Working with Designers: Non-Fee Based Strategies for Strengthening the Relationship Between Designers and Producers

<u>All Design Disciplines:</u>

- **Communication**

  - **Updates**: Keep designers in the loop, especially during the offer/contract negotiation phase. Check in with us every week or two if you are waiting on information before you can make an official offer – even if it's just to let us know that you don't have new information.
  - **Validation:** Make it clear that it's ok for us to ask for more support or more money for the design, even if you aren't able to offer it.
  - **Check in throughout the process:** Every once in a while, ask your designers how things are going, and be conscious about whether the scope or scale may have changed since initial conversations.

- **Staffing:** The following positions should be budgeted for:
  - Technical Director
  - Carpenter(s)
  - Head of Wardrobe
  - Painter
  - Props person(s) – builder/buyer
  - These are all jobs that are different from designing. Please don't assume or expect that your design team should be doing these jobs without including that in initial conversations.

- **Available Resources:** Having an early cold read or a video recording of a previous workshop is always helpful to understand the show. If any material relating to the show exists, please make it available.

- **Design Integration**: It is always helpful for the designers to discuss and integrate design ideas with each other in the preliminary stages. A design meeting with the director and all designers before the first production meeting can be very helpful, both creatively and technically.

- **Meetings:** That being said, check in and be aware about the number of design meetings being requested by the director. Everyone's process is different and it's helpful to ensure that everyone is getting what they need, while ensuring that the job is done efficiently and on time.

- **Tech Schedule**: Engage in a conversation that addresses the actual needs of this particular production with respect to the tech schedule - try to avoid cookie-cutter scheduling. Can we light over a rehearsal before tech? Can we do a prelim cueing session with sound in the rehearsal hall? Do we need to dedicate time for Lights, Video & Sound to get together and figure out a particularly complex sequence? When do you need each designer in the room?

- **Tech Week:** Be cognizant of how many hours your designers are working during tech week. Are they present during rehearsal, then rushing to get things done while the actors are on break? Did they come in from 9-12 to do notes before a 12-12 Q2Q day? Did they work for 3 hours after rehearsal in order to bring in new content for the next day? *Remember that for a designer to make changes or add content means hours outside of the theatre on top of the scheduled day.* Try to make sure designers get actual breaks and acknowledge their unseen hours.

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- **Managing our money:**

    o **Payment**: Please pay us on time. A standard ADC fee schedule has the first payment upon contract signing, second payment on "completed design" or a specific midpoint date (usually first rehearsal), and final payment on opening. Please do not expect us to do substantial work before signing a contract and receiving our first cheque.

    o **Petty Cash**: Please be ready to provide the full amount of petty cash when needed. Out-of-Pocket expenses and the time they take to get refunded are too common and really affect our finances.

    o **Studio Expenses/Kit Fee**: Automatically add a line item in your budget, and in our contracts, that will help pay for our studio expenses, like workspace, personal gear, software, tools, printer paper & ink, model materials etc. This number will vary between disciplines.

    o **Royalties/Remounts**: Don't just leave those lines for royalties or remount fees blank or TBN. Take the time to fill them out. They indicate an optimism about the future of the show, and mean in the future we don't have to reopen negotiations around the production contract. If and when the remount happens, please track when royalty payments are due and pay them to your designer on time**.**

- **Harassment**

    o Make sure your designers are present for your overview of Not in Our Space or any other harassment policy. If we can't be there that day, email us your harassment policy and a list of who to speak to if we encounter harassment over the course of the project.

    o Re-state your harassment policy on day 1 of tech (load-in) with all technicians present. ***State clearly and publicly who reports to who and that harassment and bullying will not be tolerated.*** Do this again any time there are new technicians or crew in the room who haven't heard this. This practice can also really benefit Stage Management. *Note: The producing company is responsible for preventing/addressing any harassment issues that may arise regarding IATSE crew members hired for a project, even if a crew member is only present for 1 day.*

- **Acknowledgement/Recognition**

    o ***Credit the designers in any promotional material that displays our work.*** It's really nice when you also include the Sound Designer and any other designers whose work isn't featured in a particular photo. Please remember to inform the rest of your staff, tech crew, cast members, etc.) to do this when posting on social media. This is laid out as a clause in the ADC contract, but we hope it becomes standard practice everywhere.

    o **Acknowledgment:** Whenever you talk about this fantastic show you just produced, talk about your team, put our names out there!

Set Design:

- **Shop (Build & Paint)** - Have a shop space planned or where the set will be built (this is usually organized by the TD). The building and painting of the set, as well as organizing the carpenters and shop is not the set designer's job (unless they request it).
- **Theatre Plans** - Have a proper CAD, VWX, DWG, etc. floor plan of the theatre. Make sure the measurements are up to date and as accurate as possible. A few inches off and it could mean having to redesign and redraft the entire set.
- **Deadlines + Redesign** - Sometimes it is necessary to change a design completely, which may mean that the set designer has to redo their whole process of creating a series of sketches, white model & drafting, final model & final drafting & paint elevations.
  - Add a line in the contract for redesigns that happen after the finals deadline or keep communications open for negotiations instead of it becoming an expectation.
  - Include a props addition deadline and adhere to it. This helps the props person to finish/fix/adjust props for the final week, instead of frantically building and sourcing new props during tech.

Costume Design:

- **Sketches**: Be aware that these can take an average of 2 hours a sketch. In general, a round of 2 to 3 revisions should be enough to get the design ideas landed. These are meant to provide a clear sense of general ideas and color palettes. The real design work happens in the fitting room, guided by the drawings.
- **Build**: Have a conversation as early as possible regarding the scope of the design, whether there will be a space to do the build and a wardrobe team. This will define the amount of work involved by the designer in the show, and therefore their fee.
- **Designer's Role**: Costume shop staff can sometimes be overworked and designers like to be supportive when possible. But please be aware that activities such as stock materials shopping, underwear and doubles shopping, shopping returns, costume transportation, etc. are not part of the designer's contract and tend to add a big load of work to our already stressful job.
- **Tech:** When possible, budget for a wardrobe support staff person over tech weekend. This helps the staff addressing directly the resulting notes, without questioning the reason these notes need to be done which can be quite stressful. It can also give a break for the designer when needed, instead of using the break time to fix notes ourselves.

Lighting Design:

- **Light walkers**: always book them. Don't ask if we need or want them - we always do. And book 2, not just 1, for all levels sessions.
- **Levels time:**
  - In the schedule - can you give us at least 1 call where we're not working over someone else's work, like sound or video, painting or finishing installing the set?
  - Find a way for the director to not be in rehearsal when levels are being set, so that they can be with us in the theatre.
- **Rental budget**: increase (or add) a budget for rentals or consumables - this can feel like an increase in fee, even if it isn't really.
- **Costumes on stage**: can we get costumes or costume pieces into the mix earlier in the schedule? Adding wardrobe to the stage means that lighting is working with a fuller palette of the eventual colours and textures of all the designs.

Lighting Design Cont'd:

- **Production run**: can we have the entire production working toward at least a run of each act, at least a few days prior to load-in? A run of the full show is even better, but broken into acts is also
- beneficial. And let's stop calling it a "run for lights." This makes the lighting designer feel like they're imposing on a rehearsal process that would prefer to not do a run at that particular time. A run-through benefits everyone. Period.
- **Inventory**: a company that maintains a current and accurate equipment inventory is doing each designer a great service. If lights are broken, indicate that on this inventory. On a big show in a small theatre, every light counts, but lights that are out of service don't count at all, and we're better off knowing what equipment is actually working before loading day.

Sound Design:

- **Make time for sound during tech:** During tech, sound designers are often struggling to find a quick moment to play a sound that won't interrupt the flow of rehearsal. Unlike visual disciplines, we can't make edits over top of acting rehearsal, and need to either have silence, or to hear something specific onstage to do our job. Give the sound designer agency and support to ask for quiet so we can listen to a cue one more time (or a few more times).
- **Incorporate sound into rehearsal:** Schedule a few hours to work transitions in the rehearsal hall so that everyone can see and hear how sound works in the piece. If possible, do one session early on for everyone to hear how the sound world affects the world of the play, and then a more technical cueing session before heading into tech. This can also save time in the theatre.
- **Sound Design vs. Composition:** While sound design and composition are technically two different disciplines, they tend to be conflated in common practice. Many sound designers are happy to create original content, but be aware that a show with original music should call for a fee above minimum *(This is kind of about fees, sorry!)*
- **Musical direction**: Musical direction is not sound design. If you'd like your sound designer to come into rehearsals to work with the cast on live music, include this in your initial negotiations.
- **Music Licensing:** Learn about the laws that exist around music use in Canada. The ADC has this handy tip sheet: www.designers.ca/music-rights-tip-sheet. If your script hinges on the use of a specific song, make a plan to obtain the rights for that content far in advance.
- **Promotional Trailer:** If you are planning to put together a trailer, please try and use audio content from the show! It's the only promotional material that features our work, and is a great way to show the community how our work contributes to the production. Let the sound designer know in advance if you would like to use our content. In some cases, we may be able to pull a cue and edit it slightly for the trailer, but creating new content for a trailer would fall outside of the show contract and may require a small additional fee.
- **Show Computer:** Avoid running sound and video off of the same computer. It doubles the amount of programming work for both designers, and makes editing during tech significantly slower and more challenging than running the designs off separate machines.

Projection Design:

- **Expectations and technical scope of the project:** Whether we are talking workshop, work-in-progress presentation or a full production, consider the conditions in which video will be integrated physically to the venue, the reading space or rehearsal room. Is it a theatre, a black box studio, a gym? Always good to have as much information in advance for the designer.
- **Equipment and supplies:** Most of the times, designers create content using their own equipment. Is there any gear or equipment the company owns that can make life easier for the designer? Do you have contacts or deals for supplies that the designer could have access to while working on your production? (examples: drives, memory cards, printing facilities, licensed software, etc)

Projection Design Cont'd:

- **Content creation, production and image sourcing:** Keep track of what goes into realizing the visual imagery that gets created for your show. Is the designer acquiring images from stock sites? Found visuals? Sampling? Or are they crafting an animation? Are you working on a project that will require no content creation per se, but a full closed circuit system? Every approach to visual creation can be completely different and require a different level of involvement from the producing company.
- **Technical team:** Take into consideration that if your show uses video you may need to build a technical team that is familiar with video/projections.
- **Tech week/days:** Keep an eye on the fact that video takes time and resources during tech. While it is often possible to work around other elements of design in the space such as lights, costumes or sound, this is not always the case, as video also requires moments of complete darkness that render spaces impossible to work around. Support your designer by making space for this work, and letting the rest of the team know that this time is necessary.

Additional Resources:

Vancouver Design Forum:
www.vancouverdesigners.org
vandesignforum@gmail.com

ADC Links for Producers:
www.designers.ca/standards-and-working-procedures
www.designers.ca/production-information-checklist