



Arts Centre Melbourne

Relaxed Performance Guide





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Introduction

Arts Centre Melbourne brings people together for remarkable experiences. As part of our every day, Arts Centre Melbourne provides access for disabled artists, audiences and employees.

Arts Centre Melbourne is committed to being an inclusive and welcoming workplace and to making its performances, programs and venues accessible for everybody, with and without disability. We acknowledge there are ongoing barriers that many people face to work and participate fully at Arts Centre Melbourne.

The Social Model of Disability recognises that people are disabled by the barriers created by society. A barrier might be physical, like a building having stairs and no lift. Another barrier might be an individual's attitude, communication or behaviour. At Arts Centre Melbourne everything we do is guided by the Social Model of Disability.

What is this guide and who is it for?

Drawn from Arts Centre Melbourne's experience developing and presenting Relaxed Performances and audience feedback, this guide gives an overview of what is involved in staging a Relaxed Performance. It is designed as a wholistic introduction for artists, companies and performing arts venues.

Access and inclusion is an evolving area. We hope by sharing our experience, we can help grow and improve inclusive theatre experiences.



What are Relaxed Performances?

Relaxed Performances are for anyone who would benefit from a more relaxed theatre environment – this can include, but is not limited to, people who are Autistic, have sensory sensitivities, learning disabilities, dementia, as well as those living with anxiety or who have experienced trauma. Arts Centre Melbourne's approach focuses on relaxing – or adapting – the theatre environment and preparing audiences by providing comprehensive pre-show resources. These resources include visual stories and audience notes, specifically tailored descriptions of what to expect before, during and after an experience.

Sometimes we provide pre-show talks to further support our audience and enhance their experience, and we are open to suggestions of different ways to welcome audiences. We maintain the creative integrity of each show and request companies make no or only minor modifications to sensory elements like lighting and sound.

Relaxed Performances are unique. They break many of the rules we have come to expect of theatre, and it is important to support and guide your team throughout their delivery.

"The traditional expectation of an audience sometimes is to be quiet and sit still in the dark, without leaving your seat. Relaxed Performances create a warm welcome for anyone who might find this uncomfortable, inviting audiences to be themselves, and offers creative solutions to make theatre more accessible.

We encourage a relaxed attitude towards noise and movement from the audience, and make adjustments such as keeping house lights up and providing quiet areas to take a break. We also offer general admission seating at reduced capacity, which can allow more freedom to move through the aisles and change seats.

While many might prefer to avoid "spoilers," resources like visual stories can reduce anxiety, familiarising people with the performance environment and content, and supporting self-regulation.

At times we collaborate with theatre companies to adapt aspects of a show such as loud sudden sounds or flashing lights, to provide a lower sensory experience. This doesn't diminish the performance for audiences, but instead opens the opportunity to attend the theatre to more people who can enjoy it in an authentic and safely embodied way.

ANNA MOLNAR, ASSOCIATE PRODUCER, ACCESS & INCLUSION ACM

Building blocks of inclusive theatre: the must-dos

There are three main elements to consider when thinking about Relaxed Performance: preparing the audience, adapting the theatre environment and adjusting show elements. Within these elements are some must-dos. Think honestly and carefully about how your show or your venue will respond and discuss with your team and collaborators.

1. Preparing the audience

- In all marketing and communications, be clear about which shows in the season are relaxed and explain what this means. This is important for all audience members to understand, not only your Relaxed Performance target audience.
- When marketing your show, tell your audience everything they need to know about its creative elements, so they know what to expect and can prepare accordingly. This means content, themes, the inclusion of puppets or costume characters, venue details and any special visual, lighting or sound effects. Being open and clear helps the audience decide if the show is for them.
- Prepare a visual story (sometimes called a social story or social script) and make it available in advance. This helps your audience get ready for the entire journey, from arriving at the venue to seeing the show itself. Examples of Arts Centre Melbourne visual stories can be found [here](#).

2. Adapting the theatre environment

- During the performance, keep the venue doors open to allow people to freely come and go.
- Open doors to the venue approximately 15 minutes earlier to allow time for the audience to adjust to the theatre and to transfer from wheelchairs to seats, as required.
- Keep the house lights up a bit (we suggest 20-30%) so people are not in complete darkness.
- Ensure the audience knows they are free to make noise, move around and be vocal. Do this in marketing and communications as well as an announcement in the foyer's pre-show, informally through your ushers. Some shows also do pre-show introductions from the stage.
- Do not sell to capacity – give people space to move and change seats if they want to.
- Offer a separate quiet space or chill out zone in the foyer where people can relax and retreat. Comfortable seating, ambient lighting and encourage audience members to bring their own fidget toys or comfort items.
- Keep a supply of ear buds and/or sunglasses available for ushers to give audience members, even if when noise or lighting adjustments are made.

If your venue has Cloaking and Food & Drink policies, consider relaxing any restrictions. Encourage audience members to bring whatever they need to help them feel more comfortable, such as headphones, communication devices, fidget toys, and weighted blankets.

3. Adjusting the show

- Companies/artists and venues should have open conversations about the creative elements they are willing to tweak prior to confirming the Relaxed Performance.
- No strobe lighting.
- Review the show content and technical effects as early as possible and note sound levels, visual effects or potentially distressing themes or content. There are few hard and fast rules, and often there are creative solutions rather than significant changes. It is a case-by-case discussion, and one that is best started early.

Tips

We have been presenting Relaxed Performances as part of our inclusive theatre offer since 2014, here are our tips for Relaxed Performance success:

- Learn from experts: when we first started presenting Relaxed Performances, we worked with AMAZE and involved Autistic consultants in the planning, development and evaluation of our performances.
- Plan: scheduling a Relaxed Performance should be part of early conversations and plans about the season, both internally and externally. It is important to have these conversations before contracts are signed and shows are on sale.
- Communicate openly: with your audience, artists, venues and team.
- Keep learning: survey your audience; invite community organisations and ask for feedback; debrief with your venue, artists and team; plan access and inclusion training for your team, particularly frontline staff and artists; share your knowledge and experience.
- Remember the intent: Relaxed Performances are about more people experiencing the wonder of theatre. The more Relaxed Performances are staged, the more they become a regular part of the performing arts.
- For Community, By Community: an important part of working with community has been engaging neurodivergent writers to create audience resources, including the visual story; writing for the community with which they identify.

When to start Relaxed Performance planning?

Start your Relaxed Performance discussions when you start planning a show season. The earlier, the better. Ensure key people are involved in these discussions and let your project team know as soon as the Relaxed Performance session has been confirmed.

Respect the intent of Relaxed Performances and the audiences for whom they are designed. If you are concerned your venue or your show can not accommodate the must-dos detailed below, seek advice in this field – from your peers, access and inclusion experts or community organisations.

Who are the key contacts and relationships in staging Relaxed Performances and what do they do?

Our checklists provide detailed and role-specific guidance. We have based these roles on our team and experience at Arts Centre Melbourne, but teams vary from venue to venue and in some small organisations, many of these functions may be one person's responsibility. Below is a description of each role's function for clarity:

- **Venue Producer:** responsible for coordinating the delivery of the show from the venue's perspective.
- **Venue Production Manager:** works with the artist/company to realise the show; responsible for coordinating the production team, including technical staff on light and sound as well as stage management and mechanists.
- **Theatre Company:** the creative team/artist(s) putting on the show.
- **Marketing:** in charge of preparing the marketing campaign, including the collateral for the season.
- **Front of House:** responsible for front-line interaction with the audience.

Within the checklists we also mention other team members; these include:

- **Program Manager:** responsible for programming the work as part of a curated program.
- **Access and Inclusion:** the people inside or outside your organisation best placed to advise you on access and inclusion matters. This might be a specific internal team of skilled staff or committee dedicated to providing guidance. Some organisations may seek this advice from an external group, consultant or peak body (see community organisations and peak bodies below). Getting feedback from experts on access is important, especially when starting out. Make sure you have someone with expertise and prioritise working with disabled people.
- **Ticketing:** In charge of your ticket build and configuration.
- **Community organisations and peak bodies:** groups and organisations who provide services, advice or advocate for specific communities. Examples are [AMAZE](#), [Autism Awareness Australia](#), [Autism Spectrum Australia \(Aspect\)](#) and [Arts Access Victoria](#).
- **Venue Management:** the people who manage the venue bookings as well as coordinate and communicate the operational aspects of the theatre or venue.

Relaxed Performances Planning Timeline



"We are constantly learning by walking in someone else's shoes, being inclusive and open to possibilities. The Arts is a common denominator – imagine not being able to go to the theatre because of stigma or the feeling of not being welcome?"

DAVID MCDONALD, PRODUCER



Relaxed Performances

Guide for Producing

This guide for **producing** has been prepared drawing on the experience of Arts Centre Melbourne's producing team, which includes venue producers, program managers and Access and Inclusion staff. This guide outlines the producing responsibilities in putting on Relaxed Performances and provides a checklist of tasks, identifying who they involve and when.

Use this guide if you:

- Work for a venue/theatre
- Have been charged with delivering a Relaxed Performance as part of a show's season
- Are responsible for coordinating everyone involved in putting on shows
- Will be the main point of contact for the artists/theatre company and everyone else at your venue

What is the venue producer's role when it comes to Relaxed Performances?

Although the specifics of producing duties may vary from venue to venue, when it comes to Relaxed Performance, producers coordinate the moving parts, are the central point of contact between the artists and the venue, and help bring everyone along for the journey in the benefits of breaking long-held theatre rules.

When do I get involved and who should I talk to? Creating a checklist

Here is an example of a typical checklist of who to talk to and when, based on our experience at Arts Centre Melbourne. Adapt as you need to and integrate it into your current checklists.

Before contracted

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Assess show suitability	Bring together Access and Inclusion, Program Manager, Production and Theatre Company to consider the performance's overall suitability and what may need adjusting. Each show is different and requires individual consideration. The kinds of questions to ask yourselves: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any scenes, sounds, lighting effects, characters or content that might be an issue? • Can the creative integrity of the show be maintained if these are softened or removed? Or will it be OK if we let the audience know about these elements in advance? 	Access and Inclusion, Theatre Company, Program Manager, Production
Find suitable venue	Consider audience access to and within the venue. Are there suitable seating options for people with wheelchairs, walking frames and other mobility aids to view the performance?	Access and Inclusion, Production, Front of House
Chill out/quiet area available	Ensure there is a space that is easily accessible for the audience to retreat to and readily available on the day of the performance. Consider way-finding and directional signage so the space is easy to find on the day.	Front of House, Production, Access and Inclusion, Marketing
Budgeting	If reducing venue capacity, identify forgone income due to fewer seats on sale, in the program budget for transparency. Consider affordable ticket pricing, holding complimentary seats for community representatives, and whether additional funding sources could support the delivery of this event.	Program Manager, Theatre Company
Confirm Relaxed Performance date(s) and time	Discuss and communicate this with key contacts, such as the Theatre company, Production and Marketing.	Theatre Company, Program Manager, Production, Ticketing, Marketing, Venue Operations, Front of House, Access and Inclusion



Before on sale

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Hold seats	If providing general admission seating, then reduce venue capacity to make space for the audience to spread out and move seats if they wish. Hold seats for invited access specialists and Autistic people in the community so they can provide feedback on the experience. Provide clear language in the ticket purchase pathway to remind audiences the session is a Relaxed Performance and what to expect. Providing this information at the point-of-purchase will support an inclusive experience for all choosing to attend.	Ticketing, Production, Theatre Company
Pricing	Ensure carer tickets are available at no cost. Discuss cost and any special discounts you may be able to offer. Affordable pricing is a type of access and cost can be a barrier for many people.	Ticketing
Marketing plan in place	Create suitable collateral and develop strategy for reaching the right audience. This strategy could include providing ticket links for peak bodies and communities to share with their networks.	Program Manager, Marketing team, Access and Inclusion
Show elements of concern noted	Knowing the sensory elements, content warnings and other areas of concern informs the visual story, any other pre-show resources and marketing collateral, and production decisions.	Theatre Company, Production, Access and Inclusion, Writer
Visual story preparation commenced	The visual story helps make the venue a welcoming environment, and supports audience familiarisation with the performance content. This pre-show resource is to be prepared in consultation with the Theatre Company. Responsibility for writing and coordinating the visual story can sit with various team members. At Arts Centre Melbourne it is prepared by the Access and Inclusion team.	Access and Inclusion, Writer, Marketing, Theatre Company

Before season

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Venue Staffing	<p>Ensure front line staff have received disability awareness training, with a focus on Neurodiversity.</p> <p>Additional front of house staff rostered if required, to allow for staff presence in theatres, foyers and dedicated staff available to assist with access.</p> <p>Ensure all front line and technical staff are briefed.</p>	Front of House, Production
Visual story available for audience	Have this resource ready as early as possible but at least two weeks prior to show season.	Writer, Designer, Marketing, Access and Inclusion
Chill out/quiet area planned and ready to go	A quiet space reserved in part of the foyer with comfortable spaces to sit. Consider having beanbags, soft lighting and fidget toys available in this space.	Front of House, Production
Technical/content adjustments confirmed	Any adaptations discussed with Theatre Company and tested.	Production Manager, Theatre Company
Invitations out	Invite access specialists and Neurodivergent people from the community to attend the performance and request feedback on their experience.	Peak bodies, community groups, consultants

During season

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
View first performance	<p>Assess if any further tweaks might be needed (if first performance is not the Relaxed Performance).</p> <p>Watch and listen to audience responses and comments as they leave the venue, to inform adjustments during the season.</p>	Theatre Company, Production
Pre-show reminder emails out	Include advice on the performance's suitability, how it was adapted and links to pre-show resources, including the visual story.	Marketing
Chill out/ quiet space ready	Maintain and restock space as required.	Front of House

After season

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Survey audience	What worked, what could have been better, notes for next time.	Marketing
Ask invited experts/ consultants for feedback	What worked, what could have been better, notes for next time.	Access and Inclusion
Debrief	What worked, what could have been better, notes for next time.	Theatre Company, All teams involved
Resources	Consider sharing show specific resources with the Company for future presentation.	Access and Inclusion, Theatre Company



"We are constantly refining our collective experience with presenting relaxed performances, and we review each performance on a case-by-case basis in close consultation with the creative team. The successful implementation of relaxed performances relies on open communication with the company to make a season accessible as possible whilst maintaining the creative intent of the performance. Relaxed performances are another aspect of our creative problem solving that we traverse daily in the creation of work for our stages."

TONY HARDING, SENIOR PRODUCTION MANAGER



Relaxed Performances

Guide to Production

This guide to **production** draws on the experience of Arts Centre Melbourne's Production Management team.

Use this guide if you:

- Work for a venue/theatre
- Are a freelance production manager
- Are responsible for coordinating technical staff and liaising with the artist/theatre company's production team

This guide will answer these questions:

- What's the production manager's role in putting on Relaxed Performances?
- Who are my key contacts?
- What are my key tasks and when do they happen?

What is the venue's production team's role when it comes to Relaxed Performances?

Specific production duties may vary from venue to venue, but when it comes to Relaxed Performance, production managers generally schedule the activity in the theatre during the season, coordinate the venue's technical staff, and are the main point of contact between the creative team's production team and the venue.

There are three main elements to Relaxed Performances and they each come with their set of must dos. Not all are applicable to the production manager role but it's critical all team members are aware of all the steps:

What are my key tasks and when do they happen: Creating a checklist

Here is an example of a typical checklist of who to talk to and when, based on our experience at Arts Centre Melbourne. Adapt as you need to and integrate it into your current checklists.

Before contracted

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Assess show suitability	Provide advice on if/how technical elements (such as sound and lighting effects) might be adjusted. Consider what the limits and possibilities of the adaptations as well as the impact on the performance.	Access and Inclusion, Theatre Company, Program Manager, Venue Producer
Suitable venue access	Provide advice on access to and within the venue. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there suitable seating options for people with wheelchairs, walking frames and other mobility aids to view the performance? Is there space to create flexible seating options i.e. floor sitting, cushions or bean bags? Are there any options/solutions to improve access that can be put in place for the performance? 	Front of House, Access and Inclusion, Venue Producer
Chill out/quiet area available	Ensure there is a space that is easily accessible for the audience to retreat to and readily available on the day of the performance.	Front of House, Access and Inclusion, Venue Producer
Confirm Relaxed Performance date(s) and time	Make sure there is time in performance schedule for the Relaxed Performances.	Theatre Company, Program Manager, Venue Producer, Ticketing, Marketing, Venue Operations, Front of House, Access and Inclusion
Draft production schedule for contract	Discuss the production schedule with the Theatre Company, determine if extra time should be set aside to run through any adjustments. Time needed will depend on Theatre Company experience with Relaxed Performances, they may need more time if this is their first show to be relaxed.	Theatre Company, Venue Producer, Program Manager

Before on sale

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Check seating and views	Identifying seats not suitable from technical point of view and advising Producer to withhold from sale. Discussing if a space between the stage and audience is required and reserving the front row or two with e.g. seat covers.	Venue Producer, Theatre Company
Sensory elements and content warnings noted	Note sensory elements, content warnings and other areas of concern for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relaxed Performance technical run through, to monitor on the day, and advise the person coordinating the visual story and marketing team of any elements to include in communications. 	Theatre Company, Venue Producer, Access and Inclusion, Technical staff

Before season

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Staff briefing	Ensuring all production staff are briefed	All production staff involved
Chill out / quiet area planned and ready to go	A quiet space reserved in part of the foyer with comfortable spaces to sit and fidget toys available; production support as required	Front of House, Venue Producer
Technical / content adjustments confirmed	Any changes discussed and tested in rehearsals	Venue Producer, Production Manager, Theatre Company

During season

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Technical rehearsals	Rehearse any technical adjustments with the crew and cast, including any pre-show talks	Venue team, Production Manager
View show and adjust if needed and possible	Assess if any further tweaks might be needed Watch and listen to audience responses and comments as they leave the venue, to inform adjustments during the season.	Theatre Company, Venue Producer, Front of House
Chill out space ready	Production or Front of House staff to manage	Venue Producer, Front of House
Unsuitable seats identified and clearly marked	Ensure people do not sit in unsuitable seats	Producer, Front of House

After season

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Debrief	Recording what worked, what could have been better, notes for next time	Theatre Company, All teams involved



"My advice for anyone considering relaxed performance: pair yourself with an organisation who are experts in the field – talk to a venue who has done it before or a company who has done it before – having the support was a confidence boost, to know they were on the right track – but also follow your instinct too...and having a conversation about what the needs are and what they (the venue, the community) would deem relaxed – community consultation, really. Take a risk with it, think about the people you're serving or you're giving more opportunity to; it's easy to create an elitist work, but art is about changing people's lives."

**NICHOLAS PAINE,
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, DEAD PUPPET SOCIETY**

Relaxed Performances

Guide to Creative and Company Considerations

This guide to **creative and company considerations** has been prepared drawing on the experience of an independent small – medium theatre company who presented their work as part of Art Centre Melbourne's Families Program in 2019. For simplicity, this guide will refer to theatre companies and/or artists as the Theatre Company.

Use this guide if you:

- Are an artist or work for a company producing performing arts experiences and have a role in decision-making
- Are considering offering a Relaxed Performance as part of a show's season
- Are responsible for coordinating everyone involved in putting on your show
- Will be the main point of contact with the presenting venue and everyone else involved in your production

This guide will answer these questions:

- What is the Theatre Company's role in putting on Relaxed Performances?
- What are my key tasks, who do they involve and when do they happen?
- How do I know if it worked?

What is the Theatre Company's role when it comes to Relaxed Performances?

The Theatre Company is in control of the creative elements of the work and decides whether their show should offer a Relaxed Performance as part of their season. They provide clear and accurate information about their show to their presenting partner/venue. This usually includes information about theatrical elements like visual and sound effects, providing a script and a recorded copy of the show (where possible), and supplying the presenting partner with marketing assets, like photography, well in advance. This helps the presenting partner create a visual story, market the show to a Relaxed Performance audience and brief their own production and front of house staff. If they have done a Relaxed Performance before, theatre companies will usually share any associated resources. Sometimes, performers or company members will participate in pre-show talks or post show audience interaction.

For the best chance at success, theatre companies must be open and clear about what elements of the show they are prepared to adapt and what is not on the table. It is invaluable to consult with Access and Inclusion specialists, either through their presenting partner or the company's own contacts, for guidance.

What are my key tasks, who do they involve and when do they happen? Creating a checklist

Here is an example of a typical checklist of who to talk to and when, based on presenting at Arts Centre Melbourne. Adapt as you need to and integrate it into your current checklists.

Before contracted

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Provide resources – script and/or video recording	This will help in determine the shows suitability for being relaxed and elements that may need adjusting. If it is decided the season will include a Relaxed Performance, this content will aid the development of pre-show resources, marketing and communications.	Access and Inclusion, Venue Producer, Program Manager, Production, Marketing, Writer
Assess show suitability	<p>Understand everyone’s experience with Relaxed Performances. Advise presenter of the show’s content and theatrical elements: think about content, themes, visual and sound effects, strobe or bright lighting effects. Consider its suitability to be relaxed and what may need adjusting or explaining. The kinds of questions to ask yourselves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any scenes, sounds, lighting effects, characters or content that might be an issue? <p>What are the limits and possibilities of any adaptations?</p> <p>Can the creative integrity of the show be maintained if these are softened or removed? Or will it be ok if we let the audience know about these elements in advance?</p> <p>Ways to let the audience know in advance about a potentially scary element include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mention when and what happens in the visual story. • Have a pre-show talk with the creative team. Actors can appear in pre-show talks to introduce themselves, their characters and elements to be aware of. Pre-show talks can also reassure the audience sound and movement are allowed. 	Access and Inclusion, Venue Producer, Program Manager, Production, Writer
Confirm Relaxed Performance date(s) and time	Make sure there is time in performance schedule for the Relaxed Performances.	Theatre Company, Program Manager, Venue Producer, Ticketing, Marketing, Venue Operations, Front of House, Access and Inclusion
Additional rehearsal or technical run throughs confirmed	Ensure there is enough time in bump in in the schedule.	Program Manager, Venue Producer, Production
Contracting	Outline in the contract details about the Relaxed Performance, including what the Theatre Company and venue agrees to deliver.	Program Manager, Venue Producer
Draft production schedule for contract	Discuss the production schedule with the venue, determine if extra time should be set aside to run through any adjustments. Time needed will depend on the company’s experience with Relaxed Performances, they may need more time if this is their first show to be relaxed.	Theatre Company, Venue Producer, Program Manager

Before on sale

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Provide assets and resources	Provide imagery, video, script and copy to marketing and any resources from previous Relaxed Performances.	Program Manager, Venue Producer, Venue Production Manger
Advise presenting partner of any changes since contracting	This can inform communications to audience.	Venue Producer, Marketing, Access and Inclusion team

Before season

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Venue team consultation and communication	Consult venue team on any further show tweaks or adjustments. Communicate all changes to the team.	Venue team Program Manager, Venue Producer, Venue Production Manager, Access and Inclusion team
Visual story available for audience	Include with any theatre company led marketing/comms.	Marketing
Technical / content adjustments confirmed	Any changes discussed and tested in rehearsals.	Theatre Company

During season

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Technical runs	Rehearse any technical adjustments with the crew and cast, including any pre-show talks.	Theatre Company, Production Manager, Venue team

After season

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Debrief	What worked, what could have been better, notes for next time.	Theatre Company, Venue team



"Having a Relaxed Performance as part of an event season is not only an important offering for our audiences, its also an opportunity to build awareness of our venue as a space where everyone is welcome. It means we are walking the talk when it comes to accessibility and inclusion and can integrate messaging about the Relaxed Performance in all aspects of the campaign."

CLAIRE BARLEY, MARKETING COORDINATOR

Relaxed Performances

Guide to Marketing and Engagement

This guide for **marketing and engagement** has been prepared drawing on the experience of Art Centre Melbourne's marketing campaign managers and access & inclusion staff. It outlines how Relaxed Performances might be marketed and the important things to consider when supporting audience engagement. It provides an example checklist of key tasks, who they involve and when they should happen.

Use this guide if you:

- Are promoting a Relaxed Performance show as part of a season
- Will be the main point of contact for marketing and social media planning
- Coordinate paid marketing campaigns across a range of platforms (print, web, email, social media)
- Work with graphic designers to produce collateral
- Are developing the visual story

What is the marketing team's role when presenting Relaxed Performances?

The marketing team design and manage the marketing campaign for the show's whole season and integrate Relaxed Performances into the entire campaign. Their focus is reaching the right audience and selling tickets to the show. They do this by creating compelling campaign artwork and collateral, assisting with the design of the visual story and purchasing paid advertising for the season. They also plan and purchase paid social media ads and organic social posts (unpaid social posts).

The development of the visual story is key to audience engagement for Relaxed Performances. Responsibility for writing and coordinating the visual story can sit with various team members. At Arts Centre Melbourne it is prepared by the Access and Inclusion team.

When do the marketing team get involved and who should they talk to? Creating a checklist

Here is an example of a typical checklist of who to talk to and when, based on Arts Centre Melbourne's team experience. Adapt as you need to and integrate it into your current checklists.

Before contracted

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Marketing advised of upcoming Relaxed Performances	Add to marketing schedule.	Theatre Company, Program Manager, Venue Producer, Access and Inclusion
Arrange disability access training.	Prepares team by providing best practice tips on language and outreach strategies. Training is especially important for staff working on the Relaxed Performance.	Team Manager, Learning & Development, Access and Inclusion

Before on sale

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Confirm details of how show is relaxed	Prepare the audience and communicate how the theatre environment and show itself will be relaxed: e.g. lighting effect adjusted, sound reduced, doors open, lights up in the theatre, quiet space etc.	Venue Producer, Venue Production Manager, Theatre Company
Gather marketing assets about the show	Market the show with imagery, video and copy sourced from Theatre Company.	Theatre Company
Gather marketing assets about the Relaxed Performance experience	Market the Relaxed Performance experience with images, video or text about the audience experience (e.g. images of audience in theatre showing lights slightly up and plenty of space; images of quiet space; images of key parts of performance).	Theatre Company, Venue Producer, Marketing, Access and Inclusion
Planning campaign – social media and marketing	Ensure the message reaches the target audience by developing relationships with relevant community organisations and networks, and publications.	Marketing, Access and Inclusion
Prepare Relaxed Performance marketing collateral	<p>Communicate with the target audience and provide them with resources to promote the show through their networks. This can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PDFs • short videos • copy <p>Ensure marketing is friendly, clear and accurate.</p>	Access and Inclusion, Writer, Theatre Company

Access/inclusion terminology check	Ensure your wording is appropriate, current and correct.	Access and Inclusion, Marketing
Visual story preparation commenced	<p>This pre-show resource is to be prepared in consultation with the Theatre Company.</p> <p>The visual story helps make the venue a welcoming environment. Keep this resource friendly, clear and accurate. Explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what to expect before, after and during the experience; • how the show will be relaxed; and • highlight any parts of the show audiences should be aware of. <p>Parts of the show the audiences should be aware of can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • darkness and visibility in the theatre • bright lights, bright screens • sudden or loud sounds • costume characters or puppets • scary scenes or challenging content • clearly explain seating and ticketing arrangements (for example is the show general admission and reduced capacity? Can the audience change seats during the performance?) • house lights will be up, and • doors will be open so people can come and go as they please during the performance. 	Access and Inclusion, Writer, Designer, Venue Producer, Theatre Company

Before season

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Run marketing and social media ads	Ensure message reaches target audience.	Marketing, Community organisations, peak bodies, Access and Inclusion
Visual story available for audience	Include on website, providing to Theatre Company and Access and Inclusion team.	Access and Inclusion team, Writer, Designer, Theatre Company, Venue Producer
Plan documentation during season if required	Build a library of collateral demonstrating the Relaxed Performance experience for a range of demographics – useful for future Relaxed Performance marketing.	Venue Producer, Theatre Company, Front of House

During season

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Pre-show email	Prepare and send pre-show email to the audience (send this close to the performance date); share visual story, remind audience of show content and any specific details about theatre access.	Venue Producer, Ticketing, Front of House

After season

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Survey audience	Send out survey to gather information from audience about the experience. Ask community groups and access specialists for feedback.	Community organisations, peak bodies, Access and Inclusion
Debrief	What worked, what could have been better, notes for next time.	Theatre Company, Venue team



"I would like to mention a team member of yours, who showed Henry the utmost care and respect before, during interval, and after the performance. He chatted to Henry about the play without being patronising – something that is very rare in Henry's life."

RELAXED PERFORMANCE AUDIENCE MEMBER

Relaxed Performances

Guide to Front of House

This guide for **front of house teams** has been prepared drawing on the experience of Art Centre Melbourne’s visitor experience team members. It outlines how Relaxed Performances manifest as an audience experience and the important things to consider for front of house staff. It provides an example checklist of key tasks, who they involve and when they should happen.

Use this guide if you:

- Work for a venue/theatre in a front of house role
- Are responsible for receiving, welcoming and supporting audiences’ experience in the venue

This guide will answer these questions:

- What’s the Front of House role in putting on Relaxed Performances?
- Who are my key contacts?
- What are my key tasks and when do they happen?

What’s the front of house team’s role when it comes to Relaxed Performances?

These team members have an incredibly important role, they help ensure audiences feel safe and supported in what might be their first experience in a theatre. In a relaxed performance a front of house team member might let people know the door will remain open throughout the show; there is a quiet space available for people to retreat in at any time; and that making noise and moving during the show is OK.

When do I get involved and who should I talk to? Creating a checklist

Here is an example of a typical checklist of who to talk to and when, based on Arts Centre Melbourne’s visitor experience team’s experience. Adapt as you need to and integrate it into your current checklists.

Before season

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Training	Front line staff to receive disability awareness training, with a focus on Neurodiversity.	Venue Producer, Access and Inclusion

During season

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Pre-show announcement	Ensure the audience knows they are free to make noise, move around, leave the theatre and be vocal. Do this in the foyers pre-show or informally through ushers speaking to audience members before the performance. If possible, repeat the announcement from the stage once everyone is in the theatre.	Venue Producer, Access and Inclusion, Stage Manager
Visual story available for audience in the foyer	If available front of house staff to provide printed visual stories to the audience.	Venue Producer, Marketing
Doors to the theatre remain open	Leave doors open so audience members can leave and return to the show at any time.	Venue Producer, Production
Chill out space ready	Setup a quiet space in part of the foyer with comfortable spaces to sit and fidget toys available; production support as required.	Venue Producer, Front of House

After season

TASK	FOR	KEY RELATIONSHIP
Debrief	What worked, what could have been better, notes for next time.	Theatre Company, Venue team



Thanks

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