



**WORKFORCE  
READINESS  
SYMPOSIUM**

# Ready to Work: Career Training, Skills & Knowledge Theatre Students Need to Step into the Workforce

## Background: The Workforce Readiness Symposium

In September 2018, Center Theatre Group convened approximately 100 representatives from the Southern California higher education community at East Los Angeles College to discuss workforce readiness for theatre students. Attendees represented more than 30 colleges and universities, including community colleges, private institutions, graduate programs, and both the California State University and University of California systems.

The morning included research presentations, information about hiring and job statistics, and a series of short “Provocations” by working artists and theatre practitioners, all focused on issues surrounding workforce readiness for theatre students.

The definition of workforce readiness used at the event is as follows:

*While elements like craft, theatre history, technical skills, and artistry are crucial components of a theatre education, we will be examining a separate important skillset: workforce readiness. Workforce readiness is a student’s ability to step directly from college into a career in theatre, and includes skills as diverse as understanding how and where to find jobs, financial literacy, knowledge of union structure, and entrepreneurship/self-marketing training.*

## Working Groups

After the Provocations, higher education representatives broke out into “working groups” based on 11 focus areas. The specialization-focused groups were Acting; Arts Management & Administration; Costume Design & Technology; Directing; Playwriting & Dramaturgy; Scenic Design & Technology; Sound, Lighting, and Projection Design & Technology; and Stage Management, Technical Direction &

Production Management. The topic-focused groups were Department Chairs; Supporting Diverse Students; and What We Can't Hire (Field-Wide Hiring Challenges).

Groups ranged in size from three to 13 people, and included both the higher education partner facilitator and a Center Theatre Group staff member acting as a scribe.<sup>1</sup> Attendees were primarily representing theatre departments at their campuses, although some attended on behalf of career centers and/or multidisciplinary degree programs. The groups had just over an hour and a half to move through the facilitation process.

Each group engaged in a collaborative brainstorming process, facilitated by a higher education partner. For specialization-based groups, the process culminated in the creation of a list answering the question, "What workforce skills/training/support does a person need to step directly into a career in theatre in this specialization area?" The three topic-focused groups had different questions focused on supporting students' career preparation.

## The Lists

All of the lists created in those working groups are documented below, in alphabetical order by title. They have been lightly edited for formatting and clarity, but otherwise reflect the tone, format, and focus of each individual group.

These lists can be used by educators, students, and field practitioners to inform the training opportunities we provide to the next generation of theatre artists and managers. While not comprehensive, they represent one group's thoughts on how best to prepare students—*outside of craft*—to enter this rewarding but competitive field.

Center Theatre Group and the creators of the following lists hope they will be helpful as we look ahead at how we train and prepare diverse theatre students to enter rewarding, sustainable careers in the field.

For more information on this project and other workforce development initiatives, please contact Center Theatre Group's Program Director for Next Generation Initiatives, Camille Schenkkan, at [cschenkkan@CTGLA.org](mailto:cschenkkan@CTGLA.org) or 213.972.8031. More resources are also available on the Working in Theatre portal of our website: [CTGLA.org/WorkinginTheatre](https://CTGLA.org/WorkinginTheatre).

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that although a staff member was present, these lists do not necessarily reflect the thoughts or priorities of Center Theatre Group.



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## Acting (Including Musical Theatre Acting)

Facilitator: Vanessa Mizzone Pellegrini, Theatre Arts Faculty, East Los Angeles College

### What workforce skills/training/support does a person need to be prepared to step directly into an ACTING career in theatre?

1. Awareness of industry culture and understanding that everyone's individuality is what makes them special.
2. Practice centering/self-care to take on the challenges of a theatre workplace.
3. Organizational skills to best manage preparation, focus, auditions, and self-promotion.
4. For actors of color, understanding the legacy of colonization on self-identity, industry culture, and professional potential.
5. A strong mentor relationship and/or connection with an affinity group.
6. Communication etiquette.
7. Skills in relationship-building to build a professional community.
8. Resources for career education, in order to get a survival job.
9. Financial education, management, and planning.
10. The entrepreneurial spirit and skills to bring their own artistic voice to the table.
11. Understanding *rights* in the face of harassment, abuse and/or discrimination.
12. Cultivating the ability to be a well-rounded, interesting, and contributing citizen and human being.
13. Access to continued training.
14. Grit, perseverance, and *gut*.
15. Willingness to love and embrace the journey.



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## Arts Management and Administration

**Facilitator:** Amy Shimshon-Santo, Program Director, Arts Management, Claremont Graduate University

### **What workforce skills/training/support does a person need to be prepared to step directly into an ARTS MANAGEMENT/ADMINISTRATION career in theatre?**

1. Big idea: How to manage people
2. Hard skills
  - community engagement and education
  - marketing and communications
  - business development
  - finance and accounting
  - fundraising
  - writing
  - project planning
  - human resources
  - legal
  - understanding how to create a safe working environment
  - developing needed resources (resumes, transferable skills)
  - board development
3. Resources for finding work
  - understanding management career pathways
  - where to find jobs: online job portals, publications, job ads
  - career pivots/lifecycle of their career
4. Soft skills
  - how to be a good human being
  - entrepreneurial skills



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## Costume Design and Technology

**Facilitator:** Jessica Hansen, Theatre Arts Department Faculty, Costume Program; Guided Pathways Facilitator, East Los Angeles College

### **What workforce skills/training/support does a person need to be prepared to step directly into a COSTUME DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY career in theatre/entertainment?**

1. Flexibility and communication are soft skills that are necessary for sustaining a career in theatrical costumes, both in your career and in the production process.
2. Professional respect in the workplace creates an inclusive and safe working space for everyone, regardless of their identity or ability.
3. They need the ability to say yes without fear, and the courage to say no in professional endeavors.
4. Maintain a life outside of theatre for health, stamina, self-care, and to stay inspired.
5. Professionals in this field need to define for themselves what success means for their career, and understand that it is fluid and will change throughout their lives.
6. Financial literacy:
  - a. Costumers need to be activists for themselves and others for financial equality with transparency.
  - b. They should know how to create shop budgets that include variable costs, fixed costs, and contingency.
  - c. They should be realistic about how much their time is worth and what they can do to stay financially sound, including creating a safety net.
7. Time and project management require focus, stamina, organization, and ability to prioritize.
8. Designers and Technicians need shared hard skills for collaboration and communication, including: practical sewing, period research, hands-on experience, understanding technology, sketch interpretation, and problem-solving.
9. Professionals need working knowledge of entertainment employment opportunities and available jobs. They should know what their job is, with specificity/clear expectations.
10. Networking and self-promotion:
  - a. Need to create and maintain appropriate materials for self-promotion.
  - b. Need to seek out out mentorship and guidance with working professionals to expand their networks.



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## Department Chairs

**Facilitator:** Meredith Greenburg, Chair of the Department of Theatre and Dance, California State University, Los Angeles

### **What are proactive strategies or action steps we can take to embed workforce readiness into our department's operations and curriculum?**

1. Facilitate internships and mentorships:
  - a. Develop relationships
  - b. Curricularize (add internship/mentorship requirements and guidelines to curriculum)
  - c. Support student accountability
2. Embed soft skills, health, well-being, values like grit, and professional behavior in every course.
3. Draw upon resources across campus:
  - a. Career Center
  - b. Financial Aid
  - c. Counseling
4. Exposure to industry professionals:
  - a. Guest artists/groups/unions on campus
  - b. Field trips to professional theatre (keeping diversity in mind—artists, organizations, etc.)
  - c. Connect to working alumni/faculty
  - d. Create networking opportunities
5. Engagement and education of faculty:
  - a. Brainstorm with faculty re: workforce readiness and students' needs
  - b. Provide opportunities for faculty and students to create a document for productive expectations and professional standards, including understanding contracts, negotiation and professional behavior
6. Workplace learning opportunities/create curriculum around workforce readiness:
  - a. Professional writing
  - b. Career research/resources/applying for jobs
  - c. Business/financial/legal knowledge
  - d. Interview preparation
  - e. Self-promotion
  - f. Digital literacy
  - g. Recognizing scams





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## Directing

**Facilitator:** Chris Anthony, Managing Director, California Repertory, California State University, Long Beach

### What workforce skills/training/support does a person need to step directly into a DIRECTING career in theatre?

1. Moving up the career ladder: Mentors to help reach out to artists and companies.
2. Starting out:
  - a. How to self-produce/create opportunities.
  - b. Understanding a budget.
  - c. Developing networks for bartering.
  - d. Knowing where good dumpsters are.
  - e. Knowing demands and limitations of a space.
3. Continued professional practices/professional development:
  - a. Working with Google apps and spreadsheets.
  - b. Seeing theatre regularly.
  - c. Answering emails promptly.
  - d. Knowing artists/plays/companies they like.
  - e. Finding “applied theatre” in non-traditional places/outside theatre.
  - f. Knowing what’s happening in your general community/audience.
4. Using resources for producing/connecting, e.g. Hollywood Fringe Festival, LA Stage Alliance
5. Taking care of yourself:
  - a. Drinking H2O.
  - b. Personal sustainability (self-care).
6. Self-marketing:
  - a. Creating directing reel.
  - b. Creating a website/how to photograph work.
  - c. Creating general online presence, including social media.
7. Collaboration:
  - a. How to communicate with individuals.
  - b. How to lead a team.
  - c. How to develop relationships with playwrights.
8. Habits of mind:
  - a. Don’t be a jerk.
  - b. Remember to act like you are going to be hired again.
  - c. Celebrate the progress of others.
  - d. See problems as opportunities.



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## Playwriting & Dramaturgy

**Facilitators:** Dr. Jocelyn Buckner, Assistant Professor of Theatre, Chapman University; Amanda Shank, Faculty, School of Theater, CalArts

### **What workforce skills/training/support does a person need to be prepared to step directly into a PLAYWRITING OR DRAMATURGY career in theatre?**

1. Awareness and understanding of all areas of the production process, and access to production opportunities and resources.
2. Knowledge of new play development models.
3. Knowledge of industry standards and best practices.
4. Ability to be resourceful and strategic in regards to self-producing and self-promotion/marketing.
5. Access, access, access (to mentors/professionals, submission opportunities, resources, other playwrights/dramaturgs, directors, festivals, etc.).
6. Assistance with creation of portfolio and resume/CV/bio and website/social media.
7. Early professional development opportunities and the opportunity/ability to cultivate a professional network.
8. Systems and resources for sustainable production/practice (ex. time management, day job/other income, time for creativity and generation).
9. Practical business & working skills (knowledge of how to create grants, presentations, cover letters, queries, playwright/dramaturgy notes).
10. Communication and research skills and cultural competency.
11. Understanding of the canon *and* the emerging theatrical landscape.





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## **Scenic Design & Technology**

**Facilitator:** Francois-Pierre Couture, Theatre Arts Department Faculty, East Los Angeles College

**What workforce skills/training/support does a person need to be prepared to step directly into a SCENIC DESIGN/TECHNOLOGY career in theatre?**

1. Create a career goal chart, including opportunities and talents.
2. Successfully create documents to market themselves (portfolio, websites, etc.).
3. Learn to talk to/connect to mentors and field professionals.
4. Be a professional: understand, adapt to, and overcome different career environments.
5. Identify their financial needs, limitations, and sources.
6. Find and utilize an organization that works for you.
7. Understand the technology used in set design.
8. Identify and acquire technical skills used in set design.
9. Understand and apply design concepts.



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## **Sound, Lighting and Projection Design and Technology**

**Facilitator:** Jason Thompson, Lighting and Projection Designer, PXT STUDIO; Professor, University of Southern California

### **What workforce skills/training/support does a person need to be prepared to step directly into a SOUND/LIGHTING/PROJECTION DESIGN/TECH career in theatre/entertainment?**

1. The safety and first aid training to be a “first responder” (ex. OSHA 10-hour training).
2. The ability to communicate and articulate non-tangible, artistic ideas through a variety of mediums.
3. A comprehensive and fundamental knowledge of the histories of visual, performing, and literary arts.
4. A working mentor willing to train/apprentice an emerging artist.
5. An exposure to tangential career path opportunities.
6. Knowledge of current business practices and methods to obtain and maintain a career in entertainment.
7. Critical life skills to perpetuate a healthy work/life balance in a gig economy.
8. Hands-on training (and plenty of it).
9. A complex philosophy of applied software solutions.
10. An ongoing engagement with new and emerging technologies.
11. Mastery of collaboration utilizing a process of critiques, critical thinking, and a unique worldview.



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## **Stage Management, Technical Direction & Production Management**

**Facilitators:** Joel Veenstra, Associate Head of Stage Management, University of California, Irvine;  
Matthew Jackson, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Theatre, California State University,  
Northridge

*Note that the Stage Management group chose to merge with the Technical Direction and Production Management group on the day of the Symposium, as they felt the skills and training necessary for these careers was aligned.*

### **What workforce skills/training/support does a person need to be prepared to step directly into a STAGE MANAGEMENT, TECHNICAL DIRECTION, OR PRODUCTION MANGEMENT career in theatre?**

1. Develop core management skills (computer literacy and working knowledge of theatre).
2. Understand entry-level and adjacent jobs.
3. Have knowledge of where to find jobs in and adjacent to the field.
4. Develop personal and professional finance management skills.
5. Know best practices for crafting and sustaining a professional image.
6. Cultivate and maintain relationships with professionals in the field.
7. Have a working knowledge of unions and contracts in the field (and/or within the arts in general).
8. Develop soft skills and cultivate a high emotional intelligence.
9. Understand the importance of work/life balance and self-care.
10. Foster knowledge of current trends in theoretical practice and technology.



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## Supporting Diverse Students

**Facilitator:** Elena Muslar, Assistant Director, Entertainment and Fine Arts Professions, Loyola Marymount University Career and Professional Development

### **What barriers might be preventing students of diverse backgrounds from having access to workforce readiness skills allowing them to successfully enter into the field?**

1. Barriers:
  - a. Economic inequalities and challenges.
  - b. Lack of access to representative figures (can't see themselves in these jobs).
  - c. Lack of family and community support.
  - d. Institutional resistance (higher education and the theatre field).
  - e. Standing outside of "the room where it happens" (access to opportunities).
  - f. Lack of practical preparation.
  
2. Action Steps:
  - a. Embrace complimentary career and life pathways.
  - b. Reflect the student community through professional exposure to diverse artists, educators, and organizations.
  - c. Engage families and communities in the student journey in order to create accessible environments.
  - d. Expand professional qualifications to include nontraditional students.
  - e. "Come as you are"—fostering an environment of inclusivity and access, on- and off-campus.
  - f. Require practical professional preparation by partnering with career centers, dismantling curricular requirements, etc.



## What We Can't Hire (Field-Wide Hiring Challenges)

**Facilitator:** Cheryl Rizzo, General Manager, Boston Court Pasadena; Camille Schenckan, Next Generation Initiatives Director, Center Theatre Group

### How can we share information about the variety of job prospects and field needs with our students?

1. Expose students to the practical and life experience of alumni from their campus (at many career phases).
2. Communicate the intrinsic value of arts careers to students, parents, and beyond.
3. Bring students to theatre off-campus and use the experience to expose them to the process, equipment, and professionals (onstage and offstage).
4. Encourage students to actively pursue field experience (internships, etc.).
5. Empower/activate students to do their own research and take control of their careers.
6. Invite industry professionals to campus to share about their careers and provide insight into career pathways, making sure guests represent diverse and cross-disciplinary experiences, including union perspectives.
7. Use online tools for connecting students to high-quality/vetted career information and/or to professionals.
8. Create opportunities for students to get feedback from working professionals in their desired field (design review, mock interviews, etc.).
9. Require students to experience multiple areas of theatre and expose them to those careers to understand the collaborative nature of theatre.
10. Introduce students to the hidden crafts and jobs in theatre, and provide information about the finances of each.
11. Professional theatre and artists need to *go to campus* (theatre department and career centers).





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## Career Training and Skills for Workforce Readiness

The following was shared with attendees to help guide their process. Information was provided by working theatre professionals through a series of focus groups held before the Symposium, regarding career training that they either received in college/university and have since applied, or that they wish they had received prior to entering the workforce.

### Understanding the Theatre Landscape

- Understanding how to work with theatres and artists of varying budgets/doing more with less
- Overview of the theatre landscape of various cities—union structure, number of professional productions, number of Equity contracts & which houses offer EMC points, etc.
- Statistics about relative job prospects in theatre, including areas of need for theatre companies
- Hands-on professional training (internships, apprenticeships)
- Ability to see live, professional theatre off-campus to develop taste and understanding of the local scene
- Intro to arts management or administration in general (regardless of career aspirations)

### Mentorship and Support

- Individualized and hands-on attention from theatre professors —especially those working in professional theatre —within your college/university program
- Mentorship by a working professional
- Affinity spaces for students from marginalized groups to prepare them for bias and racism in the field, including training in self-advocacy, protest, and understanding your rights and value
- Equity, Diversity & Inclusion training: anti-bias, anti-racism, anti-discrimination

### How to Get Work

- How to pitch yourself/how to describe your art or the art you want to make (elevator speech)
- Networking 101
- Resume/job application support
- Self-producing and creating your own work/opportunities
- Fundraising 101

### Financial Literacy

- Where and how to find jobs in your specific career area
- Self-marketing/entrepreneurship/self-promotion/social media training
- Negotiating contracts and contract basics/international visas
- Salary and payment best practices/what to ask for
- Financial literacy training/taxes/handling money, especially for independent contractors
- Finding and applying for grants and research money for arts-related projects