invention'.

Look for opportunities to support the 7'Rs:

- Reuse what you find at the venue.
- Refuse to use toxic materials and find non-toxic options, e.g. water-based paints and natural dyes.
- Reduce energy usage, e.g. tungsten versus LED lighting. There's lots of advice on technical matters from [The Sustainability in Production Alliance \(SiPA\)](#).
- Rethink the distribution of budgets to reflect true costs, e.g. spend more on people and less on materials. Recycle the set and costumes after the project., e.g. donate to a school, advertise on set-swap cycle (web address).
- Reimage existing pieces from previous productions, e.g. set and costume stock, props stores, or a local community. Consider giving yourself a specific creative challenge, such as taking a performer to a specific charity shop and choosing everything from there.
- Substitute generic set elements when touring shows rather than transporting them.

- Regenerate part of your local ecosystem by finding ways the project can contribute to the locality, e.g. create a community space that can be used after you've gone, or connect people that otherwise wouldn't normally meet.

Demonstrate your commitment to sustainability by using the Ecostage Pledge stamp on emails, documentation, technical plans etc.

Work towards zero waste

“There is no such thing as ‘away.’ So, when we throw anything away, it must go somewhere.” Annie Lennard, executive director of Greenpeace USA.

[Annie Leonard of Greenpeace's Message on Climate Change](#)

Make working towards zero waste a goal and break it into steps.

Practical examples:

- Explore modular design to facilitate reuse and sharing.
- Plan for disassembly, such as using screws and bolts instead of glue.
- Make recycling easy for the team and the public.
- Reduce printing.
- Replace single-use plastic with reusable options, e.g. reusable cable ties, velcro ties or twine instead of disposable cable ties. Also bring your own mugs, plates etc.
- For a double win, check out sources of industry surplus, which can be a fantastic source of raw materials that would otherwise be heading for landfill.

Recommended watching:

In a unique science experiment, Dr George McGavin and Dr Zoe Laughlin chronicled the history of rubbish by excavating three landfill sites in the UK from different eras. Most notably, this revealed an intact 1980s

newspaper and, less surprisingly, a wearable synthetic child's dress. This also raises ideas of how landfill sites could be 'mined' for reuse.

The Secret Life of Landfill: A Rubbish History

Audit usage, track impacts, take action

This asks us to take responsibility for the waste from our industry and our carbon footprint both from the project and as the Global North. This point speaks to taking practical steps, goal setting and making clear plans. After implementation, measure how your impacts have changed and report them to everyone involved, remembering to celebrate any wins. Then start over again.

Examples and training for our sector:

Freely available practical help and specific training include:

- The Society of British Theatre Designers Carbon Literacy Training has been developed by the SBTD's Sustainable Design Working Group.
- The Theatre Green Book sets out measurable steps towards sustainability and is now a theatre industry standard.
- Some funding is contingent on using a carbon calculator such as the one from Julie's Bicycle - these don't give a comprehensive or absolute picture of a production's ecological impact but are useful for comparing projects and tracking relative improvement.
- Green mapping. Create a 'green map' at the project's outset to help sustainably source materials in your area, and then share that knowledge. The SBTD working group is creating a map for the UK - get in touch to get involved.

Find which way works for you to measure your current impacts, then create a strategy to improve them.

Listen to what materials have to say

This point comes from the perspective that all materials are intrinsically valuable. Consider working with each material's unique properties and

lifespan. Let materials take the creative lead - from the raw to the manufactured. Be open to what materials you find along the way.

Example:

Employ a more embodied and tactile creative approach and process by 'thinking with your hands' (inspired by the book of the same name by furniture designer Willy Guhl).

Resources and links to eco-friendly materials:

The development of eco-friendly materials is advancing. Some of the most eco-friendly materials are bamboo and bamboo fibre used in clothing, cork, bioplastic, compostables, hemp, organic cotton, soybean fabrics and mycelium.

Often, this is not about replacing one non-sustainable material with a sustainable one. Sometimes it's about rethinking at a deeper level. Sometimes it's about the same material but from a more ethical source.

That said, there are some direct swaps. For example, that theatre staple, gaffer tape, is available in [a more environmentally-friendly version](#), and MDF can often be replaced by [Ecoboard](#).

Research into eco-friendly materials for theatre is being conducted by a range of institutions, including [Central St Martins](#). Aalto University has published [The Chemarts Cookbook](#), with ideas and recipes for hands-on experiments with wood-based materials.

Use the 'materials' tag on our Resources page to find a range of suppliers and materials libraries.

The Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) in Wales provides [a wealth of helpful information](#), particularly when it comes to construction and energy.

Recognise no decision stands on its own

This point draws attention to a systematic way of thinking, inviting an approach that looks at individual decisions and their systemic and collective consequences. In a systems model, the health of the whole is dependent on the health of all its parts. One way to look at this is the

'doughnut economics' model: we want our actions to sit in the 'safe and just space' that neither undermines the social foundation nor breaks the ecological ceiling.

Example:

Map your project with post-it notes or scraps of paper on a 'doughnut diagram'. Various tools and examples can be found at [DEAL \(Doughnut Economics Action Lab\)](#), such as the business tool, which you can use if you run a theatre company.

2. Run the Marathon Not the Sprint

Principle: Wellbeing

Care for yourself and the team

It is notoriously difficult to balance well-being and self-care with the expectations and pressures of theatre-making. This is why we place our well-being principle centre-stage as part of a holistic and sustainable approach to creating work. We include exercises and examples of how well-being can be incorporated. This may seem obvious, but it is easy to get swept along with the project you're working on.

Everyone is different and has different needs and requirements. Explore with the team what well-being means to each person. Looking after ourselves in the performing arts sector can be challenging. Manage the expectations we place on ourselves and others.

Suggested resources. There are more on our resources page. Share your top tips too.

- Guidelines are available, e.g. Equity's safe space statement
- Training: Access professional development training to learn how best to cater for your team, e.g. social justice training and LGBTQ+ safe space training.
- Simple somatic (body work) exercises can connect us back to ourselves and the environment. Take a few moments a day to stop and notice your breath. This can be supported by placing your hands over the stomach and heart area and feeling the rise and flow of the in and out breath and the rhythm of your heart.
- Using a mindfulness app such as Brainway is another way to support different mental states.
- Setting a timer to remind you to take breaks, such as Insight Timer. This is free and offers choices of ambient bells and chimes.

Consider how self-care and taking time for acts of well-being towards ourselves and others is a form of activism in a society that rewards and promotes continuous productivity, and how creating the changes we seek also relates to how we treat ourselves.

Uphold the right to fair pay, safety at work and universal rights

Part of self-care is finding ways that are right for you to speak about things you're not happy about and being able and supported to say 'no' to unrealistic and unhealthy demands. What feels safe for one person may not feel safe for another. Whatever our role - co-creator, organiser, participant, maker, designer or performer - be mindful of creating a space where people can speak up.

Everyone deserves good working conditions which support mental, physical and emotional well-being, provide an equal opportunities statement and a transparent complaints process, and implement them.

The industry provides standards and guidelines, and you can find out more about your rights and protections as a freelancer from unions and professional associations. For example, Equity provides advice on minimum pay, safeguarding etc., and the Society of British Theatre Designers works to ensure designers' contracts are fair. Pay interns a fair wage and be aware of exploitative practices.

There's also a lot of useful help for freelancers here: [The Illustrated Freelancer's Guide](#).

Go slow to go fast

Derived from mindfulness practices, this point brings awareness to the process, not only the goal. It acknowledges the value of taking time to understand the problem, slowing down, taking a breath, pausing and daydreaming as sources of creative inspiration, well-being and paradoxically greater success and efficiency.

For example, a tailor might say, *measure twice, cut once*. The redistribution of budgets to honour labour over materials when working sustainably is another way to work on a human scale.

Provocations and exercises for individuals and groups:

Ask people to 'Smell a Flower on the Way to Work' and then share what they find.

- 'What did you notice?'
- 'How is that needed in your life, work or project, or how might it be helpful?'
- 'If you did not smell a flower on the way to work, that's good too. Did you notice what comes up for you?'

Walking meditation: try it for 5 mins or more. On your travels, notice what you notice and name what you see around you without describing the content, e.g. tree, pavement, bus, flower.

Optimise access and inclusivity

When setting up a space for wellbeing, consider the seating plan, diverse needs, access, lighting and fresh air, e.g. the effects of artificial lighting on wellbeing and health. Plan for regular breaks.

Examples of supporting access and inclusivity:

- Spin a pen to choose a 'timekeeper' to ensure breaks are included and a 'heart keeper' to check in with everyone.
- Provide support for caregivers, tinted paper for people with dyslexia, use captioning, signing, etc. If signing and captioning aren't available, find other ways to communicate, such as the approaches in [this video](#) of how hearing people might communicate with deaf people.
- Check-ins and check-outs can make people feel welcome, e.g. say your name, pronoun and an icebreaker, such as how you got here today. If everyone states their gender by naming their pronouns, it takes the pressure off those who are trans or nonbinary.

- Invite different ways to participate by cultivating an atmosphere of choice, e.g. making it clear people can choose if they want their camera on or off in a Zoom.
- Provide options for anonymous feedback, e.g. using a Google form.

Consider how to better understand and support invisible needs, such as those relating to mental health, e.g. good disability access, mental health support, frequent breaks, wide text format, 'jazz hands' for non-aural agreement or applause, having the choice to be silent, etc.

Find what makes your eco-heart sing

Asking a different sort of question, such as 'What makes my eco-heart sing?', can reposition our thinking and may lead to some unexpected answers. It also connects us to the bigger picture.

You can do this as an exercise, in a group or on your own:

Take a moment and make yourself comfortable. Notice your breath. Ask yourself this question 'What makes my eco-heart sing?' Your job is to simply notice what you notice and stay curious about what comes up: feelings, thoughts, images, sensations or memories. Write a few notes and share if you want to. There is no right or wrong way to do it. Let yourself be surprised - it might be the beginning of a new adventure!

3. Nurture Nature

Principle: Interconnectivity

Acknowledge that humans are inextricably part of Nature's deep 'web of life'

The ecosystem we are part of is under threat. Acknowledging we are animals and therefore part of the greater ecosystem, can stir something deep inside. This is both personal and collective. Consider the 'pale blue dot' experience articulated by scientist Carl Sagan. 'look again at that dot, that's here, that's home. That's us.'

Provocation for our sector:

Reflect on your different roles and responsibilities within the project/company/organisation and how performance-making itself is a mini-ecosystem in which each part affects every other. With this in mind, is there something you would do differently?

- Capture what you discover, noticing new and exciting connections and steps. Use mind maps to help with this.
- Consider that these ecosystems are not self-contained. They impact both society and the environment.
- Reflect individually and as a team on what informs the decisions you are making for your projects.

Recognise environmental personhood, which designates Nature the status of a legal person

This acknowledges that Nature inherently exists in its own right, as does each unique element of its multitudinous variety. It also challenges colonial ideas of the natural world as 'empty space' for resource extraction or as a site of 'sacrifice zones' (reference Naomi Klein's book. We have chosen to reflect this by writing Nature with a capital 'N' and invite you to do the same.

This is an example of how the Global North is coming to understand the wisdom of the cultures it has marginalised and exploited. Many indigenous cultures have long experienced Nature in this or similar ways, and now some places in the West are learning from them. New Zealand, for example, has acknowledged the Maori worldview in which environmental features have living spirits by granting legal personhood to Te Urewera National Park, the Whanganui River and Mt. Taranaki, and creating a legal framework to support this.

We ask, as artists and makers, how we, too, can not repeat history and learn from this approach.

Let Nature nurture, inspire and teach us

Being in Nature can be truly transformative and can inform our practices. There are many and varied ways to connect with and learn from Nature.

Personal benefits range from 'nature prescriptions' to taking a brief moment looking out the window. How can our work in the arts deepen our connection - as arts professionals and audiences - to the more-than-human world and create opportunities for regenerative experiences?

Inspiration:

- Biophilia - Designers can also learn from Nature in very practical ways through biophilic design, which draws on natural cycles, structures and processes. Often the design challenges we face have already been solved by Nature. Find out more from [Terrapin Bright Green 14 Patterns of Biophilic Design](#).
- Permaculture - Another learning from Nature is to draw on principles of Permaculture's three intertwined ethics - Earth Care, People Care and Fair Share - which demonstrate true balance only when meeting in the centre, creating regenerative systems. Permaculture can be defined as a practice-based philosophy derived from learning from the rhythms and cycles found in Nature. What, for example, can we learn from the cycle of a plant sprouting,

growing, and composting back to the soil, readying itself to repeat the cycle?

Activity: Experience Nature as simply a source of inspiration.

Ask the team to popcorn* heightened moments in nature that fill us with awe and wonder.

*To popcorn is to share ideas in a group in a non-formal way, when anyone can call out in any order.

Suggested reading:

Ecoscenography: An Introduction to Ecological Design for Performance by Tanja Beer weaves environmental philosophies and practices across genres and fields to provide a vision for the future of sustainable theatre production.

Value co-dwelling on Earth with ‘the more than human world’

Making spending time in Nature part of our practices, when possible, helps to develop reflection, grounding us as a part of the wider ecosystem. We can take time to perceive the uniqueness of each creature, with all their rich differences, e.g. the collective intelligence of ants and bees, whales' ultrasound 3D view of the world or trees' interconnected roots system and fractals. We can research our natural environment, noticing the impact our work might have on it and striving to work collaboratively with it, and protect it. We can make our connections more explicit by performing in green spaces like parks and community gardens.

Examples and practices:

Wherever you are, find your Nature or power spot.

- Slightly close your eyes and turn on the spot like a compass. Take a few steps in each direction. Allow yourself to follow an impulse to move in that direction.

- Check out a few directions until you find a spot where you feel grounded, calm, empowered, or whatever feels right. This is your power spot for today. Enjoy.

- Adapted from practices and exercises from the School of Process Oriented Psychology (POPUK).

Provocation: Find out more about sensory grounded approaches and what you enjoy about this way of being. Is there a way to bring this into your working practice? An example of a sensory approach might be how we notice the seasons when our senses detect changes in temperature, smell new plant growth, hear the birds and taste the air after the rain. Sensory experiences build layers of memories in our brains, which in turn create an emotional attachment to Place.

For more examples of theatre practices that work with Nature, look at our collection of case studies.

Suggested video: [Donna Haraway: Story Telling for Earthly Survival](#)

Another area is queer ecology, which invites us to question heteronormative ideas of what is 'natural', such as rigid binaries, gender essentialism, devaluing of 'non-essential' qualities like joyfulness, and framing desire as a purely reproductive urge. [This article by Alex Johnson](#) is a good introduction, while [Timothy Morton's essay](#) digs deeper.

Become a custodian of the Living Planet

There are many ways to explore this principle, but a good place to start may be exercises and ideas for workshops from [Joanna Macy: The Council of All Beings](#).

Suggested reading: *Thinking Like A Mountain*, a short book by John Seed, Joanna Macy, Pat Fleming and Arne Næss, applying principles of Deep Ecology.

Provocations and suggestions:

- How can environmental stewardship be part of our practices?
- Can caring for Nature be part of your work?

- Can you use your platform to champion your local greenspaces?
- If working outside your specialism, seek advice from those with expertise, including local authorities, public service bodies, universities, community volunteers, etc.
- Include in any statements of values or intent how you are protecting the natural world.
- If you're working with plants or other living things, treat them with kindness and consider their needs.

Suggested initiative: London's National Park status - [you can find the map and other info here.](#)

4. Cultivate Co-Creation

Principle: Creativity

Value creativity and imagination in all forms.

This is about creativity as a birthright. As such, we are all creative and have unique contributions to make. Everyone expresses their creativity differently. This point speaks to creativity as a process with intrinsic value.

How might the creative power of the performing arts be uniquely placed to inspire change, offer sustainable solutions and dream up new possibilities? Through this section, we've provided some tools to help cultivate creativity.

Inspiring Resources:

- *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* - the classic guide to observational drawing by Betty Edwards,
- [Advice to poets from Roger Robinson](#) - much of which is useful for everyone exploring their creative potential.
- [Morning Pages](#): Julia Cameron from *The Artist's Way* - Morning Pages are three pages of longhand, stream-of-consciousness writing, done first thing in the morning. *There is no wrong way to do Morning Pages*-they are not high art. They are not even 'writing.' They are about anything and everything that crosses your mind and are for your eyes only. Morning Pages provoke, clarify, comfort, cajole, prioritise and synchronise the day at hand. Do not overthink Morning Pages: just put three pages of anything on the page...and then do three more pages tomorrow.
- 'Go on an Artist's Date', again from Julia Cameron - The Artist Date is a once-weekly, festive, solo expedition to explore something that interests you. The Artist Date need not be overtly 'artistic'- think mischief more than mastery. Artist Dates fire up the imagination. They spark whimsy. They encourage play. Since art is about the play of ideas, they feed our creative work.

Try something new.

Engage creativity and play as tools for change, and dream up new possibilities together

This point recognises there are many different cultures and communities and honours the diversity and expression of each culture.

'Art involves the imagination, and if we believe that revolutions are possible, we have to be able to imagine different modes of being, different ways of existing in society, different social relations. I think that art is actually crucial. Artists are at the forefront of social change. Artists often allow us to grasp what we cannot yet understand.'

-Angela Davis, legendary scholar, philosopher, author, and activist.

Davis studied the relationship between aesthetics and politics, exploring the ways art produces a type of knowledge that can't be activated by speeches or rhetoric. Davis has often spoken about how art is crucial in political struggles. On a personal level, art teaches us how to feel free even when living under unfree terms. Collectively, art cultivates our imaginations, enriching our ideas about revolution and change.

Provocation:

Harnessing creativity as a tool for change can be powerful and fun. It can look many different ways - Poetry, spoken word, dance, writing, designing, building, directing, conducting, playing etc.

How is your creative project uniquely placed to enrich communities, explore sustainable solutions and inspire change?

Playful exercises and ideas:

- Creativity Labs - invite people to share their creative ideas and practice. Take it in turn to set creative provocations and tasks.
- Share your creative process and eco-backstories: write a blog, article, a case study for Ecostage, do a talk, social media, Facebook groups, e.g. EcoScenography and Ecostage.online discussion.

- Explore sustainability by playing with plasticine or found objects. Divide into groups. Create two worlds, one dystopian and one utopian, and see what happens.
- Guided visualisations, play, theatre games and mind-mapping.

Suggested reading:

August Boal: *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*.

Examples of practices and theatre companies involved in creative acts for change:

- Deafinitely Theatre - Deaf-led company making theatre that's accessible to BSL users and non-users alike.
- Extant - UK's leading visually impaired theatre company.
- Vital Xposure - promoting hidden voices with extraordinary stories through touring productions with integrated access,
- Graeae - breaking down barriers, challenging preconceptions, championing diversity across the sector and boldly placing Deaf and disabled artists centre stage.
- August Boal's *Forum Theatre*, including theatre as a tool for democratic participation.

Suggest your own creative resources for inspiring others on the Ecostage website.

Co-create with Place

This point emphasises how Place can be a vital collaborator. Co-creating with Place in this context refers to natural and built environments, including the venues in which the work takes place. The venues and theatres are not neutral spaces, and from this perspective, all works are site-specific, sited within different locations and communities. Shaping our understanding of our relationship with our surroundings creates valuable connections between participants and Place, and can help bring meaning.

Suggestions:

- How can local spaces, knowledge, climatic conditions and resources be unique creative opportunities?
- Consider capitalising Place when talking about a specific location as an acknowledgement of its uniqueness. The aforementioned case of New Zealand granting personhood to three sacred sites as an act of reparation is a great example of respecting the unique and often spiritual value of Place. Places have their own irreplaceable particularities, their stories, their meanings. As theatre-makers, we can choose to acknowledge the sacredness, uniqueness and significance of Place.

Working with Place includes researching, learning and responding to Nature, ecosystems, communities, and climatic conditions, using local materials and being inspired by colours, forms, sounds, tastes, textures and smells. It also involves connecting with local knowledge and experts such as conservation specialists, e.g. are there endangered species on the land or how are the plants being cared for as co-performers?

An important provocation for the project: 'How can I and/or this project be an example of regenerative culture for the Place where I'm working?'

Explore expanded scenography. An example of this approach is Tanja Beer's The Living Stage, an example of making site-specific work and site-specific productions.

Connect with communities and explore participatory, interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches

This point speaks to how co-creating with the diversity of our communities enriches the performing arts, bringing many different patterns of thinking and ways of being together during the creation of the project. This includes seeing audiences as co-creators. It speaks to the diverse and the cross-disciplinary, and how expansive ways of performance-making are evolving.

Provocations for discussion and self-reflection:

- What does connecting with communities mean to you and/or your project?
- If you're working somewhere new to you, how can you research the area and respect its traditions and elders?
- What assumptions are you making? For example, are you assuming everyone speaks English?
- Are you recognising and valuing our differing experiences as collaborators and within communities? Are you valuing both formal and informal education, e.g. institutional degrees and learning new skills on the job?
- How can you generate opportunities for participants' growth to contribute and co-evolve on a deeper level with the project.?
- How can you frame invitations to participate or collaborate in ways that inspire enthusiasm and enrich participants with new ideas? How can you share and promote the work of your peers at different stages of their careers?

This principle also asks us to recognise the input of each co-creator by crediting all team members, not only the 'big names', whenever their work is used in the future, e.g. in blogs, programme notes, over social media. Think about job descriptions, e.g. use the term 'associate' rather than 'assistant' if a greater creative contribution should be acknowledged.

Inspiring reading:

Lucy Neal's *Playing for Time: Making Art as If the World Mattered* is a resource for artists, community activists and anyone wishing to harness their creativity to make change in the world. It explores artists' pivotal role in re-thinking the future, re-inventing and re-imagining our world at a time of systemic change and uncertainty. It identifies collaborative arts practices emerging in response to planetary challenges, reclaiming a traditional role for artists in the community as truth-tellers and agents of change. Sixty experienced artists and activists give voice to a new narrative shifting society's rules and values away from consumerism and commodity towards community and collaboration with imagination,

humour, ingenuity, empathy and skill. Inspired by the grass-roots Transition movement, modelling change in communities worldwide.

Rob Hopkins on transition movement.

Nurture curiosity, a beginner's mind, joy, awe and wonder

Creativity involves the cultivation of curiosity. This point speaks to bringing an open attitude and open mind to the creative process, rather than preconceived ideas, and fostering the mindset of 'Beginner's Mind', originating from Japanese Zen Buddhism. The term 'Beginner's Mind' (or 'shoshin') refers to a paradox: the more you know about a topic, the more likely you are to close your mind to further learning. Using this concept, you can recapture the sense of excitement, curiosity, and wonder you experience when trying or learning something new — even if it's no longer new to you. A beginner is almost never right, and as a result, they enjoy new learning experiences. Let go of the need to be right and approach every situation as an opportunity to learn something new and improve yourself.

Exercise:

Start asking questions like children do. What is this? Why is it this way? How does this work? When you ask these kinds of questions, whether to yourself or others around you, you start learning more things you previously believed you were an expert in.

5. Be a Changemaker

Principle: Transformation

Challenge the status quo, and inspire systemic change through advocacy, activism, kindness and a spirit of generosity

This point speaks not only to the actions we take but also to the way in which we make them. Interrupting the status quo can look many ways and mean different things to different people.

In the performing arts, many activists and advocates are building personal and sector-wide awareness by incorporating key practices such as those in this guide. At Ecostag, we advocate looking for ways to work sustainably and respectfully with each other and to address the attitudes that uphold structural discrimination by, amongst other things, actively making space for quieter and more marginalised voices.

Provocation: what does being a changemaker mean to you, the project or the company?

Examples:

- Creating work about ecological and social issues, direct climate action and noticing greenwashing or exploitative practices. Addressing global issues through local and personal story-telling.
- Ecostage case studies show designers and makers using the vehicle of performance to raise awareness about disability, festival waste and mental health.
- We suggest noticing what you are doing to bring about personal and collective change, stopping, congratulating yourself often and doing more of it. This in itself can be a radical act.
- Consider kindness as a form of counter-cultural activism.

'Radical kindness refers to those acts and activities that intentionally seek to build bridges across differences, develop solidarity and shared ground,

and promote social connection between different groups and communities.'

From: Radical Kindness: Bridging Difference and Inspiring Connections During the Covid-19 Pandemic by Kaya DaviesHayon, Jo Broadwood, Christine Cox & Belong - The Cohesion and Integration Network

Initiatives:

Julie's Bicycle is a good example of an organisation that works to influence culture using the arts as a catalyst.

The Black Environmental Network, founded by Judy Ling Wong CBE, advocates for a vision of full multicultural environmental participation, local and global.

Embrace regenerative cultures and create new narratives

This point speaks both to the overarching goal of working towards regenerative cultures in our thinking, design and actions, and how we as performance makers can shape and respond to culture through the stories we tell and how we tell those stories. An important shift towards regenerative cultures includes incorporating new measures of success into our creative and production processes, such as an emphasis on how the work has been created, and not only on audience numbers, reviews and financial and aesthetic outcomes. Another aspect of this is creating work that not only focuses on the problem but offers new narratives to show how it could be.

Provocation and exercise:

Accentuate the possibilities of 'what if?'

Linked to challenging the status quo and regenerative culture, try this visioning exercise to cultivate a more open attitude to what is possible,

The 'What if' visioning exercise is a three-stage process that enables us to visualise and discuss the changes we want to see for our community as a whole or an area that we would specifically like to focus on, such as food growing or community energy.

Work towards decentralisation, celebrate regional and cultural diversity.

Change is needed at grassroots, managerial and policy levels. This point acknowledges how centralised power has often dictated who was given the opportunity to flourish, thus building a mainstream culture that upholds the status quo. Decentralisation – or the transfer of power to creators, independent platforms, community groups etc. is essential to redress this imbalance and create space for change. Examples might be co-creating new work with community artists alongside traditional programming or arts organisations decentralising and reimagining their roles in service to their communities. A useful idea from green economics is 'subsidiarity', the principle that decisions should be dealt with at the most local level practical.

Key to this process of decentralisation is the decolonisation of the arts, inclusivity and the recognition of structural racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, classism etc.

How does your or the company's positionality affect the lens with which you create the work, for instance, regarding gender, race, class or neurodiversity?

Things to consider

If you are coming into a community as a freelancer or from a mainstream organisation or venue, consider your positionality and assumptions. Having personal agendas is normal; be transparent about your hopes and dreams for the project. Some things to think about might be:

- How is your project honouring localities, regions and communities?
- How will you go about consulting with the community and local custodians, with their knowledge about the area? How will you build on what already exists?
- How are you choosing where you spend your cash? Can you employ local crew members and services, support local businesses, charity shops, car boot sales and storage, and pool localised resources through, for instance, the [Green Map](#) project?

Recommendations:

The Society of British Theatre Designers (SBTD) has championed the lack of regional diversity through its Regional Hearts initiative, addressing the London-centric nature of the sector by creating regional networks for designers to meet, share knowledge and find mutual support.

Team up to explore collaborative leadership, cross-pollinate ideas, embrace the spirit of learning, and take creative action

Collaborative leadership refers to being both facilitator and participant. This model advocates for regularly seeking out a diversity of opinions and ideas among teammates to build strategies and solve problems. This includes diverse voices from a variety of disciplines, departments, ages, cultures, orientations, mindsets, and motivations to increase the project's potential.

In collaborative leadership, there is input from the team before choosing the process for specific projects. For example, Zooms, collaborating on shared documents, mind-mapping, eco-labs or workshops to try new ways of doing things.

Facilitate diverse ways of communicating, such as presenting information in multiple forms to accommodate learning styles, e.g. captioning, sign language or sensory-friendly sessions.

Experiment with interdisciplinary collaborations and work with people who bring different perspectives and areas of interest, such as ecologists, climate change scientists, community projects, gardeners, youth groups and sustainability experts.

Provocations:

- How is your project cross-fertilizing ideas/modalities and making links between people, places, and communities to ensure sustainable ways of working?
- What does collaborative leadership mean to you and the project?

Some methods and ideas to facilitate/participate in groups and communities

- Open Space Technology used by Improbable Theatre company during their Devoted and Disgruntled sessions holds space for group conversations about multiple topics. It offers Four Principles and One Law, which serve as guides to the leader and all participants. The principles are: Whoever comes are the right people. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have. Whenever it starts is the right time and the One Law says when it is over, it is over. More info here: [setting up a session](#).
- Try the [World Cafe Method](#) to host large group dialogue using the format of being in a cafe atmosphere. This makes use of an informal cafe setting for participants to explore an issue by discussing it in small table groups. Discussion is held in multiple rounds of 20-30 minutes, with the cafe ambience intended to allow for more relaxed and open conversations to take place.

Recognise our spheres of influence are greater than we think

In this context, we direct our enquiry to how each of us has influence and also impacts, and that these can be both positive and negative - the latter especially if you are living in the Global North. If I make a change, it's personal to me. If both of us do, it's social change.

Examples of change-makers:

- John Lennon and Yoko Ono ran a revolution from their bed!
- Yasmine Ostendorf (Founder of Green Art Lab Alliance, Head of Nature Research at Jan Van Eyck Academie) uses the analogy of a mycelium way of working: like fungus, some of it stays below ground.
- Chadwick Boseman shook up the film industry as a globally-recognised black role model on and off screen.

Provocation:

Are you a butterfly or a bee in style and temperament - do you flit around lightly carrying conversations from person to person/group to group, or are you a 'buzzy' type of cross pollinator who goes more deeply into each topic before moving on? Both are needed. (This idea comes from Devoted and Disgruntled OpenSpace Technology.)

Some examples of different ways we can use our influence and privilege with more awareness:

- Share your preferred personal pronouns.
- Support knowledge exchange, offer learning and training opportunities, and skill swaps, e.g. mentoring schemes.
- Use community platforms, pre- and post-performance workshops and events, Q&A, Show and Tell.
- Openly share ecological values, ideas, stories, aspirations, concerns and challenges via programmes, social media and local and global networks.
- Celebrate the project's sustainability by detailing it within marketing material, show notes and programmes.
- Donate work to the creative commons. A striking example used by XR is the iconic The Red Rebel Brigade, a performative activist arts group created as a response to the global environmental crisis. Artist and activist Doug Francisco, the founder, who gave his rights to creative commons, said: 'We divert, distract, delight, and inspire the people who watch us.'
- Join a relevant working group like the SBTD's Sustainable Design Working Group.
- Read case studies and share your own.
- Car share or invite someone to a show who would otherwise have little chance of experiencing it.
- Offer financial support to a charity or campaign that will help bring about the change we are seeking, or become a patron or trustee.

- Check out the creative sector's existing tools, statements and ethos to find inspiration, e.g. join the Ecostage community and share resources on our site.

Spheres of Influence game:

Using 'Power Questions for Thinking and Dreaming' - also from Improbable Theatre.

Drawing on principles of creativity and change-making to include the perspective of your and your project's 'spheres of influence'. Try this as a jam board, using different headings on scraps of paper and mind maps so you can link areas and ideas easily and move them around to see how they influence and change each other. Make up your own game.

Do it at any stage and as often as you like. No right or wrong way to do it or answer the questions.

1. What's the project or idea?
2. What needs to be done to make the project happen?
3. What am I/we resisting about this?
4. What will happen if I/we do nothing?
5. How would you like this to be?
6. What am I/we prepared to do about this?
7. Could I/we let go of part of this?
8. What is the one thing that would have the greatest effect if I / we did it?
9. Who or what is missing from the conversation?
10. What is not working?
11. What is working, how can we do more of it?
12. Having reviewed these areas, what are the project's spheres of influence, both personal and project-wide? Notice both its 'powers and impacts'. And how this changes and affects each section.

- Based on a worksheet by Improbable Theatre

Examples of projects which creatively utilise their spheres of influence:

- Shambala runs a carbon-positive festival
- David Shearing's Weather Cafe participatory experience in 2016 was an immersive café installation that responded to the changing weather of the city and presented the voices of over 100 people living and connected to Leeds.
- World Factory, co-created by Simon Daw and Zoe Svendsen for Metis, Young Vic 2015. This interactive performance project explored the relationship between China and UK through the lens of the global textiles industry.

6. Grow a Deeper Democracy

Principle: Inclusivity

Definition of Deep Democracy

The concept of Deep Democracy was developed by Arnold Mindell, founder of Process Orientated Psychology. It is defined as an attitude and a principle, and it has many applications – conflict resolution, group facilitation, one-to-one therapy, arts and theatre.

At its heart, the notion of ‘deep democracy’ has to do with the potentials of our relationships and community. It refers to the relationship between all parts of our experience. By bringing awareness into the interaction of all parts, a difficult situation can transform and evolve.

These points seek to tease out some of the aspects important in a deep democracy model that can be applied to personal situations, creating projects, holding meetings, engaging with groups etc.

Welcome everyone and all parts of everyone, and engage with the complexity of our stories, feelings and dreams

'Democracy insists only that every person be represented. Deep Democracy asks that everyone and every feeling (and dream) is represented'. Arnold Mindell

A deeper democracy model is an attitude that fosters a radical form of inclusivity. This includes valuing our feelings, visions for the future, life experiences, night-time dreams, daydreams and instincts as being important, valued and needed. This, for many, positions us as counter-cultural.

This point draws attention to the complexity of experience and the intersecting issues contained within each one of us as well as in group situations. Powerful outcomes can come from holding space for hearing our stories and witnessing.

One way to incorporate these ideas at meetings, rehearsals and gatherings is to begin with an invitation and framing. For instance, XR's sixth principle is 'We welcome everyone and every part of everyone'.

This point also suggests we cultivate a 'guest house attitude to all who come to the door', including the more marginalised parts of ourselves. This is inspired by 'The Guest House' by Rumi, who uses the metaphor of a house guest to create an image that each day we have the opportunity to welcome something new into our lives, even if it is unexpected.

The deeper democracy idea on which this principle is based welcomes a wider concept of what it is to be human and a wider concept of humanity.

Foster different styles of engagement, enabling us all to turn up as we are

This point acknowledges that we all engage in different ways, and we credit Sadeysa Greenaway-Bailey, a stage designer, for introducing us to the idea of 'turning up as we are'.

Diversity awareness welcomes all cultures, ages, genders, races, sexual orientations, religions, economic backgrounds, jobs, abilities and world views.

This point emphasises that we all connect and engage in different ways. . and have different ways of processing information, some people more through one sense than another, such as visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and internal dialogue.

While most of us may have some general idea about how we learn best, often it comes as a surprise when we discover what our predominant learning style is.

Provocation: How is your project supporting people to turn up as they are?

An example might be providing tinted paper and wider spacing in scripts for people with Dyslexia.

Facilitate awareness of the intersectionality of social, climate and environmental justice

The performing arts sector is grappling with challenges: social justice, systemic racism, and climate change, among others. This point acknowledges the impacts of rank and privilege. It asks all of us to grow our awareness, be transparent about our positionality and use our privileges to engage with these issues.

Importantly, if you are someone who comes from a mainstream cultural perspective and/or group, be aware of your privileges in society and don't leave it to marginalised groups to do all the work, for instance, naming your positionality: 'As a white, cis-gendered male I am aware that my perspective on this situation is affected by my position, rank and privileges in society...'

Some examples in the performing arts of different styles and methods that incorporate this approach in their group work:

- Performance group Playback Theatre reenact personal and social scenes so that audiences can experience and better comprehend situations in their own lives and groups
- Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed expresses the world-views of Brazilian citizens with psychologically orientated theatre techniques used to make real political change and creates space to explore ideas and test models for society.

Deep Democracy models can be used to help make decisions collectively, e.g. People's Assemblies used by XR are a structured way for a group of people to discuss issues or make decisions collectively, so that all voices are heard.

For Further reading/audiobooks on Processwork and Deep Democracy Models:

- *Deep Democracy of Open Forums and Sitting in the Fire* by Arnold Mindell
- *Nonviolent Communication* by Marshall Rosenberg

Be proactively inclusive, from making space for quieter voices in the room to inviting in voices that are missing

Consider that from a systemic perspective, each and every voice is an important part of the whole and is needed to complete the whole.

Setting the scene for group meetings is important. A powerful way to do this is to come with an invitational attitude and create a welcoming atmosphere. Make space for names and pronouns, and be aware of people's pronouns to show solidarity. Practically support different communication needs (e.g. BSL) and learning styles. Check in with people before you name them or speak on their behalf, individually or as a group.

This point asks us to cultivate a radical form of listening and engagement, and to become more aware of our positionality. It recognises how our positionality relates to structural discrimination (gender, race, class, ableism etc.) and supports our growing awareness.

Suggestions:

- If you are someone who speaks easefully, you could try framing your contribution with something like, 'I am aware that I am someone who often says a lot...!' If you are someone who finds it harder to share in public, try framing a little of the difficulty, for example, 'I feel a little shy to speak...' By bringing these dynamics into the open, a deeper way of connecting is possible. It can often be the quieter voices in the room that hold the key to the next steps:
- Even if you are not the designated facilitator, you can still pick up our agency to become 'participant facilitators'. A term akin to Augusto Boal's Spect-actor, this refers to the dual role of those involved in the process as both observers and participants. An example of how to pick the role of participant facilitator: 'I notice there are some people who have not spoken yet. Perhaps they would like to...?'
- Frame choices and be aware of assumptions about each other. This includes asking permission to refer to someone else in the group. We all have different experiences with recording, filming etc. Be

aware of confidentiality and always obtain permission from participants.

Acknowledge the bigger picture and appreciate the small steps

An interesting reflection: if we don't pause from time to time to notice and appreciate the small steps towards our projects, dreams and goals, we support the status quo. Appreciation can be transformative.

We are all learning as we go. The steps to creating work are as important as the final outcome.

Make a group artwork to help distil, formulate and anchor what you want or have learned, and clarify your next smaller steps and bigger leaps.

A big and little picture exercise:

Co-create a 'big picture' for your project. Invite people from different departments and roles to add to it. It can be collage, drawing, writing, or mark-making about the project's themes and ideas. This could include hopes, dreams and challenges. Put on the wall and use the artwork to support next steps.

This exercise is adapted from practices and exercises from the School of Process Oriented Psychology POPUk.

7. Build Positive Legacy

Principle: Regeneration

Recognise that, whatever art form, whatever communities we serve, we can shape ecological thinking and contribute to regenerative culture beyond projects

As performance makers, we are engaged in the process of creating legacy, be it ecological, social, economic or political. This point speaks to the responsibility that performance makers have to the people, communities, environment and Places they work with.

This point speaks to the idea that performance-making can be a collective dreaming through which we re-envision what it is to be human. To co-create a positive legacy, many voices are needed.

Provocations to support future forward thinking:

- How can the project create life-enhancing experiences?
- What is the exit strategy - what will be left behind, and what will be taken away? What is the formal or informal assessment process to determine the longer-term impacts of the work?
- How is the project opening itself up to its team, audiences and the wider community, and making space for consultation, feedback, reflection and other responses?
- How does the project embed, demonstrate and/or inspire ecological thinking? For instance, using an electrical van for touring reduces your carbon footprint but also demonstrates a green practice.

Acknowledge our unique position to take meaningful action at this tipping point in history

As performance makers and culture shapers, we are uniquely positioned in the context of the bigger picture of spirit, place and community. We also find ourselves uniquely positioned in time, facing potentially devastating

anthropogenic climate change, much of which can still be averted if we act soon enough. This comes with many opportunities to make a difference. Some might argue it comes with a responsibility to use our platforms for good.

The performing arts, like all the arts, position us both as investigators and as communicators. Artists often create the narratives that society follows.

Provocations:

- What new stories can we write?
- How can our projects yield deeper engagement around the climate crisis?
- How might post-show talks, Q & A sessions and roundtable discussions help interrogate a project's positionality?
- How can the project communicate accessible information about our relationship with Nature?
- How can workshops be used to develop a deeper understanding of specific topics?

Support climate justice and work towards decolonising the arts

Climate justice examines concepts such as equality, human rights, collective rights, and the historical responsibilities for climate change.

This entails ensuring representation, inclusion, and protection of the rights of those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Solutions must promote equity, assure access to basic resources, and ensure that young people can live, learn, play and work in healthy, clean environments.

There are many ways the practices of those of us in the Global North might perpetuate postcolonial and other injustices. A few examples are:

- Shipping our waste abroad
- Greenwashing
- Cultural appropriation

- Using violently extracted resources

This point asks how we can each take more accountability for how we perpetuate the situation.

Go to the source: if you want advice on showing solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, ask someone who is black; if you want to celebrate trans culture, let trans people take the lead; if you want to include some indigenous Australian legends in your play, consult with an indigenous Australian person; if you want to be accessible to deaf people through signing, hire a BSL consultant, and so on.

Sometimes we need to step back and make room for others.

Embrace the ‘Seventh Generation Principle’, and indigenous and local knowledge

This recognises the many cultures of the world and honours the diversity and expression of each culture.

Embracing the ‘Seventh Generation Principle’ reminds us to keep in mind the wellbeing of seven generations into the future, a concept from the Native American Haudenosaunee (people of the long house). This brings awareness that personal decisions taken today affect the wider living systems of tomorrow and invites personal responsibility for the long-term impacts of projects and practices.

Provocation: How can your project draw on local knowledge and techniques?

Become an eco-ancestor

An eco-ancestor cultivates an inherently reciprocal attitude towards all life. They bridge the inter-generational gap, looking to the past and our elders for wisdom while opening the way for the future that allows new generations to progress.

This concept also notes that elders are of any age and found in all cultures. We all have figures in our lives that inspire and support us to think and feel differently.

Two inspiring eco-ancestors:

Greta Thunberg: Swedish environmental activist challenged the world leaders to take immediate action for climate change mitigation.

Thunberg's activism began when she persuaded her parents to adopt lifestyle choices that reduced their own carbon footprint.

“I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act. I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if our house is on fire”.

Vandana Shiva: Indian scholar, environmental activist, food sovereignty advocate, ecofeminist and anti-globalisation author. Based in Delhi, Shiva has written more than 20 books. Shiva's idea was that a decentralised approach to agriculture, based upon a diverse array of locally adapted seeds, would be more likely to weather the vagaries of a changing climate than a system relying on only a few varieties.

[The Seeds of Vandana Shiva - A documentary film](#)

We hope to inspire you to consider how you too are positioned as an eco-ancestor in the many roles and jobs we do - parents, mentors, students, creatives and makers etc.

Exercise: An invitation to connect to an inspirational ‘figure’ and ally.

The inspirational figure can be real or imagined: a superhero, a person from history or someone from your family lineage, a friend or an animal. It can be a Nature spirit or the earth itself.

- Choose a figure or go with whatever pops into your mind. Picture the ‘figure’ or write their name down if you prefer.
- Continue to imagine them and/or call them in and notice what it is about this figure that inspires you. What are their qualities? Are they, for example, compassionate? Do they have a sense of humour or have superpowers? Make a quick sketch, find an image of them and/or make notes.

- There is no right or wrong way to connect with the 'figure'. Follow what feels right for you. You may like to have a conversation with them to find out about their view on a particular situation. Notice what you notice and their qualities and perspective. How might this be helpful at the moment?
- As a final step (optional), see if you can embody the quality or qualities you discovered about your inspirational figure. Try standing and moving like them. What do they look and sound like? Give it a go. What does life look and feel like through their eyes? Notice if there is some advice for you on a particular situation.
- Meeting an inspirational figure can provide allyship and useful insights, and you can draw on their wisdom whenever you need.

Adapted from practices and exercises from the School of Process Oriented Psychology POPUk.

The principle of being an eco-ancestor brings powerful opportunities to express shared humanity, challenge assumptions, and inspire joy and wonder, dreaming and building solutions for a fair, flourishing, greener future.