



AACTFest  
2021 Invitational  
Handbook

American Association of Community Theatre



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**AACTFest 2021 Invitational Handbook**

Welcome to AACTFest 2021. The *AACTFest Handbook* facilitates participation in AACT's festival program to celebrate theatrical creativity across the nation.

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Copies of the *AACTFest 2021 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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OF COMMUNITY THEATRE

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**AACTFest 2021 Invitational Handbook**  
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Company Forms available at [aact.org/handbook](http://aact.org/handbook)

# American Association of Community Theatre

## **AACTFest 2021 Invitational Handbook**

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.

### **National Invitational Festival**

The festival system—the state-to-regional process that chooses productions featured at nationals—has been compromised by COVID-19. For AACTFest 2021 to go forward representing outstanding productions from across the nation, a one-time-only invitational system has been developed. This is in recognition of the inability of many theatres to attend a state or regional festival and of all theatres' precarious financial statuses.

- AACT will accept applications from member theatres that want to be considered for the national festival and are willing to put forth a production to be judged by traveling adjudicators within a set timeline. On-line application deadline will be October 31, 2020.
- Those applications will be reviewed with follow-up interviews and, from the pool of applicants, twenty-five theatres will be chosen for adjudication to determine national entries. Those theatres may choose to perform whatever play they wish.
- Theatres may present a full-length production within their season or present a cutting specifically for the festival to be reviewed by traveling adjudicators. If a full-length production is viewed, the theatre must also have a 60-minute cut version of the script along with permission to do so. At AACTFest 2021 in Louisville all festival rules will apply.
- For a production to be considered, it must be performed for adjudicators between November 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021.
- Five sets of two adjudicators hired by AACT will attend productions. Each set will see a roster of five productions and from that field nominate two. If less than two productions on a roster are not fully realized enough to come to a national festival, responding adjudicators may opt to pass their vote to another set.

- A full set of criteria used by adjudicators will be made available to the producing theatres.
- When a set of adjudicators attends, there will be time either directly following the performance or early the next day to offer feedback to the director and/or company.
- From the twenty-five productions eight to twelve productions will be selected to perform at AACTFest 2021 in Louisville. Each theatre will receive \$3,100 to aid with travel.
- Whereas there is focus on providing national representation by including as many regions as possible, the main goal is to select excellent productions. Adjudicators will only be instructed to choose the top fully realized productions.
- Region X has an adjudication process in place that will produce their contribution to the festival.

Given the uncertainty of these times, there may be few applications. Should that be the case, AACT reserves the right to solicit theatres to provide a full roster of productions.

If a state or regional festival does go forward, winners will be announced and celebrated at AACTFest 2021. Participation in a state or regional festival does not prohibit a theatre from applying to the invitational.

No festival commissioners will be used in this process; however, once a play is selected for performance at AACTFest 2021, a mentor will be assigned to assist with meeting national festival standards and rules.

## **Administration**

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

## **Focus**

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

## 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 their achievement through an appropriate adjudication process.
- To develop enlightened and discerning audiences for community theatre.

## General Rules for the National Festival

- All selected theatre companies must meet the same eligibility standards and requirements.
- It is the responsibility of each selected company to read the entire AACTFest 2021 Handbook and comply with all of the rules.
- 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 National Technical Liaison and National Commissioner, will be scheduled in the theatre facility for each competing company. Please note: This rehearsal will not necessarily be scheduled the same day as performance. The house must be closed at the start of and then during each performance. It must remain open for set-up and strike.

## Censorship

AACT policy permits the widest possible range of dramatic material to be performed in any 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.

## **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 may be grounds for disqualification. The decision of the Vice President for Festivals is final. When a disqualification takes place, the company will be notified on site, but no public announcement shall be made.

The Vice President for Festivals 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**

Any amateur theatre organized for at least one year prior to the state festival, that has produced at least two shows prior to the national festival entry is eligible to enter the festival process.

## ***Company Members***

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. 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 determines the end of 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 adjudicators 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. Productions selected must follow the same concept as when viewed during the selection process; a production cut to one hour from a full length play must have the essential quality of the theatre's original presentation. Adjustments in staging may be made in response to adjudication or to allow for differences in stage facilities.

## **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 the assembled scenery does not exceed the allotted storage space, and the process does not interfere with any other performing company 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 used to present the production) must fit into a storage area and on-deck area (see definitions below). Exceptions are 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. The National Festival will have an on-deck area of 10' x10'.

### **Storage Area:**

If there is not sufficient space to have an on-deck area for each company, it will be necessary for the facility 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 facility should publish the necessary rules, it is ultimately the responsibility of the performing company to confirm whether or not a specific item or action 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 finished, the company may assemble as determined by the company and the company spokesperson will again signal the festival stage manager that set-up has ended. 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. However, such a breach may lead to disqualification. Immediately after the strike, company members are usually seated in the front rows in the auditorium for the adjudication.

## National Festival Documentation

The AACT office will provide companies a deadline for the required material. Each company must provide the following to the AACT office before the festival begins: 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). Festival Entry/Information Sheet (Form T1).

- Five 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.
- Entry and registration fees.
- Affidavit of AACTFest Eligibility for each actor (Form T3).
- Technical Information Form (Forms T4 a, b).
- Program information as requested by the festival.
- Organizational membership in AACT is required for National festival participation.

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 Vice President for Festivals are final.

## Emergencies

Only the Festival Commissioner or the Facility Coordinator or the National Technical Liaison 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 a production is stopped, 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.

# Technical Specifications

## *Lights*

The use of a basic festival lighting plot will be provided for all companies. The plot may not be altered. The AACT office will 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, setup 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 National Technical Liaison 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 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 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 AACT may set reasonable conditions for the service, such as a specific deadline for submission of cue parameters prior to the festival.

## ***Sound***

The theatre will 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 three microphones for use by both the companies and the adjudicators. Companies must bring their own laptop for sound f/x playback.

If a company elects to supplement existing equipment, the company's equipment may be set up during the company's rehearsal period and the National Technical Liaison 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 National Technical Liaison 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 facility must approve scenic devices requiring set up in the "house" of the theatre. The theatre may override placement of any special devices if deemed a hazard. The devices should be set up during the company's technical rehearsal. The National Technical Liaison may determine a scenic element should stay in place to prevent potential injury and may allow a scenic element to stay hung if 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 National Technical Liaison to initiate the warmup process prior to the set up.