

The Producer's Guide

DON'T PANIC

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1 1. Some Random Suggestions Before You Start

- Read this entire guide over before starting. It is full of suggestions and every show is different. It's a guide and a reminder, not the instruction sheet.
- Encourage everyone to make copies by themselves at CopyTech in the basement of building 11 or in the first floor of the Student Center. It's the cheapest place. Coordinate with the Guild Treasurer and make sure everyone knows how to correctly use the account so copy expenses are traceable.
- Things will of course get stressful. If you have problems, need to talk or just blabber endlessly, use someone not in any way connected to the Guild to talk to. They won't be stuck in some Guild rut, and can be an objective ear.
- Remember, this is your show, and you are producing it your way. Be open to helpful comments from others but don't try to live up to any standards. How much money a show makes has nothing to do with the success of the show!
- Delegate as much as you can to other members of your prod staff. Keep an eye on things, but the more you delegate, the more fun you'll have, and the better able you'll be to support your prod staff by dealing with those little emergencies that crop up throughout the production.
- Smile a lot. It reassures everyone and keeps you in a good mood.
- Communication. Communication. Communication.
- Best of luck!

2 2. Rights and Scripts

- Check with the treasurer and make sure that s/he has ordered/obtained rights. Get a copy of the license from him/her. (This is particularly useful for the specifications of the publicity design.)
- Make sure you're getting the full orchestration and enough scripts. Verify that they'll arrive at an appropriate time (materials generally come 2 months before opening. Depending on your show this may not be adequate and a reasonable fee will get you extra rental time.)
- Check what the show has- vocal books, scripts, librettos- and know what photocopies you may have to make to fill in gaps.
- Check the box when it comes, call the company if anything is missing.
- Make a tally of everything in the box, and keep it close to your heart. You must be sure that everything is sent back or we will have to pay for it. Save all receipts, because you must send all the stuff back the instant the show closes.
- The Music Director should distribute the orchestrations, the Stage Manager should distribute the rest of the stuff to the cast, making sure to number the scripts and keep track of who has which one. Leftover vocal books and scripts may be distributed at the Producer's discretion. If non-photocopied materials are given to the prod staff, keep track of those just as carefully and get deposits from them also.
- The Treasurer will tell you how much to charge as a script deposit. The Stage Manager should collect this amount from the cast. Checks are good. Date them for the last day of the show and tear them up when the script is returned. It is strongly suggested that the Stage Manager give all the checks to the Treasurer to hold on to. This will save confusion later if any checks need to be cashed.
- Have your orchestra director check what instruments will need to be borrowed or rented and make arrangements. MIT Music Department and MIT Concert band are common sources. The sooner these are secured the easier you will sleep at night.

3 3. First-Round Interview (Directors)

During the first round of interviews, we pick the main directorial staff - Director, Vocal Director, Orchestra Director Technical Director, Stage Manager, Choreographer, Set Designer. *We usually also get our Producer at this time, so some of these may have already happened.*

- Run exactly like second-round interviews (see below) but a week sooner.
- Set interview dates so that the new directors can be there to interview other members of the prod staff.

4 4. Second-Round Interviews (Others)

You were selected as part of the first round process. Perhaps this is because the board thinks that you are important. Perhaps the board just wants you to handle the scheduling for the remainder of the interviews. Whatever the case may be, you are the chair of the I-Board.

- First, get the Guild Publicity Director to start getting publicity together for interviews. This means e-mail spam and basic on-campus postering.
- Make sure the Guild webmaster knows about interview announcements so that that kind of stuff gets on the web page.
- Go assault random people on the street and ask them if they want a career in Musical Theater. Nay, tell them they want a career in musical theater. This really is the best way to find people.
- Put together an Interview Board. This will include all members of the Managing Board who aren't interviewing for some position. The board can be filled out as necessary with previous Board members and previous dir staff members. Make sure different areas of expertise are represented.
- Read the official Guild documents defining the I-board and discuss with the Managing Board to make sure you agree on all the details of the policy.
- The offers should be pouring in by now, so find out when the members of your Interview Board are available, and schedule interviews in half-hour time slots in the MTG office.
- Run Interviews. This is a lot harder than it sounds, but there's no way to learn how to do it, so observe experienced people and think about it. If you're not familiar with the process, ask the Guild President to chair the first couple of interviews until you get a feel for the spiel.
- There are certain boxed questions which should be asked of each candidate:
 - What are your time commitments?
 - What are your conflicts?
 - Are you willing to have an assistant?
 - Are you willing to be an assistant?
 - Is there anyone in MTG with whom you would particularly like to work?
 - Is there anyone in MTG with whom you would particularly not like to work?
 - What is your phone number, email address, etc.?
 - Do you have any questions for us?
- After each interview, take some time to discuss the candidate. Listen for concerns by the other members of the Interview Board. Keep careful notes and hold on to them even after candidates have been chosen- sometimes you may want to justify a decision to others or yourself later on.

- After all candidates for a position have interviewed, the I-board should either select a candidate or make a decision to keep looking if necessary. Positions are selected through a vote of the I-board, but as often as possible you should have a clear consensus.
- Tell the people who get positions to show up to the first Prod Staff meeting, which you should set for shortly before auditions if possible. Tell those that don't get positions that they were not selected, and ask them if they would like to interview for another position that has yet to be filled.
- After auditions and casting, you can usually stop worrying about the formality of the Interview Board. Make sure the Managing Board approves, and then you can appoint people as you see fit.

5 5. Production Staff Meetings

- Go into every meeting with a written agenda and leave with written notes, even if nobody but you ever sees them. E-mailing concise minutes to the prod staff to remind everyone what was agreed on and what folks are doing can be helpful also.
- At the first meeting, do the following things:
 - Set a meeting time for every week from now until opening night. In summer, consider having meetings every two weeks until early July.
 - Get budget proposals from everyone (but see also section 6 on budgets).
 - Introduce everybody to everybody.
 - Find out when people may be out of town (something you may want to have asked at Interviews, but confirm it now).
 - Find out if more rehearsal space is needed.
 - Set up the time, place and procedure for auditions with the Stage Manager, Music Director, and Director. Let the Guild's webmaster know so that he can put that info up on the web.
 - Encourage the Technical Director to set up design meetings with the director and principal designers.
 - If they haven't already, get your Director to produce a clear written statement covering their concept for the show including casting plans, artistic concepts, technical wants and needs. This will be helpful for everyone. If the Director has trouble doing this now, keep an eye on how that may indicate trouble coming later.
 - At later meetings, have every person let you know how much money they spent that week and what they've spent total.
- Have meetings every week (or two early in Summer) until Prod Week, making sure that individual meetings occur between anybody who needs specific communication- scheduling meetings, design meetings, etc. This is vital for everyone's sanity!

- Call and e-mail any prod staff member who has to miss a meeting. You need to know how they are doing. When you are done calling them, call their roommates to check up on them. Then, e-mail them again.
- If problems with communication pop up - which they will - fix them quickly. As you might guess, this is not always an easy task, especially if you are not being communicated with. Be nosy! Know everything that is going on, but be careful not to be overbearing. If you insert yourself early into all the channels of communication, people will start to get used to talking to you. Since a lot happens via e-mail, encourage folks to cc: you on anything and everything. But remember that keeping track of every detail of the show doesn't mean you should micromanage every detail, as long as things are going smoothly.

6 6. Budget

(There are two schools of thought on how to budget a show. The first is to draw up a budget yourself, and impose it on your prod staff with limited input. The second is to get proposals, and hammer out a cooperative budget with the input of your designers. The second method is a lot more work. The actual method will just about always be some combination.)

- Get proposals from the prod staff. This step is optional, except if you are going up in Sala, talk to the TD early about projected seating capacity. This may affect the income you can budget for.
- Ask the treasurer for the last few shows' budgets, paying attention especially to the last few shows that occupied the same slot as the one you are budgeting.
- The Treasurer will give you a number for "Guild expenses". This is the profit your show needs to make, above the money your show has spent specifically, to cover money the Guild spends that doesn't go on any show budget.
- The guide used to include specific things you need to budget for, but times change. The Guild's productions change, the people we interact with change. Use recent budgets and lengthy consultation with the Treasurer and anyone else with experience to make sure you budget for everything your show will need.
- Using old budgets, ticket prices and seating capacity, come up with a reasonable number for projected revenue.
- Sometimes it is best to just tell people how much money they will be allowed to spend and have the designers make their plans accordingly. Of course, you should be slightly flexible with the amount of money you give people when planning the budget. Once the budget is set, however, *stick to it!* It will save you and the Guild a lot of grief in the end.
- If there are problems, iron them out and then go through the Board, which must approve the final copy.
- Stick with everyone who has spending authority to make sure you know what they're doing. Especially make sure that those who are spending the money are aware of just how much

they are spending. Keep track of the vouchers you sign (remember - only you are authorized to do so) and stay on top of expenses.

- A suggestion is to post a separate sheet for each budget, so that as vouchers are filled out the amounts get entered on the sheet. That way everyone knows what is being spent where and when, and no one will be surprised when they go over budget. Plus, you won't find yourself authorizing things when you aren't sure where things stand financially.
- Make absolutely sure people give you receipts or at least estimates in a timely fashion, and always before strike. This requires a lot of nagging, but knowing exactly where your show is every step of the way is worth it. *(This is a nice theory, but often times you won't see hint of a voucher until the reimbursement forms get turned in to you at the cast party. Point is, you will want to think creatively when it comes to keeping your designers in line, and you will want to keep on top of this over the entire production period.)*

7 7. Auditions

- If you have a Publicity Director for the show, this is their first job. If not, turn to the Guild Pub Dir. Email should be sent to the right mailing lists, and posters printed and posted. Also, make sure that the Guild webmaster knows the when, where, and how.
- Although we usually run auditions for three hours (often evenings from 7-10), we generally advertise two hours (7-9). That way, if people aren't showing up in droves, you, the Stage Manager, and the directors can all leave at nine, rather than waiting around for hours in case someone wants to show up just before closing time.
- An ASM or other prod staff member should run the audition desk. You, the Producer, should be around to make sure everything is running smoothly and the SM should keep things organized inside. Using wireless instant messaging to communicate between inside and outside will amaze people and it will save time.
- Have a meeting with the Director, Music Director, Choreographer, Vocal Director, Rehearsal Pianist, etc. about how to run auditions and what they want on the audition form. Use old forms as guides. There is a recent (2002) template in /mit/mtg/producer/Auditions/AuditionForm.tex. Make sure the TD includes information about tech requirements and tech crew preferences.
- If possible, reserve two rooms with CAC for each night. Make sure that there is a piano in each room—one for auditions and one for the auditionees to warm up while they are waiting.
- Get a CRB chair who you can put together a CRB before auditions and have them or a representative talk to the above group about casting policy and the CRB's function.
- A CRB representative should be present at all auditions but not for the final decision process. This is really up to the Director, but having that representative will only help you getting your cast approved.
- Get an audition pianist for each night. If you do not know who to ask, try emailing mtg-piano@mit.edu.

- Print out a bunch of copies of the Casting Notification Policy. We use this to tell actors about when they'll be notified, and when we expect a response, so that it's easier for them (and us) to make decisions about any other shows they might be auditioning for. A copy is currently being kept on the web site, under "About MTG" -> "More useful information". That policy references the mtg-crb mailing list, so ask the secretary or someone else to make sure that that list is up-to-date before auditions start.
- Bring to auditions:
 - Camera. Recently we've used a digital camera or an instant "sticky" camera.
 - Scissors
 - Stapler and staples
 - Audition forms (numbered)
 - Many copies of the Casting Notification Policy
 - Lots of pens and pencils
 - Song books for people who forget to bring music.
 - Two wireless-ready laptops
- You should wait around after the last night of auditions to get a list of people to call back. This list can be posted for everyone to see, or it can be done via e-mail. If you auditioned for the show, someone else (Stage Manager, MTG President, etc.) who is not directly involved in the casting process should call people.
- After the show gets cast, and the CRB votes on it, you will be calling people according to the Casting Notification Policy to offer them roles or rejections. This part can be quite difficult, but remember that you are not the one who cast the show. Keep this in mind, and you will be able to sleep at night.

8 8. Casting Review Board

- The CRB should be set up before auditions, and should consist of as much of the Managing Board as possible (much like the Interview Board). See the Constitution for details, and consult with the Managing Board if you're not familiar with the process.
- Make sure a CRB representative meets with the director, etc. before auditions to explain their function and the casting policy. This is especially important if your director is new to the Guild or hasn't directed for us recently.
- You should present a list of details about auditions and casting to the CRB on behalf of the Director for approval. Make sure you know what the director is thinking in areas where you expect a fight. (See CRB.mss in /producer)
- You should communicate with the CRB the time when you expect the directors to complete their casting decisions. CRB usually convenes late at night in the MTG office after callbacks and after the directors have cast the show. It is considerate to continually inform the CRB of changes in the estimated completion time.

- Prepare the director, etc. for being called on some casting decisions if you feel the CRB might have questions or reservations. Forewarning may help the discussion along. Anytime there may be questions, your director should hold a callback to prove their decision to the CRB representative.
- Present a list of details about auditions and casting to the CRB:
 - Total number of men who auditioned
 - Total number of women who auditioned
 - Men who auditioned, and whether they were 1s (MIT Students), 2s (MIT Community /MTG Members), or 3s (other).
 - Women who auditioned, and whether they were 1s, 2s, or 3s.
 - For each cast role, whether a 1, 2, or 3 was cast in the role.
- Answer any questions which the CRB may have, and request approval of the casting decisions (without names). Have the CRB rep defend any decisions you're questioned on. Upon approval, inform the CRB of the cast list with names.
- Keep in communication with the CRB until all cast roles have been accepted. If certain roles are rejected, run proposed replacements by the CRB for approval. The CRB remains assembled until the show has been completely cast.

9 9. Production Staff

- If you do not have a full Production Staff after Interviews and coercion, it's time to look harder. Design and Directing positions might require a new round of interviews, or asking members of the Guild who have held the positions in the past. It is crucial to have a full production staff. You may think you can fill in lots of places, but come prod week you'll lost time to every detail you have to help with, along with your producing duties.
- Advertising Manager, Program Manager, Publicity Director, House Manager, Box Office Manager, and Ticket Booth Manager are hard to find, but crucial. You may have to get several people to contribute to each one. Try to get a cast member for Ticket Booth Manager. Try to find someone truly trustworthy for Box Office (former Producers are ideal). Again, remember, every position that you do not fill just dumps more work on you. Good luck.
- Tension is bound to happen. Welcome to theater. Your best assets are the telephone, e-mail, and instant messenger. Keep in contact with everyone and be as calm, understanding, and helpful as possible. If a shouting match occurs, use your best people skills. They will work out in time given a little calm reflection. (Try bashing file cabinets...)

10 10. Two Months Before Opening...

Naturally, if you're doing a show where you have less than two months before you open, you should start doing all this *now*.

- Sell ads! Sell ads! Sell ads! We may have recurring ads that will need to be in the program. The Treasurer can tell you. Any new ads you sell will benefit your bottom line and future shows. Think of dumping this on your Advertising Manager completely, or sharing it out to the Publicity Manager. The more you delegate, the less your head will hurt.
- Keep communication lines open on the prod staff and to the cast. Make sure people are talking.
- Arrange to have tickets made. John van der Meer did this for many years, recently Stuart Levine and Alex French have filled in. With a nice little mail-merge template this isn't a big deal, but you don't want to deal with it yourself.
- Have your music director arrange with CAC for piano tuning now if you'll need it.
- Scripts should arrive and be dealt with.
- Make sure your TD has a Set Shop Cleanout, working with the Set Shop Manager, and that regular set builds began.
- Set plans should be drawn up as clearly and as early as possible. This will save your prod staff (and you) lots of anxiety later on. Your TD should keep the plans up-to-date. Posting .pdf copies somewhere accessible is a good idea. Bring to someone in CAC (Paul Buckley or who ever replaces Dave Kemp) ASAP...you can show him changes as they develop, but getting the main idea to approved early is important.
- The lighting design should also be submitted to CAC as soon as possible. Same caveats apply as for sets.
- Check with the Board to get a printout of our Reservation list. This should include all rooms we have scheduled for the show. Check this carefully against the rehearsal schedule to make sure we get extras when necessary. You may also have to schedule some things (like nights with multiple rooms at once) based on what space we can get. The Schedules Office in building 5 can help you reserve classroom space when needed.
- If you need to get more rooms schedule these space with CAC as soon as possible.
- If you are a student, get yourself Signatory Power. This will make reserving rooms a lot easier. If you're an Alum, don't bother. A student on the Board should be shanghai'd into signing for reservations. Note: This may change with the implementation of the EMS Online scheduling system. This section should be updated once it has come fully on-line.
- Find out about Lobby 7 drop poster space, Lobby 10 booth space, and Bulletin Board times and spaces we have reserved. Post all of this on the Producer's Board so that all can see it and tell you what more they need. Some of this space can only be reserved semester-of, so prompt the President if necessary.
- Becoming friends with CAC (if you have not already done so) is very helpful. Know not just the secretaries, but all the managers. Phil Walsh is the head, you'll probably never meet him. Dave Kemp dealt with tech, but he quit. Right now Paul Buckley fills in. CJ Azubuine is great for dealing with reservation issues, Jennifer Smith is the head of Event Reservations or some title like that and can be very helpful. Avoid dealing directly with Mike Foley.

- A final budget should be posted on the Producer's Board and on-line.
- Make sure you know the Publicity Manager's schedule. Keep a copy of it posted on your board and check things off as they're done.
- Read the Publicity Manager's Guide and the Technical Director's Guide. Make sure you understand what they each should be doing.
- Have your TD and Music Director make sure we have enough music stands and stand lights. Have them make arrangements to borrow if necessary.
- Arrange to have one of the performances videotaped. Solicit ahead of time to find out how many people want to purchase copies of the tape. Get two tapes for the Guild Archives. The Guild will pay for these two copies, but should not pay for any other video costs. The Guild has used Richard Kim (kvbproductions@comcast.net) with mixed results recently.
- As soon as you have a cast, make a Contact Sheet, and give it to everyone. Post a copy online (but not directly linked to from other sites).
- Talk to the Guild webmaster about putting a production schedule on-line. This can be really useful, if it's updated often enough when rehearsal schedules or meeting times change. Get long term events (prod week schedule) posted, or at least hinted at, as early as possible.

11 11. One Month Before Opening...

- Sell Ads! Sell Ads! Sell Ads!
- How's that communication coming?
- Figure out who's doing what Prod Week - Box Office, House, etc. even if it has to be you. Make copious lists. It will help keep you sane.
- Have your house manager begin looking for ushers. You'll want between 2 and 4 ushers per night depending on what space you're in and what size crowds you expect. Do not include yourself or your assistant producer in this number. Later when you still need ushers, include that in the show announcement spam and you can get folks who want to see the show and save a few bucks.
- Have your Program Designer begin collecting information for the program. You'll want bios, year affiliations, crew members, acknowledgements, and director's notes.
- Publicity designs should be in and advance publicity should be moving. For more information see the Publicity Manager's Guide.
- Make sure any publicity information is getting to the Guild webmaster.
- Fill out Event Registration forms from w20-549. You'll need a host of signatures, in a specific order, and then you'll need to take a check for entertainment license fees, with the form, to the Municipal Building.