

AACT YouthFest 2025 Participant Guide

YouthFest is a program of the American Association of Community Theatre (AACT). Interested theatres submit an application, and selected theatres will be invited to participate. YouthFest includes adjudication and may include recognition awards for various production aspects and individual performances/contributions. Invitations may only be issued to youth productions in which all performers and crew members are non-union and in 12th grade or younger during the 2024-2025 school year.

Goals

- To provide learning experiences in artistic, technical, and management areas through performances, adjudication, workshops, and festival participation; thereby affirming, supporting, and nurturing youth theatre.
- To stimulate and inspire youth 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 youth community theatre through participation, observation, and constructive adjudication.

General Guidelines

- All theatre companies must meet the same eligibility standards and requirements.
- It is the responsibility of each company to ensure compliance with all YouthFest guidelines.
- Maximum festival performance time is 60 minutes from bare stage to bare stage (to include set up, performance, and strike). A closed 60-minute tech rehearsal will be scheduled in the theatre facility for each company. The company is allowed to ask timers how much of their 60 minutes remain during the strike period.
- The house must be closed during each performance. It may remain open for set-up and strike.

Administration

The festival process is conducted and guided by AACT through the Youth Activities Committee, YouthFest Chair, and assigned staff.

Policies

AACT's primary YouthFest focus is on the productions and providing learning opportunities for participating companies and audience members. The intent is that YouthFest guidelines and decisions are made for the benefit of the performing companies.

Censorship

AACT policy permits the widest possible range of dramatic material to be performed in a festival of the American Association of Community Theatre and does not permit censorship of any company's production (unless proof of permission to edit from licensing company and/or playwright, as appropriate, is provided).

Production Choice

A production entered in the festival process may be a licensed cutting of a full-length play or musical, a one-act play, or any other performance of a theatrical nature. The genre/style of theatre chosen is entirely up to the producing company.

Entry Requirements

Each company must provide the following to the YouthFest Chair before the festival begins. The YouthFest Chair should provide companies a deadline for the required material.

- Warranty of Company Compliance verifying 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.
- Festival Entry/Information Sheet
- Three 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.
- Registration fees as required to attend AACTFest
- Theatres that are selected to perform at YouthFest must be AACT Organizational Members
- Technical Information Form
- Program information as requested by the festival

Production Process

The total length of the production set-up, performance, and strike may not exceed 60 minutes (including introductions, scene changes, and curtain calls). Timing will begin with the “Go” instruction from the stage manager or other designee to begin set-up and will end when strike of the set pieces has been completed, the stage is bare, all production items are returned to the 10X10 assigned space, and the stage manager or designee has called “Stop.”

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 but the Youth Festival Chair/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, which are temporary in nature and affect the overall quality of the production.

Following the performance, the adjudicator(s) will comment on the performance. Emphasis will be on acting and direction, but final consideration will be the overall realization of the production. A longer, private adjudication session will be scheduled for each YouthFest performing company to receive more individual and personalized feedback from one adjudicator. (see Page 6 for details on Adjudication)

Production Guidelines

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.

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 60-minute rehearsal time.

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.

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 a 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. All sets, props, special effects, etc. (everything utilized to present the production) must fit into a storage area and on-deck area (see definitions below). Exception: costumes and musical instruments, if they are not part of the set or used as properties in the production, need not fit in the storage or on-deck area. Costumes and make-up may be stored in the dressing room (if space allows), and put on prior to the performance. Each company will have a storage area 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 remove 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.

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. Contact the YouthFest Chair/Commissioner with any questions you may have.

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 ending 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 guidelines.

Light and sound operators may begin the set-up period in their respective operations areas and remain there at the end of set-up and need not join the rest of the company during or after strike.

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 strike time. Care should be taken not to disturb succeeding shows' spike tape. Spike tape will not be removed by the company during strike.

The production process (set-up, performance, strike) should continue without significant delay until complete. Should a production exceed the time limit, the performance will not be stopped nor will an announcement be made. Adjudicators will comment as scheduled.

Immediately after the strike, company members are usually seated in the front rows of the auditorium for the adjudication. (see Page 6 for details on Adjudication)

As a "learning moment," a production that has exceeded the timing or other guideline will be notified in private at a time subsequent to adjudication.

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 should 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 YouthFest Chair/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. 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 a 60-minute slot for each competing company some time prior to their performance time and after the production meeting has taken place. 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.

Technical Specifications

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.

Special lighting is permitted; any special lighting must be set up during the 60-minute tech rehearsal period. The host may, at its discretion, set up specials prior to the company's rehearsal if the same level of accommodation is provided to all groups. Lighting specials are limited to the use of six (6) circuits. Additional specials may be included if used in sets, such as strip lights or practicals, or carried by actors, including battery powered light emitting devices, if such specials are not incorporated into the house lighting system. To reiterate, all specials used in the house system may use no more than six (6) circuits, dimmers and/or control channels. The Host Technical Director must approve all instrumentation for lighting specials. If it is necessary to re-plug, 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 and equipment not part of the festival plot may be connected and left in place unless the Host Technical Director determines that their placement will be detrimental to other companies. If so, the designated equipment must either be relocated or be set-up and struck as part of the utilizing company's 60-minute time limit.

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 as part of the utilizing company's 60-minute time performance limit.

Sound

The host theatre must have a functioning sound system with a minimum of a CD player, house speakers, a means of communication between all operator positions including at least one house microphone to be used by the companies as a special sound source and by the adjudicators. 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 and the host technical director will determine whether the placement of such equipment interferes with or will obstruct other companies. 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 utilizing company's set-up.

There is no limit to the number of sound cues or effects used during the performance, but any sound effect device, such as a door unit that is used for a "slamming" sound during the performance, must be set up and struck as part of the utilizing company's allotted time.

Scenic Devices

No scenic devices may be hung, placed, or positioned in the playing area prior to the set-up. Scenic devices used for creating special effects have no limit, but must be provided by the company. The host facility must approve scenic devices which require set up in the "house" of the theatre. The host may override placement of any special 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 as long as it is not detrimental to other companies.

If a company has equipment requiring significant warm up time (fog machines, for example) the equipment should be stored at the edge of the company's storage area and arrangements made with the Host Technical Director to initiate the warm up process prior to the set-up.

Adjudication

The purpose of adjudication is to provide validation of companies' skills, while at the same time offering learning opportunities to enhance their work, offer options for expanding their creativity, and prepare them for success at future festivals.

Adjudicators for festivals in the YouthFest cycle must be individuals with extensive theatrical knowledge, experience, and understanding of theatre produced by youth. 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.). Design and technical competence is to be given consideration as to its effectiveness as an integral part of the total production experience.

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

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. Caution: the adjudicator should not redirect the show.

Awards

As an invitation-only festival, adjudicators will not rank participating companies (e.g., first place, second place, best of show, etc.). However, adjudicators will confer and may award various recognitions for individual performances and/or special production quality recognitions.

Emergencies

Only the YouthFest Chair or the Host Facility Coordinator 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 Chair will immediately investigate the seriousness of the problem and the likely impact on the production. If the company stops its performance, the performance may begin from the beginning or from the point of interruption, at the company's option, subject to local scheduling needs, and once the issue has been addressed. 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.