



GROUNDWATER ARTS PRESENTS

# GREEN NEW THEATRE

## A WORKING DOCUMENT

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## Introduction

*Before we get started, what you need to know is that [“to change everything, we need everyone”](#). Furthermore, we already have everything that we need. It’s that straight-forward.*

The goal of this document is to outline ideas, strategies, and principles that will help individual artists and arts institutions working in the American Theatre change how they work in order to adapt in the face of the climate crisis. Everything here is an idea that another business, community, or policy-maker is currently enacting. The American Theatre, as an institution and community, is already being left behind. Anyone who works in an institutional theatre can tell you that the subscriber model is dying and we are at a point where we must wholly adapt our business models. With few exceptions, our labor practices are unsustainable and our productions create enormous waste. But theatre has endured and evolved throughout centuries, and this story is not one of despair but one of hope and opportunity. We have an incredible chance to adapt not just the stories we tell, but the entire system of producing and creating theatre. And we must. It is the only way to ensure that we not only are able to continue to produce theatre, but that we have a planet healthy enough on which to produce theatre.

The real question is not *if*- it’s *how*. How can not just the stories we tell, but the organizations in which we tell them, change and adapt to create regeneration and sustainability?

One example of this system-wide change: as extractive industries close down, what if theatre institutions took on hiring skilled laborers to work in our scene and costume shops and to fill gaps in our needs for skilled master electricians, technical directors, and master carpenters? As climate refugees continue to be displaced into our communities, how can theatre institutions become official places of sanctuary? What if theatre institutions more actively joined local, state and national movements demanding policy change?

Regenerative capitalism principles, B-Corp standards, and the introduction of the sweeping reforms proposed by the Green New Deal in the United States Congress provide further ideas for how the American Theatre can make drastic changes to operating structures and behaviors in order to actualize our mission statements in even more meaningful and pressing ways.

The arts sector also has an important role to play in shifting the narratives about the climate crisis. While this is important, it is not enough for our industry to tell the stories of change. We must change ourselves and our ways of working. It is in our best interest to rise to this occasion, both as a vanguard for other arts and non-profit institutions, and to ensure that theatre will be sustained into the future.

[This is zero hour.](#)





## How Do We Pay For It?

Now for the sticky question: How can we make broad, sweeping, urgent changes quickly while still being able to keep the lights on and pay people's salaries? How does an organization divest from fossil fuels *and* commit to a living wage *and* participate in a Just Transition? How do we pay for all of this?

The good news: Companies that prioritize [sustainability](#), [diversity](#), [regeneration](#), and [just](#) values make more money than companies that don't. These organizations are more resilient, have more positive employee engagement and investment, and are more likely to foster positive relationships with their communities. These are all important milemarkers for theatres to embrace as society as a whole inevitably moves away from extractive neo-liberal capitalism in the face of the climate crisis. In the short and the long run, it is more profitable for organizations to begin the move towards a just transition now and adopt the principles outlined here.

## How To Use This Document:

**Green New Theatre (GNT)** is a movement building tool that provides a set of actionable principles for the arts field to adapt and evolve in the face of the climate crisis. Our approach is multi-layered and emergent. It adapts for organizations and individuals at every level of production.

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What this means is that you are free to download, implement, and share Green New Theatre however you want! We offer these ideas to the American theatre community and beyond, as we work together to envision a new, resilient future for theatre and our planet.

If you or your community find new ways to implement or innovate on Green New Theatre, that’s great! We just ask that you share any insights, proposed modifications, strategies, and/or feedback with Groundwater Arts directly.

## PRINCIPLES OF A GREEN NEW THEATRE

*These principles create a set of guidelines and procedures that can be incorporated into any theatre organization and for every individual artist at any budget and size level.*

COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY

PUBLICLY TRANSPARENT BUDGETING

DECOLONIZED LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

SUSTAINABLE RESOURCES

RIGHT RELATIONSHIP TO LAND & HISTORY

IMMEDIATE DIVESTMENT FROM FOSSIL FUEL INTERESTS &

SPONSORSHIPS





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## COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY

*(Introduction by Tara Moses)*

The Resident Theatre Movement (RTM) began with Margo Jones, Zelda Fichandler, and Nina Vance in the late 1940s. The purpose being to bring socially relevant and dynamic work outside of New York, to create theatre with local artists, and to become embedded in their communities. The RTM provided a turning point in the American theater, and now we are at another one. Over the past 70 years, the power dynamic between theaters and their communities has only widened. Because there is a power imbalance between institutions and individuals and predominantly white institutions (PWIs) and institutions run by Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), it is the responsibility of institutions with power to assess their impact and harm on their community and be held accountable to it. Community encompasses more than a single neighborhood or a single group of people as our identities are never single-fold. As an example, PWIs that program works by BIPOC are in relationship to BIPOC communities and must be held accountable to those people. Now go larger than that. Your community also includes the Indigenous people whose land you create on. It includes the physical land you create on. It includes the air, water, and soil. When we expand our definition of “community” to include the land, air, waters, and more-than-human beings, the scope of those to whom we are accountable widens. We begin to get a sense of just how wide the power imbalance is, and we can begin to correct the power imbalance. Institutions that have historically (and currently) been resourced through funding, prestige, and other forms of power, must hold themselves accountable to - vulnerabilized peoples, entire communities, and the earth itself.

What are actionable steps an organization can take to ensure community accountability and work it into every level of their mission and practice?

- Reflecting, articulating, and defining who your communities are / belong to.
- Involving your community deliberately at every possible organizational level: major decision making such as leadership transition, season planning, and program development
- Encouraging and welcoming anyone who wants to be involved in the organization
- Identifying, articulating, and developing an actionable plan to break down implicit and explicit biases to ensure all voices are being heard, listened to, and valued
- Meetings and discussions are open, advertised, and published publicly so that there is an opportunity for community members to join and advocate for themselves
- Train staff in sanctuary space practices and publicly declare the institution a sanctuary space See: [Art Space Sanctuary](#)





## PUBLICLY TRANSPARENT BUDGETING

*(Introduction by Anna Lathrop)*

As nonprofit organizations, money is at the forefront of our minds. How we choose to spend it is a reflection of our priorities. We “put our money where our mouths are” when we spend our money on the things that we say we will. And when we turn to our communities and ask them for their money, we are asking for a show of trust and faith in our integrity around how we spend. Publicly transparent budgeting allows the community to be in the room (sometimes literally) and hold our organizations accountable for where we spend our money and resources. It also opens a dialogue between institutions and their communities by allowing institutions the opportunity to explain why money is needed in certain places, and how what they do is serving the community in other language besides marketing and development.

What are ways we can increase transparency and public investment in our budgeting practices in a way that holds our organizations in reciprocal accountability with our communities?

- Publishing publicly accessible, detailed, itemized budgets: See [Flux Theatre’s Open Book Model](#).
- Welcoming community members to join in conversations about budgeting: See NYC’s [Participatory Budgeting Project](#).
- Passing budgets with full agreement of both communities and employees: See [Alternate Roots](#)
- Major financial decisions are open meetings and decisions are made by vote
- Percentage cap in hierarchical pay: the AD/ED can only make up to 200% more than the lowest paid employee (including independent contractors) See: [HSBC Limiting Executive Pay](#)

## DECOLONIZED LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

*(Introduction by Ronee Penoi)*

In order to transform our society and our arts ecology, we need to look critically at the foundation of how they were founded: **colonization**. While it may be tempting to see colonization as a historical event, it is the structure of our society, and the water we swim in (see much more in Annalisa Dias and Madeline Sayet’s series on Decolonizing Theatre [here](#)). Many structures that we think of as ‘the norm’ or ‘default’ are manifestations of this structure. We take these structures for granted and assume that changing that norm is impossible.

But anything is possible, and, like we said to start, we already have everything we need. Moving from an extractive to a regenerative society means wrestling with the origins of our capitalist, hierarchical society and decentering our society’s dominant (white, male, cis-heteronormative, able-bodied, upper-class) settler ideas and priorities. A decolonizing framework helps us understand the scope of the challenge to





making widespread change - it requires not only a shift in ideas and action, but an entire reframing of the power structures within which those ideas and actions arise. This shift isn't temporary or trendy, but a necessary and fundamental shift in our evolution.

So what does it mean to decolonize leadership practices? Everyone, at every level of power in our arts field, has the capacity to be a leader. Leadership doesn't just sit with managing and artistic directors, or with boards and big-name artists. If we want change, we all need to lead. This could look like making a vertical organizational structure horizontal, or enacting employee ownership models. Additionally:

- Applying decolonized leadership practices to all levels of leadership, including the Board and creative leadership
- Decentering decision making see: [Action Network](#)
- Active, deliberate dismantling of white supremacy at all levels of leadership [See Dismantling White Supremacy and the 5 stages of grief](#)
- Reevaluating wealth and value, both in standards and definitions see: [Decolonizing Wealth](#)
- Understanding leadership as a responsibility to those below and around you in an organizational hierarchy instead of to maximize returns for those above you
- Requiring a sabbatical to remove emphasis on any one individual

#### *THE FOLLOWING ARE STRATEGIES SPECIFIC TO EMPLOYEE OWNERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT*

- Employees get votes equal to leadership in regards to passing budgets and major financial decisions
- Major staffing changes and decisions are taken by vote
- Decolonizing all spaces to dismantle implicit and explicit biases and oppressions
- Unionizing, informal organization, and affinity groups are encouraged and supported on an institutional level
- Theatre agrees to binding resolutions decided upon by groups as detailed above
- Emphasis on transformational leadership
- Employees get a financial stake and stakeholder ownership in the company, both to give empowerment in terms of financial ownership, but also to spread out financial responsibility and burden
- Train employees in sanctuary space laws and practices to ensure all employees to feel safe within their institutions

## **SUSTAINABLE RESOURCES**

*(Introduction by Anna Lathrop)*





Often when we talk about sustainability, we are actually talking about a narrow lens of environmental material sustainability. We are challenging the American theatre to hold in equal consideration sustainability in our material environment and sustainability in a holistic manner that includes labor, people, time, history, and the future. Sustainability requires adaptability, and this means rejecting a “one-size-fits-all” approach, and embracing the uniqueness that informs each of our practices. By investing in both our people and our planet we are ensuring a resilient, sustainable future for the American Theatre.

What are the different ways we can consider resources, while also focusing on making them sustainable? What is available to us? What are we potentially missing or discounting?

#### *ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY*

- Deliberate incorporation of environmentally sustainable or regenerative principles into design, tech, and production elements [See Julia’s Bicycle](#)
- Committing to recycle or reuse every element of set, costume, light, and tech, going as far as refusing to budget money for materials. See: [Zero Waste Production of Mr. Burns Post-Electric Play](#)
- Resource sharing amongst organizations to decrease redundancy and waste see [Materials for the Arts NYC](#)
- LEED certification for buildings
- Investing in renewable energy sources e.g. solar panels and aquaponic gardens
- Checking with city, county, state and local indigenous nations for environmental programs you can support. See: [DC Department of Energy & Environment Rain Barrel Program](#)
- Decolonizing our definitions of resources to include regeneration of land, sky, water, and time

#### *HOLISTIC VIEW OF RESOURCES*

- Considering Labor and People as resources equally in need of regenerability
- Committing to pay a Living Wage as determined by the [Living Wage Calculator](#) to all employees, plus manageable schedule and workload
- Flexible employee scheduling and commitment to overall pay equity
- Decolonizing neoliberal capitalist definitions of wealth and value
- Implementing the strategies of Just Transition to move your organization from an extractive, industrial economy to an interconnected, participatory one. See: [Movement Generation Just Transition](#)

## **RIGHT RELATIONSHIP TO LAND AND HISTORY**

*(Introduction by Tara Moses)*





Settler colonialism is a distinct type of colonialism that functions through the replacement of Indigenous populations with an invasive settler society that, over time, develops a distinctive identity and sovereignty. As an example, we see this in the United States through language such as the “unsettled frontier”, “Manifest Destiny”, referring to yourself as a “native New Yorker” etc. These phrases and ideologies erase the Indigenous peoples who have stewarded Turtle Island for thousands of years, continue to this day, and will steward for generations to come. Indigenous people across the world have/do sustainably and responsibly harvest resources from the earth. Since the introduction of capitalism from colonizers, the earth’s resources have been grossly overharvested, harmfully resourced, and unsustainably manufactured - all to save a dollar. So when we talk about climate justice, we must correct the relationship to land and learn/unlearn the history of how we got to this point - the colonization of Indigenous peoples. We do this by centering Indigenous and marginalized people, and that will help us all move forward. This is the first step to reconciliation. This is the first step to correcting the wrongs colonization has brought. This is the first step towards climate justice.

How can we right our organization’s history with the history of marginalized communities and peoples in the physical land that we inhabit? How can we honor the stories that came before us, and surround us? How do we engage in the land in a holistic way? How has your organization or your practice upheld settler colonialism?

- Investing in physical land and the entire community on and around it, with an emphasis on communities that may have been removed from that land
- Expanding community definition to include plants, sky, and bodies of water
- Deliberately acknowledging and working actively toward the reversal of community erasure both past, immediate, and potential future
- Accepting responsibility for the taking of space as an organization, both physical and mental
- Dismantling neoliberal ownership notions and pro-gentrification narratives
- Decolonizing community relationships and inherent power dynamics
- Actively and deliberately dismantling white supremacy including white savior and empty land narratives

## IMMEDIATE DIVESTMENT FROM FOSSIL FUEL INTERESTS & SPONSORSHIPS

*(Introduction by Annalisa Dias)*

As our friends at 350.org have [succinctly stated](#): “Fossil fuel companies are the wealthiest and most powerful companies on the planet, and they’re using their money to block every serious attempt to stop climate change. By convincing our institutions to divest, desponsor and defund fossil fuels, we can turn the tide of public opinion against them.” Divesting, defunding, and de-sponsoring from fossil fuel





companies removes the “[social licence to operate](#)” from business models that rely on the devastation of the planet.

- Critically evaluate funding sources and cease taking new corporate sponsorships or donation money from companies and individuals who profit from the fossil fuel industry See [Green New Deal](#).
- Publicly joining one of the international divestment movements and contribute to withdrawing consent and social license to operate from extractive industries. See [Oil Sponsorship Free](#) & [Go Fossil Free](#).
- If you or your institution have invested funds or endowments, speak with your investment manager about [re-investing](#) in renewable energy, green infrastructure, and organizations operated by BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color).
- Prioritizing the leadership of local frontline communities in setting goals for how a just transition away from investments in extractive industries to re-investing in regenerative industries actually works.
- Celebrating once you or your institution have publicly made commitments to divesting from fossil fuel interests and reinvesting in regenerative projects, and maximize the impact of your commitment to divest by pressuring peer institutions to do the same.

## Call to Action

We need your help. We don't have all the answers about what how GNT should, or could look like. How would you, or your theatre, or your community implement GNT ideas? What do you need to implement them? What's holding you back? Where have you already succeeded?

Help us strategize!

## Contact Us

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## Links & Resources

*People's Climate Movement*

<https://peoplesclimate.org/>

*Zero Hour*

<http://thisiszerohour.org/>

*Green New Deal*

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-resolution/109/text>

*Vox: Explaining the Green New Deal*

<https://www.vox.com/energy-and-environment/2018/12/21/18144138/green-new-deal-alexandria-ocasio-cortez>

*The Economies of Data:*

<https://www.cigionline.org/articles/economics-data-implications-data-driven-economy>

*Scarcity Mind v Eco-Mind*

<http://www.asap4all.com/scarcity-mind-or-eco-mind-where-do-they-lead/>





*Capital Institute Regenerative Capitalism*

<http://capitalinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2015-Regenerative-Capitalism-4-20-15-final.pdf>

*B-Corp Standards*

<https://bcorporation.net/about-b-corps>

*Non-Profit Quarterly: Why Are We Still Struggling With EDI in Nonprofit Governance*

<https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2018/11/20/why-are-we-still-struggling-with-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-in-nonprofit-governance/>

*Non-Profit Quarterly: Non-Profit Sectors Are White Spaces*

<https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2018/05/30/nonprofit-sector-white-space/>

*Nonprofit Professional Employees Union*

<https://npeu.org/>

*McKinsey: Delivering Through Diversity*

<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/delivering-through-diversity>

*Digital Mag: Sustainable Business is Profitable Business*

<https://www.digitalistmag.com/improving-lives/2018/08/08/sustainable-business-is-profitable-business-06181889>

*Forbes: Diversity = More \$*

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/annapowers/2018/06/27/a-study-finds-that-diverse-companies-produce-19-more-revenue/#5ce506a2506f>

*Just Transition Business Guide*

[https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/just\\_transition\\_-\\_a\\_business\\_guide.pdf](https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/just_transition_-_a_business_guide.pdf)

*Inc: The Future of Business is Regenerative*

<https://www.inc.com/maureen-kline/the-business-of-future-is-regenerative.html>

*FAQs of Divestment*

<https://gofossilfree.org/divestment/frequently-asked-questions/>



