

AACTFest Goals and Criteria *Taken from AACT Handbook*

- To provide an optimum learning experience through festival entry at state, regional, and national levels, which affirm, support, and nurture community theatre companies as they strive toward excellence in theatrical production.
- To Stimulate and inspire community theatre companies to strive for the best work possible and to recognize them for their achievement through an appropriate adjudication process.
- To provide learning experiences in artistic, technical, and management areas for people in attendance through performances, adjudication, and workshops.
- To develop enlightened and discerning audiences for community theatre.

Criteria are in place to achieve the aforementioned goals. Among the most significant are:

- All theatre companies must meet the same eligibility standards and requirements.
- **It is the responsibility of each entering company to read the entire AACTFest Handbook and ensure compliance with all of the rules.** (www.aact.org)
- The festival must be held in a functioning theatre facility.
- A production must be performed in the same form at all festival levels.
- Maximum time limits are 10 minutes for set-up; 60 minutes for performance, and 10 minutes for strike.
- All actors, musicians, and on-stage personnel must begin setup and end either in or immediately adjacent to the on-deck area.
- The house must be closed during each performance. It must remain open for setup and strike.
- Qualified and impartial adjudicators are essential to the success and fairness of the festival process.
- Adjudicators must not discuss productions before the first ballot.
- The Festival Commission Representative will make the final determination in all matters of dispute during a festival.

Theatre Companies

Any amateur theatre organized for at least one year prior to the state festival which has produced at least two shows prior to the state festival entry, and is governed by a board from the community, is eligible to enter the festival process. Companies from city or county recreational departments, universities, colleges, military bases, etc. must have a governing board from the community, separate from the umbrella organization. Ideally, any theatre meeting these criteria should be able to enter a state (or district) festival without any prior selection process. Fairly administrated limits on the number of performing theatres for festivals, due to resource constraints, are acceptable.

Each theatre may enter only one production in only one state in any given festival cycle. Theatres may showcase other productions with the permission of the Festival Chair. Any production selected to proceed or that participates in a regional festival in a given festival cycle may not be reentered in the next festival cycle.

Methods other than a festival, such as a traveling adjudicator, for selecting a production to represent a state at the regional festival may be acceptable if the Festival Commission Chair grants prior permission. States may combine for festivals if adjudicators make their selections by state. If a state has no festival or other selection method, but a theatre wishes to enter the state's regional festival, the theatre may apply to the Festival Commission Chair for an appointment to the regional festival with a recommendation from their Regional Representative. Upon appointment, the company may represent the state with its production at the regional festival if all other requirements for participation have been fulfilled. A state theatre association may petition no entry from its state be appointed.

Prior to the festival, the director should explain to the cast and crew that following the performance and strike, there will be a public adjudication. It should be clarified that the purpose of the adjudication is not to criticize or denigrate a production, but to offer possible improvements. The adjudication process should be a constructive learning experience for the cast, crew and audience.

The productions selected to proceed from the state festivals are the entered productions for the respective regional festivals. If for some reason a production selected to proceed cannot do so, the production ranked next in the balloting will proceed.

State festivals with four or more entered companies may send two productions to the regional festival. Appointments will continue to be limited to one.

The productions selected to proceed from the regional festivals (one each for all regions except Region IV, which may have two) are the entered productions for the national festival.

In addition, a twelfth company is selected on an at-large basis in the following manner. When all entering companies at state festivals, each of which has agreed to “go on,” are confirmed, the Festival Commission Chair will count the number of companies. The count will be based on the total in each individual state regardless of the number of festivals. The state numbers will next be totaled by region.

The region with the most eligible entering companies will send two companies in the Regional Festival to the National Festival. Region IV is not eligible to send an additional company. In the event of a tie in the number of these companies between two or more regions, the Festival Commission Chair will supervise a coin flip to determine which region will send another production.

The national host theatre for any particular festival cycle is not allowed to enter a production in the festival process for that cycle.

Company Members

Once a play is in rehearsal for the festival process, actors and technicians may not be paid, directly or indirectly, to rehearse or perform in that production. Members of a theatre’s production staff, such as directors, designers, costumers, technical directors, etc., may receive normal remuneration, as long as no additional or bonus dollars are paid specifically for hands on efforts for that production.

Musicians who provide accompaniment for a production may be paid if they do not perform as actors, directly or indirectly. To not be considered an actor, a musician must meet the following criteria:

- They must perform from an orchestra pit, an offstage wing position or an onstage position that is not visible to the audience. Or...
- If visible to the audience, they do not interact in any way, physically, verbally or visually with any member of the cast or audience. Any interaction between musicians must not in any way relate to actions taking place on stage.
- If the theatre does not have an orchestra pit or adequate wing space, the Festival Commission Representative and the Host Technical Director may designate an area for the musicians to perform.

American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters are treated in a manner similar to musicians although they may “shadow” actors without being considered an actor and may not be paid. If they take a role, they cannot be paid.

Persons who receive more than twenty five (25%) of an annual “living wage” as income from work as actors in live performances, or are active members of Actors Equity at any time during the festival cycle in which they are to appear, may under no circumstances perform at any level of AACTFest. All performers are required to sign the Affidavit of AACTFest Actor Eligibility. This includes musicians who do not meet the above criteria.

Productions

A production entered in the festival process may be a cutting of a full-length play or musical, a one-act play, or any other performance of a theatrical nature. The total length of the performance may not exceed sixty minutes (including introductions, scene changes, and curtain calls). Any element, which brings the audience into the world of the play (music, sound, movement, lights, etc.), will begin the sixty minute performance time. The complete cessation of such will complete the timing period. If a set-up or strike is intended to set mood, establish character, or to entertain the audience in any way, it will be considered part of the sixty-minute performance time.

Suggestion: Entering material requiring more than fifty-five minutes to perform may result in timing problems. Audience response may add time.

The adjudicator(s) will comment on the performances. Emphasis will be on acting and direction, but final consideration will be the overall realization of the production. Because of difficulties in touring (unfamiliar stage, host technical crew, travel distance, festival lighting, etc.), theatres should consider the technical aspects of performing “on the road” when selecting a show. A blank stage or a complex set can be equally effective, if appropriate to the material selected.

Each company is responsible for furnishing sets, props, or furniture needed for the production. The host theatre may provide standard articles of furniture, if requested to do so in advance.

All sets, props, costumes, musical instruments, special effects, etc. (everything utilized to present the production) must fit into a storage area that will me a minimum of 100 square feet. Costumes and make-up required to begin production may be donned off premise or in dressing room. Each company will have a storage area of similar size and should be aware different spaces will have different height clearances. If planning to “high stack” scenery, companies should check with the host facilities at all levels for available height. The on deck and storage spaces may be open on all four sides; items need to be self-supporting. Perishable or valuable objects and weapons should be brought to the storage space immediately prior to rehearsal and performance and removed thereafter.

The rules and laws governing the use of weapons, pyrotechnics and special effects vary greatly from location to location. Do not assume because it is allowed in one facility, it can be used in others. Even items as innocuous as cigarettes and candles can be a problem. Weapons are especially problematic; real guns (even if not fired) often present special difficulties.

Companies should check with the festival venue concerning rules governing special effects. Certain items can be used, but only with proper checkout by local authorities.

Be aware of the possibility the checkout, which may include demonstrations requiring additional supplies, will probably not be during the scheduled rehearsal time. While the host facility should publish the necessary rules, **it is ultimately the responsibility of the performing company to confirm as to whether or not a specific item is permissible.**

Each production is allowed a maximum of 10 minutes set-up time and 10 minutes strike time, with timing beginning and ending with all actors, musicians, and on-stage personnel either in or, if necessary, immediately adjacent to the 100 square foot on-deck area. For setup, the entire company will assemble in the designated area. When ready, the company spokesperson will signal the festival stage manager (or the designee) who will announce “go” loudly enough for all timing personnel to hear. The company will proceed with the setup. When finished, all company personnel must assemble back at the start area. When all have reassembled, the company spokesperson will again signal the festival stage manager who will announce, “stop.” At this point, no other action may take place on stage until the start of the performance.

Light and sound operators are exempt and are allowed to remain in their respective operations areas at the end of set-up, if they have traveled there for setup/final checks must be completed within the 10 minute setup time. Light and sound operators may also finish setup with the rest of the company and travel to their operational locations.

After the performance, strike will proceed using the same procedure as was used for setup. Strike may begin with the lighting and/or sound operators in their operational positions or the company may wait for them to join the rest of the company at the on-deck area. The choice is at the company’s discretion, but must be consistent before and after the performance. It is the responsibility of the company to ensure the stage floor is left in the same or better condition than it was when the setup began; including wet mopping, if necessary. Nothing may be placed on the stage floor that cannot be adequately removed within the allotted strike time. Care should be taken not to disturb succeeding shows’ spike tape. (It is recommended spike tape not be removed by the company during strike.)

The “production process” (set-up, performance, strike) should continue without significant delay until complete. Individual productions may hold for any unused set-up time.

Should a production exceed any time limits, the performance will not be stopped nor will an announcement be made. Adjudicators will comment as scheduled. Timekeepers will notify the Festival Commission Representative who will disqualify the company from selection to proceed.

Immediately after the strike, company members are usually seated in the front rows in the auditorium for the adjudication.

Productions selected to proceed must be performed in the same form at all levels. Adjustments in staging may be made to allow for differences in stage facilities and for integrating adjudicator suggestions, but material may not be added or withdrawn. **Actors, production staff, musicians or technician substitutions may not be made without written consent from the Festival Commission Chair. Substitution requests must be for legitimate hardships.**

Requirements

At each level, every company must provide the following to the festival chair before the festival begins. The festival chair should provide the companies a deadline for the required material:

- Proof of permission to perform the property from the leasing agent and/or author. (It is wise to obtain performance permission for all three levels prior to the state festival)
- Proof of permission to perform the property as cut or altered.
- Warranty that the theatre has obtained all other necessary rights.
- Five scripts marked as intended to be performed. **Do not photocopy any scripts without proper permission.** (This does not mean that scripts available only in anthologies cannot be copied if permission to copy is received.) Additional scripts may be required for interpreters, but only with notice to the company.
- Entry and registration fees as required by specific festivals.
- Affidavits of AACTFest Eligibility for each performer.
- Festival Entry/Information sheet.
- Technical Information Form.
- Program information.
- Proof of membership in state/regional associations and any other local applicable fees as required by the particular festival.
- A festival fee equal to the amount of the lowest AACT Organizational membership made payable to AACT (prior to state festival only). This fee is waived for AACT members. Organizational membership in AACT is required at the regional and national levels.

Failure to comply with the AACTFest rules may be grounds for disqualification. This includes, but is not limited to, failure to follow the terms of the licensing agreement. It is ultimately the entering theatre's responsibility to ensure all documentation has been obtained and submitted to the Festival Chair. If there are questions, they may be directed to Kristi Quinn, AACT Vice President, Festivals, festivals@act.org

Lights

The use of a basic festival lighting plot will be provided for all entering companies. The plot may not be altered in any respect including, but not limited to, instrument location, focus area and gel color. The basic plot will include:

- A minimum of six (6) individually controlled cool and warm wash areas which are eight (8) to ten (10) feet in size. (A larger playing area will necessitate more areas.)
- Any additional instrumentation necessary to illuminate the playing area completely.
- Two followspots.
- Additional instrumentation may be provided as part of the basic plot at the discretion of the host

The host must provide all performing companies with drawings, magic sheets, etc. clearly illustrating the instrumentation, gel colors, circuiting and wash areas on a timely basis consistent with deadlines.

Performing companies may have lighting needs beyond the basic festival plot. Special lighting, within certain limits, is permitted, but companies need to remember on-stage rehearsal time will be limited to no more than eighty (80) minutes and any special lighting will need to be setup during that time block. The rules concerning the use of lighting specials are:

- If it is necessary to re-plug, re-aim and /or re-gel instruments between performances, the operation will be completed by the host staff and will be done prior to the production company's setup. Any errors by the host staff discovered during the company's setup may be corrected without the use of the performing company's setup time.
- The Host Technical director must approve all instrumentation for lighting specials.
- The producing company is ultimately responsible for providing instrumentation for any lighting specials. The host may, at their discretion, provide instrumentation to the companies but every company must have access to the same selection of lighting instruments.
- It is the producing company's responsibility to ensure any instrumentation not provided by the host has electrical connections compatible with the host facility's equipment. Any safety requirements of host must be followed.
- Lighting specials must be able to be setup during the company's rehearsal period. The host may, at their discretion, setup specials prior to the company's rehearsal if the same level of accommodation is provided to all groups.
- Lighting specials may be connected and left in place between a company's rehearsal and performance unless the Host Technical Director determines the placement may be detrimental to other companies. If this is the case, the specials must either be relocated or setup and struck as necessary by the host technical staff prior to the 10 minute setup.

- If a company elects to supplement the host facility's lighting equipment with portable control consoles, etc., specials will be subject to the six (6) instruments / circuit/ dimmer / channel rule. The equipment, including any necessary power or control cables, must be set up during the company's rehearsal period. The Host Technical Director will determine whether the placement of any or all of the equipment is detrimental to other companies. If so the designated equipment must be set-up and struck during the standard set-up and strike time.

The host facility control system may not be used for the control of any KMX dependent equipment, including, but not limited to, automated lighting fixtures. In this context, KMX will be construed to mean any computer control protocol (MIDI, CAN, etc.). The only exception is if the equipment is part of the basic festival light plot supplied by the festival host. Should a performing company wish to use other DMX controlled equipment, they must provide their own control mechanism. The setup will be subject to the same rules as supplementary lighting equipment.

Some participating companies may be unfamiliar with computer controlled lighting consoles. Should a host theatre utilize such equipment, the host must ensure the availability of technicians able to assist with lighting operation or, if necessary operate the equipment during the performance. Companies unfamiliar with computer lighting consoles should be aware that in addition to light levels. The console may also store and control fade times. It is the company's responsibility to do one of the following:

- Program fade times for each cue
- Learn how to run cues manually (if possible)
- Run the show with the default fade times

The host theatre may elect to program cues for the entering companies prior to the scheduled rehearsal times, subject only to offering the opportunity to all performing companies. The host may set reasonable conditions for the service, such as a specific deadline for submission of cue parameters prior to the festival. It remains the company's responsibility to ensure the cues have been programmed correctly and the proper sets of cues have been loaded into the lighting console for the performance.

Sound

The host theatre at all levels must have a functioning sound system with a minimum of:

- A Cassette player.
- A CD player.
- House speakers.
- A means of communication between the light booth, the sound booth, backstage and the spotlight positions.
- A mixing board capable of accommodating the available sound sources.
- A house microphone for use by both the companies and the adjudicators.

If a company elects to supplement existing equipment, the company's equipment may be set up during the company's rehearsal period and the host technical director will determine whether the placement of such equipment or accessories is detrimental to other companies. If so deemed, the equipment must be set up and struck within the standard set-up and strike times.

If the host facility offers any optional equipment to any company, it must be made available to every company.

There is no limit to the number of sound cues or effects used during the performance but any sound effect devices, such as a door unit that is used for a "slamming" sound during the performance, must be set up and struck during the set-up and strike times. Any special sound effects are the sole responsibility of the company.

The host must provide the performing companies with complete information including static microphone and speaker locations on a timely basis.

Scenic Devices

No scenic devices may be hung, placed, or positioned in the playing area prior to the set-up. Scenic devices used for creating special effects have no limit, but must be provided by the company. The host facility must approve scenic devices requiring set up in the "house" of the theatre. The host may override placement of any special devices if deemed a hazard. The devices should be set up during the company's technical rehearsal. The Host Technical Director may determine a scenic element should stay in place to prevent potential injury, and may allow a scenic element to stay hanging as long as it is not detrimental to other companies. Set-up and strike are an important part of festival production; installation of most scenic devices can and should be done then. The Host Technical Director and/or Festival Commission Representative are a resource in accomplishing any setup, and should be consulted prior to the technical rehearsal. Bring a large enough crew to accomplish technical and setup objectives.

If a company has equipment requiring significant warm up time (fog machines for example) the equipment should be stored at the edge of the company's storage area and arrangements made with the Host Technical Director to initiate the warm up process.

As theatre technology advances, there may be occasions where it is questionable exactly how a piece of equipment should be classified. An example is a video or slide projector. Should it be considered a scenic device, which must be positioned during set up, or is it a lighting device, which may be positioned during rehearsal and allowed to remain? A company with a question or desiring a ruling should contact the Festival Chair. In one specific case, it was determined that the projector was more closely related to a lighting instrument and could be dealt with according to the rules for lighting specials.

Guidelines

Plays are to be adjudicated based on the overall production with acting and directing as the major elements. All types of productions (comedy, drama, original works, musicals, revues, avant-garde, “controversial”, etc) are acceptable entries to the festival and must be considered on a similar basis, with the best production being the one most fully realizing all production values and criteria. Technical competence is to be given consideration as to the effectiveness as an integral part of the total production experience.

Each company has a free choice of material (a one-act, a cutting, a selected act, etc.). Adjudicators may not question the choice, except as to its appropriateness for the company and comment only on how it was performed.