

# Check Ins & Outs

## Guidance & Best Practice

By Artist Wellbeing Practitioner, Lou Platt

I've been encouraging artists to use Check In/Outs (CIOs) for some time now. CIOs seem quite simple at a glance - before you set to work everyone checks in with each other & before you finish everyone checks out. This practice can lead to the creation of safe working spaces. They can also promote creative risk taking as those involved are proactively supported and become more aware of personal & collective limits. They can establish inclusive, democratic & engaging working environments that establish solid foundations for the art to then be built upon. Truly effective CIOs are nuanced, responsive and unique to each creative team.

Conversely, CIOs can be counter-productive, unhelpful and even dangerous if they are not actively thought about and set up with care and due diligence. Facilitating and being part of effective CIOs is a skill that needs to be thought about, prepared for and practiced.

Here is a guide to using Check In/Outs in your creative practice. This guide is an accumulation of discoveries made from facilitating CIOs and listening to how various artists implement CIOs into their own practice. This is a guide, not a rule-book. CIOs is an evolving practice and is open to suggestions and new ideas.

### Preparation

Check In/Outs are not a “one-sized-fits all” solution. They should always be applied with forethought, clear objectives and consideration of who will be involved.

Before using CIOs make sure you and the team know why they are being used.

#### Possible aims of integrating CIOs into your creative practice:

- to arrive/depart with intention –
- to provide a dedicated & meaningful space-time to establish self-awareness and awareness of others
- to create and promote a transparent working culture
- to provide a ritual to contain the rehearsal so that the work doesn't bleed out too much into other areas of life: “books ends” for the day / process
- to reconnect to the process/team
- to name / let go / take responsibility of unhelpful thoughts / feelings / behaviours that may block creative processes
- to have time to communicate thoughts / feelings to the team
- to become more aware of possible unconscious dynamics and processes that may unknowingly be affecting the process
- to take care of the creative process & the personal spirit
- to promote a culture of equality and democracy
- to engage individuals into the collective identity
- to have space and time to process what has happened in the day
- to acknowledge the presence of life beyond the creative process

### **CIOs can be great but they should never be mandatory:**

They don't & won't work if people are forced to take part. If creatives don't feel like they have a choice about their participation, CIOs can easily turn into dangerous, damaging and destructive practices. Everyone in the room is invited to take part in CIOs.

### **Be aware of difference:**

It is important to recognise that people will respond differently to CIOs depending on their background & experience. If someone doesn't want to take part then that is absolutely fine – sitting out should always be permitted. If anyone would like to sit out, then let them know that they are welcome to stay in the room when others are in a CIO, and that they are welcome to take part whenever it feels good for them.

### **Check In/Outs are rituals to frame the day & process:**

Take care of the ritual by making sure you have a clear quiet space if possible. It's best to do them in the room you'll be working in as it'll also "warm up" the space.

Most times the group will sit in a circle on the floor, it's often useful for the group to be at the same level if possible, but don't worry if this isn't possible.

## **Facilitation**

If the team have never run a Check In/Out before, and no one has been part of a CIO elsewhere, then I would recommend that you bring someone into the process who is familiar with CIOs in order to facilitate the first one. This will help get the ball rolling and set up safe and effective CIO practices.

Usually the Lead Artist will introduce a CIO, but anyone in the process can suggest it.

When establishing the practice, someone may want to take responsibility for making sure the CIOs happen. It doesn't have to be the same person each day. For a group of about 6 people, 20 minutes at the beginning and end of the day should be enough.

Find your own way of marking the time: hit a gong, call for it, sit in the circle.

### **Three suggested CIO styles:**

When setting up the CIOs ask the group which one they would like to try (or make your own rituals):

1. *Open Space*: When the circle is established individuals will take it in turns to speak and listen. You may want to begin going round the circle, but work towards it being more fluid and open to any pattern that emerges in the moment.
2. A *"Talking Stick"*: You can place an object (anything – a water bottle, a shoe, a pen) in the middle of the circle, and when someone wants to talk they collect the object, talk, and then replace it ready for whomever would like to pick it up next. Try not to "pass it round" – trust the natural patterns that emerge.
3. *Two "Talking Sticks"*: Similarly to the previous one, but this time TWO objects will be placed in the middle. Someone will collect them, speak and then replace them. One object will represent our personal narratives and

the other will be the professional. This can be useful if the group needs a bit more structure, or if the group are get stuck in just talking about personal or professional things.

NOTE: It's okay not to speak. You can collect the objects and hold them for a bit in silence and then put them back if you are not ready/willing to speak. Trust yourself.

NOTE: CIOs are not conversations. Try not to respond to each other in a CIO. And try not interpret or analyse yourself or others.

### How to respond to challenging / conflicting offers:

Has the team agreed on how they deal with conflict in the creative space? I strongly suggest that, at the very beginning of a new process or phase, the creative team thinks together about how the collective would like to respond to conflict/challenges that may emerge in the process, and decide upon ways in which to meet/hold/respond to the conflict and challenges.

If you ever feel unnecessary discomfort in the CIOs then go back to the checklist.

## PACE yourselves

A useful way to approach Check In/Outs are to use the PACE model.

Invite yourself and the group to approach and engage with the CIOs in the following ways:

- Playful
- Accepting
- Curious
- Empathic

*(To find out more about the PACE model in creative processes, sign up to the blog for further posts)*

## Review & Evolve

CIOs should feel alive and connecting. From time to time, you should review the CIO process and see if you need to alter it in anyway to meet the unique needs of the creative team. Below is a CHECKLIST to help you establish and maintain productive and healthy CIOs.

Not every process will benefit from CIOs. There may be time when CIOs aren't aiding the process. And it's okay to let them go and choose not to do them, or to do them differently.

Notice if patterns start emerging and be curious about them.

Remember that it usually takes time to feel able to be fully present and open in a CIO. Let everyone engage at their own pace and way whilst adhering to the ritual of the process.

## CHECKLIST for Check In/Outs

Here's a simple checklist that will help you make sure the CIOs are productive, healthy and safe.

If you answer “no” to any of the following questions then you should reflect upon and review the CIO process. Where and how can you make any changes to alter the process in order for the no to become a yes?

- Do I/we know how to be part of a CIO?
- Do I/we understand why they are being used?
- Do I/we feel safe enough in the CIOs?
- Do I/we have a choice to take part?
- Do I/we make enough time for the CIOs?
- Do I/we know how to respond to difficult/challenging offers?
- Do the CIOs feel productive (in an indirect and/or direct way)?
- Am I/are we being Playful, Accepting, Curious & Empathic?
- Am I/are we as being truthful, authentic & present as I/we can?

[Click here](#) to download a printable version to put up in the rehearsal room. (I suggest you also download Equity's [‘Safe Space’](#) statement too).

## Basic tips

Here are some basic tips to help shape your CIOs:

- Take responsibility of what you offer into the CIOs (even if you don't yet know what to do with it) – they are not dumping grounds.
- If you need to name a challenge/conflict/difficulty try to find a way of offering it that is pro-active and solution focused.
- Do not talk over each other - it is not a place for conversations.
- Do not analyse or interpret what is said or unsaid.
- Do not “do the work” in a CIO – for example, if you're a director do not give notes in a CIO.
- Try to make “I” statements rather than “you”.
- Trust the group process - it takes time for the CIOs to find their unique way with each creative team.
- Dedicate and protect time to CIOs in the rehearsal schedule – integrate it into the shape of the day, don't see it as an add-on or something extra.
- Check Outs are easily forgotten - end the day/process with the same intention as you started it.
- Remember it's not therapy.
- PACE yourselves (be playful, accepting, curious & empathic).

If you have any questions, feedback, ideas, comments on Check In/Outs then add your thoughts to the comments below or email me - [info@louiseplatt.co.uk](mailto:info@louiseplatt.co.uk) or tweet [@artistwellbeing](https://twitter.com/artistwellbeing)