



2025 HANDBOOK



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.

For questions or other information:

Bob Frame

Vice President for Festivals
Cell/Home: 315-406-2139
Framer@cayuga-cc.edu

Chris Serface

Festival Commission Chair
Cell/Home: 360-556-5735
chris@tacomalittletheatre.com

Mary Jo DeNolf

AACT Festivals/EngagementCoordinator
Cell/Home: 616-822-0006
maryjo@aact.org

American Association of Community Theatre

PO Box 101476, Fort Worth, TX 76185-1476
817-732-3177 Fax: 817-732-3178
info@aact.org
aact.org

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

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American Association of Community Theatre

AACTFest 2025 Handbook

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 eleven 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 2025 Handbook* and comply with all of the rules.
- Each festival must be held in a functioning theatre facility, unless granted an exception by the AACT Vice President for Festivals.
- Productions advancing to the regional or national level must be the same performance. The script, actors, design elements, and blocking must be consistent with the original entry unless an adjudicator suggests a change. If there is a change necessitated by facility limitations, this requires 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. **Please note:** This rehearsal will not necessarily be scheduled the same day as performance. The house must be closed at the start of and 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, AACT Festival/ Engagement Coordinator, 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 regarding disqualification must first be addressed to the Commissioner. The Commissioner verifies each production's time with the official festival timekeepers and, if a violation occurs, the Commissioner will notify the company in violation following the completion of the festival.

Focus

AACT's primary festival focus is on the productions. AACTFest rules, guidelines, and decisions are made for the benefit of the entering companies by creating an even playing field for all participants.

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, therefore, 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.
- The house must be closed at the start of and then during each performance. It must remain open for set-up and strike.

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 (email) to the VP for Festivals and copied to Festival Commission Chair and AACT Festival Coordinator. 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. When 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 that has been organized for at least one year prior to the state festival, and has produced at least two shows prior to the state festival is eligible to enter the festival process. (This applies only to new theatres entering the AACT process)
- At the state level, a host may decide to limit the number of entrants if there are resource constraints; however, the limitations must be immediately announced, and companies accepted on a first come-first served basis.
- 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 only showcase productions will not be considered part of the AACTFest cycle, and no Commissioner will be assigned.
- Any production participating 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.
- State festivals with four or more AACT eligible entered companies shall send two adjudicated productions to the appropriate regional festival.
- In festivals where one production advances, balloting must rank productions first through third place. If the selected company is unable to advance, the second and third ranked shows are considered official alternates, respectively. In festivals where two productions advance, balloting must rank productions first through sixth place. (NOTE: If there are fewer than six productions, ranking is just through the entire slate.) If the selected company is unable to advance, the third, fourth, fifth and sixth ranked shows are considered official alternates, respectively.
- If a company decides not to advance to the next level, the alternate assumes the same rehearsal and performance slot originally scheduled for the advancing production.
- Appointments: 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 - or only one theatre wants to participate.
- All productions appointed to the National Festival from a region not holding 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 used:

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) are entered into the national festival.

A twelfth company is selected from the region with the highest number of eligible productions in its AACTFest state festivals during the cycle. Note: This does not include showcased productions. If a region does not advance a show and a second slot in the national festival opens, the same criteria will apply to the region with the second highest number of eligible productions in its state festivals during the cycle.

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

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 each 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. Lines or business may not be removed 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, costume changes, special effects, etc. (everything utilized to present the production) must fit into a storage area and on-deck area (see definitions below). Exceptions are costumes and musical instruments, which need not fit in the storage or on-deck areas if they are not part of the set or used as properties in the production. If space allows, primary costumes and make-up may be stored in the dressing room, and changed into 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 the 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; everything must be ready and in place, on stage and backstage for the show to start. Cast and crew can still move to “places”. 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. They do not **need to join the rest of the company during or after strike**. If these operators assist in the on-stage set-up **they must be in their show positions before “stop” is called**. 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 any and all 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:

The Festival Chair should provide companies a deadline for the required material.

At each level, each company must provide the following to the Festival Chair before the festival begins.

- [Festival Entry/Information Sheet \(Form T1\)](#).
- 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.
- 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 \(Forms T4 a, b\)](#). Companies advancing to regional and the national festival must re-submit Forms T4 a & b, reflecting any corrections and/or changes, to the AACT office for the next festival chair, or for the the National Festival Technical Director to the national festival liaison.
- 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.
- AACT Non-Member theatres are required to pay a \$100 authorization fee. This fee qualifies you to participate and advance in the AACT National Festival Cycle. Fee includes a one-year AACT introductory membership. Fee does not include state, regional, or national registration costs. Those fees are determined by the host association and facility.

Failure to comply with the AACTFest rules are 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:

For the 2025 Festival in DesMoines Iowa, there will be an 8 x 8 door frame from the on deck storage to the stage. **This is only for the national festival only.**

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.

It is the responsibility of the performing company to coordinate any additions to the Festival Lighting Plot with the House Technical Director PRIOR to arriving at the Festival Theatre.

When part of the inventory, the Host theatre may offer the use of a followspot. If the followspot needs to be rented, the cost will be shared by all companies requesting its use. A company may supply their own followspot, providing the Host Technical Director approves of this use.

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, if such specials are not incorporated into the house lighting system.

A performing company may provide moving lighting instruments and/or LED fixtures to be used as specials, providing the Host Theatre Facility can accommodate their use. Each moving lighting instrument will count as one special no matter how many times it is used. The programming and focusing of these specials must be accomplished during a performing company's 80-minute tech rehearsal. The Host Technical Director must approve all instrumentation for lighting specials. This approval must be requested prior to the Festival.

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.

During their technical rehearsal time a company will program the lighting looks/cues needed for their performance. These cues will be stored on the Lighting console if it has memory capability. 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, a hook up for a laptop computer, house speakers, and a mixing board capable of accommodating the available sound sources. There should be at least one to three house microphone for use by both the companies as a special sound source and by the adjudicators. There needs to be a means of communication between all operator positions including backstage, sound & light control and spotlights if used. When possible, the Host Facility should have onstage speakers available as playback monitors for actors to hear music or important sound F/X.

The Host Facility is NOT expected to provide body mics for actor sound reinforcement. If a performing company brings their own body mics and mixing board, they must coordinate with the Host Technical Director prior to the Festival to ascertain body mic feasibility at the Host Facility.

If a company elects to supplement existing equipment, the company's equipment may be set up during the company's rehearsal period. 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. Sound cues may be loaded onto the Host theatre's equipment during the technical rehearsal. 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 and be stored with scenery in the on-deck area.

For panel adjudication, each adjudicator must be issued a separate microphone.

Scenic Devices

No scenic devices may be hung, placed, or positioned in the playing area prior to the scheduled Tech Rehearsal. Scenic devices used for creating special effects have no limit but must be provided by the company. The Host Facility must approve scenic devices required to be set up in the "house" of the theatre or onstage. The Host Technical Director may override placement of any 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 if it is not detrimental to other companies. If the Host Technical Director has concerns about the safety of a scenic device, they must consult with the AACT Commissioner and company representative to solve the issue.

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 warmup 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 cases, 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.





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Adjudication Guide



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Adjudication Guide

Adjudicators for festivals in the AACTFest cycle must be individuals with extensive theatrical knowledge, experience, and understanding, and must be approved by the AACT VP for Festivals. Adjudicators view each festival production and share their observations with the entering companies and the audience. Comments should be confined to those within the AACT Adjudication Guidelines (below).

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, as each company has a free choice of material (a one-act, a cutting, a selected act, etc.). The best production is the one most fully realized in relationship to acting, directing, and a consistent design concept, keeping in mind the criteria listed below. Design and technical competence is to be given consideration as to their effectiveness as an integral part of the total production experience.

Adjudicators may not question the choice of material, except as to its appropriateness for the company, and comment only on how it was realized.

AACT Adjudication Guidelines

Among the criteria to be considered are:

- Is the acting believable and technically skillful with effective timing?
- Are the characters well interpreted?
- Does the company display ensemble work?
- Is the material appropriate for the company?
- Is the concept appropriate for the material and realized by the company?
- Has the structure of the production been controlled?
- Are the movements and stage pictures effective?
- Is the production well paced?
- Do the technical elements support the overall production?
- How effective was the total impact?

Focus is to be placed on positive solutions to problems the companies have with production issues by suggesting alternative possibilities. Productions may advance to other festivals; these companies should be able to benefit by incorporating the adjudicators’ comments. Caution: the adjudicator should not redirect the show.

Any question of rule violation must be addressed by the Festival Commissioner, whose decision shall be final. Adjudicators must focus attention on the performances, not possible rule violations.

Adjudicator Selection

State Adjudicators are selected by the state festival committee or chair and must be approved by the AACT VP for Festivals. All festivals are encouraged to use three adjudicators; states may use fewer if necessary. It is strongly recommended at least one adjudicator be from out of state. An adjudicator associated with a company entering the festival may not be utilized.

Regional Adjudicators are selected by the regional festival committee or chair. Regional festivals must use three adjudicators. It is strongly recommended at least one adjudicator be from another region. A person connected with a state festival entry proceeding to the regional festival may not adjudicate that regional festival. An adjudicator may not adjudicate both a state festival and its regional festival.

Festival Chairs should provide the adjudicators with:

- A contract detailing conditions of service
- An honorarium
- Transportation and housing
- Per diem, meal cost reimbursement or direct purchase of meals

Adjudication Process

Prior to the festival, adjudicators must read the plays to be presented. **Adjudicators must attend a meeting prior** to the first performance session with the Festival Commissioner to review the adjudication process. Each adjudicator must sit in the same seat for the festival entry performances to provide a consistent vantage point. The AACT commissioner will work with the adjudicators to choose these seats and then block off surrounding seats.

Panel Adjudication

Festivals may use panel format adjudication when using more than one adjudicator; this selection is made independently by each festival. The duration of each panel adjudication will be 15 to 30 minutes; each panel member must have a separate microphone. The decision to use panel adjudication must be made on a timely basis and published with other festival details. The Festival Commissioner needs to be notified. Adjudicators should be comfortable and familiar with the panel process, which may adhere to the following suggested format:

- An adjudicator is designated to act as the moderator for the adjudication session. The adjudicators rotate being the moderator for the sessions.
- The panel adjudication should begin with each adjudicator briefly summarizing his or her overall impression, with equal time allotted for each adjudicator.
- Following the summaries, the adjudicators will participate in open discussion with the designated moderator serving as facilitator.

Regardless of the adjudication format (panel or individual), adjudicators' personal likes and dislikes as to authors and material are not to play any part in the adjudication process. A person who cannot overcome an aversion to certain authors or plays during the festival must not adjudicate.

Companies may record the adjudicators' comments about their own performance. Adjudications are

open to all festival attendees; no private sessions may be held until after the awards are announced. The adjudicators may discuss the festival productions among themselves, but not with anyone else present until after the awards are announced except during balloting. Adjudicators should allow time in their schedules, following the awards presentation, to meet one-on-one with the directors of advancing companies to provide additional feedback.

Adjudicators will be evaluated on their performance. Completed evaluation forms are kept by the AACT office and made available to the adjudicators minus the names of the evaluators.

Individual Adjudication

Following performances, each adjudicator will have at least five (5) minutes to respond, based on the AACT Adjudication Guidelines. (The Festival Chair may set a longer response time.) The adjudicators will rotate in order as to who goes first. The adjudicators must be provided with a microphone. Adjudicators should address comments to the entire house as well as the cast and crew of the performance just completed. Adjudicators may hear preceding adjudications as well as succeeding ones, if they wish. Adjudicators are required to use a microphone and must be lighted.

Balloting Process

The balloting process shall be conducted by the Festival Commissioner immediately following the final adjudication. This room will be closed to all except for the AACT Commissioner and adjudicators. If they are not associated with any of the AACT eligible companies, the Festival Chair is also invited to observe.

The first order of business is the determination of specific festival awards without discussion of ranking. Adjudicators should have a list of any awards that will be given other than rank placement prior to any performances.

Adjudicators will discuss these awards in order to arrive at consensus. Following the determination of these awards, balloting takes place, with the adjudicators ranking each production in order of preference with the most fully realized performance being “1,” the next “2,” etc., on the Adjudicator’s Ballot form.

In festivals sending one production forward, if unanimous agreement is established on the first ballot for the “1,” “2,” and “3” positions, the balloting process is complete.

Festivals sending two productions forward must continue the ranking process through all entered shows through the “6” position.

If there is not unanimous agreement, discussion may take place before the next ballot. Following discussion, a second ballot is taken, and if unanimous agreement is not reached, discussion will again ensue, followed by a third ballot. Following the third ballot, if a unanimous decision is not reached, a split decision shall be allowed, with a majority of the adjudicators in agreement on each position.

If two adjudicators are utilized at the festival and no agreement can be reached, the Festival Commissioner shall break the deadlock by voting after the third ballot. If any company is not eligible to proceed for any reason, the tally sheet should be altered to indicate the company's ineligibility to proceed.

When possible, the adjudicators should attend the Festival Award ceremony. Following the ceremony, the adjudicators should meet with the advancing company(s) to give more in-depth feedback to assist them as they move forward.

At the National level, the adjudicators will nominate four productions for Outstanding Production and select one of the four as the winner. No other production rankings will be given besides the sole winner and the nominees for Outstanding Production.





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Festival Chair Guide



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Vice President for Festivals

Cell/Home: 315-406-2139

Framer@cayuga-cc.edu

Chris Serface

Festival Commission Chair

Cell/Home: 360-556-5735

chris@tacomalittletheatre.com

Mary Jo DeNolf

AACT Festivals/EngagementCoordinator

Cell/Home: 616-822-0006

maryjo@aact.org

American Association of Community Theatre

PO Box 101476, Fort Worth, TX 76185-1476

817-732-3177 Fax: 817-732-3178

info@aact.org

aact.org

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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American Association of Community Theatre
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

