



**AACTFest
2019 Handbook
The Basics**

American Association of Community Theatre

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AACTFest 2019 Handbook

Welcome to AACTFest 2019. The *AACTFest Handbook* helps you participate in AACT's festival program that celebrates the creativity of theatre across the nation.

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Copies of the *AACTFest 2019 Handbook* are available from the AACT office for a nominal fee or can be downloaded free from the AACT website at aact.org/handbook.

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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
OF COMMUNITY THEATRE

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The Basics

AACTFest is a program of the American Association of Community Theatre (AACT). The festival process or cycle culminates in a national theatre festival held in odd numbered years. The festival cycle presents a forum for community theatres from the ten regions of AACT to enter productions for adjudication and possible advancement to higher festival levels.

Goals

- To provide learning experiences in artistic, technical, and management areas through performances, adjudication, workshops, and festival participation; thereby affirming, supporting, and nurturing community theatre companies.
- To stimulate and inspire community theatre companies to strive toward excellence in theatrical production and to recognize them for their achievement through an appropriate adjudication process.
- To develop enlightened and discerning audiences for community theatre.

General Rules

- All theatre companies must meet the same eligibility standards and requirements.
- It is the responsibility of each entering company to read the entire *AACTFest 2019 Handbook* and ensure compliance with all of the rules.
- Each festival must be held in a functioning theatre facility, unless granted exception by the AACT Vice President for Festivals.
- A production must be performed in the same form at all festival levels, with changes permitted only if based upon adjudicator comments. Changes for facility limitations require a waiver from the Vice President for Festivals.
- Maximum time limits are 10 minutes for set-up; 60 minutes for performance and 10 minutes for strike. A closed 80 minute tech rehearsal, supervised by the Commissioner, will be scheduled in the theatre facility for each competing company.
- The house must be closed during each performance. It must remain open for set-up and strike.

Administration

The festival process is conducted and guided by AACT through the Vice President for Festivals, the Festival Commission Chair, the Festival Commission and assigned staff.

Festival Commissioners

Festival Commissioners are assigned by the AACT Festivals Coordinator under authority of the Vice President for Festivals to provide assistance to state and regional festivals.

In matters of dispute during the festival, the Commissioner makes the final ruling. Any questions or discussion of disqualification is made through the Commissioner. The Commissioner verifies each production's time with the official festival timekeepers and, if a violation occurs, responds appropriately at the end of the festival.

Policies

AACT's primary festival focus is on the productions. The intent is that the AACTFest rules, guidelines, and decisions are made for the benefit of the entering companies.

Censorship

AACT policy permits the widest possible range of dramatic material to be performed in a festival of the American Association of Community Theatre, and does not permit censorship of any company's production.

Production

Companies will set up with the main curtain open. Set-up may occur behind a closed curtain if a public set-up would have a negative impact on a production. It is assumed this will be an uncommon occurrence and must be cleared with the Festival Commissioner in advance.

Once in progress, a production may only be stopped or interrupted for reasons of public safety or due to problems with the theatre facility, which are temporary in nature and affect the overall quality of the production.

Waivers

Any request for a waiver of specific rules (except waivers pertaining to facility, which may only be granted by the AACT Vice President for Festivals) must be submitted in writing or electronically to the Festival Commission Chair. The solution must maintain equality for all companies.

Disqualification

Failure to comply with festival rules and requirements will be grounds for disqualification. The decision of the Festival Commissioner is final. In the situation

where a disqualification takes place, the company will be notified on site, but no public announcement shall be made.

The Festival Commissioner will also notify the contact person for the disqualified company by mail or electronically, and will send copies to the Festival Commission Chair and the AACT office within one week of the close of the festival. The notification should include a reference to the Handbook section dealing with the violation.

Entrants

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 is eligible to enter the festival process. Fairly administered limits on the number of performing theatres in a festival, 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. However, festivals with showcase productions only will not be considered part of the AACTFest cycle and no Commissioner will be assigned. Any production that participates in a state or regional festival in a given festival cycle may not be reentered in the next festival cycle. In addition, a production must be originally mounted by the presenting organization and may not appear as an “imported” production, mounted independent of the presenting theatre.

The production ranked in balloting as second, or third in the case of two productions moving on, shall be considered the official alternate at the next level in case a selected production is unable to advance.

State festivals with four or more entered companies may send two adjudicated productions to the appropriate regional festival. The AACT Vice President for Festivals has authority to appoint one production to represent a state or region when no official festival has been conducted. All productions appointed to the National Festival from a region that does not hold a Regional Festival must have been adjudicated, at the theatre’s expense, by an adjudicator approved by the Vice President for Festivals or his/her designee. If more than one production is interested in advancing from the State level to Regional, one of two selection methods must be utilized:

1. A festival must be held to select an advancing company.
2. All productions must be adjudicated by the same adjudicator at the theatres’ expense. Use of this method and the adjudicator must be approved by the Vice President for Festivals or his/her designee.

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.

A twelfth company is selected from the region with the highest number of non-showcase, eligible productions in AACTFest state festivals during the cycle. In the absence of a production advancing from a region, resulting in an additional slot opening, the same criteria will be applied, i.e. the region with the second highest number of non-showcase productions will send a second representative. Region IV is not eligible for this process as it already has two productions advancing.

If only one state in the region hosts a festival and there are no productions appointed from the other states in the region, the winning production may advance directly to the national festival.

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. Musicians for a production may be paid if participating only for musical accompaniment. 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 that production.

Persons who are active members of Actors' Equity or Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) may not under any circumstances be involved as an actor in an entering production at any level of AACTFest. All entering company actors are required to sign the Affidavit of AACTFest Actor Eligibility (Form T3).

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, including children's theatre productions intended for youth audiences and/or performed by children. The total length of the performance may not exceed sixty minutes (including introductions, scene changes, and curtain calls). Any element that 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 otherwise begin the experience of the play, it will be considered part of the sixty-minute performance time.

Following the performance, 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.

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

Productions selected to proceed must be performed in the same form at all levels, except that adjustments in staging may be made in response to adjudication at the prior level within the cycle or to allow for differences in stage facilities. Material may not be withdrawn except to allow for easier compliance with timing issues. Actor substitutions may not be made without written consent from the Festival Commission Chair; substitution requests must be for legitimate hardships. Substitution of musicians, production staff and technicians does not require consent; however, addition of crew or musicians does require consent.

Production Process

The company will be permitted to pre-assemble any portion of the set on site during load-in, or other pre-agreed times available to all companies, provided that the assembled scenery does not exceed the allotted storage space, and the process does not interfere with any other entrant or the reasonable rules of the host. Any assembly that cannot be accomplished during load-in or the pre-agreed times will need to be accomplished during the company's 80-minute rehearsal time.

All sets, props, special effects, etc. (everything utilized to present the production) must fit into a storage area and on-deck area (see definitions below). Exception: costumes and musical instruments, if they are not part of the set or used as properties in the production, need not fit in the storage or on-deck area. Costumes and make-up may be stored in the dressing room (if space allows), and put on prior to the performance. Each company will have a storage area of similar size and should be aware different theatre spaces will have different height clearances. The on-deck and storage areas 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 area immediately prior to rehearsal and performance and removed thereafter. Note: Items used during the production (props, costumes, etc.) may be struck to the on-deck area as soon as their use is complete.

On-deck area: The on-deck area is immediately adjacent to the performance area. It is the location from which the set-up starts and the strike ends. The on-deck area must be 100 square feet (no more, no less). While it can be of any shape, it is strongly suggested that the dimensions be 10' x 10' if at all possible. The national festival will have an on-deck area of 10' x 10'.

Storage Area: If there is not sufficient space to have an on-deck area for each company, it will be necessary for the host to provide storage areas. The storage area will be repository for all materials that will be placed in the on-deck area prior to set up/performance. The storage area may be any size or shape, but it must hold everything that will ultimately go in the on-deck area.

Companies must follow the festival venue's rules governing the use of weapons, pyrotechnics, and special effects. While the host facility should publish the necessary rules, it is ultimately the responsibility of the performing company to confirm whether or not a specific item is permissible. Backstage, onstage, house safety procedures, and other established safety policies of the host theatre must be followed at all times.

Each production is allowed a maximum ten minute set-up time and ten minute strike time. 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 timing will begin at that point, and the company will proceed with the set-up. The company is allowed to ask timers how much time remains in the set-up or strike period. When finished, the company may assemble as determined by the company and 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. After the performance, the strike will proceed in the same manner. **Technical and performance personnel need not gather in or near the on-deck area before and after set-up or before and after strike.** While it may be useful for the company to set a beginning and end position for the sake of keeping track of company members, their location will be at the discretion of the performing company and is not governed by festival rules.

Light and sound operators may begin the set-up period in their respective operations areas and remain there at the end of set-up, **and need not join the rest of the company during or after strike.** However, lighting and sound checks must be conducted within the 10-minute set-up time.

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 set-up 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. Spike tape will not be removed by the company during strike.

The production process (set-up, performance, strike) should continue without significant delay until complete. 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 Commissioner 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.

Entry Requirements

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

- Warranty of permission to perform the property from the leasing agent and/or author, and warranty of permission to perform the property as cut or altered; warranty that the theatre has obtained all other necessary rights (Form T2). It is wise to obtain performance permission for all three levels prior to the state festival.
- Festival Entry/Information Sheet (Form T1).
- Four scripts marked as intended to be performed. Do not photocopy any scripts without proper permission from the playwright or publisher. Additional scripts may be required for interpreters or other personnel, but only with sufficient notice to the company. Note: Because of the addition of an alternate adjudicator, five scripts will be required for the National festival.
- Entry and registration fees as required by specific festivals.
- Affidavit of AACTFest Eligibility for each actor (Form T3).
- Technical Information Form (Forms T4 a, b).
- Program information as requested by the festival.
- Proof of membership in state/regional associations and any other local applicable fees as required by the particular festival.
- A non-AACT member theatre must pay a festival fee equal to the amount of the lowest AACT Organizational membership made payable to AACT (prior to state festival only or at the time of appointment). This fee is waived for AACT members. Organizational membership in AACT is required at the regional level; the festival fee paid at the state festival may be applied to AACT membership during the membership year in which paid. The festival fee is not required for showcase productions that are ineligible to proceed.

Failure to comply with the AACTFest rules will be grounds for disqualification. If there are questions, they may be addressed to the Festival Commissioner or the Festival Commission Chair at any time. During the festival, the rulings of the Festival Commissioner are final.

Technical Specifications

Lights

The use of a basic festival lighting plot will be provided for all entering companies. The plot may not be altered. 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.

Special lighting is permitted; any special lighting must be set up during the 80-minute rehearsal period. The host may, at its discretion, set-up specials prior to the company's rehearsal if the same level of accommodation is provided to all groups. Lighting specials are limited to the use of six (6) circuits. Additional specials may be included if used in sets, such as strip lights or practicals, or carried by actors, including battery powered light emitting devices, if such specials are not incorporated into the house lighting system. To reiterate, **all specials used in the house system may use no more than six (6) circuits, dimmers and/or control channels.** The Host Technical Director must approve all instrumentation for lighting specials.

If it is necessary to replug, 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 set-up. 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.

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 obstruct other companies. In this case, the specials must either be relocated or set-up and struck as necessary by the host technical staff prior to the 10 minute set-up.

If a company elects to supplement the host facility's lighting equipment with portable control consoles, etc., 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 theatre may elect to program cues for the entering companies prior to the scheduled rehearsal times if the opportunity is offered 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.

Sound

The host theatre must have a functioning sound system with a minimum of a CD player, house speakers, a means of communication between all operator positions including backstage, a mixing board capable of accommodating the available sound sources, and at least one 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 obstructs other companies. Sound equipment 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 equipment must either be relocated or set-up and struck as necessary by the host technical staff prior to the 10 minute set-up.

There is no limit to the number of sound cues or effects used during the performance but any sound effect device, 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.

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 hung as long as it is not detrimental to other companies.

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 prior to the set up.

Emergencies

Only the Festival Commissioner or the Host Facility Coordinator (this may be the Festival Chair) may determine and declare a public safety problem. The designated representative of the company in performance may declare a problem with the theatre facility. In such case, the Festival Commissioner will immediately investigate the seriousness of the problem and the likely impact on the production. If the company stops its performance and the declaration is denied, the production will be disqualified. The disqualification will not be made public and the company will be notified of the disqualification following AACT policy. In any case, the performance may begin from the beginning or from the point of interruption, at the company's option, subject to local scheduling needs. Problems with the theatre facility should be invoked in only the most extreme of circumstances. Any declaration must be made while the performance is in progress; no claim will be entertained after the fact.