



# **2027 HANDBOOK**

## **Festival Chair Guide**



American Association of Community Theatre  
**AACTFest 2027 Handbook**

Welcome to AACTFest 2027

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 2029 Handbook* is published.

Copies of the *AACTFest 2027 Handbook* are available from the AACT office for a nominal fee or can be downloaded free from the AACT website at [aact.org/handbook](http://aact.org/handbook).

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American Association of Community Theatre  
**AACTFest 2027 Handbook**  
**Festival Chair Guide**

**Festival Chair Responsibility**

**The Festival Chair must read the entire AACT Festival Handbook—not just this section.** The Festival Chair is responsible for the full scope of the festival and must be familiar with all components, rules, and information provided.

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**Overview**

The official name for the festival process is **AACTFest**. The first five (5) letters are capitalized and the last three (3) letters are lowercase. The name consists of eight (8) continuous letters with no spaces or punctuation.

AACT and AACTFest logos are available from the AACT office and website and may be used by festivals participating in the AACTFest process.

AACT's primary festival focus is on the productions. All rules, guidelines, and decisions are intended to benefit the participating companies by ensuring a fair and equitable playing field.

The Festival Chair and host organization may determine additional awards, beyond production rankings, for adjudicators to assign. A list of these awards must be provided to the Festival Commissioner and adjudicators prior to the first performance.

Copies of the full handbook, or individual guide sections, are available at [aact.org/handbook](http://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 the authority of the Vice President of Festivals, to serve as the official liaison between AACT and each festival (see Form F1).

The Commissioner will:

- Initiate and maintain communication with the Festival Chair and Technical Chair throughout the festival process, providing guidance and support as needed.
- Confirm the eligibility of all participating companies.
- Conduct production meeting(s) and attend rehearsals and performances.
- Conduct adjudication orientation and assign adjudicator evaluations.
- Verify each production's running time with official festival timekeepers.
- Serve as the ballot tallying officer.
- Complete and submit the final report.

Once assigned, an introductory meeting will be scheduled between the Festival host/committee, the AACT Commissioner, and AACT staff to address introductions, questions, and expectations.

In the event of disputes during the festival, the Commissioner has final authority. Any questions regarding eligibility or potential disqualification must be directed to the Commissioner. The Commissioner must not be affiliated with any competing production in the assigned festival.

Festival registration fees are waived for the Commissioner.

Lodging may be provided by the Festival Host but is not required.

## **House Policies**

Host venue policies apply to all attendees, including regulations regarding smoking, food and beverage, and admission of children.

Recording of performances is prohibited, except by individuals officially designated by the Festival Chair. The official photographer must not use flash or any distracting lighting and must remain as unobtrusive as possible. If a performing group believes photography will negatively impact their production, they may request accommodations through the Festival Chair or Commissioner.

Performing companies may record adjudications of their own productions.

The house must remain closed during performances. However, it must remain open during set-up and strike. Patrons who leave during a performance may not re-enter until the performance concludes, unless the facility allows re-entry without disruption (such as a separate balcony entrance).

It is recommended that the festival begin with an opening ceremony, including introductions of Festival staff, adjudicators, and the AACT Commissioner, along with a brief overview of the AACTFest process and applicable house rules.

## **Facilities**

The Festival Chair and host organization must provide an appropriate theatre facility unless an exception is granted by the AACT Vice President for Festivals. The stage must be fully operational and suitable for mounting productions.

All festival-related facilities—including backstage areas, dressing rooms, lighting and sound control booths, and other technical spaces—must be accessible to the Festival Chair, Festival Commissioner, and authorized AACT staff at all times during the festival, including performances.

All participants must adhere to established safety procedures and reasonable policies of the host theatre at all times.

# Technical Information

Detailed technical requirements are outlined in the *AACTFest 2027 Handbook, The Basics: Technical Specifications*.

Each festival, at all levels, must designate the following personnel:

- Technical Director (all technical questions must be directed to this individual)
- Host Stage Manager
- Two (2) official timekeepers (one backstage and one in the house)
- Equipment operator(s)
- Additional personnel as necessary to ensure the festival runs efficiently and on schedule

While performing groups may be permitted to operate their own lighting and sound equipment at the discretion of the Festival Host, a qualified operator must be present at all rehearsals and performances to run equipment if needed.

## **Company Packets**

The Festival Chair will distribute a comprehensive information packet to all participating companies and the AACT Commissioner (see checklist example). An electronic version accessible online is acceptable.

The packet should include:

- Deadlines for submission of all materials required by the *AACTFest 2027 Handbook*
- Contact information (name, address, email, phone) for the Festival Chair and Technical Director
- Tentative schedule (to be updated once the number of entries is confirmed)
- Festival registration information
- Hotel and lodging information
- Theatre floor plan and stage ground plan
- Technical specifications of the theatre
- Lighting and sound plots, including additional technical details (e.g., fly system capability, soft goods plot, on-deck and storage areas)
- Accessibility information, including how to request accommodations, and notice of ASL interpretation or captioning if available
- Maps and local area information

### **Regional Festivals:**

Regional Festival Chairs must prepare and distribute packets containing the above information to State Festival Chairs within the region and to the AACT office. These packets must be received at least twenty (20) days prior to each state festival. Exceptions may be granted by the AACT Vice President for Festivals.

State Festival Chairs are responsible for forwarding the regional packet to the company or companies selected to advance.

### **Company Documents**

At each level, participating companies must submit required documentation to the Festival Chair in advance of the festival. The Festival Chair must establish a submission deadline no later than thirty (30) days prior to the start of the State, Regional, or National festival.

Required materials may include, but are not limited to:

- AACTFest Registration Forms (T1–T4)
- State Festival registration form and fee (if applicable)
- Proof of AACT membership (if not already a member)

Refer to the *AACTFest 2027 Handbook, The Basics: Entry Requirements* for complete details.

Following the festival, the Festival Commissioner will collect documentation and scripts from advancing companies and ensure their transfer to the next level Festival Chair.

### **Production Meeting**

A production meeting (15–30 minutes) must be conducted with each participating company prior to its scheduled technical rehearsal. This meeting should include cast, crew, musicians, and other key personnel.

All company schedules must include this meeting, which will take place in the theatre and include a facility tour. The tour should cover:

- Backstage areas
- Dressing rooms
- Scenic storage and 10x10 space
- Access routes (e.g., front-of-house, backstage entrances, loading areas)

The Festival Commissioner will conduct the meeting in coordination with the Host Technical Director and Host Stage Manager.

While attendance by all company members is encouraged, it is not required. However, this meeting is the only opportunity for company members to view the facility prior to their performance.

Because each venue and festival is unique, adjustments may be made to accommodate local conditions. Information reviewed during the meeting will largely reiterate details provided in the company's technical questionnaire (see Form F3).

## **Technical Rehearsal**

The festival schedule must include an eighty (80)-minute technical rehearsal slot for each competing company. This rehearsal must occur after the production meeting and prior to the performance. (This requirement does not apply to showcase productions.)

Technical rehearsals may be scheduled on a different day than the performance.

The Festival Commissioner will supervise all technical rehearsals. Attendance is limited to:

- Company members
- Festival Chair
- Festival Commissioner
- Host technical and stage crew
- Authorized AACT staff

The Festival Chair may attend as needed, provided they are not affiliated with a competing production.

# Adjudicators

## 1. Selection

- Adjudicators must have extensive theatrical training, experience, and the ability to provide constructive, supportive feedback.
- Begin the selection process several months in advance; qualified adjudicators are in high demand.
- Refer to [AACT Guidelines for Choosing State or Regional AACT Adjudicators](#).

## 2. Host Responsibilities

- Hosts must research and verify the qualifications of all prospective adjudicators.
- Careful research increases the quality of the festival experience.
- The Festival Chair is encouraged to consult the **AACT Vice President for Festivals** or AACT staff.
- Adjudicator evaluations are available online upon request.

## 3. Conflict of Interest

- If a competing theatre is also the festival host, adjudicator selection must be done by an individual not affiliated with that theatre.
- Individuals with any direct involvement in a participating production (director, actor, musician, technician, etc.) **may not** select adjudicators or serve as Festival Chair.
- No person with personal connections to an entered production or the host theatre may be involved in adjudicator selection.

## 4. Approval Process

- Submit resumes or background materials for all prospective adjudicators to the **AACT VP for Festivals** for approval.
- All adjudicators used at any level of the AACTFest cycle must receive VP approval.
- Once approved, notify the AACT office or submit **Form C2** listing the adjudicators.

## 5. National Adjudicators

- National adjudicators may adjudicate **no more than two state festivals** during the cycle.
- National adjudicators **may not** serve at the regional level.

## 6. Required Materials

- Provide all prospective adjudicators with:
  - **AACTFest 2027 Handbook**
  - **Adjudication Guide**
  - Contract (see **Form C3** sample contract)

- If an adjudicator cannot agree to the responsibilities or guidelines, they should not be selected. A signed contract outlining expectations is strongly recommended.

## 7. Compensation & Hospitality

Each adjudicator should be provided with:

- Travel and local transportation
- Hotel accommodations  
Food (direct purchase, reimbursement, or per diem)
- Admission to all festival social events
- A local host
- An honorarium (strongly recommended)

## 8. Orientation

- The Festival Commissioner conducts an adjudicator orientation prior to the first performance.
- Schedule up to one hour.
- Attendance is limited to:
  - Adjudicators
  - Adjudicator Hosts
  - Festival Chair
  - Co-Chair or Assistant  
Technical Director (or designee)
  - Festival Stage Manager  
Timekeepers
  - Appropriate AACT staff

## 9. Seating

- At the end of orientation, adjudicators select their viewing seat.
- When possible, block the seats directly in front of, behind, and beside the adjudicator.

## 10. Adjudication Delivery

- Adjudicators must:
  - Use a microphone
  - Be lit while speaking
  - Remain visible to the full audience (standing or seated)

## 11. Director Meetings

- It is strongly recommended that time be scheduled **after the awards ceremony** for adjudicators to meet one-on-one with directors of advancing productions.

# AACTFest 2027 Handbook

## Festival Chair Checklist

This checklist is intended as a guide. Some items may not apply to every festival; however, all starred (\*) items are required.

For questions or concerns, please contact Mary Jo DeNolf at [maryjo@aact.org](mailto:maryjo@aact.org).

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### 6–12 Months Prior

- \* *AACT Festival Form – C1*
  - Secure venue for the event (refer to handbook for specifications)
  - Secure host hotel and establish room block and nightly rate
  - Schedule a meeting with AACT staff to review questions and expectations
  - Establish festival budget
  - Form Festival Committee, including:
    - Festival Chair
    - Technical Director
    - Host Stage Manager
    - Two (2) timekeepers
    - Equipment operators
    - Additional volunteers/personnel as needed
  - \* Identify prospective adjudicators and submit for approval to the AACT Vice President for Festivals (include résumé or background)
  - \* *Ensure all adjudicators are approved by the AACT VP for Festivals*
  - \* Notify AACT office of adjudicator selections or submit Form C2
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### 6–8 Months Prior

- \* *AACT Adjudicator Information – C2*
  - Promote festival through all available communication channels
  - Secure sponsors (e.g., restaurants for afterglows, program advertisers)
  - Develop individual registration form and fee structure
  - Set ticket pricing and implement ticketing platform
  - Plan afterglows and awards ceremonies (if applicable)
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### 3–4 Months Prior

- \* *Send and obtain signed adjudicator contracts (C3 example)*
- \* *Distribute AACTFest Company Entry Form – T1*
- Collect applicable fees (AACT membership and/or State/Regional festival fees)

- Send company packets (see example), including:
    - Hotel information
    - Lighting plots
    - Stage dimensions
    - Sound specifications
    - Floor plans and other technical information
  - Send registration materials to individual attendees not affiliated with performing companies
  - \* *Contact assigned AACT Festival Commissioner*
  - Participate in AACT-coordinated meeting with Festival Chair, AACT staff, and Commissioner (introductions, questions, expectations)
  - Develop preliminary festival schedule (allow flexibility as entries are finalized)
  - \* Distribute scripts to adjudicators (five [5] scripts per company required)
  - Prepare for festival operations, including session introductions and company hospitality
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### **At-Festival Duties**

- Conduct opening session, including introductions of Festival staff, adjudicators, and AACT Commissioner
  - Ensure all participating companies are welcomed and supported throughout the festival
  - Oversee daily operations and maintain adherence to schedule
  - Coordinate production meetings and technical rehearsals
  - Ensure adjudications are conducted in accordance with AACT guidelines
  - Support front-of-house and backstage operations as needed
  - Monitor hospitality events, including afterglows and awards ceremonies
  - Address questions or issues in coordination with the Festival Commissioner
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### **Wrap-Up Duties**

- Coordinate post-festival handling of scripts and materials for advancing companies
  - Confirm where and when scripts must be sent to the next level festival
  - Ensure Festival Commissioner has all required documentation
  - Complete and submit any required reports to AACT
  - Send acknowledgments to volunteers, sponsors, adjudicators, and participating companies
  - Conduct a post-festival evaluation with the Festival Committee
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### **Notes**

Examples of company packets should be included in the appendix or supporting materials.