

IBA – Guiding Principles

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General questions:
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Preamble

The following document is the result of member experiences and discussions between biennial makers from across the world organised and promoted by the International Biennial Association (IBA). The association is grounded in knowledge sharing and cooperation between biennials and triennials globally in an effort to create a transparent, collaborative and non-hierarchical network.

In line with Article 27 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights we pursue the right for everyone to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. As a result, we pledge to protect the right of artistic freedom for all our members and associated individuals.

As Members of IBA we acknowledge the intrinsic structural uniqueness under which biennials exist and operate throughout the world. We further recognize that in order to be acknowledged as institutions/organisations/initiatives fit to operate in our current world, our members reflect equitable values and models fostering social, environmental and economic sustainability.

While its main purpose is to act as guidelines for IBA Members, to assure the sustainability of the model, the document may also serve other institutions and individuals as a framework for fostering growth and allowing for change. According to the principles stated in the document itself, this should be done with a shared spirit of growth and dialoguing, in order to improve the process of biennial making. We therefore see the following document as a guiding set of principles our members should always be striving to achieve.

We understand this document to be a living and collaborative document adapting and open to changing realities and specificities of our members and world-wide biennial community.

Communication as a Fundamental Attribute for Biennials

As a core element of best practice, Members are encouraged to exercise effective communication with, and between, their key communities, both internal and external. Open communication and feedback are vital in sustaining and improving working relationships, establishing trust and stimulating creative ideas.

Members are encouraged to exercise the key components of effective communication, which we identify as:

- two-way communication between individuals involved in the making and presenting of a Biennial, at all levels of responsibility therein, that is clear and respectful
- effective communication between the Biennial and its key stakeholders
- keeping stakeholders informed of the Biennial's activities

Biennials as Listening Institutions

While most of our members are private and independent institutions, we do recognize that each of these contribute in complex ways to the public discourse locally as much as internationally thus we have to acknowledge a public role of biennials and consider their accountability.

As institutions/organisations/initiatives operating within the public sphere we understand a fundamental commitment to an open communication and exchange with the various communities forming a biennial's constituency.

We recognise the importance of establishing channels of communication with our communities, with learning and outreach not only as a tool to disseminate the project of a specific biennial but also as a moment to gather insight into the needs/interests of the communities.

Some current considerations in ensuring Biennials remain listening institutions, responsive to their communities include:

How to respond to current events?

How do we inspire people through our programming to live in a more harmonious, inclusive world?

How do we track key changes in our communities and react to these changes?

How do you involve key members of the community within the organisation to assure a dialogue over time?

How to react to specific grievances while also protecting institutions/artists from adverse reactions?

How do we deal with censorship/self-censorship?

How does listening connect to governance and management of relationships?

How to create alliances and/or isolate parts of the community which can foster toxic relations?

How key communities of each biennial inform decisions of the institutions?

How do we give the biennial's legacy role the right importance?

Biennials as Communities

Biennials are the result of the coming together of a vast ecosystem of individuals and communities. The interaction between them in a fair and respectful manner is our most important predicament. To allow this to happen we must acknowledge each of their roles within the existence of a biennial as valuable and interconnected.

First and foremost, we recognize the invaluable role of our audiences in driving our efforts to create spaces of dialogue, culture, and encounter. Their contribution is the ultimate *raison d'etre* for the efforts of artists, team, and partners.

Furthermore, Biennials' complexity lays in operating constantly on multiple geographical scales, which defines our publics as multiple and extremely diverse: from the proximity of a street and neighbourhood, to international public following directly or through the press each and every biennial. We appreciate the importance of both, underlining however that the strength of a Biennial lays primarily on the capacity to interact and engage with its local audiences.

This dichotomy is defined not only through its geographical characteristics but also its temporal: while the international audience is likely to engage in the Biennial in its two/three year cycles, the local community has a more continuous sense of its ongoing presence and connection to its place.

Continuous Communities

Core to the existence of a Biennial is what we define as its *continuous community*, composed of the individuals of its permanent team (the structure of which can vary greatly between biennials). It is primarily responsible for creating the conditions for its biennial to take place and is ultimately responsible for it to be carried out in a fair and sustainable way.

We strive for our members to create institutional and management models which allow their cultural and artistic vision to grow sustainably and respectfully towards all of its participants – audience and artists alike.

We lay great value in nurturing an environment between its makers built on respect, transparency and good communication.

We strive for our members to achieve this by fostering fair conditions for any individual associated with their organisation and aim for the creation of virtuous and long-lasting collaborations with all members of the community. Fair conditions are established within a local framework of employment and humanitarian law, and informed within an international framework of best practice between biennials.

We strongly support the drafting of individual and specific code of conduct documents by our members which reflect the principles expressed in this document detailing specific conditions brought about by local circumstances.

Temporary Communities

We recognize as an essential characteristic of Biennials their cyclical temporality, this leads to the creation of wider temporary community around the project of a Biennial.

The ties and connection created this way contribute greatly to the positive impacts a Biennial can have on its own local community. Likewise the creation of these professional as well as personal connections impact those members of the temporary community, specifically artists and curators, who have the possibility of growing a better knowledge of a specific city/region.

As the growth of each organisation in the context of the production of a biennial can be quite significant, we strongly encourage our members to establish modes of collaboration which respect cultural, gender and economic differences of all participants in order to allow everyone to participate in positive and respectful ways. We fully support an idea of art as a free form of cultural expression respectful of the autonomy of those engaged in the making of it. In the context of the temporary community growing around each biennial, this entails the effort of those individuals closer to the local community in bridging the messages if needed and mediating the works to allow access to those works who might require it.

We strive for our members to create these temporary communities guided by a sense of mutual responsibility towards the project by all parties involved. In particular it is sensible for internal code of conduct documents to foresee a clear set of rights and duties for each role to facilitate a positive working and creative environment.

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Biennials as Sustainable Institutions

We strongly believe that for the Biennial model to maintain its relevance among other contemporary art institutions as spaces for the production, encounter and appreciation of art, our members need to work towards a sustainable mode of production. We understand the term sustainable in relation to economic, social and environmental aspects of biennials.

We understand that in order to thrive, biennials should promote a culture of collaboration rather than competition internally as well as between them. We therefore strongly support inter-institutional cooperation leading to a better and more fair use of resources.

Environmental Sustainability

Considering the rapidly manifesting climate change which is affecting all forms of life on earth, and which is a stark reminder of the finite resources we can rely on, we urge our members to act consciously and respectfully towards our planet.

We encourage our members to establish an environmental agenda with the aim to reduce the environmental cost of their actions fitting their capacity and needs. This should include a conscientious reduction of carbon footprint as far as possible through reduction of waste, research for sustainable practices in the production and transportation of works presented. Additionally, aiming as much as possible to avoid producing works for the sole duration of the event itself and working to create a legacy locally and/or through collaborating with other biennials and other institutions. In the case of reuse of materials used as part of an artist's work, we urge our members to undertake necessary agreements with the artist and partner institution to avoid any possible conflicts.

We encourage the efforts of any of our members to quantify and consequently reduce the actual carbon footprint of the exhibition and the institution/organisation/initiative itself.

We acknowledge that biennials as spaces for cultural exchange rely on the mobility of artists and curators, and as we realise the impact of travels on climate we encourage our members to imagine longer engagement of the invited artists with local communities through residencies and/or remote communication in the process of creating works rather than encouraging multiple or short-stay travels.

We support efforts by our members to reduce the unnecessary use of finite resources through a push towards paperless institutions and exhibitions. Likewise we see positively the development of exhibition models which aim to re-use materials and source them locally as much as possible and support the collaboration with experts in the field. We also encourage our members to share research resources on this topic to build much needed best practice tools for other organisations to be inspired by.

Social/Economic Sustainability

The reliance on the temporary community as described above means that Biennials can thrive only through a wide support by their local constituency, thus we urge our members to operate within their means and assure fair compensation to everyone involved according to their possibility.

We encourage our members to build long-term sustainable working conditions by pursuing paths of capacity building and establishing a culture of learning within its team and with the collaborators of the temporary community.

Similarly we strive for our members to draft policies aimed at inclusion practices and acknowledging the invaluable role of the local communities and

urge them to avoid any practice which exploits or extracts resources from these.

We support the establishment of collaborations with research institutions and local context to gain access to sources relevant for any artistic research and for biennials themselves as integrating these may also provide additional tools for sustainable practices.

We encourage our members to establish ethical and transparent funding policies.

IBA Rights and Duties

The IBA Board expects all members to abide by the Guiding Principles. Members are encouraged to report alleged breaches of this document to the IBA Office in writing via email.

When an alleged breach has been identified, IBA - as an association created as a platform for establishing, researching and exchanging knowledge between the biennial community - will communicate with the member concerned in an attempt to resolve the alleged breach informally and confidentially.

IBA is not a policing association, and IBA is not responsible for mediating grievances between members of the community and members of IBA.

As an organisation designed to uphold best practices and support individuals and organisations in the biennial network, in case of an alleged breach of the Guiding Principles document, IBA can assist in assessing and communicating industry best practices on an international scale in an attempt to limit liability and reputational risk to all parties.

In extreme cases, if a breach of this document is obliterated and beyond repair, membership to IBA for the individual/institution will be revoked until such time the breach has been remedied or satisfied.