

GUIDE TO PRODUCING 101



MELBOURNE
FRINGE

(I'M Going to Die in This Bracket), Melbourne Fringe 2020.

Photo by J Forsyth. Pictured: Shannon Loughnane.

Image description: a performer in silver sparkling dress and black boots, waving a yellow piece of paper on the grass.

Contents

This guide is aimed at helping artists and producers put on an independent event.

03 [So you want to produce an independent event?](#)

04 [Your Team](#)

05 [Project Management](#)

08 [Risk Management](#)

10 [Music / Copyright / Acknowledgement of Country](#)

11 [Accessibility](#)

13 [Money](#)

14 [Sustainability](#)

16 [Four very important things \(to nail\) for your event](#)

This resource is designed to help you put on an independent event. Please note that this document was created in April 2021 and all information was accurate at this date. If in doubt about the contents or if you have a question, get in touch with our Participants Services team at artists@melbournefringe.com.au.

So you want to produce an independent event?

The Travelling Sisters at *Kick On*, Melbourne Fringe 2019.

Photo by Theresa Harrison. Pictured: The Travelling Sisters.

Image description: three performers in sequin jackets, colourful shorts and wigs holding their hands as fists on stage.

Get around this Producing 101 Pack for all the need-to-knows.

We know it can seem like there are 20 million important things to take care of. Don't worry, we feel you. But we also know that if you are aware of all the steps early on then you'll be primed to tackle any 'creative challenges' that may come your way.

Let's start with the basics.

What even is a producer?

Let's be real, if you're reading this pack then your producer might be YOU!

Producers are ninjas. Wizards. Other areas of the cultural industries might know them as project managers, curators, arts administrators, company managers, even editors. We think of them like grand coordinators of the tasks and responsibilities involved in developing, rehearsing and staging an event, performance, exhibition or installation.

A producer is a **facilitator**. The specifics of the role can vary depending on their particular skill set, and the skills and strengths of other team mates.

Some producers might be very involved in the creative/conceptual development of a production while others might have nothing to do with what happens inside the rehearsal room. If you've got a great director and some wonderful actors, but no marketing manager, then that's where your producer should be devoting their attention. Good producers know what it takes to get quality shows together and will make those tasks their priority. They simply Get. \$#!t. Done.

Your Team

At Fringe, we like hats. That's why we wear so many – often being artists, producers and venue managers, all at once. If you're like us, it can be a good idea to get a core team together early on in the process and be really clear about who does what.

You as the project manager or producer are responsible for setting the pace and tone of your projects. In saying that, you often can't do it alone. So the first question is... who do you need on your team to make this project into a reality?

It's likely you won't need ALL of these kinds of collaborators, but here are a few suggestions:

- Performers
- Director
- Writer
- Musicians
- Visual Artists
- Digital Media
- Scenic Designer
- Dramaturg
- Choreographer
- Photographer/Videographer
- Lighting Designer
- Sound Designer
- Costume Designer
- Production Manager
- Front of House Manager
- Broadcast/Technical Manager

A few questions to ask yourself as you embark on your project:

- Who is your producer? (Maybe it's YOU!)
- Who answers the emails and phone calls?
- Who finds the venue and signs the contracts?
- Who handles the box office and other finances?
- Who is leading your marketing & publicity campaign?
- Who can help you get a killer promo image?
- Who can write a punchy blurb and press releases?
- Who can social media like a boss?
- Who can coordinate your invitations?
- Can you ask someone to be your mentor?

Project Management

Cherese Sonkkila and the Fruits at *Kick On*, Melbourne Fringe 2019.
Photo by Theresa Harrison.

Image description: a performer with a hair band, pink cropped top and shorts dancing with a towel in her hands, two topless performers dancing behind.

Projects, just like sandwiches, come in different shapes and sizes but the ingredients are (mostly) the same. Here at Fringe HQ, we believe that good project management skills are the secret sauce in the proverbial independent art sanga.

Want to learn how to plan better, be more organized, and move projects along without burning out along the way? Here's our 4-stage-process for delivering a tasty event:

Stage One: Creative Concept, Funding & Partnerships

This is the stage where you should be dreaming and thinking about all the BIG picture stuff. It's the time to talk about key goals, key milestones and key activities.

At Fringe all our projects have a project team and a project manager – and this is the very first thing we decide when we embark on a project. The project manager is ultimately responsible for the day-to-day management of the project, coordinating all the various elements including planning, delegation of tasks, stakeholder liaison, implementation and problem solving.

Once you've decided who will be the project manager, here's a few ideas about where to start:

- **Goals** – Defining the different goals and aspirations you have for your project will place you one step closer to achieving them. Ask yourself: what are your project's aims? What do you want to achieve? WHY does *this* work need to be made, and why now?
- **Skills and Experience Audit** – What roles is everyone taking on? Do you have the right team to supplement your own skills/experience? Are you going to plan to engage more people at some point?
- **Money** – This is where you calculate your income and expenditure and work out what the goal is financially. Will the event be free? Ticketed? How much will the tickets cost? Have you planned a

date when you need to have your budget finalised?

- **Venue** - Where are you going to hold your event? Is it at an established venue? A pop-up space? Your own lounge room? Working in non-traditional or public spaces can be very fun but often requires a lot more work. Think about how big you want your venue to be – there's no point in hiring a 150 seat theatre if you think you'll only get 20 people per night
- **Partnerships** - You could also be seeking partnerships at this stage - whether they're financial, artistic, or just your friend's parents letting you use their shed for rehearsals
- **Mentorships** – If you're producing your first event, it can often be worth approaching a mentor to guide you along the way. Is there someone you admire who would be happy to mentor you on your project? There's no harm in asking!

Stage Two: Project Planning & Execution

This is the stage where you really get into the nitty gritty and begin planning for everything you need to execute the project successfully.

At Fringe, we recommend drafting a project worksheet and sharing it with your team so you can see what needs to be done (and importantly, by who!)

Here's a few ideas from Fringe HQ about where to start:

- **Timelines for rehearsals** – When are you rehearsing and where? What needs to be achieved creatively before opening night?
- **Risk Management** – Are you going to plan in advance for if something goes wrong?
- **Insurance, licensing and permits** - Do you have public liability insurance? Other licences or permits may be necessary – for example, if you're using music during your show, selling drinks, or if your show is outdoors or in a council-owned space
- **Marketing plan** – No-one's going to come to your show if you don't tell them about it. Devise a detailed marketing plan - who is your audience (hint: it's not 'everyone'). How will you get the word out there? When will you draft a marketing plan? What are the key milestones you need to consider in your project plan (launch, on-sale date, etc)? If you're at an established venue then they may include you in their marketing, but don't rely on it - you need to get the word out too. You may not have a lot of marketing money, but that doesn't mean you can't use social media or publicity to your advantage
- **Accessibility** – How does accessibility fit into your project plan? How will you make your show as accessible to the widest possible audience?
- **Environmental sustainability** – When considering the full scope of your project, how and when should you think about environmental sustainability? How will your project impact the environment? How will it impact the health and happiness of your crew?

Stage Three (season): Delivery & Management of Event

This is everything that happens between opening night and closing night.

- **Promotion** – spend time every day promoting your show. Most people don't buy tickets until the week or even the night of the show, so don't forget marketing at this stage!
- **Schedule** – Who is selling the drinks? Who are your technicians/stage managers? If there are consumables, who is buying them each day? Is there a pack down and setup element? Again, it's all about communication of roles – develop a schedule and disseminate it to your entire team!
- **Ticketing** – Depending on your venue, will you have to manage ticket reports? Will you have to run the box office? Maintain a spreadsheet of sales. Keep a tally of any seats you give away as complimentary tickets. Balance your box office costs and income daily and deposit takings in a bank account set up to that end.

Stage Four (post-season): Evaluation of Project

It's very easy to think that once the final show is over, you can party and not have to think about the project ever again... unfortunately, this ain't true. Evaluating your project is just as important (especially if you're planning on remounting the show again!) What tasks do you have post-event? Do you need to pay anyone? Do you need to evaluate and report for any funders (and if so, how)?

- **Don't forget:** grant acquittals, sponsorship reports, audience surveys etc. These things are especially useful if you're planning to remount the project in the future!

Risk Management



Church of Burt, Melbourne Fringe 2019.

Photo by Duncan Jacob.

Image description: a performer in white dress and white wig singing in front of a band with similar outfits on stage.

Without being Captain Killjoy, effective risk management is about much more than just ‘doing the right thing’. If this is the beginning of your big break, make it a clean one and ensure your show is above board. Take a risk... but make sure to do it safely. Audiences can often recognise when something is unsafe, which will change the way they view your work. Creating a safe and well managed environment will allow audiences to feel comfortable, free to relax and enjoy the experience.

Cultural Safety

Cultural safety means creating environments where people feel safe – where there’s no challenge to their identity, and where their needs can be met. Ruth De Souza and Robyn Higgins have identified 12 ways you could make a start to make your work more culturally safe:

1. Understand and know your own biases through self-education and self-analysis.
2. Read and research. There are plenty of books, blogs, articles and websites on cultural safety and related areas that invite us to reflect on our biases and worldviews as well as the ways power and control operate. These include: critical whiteness, racial literacy, queer theory, cultural democracy, ableism, intersectionality, decolonisation and feminism.
3. Attend workshops, talks, events and conferences that support you to unpack how your own cultural background structures your thinking and behaviour. Seek to expand your appreciation and respect for people whose experience and knowledge differ from your own.
4. Self-evaluate and invite peer-evaluation of your arts activities, projects and practice. Ask yourself how you have applied cultural safety principles to your work and what actions you have taken to address culturally unsafe spaces within your sphere of influence.
5. Find or develop a community of practice. This may be a network, a small group, or even a few friends you can meet.

6. In a safe space to discuss the ideas and principles behind cultural safety. This is a group where you can collectively.
7. Draw on each other's skills and knowledge, brainstorm.
8. Challenge and support each other's ongoing development.
9. Commit to communicating about cultural safety and the lack of it with those you work with.
10. Examine and challenge organisations, institutions and structures. Think about the values that are evident in the arts and cultural organisations you work with. Seek to collaboratively amplify the values that reflect cultural safety and challenge and disrupt those that do not.
11. Lead, steward and/or support your organisation towards a commitment (and actions) to being a culturally safe place.
12. Above all, persist. Working towards cultural safety in your creative practice is a life-long commitment. Acknowledge and celebrate the effort and the learnings along the way

An extended version of this content was first published in *The Relationship is The Project* (Brow Books, 2020) and re-published in this ArtsHub article ["Taking action for cultural safety"](#) in 2020.

OH&S

This is about making sure no box is left unticked. It's much easier to create an event when you are aware of the legalities up front – these can be murky waters to wade if discovered later down the track. Check out these [Safety Guidelines for the Entertainment Industry](#) from Live Performance Australia and the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance for all the need-to-knows.

Public Liability Insurance

Public Liability Insurance can help protect you if you're found to be legally responsible for personal injury of others or property damage during the running of your event.

Public Liability Insurance does not cover you (or your cast) for injuries during rehearsals or performance, for cancelled performances, loss of income, damage to equipment for example. It's purely to cover the public during your event.

For year-round coverage you can go it alone with [Duck for Cover](#), [NAVA](#) or [AON Performers Insurance](#), among others.

There are other types of insurance which cover these aspects (things like Personal Accident Cover, Performing Equipment Cover, Professional Indemnity Cover). These can often be bought as a package or as add-ons to your PLI policy if purchased directly through places like Duck for Cover. Pretty much all venues will require you to have PLI, however these other types of cover are optional so decide for yourself. Got thousands of dollars of expensive sound equipment you might want some equipment cover.

Remember: PLI only covers the public, it's required by nearly all venues but check with them first as they may cover you. Melbourne Fringe Umbrella cover is only for PLI and only for the course of the Festival.

Music

Planning on using music for your event? You may have to pay a fee to use it. APRA, OneMusic and PPCS are the governing bodies that collect funds on behalf of music artists. By going through these organisations, music artists get paid for their work and you'll get legal approval to press play.

Big acts (say Beyonce or Ariana Grande) can sometimes be tough to get approvals for.

Check out our [Guide to Using Music in Your Event](#) if you think you will be using music.

Copyright

If you are performing or adapting a work that is under copyright, you must get permission in writing from the author or his/her literary agent or publisher. Typically, a work remains under copyright for the length of its author's life plus 70 years, though there are numerous exceptions to the rule. It's your responsibility to find out your obligations under the law and, if necessary, to pay the appropriate copyright fees.

Acknowledgement of Country

An Acknowledgement of Country is significant protocol for First Nations people. It is a way for everyone to practice cultural awareness and respect for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and their ongoing practice of culture and connection to country.

It's important to consider how you'll make an Acknowledgement of Country at your Fringe event, so here are some useful resources to help you out. Check out [this website](#) from Aboriginal Victoria for more information, including some great example Acknowledgements of Country you can use as a starting point.

Remember: if you're doing a digital or physically distanced event - it's important to still consider how you'll make an Acknowledgment of Country at the start of your Fringe event.

Accessibility



Kick On, Melbourne Fringe 2019.

Photo by Theresa Harrison.

Image description: an Auslan interpreter in black top and glasses on stage.

Access considerations should flow into and be embedded within your creative processes, audience development and marketing campaigns. Get on it from the get-go and avoid having to make costly decisions down the line when it's too late.

To start off, take a look at our [Producer's Guide to Access](#) and consider:

Key phrases:

- **Disabled people** – At Melbourne Fringe, we say 'disabled people'. Many people in the disability community prefer identity-first language. This positions disability as part of a person's identity and belonging to a cultural group. Another preferred term is 'people with disability' – this term puts the person before the disability, and it acknowledges that disability is caused by societal barriers.
- **Deaf people** – We use 'Deaf people' to refer to people who are culturally Deaf – that is, people who were born deaf, or became deaf early in life, and who use Auslan sign language to communicate.
- **Physically accessible** – A venue or event with adequate physical mobility access would indicate a space free of physical obstacles for all involved persons including artists and patrons, allowing everyone to utilise the space equally. This would involve no steps without an alternative flat pathway for patrons in wheelchairs or those with limited mobility and a mobility accessible bathroom.
- **Audio Description** enhances the live theatre experience for people who are blind or have low vision. Through the use of a small radio receiver and a free, easy-to-use headset, audiences can listen to a description of the visual aspects of the performance during appropriate breaks in the dialogue.

- **Relaxed performances** are designed to create a safe and welcoming environment for patrons with learning difficulties and/or sensory and communication challenges. There is a relaxed attitude to noise and movement, often small changes are made to the lighting and sound effects, and audience members can be invited to enter and exit the venue throughout the show.
- **Auslan interpreting** – The term Auslan is an acronym of “Australian Sign Language” and is the language of the Australian Deaf community. Check out this great factsheet for more information. If you are interested in booking an interpreter for your event, get in touch with Melbourne Fringe or Arts Access Victoria, and we can put you in contact with a range of Auslan service providers.
- **Visual rating** – If your event is not Auslan interpreted, or interpreted only on specific dates, a visual rating gives audience members who are Deaf a better understanding of how they can access your work.
- **Aural rating** – If your event does not have an Audio Description service, or is interpreted only on specific dates, an aural rating gives audience members who are blind or low vision a better understanding of how they can access your work.
- **Language no barrier** – A Language No Barrier symbol indicates that audiences can understand and engage with the event without a comprehensive understanding of the English language. This may include (but not limited to) events that have a high visual or physical component (e.g. visual arts, dance, circus) or musical performances with no or very minimal English language spoken.

Want to know more? More information on language can be found at [People with Disability Australia](#).

Money

Benjamin Hancock at *Kick On*, Melbourne Fringe 2019.

Photo by Theresa Harrison.

Image description: a drag queen with two buns on the head dancing on a table with their legs up.

We know times are tough, so have a good think about what you have to spend and what you can afford to lose. Have a read of our [Guide to Budgets, Money and Grants](#) resource and consider:

Your team

Are you working on a profit share model, or to a fixed fee? Be clear and ensure everyone you're working with is on the same page. Speak with your team early and don't be afraid to get clear on expectations from the start.

Your budget

Keep track of everything. Hold on to all receipts, and make sure you get invoices from any collaborators if you plan to pay them out of your box office takings. Check out our [budget template](#) if you need a hand.

Your income

It's best to budget your income based on 30% of your venue capacity.

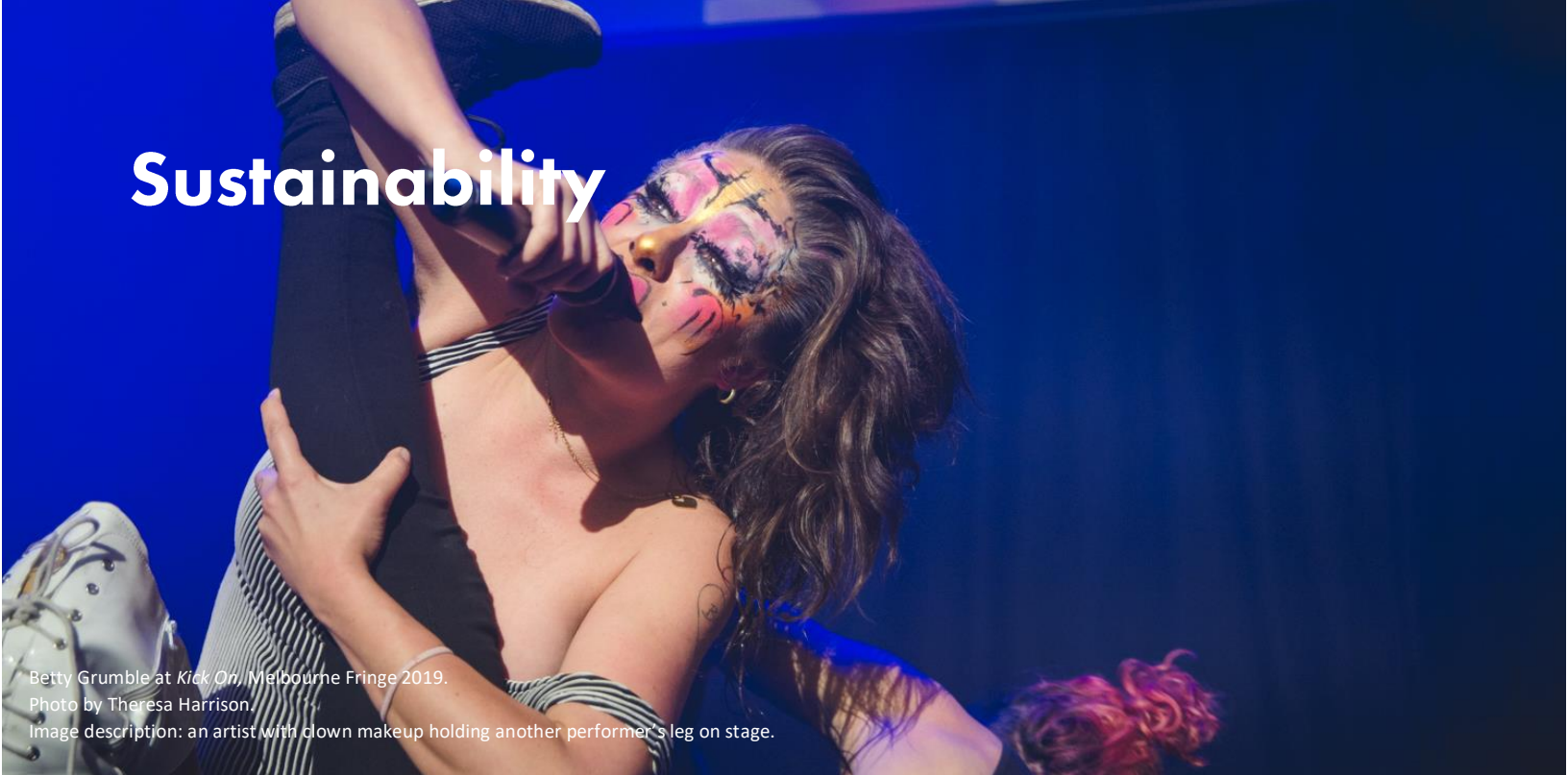
Crowdfunding

Tapping into your own support networks can be a great way to help finance your event. Get the know-how from the experts over at [Pozible](#) and [Creative Partnerships Australia](#).

Funding

Grants and other funding opportunities often follow annual cycles so it can be a little tricky if you haven't got the money at this stage. It still may be worth joining the [Auspicious Arts eNews](#) and [TNA eNews](#) for a good digest of funding opportunities as they arise. You can also check our [Guide to Budgets, Money and Grants](#) for a list of other quick response grants you may be eligible for.

Sustainability



Betty Grumble at *Kick On*, Melbourne Fringe 2019.

Photo by Theresa Harrison.

Image description: an artist with clown makeup holding another performer's leg on stage.

It's important to think about the impact of your event – on the environment, on the health and happiness of you and your crew, and on your bank balance.

Environmental Sustainability

There are no climate change sceptics at Melbourne Fringe. It's everyone's responsibility to be mindful of the impact their Fringe event may have on the environment. A lot can be done simply by choosing appropriate materials for your production, limiting the amount of printing you do and by working with your venue to use low power equipment.

For some more in depth guides take a look at the resources from the green beans:

- [Sustainable Production Guide](#) from stellar UK based organisation Julie's Bicycle
- [Live Performance Australia's](#) environmental sustainability initiative,
- [Greener Live Performances](#) through Energy Efficiency.
- [Greening The Arts policy report](#) from Greenie-in-Residence program at Arts House.

Financial Sustainability

If your funds are limited (which they so often are when you're putting on an independent event), plan your expenses and spend your pennies wisely. Get in early and you can save cash and avoid surprises that usually hurt the hip pocket.

Some tips from Fringe Festival veterans:

- Talk with your team early about how you plan to run your budgets i.e. profit share.

- Be strategic about spending money – the later you do things the more expensive they tend to be.
- Have some contingency for an emergency (it can always be re-allocated to your budget for the nicer things like thank you gifts for your team or a celebratory dinner when you finish your run).
- Don't forget the costs that may come out of your box office takings i.e. inside charges on your tickets, extra tech you ordered with your venue etc.

Health & Emotional Sustainability

There's no point in getting to the end of your event and feeling like you never want to do it again. You and your team are likely to go through some high's and low's so it's important to keep perspective on your journey. It's a good idea to have a check-in conversation about how you and your team are going – you might even find that this is best done with a trusted person outside of the project to give you some wider perspective.

Have a read of our [Wellbeing Guide](#) resource (drafted by psychologist Chris Cheers) and some further reading here:

- [Arts Wellbeing Collective's resources](#)
- [Entertainment Assist's resources](#)
- [50 Ways to Take Care of Yourself in the Arts](#)
- [8 Ways to Deal with Post-Project Blues](#)
- [Click here for a list of psychologists, psychiatrists and GPs that specialise in the arts](#)

Four very important things (to nail) for your event

THING 1. (Nail) Your venue

- Make sure it's the right venue for you and your work:
 - Don't just think about size and location – consider if you want to be part of a program at an established venue or if it's better to be on your lonesome in a cool warehouse in the burbs.
 - How many seats are there in the space and will this work for your show? It can be better to have a full, small venue than an empty large one.
 - Is the stage the right size and shape for your show? Consider the size of the performing space and its position to the audience.
 - Think about access - will your audience be able to get in the door and enjoy the event?
- Be upfront about what's on the table:
 - How much will you need to pay and when – is it a free model based on your box office takings or a straight hire fee?
 - Make sure you're really clear on what your venue can/is offering, right from the start. There are SO many different arrangements with venues – be upfront when you're shopping around and don't sign anything until you know what the venue is providing and what they expect you will be providing.
- Keep your venue informed:
 - Remember to contact a number of different venues to get an idea of market rates.
 - If you're exploring multiple options, be honest with your venue manager/programmer. It can make people feel very unkindly toward you if you have seven different spaces booked and they don't know you're looking elsewhere. Just be honest – people get that you need to shop around, they just need to know so they don't have any nasty surprises if you pull out of your booking.
- It is ok to ask lots of questions:
 - It is important to openly discuss any concerns you might have with your business arrangements. Don't feel pressured into any agreement you don't fully understand or the terms of which you find questionable. Get all your queries clarified in writing.
- Get confirmation of your agreement from your venue in writing.
 - [Here's our Venue Agreement Template](#) – we highly recommend you have an agreement in place.
- Here is a checklist you can use in making sure your deal suits your needs:
 - **Check which performance dates and times are available.** Make sure you know if rehearsal time is included as part of your rental – and if so, what dates/hours you can rehearse in the space

- **Be sure to ask about the timeframe for bump-in and bump-outs** and if this is included as part of your rental
- **Find out what equipment and facilities** (for lighting, sound, AV etc.) are available and included at the venue
- **Ask if technical staff are on hand** for sound and lighting during performances or if it is up to your company to arrange
- **Check the venue's insurance coverage** and ask whether your show needs to hold public liability insurance
- **Check if the venue runs its own box office** and what the associated costs are / if they take a cut at the door
- **Ask if the venue provides any support in the way of marketing services**
- **Ask the date of the box office payout** and be sure this is included in the contract
- **Ask what happens in the event of a cancellation** either on your own part or the venue's. Set down the timeline for advance notice and any monetary penalties. Scrutinise the conditions for cancellation closely!

THING 2. (Nail) Your image

We eat with our eyes, and killer imagery will ensure your event is one tasty feast.

This is a Public Service Announcement: DO NOT put text, including your show title, on or in the image. Under any circumstances. It can mean media won't use your image, and it looks proper ugly.

THING 3. (Nail) Your blurb

Imagine someone who knows nothing about art comes across your event. Even if your show is abstract and experimental, it doesn't mean the language you use to describe it should be.

A few key tips when drafting your blurb:

- Keep things succinct and relevant.
- Use concise language.
- Short, sharp sentences work best.
- Pretend you're actually talking to another human-being.
- Be direct.
- Address the reader, use words like 'you' instead of 'audiences' or 'people'.
- Ask yourself: What will they experience? What will they see? What will they think about when they leave?

This is another Public Service Announcement: Avoid making the entire blurb a review of your show. For instance, a blurb that just reads: *"Everyone and their dog-walker absolutely needs to see this saucy number. Simply outstanding! – **** Ballarat Bugle"* will not, by itself, sell tickets.

THING 4. (Nail) Your ticket prices

By using an average of 30% capacity houses over your season as a guide, you can begin to work out what box office takings you need to recoup in order to break even with your projected income. You set

your own ticket prices, so have a think about what your audiences will happily pay. Don't undersell yourself either – \$5 tickets aren't going to help you pay your actors (or your rent!). Make sure the price is right.

Ticketing price types:

- Full – full price/adult ticket
- Concession – can be offered to valid concession card holders including students, unwaged, health-care card, MEAA members, etc.
- Tuesday – it's often good to have a cheap night to encourage bookings and offer a different price point for audiences. Fringe has a tradition of Cheap Tuesdays.
- Preview – a good way to test your show in front of a paying audience. As it's a test for you and them, give them a discount to match their expectations.
- Usually Tuesday, Group and Preview ticket prices are similar to Concession tickets.
- Promo codes – producers will often want to create a special discount for particular user groups to promote sales and awareness. These are generally organised closer to your event once you know more about how it's selling.

Is that it?

Here is a little checklist before you get started:

Have you...

- Assembled your team?
- Secured your venue?
- Drafted your budget?
- Confirmed your ticket prices?
- Finalised your marketing plan?

Now what?

GO FORTH AND PRESENT YOUR INDEPENDENT EVENT!

Ways we can help...

Melbourne Fringe is a year round arts organization and we are always here to help. We offer a stack of free and low-cost information sessions and workshops at Melbourne Fringe, so come along to one of them and ask us all of your burning questions. It's also a great opportunity to meet fellow artists and build your networks.

Let's Talk

Questions?
To chat more, please contact:

Participant Services Team
Melbourne Fringe

03 9660 9600
artists@melbournefringe.com.au



Betty Grumble at *Kick On*, Melbourne Fringe 2019.

Photo by Theresa Harrison.

Image description: a performer wearing a stripy one-piece swimsuit and clown makeup, holding a microphone in her right hand and raising her left hand.