

ACTRA Background Performers: A guide to best practices



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So, you want to be a Background Performer...

Getting Started

A background performer is a performer without dialogue who provides “atmosphere” to a scene, either alone or as a member of a group. Working as a Background Performer is “work.” It requires commitment and dedication like any other job.

Background performers need background agents.

Productions use background casting directors to find the background performers they need. Those casting directors, in turn, call on talent agents that represent background performers. **NOTE:** It is **not uncommon** for background performers to be represented by **more than one background agent.**

Some things you will need to provide:

- Documents verifying that you are legally able to work in Ontario, including your Social Insurance Number and proof of Ontario residency (copy of a driver’s license or utility bill)
- Photos, including head shots and full body (don’t pay your agent for photographs)
- Résumé with your experience in the business as well as height, weight, other applicable measurements, special skills
- At least two references

Your agent(s) can advise you how to improve your chances of getting cast in a production.

- **Attend “go sees:”** Casting directors may hold open calls to see whether a specific group of performers have the “look” required by a Director.
- **Stay in touch:** Always let your agent(s) know when you are and are not available for work.
- **Be flexible:** Production schedules can change for many different reasons. If there are days when you cannot work or you are working around child care or other family and work responsibilities, let your agent(s) know.
- **Be honest:** If you are not available, let your agent(s) know. Remember, agents talk to each other so be up front with all of them.

ACTRA Toronto has more than 15,000 members and is the largest organization within ACTRA (Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists). As an advocate for Canadian culture since 1943, ACTRA continues to secure the rights and respect for the work of professional performers.

ONCE YOU'RE BOOKED...

Your agent will send you a booking request and other important information.

Estimate of call time:

- Plan to arrive 10-15 minutes earlier than your call time. Note whether it is a day or evening call, inside or outside.

Location:

- *Google it!* Find out where you are allowed to park or where the closest bus or subway stop is to the location. Is there more than one location for the shoot?

Transportation:

- How will you get from one location to another? If the call time is outside of regular transit times, how will you get to set? Is there a shuttle? What time does it leave and from where? What about returning from set? What if you get lost or are running late? **Call your Agent.**

Wardrobe requirements:

- You will typically be asked to bring a couple of changes of clothes in addition to what you will be wearing. It doesn't hurt to carry three or four changes. (*Note: there is sometimes little adequate space to hang clothes on set.*)
- Business attire
- Casual clothes

- Formal wear
- Whatever the need, make sure your clothes are clean, ironed and ready to wear.

ON-SET...

Sign-in:

- Print clearly; have a copy of your proof of residency and identification with you (keep copies on your phone if you can).
- Use your phone or small notepad to keep track of when you signed-in.
- Get to hair and make-up early or be hair and make-up ready as per call sheet.
- Keep phones on silent or vibrate.
- Don't take any photographs.
- No tweeting or using social media.
- You may be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement.

Food:

- Bring snacks and water; most sets provide food so you don't have to leave, but there are different provisions and meal times depending on the agreement.
- Don't ever walk off the set without letting someone know.
- Be prepared to be in "holding" for a long time.
- Bring a book or head

phones you can attach to your phone or mobile device.

At the end of the day:

- Return any wardrobe that isn't yours.
- Sign-out; make sure all information is correct and clearly written.

OFF SET...

- Participate in ACTRA workshops, conferences and committees.

What if you book two jobs back-to-back and the first one runs late?

It's not a good idea to book back-to-back-work as schedules change with very little notice. Also, days can be long and may require overtime.

Working back-to-back shifts, you run the risk of being late, too tired at work or working without any rest.

Know your limits.

Do not put your health and safety or anyone else's at risk.

REGISTER ONLINE:



Note: Having a background agent is not a guarantee of work.