



2025 HANDBOOK

Festival Chair Guide



American Association of Community Theatre

AACTFest 2025 Handbook

Welcome to AACTFest 2025.

The *AACTFest Handbook* facilitates participation in AACT's festival program to celebrate theatrical creativity across the nation.

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This handbook will be in effect until the *AACTFest 2027 Handbook* is published.

Copies of the *AACTFest 2025 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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AACTFest 2025 Handbook

Festival Chair Guide

**** Festival Chair must read the entire AACT Festival Handbook, not just this section. The Festival Chair is responsible for the entire festival and needs to know all components, rules and information provided****

Overview

The official name for the festival process is AACTFest. The first five (5) letters are capitalized and the last three (3) letters are lower case. The name is eight (8) continuous letters with no intervening spaces or punctuation marks. The AACT and AACTFest logos are available from the AACT office and website, and may be used by festivals in the AACTFest process.

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 by creating an even playing field for all participants.

The festival chair/hosts will determine any and all specific awards that they wish the adjudicators to determine apart from the show rankings. A list of these awards will be provided to the Commissioner and the Adjudicators before the first performance.

Copies of the entire handbook or individual Guide sections can be downloaded at aact.org/handbook.

**** All Regional Festivals must be completed by April 15 of the festival year.****

Festival Commissioner

Festival Commissioners are assigned by the AACT Festivals Coordinator under authority of the Vice President for Festivals to provide assistance and serve as liaison between AACT and AACT festivals. (See Form F1)

The Commissioner is the official liaison between the state or regional festival and AACT.

The Commissioner will:

- Initiate and maintain communication with the Festival Chair and Technical Chair through the festival process, providing assistance as needed.
- Confirm the eligibility of the entering companies.
- Conduct the Production Meeting(s); attend rehearsals and performances.
- Conduct the adjudication orientation and assign adjudicator evaluations.

- Verify each production's time with the official festival timekeepers.
- Serve as the ballot tallying officer.
- Complete the final report.

In matters of dispute during the festival, the Commissioner makes the final ruling. Any questions or discussion of disqualification is made through the Festival Commissioner. The Commissioner shall not be affiliated with any competitive production entered in the festival to which s/he has been assigned. Festival registration fees are waived for the Commissioner. The Festival Host may provide lodging as well, but this is not required.

House Policies

The host theatre facility's house regulations will apply as pertains to smoking areas, food and beverage consumption, admission of children, etc.

The use of recording devices is not allowed during performances except those officially designated by the Festival Chair. The official photographer may not use any kind of flash or distracting light, and must be as unobtrusive as possible. If a performing group feels photography will be detrimental to their performance, the group may request an alternative solution from the Festival Chair or Festival Commissioner. Performing companies may record the adjudications of their respective performances.

The house must be closed during the performance, but must remain open during set-up and strike. Anyone who leaves during the performance may not return until the performance has ended, except if the facility allows for reentry without distraction (e.g. a balcony entrance separate from the main seating area).

Facilities

The Festival Chair and host must provide a proper theatre facility unless granted exception by the AACT Vice President for Festivals. The stage of the theatre is required to be in working order and fitted to mount productions.

All theatre facilities relevant to the Festival, must be accessible without restriction to the Festival Chair, Festival Commissioner, and appropriate AACT staff at all times during the run of the festival including during the performances. The facilities may include (but are not limited to) backstage, dressing rooms, light, sound, and other control booths.

Safety procedures and reasonable policies of the host theatre are to be followed at all times.

Technical Information

Detailed technical information is contained in the *AACTFest 2025 Handbook*, The Basics, Technical Specifications.

Personnel

Each festival, at all levels, must have a designated

- technical director
- host stage manager
- two timekeepers (one backstage and one in the house)
- equipment operator(s)
- other personnel as necessary to keep the festival moving in a timely order

While light and sound operation by performing groups is at the host's option, there must be someone capable of running the equipment, if necessary, present at all rehearsals and performances.

Company Packets

The Chair will distribute to all entering companies and the AACT Commissioner, a packet giving all times, dates, places, and other information. An electronic version of the packet - accessible online to all entering companies is allowed. The packet should include:

- The deadline for sending all materials required by the *AACTFest 2025 Handbook*
- Names with addresses, email addresses, and phone numbers of Festival Chair and Technical Director
- Tentative schedule, to be updated when number of entries is known
- Registration information for the festival
- Hotel information
- Floor plan of the theatre and stage ground plan
- Theatre technical specifications
- Light and sound plots and other technical information such as fly ability, soft goods plan, on-deck and storage area details, etc.
- Accessibility issues of the facility and provisions to request access assistance. Notice of ASL interpretation or captioning, if provided
- Maps and city information

Regional packets with the aforementioned information should be prepared by the Regional Festival Chair and sent to the chairs of the state festivals within the region and the AACT office. The packets must be received by the State Chair at least 20 days prior to each state's festival. (Exceptions may be granted by the AACT VP for Festivals.) The State Festival Chair will deliver the regional packet to the company (or companies) whose productions have been selected to proceed.

Company Documents

At each level, every company must provide several documents to the festival chair before the festival begins. The Festival Chair should provide companies a deadline for the required material 30 days prior to the start of State/Regional/National festivals. These documents may be, but are not limited to:

- AACTFest Registration forms T1-T4
- State Festival Registration form and fee (if required by your state)
- AACT Membership (if not already an AACT member)

See the *AACTFest 2023 Handbook*, The Basics, Entry Requirements for details. After the festival, the Festival Commissioner will collect the documents and scripts of the advancing companies and assure their transfer to the next level festival's chair.

Production Meeting

A production meeting (15-30 minutes) must be held separately with the company's members, including cast, crew, musicians, etc., prior to the company's rehearsal time. The session must be held in the theatre and should include a tour of the facility, notably: backstage, dressing rooms, scenic storage and 10x10, as well as any access paths needed by the company (i.e. to FOH, backstage entrance doors, etc.). The Festival Commissioner will conduct the meeting in conjunction with the Host Technical Director and Host Stage Manager. While it is preferable for all company members to attend, it is not mandatory. However this will be a company member's only chance to see the facility prior to their performance.

Each facility and festival is unique, and as such, adaptations may be necessary for local conditions. Most items covered in the production meeting are a reiteration of information supplied by the individual companies on the technical questionnaire. (See Form F3)

Technical Rehearsal

The festival schedule shall include an 80-minute slot for each competing company at some time prior to their performance time and after the production meeting has taken place. This is not required for showcases. **Note:** This rehearsal may not necessarily be scheduled on the same day as performance. The Commissioner will supervise the technical rehearsal restricted to the company members, Festival Chair, Commissioner, house technical/stage crew, and appropriate AACT staff present at the festival. The Festival Chair, unless they are associated with another company performing at the festival, may attend as needed.

Adjudicators

Care should be taken in adjudicator selection. Adjudicators must possess a wide range of theatrical training and experience, and the skills to provide constructive feedback in a supportive manner. This selection process should begin many months prior to the festival as experienced adjudicators are in demand and not always available.

- It is the responsibility of the host to research and determine the validity and appropriateness of prospective adjudicators. The quality of the festival experience will increase if adjudicator choices are based on careful research. The chair is urged to seek assistance from the Vice President for Festivals or appropriate AACT staff. Adjudicator evaluations will be provided online upon request.
- If a competing theatre is also the festival host, the task of selecting prospective adjudicators must be performed by someone other than the host. Selection of adjudicators cannot be made by anyone who is affiliated with an entered production or personally connected with the host theatre.
- In addition, anyone specifically involved with a production from any company participating in a festival who has any “hands-on” duties, such as a director, actor, musician, or technician, is not allowed to choose the adjudicators for the festival or serve as Festival Chair.
- Once prospective adjudicators have been selected, they are submitted for approval by the VP for Festivals by emailing a resume or background.
- AACT VP for Festivals must approve all adjudicators used at any level of the AACTFest cycle. Once approved by VP for Festivals, the AACT office must be notified of the festival adjudicator selection or sent a copy of Form C2.
- The national adjudicators are allowed to adjudicate a maximum of two state festivals during the cycle. They may not adjudicate at the regional level.
- Prospective adjudicators at all levels should be sent the *AACTFest 2025 Handbook*, Adjudication Guide with the contract.
- A prospective adjudicator who has reservations about any of the responsibilities or guidelines should not be utilized. It is strongly suggested adjudicators sign a contract stating what is expected of them and what they should expect in return. See Form C3 for a sample contract.
- Each adjudicator should be provided with travel, local transportation, hotel accommodations, food (in the form of direct purchase, reimbursement, or per diem), admission to all festival social events, and a local host. In the interest of acquiring highly qualified adjudicators, an honorarium is strongly recommended.
- The Festival Commissioner will conduct an orientation session with the adjudicators prior to the first performance. A maximum of one hour should be scheduled for the session with attendance limited to the Adjudicators, Adjudicator Hosts, Festival Chair, Festival Co-Chair or Assistant, Technical Director (or designee), Festival Stage Manager, timekeepers, and appropriate AACT staff present at the festival.
- At the end of this meeting, the Adjudicators will choose the seat in the theatre from which they will view each production. Once the Adjudicator chooses their seat, when possible, the seats immediately in front, behind and to each side will be blocked off.
- Adjudicators are required to use a microphone and must be lit when presenting their comments. They may sit or stand, but they must be visible to the entire audience.
- It is strongly recommended that the festival schedule include time, following the awards presentation, for adjudicators to meet one-on-one with the directors of advancing companies.

AACTFest 2025 Handbook

Festival Chair Checklist

This checklist is meant to be a guide. Some items may not pertain to your festival but the starred (*) items are ones that should be checked for everyone. Please contact Mary Jo DeNolf at maryjo@aact.org if you have any questions or concerns.

6-12 months prior

- ☐ * [AACT Festival form - C1](#)
- ☐ Secure Venue for event - please refer to handbook for specifications
- ☐ Secure Host Hotel and room night rate
- ☐ Set up meeting with AACT staff to go over questions and concerns you may have
- ☐ Set Budget for the festival
- ☐ Arrange for Festival Committee: to include Festival Chair, Technical Director, Host Stage Manager, two time keepers, equipment operators and other members/volunteers as you see fit

6-8 months prior

- ☐ * [AACT Adjudicator Information - C2](#)
- ☐ Promote Festival thru all means of communication
- ☐ Secure sponsors for event such as restaurants for afterglows or advertisers for programs
- ☐ Set up Individual registration form/fee
- ☐ Set up Ticket costs and set up through ticketing software
- ☐ Plan Afterglows / Award ceremonies if using

3-4 months prior

- ☐ * Adjudicator contracts sent and signed ([C3](#) is example)
- ☐ * [AACTFest Company Entry Form - T1](#)
- ☐ Applicable fees - such as AACT membership or Festival entry fee for State/Region
- ☐ Send Hotel information to all companies as they register
- ☐ Contact AACT assigned Commissioner
- ☐ Send Theatre specs to companies (sound, lights, stage dimensions, etc)
- ☐ Plan out schedule of events - leaving room to adjust as group information comes in

1-2 months prior

- ☐ *[AACTFest Company Compliance - T2](#)
- ☐ *AACTFest Affidavits of Actor Eligibility T3- printable from website, signature needed.
- ☐ *[AACTFest Program Information](#)
- ☐ Make schedule for event (leaving room for adjustments if needed)
- ☐ [AACTFest Technical Information - T4](#)
share with on-site Tech Director
- ☐ Send Schedule of event to all companies - keep in mind rehearsal schedule must include 15-20 minute meeting with Commissioner and 80 minute rehearsal onstage

30 days prior

- ☐ In House Program information, if using, to printer (C4 information provided to use in playbill)
- ☐ *Scripts (as cut) sent to adjudicators for perusal (no photocopies are permitted without written permission from the author/agent)

2 weeks prior

- ☐ Awards information sent to adjudicators prior to arrival (C5 is a list of suggested AACT awards, others may be given at State/Regional level but must be given to adjudicators prior to the festival)
- ☐ Finalize all details with onsite committee

