

# **Sorenson Theatre Events Handbook**

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This operations handbook is provided as a guide for organizations who use the Sorenson Theatre and its technical capabilities. There are certain protocols that must be adhered to in order to maintain levels of safety, communication and professionalism that will all make your show run as smoothly as possible.

There are four main areas of concern that will be addressed: **Safety**, **Show Advancement** (planning and logistics before your time in the theatre), **Run of the Event** (time in the space for the event) and **Load Out/Post-Show** (cleanup, discussion about the event, return of rental equipment, etc).

These are the areas that need to be discussed in order to provide you with as professional an experience as is possible when you use the Sorenson Theatre and its facilities.

## **Safety**

Safety in the theatre is paramount. It comes before any amount of planning, the run of the show, or anything else. There are several pieces of equipment in the theatre that can cause injury or death to those who do know how to properly use them. If no one from your organization has been trained on certain pieces of equipment, the Technical Director should be present to provide training for you. There are also several safety and fire codes that must be adhered to or you risk having your show shut down.

### **Theatre Systems That Require Safety Training:**

**Counterweight Line Set System:** This includes the black curtains, legs, movie screen, scrim, electrics and any flown scenery. If your show requires any rigging of any sort (flown scenery, chandeliers, hanging props, etc.) the Technical Director needs to be on premise to direct and check the rigging for safety.

If your organization has trained theatre technicians on staff, they may operate the line sets without the supervision of the Technical Director, but any adjustments to them need to be checked with the Technical Director. The Technical Director may train persons in your organization to use the linesets.

**Genie Lift:** The Genie Lift is not to be used by student or rental organizations without permission from the Technical Director.

### **Fire Codes:**

The State of Massachusetts can be very particular about code violations. If a fire marshal were to walk through the Sorenson Theatre and find any code violations, they could shut down whatever show was currently in the theatre until the violations were remedied. This includes student shows as well as professional and rental clients.

The most common code violation has to do with egress to and from building exits, also known as fire lanes. There is a minimum four (4) foot path that must be maintained to at least two exits from any room. The main lobby cannot sustain a seated dinner, as the lobby is the main egress from the theatre. The stage is considered a different room than the auditorium because of the heavy fire curtain that drops if there is a fire, and as such it also requires two separate exits to be clear of obstruction. The hallway stage right is a primary fire exit from the stage and cannot be filled with props or used for other storage that blocks the stairs. The loading dock needs to be in a suitable state of organization so that it

may be used as a fire exit, especially because it is the primary fire exit for both the theatre and the dance studio.

Spray paints, adhesives and other flammable substances used during the load-in of shows must be stored in a lockable space, preferably the tool storage cage in the loading dock, at the end of each day, and either disposed of properly or taken out of the theatre during load-out.

Use of atmospheric effects (foggers and hazers) must be checked with the Technical Director before use. Legally, a minimum of two (2) Massachusetts Fire Marshals must be on hand to monitor the fire alarm panel and to turn off the fire alarms in the event that fog or haze travels into the adjoining buildings to the theatre (Reynolds and Hollister) via the bridges that connect them. The cost for this can add up quickly if you add up the hours for rehearsals and shows, and add one (1) hour to the total show time per night of use. The cost can be up to \$45/hr, per fire marshal. If you do not gain permission and/or have the proper safety staff in place, the Technical Director reserves the right to stop the use of fog and haze.

Pyrotechnics are strictly prohibited. A permit for such visual effects is required, and the City of Wellesley will not grant one. Don't even ask.

### **Drugs and Alcohol:**

You may not use or be under the influence of alcohol or drugs while operating the Sorenson Center facilities. A person under the influence of alcohol or drugs is by definition a dangerous situation, especially while working backstage. If you suspect or know that someone is in no condition to work, either see to it that they leave for the day or bring the matter to a staff member or Babson Public Safety.

## Show Advancement (Pre-Show, Show Planning)

Show Advancement is important because it gives the Technical Director an idea about what sort of show you are putting together, how many people are needed to run the show, what type of support you need, and if there are any special requests for the show.

If at all possible, the Technical Director should be contacted at least **one (1) month** prior to your show if it is a one or two day event, and preferably **two (2) months** before a weeklong (including rehearsals) event. If the event has been added to the schedule last minute, you need to talk to the Technical Director as soon as is possible. This is especially important if the event requires outside technicians that need to be hired or if additional equipment needs to be rented.

It is best to begin discussions with the Technical Director as soon as you have scheduled the use of the theatre. The Technical Director has experience that can help you and your organization to decide if certain things are feasible in the time and space you have allotted to you. Special requests are welcome even earlier so that discussions about feasibility can occur before it becomes too late to try to attempt certain things. Even if first contact is just to introduce yourself and to give some sort of idea about what sort of event you want to produce, it gets the ball rolling and helps the Technical Director begin planning for the event. The following is a list of things that should be discussed in these meetings.

**Type of the Event:** What kind of show are you putting on? Is it a dance show? Theatre? A musical? A guest speaker? A movie? A concert? A combination?

**Feasibility:** This is mostly a discussion about whether or not certain things you may want for your show are possible with the time available for rehearsal, budget for extra equipment, etc. Is the Sorenson Theatre a proper venue for your event and what can we do to make your event a success?

**Event Staffing:** The Technical Director is the only technical staff at the Sorenson Center for the Arts. **It is not the responsibility of the Technical Director to find staff for your event, nor to work as staff for your event.** The Technical Director's responsibility is to train and assist technicians who are either members of the organization sponsoring the event or freelance technical staff hired to run certain aspects of the event, such as lighting or sound or stagehands. Please be certain that if you are using your own organization's members as technical staff for your event that they are comfortable with the level of performance you have organized. If your staff does not have the technical experience they need to run your event, you must hire outside technicians.

Occasionally, students who work for the Sorenson Theatre may be available to help staff your event, but that is subject to their availability and skill level. Do not expect their availability.

The Technical Director can help your organization find freelance technicians if needed, but this should be requested at least **one month** in advance. Unless the Technical Director has told you they will find technicians for the event, the client is responsible for finding all outside technical help.

**Lighting Requirements:** Lighting in the theatre can be as simple as you want it to be or as complicated as you can afford. The basic lighting system is very capable, and can do everything from manually working the faders to writing automatic cues for the whole show. Some organizations rent additional lighting at additional cost. This level of production requires hiring an outside lighting designer.

**Audio Requirements:** Audio in the theatre is much like lighting in that it can be very simple, or it can quickly become quite complicated. The theatre has a variety of audio equipment and microphones for basic shows. There are wireless microphones, but not enough to do more than four at a time, and they may not always be available.

**Concerts:** The Sorenson Theatre is not properly equipped to provide full concert level sound reinforcement. The Technical Director needs to be made aware of the technical requirements of any concert well in advance, at least **one month**. A judgment call will be made as to whether or not an outside audio company is required to provide the audio requested in the technical riders from the artists. **This is non negotiable.** A signed contract with a group or artist assumes that certain audio capabilities will be met for the venue and they reserve the right to not perform if the equipment is not up to what they have requested and the organization has signed off on.

**Video Requirements:** Are you planning on using the projection equipment in the theatre? The video screen does take some time to bring in and out and it is manually operated from a counterweight line set on the floor, so you will need somebody to be trained to operate the screen. You can run video from VHS, DVD, Laserdisc or a laptop computer. Please have any video clips available to test prior to your show so there is enough time to re-edit if it for some reason does not work with the system. It is also best if you have several video clips to play from computers that you put all of them on to one machine for the rehearsals and show. It just makes things a lot easier.

**Floor Requirements:** There are a few options for the finish on the floor for shows. The natural blonde wood floor is the standard surface. There are also two black floors, one is a newer dance floor that is reserved for dance shows and

the other is an older dance floor that can be put out for musicals or other shows requiring both a black floor and scenery on stage.

**Facilities Logistics:** Some shows require things that Babson Facilities take care of. There are removable seats in the theatre in certain sections that can be taken out to create pits for orchestras. There are nicer chairs, furniture, flags, tables, dividers and other things that Facilities has access to that can be brought over for a show. The Technical Director needs to be notified with enough advance time to put together a Work Order for these requests.

Pianos count as theatre equipment. The only pianos Facilities will move are the upright pianos with the large casters, and those are only movable from room to room, not to the auditorium floor or anywhere else that steps are involved. The Technical Director needs to know if you need a piano moved and will call a professional piano moving company, at your organization's cost, to move one if you wish.

**Equipment Rental:** The Sorenson Theatre is a well equipped venue. However, it does not have everything available at a moments notice. Some organizations rent additional equipment to make their show better. Dance companies frequently rent additional lighting and extra wireless microphones are brought in for musicals. If you do decide to rent, you must make sure that your technicians have the training to use the extra equipment, or hire a freelance technician. The Technical Director can also direct you towards lighting and audio rental companies if you have the need (and the budget) to bring in extra equipment. Again, additional equipment rentals must be requested **one month** in advance.

## **Run of the Event**

During the run of your show, it is important to follow these guidelines. Your show will run safer, more professionally and will make for an easier load-out and clean-up process after your show closes. These guidelines are probably more applicable to the events that have more than one day in the space, but should be looked at by all organizations for reference.

**Having a Stage Manager:** A Stage Manager in the professional entertainment industry is a multifaceted job. They run rehearsals, make sure that things get put away at night, set up before the run of the show, check in with all aspects of the production during the rehearsals and the run of the show, etc. They also run operations on deck during the show, oftentimes running linesets for curtains and the scrim, moving scenery, or changing gels in lighting instruments. They are generally on headset and in complete communication with all of the technical aspects of the show. A Stage Manager who knows the entire rundown and order of the show can make a huge difference in the smoothness of the production, even if it's just to call the show cues for the technicians. A Stage Manager is not necessary for all events, but it is a good idea for larger shows to have a single coordinator of the day to day running of the show.

**Clean Up/Restore After Each Run:** If your show is running for more than one night, there are several things that need to be taken care of before you leave the building. All of the dressing rooms and technical areas need to be locked up. The lighting and sound system need to be shut down. All headsets need to be put back into the sound booth. Backstage and work lights are to be shut off at the end of the night. If there is a ridiculous amount of trash that has accumulated, it should be taken care of and put out in the dumpster outside the theatre. Make sure all outside doors are locked or call x5555 and have Public Safety come to lock up for you when you are done. These are good things for a Stage Manager to look after if you have one.

Remember, the more you clean up as you go through the run, the less you have to clean up during your load out.

**Changeovers/Multiple Events in the Space:** Sometimes, given the tight scheduling of the Sorenson Theatre, there is a need to make sure the show can be struck to a certain size or that parts of the stage are still usable for smaller events during other times of the day, for example, Town Meetings and other events that utilize the projection screen and minimal audio and lighting. Sometimes, multiple organizations are rehearsing in the same week, which makes technical pre-settings impossible. Your organization will be informed as early as is possible about the scheduling of such events so that you can plan for them as best you can with the Technical Director and/or the other organizations sharing the space with you.

## **Load Out/Post-Show**

The Strike and Post-Show part of your event begins as soon as the event comes to a close. The faster things are cleaned up and equipment is put back in their proper places, the faster everyone can go home. The Technical Director expects the e-board members of the organization, at the very least, to stay afterwards and help with the cleanup effort.

**Restore:** If any changes to the repertory lighting plot or to the standard sound configuration for the theatre have been made for your show, it is the Technical Director's discretion as to how much your organization must restore the equipment to the usual settings. Lights must be put back where they came from (and refocused and gelled if necessary), cable gets put away, the sound board needs to be zeroed, control booth and backstage areas must be cleaned.

**Load Out:** Loading out your event requires that everything that you brought into the theatre gets taken out on the night the show ends, unless there has been a discussion with the Technical Director about temporary storage of larger set elements that might not be able to be moved easily. There is a limited amount of space in the theatre, and there are many clients who use the theatre in a very tightly orchestrated schedule. Make sure things get removed from the theatre in a timely manner, as a full backstage or loading dock for an incoming client can provide for many headaches.

**Post-Show:** After the event is closed and all clean up has taken place, sometimes there are concerns about the production of the show, ideas about how to make things better the next time or just things that can be discussed about the run of the show. Feel free to contact the Technical Director about any of this.