EXPANDING
THEATRES
A GUIDE TO MAKING
HYBRID EXPERIENCES

The toolkit was written by:

Hilary Knight
Ash Mann
Annette Mees
Eleanor Turney

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Executive summary

WHAT IS THIS?

This toolkit provides a roadmap for theatre makers, theatres and other performing arts organisations to undertake the creation of hybrid audience experiences. Digital tools allow theatre makers to break out of the 4 walls of our buildings and creating new ways for audiences to engage with theatre makers, performance, and storytelling. Working with new tools while keeping theatre at the forefront demands new ways of working and thinking. This toolkit is a step by step plan to design projects that integrate their live activities with the possibilities of digital technologies.

This tool kit focusses on hybrid cultural experiences - an approach that blend the live and the digital. As live performance makers we want to expand what we do, without loosing the core craft of live performance. Hybrid reaches beyond just recordings of theatre shows or live-streamed events. They're connected experiences designed to exist across spaces, formats, and platforms, taking advantage of modern technologies to merge the physical and the digital in meaningful ways.

Our hybrid approach can take many forms; it take audiences behind the scenes, connect audiences and makers, reach across borders, or deeper into the themes and creative world of a piece, improve accessibility, inviting them to participate in ways that aren't possible in more traditional, non-digital forms of experience.
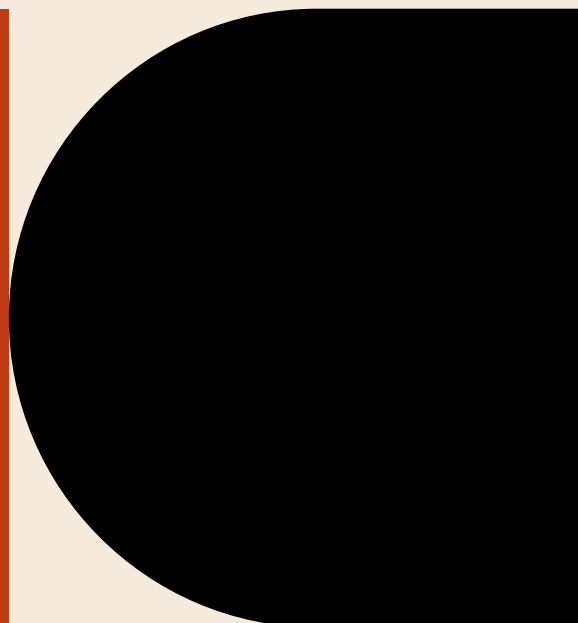
At their best, hybrid experiences break down barriers, making culture more accessible, playful, and impactful. They can help you reach people who might never set foot in a theatre, museum, concert hall or gallery. They're about expanding, not replacing the magic of live experience, offering new ways to connect, create, and experience culture.

Hybrid experiences are an exciting new area of practice to reach new audiences, in new ways. This toolkit aims to help make such projects a bit easier to embark on.

By sharing the lessons learned through real-world research, undertaken by interdisciplinary experts from the worlds of theatre, technology and experience design, we clearly lay out the phases through which a typical hybrid project will progress, from ideation to closing, and the key considerations and challenges for you to think about at each stage.

This guide is designed for small to mid-scale cultural organisations.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

COLLABORATION IS KEY

Hybrid projects require clear communication between artistic, technical, and operational teams.

CLARITY OF PURPOSE

A well-defined "North Star" ensures alignment across disciplines.

AUDIENCES MUST BE AT THE CENTRE

Hybrid work should be user-friendly, accessible, and meaningful to its intended audience.

SUSTAINABILITY MATTERS

Beyond a single project, consider long-term financial and technological sustainability.

DIGITAL PROJECTS NEED THEIR OWN PRODUCTION LOGIC

They don't follow the same rhythms or workflows as traditional arts production. Organisations need to acknowledge this and adapt.

THE ROADMAP

Hybrid work varies wildly from project to project, but it is our experience that the production process typically follows the same five key phases or stages:

1 **Ideation** - Defining the artistic vision, audience, and goals.

2 **Pre-production** - Assembling teams, funding, and setting the project framework.

3 **Production** - Developing live and digital elements while managing alignment.

4 **Performance/Launch** - Engaging audiences and adapting based on feedback.

5 **Closing & Legacy** - Evaluating impact, preserving digital assets, and planning sustainability.

Ideation	Pre-production	**Production**	Performance / Launch	Closing & Legacy

By using this overarching framework you can weave together and align the, often very different, working styles and practices of the types of organisations you will likely be partnering with; artists, technologists, creative agencies etc.

For each phase we have highlighted key considerations, challenges and recommendations, as well as the questions you should be aiming to answer and the outputs that should help to progress your project.

We have also drawn on our collective experience to tell the story of each phase across four key areas of consideration; your people, operations, money, and audiences.

READING GUIDE

This toolkit is designed as a flexible resource, you don't have to read it from start to finish. Instead, feel free to dip in and out, exploring the sections that are most relevant to your current needs. Whether you just started exploring if a hybrid audience experience is what you need, are in the middle of development, or preparing for the next phase, you'll find practical insights, tools, and inspiration to support your process. Use it as a guide, a reference, or a source of new ideas whenever you need it.

Introduction

WHAT?

"Hybrid" refers to experiences that take place both live and in digital spaces.

Most of our lives take that form now - the way we shop, the way we communicate, the way we navigate the world.

In theatre we are starting to look at what it means to approach "hybrid programming" - creating meaningful, integrated programming across live stages and digital spaces.

WHY?

During the pandemic, we were all reminded that performances and audiences can connect in all kinds of ways and places.

As theatre makers we have a real opportunity to expand our practice into digital, online spaces.

Hybrid programming can help us connect to audiences that do not come through our doors (yet), because they are too far away, because it is hard for them to travel to our buildings, because they don't feel comfortable entering, or because they feel that theatre is 'not for them'.

WHO?

For this work to be artistically successful, technically functional and to reach audiences, people and teams with different expertise need to come together.

Theatrical and artistic expertise and artistic rigour needs to work with technical expertise and operational capacity. Each team will look different but all will need to have those key components present.

HOW?

The key word is collaboration. Every project and process will be unique.

It is important to set out a shared vision and goals so that the team across the different disciplines have a North Star to apply their expertise towards.

A typical production timeline in theatre looks very different from a typical digital creation process. They share some elements and diverge on others. It is important that both the theatre and digital partners recognise these different ways of working and differing timelines, and agree on how to make a hybrid product that suits the working styles of all parties.

BACKGROUND

In 2024 four partners (NITE/Club Guy & Roni and DEN in the Netherlands, digital agency Substrakt and Annette Mees of Audience Labs in the UK) came together to explore how digital technology can work with live performance, whether that is to share a piece more widely, create new experiences alongside it, or enhance an existing piece of live performance. This toolkit is one of the results of that collaboration.

The research project ran alongside a dance production by Club Guy & Roni, HIIT and 2k.far called Faith, which was made with Moroccan choreographer Khalid Benghrib.

The team worked with different artists, makers and technologists across mediums to explore how to expand the themes, stories and process of the show beyond the stage. Both to deepen the experience of the live show for those who saw it, and offer something standalone for those who did not, especially those in Morocco or otherwise excluded by geography.

The results of this work can be viewed on faith.show.

PEOPLE

NITE

NITE is the National Interdisciplinary Theater Ensemble, located in Groningen, The Netherlands. Together with the contemporary dance company Club Guy & Roni and the two music ensembles HIIT and Asko| Schönberg, it forms an ensemble of actors, dancers and musicians. NITE presents interdisciplinary shows that resonate with a diverse audience and establish new connections between art forms, artists and society.

Their theatre show FAITH which opened in the fall of 2024. That production formed the artistic centre of the research and the hybrid commissioning.

DEN

DEN is the Dutch national knowledge institute on digital transformation in culture. DEN inspires and assists cultural organisations in engaging with the digital world, by identifying trends, supporting innovation and developing knowledge on themes as audiences of the future, data-driven working, digital leadership and innovative business models. It offers practical advice, academic programmes and tools for cultural organisations to start their digital transformation process.

DEN oversaw the research of Venues of the Future and will distribute results and learnings.

Substrakt

Substrakt is a digital agency based in the United Kingdom that partners with cultural organisations around the world to deliver meaningful digital experiences. Its work is inherently collaborative and all of its projects involve multiple partners. Substrakt designs and builds websites and digital products alongside providing strategic consultancy, training and support services. Its goal is to create positive, sustainable and impactful change in the cultural sector.

Substrakt brought the technological expertise to build the the digital framework for FAITH and support the artists and technologists in the realisation of the commissions

Annette Mees

Annette Mees is an award-winning theatre director and dramaturg who creates interdisciplinary immersive work that defies definition and sparks new thinking. She works with artists and cultural institutions who want to create new forms of storytelling and immersive experiences. Previously, she led Audience Labs, the innovation department at the Royal Opera House, collaborating with world-class ballet and opera artists and technology companies like Google and Magic Leap to create groundbreaking productions in live and virtual spaces. She began her career as one of the founding co-Artistic Directors of Coney - an internationally renowned immersive theatre company - where she directed over 20 immersive and interactive shows.

As the 'innovation dramaturg', Annette blended the artistic and technical aspects across the project, facilitated the Round Tables and the Lab, developed the hybrid approach and the artist commissions.

Hilary Knight

Hilary Knight is an independent consultant and a senior associate of AEA Consulting. She helps creative and cultural organisations devise strategies that make them more responsive and resilient in a fast-changing world. Hilary brings over 20 years' experience of delivering organisational, digital, and content strategies with a focus on work that happens at the intersections of arts, culture, and technology. Her clients include national cultural institutions, innovative SMEs, foundations, artists, and cultural districts, and she has held senior positions at Tate, Film4, Channel 4, and the BBC.

Hilary provided the project with strategic insights and provocations, and co-authored the report.

Before you start

RATIONALE

Everyone working on the project needs clarity about why you are doing it: Is it to reach or serve a particular type of audience? Do you want to create more dialogue or impact around the work? Is it to work with a specific artist or creative? Is it to explore the themes of the piece more deeply? Do you want to connect audiences or artists across borders?

- **Define your 'North Star' early** - Establish a clear, shared objective that guides creative, technical, and strategic decisions throughout the project. Remember that one project can't do everything. Make choices and create priorities.

- **Be specific about purpose** - Are you expanding audience reach, exploring new creative possibilities, or collaborating with a particular artist? Aligning on the 'why' ensures focus.

- **Get everyone on the same page** - Make sure all teams understand and agree on the project's goals from the start to avoid misalignment later.
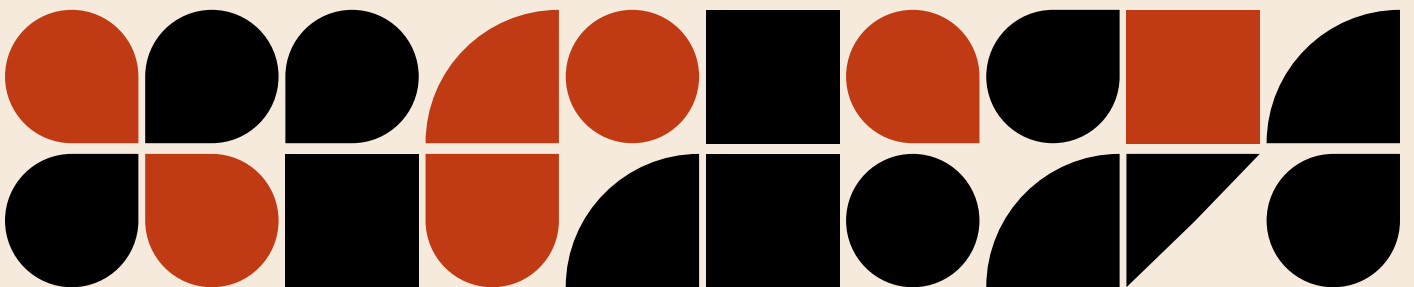
STAFFING

You need a person with credibility and authority to make decisions on both sides (artistic, and digital/technical).

- **Appoint a central decision-maker** - This person must have authority and agency across both the artistic and digital/ technical aspects of the project.

- **Ensures coherence** - They lead the process and product to maintain artistic integrity and technical viability.

- **This is a new/blended role** - Their responsibilities span responsibilities typically associated with Product Owner, Digital Producer, Project Manager, and Process Manager roles.

- **Could be an internal appointment** - Many cultural organisations lack this dedicated role, but the necessary skills may exist within your team already and can be formalised.

DECISION-MAKING AND COMMUNICATION

You need clear lines of communication, authority and decision-making: With so many people involved - especially if they haven't worked together before - it's crucial that everyone stays on the same page.

Key considerations include:

- **Clear authority & roles** - Define who makes decisions at each stage (artistic, technical, production) and who has the final say on key aspects.

- **Transparent communication** - Establish regular check-ins, shared documentation, and agreed on feedback loops to prevent working in silos.

- **Defined change control process** - Hybrid projects evolve; set clear criteria for when and how changes can be made.

- **Timelines & dependencies** - Digital and live production schedules differ; ensure alignment through shared calendars and milestone tracking.

UNCERTAINTY

You need to have a frank conversation about divergence, and failure.

You probably have a proven track record, and a highly sophisticated methodology for making exceptional performance work. When making something new, like a hybrid set of experiences, you will bring all that expertise but will also have to try new things. Failure and iteration is part of the process - it is reminiscent of the rehearsal process in which trying and finessing is the modus operandi, rather than a pre-set, known linear production process.

Digital working is inherently iterative and exploratory, getting comfortable with the fact that where you end up may be different to what you expected at the start is an important aspect of making this type of work.

- **Embrace experimentation** - Hybrid projects evolve through trial and error. Be open to unexpected directions and allow room for creative and technical iteration.

- **Acknowledge the learning curve** - If hybrid work is new to your organisation, approach it as an opportunity to develop new skills and ways of working, rather than expecting a seamless process.

- **Plan for flexibility** - Set clear goals but accept that the final outcome may shift as you test, adapt, and refine your approach.

Phase 1 - Ideation

"The biggest potential obstacle at this stage is the (lack of) digital literacy of artists and arts organisations."

This phase provides the map for the rest of the project.

Working across different disciplines opens up all kinds of new and exciting opportunities. Find partners that get excited about similar outcomes and impact.

Be clear about the scope (i.e. what is the project going to try to do and achieve), but equally important is to decide what the project is not doing. Exploring new opportunities can sometimes lead to overreach.

Clarity is key. Avoid theatrical and technical jargon. Everyone involved should be able to understand the options being explored, ask questions, and make informed decisions.

FOCUS OF PHASE 1

- **Creative vision**
  mission and strategy.

- **Making clear artistic choices**
  and clear choices about what is inside and what is outside the project scope.

- **Creating alignment**
  internally and with partners.

- **Build your network**
  of trusted advisors and conversation partners.
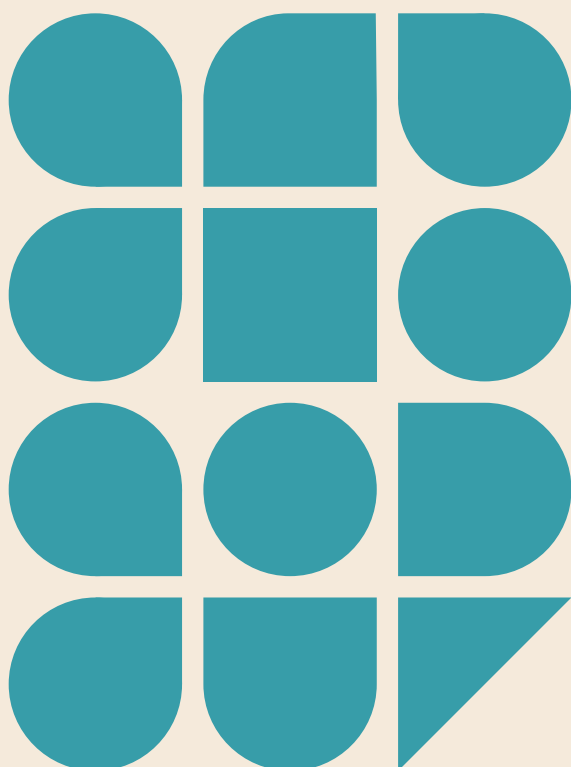
Create vision

Make choices

Create alignment

Build network

KEY STEPS & OUTCOMES OF PHASE 1

1

STEP 1 - SETTING THE VISION
Outline the overarching creative vision, mission, and strategy in a document that can be shared internally and externally. Include success criteria and a rough timeline to ensure alignment from the start.

2

STEP 2 - RESEARCH AND DISCOVERY
Define what the project aims to do, who it's for, and which key technologies and/or artists will be involved. Capture this in a discovery document.

3

STEP 3 - ASSEMBLING PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS
Formalise key partnerships with Letters of Agreement (LOAs) to clarify roles and expectations.

4

STEP 4 - REFINING THE VISION AND TOP-LEVEL PLAN
Develop a clear project plan that allows for partner contracts, ensuring IP agreements are in place.

5

STEP 5 - ALLOCATING OR RAISING FUNDS AND RESOURCES
Establish a proposed budget or budget range, along with a resourcing or fundraising plan.

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER BY THE END OF PHASE 1

⌐ What's the vision?
What kind of work or experience are we creating, and why does it matter?

⌐ What's in (and out) of scope?
What are we focusing on, and what are we consciously leaving out?

⌐ Who is this for?
Who is the audience, and how will they engage with the work?

⌐ How will collaboration work?
What principles will guide our partnerships, and what does success look like for everyone involved? What principles will guide our partnerships, and what does success look like for everyone involved?

⌐ Do we have the right team?
Where are the skill gaps, and who do we need to bring in?

⌐ How will we fund and run this?
Where is the money coming from, and who will manage it?

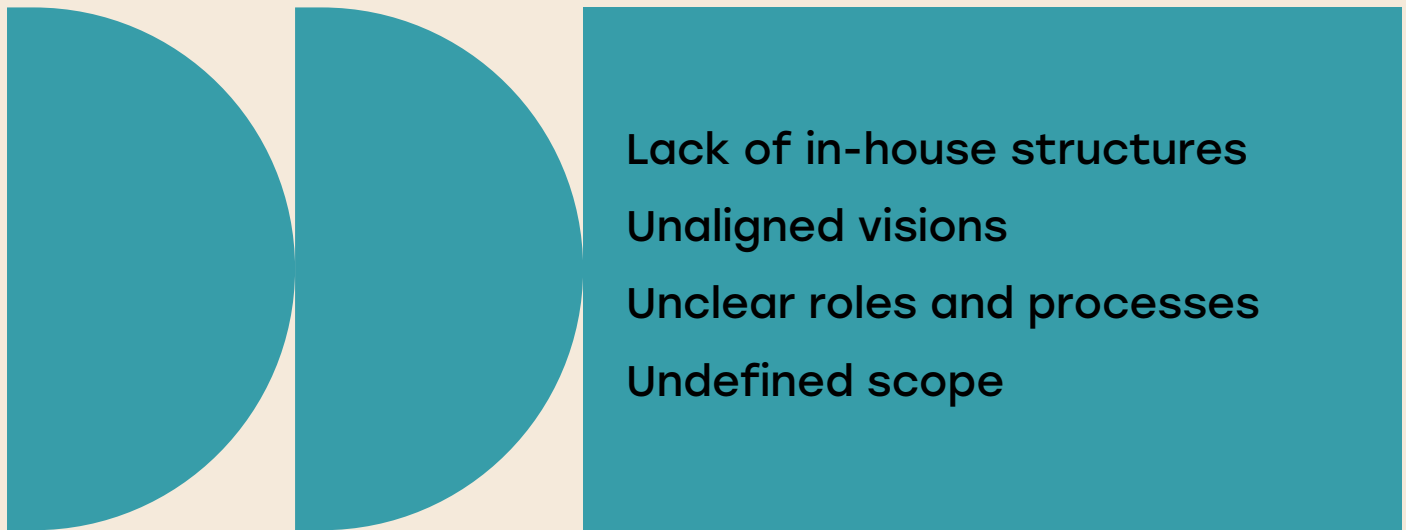**⌐ How will we stay on track?**
What systems will keep the project organised and moving forward?

⌐ Who owns what?
How is intellectual property (IP) shared, licensed, or retained?

> Note: Make sure to differentiate between artistic IP, technological IP, pre-existing or underlying IP etc. And remember that usage (in perpetuity or for a restricted time period) is not the same as holding the IP.

COMMON CHALLENGES IN PHASE 1, AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

Lack of in-house structures

Unaligned visions

Unclear roles and processes

Undefined scope

Bring in expertise early
Most organisations lack in-house structures for hybrid projects. Consider an advisory group or consultants to guide the process.

Align on language and vision
Cross-disciplinary work takes time to establish a shared vocabulary and shared understanding of what 'good' looks like. Take the time to ask questions, explain priorities and values, and use clear examples of what you think works (and what doesn't).

Clarify roles and processes
 Misunderstandings arise when responsibilities aren't defined. Document decision-making, communication, and tracking methods upfront. Make sure everyone understands who is responsible for what.

Set boundaries and be clear about the scope of work
Resources will shape what's possible. Define priorities early to avoid overextension, making decisions about what you are not focusing on can be helpful.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHASE 1

Holistic team engagement

Prioritise the right partners

Build face to face time

Involve key teams early
Hybrid projects intertwine resources, strategy, and artistic vision. Engage your executive team, as well as development, box office, audience, digital, and marketing teams. The more the project is designed to align with the existing mission, strategies and capacities within your organisation, the easier subsequent phases will be.

Prioritise the right partners
Choose collaborators based on compatibility, not just technical skill. Take time to understand their different work styles, methodologies, personalities, and flexibility - you need partners, not just suppliers.

Build in face-to-face time
Even for remote projects, regular check-ins and some in-person sessions can help maintain alignment and momentum. 'Showing and telling'-type discussions are a large part of the work during this phase.

KEY VOICES IN PHASE 1

Exec team **Tech partners** **External advisors** **Key artists**

The executive team
of the theatre or theatre company and any of the departments
who might play a key role in the wider project.

The technology partner(s)
part of the ideation process is identifying the right one(s). The
second part of the ideation phase is a co-creation process
between the technology and the theatrical disciplines.

External advisors
that can help shape vision and 'translate' between theatre and
technology partners and/or can help scout for possible partners.

Any key artists
who the company might want to work with.

Phase 2 - Pre-production

"A hybrid project cannot be done by an artistic team giving a technical team a brief and then stepping back."

The ideation work is complete, the artistic vision is set, and the overall direction is in place. Now, the focus shifts to implementation - defining clear structures, assembling the right team, and ensuring the project has the flexibility to evolve without losing alignment.

Hybrid projects, particularly those blending digital and live elements, require an iterative and adaptive approach. This phase is about creating robust but flexible systems that allow the project to move forward smoothly while accommodating creative discoveries along the way.

FOCUS OF PHASE 2

▉ **Build the project team**
Establish roles, responsibilities, and working structures.

▉ **Create detailed plans**.
Define production timelines, budgets, and decision-making frameworks.

▉ **Set up systems for collaboration**
Ensure seamless communication between live and digital teams.

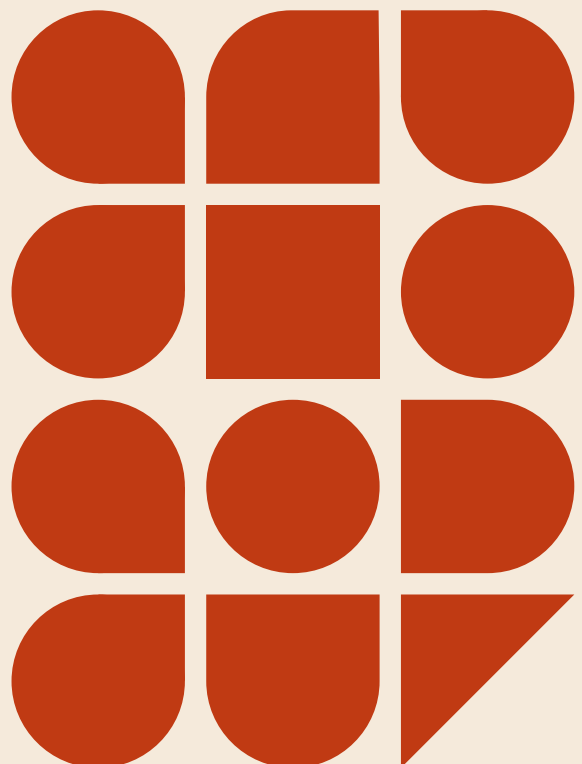▉ **Commission artists and technologists**
Align creative and technical briefs with the project's vision.

Build the team

Create plans

Set up systems

Commission & brief

KEY STEPS & OUTCOMES OF PHASE 2

1

STEP 1 - BUILDING THE TEAM
Define a distributed leadership model to manage both live and digital elements effectively. Assign a central artistic lead (e.g. Digital Dramaturg, Digital Creative Director) to ensure artistic alignment across platforms and a central producing role to coordinate workstreams. Structure the team with the right expertise, capacity, and communication processes to maintain trust and collaboration.

2

STEP 2 - PLANNING & PRE-PRODUCTION
Develop a shared production timeline that integrates live and digital milestones, identifying key decision points and communication methods. Establish a decision-making framework to clarify responsibilities and define how the executive team and key stakeholders will stay informed and engaged. Use a flexible project management approach to balance structured planning with iterative workflows.

3

STEP 3 - COMMISSIONING
Create a commissioning brief that aligns with the project's vision, audience, and technical requirements. Clearly outline the artistic intent, engagement model, budget expectations, and technical parameters to ensure feasibility. Define whether the digital component is static, interactive, or evolving and how it will integrate with the live experience.

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER BY THE END OF PHASE 2

Who is leading the project?
Have we defined key leadership roles across artistic, production, and digital?

How will decisions be made?
Have we set up clear structures for approvals, change management, and alignment?

Who are our creative and technology partners?
Have we identified and commissioned the right artists and technologists?

How will the budget be allocated?
Have we planned for both artistic and digital costs, including contingency for unexpected developments?

How will the project be managed?
Do we have a solid project management system that keeps everything on track?

How will teams communicate and collaborate?
Have we established regular check-ins, reporting structures, and shared documentation?

COMMON CHALLENGES IN PHASE 2, AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

Lack of in-house structures

Unaligned visions

Lack of in-house structures
Most cultural organisations aren't set up for hybrid projects. Consider assembling an advisory group or hiring consultants to guide the process.

Bridging disciplines takes time
Establishing a shared vocabulary and vision of success is essential. Take time to ask questions, clarify priorities, and document decision-making and communication processes.
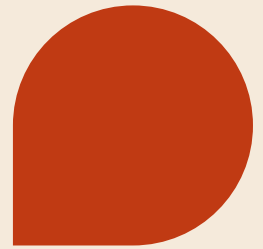
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHASE 2

| Integrate expertise | Break down the work | Define the approval process | Prepare to adapt | Involve all teams early |

Integrate digital and live expertise early
Avoid treating digital as a separate add-on; ensure artists and technologists collaborate from the start.

Use an iterative approach
Break down work into smaller, testable cycles rather than committing to a fixed idea too early.

Formalise decision-making
Define approval processes for artistic, technical, and decisions to prevent confusion later.

Plan for flexibility
Hybrid projects require adaptability; ensure structures allow for creative and technical evolution.

Involve marketing and audience teams early
Engagement strategies should be considered during pre-production, not just at launch.

Phase 3 - Production

"This phase is to check if the plan is working, not to make the plan - it should be about iteration and refining, not starting new stuff."

In this phase, both the live and digital elements move into full production.

With timelines, budgets, and plans now in motion, the focus shifts to execution. Live rehearsals and digital development (the building, testing, and publishing) often run in parallel, which can create challenges to keep everything aligned.

The work you have done in phases 1 and 2 to ensure you have clear project objectives, communication lines and decision-making structures will help mitigate the risk when things, inevitably, deviate from the original plan.

As the commissions take shape, attention turns to how audiences will engage with the work. This includes ensuring clear pathways between the live and digital experiences and working closely with communication and audience teams to define those journeys.

With production underway, it's also time to consider the project's long-term presence. Every element, live or digital, has a lifespan. Without active planning, live work fades, and digital components risk slowly breaking or disappearing as platforms and technologies evolve. A strategy for archiving and maintaining access should be built into this phase, not left as an afterthought.

FOCUS OF PHASE 3

◗ **Creating artistic creative work**
that will thrill audiences.

◗ **Creating a digital 'home'**
for the project that connects the projects.

◗ **Audience experience strategy**
and a communications strategy.

◗ **Designing the legacy**
and archive of the project.
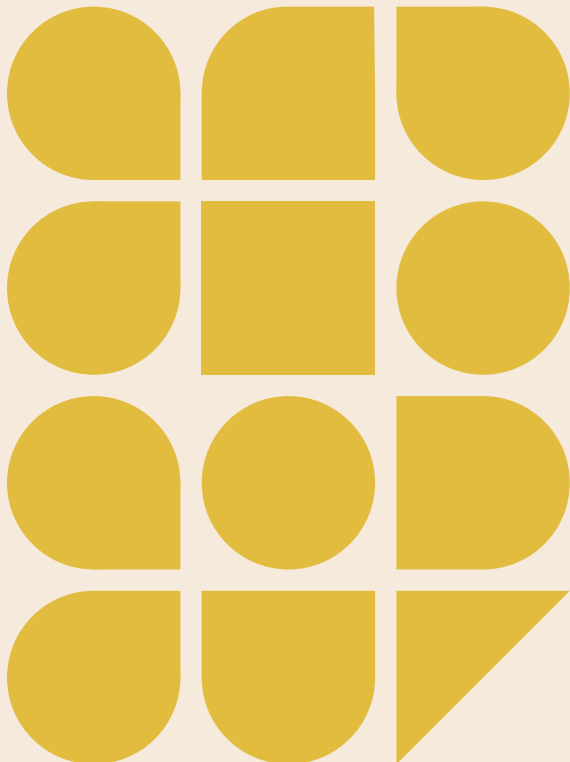
Create artistic work

Create a digital home

Strategy

Design the legacy

KEY STEPS & OUTCOMES OF PHASE 3

1

STEP 1 - CREATE A DETAILED PLAN
Shared documents that give an overview of the whole project, and detailed documents for each project and/or element of the project.

2

STEP 2 - ARTISTIC AND CREATIVE CREATION
The artistic project elements, both live and digital, ready for launch.

3

STEP 3 - AUDIENCE TESTING
test sessions with audiences that provide insight in the usability and accessibility of the digital project.

4

STEP 4 - DESIGN THE LAUNCH AND LEGACY
A launch plan, including framing editorial (text and images) surrounding the commissions, digital and physical wayfinding infrastructure, marketing and PR assets and audience pathways. An equivalent legacy and archiving plan which sets out any changes that need to be created for the framing editorial (text and images) surrounding the commissions in archived states.

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER BY THE END OF PHASE 3

Are the live and digital elements aligned?
Have we tested how audiences will move between live and digital experiences, and are all teams clear on how their work connects?

Is the work ready for launch?
Have all artistic and technical elements been completed, and have we addressed accessibility and usability through audience testing?

Do we have a clear audience engagement strategy?
Do we have a clear plan for how audiences will discover and interact with both live and digital components, and is there a marketing and communications plan linking both experiences?
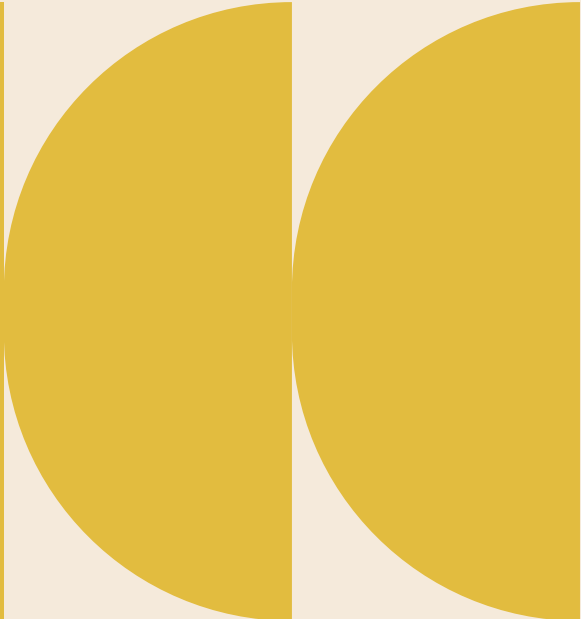
Have we planned for post-launch iteration?
What aspects of the project can or should be adapted based on audience feedback, and who has the authority to make those changes?

What happens to the digital components after the project ends?
How long will they remain live, who is responsible for maintaining them, and have we set a plan for archiving and long-term access?

COMMON CHALLENGES IN PHASE 3, AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

Scope creep

Bottlenecks

Misaligned creative visions

Lack of contingency

Lack of sustainability strategy

- **Managing scope creep**
  The production phase is for refining and execution, not introducing new ideas. Without strict scope control, teams risk overextending and compromising quality.

- **Decision-making bottlenecks**
  Key decision-makers (directors, producers, technical leads) may be deep in rehearsals or technical development, slowing down necessary approvals and changes.

- **Misalignment between digital/technical and artistic teams**
  In this high-pressure phase, the differing workflows and timelines of artistic and technical teams can drift apart, leading to misalignment.

Budget strain from unplanned iteration
Unexpected challenges, whether technical, artistic, or audience-driven, can demand additional work. Without a well-planned contingency budget, this can cause financial strain.
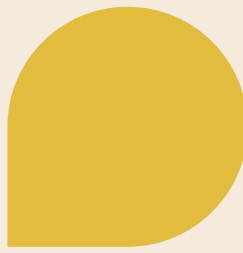
Overlooking long-term sustainability
Digital elements require maintenance. Without a clear archiving and transition strategy, they risk becoming obsolete or disappearing after the project ends.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHASE 3

Tight scope adherence

Team alignment

Test early

Stick to the plan, refine, don't reinvent
This phase is about executing what's already been agreed, not launching new ideas. Keep a tight grip on scope to avoid overreach and protect the quality of the work.

Prioritise alignment across teams
The production processes for live and digital elements often run in parallel, this can lead to drift. Regular check-ins between artistic, technical, and audience-facing teams help keep the project cohesive and ensure the audience journey is seamless across all the different types of experience.

Test early and use what you learn
Audience testing is essential, not just to polish the digital experience, but to validate decisions you have made around accessibility and usability. Make sure you have space to respond to feedback without derailing the timeline or budget.

Plan now for what comes after
Don't leave the project legacy to chance. Build in time to plan how digital content will be archived, maintained or retired. Without this, important work can vanish or become unusable over time.

Keep decision-making agile
Bottlenecks often emerge when key leaders and decision-makers are stretched. Clarify who has authority to make decisions during production so progress doesn't stall when things inevitably shift.

KEY VOICES IN PHASE 3

Artists · Digital team · Technology · Design · Exec team

- **The commissioned artists**
  are at the heart of this process this may include digital artists or they might be theatre artists working with the technology partner.

- **The core digital team**
  artistic and production working closely with the artists to make sure that each project element delivers on the wider project objectives.

- **The technology partners**
  in delivering a digital framework and/ore digital infrastructure to deliver the projects.

- **Any departments that can help design pathways to the audience**
  this could be outreach, education and/or marketing specialists.

- **The executive team**
  of the theatre or theatre company and any of the departments who might play a key role in the wider project and/or key external advisors are available, are kept informed, and can be called upon in key decision-making moments.

Phase 4 - Performance

"With a live, physical performance, you have the audience's attention for the duration of the show. With a digital or hybrid piece, you're competing with everything else in their lives."

The Performance phase is all about meeting your audience.

Live and in-person theatre performances are kept 'fresh' during their run by altering subtly in response to the different audiences at each performance.

Digital projects can be just as dynamic, adapting in real-time to audience interactions, current events, and cultural conversations. This flexibility creates opportunities for deeper engagement and richer storytelling.

Investing in audience measurement allows you to track responses and make informed adjustments.

Even with extensive testing in the Production phase (Phase 3), real audience behaviour will still bring surprises. Having the ability to refine the work based on audience input can enhance the experience and strengthen connections.

Beyond the immediate project, measurement also provides valuable insights for future work, helping inform creative decisions, audience strategies, and funding conversations. Documenting how audiences engage - what draws them in, what holds their attention, and what they share can create a foundation for stronger, more impactful hybrid projects in the future.

FOCUS OF PHASE 4

■ **Showing / launching the work**

■ **PR & Marketing the live and the digital work**
in traditional press, social media, targeted communications and online communities.

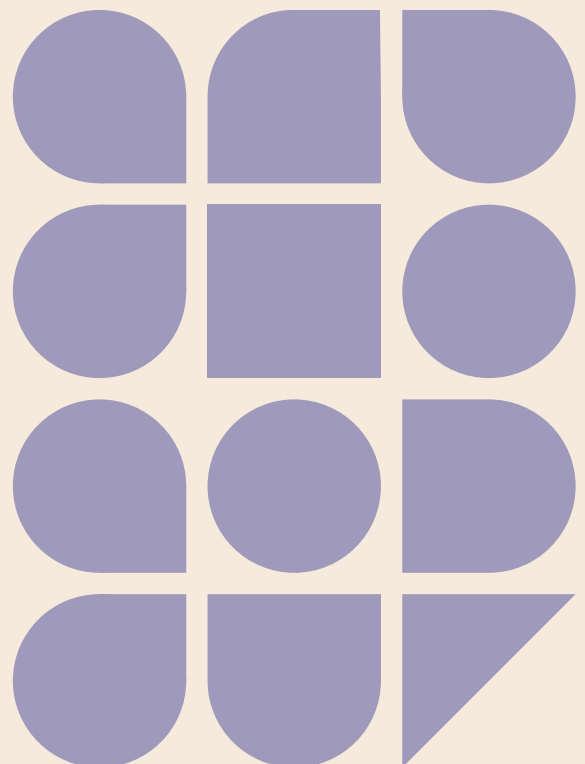■ **Audience measurement**

■ **Flexible adaptation**
of live and/or digital work.

Show the work

PR & marketing the work

Audience measurement

Flexible adaptation

KEY STEPS & OUTCOMES OF PHASE 4

1

STEP 1 - LAUNCH AND PROMOTE
The launch is another moment where responsibilities might shift. Does the originating artistic team or members of the digital core-team suggest, decide or make any alterations during the course of the run. Have another decision making protocol in place post-launch.

2

STEP 2: CREATING AUDIENCE TRACTION
Cross-pollinating the marketing of live performance with the promotion of the digital elements. Creating 'pull-throughs' from one to the other by making the digital pats discoverable for the theater audience and creating interest in the theatre show with the digital audiences.

3

STEP 3: MEASUREMENT
what do you need to know and how are you going to measure it? Focus on actionable data - what patterns can inform immediate improvements or future projects?

4

STEP 4: THIS IS A CYCLE PROCESS
You can keep learning, evaluating and adapting incorporating experience and feedback - moving in a loop until the desired result is achieved.

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER BY THE END OF PHASE 4

How are audiences actually engaging with the work?
Are they interacting as expected, or are new patterns emerging that we hadn't anticipated?

What is surprising or unexpected in audience behavior?
Are there insights from audience reactions, digital engagement, or live performance feedback that should inform future adjustments?

Are we adapting effectively without losing stability?
Have we defined the right balance between iteration and artistic/technical integrity, ensuring that changes improve rather than dilute the work?

Are we leveraging PR and marketing to their fullest potential?
Are we reaching new audiences through targeted communications, social media, and digital outreach, or do we need to adjust our strategy?
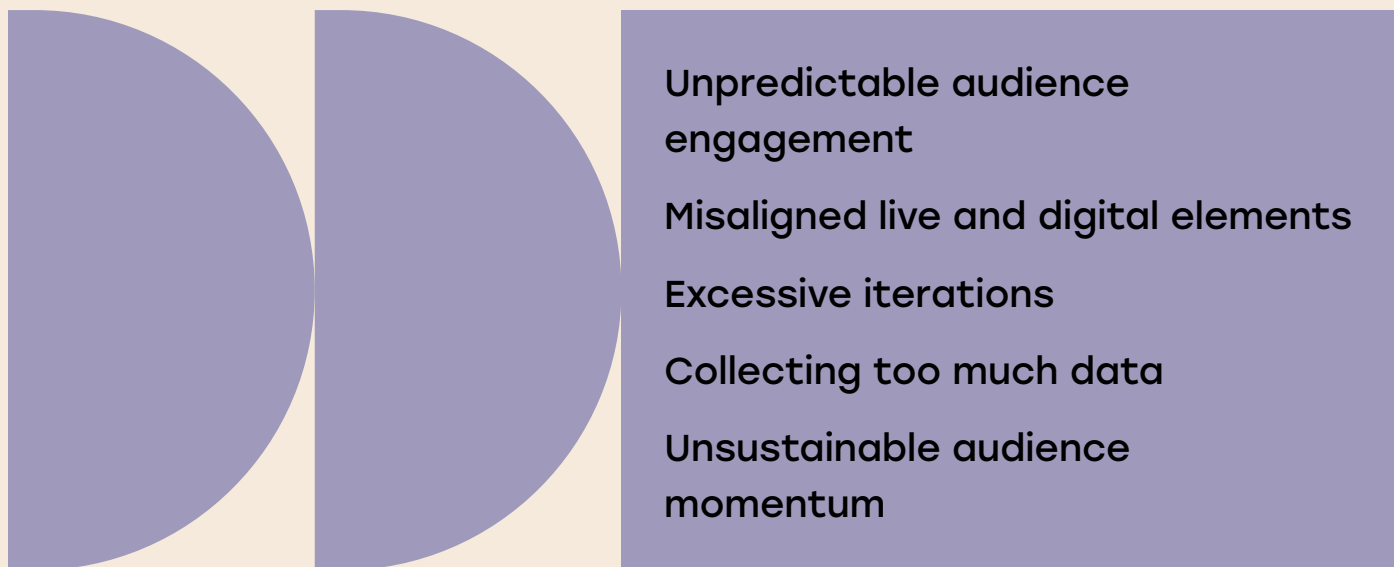
What is the best way to capture and share audience insights?
Who is responsible for translating engagement data into actionable knowledge for future projects, funding applications, or marketing efforts?

What artistic and technical learnings should be captured for future work?
How do we ensure that insights from this phase contribute to stronger hybrid projects in the future?

COMMON CHALLENGES IN PHASE 4, AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

Unpredictable audience engagement

Misaligned live and digital elements

Excessive iterations

Collecting too much data

Unsustainable audience momentum

⌂ Audience engagement is unpredictable
Even with extensive planning, real audiences will interact with the work in unexpected ways. A strategy is needed for adapting in real time without derailing the project.

⌂ Keeping live and digital elements aligned
Hybrid projects can become fragmented, with separate live and digital experiences rather than a cohesive whole. Strong communication and clear pathways between types of experience are essential.

⌂ Balancing iteration with stability
The ability to update and adapt is a strength, but constant tweaking can cause confusion or disrupt artistic integrity. Defining a set number of iterations helps manage this tension.

⌂ Effective measurement without overload
Collecting too much data can create information without insight. Teams must focus on measurable, actionable audience behaviors rather than tracking everything.
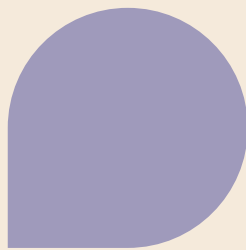
Sustaining audience momentum
Interest can fade quickly if there's no plan for **ongoing engagement** beyond the initial launch. Building audience retention strategies, such as opt-ins, extended content, or community interactions, helps maintain momentum.
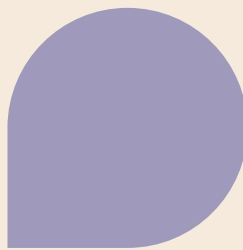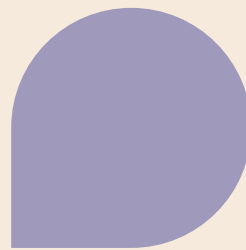
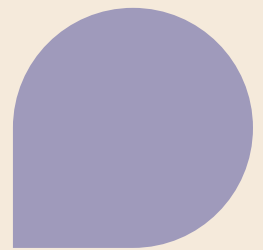## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHASE 4
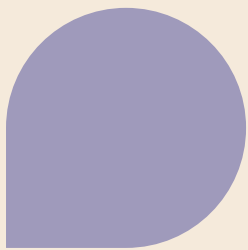
Live and digital experience	Define measurables	Real-time adaptations	Live tools & methods	Post-launch decision making

Design audience pathways between live and digital
Ensure audiences can easily move between live and digital experiences. This could mean clear signposting, exclusive digital content for in-person attendees, or interactive elements that deepen engagement across formats.

Measure what matters (don't track everything)
Define clear measurement goals. Do you need demographic insights, audience drop-off points, or engagement patterns? Avoid an overwhelming "measure everything" approach that generates noise instead of useful insights.

Embed real-time responsiveness into the project
Plan for live adaptations, whether through digital updates, post-show discussions, or interactive content that reflects audience feedback or current events. Flexibility is an artistic tool, not just a logistical challenge.

⚏ Use digital tools and methods to extend participation opportunities
Consider live-streamed Q&As, behind-the-scenes content, or audience-generated responses as ways to sustain engagement beyond the performance itself. Give audiences ways to contribute, not just consume.

⚏ Clarify decision-making roles post-launch
Once the work is live, determine who has the authority to make iterative changes, whether artistic, technical, or marketing-related. Set up a clear decision-making structure so adaptations are strategic and thoughtful, rather than reactive.

KEY VOICES IN PHASE 4

The audience	Staffing team	PR & marketing	Artists
Digital team	Tech partners	Data	Exec team
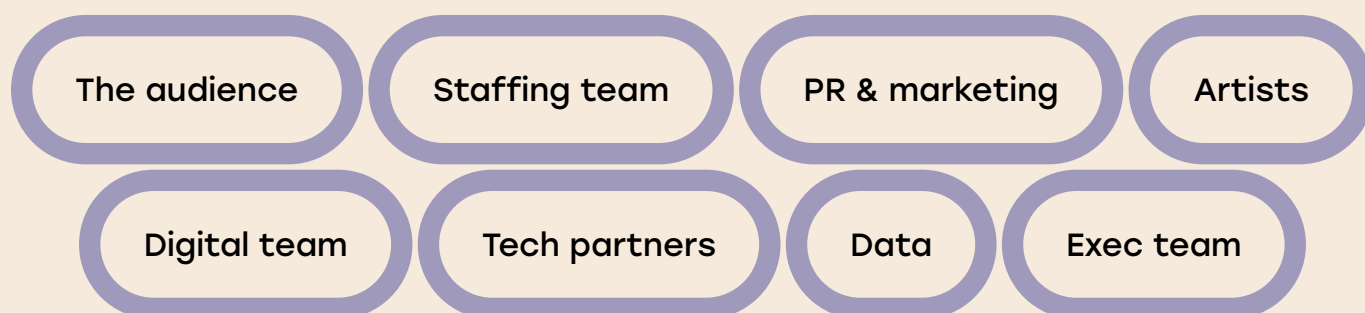
▪ The audience
in this period we want to make sure we hear from them.

▪ The people who are staffing the interaction with the audience
this role could be fulfilled by the artists, by the digital core team, the marketing or outreach team or an additional post).

▪ Any departments that can help design pathways to your audience
PR & Marketing outreach and/or education teams.

- **The artists and their creative and technical team**
  being available for press and pr and/or ongoing development and responsiveness and/or gathering the measurement and data available to them.

- **The digital core team**
  artistic and production working closely with the artists to make sure that each project element delivers and develops. and/or gathering the measurement and data available to them.

- **The technology partners**
  iterating the digital framework and/or gathering the measurement and data available to them.

- **Data interpretation**
  the data needs to be 'read' and transformed in an understandable narrative. This role could be taken on by the digital core team, the technology partner or an additional post.

- **The executive team of the theatre or theatre company**
  and any of the departments who might play a key role in the wider project and/or key external advisors are kept informed and can be called upon in key decision making processes.

Phase 5 - Closing & legacy

"The risk is that the audiences built for a digital project just disappear when the project ends."

In this phase, the project is archived, celebrated, and evaluated, while audience, partner, and artist relationships transition from project-specific to ongoing connections.

Like live performances, digital projects have a lifespan, platforms become obsolete, and ongoing interaction isn't always sustainable. Decide on an endpoint and plan for archiving key elements.

Use this moment to strengthen relationships, engage advisors, partners, and new audiences in the project's closure and invite them into future work. Internally, adapt communication channels to integrate new audiences into existing networks.
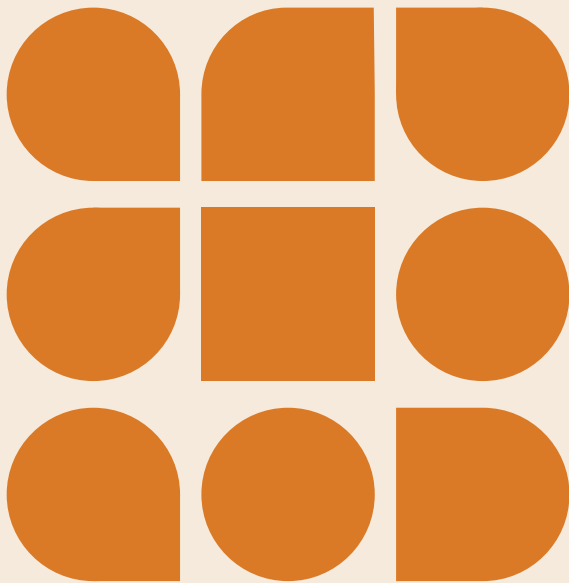
FOCUS OF PHASE 5

■ **Building the future**
Strengthen relationships and explore future opportunities for the work.

■ **Capturing insights**
Gather learnings, assets, and key conversations to inform future projects.

■ **Celebrating success**
Share achievements and communicate the project's impact.

Build the future

Capture insights

Celebrate success

KEY STEPS & OUTCOMES OF PHASE 5

1 **STEP 1 - ARCHIVING THE PROJECT**
Ensure the project remains findable by adding it to past projects with updated framing text. Close elements requiring ongoing maintenance, or if parts of the project will continue (e.g. a foyer installation or longer-term digital feature), transition them to a new team with a dedicated budget. Create content (images, audio, video, or articles) to document what happened.

2 **STEP 2 - CELEBRATING THE END**
A theatre show has a curtain call, hybrid projects should also mark their conclusion. Bring together audiences, artists, and partners through a final event, whether in-person, online, or via a targeted communications campaign.

3 **STEP 3 - CAPTURING & EVALUATING**
Document key assets, video, screenshots, photography, and audience insights, to inform future work and provide valuable materials for communications and fundraising teams.

4 **STEP 4 - SUSTAINING AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIPS**
Design a communications strategy to transition project audiences into long-term engagement. Define and identify the groups within your audience (e.g. young people from outreach programs, active participants, live audiences, online viewers) and create tailored follow-up messages. Determine when and how to integrate them into existing communication channels for future engagement.

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER BY THE END OF PHASE 5

Has everything been closed, transformed, or handed over?
Have all ongoing elements been archived, decommissioned, or reassigned to a new team with the necessary support?

What have we learned?
What worked well, what should be avoided in the future, and what new ideas, approaches, or partnerships have emerged?

How do we communicate the project's impact?
How can we tailor the story of this multi-faceted project for different audiences, including funders, partners, and the public?

How do we sustain relationships?
What strategies will transition project-specific audiences, collaborators, and stakeholders into long-term connections?

COMMON CHALLENGES IN PHASE 5, AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

Resisting closure

Volume of documentation

Audience data

Lost expertise

Resisting closure
It's tempting to keep hybrid projects running indefinitely, but without maintenance, digital infrastructure deteriorates. Build archiving into the budget and ensure any elements worth keeping are formally transferred to a responsible team.

Too much or too little documentation
Capturing interactive, ephemeral experiences is difficult. A skilled editor with time to shape materials into compelling narratives is essential. Marketing, PR, and development teams can help maximise the impact of archived content.

Managing audience data legally
If collecting emails or user data for future engagement, ensure compliance with GDPR and relevant regulations before adding audiences to long-term communications.
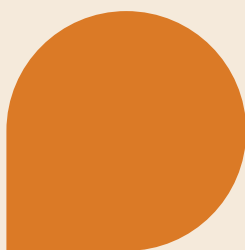
Losing expertise when the project ends
Key learnings and digital skills often leave with a project. Formal knowledge-sharing and investing in internal talent development will make future hybrid projects easier, faster, and more effective.
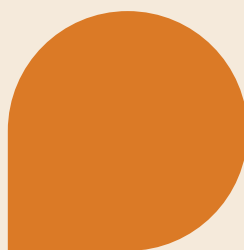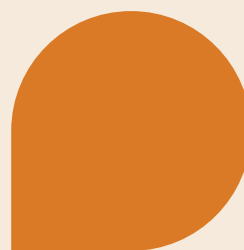
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHASE 5
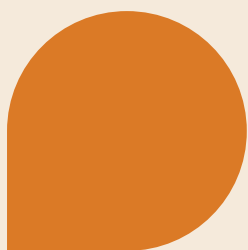
| Plan a meaningful end | Archive strategy | Build future audience engagement | Invest in knowledge sharing |

Plan a proper ending and make it meaningful
Hybrid projects deserve a thoughtful close, just like a final bow on stage. Mark the end with a moment of celebration that brings audiences, partners, and artists together, and leaves a lasting impression.

Archive intentionally, not as an afterthought
Digital work disappears fast if left untended. Build archiving into your workflow and budget, and decide what's worth keeping, what needs decommissioning, and what requires ongoing care with a clear owner and resources in place.

Build the bridge to future relationships
Use this phase to shift project-specific audiences into longer-term engagement. Identify who they are, what they responded to, and how they can be welcomed into your wider work through tailored follow-up and comms strategies.

Embed learning and don't let it walk out the door
When the project team disperses, knowledge often goes with them. Invest time in structured knowledge-sharing and internal capacity-building to ensure the insights and digital skills stay within the organisation.

Key areas

OPERATIONS

Phase 1

Operations in phase 1 are relatively 'light'.

However due to the involvement of so many voices clear communication, clear decision-making and strong project management is key.

Having a dedicated project manager or designated project lead, with responsibility for the project, is essential.

Phase 3

Project Management

During Production, the theatre and digital elements follow distinct workflows but must remain creatively aligned.

This is where the project management and communication structures established in Pre-Production (Phase 2) become essential. Regular "show and tell" sessions keep all the teams connected, offering an opportunity to share progress, ask questions, and refine the work in response to each other. These moments aren't just updates; they're opportunities to ensure the live and digital strands remain in dialogue, reinforcing a unified artistic vision.

Decision-making

Key decision-making moments arise throughout production, but their timing usually differs between live and digital work. Digital production requires early commitments to design and structure, while theatre rehearsals allow for more fluid changes. Misalignment can cause delays or unintended consequences - cutting a scene, for instance, may disrupt a linked digital element, while a shift in a digital project might impact marketing plans.

To keep the project on track, establish clear communication channels, a shared timeline, and a structured process for managing changes. A change control process should include the following steps:

1   Defining the issue and the required change

2   Assessing its impact on people, budget, and timelines

3   Consulting the affected teams

4   Agreeing on a course of action

5   Communicating the decision(s) to all the relevant people

6   Implementing the change

Capacity must also be considered in these decision-making moments. If the director or production manager is deep in rehearsals, authority should be delegated - whether to the artistic director, dramaturg, assistant director, or a trusted external collaborator. These delegation structures should be decided upon and clearly communicated before these decision-making moments arise. Decisions will often be need to be made relatively swiftly.

Phase 4

Effective operations in this phase balance audience input, project adaptation, communication, and measurement - all in constant dialogue. How audiences are interacting with the digital elements should inform both creative decisions and marketing strategies. Sharing real-time insights with the communications team allows for responsive messaging and audience engagement. Regular, focused check-ins keep everyone aligned.

Digital tracking and monitoring can be extensive or light touch. Decide what data matters to you, the specifics will vary from project to project. For example, is it important for you to understand audience demographics (who is engaging with the work) or user behavior (where do people drop off, get stuck, or re-engage)? The ways in which you track and measure this will depend on how your project works.

A data-driven approach can help you to refine the experience, but iteration must be planned and budgeted for. Define a clear endpoint because continuous adjustments can lead to endless refinements. Setting a fixed number of iterations ensures the project reaches a strong, finished state and ensures there is clarity about how much can be done.

MONEY

Phase 1

Resource allocation and/or fundraising is key in any project. During the ideation stage the ambition and scale of the project is decided.

Having external advisors and bringing a technical partner on board as early as possible will help theatres and theatre companies understand ballpark figures, likely expenses and to help identify any ideas that are too expensive or impractical, or will help you refine your ideas to something that is more feasible.

When partners are identified and collaboration considered, transparent and early conversations about resources, timelines, non-negotiables, and IP are key.

Hybrid projects often involve multiple collaborators across artistic, technical, and operational domains, making intellectual property (IP) a crucial consideration.

Key questions to address early:

- **Who owns the artistic content?** Define ownership of scripts, performances, designs, and other creative assets.

- **Who owns the digital elements?** Websites, apps, and interactive experiences may involve external developers and designers - discuss and establish licensing and access rights.

- **What are the usage rights?** Clarify whether partners have ongoing rights to use, adapt, or commercialise aspects of the project.

- **How will archiving and future access be managed?** Hybrid projects have digital longevity - ensure agreements cover long-term hosting, updates, and takedown policies.

Common IP models include:

1 **Full ownership by the cultural organisation** - All elements are retained by the organisation, with external contributors working on a commission basis.

2 **Joint ownership** - Multiple parties share IP, requiring clear agreements on how it can be used and monetised.

3 **Licensing agreements** - One party owns the core assets while others have usage rights for a defined period or scope.

 It can be helpful to engage legal or IP specialists early to avoid conflicts and ensure clarity in contracts.

Phase 3

By the production phase, top-line budget allocation should already be in place, but hybrid projects require a larger-than-usual contingency. With more variables and unknowns than traditional productions, especially if you are undertaking this type of work for the first time, flexibility in funding ensures the project can adapt to discoveries and challenges without compromising artistic or technical quality.

Commonly overlooked costs:

- **Audience testing** - Staffing, venue costs, and participant compensation for feedback sessions.

- **Ongoing digital costs** - Beyond initial commissioning, digital elements require a plan for hosting, maintenance, and security.

- **Archiving and long-term access** - Define when and how the digital work transitions into an archival state to avoid unexpected upkeep costs.

Planning for these costs from the outset prevents last-minute compromises and ensures the digital and live components remain fully functional, accessible, and secure throughout their lifespan.

AUDIENCES

Phase 1

- **Define your audience early** - Are you targeting existing theatre-goers, arts audiences, local communities, younger demographics, or those new to theatre?

- **Audience shapes the work** - Your target group will influence both your creative choices and the technologies you use. There is lots of research available on digital habits across demographics.

- **Be specific** - No project is for 'everyone,' especially in digital spaces. Being clear about your audience focus leads to stronger, more meaningful engagement.

Phase 3

Hybrid projects should be accessible by design, ensuring both physical and digital experiences have been designed thoughtfully to remove barriers to participation.

The Netherlands alone has more than two million people with disabilities, and making work genuinely inclusive means considering their needs from the start not as an afterthought. For projects involving children and young people, additional safeguards apply, including privacy and data protection laws such as GDPR, the EU Digital Services Act, and the UK's Online Safety Bill.

A user-centred approach doesn't just improve accessibility, it also generates valuable audience insights that can inform future programming and communications.

Digital platforms provide opportunities to engage audiences throughout the creative process, much like open rehearsals do for live work. Behind-the-scenes content, testing phases, and digital experiments have their own audience and can be a powerful tool for building long-term engagement. Providing opt-in mechanisms (such as mailing lists or community platforms) ensures these audiences stay connected beyond a single project.

Marketing

Marketing isn't just about announcing a production - it's about shaping how audiences discover, engage with and experience the work. In a hybrid project, this requires an integrated approach that connects live and digital elements into a seamless audience journey.

Marketing teams should be involved from the outset, not just at the launch. Early collaboration allows them to identify and shape compelling narratives, assets, and access points that will resonate with different audiences. Rather than treating marketing as a post-production task, think of it as an integral part of audience experience design.

Hybrid projects produce a rich pool of content, from design sketches and rehearsal footage to digital prototypes and audience interactions. These materials should be used strategically, not just to promote, but to invite participation and deepen engagement.

A well-planned audience strategy for hybrid projects might include:

- **Targeted digital outreach** - Reaching new audiences based on thematic or cultural interests, not just existing theatre-goers.

- **Opt-in pathways** - Encouraging sign-ups for updates, exclusive content, or live/digital invitations.

- **Influencer partnerships** - Collaborating with artists, cultural commentators, or digital creators to expand reach.

- **User-generated content (UGC)** - Encouraging audiences to share their own responses, fostering interaction beyond passive viewership.

For digital elements, audience experience must be intentionally designed. A content designer or digital producer can help map out how people navigate between live and digital touchpoints, ensuring a seamless and engaging journey.

Success isn't just about ticket sales or views, it's about sustaining meaningful audience relationships before, during, and after the experience. An integrated, audience-first approach ensures hybrid projects make a lasting impact, not just a fleeting impression.

Phase 4

Digital experiences offer many formats for audience engagement. This offers opportunities to deepen the dialogue with your audiences. To give then space to play and make and respond to the show and/or its themes. That deepening of the relationship and expansion of way the work of the company shows up in their lives is one of the most important reasons to undertake this work.

The relationship between a theatre building and its audiences is quite straightforward: a show is staged, the word is spread through brochures, email newsletters, mailshots, social media, adverts and word of mouth, people buy tickets, they sit through the show, they leave.

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Technology creates its own possible accessibility and its own barriers. Some digital work can be easily accessed on smartphones, some need high bandwidth, some experiences are location based and require travel, some special equipment. Different technologies will attract some demographics while excluding others and this needs to be thought through carefully at all stages.

What next?

The pandemic created a catalyst for reflection and change and emphasised that arts and culture organisations are more than their buildings - they are their work, their artistic community and their audiences, and the gathering of people for dialogue and connection.

Within the performing arts, we have a huge opportunity to expand cultural institutions deeper into digital spaces. Hybrid experiences are becoming normalised – in how we shop, communicate, play and live together. We believe that by exploring new digital and hybrid stages, we can create new possibilities for how and where art is made – meaning artists and cultural experiences can not only reach new and younger audiences, but engage with them. Underpinning our work is a belief that digital must become innate to the way cultural venues think, plan and programme – not an 'and' or an add-on, but a 'must-have' critical to success.

Audiences

Audiences are at the heart of the project. A crucial part of this work is creating a bridge between existing and new audiences. Technology can open up pathways into the arts for a broader range of audiences and how new kinds of audience engagement could emerge.

As audience needs and behaviours change, the cultural sector needs to do the same, to remain accessible, interesting and meaningful to existing audiences and to attract new ones.

We are collectively at the start of the creation of theatrical digital and hybrid stories. A new generation of theatre makers and audiences will grow this work further. People who grew up with smartphones, who are taught Java rather than German – who are now the country's fastest-growing segment of both consumers and employees. They like conversations and sharing. This generation is also well-known for its desire for purpose – for example, 65% want to personally create something world-changing. How does theatre connect to and host this audience in the future?

Starting by doing

The only way to learn how to make theatre, is to make theatre. This is also the case with hybrid performance work. This toolkit provides a methodology to start developing the work.

We are all on the journey together to discover these new stages, new ways of making, our collective strengths and weaknesses, the joys of working in dialogue with audiences more, how we maintain the live synergy between performer and audience, the dramaturgies and stories that we can and want to tell in hybrid ways that connect meaningfully with local and global communities.

It feels exciting and it feels that collectively we are at the start of a rich artistic exploration