



2027 HANDBOOK



American Association of Community Theatre
AACTFest 2027 Handbook

Welcome to AACTFest 2027
National Festival
Rochester MN
June 16-19, 2027

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/Engagement Coordinator
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 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.

This Handbook may be copied at will for non-commercial purposes.
© American Association of Community Theatre
All rights Reserved



AACTFest 2027 Handbook

Table of Contents

The Basics	3
Goals.....	3
General Rules.....	3
Administration.....	4
Festival Commissioners.....	4
Focus/Censorship.....	4
Production.....	4
Waivers.....	5
Disqualification.....	5
Entrants.....	6
Theatre Companies.....	6
Company Members.....	7
Productions.....	7
Production Process.....	9
On-Deck Area.....	9
Storage Area.....	10
Entry Requirements.....	11
Technical Specifications.....	13
Lights.....	13
Sound.....	14
Scenic Devices.....	15
Emergencies.....	16
Adjudication Guide	17
AACT Adjudication Guidelines.....	19
Adjudicator Selection.....	20
Adjudication Process.....	20
Panel Adjudication.....	21
Individual Adjudication.....	21
Balloting Process.....	22
Festival Chair Guide	24
Overview.....	26
Festival Commissioner.....	26
House Policies.....	27
Facilities.....	27
Technical Information.....	28
Company Packets.....	28
Company Documents.....	29
Production Meeting.....	29
Technical Rehearsal.....	30
Adjudicators.....	31
Festival Chair Checklist	33
Festival Theatres checklist	35

American Association of Community Theatre

AACTFest 2027 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 2027 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.
- Time limits are strictly enforced:
 - Set-up: 10 minutes
 - Performance: 60 minutes
 - Strike: 10 minutes
- The house must be closed at the start of and during each performance. It must remain open for set-up and strike.
- Each competing company will be scheduled for a closed 80-minute technical rehearsal, supervised by the Commissioner. Note: This rehearsal will not necessarily be scheduled the same day as the performance.

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 a festival, the Commissioner has final authority.
- Any questions regarding disqualification must first be addressed to the Commissioner.
- The Commissioner verifies each production's timing with the official festival timekeepers. If a violation occurs, the Commissioner will notify the affected company following the conclusion of the festival.
- When possible, festival hosts should provide hotel accommodations for the Festival Commissioner.
- Once a Commissioner has been assigned, a coordination meeting should be scheduled including the Festival Host, AACT staff, and the Commissioner.

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

Requests for waivers of specific rules must be submitted in writing (email) to the Vice President for Festivals and copied to the Festival Commission Chair and the AACT Festival/Engagement Coordinator.

- Waivers related to facility requirements may only be granted by the Vice President for Festivals.
- Any approved solution must maintain fairness and equity for all participating companies.

Disqualification

Failure to comply with AACTFest rules and requirements may result in disqualification. The decision of the Festival Commissioner is final.

In the event of disqualification:

- The company will be notified on site.
- **No public announcement of the disqualification will be made.**

Following the festival, the Festival Commissioner will:

- Notify the company's designated contact person in writing (by mail or electronic communication).
- Provide copies of the notification to the Festival Commission Chair and the AACT office within one (1) week of the close of the festival.
- Include in the notification a specific reference to the applicable AACTFest Handbook section outlining 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 productions**, is eligible to enter the festival process.
(This requirement applies only to new theatres entering the American Association of Community Theatre process.)
- At the state level, a host organization may limit the number of entrants due to resource constraints.
 - Any limitations must be announced immediately.
 - Entries must be accepted on a **first-come, first-served** basis.
- Each theatre may enter **only one production in one state** per festival cycle.
- Theatres may present additional **showcase productions** with the permission of the Festival Chair.
 - Festivals consisting solely of showcase productions are **not** considered part of the AACTFest cycle, and no Commissioner will be assigned.
- A production that participates in a state or regional festival in a given cycle may **not** be re-entered in the following cycle.
- All productions must be originally mounted by the presenting organization.
 - “Imported” productions—those mounted independently of the presenting theatre—are not permitted.

Advancement from State Festivals

- State festivals with **four or more eligible AACT entries** may advance **two adjudicated productions** to the appropriate regional festival.

Festivals Advancing One Production

- Balloting must rank productions **first through third place**.
- If the selected company cannot advance, the **second- and third-place** productions serve as official alternates.

Festivals Advancing Two Productions

- Balloting must rank productions **first through sixth place**.
(If fewer than six productions are entered, all productions must be ranked.)
- If advancing companies are unable to participate, the **third-, fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-place** productions serve as official alternates, in that order.
- If a company declines advancement, the alternate assumes the **same rehearsal and performance slot** originally assigned.

Appointments and Special Circumstances

- The AACT Vice President for Festivals may appoint one production to represent a state or region when:
 - No official festival has been conducted, or
 - Only one theatre expresses interest in participating.
- Any production appointed to advance (state, regional, or national) must be **adjudicated**, at the

theatre's expense, by an adjudicator approved by the Vice President for Festivals or their designee.

Selection Without a Festival

If more than one production seeks advancement in the absence of a formal festival, one of the following methods must be used:

1. **A festival must be adjudicated** to determine the advancing production, **or**
2. **All productions must be adjudicated by the same adjudicator**, at the theatres' expense.
 - This method, and the adjudicator selected, must be approved by the Vice President for Festivals or their designee.

Advancement to National Festival

- One production from each region advances from the regional festival to the national festival.
- A **twelfth production ("Wildcard")** is selected by the AACT Vice President for Festivals from the region with the **highest number of eligible productions** in its state festivals during the cycle.
- Showcase productions are **not included** in this count.
- If a region does not advance a production and an additional national slot becomes available, the same criteria will be applied to the region with the **next highest number of eligible productions**.

- If only one state within a region conducts a festival, and no other productions are appointed from that region, the winning production **may advance directly to the national festival**.

Company Members

- Individuals who are active members of **Actors' Equity Association (AEA)** or **Screen Actors Guild – American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA)** may **not** participate as actors in any AACTFest production at any level
- All participating actors must sign the **Affidavit of AACTFest Actor Eligibility (Form T3)**.

Productions

- Eligible entries may include:
 - A cutting of a full-length play or musical
 - A one-act play
 - Any other theatrical performance, including children's theatre productions intended for youth audiences and/or performed by children

- The total performance time may **not exceed 60 minutes**, including:
 - Introductions
 - Scene changes
 - Curtain calls
- The official timing of the performance:
 - **Begins** with any element that brings the audience into the world of the play (e.g., music, sound, movement, lighting, etc.)
 - **Ends** when all such elements fully cease
- If set-up or strike is used to establish mood, character, or otherwise begin the theatrical experience, it will be considered part of the **60-minute performance time**.

Adjudication

- Adjudicators will respond to each performance immediately following its conclusion.
- Emphasis will be placed on **acting and direction**, with final consideration given to the **overall realization of the production**.

Production Responsibilities

- Each company is responsible for providing its own:
 - Sets
 - Props
 - Furniture
- The host theatre may provide standard furniture if requested **in advance**.

Consistency Across Festival Levels

- Productions advancing through the festival cycle must be performed in **substantially the same form** at all levels.

Permitted adjustments include:

- Changes in staging based on adjudicator feedback
- Modifications required due to differences in performance facilities

Restrictions:

- Lines or stage business may **not be removed**, except to meet time requirements
- Actor substitutions require **written approval** from the Festival Commission Chair and must be based on legitimate hardship
- Substitution of musicians, production staff, or technicians does **not** require approval
Addition of crew members or musicians **does require approval**

Production Process

Pre-Assembly and Load-In

- Companies may pre-assemble portions of their set on-site during designated load-in times or other pre-approved periods available to all participants.
- Pre-assembly is permitted provided that:
 - The assembled scenery fits within the allotted storage space
 - The process does not interfere with other participating companies
 - All host venue rules are followed
- Any assembly not completed during load-in or pre-approved times must be completed within the company's **80-minute technical rehearsal**.

Storage and On-Deck Requirements

- All elements used in the production—including sets, props, costume changes, special effects, and related materials—must fit within the designated:
 - **On-deck area**, and
 - **Storage area** (if utilized)
 - **Exceptions:**
 - Costumes and musical instruments are not required to fit within these areas **unless** they are used as props or scenic elements.
- If space allows:
 - Primary costumes and makeup may be stored in dressing rooms and worn prior to performance.
- Each company will be assigned a storage area of comparable size. Companies should account for variations in:
 - Theatre configuration
 - Height clearance
- Storage and on-deck areas may be open on all sides; therefore:
 - All items must be **self-supporting**.
- **Security and Safety:**
 - Perishable items, valuables, and weapons should be brought to the storage area shortly before rehearsal or performance and removed immediately afterward.
- Items used during the production (props, costumes, etc.) may be struck to the on-deck area immediately after use.

Musicians and On-Stage Integration

- If musicians or a pit ensemble:
 - Interact with actors, or
 - Are positioned onstage as part of the world of the play (interactively or scenically),
- then their instruments must be accommodated within the **10' x 10' on-deck area**.

On-Deck Area Definition

- The **on-deck area** is immediately adjacent to the performance space.
- It is the location from which **set-up begins** and **strike concludes**.
- The on-deck area must be exactly **100 square feet**.

-While any configuration is permitted, a **10' x 10' layout is strongly recommended**.
-The national festival will utilize a **10' x 10' on-deck area**.

Storage Area Definition

- If sufficient space is not available to provide individual on-deck areas for each company, the host must provide a storage area.
- The storage area:
 - Serves as the holding location for all materials prior to movement to the on-deck area
 - May be any size or shape
 - Must be capable of holding all items that will ultimately be placed in the on-deck area.

Safety and Compliance

- Companies must comply with all venue rules regarding:
-Weapons, Pyrotechnics and Special Effects
- While the host facility is responsible for publishing applicable policies, the **performing company is ultimately responsible** for confirming that all elements are permitted.
- All backstage, onstage, and house safety procedures, as well as established venue policies, must be followed at all times.

Set-Up and Strike Procedures

- Each production is allowed:
 - 10 minutes set up
 - 10 minutes strike

Set-Up Process

- When ready, the company spokesperson will signal the festival stage manager (or designee).
- The stage manager will announce **“GO”** loudly enough for all timing personnel to hear.
- Timing begins at that moment, and the company proceeds with set-up.
- Companies may request remaining time updates from official timekeepers.
- When set-up is complete
 - The company spokesperson signals the stage manager
 - Stage manager announces **“STOP”**

At this point:

- No further action may take place onstage until the performance begins
- All scenic, technical, and production elements must be fully in place
- Cast and crew may move to their assigned “places”

Strike Process

- Following the performance, strike will proceed using the same procedure:
 - Stage manager calls **“GO”** to begin timing
 - State manager calls **“STOP”** when strike is complete

Entry Requirements:

Required Materials and Deadlines

- The Festival Chair shall establish and communicate a deadline for submission of all required materials. At each festival level, each company must submit the following materials to the Festival Chair **prior to the start of the festival**:

Required Documentation

- **Festival Entry/Information Sheet (Form T1)**
- **Proof of Performance Rights (Form T2)**
 - Including:
 - Warranty of permission to perform the work from the licensing agent and/or author
 - Warranty of permission to perform the work as cut or altered
 - Confirmation that all necessary rights have been secured
- *It is strongly recommended that companies obtain performance rights for all three festival levels prior to the state festival.*

Scripts

- **Four (4) scripts**, clearly marked as intended for performance
 - Scripts must comply with all copyright laws
 - Photocopied scripts **without written permission** from the playwright or publisher will not be accepted and may result in disqualification
- Additional scripts may be required for interpreters or other personnel with sufficient advance notice.
- **National Festival Requirement:**
 - **Five (5) scripts** are required due to the inclusion of an alternate adjudicator.

Forms and Technical Information

- **Affidavit of AACTFest Actor Eligibility (Form T3)** for each actor
- **Technical Information Forms (Forms T4a and T4b)**
 - Companies advancing to regional or national festivals must **resubmit updated forms** reflecting any changes
 - These must be submitted to:
 - The next Festival Chair, or
 - The National Festival Technical Director (via the national festival liaison)

Fees and Membership

- **Entry and registration fees** as required by the specific festival
- **Proof of membership** in applicable state or regional organizations, and payment of any required local fees
- **Non-AACT Member Fee:**
 - A non-member theatre must pay a festival fee equal to the cost of the lowest American Association of Community Theatre organizational membership
 - This fee must be paid **prior to the state festival or at the time of appointment**
 - This fee:
 - Is **waived for AACT member theatres**

-May be **applied toward AACT membership** during the same membership year

- **Regional Requirement:**
 - Organizational membership in AACT is required at the regional level
- The festival fee is **not required** for showcase productions that are ineligible to advance.

Program Information

- Any additional **program or publicity information** as requested by the festival.

Compliance

- Failure to comply with AACTFest rules and submission requirements may result in **disqualification**.
- Questions regarding rules or requirements may be directed at any time to:
 - The Festival Commissioner, or
 - The Festival Commission Chair
- During the festival, the **Festival Commissioner's rulings are final**.

Technical Specifications:

Lights

- A **basic festival lighting plot** will be provided for all participating companies. **Light plot example link on webpage)
 - The plot **may not be altered**.
 - The host must provide documentation (e.g., drawings, magic sheets) clearly identifying:
 - Instrumentation
 - Gel colors
 - Circuiting
 - Wash areas
- It is the responsibility of each company to coordinate any requested additions with the **Host Technical Director prior to arrival**.

Followspots

- If available in the host inventory, a followspot may be offered.
- If rental is required, costs will be **shared among requesting companies**.
- Companies may provide their own followspot with prior approval from the Host Technical Director.

Lighting Specials

- Special lighting is permitted under the following conditions:
 - Must be set during the **80-minute technical rehearsal**, unless equally pre-set for all companies
 - Limited to **six (6) circuits**
 - Host must notify companies in advance if specials cannot be supported
- Additional specials are permitted if:
 - They are part of scenery (e.g., practicals, strip lights), or
 - Handheld by actors
 - AND not integrated into the house lighting system

Moving Lights / LED Fixtures

- Companies may supply moving lights or LED fixtures as specials if the facility can accommodate them.
- Each unit counts as **one (1) special**, regardless of usage.
- Programming and focus must occur during the company's rehearsal period.
- All equipment must be approved in advance by the Host Technical Director.

Equipment Adjustments

- Replugging, re-aiming, or re-gelling between performances:
 - Will be completed by host staff
 - Must occur prior to the company's set-up
- Companies are responsible for ensuring compatibility of any non-host equipment.

Equipment Placement

- Lighting specials may remain in place between rehearsal and performance unless deemed obstructive.
If so, they must be relocated or handled by host staff during the **10-minute set-up/strike period**.

Control Equipment

- Supplemental control equipment (e.g., consoles) must be:
 - Installed during rehearsal
 - Approved for placement by the Host Technical Director
- If deemed disruptive, equipment must be set up and removed during standard set-up/strike times.

Cue Programming

- Lighting cues will be programmed during rehearsal and stored on the console (if available).
- Hosts may offer pre-programming services if:
 - Available to all companies
 - A submission deadline is established

Sound

- The host facility must provide a functional sound system including:
 - Playback capability (e.g., CD player and/or laptop connection)
 - House speakers
 - Mixing console
 - **1–3 microphones** for adjudicators
- Adjudicator microphones may be used as sound sources if requested.

Body Microphones

- The host is **not required** to provide body microphones.
- Companies providing their own must coordinate feasibility in advance.

Communication

- Communication systems must connect:
 - Backstage
 - Lighting
 - Sound
 - Followspot positions (if used)
- When possible, onstage monitors should be available for actor audio support.

Supplemental Equipment

- Company-provided sound equipment:
 - Must be set up during rehearsal
 - May remain in place unless deemed obstructive
- If necessary, equipment must be relocated or handled during set-up/strike.

Sound Cues

- There is **no limit** to the number of sound cues.
- Cues may be loaded during technical rehearsal.
- Sound-producing scenic elements (e.g., slamming doors):
 - Must be set and struck during official time limits
 - Must be stored in the on-deck area

Adjudication Requirement

- Each adjudicator should be provided with an individual microphone.

Scenic Devices

- Scenic devices may not be installed prior to the company's scheduled **technical rehearsal**.
- Companies must provide all scenic devices used for special effects.
- Placement must be approved by the Host Technical Director, who may:
 - Override placement for safety concerns
 - Require adjustments as needed
- Devices should be set during rehearsal unless:
 - The Host Technical Director determines it is safer for the device to remain in place
- Safety concerns must be resolved collaboratively between:
 - Host Technical Director
 - Festival Commissioner
 - Company representative
- The host venue must provide:
 - Offstage tables for props (not required to fit in on-deck area)
 - Optional offstage chairs

Special Equipment

- Equipment requiring warm-up time (e.g., fog machines):
 - Should be stored near the storage area
 - Must be coordinated in advance with the Host Technical Director

Emergencies

- Only the following individuals may declare a **public safety issue**:
 - Festival Commissioner
 - Host Facility Coordinator (may be the Festival Chair)
- A company representative may declare a **theatre facility issue** during performance.

Procedure

- The Festival Commissioner will immediately assess:
 - Severity of the issue
 - Impact on the production
- If a company stops performance and the issue is **not validated**, the production will be **disqualified**.
 - This disqualification will **not be publicly announced**
 - The company will be notified in accordance with American Association of Community Theatre policy

Resuming Performance

- If interruption is justified, the company may resume:
 - From the beginning, or
 - From the point of interruption
- *(Subject to scheduling constraints.)*
- Facility-related interruptions should be declared **only in extreme circumstances**.
- All declarations must occur **during the performance**.
 - No claims will be considered after the performance concludes.



2027 HANDBOOK

Adjudication 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.

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 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.

This Handbook may be copied at will for non-commercial purposes.
© American Association of Community Theatre
All rights Reserved



American Association of Community Theatre
AACTFest 2027 Handbook
Adjudication Guide

Adjudicators for festivals in the AACTFest cycle must possess extensive theatrical knowledge, experience, and understanding, and must be approved by the Vice President for Festivals of the American Association of Community Theatre.

Adjudicators will:

- View each festival production
- Provide responses immediately following each performance
- Address both the participating company and the audience

All comments must align with the **AACT Adjudication Guidelines.

Adjudication Philosophy

- Productions are evaluated based on the **overall realization of the production**, with primary emphasis on:
 - Acting
 - Directing
- All production types (comedy, drama, musicals, original works, avant-garde, etc.) must be evaluated equitably.
- Adjudicators:
 - May not criticize the **choice of material**, except regarding its appropriateness for the company
 - Must focus on **how effectively the material is realized**
- Design and technical elements are evaluated based on how effectively they support the total production.
- Feedback should:
 - Emphasize **constructive solutions**
 - Offer **alternative approaches**
 - Avoid “redirecting” or re-directing the production
- Adjudicators must focus solely on performances and **must not address rule violations**.
 - All rule-related matters are handled exclusively by the Festival Commissioner.

AACT Adjudication Guidelines

Adjudicators should consider the following:

- Is the acting believable and technically skillful, with effective timing?
- Are the characters well interpreted?
- Does the company demonstrate strong ensemble work?

- Is the material appropriate for the company?
- Is the concept appropriate and effectively realized?
- Is the production well structured and controlled?
Are movement and stage pictures effective?
- Is the production well paced?
- Do technical elements support the production?
- What is the overall impact of the production?

Adjudicator Selection

State Festivals

- Selected by the state festival committee or chair
- Must be approved by the Vice President for Festivals
- Use of **three adjudicators is encouraged**, though fewer may be used if necessary
- At least one adjudicator from outside the state is strongly recommended
- Individuals associated with participating companies may **not** serve as adjudicators

Regional Festivals

- Selected by the regional festival committee or chair
- **Three adjudicators are required**
- At least one adjudicator from outside the region is strongly recommended
- Restrictions:
 - No adjudicator may evaluate a festival in which their affiliated company is competing
 - No adjudicator may serve at both the state and regional level within the same cycle

Adjudicator Support

Festival Chairs should provide adjudicators with:

- A contract outlining terms of service
- An honorarium
- Transportation and lodging
- Per diem, meal reimbursement, or provided meals

Adjudication Process

- Adjudicators must:
 - Read all scripts prior to the festival
 - Attend a pre-festival meeting with the Festival Commissioner
- Each adjudicator must:
 - Sit in the same assigned seat for all performances
 - Use a consistent vantage point
- Seating will be coordinated and reserved by the Festival Commissioner.

Panel Adjudication

- Festivals may choose a **panel adjudication format** when using multiple adjudicators.
- Sessions should last **15–30 minutes**.
- Each adjudicator must have an individual microphone.

Suggested Format

1. One adjudicator serves as moderator (rotating role)
 2. Each adjudicator provides a brief summary of impressions
 3. Open discussion follows, facilitated by the moderator
- The decision to use panel adjudication must be:
 - Announced in advance
 - Communicated to the Festival Commissioner
 - Personal preferences must not influence adjudication.
 - Individuals unable to evaluate material objectively should not serve.

Adjudication Access and Conduct

- Adjudications are **open to all festival attendees**
- Companies may record feedback on their own performances
- No private adjudication sessions may occur prior to awards
- Adjudicators:
 - May discuss productions among themselves
 - May not discuss productions with others until after awards are announced
- Following awards, adjudicators should be available to:
 - Meet with advancing companies
 - Provide additional feedback
- Adjudicators will be evaluated, and results will be maintained by the AACT office (anonymized).

Individual Adjudication

- Each adjudicator will have a minimum of **five (5) minutes** to respond following each performance (*The Festival Chair may extend this time.*)
- Adjudicators:
 - Rotate speaking order
 - Must use a microphone and be properly lit
 - Address both the audience and the company

Balloting Process

- Conducted by the Festival Commissioner immediately following final adjudications
- Session is closed to all except:
 - Festival Commissioner
 - Adjudicators
 - Festival Chair (if not affiliated with any competing company)

Awards Determination

- Awards (other than rankings) are determined first
- Adjudicators should have award criteria established prior to the festival

Ranking Process

- Productions are ranked in order of preference:
 - “1” = most fully realised production
 - Subsequent rankings follow in order

Single Advancement Festivals

- Rankings: **1st through 3rd**
- Unanimous agreement on first ballot concludes the process

Two Advancement Festivals

- Rankings: **1st through 6th** (or all entries if fewer)

Balloting Procedure

- Up to **three ballots** may be conducted:
 - Initial ballot
 - Discussion
 - Second ballot
 - Additional discussion
 - Third ballot
- If unanimity is not reached after three ballots:
 - A **majority decision** is accepted
- If only two adjudicators are present and no agreement is reached:
 - The Festival Commissioner will **cast the deciding vote**
- Ineligible productions must be clearly marked on the final tally.

Post-Balloting

- Adjudicators should attend the awards ceremony when possible
- Afterward, they should meet with advancing companies for additional guidance

National Festival Adjudication

- Adjudicators will:
 - Select **four (4) productions** as nominees for Outstanding Production
 - Choose **one (1) winner**
- No additional rankings will be announced beyond:
 - The winner
 - The nominees



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.

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/Engagement Coordinator
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 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.

This Handbook may be copied at will for non-commercial purposes.
© American Association of Community Theatre
All rights Reserved



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.

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.

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.

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
-

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)
-

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
-

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
-

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
-

Notes

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

AACTFest 2027 Handbook

Festival Theatre Group Checklist

This checklist is intended as a guide. Some items may not apply to every production; however, all starred (*) items are required. For questions, contact Mary Jo DeNolf at maryjo@aact.org.

6–12 Months Prior

- Confirm State Festival date, location, and time with your State Organization
 - Begin fundraising efforts to offset costs
 - Secure rights and licenses for your production
 - Review the AACTFest Handbook
 - Contact Festival Chair for required forms and fees
 - Arrange housing/lodging for participants
-

6–8 Months Prior

- Verify all forms are in progress and being completed
 - Contact Host Technical Director for:
 - Floor plans
 - Lighting requirements
 - Sound requirements
 - Continue fundraising efforts
 - Arrange transportation for set and materials
-

3–4 Months Prior

- Ensure AACT membership is current
 - Submit program information to AACT and Festival Chair
 - Confirm all requirements with Festival Chair
 - Review festival schedule (when provided)
 - Ensure cast/crew availability for travel, rehearsal, and performance
-

1–2 Months Prior

- *AACTFest Company Compliance Form (T2)*
- *AACTFest Affidavit of Actor Eligibility (T3)* (signed)
- *AACTFest Program Information*

- Finalize internal company schedule (allow flexibility)
- Submit AACTFest Technical Information Form (T4) to Host Technical Director
- Share schedule with company members
 - Include required:
 - Production meeting (15–30 minutes with Commissioner)
 - 80-minute technical rehearsal

30 Days Prior

- Submit in-house program/playbill to printer (if applicable)
 - (C4 information may be included or announced at festival)
 - *Send scripts (as cut) to adjudicators*
 - No photocopies without written permission from author/agent
-

2 Weeks Prior

- Ensure awards information (if applicable) has been submitted to adjudicators
 - Finalize all logistics with Festival Host/Committee
 - *Submit completed T2 and T3 forms to Festival Commissioner*
 - (Forms may be scanned and sent in advance)
-

Key Reminders

- Adhere strictly to all AACTFest rules and deadlines
- Maintain communication with Festival Chair and Technical Director
- Ensure all materials reflect the **final performance version** of your production
- Plan for timing, logistics, and flexibility

