

CASTING BEST PRACTICES

A Guide for Directors: Building Inclusive Theatre Through Thoughtful Casting

Remember: Inclusive casting is not about quotas—it's about removing barriers, expanding possibilities, and telling stories that resonate with our entire community. When we cast thoughtfully, we create theatre that truly belongs to everyone.

This document outlines the best practices The New Reno Little Theater, Inc. will utilize in support of helping directors cast their productions in a way that aligns with our vision and values.

PRE-AUDITION TRANSPARENCY

Character Identity Disclosure

- List all relevant character demographics: age range, gender identity, race/ethnicity, nationality, languages/accent required, physical requirements, and disability representation
- Specify which characteristics are essential to the story versus those open to interpretation
 - Example: "Maria, 20s-30s, Latina, Spanish-speaking required for key scenes"

Content Warnings & Story Elements

- Clearly communicate sensitive content: violence, intimacy, trauma narratives, substance use, mental health themes
- Specify physical requirements: stage combat, dance, lifting, extended standing
- Allow actors to make informed consent decisions before auditioning

Strategies for Inclusion

- Write casting notices that signal openness: "All actors encouraged to audition for all roles"
- Describe the character's story rather than prescribing identity
- Trust actors to self-select and gravitate toward roles that resonate with their experiences

INCLUSIVE AUDITION PRACTICES

Creating Opportunities for Authentic Representation

- Make roles visible to communities who may connect with specific characters
- Partner with diverse organizations to ensure wide audition notice distribution
- Use inclusive language in casting calls that welcomes and encourages (without requiring) actors who identify with character experiences
 - Example language: “We enthusiastically welcome actors of all backgrounds. We are particularly interested in hearing from actors who connect with [character’s] experience as [relevant identity/background].”

Identifying Non-Negotiables vs. Opportunities

Non-negotiables will be identified by the ALC and IDEA Committees and shared with directors prior to auditions.

- Non-negotiables
 - Characteristics central to the story’s integrity
 - Example: "The role of Helen Keller requires a Deaf or disabled actor"
- Opportunities:
 - Areas where diverse casting enhances without altering the narrative
 - Example: "Family members can be cast to reflect adoptive/blended families"

Self-Identification Approach

We encourage actors to audition for and accept roles that they feel they can authentically perform based on their lived experiences and familiarity with content.

To that end we will:

- Allow actors to voluntarily share relevant lived experiences on audition forms
- Provide opportunities for actors to share what they can bring to a role in terms of familiarity with content
- Make clear that sharing is completely voluntary and non-disclosure will not impact consideration
- Focus on actors’ own comfort level with roles rather than making assumptions

Legal and Ethical Practices

- Never ask directly about protected characteristics (race, disability status, sexual orientation, etc.)
- Don’t make assumptions based on appearance or name
- Base casting notes on performance and suitability, not assumed demographics

CREATING EQUITABLE AUDITIONS

Accessibility Measures

- Provide materials in advance (sides, character descriptions)
- Offer multiple audition formats (in-person, video submission)
- Ensure physical space accessibility
- Welcome accommodation requests

Reducing Bias

- Use diverse audition panels when possible
- Focus on talent and suitability over preconceived notions
- Document casting decisions to identify patterns

BEYOND TRADITIONAL CASTING

Expand Your Vision

- Question assumptions about "traditional" casting
- Consider non-traditional gender casting where appropriate
- Embrace color-conscious casting that reflects your community
- Recognize that "neutral" casting often defaults to dominant culture norms

Community Reflection

- Strive for casts that reflect your community's diversity
- Build relationships with diverse community groups
- Create pathways for new performers to enter your theatre

COMMUNICATION & SUPPORT

Post-Casting Transparency

- Communicate with actors about any sensitive content they'll encounter
- Establish ongoing consent practices for intimate or violent scenes
- Provide resources for actors dealing with challenging material

Building Trust

- Acknowledge when authentic casting matters and why
- Be prepared to explain casting decisions respectfully
- Commit to learning and improving practices over time