



VOLUNTEER FRONT OF HOUSE MANAGER

Volunteer Role Date Range: March 13 to March 17, 2019

Hours Required: Minimum 4 hours

Reporting to: Volunteer Coordinator

Location: Various Venues

The front of house manager (FOHM) is responsible for the front of house (FOH) areas—the lobby spaces and the theatre space—before and after the performance. The FOHM is also responsible for the ushers. The FOHM works closely with box office personnel and the stage manager, or, if the performance does not have a stage manager, the FOHM will work closely with the venue technician.

The front of house team, which is managed by the FOHM, is often the first contact for many of our patrons. It is the responsibility of the FOHM to ensure they themselves and all ushers are prepared to assist patrons and/or know where to direct patrons if they do not have an answer. The FOHM will set a tone of professionalism amongst their team by remaining calm and courteous at all times. Work quickly and efficiently, but ensure that you do not appear to be 'flustered' as this creates a negative experience for patrons and often results in unprofessional behaviour.

Pre-show duties:

- Pick-up your front of house notes; this document will have been sent to you before your shift and outlines all of the essential information you will need to know and share with the ushers on your team.
- Connect with the box office manager and introduce yourself. You will work closely with this individual to assess when it is appropriate to close the doors to the theatre and turn the house over to the stage manager or venue technician, among other tasks. This is a good opportunity to find out from the box office manager how many tickets have been pre-sold so that you may anticipate how busy the event will be and therefore organize your staff accordingly. You will also want to know whether the tickets for the performance are general admission or assigned seating.
- Connect with the stage manager or venue technician and introduce yourself. You will work closely with this individual to ensure the performance begins without any undue delay. This is a good opportunity to find out from either the stage manager or venue technician if there are any delays or issues that may impact the start or end time of the event. If there are any special events (i.e. opening reception, post-show talk-back) ensure that they are aware and use this information to organize yourself and your team accordingly. Ask the stage manager or venue technician if there are areas where they would prefer the audience be seated first (e.g. where are the 'best' seats in the theatre or where would someone sit if they did or did not want to be called upon if there is audience participation). You will also need to find out if there is a 'latecomer's call' (this is when audience members who arrived after the show began are able to enter the theatre and take the closest available seat and will be least disturbing to the rest of the audience). The latecomers call is often a visual or aural cue, and some performances do not have a latecomers call - in that case any patron who arrives late will not be admitted. You will also need to know if anyone that leaves the theatre will be permitted back into the theatre - and if they are permitted back in the theatre, will they need to wait for the latecomers call. Ask where it is best for ushers to sit when the show begins and ensure to put reserved signs on these chairs. Finally, find out who is responsible for the safety and security of patrons should an emergency arise—this information will be available from the venue technician—and in particular, ensure you know who the fire marshal for the space is (the individual responsible for leading the public safely out of the building should there be an emergency).

- Familiarize yourself with the space
 - o Take note of the entrances and exits.
 - o Take note of washroom locations.
 - o Take note of any accessibility seating.
 - o Take note of fire alarms and fire extinguishers.
 - o Take note if there is an ATM (and if so, where).
 - o Take note of the audience configuration—especially if the performance has assigned seating.
- Ensure all facilities are clean and ready for patrons. If they are not, please inform venue staff and/or the venue technician who will be able to connect you with venue staff.
- Ensure any and all festival signage is displayed prominently and appropriately.
- Check your front of house notes to ensure there are no outstanding tasks.

When the ushers arrive:

- Greet your ushers and exchange names. It will be important for everyone to be able to efficiently communicate with each other. Communicate the environment of professionalism you will all maintain and encourage everyone to be the best host they can be!
- Orient your ushers to the performance. They will need to know:
 - o The name of the performance.
 - o A brief description of the performance.
 - o The duration of the performance.
 - o Who this performance is best suited for (is there a minimum recommended age?).
 - o How to check the theatre ticket for the correct information (sometimes patrons may accidentally arrive at the wrong venue. It is the FOH team’s responsibility to catch these errors and assist patrons).
 - o The location of an ATM if there is one onsite/nearby.
 - o If there is bar service, and if so where it is located.
 - o Whether patrons are allowed to take drinks into the theatre.
 - o When the doors to the theatre are scheduled to open.
 - o When the doors to the theatre are scheduled to close / when the performance is scheduled to begin.
 - o Any special information regarding the performance e.g. is there a strobe effect, coarse language, etc.
 - o If there are any special events, e.g. a post-show chat or reception.
- Orient your ushers to the lobby and theatre spaces.
- Ensure your ushers communicate all necessary information to each patron:
 - o Remind patrons to turn off their phones and/or any device that will beep or light-up.
 - o Inform patrons of the run-time of the performance and whether there is an intermission.
 - o Any information the box office manager, stage manager and/or venue technician has communicated to you as being necessary.

NOTE: If one or more of your ushers has not arrived on time, please give them 5 minutes, and then call them on the contact telephone number they have provided. If you are unable to reach the usher or they are unable to fulfill their shift, please contact the volunteer coordinator—their information will be on the front of house notes.

When it is time to open the doors to the theatre:

- **BEFORE opening the doors to the theatre, YOU NEED TO CHECK IN WITH THE STAGE MANAGER AND/OR THE VENUE TECHNICIAN.**

- o This is essential to the effective running of the event. Sometimes there are delays and technical issues that will prevent the doors to the theatre from opening on time. You are NOT ALLOWED to open the theatre doors until you are given the okay by the stage manager and/or the venue technician.
- When the stage manager and/or venue technician gives you the 'okay' to open the theatre doors, inform the box office manager and the ushers.
- Open the doors to the theatre. Periodically check in with the ushers to ensure they are still comfortable in their role and to check how many audience members have been admitted into the theatre.
 - o If the performance is sold out the FOHM will need to manage this number closely to ensure that all ticket holders are admitted.
- If there is an intercom / PA system, inform the patrons that the theatre doors are open. (A loud and welcoming voice may also do the trick!)
- Observe the audience entering into the theatre and troubleshoot any issues that may arise.
 - o If the performance is sold out, the FOHM may need to assist ushers in encouraging patrons to not leave an empty seat between them and the individual they are sitting next to.
 - o You may need to encourage the ushers to keep an eye out for seats in pairs or threes. There will be patrons who arrive in groups and who will want to sit together. Encourage the ushers to assist these patrons in finding seats. Ushers may want to request other patrons to move one or more seats over to accommodate others. In NO WAY should ushers 'boss' patrons around, but often a friendly request to move to assist another patron is often all is needed to ensure everyone has a good time.
- When there are 10 minutes to the start of the performance, make an announcement to patrons. Then, check-in with box office to see if they expect all ticket holders to arrive on-time.
- Often, patrons will hold their tickets at the box office and pick them up when they arrive. If there is a significant amount of pick-ups still remaining you may need to hold the house by ± 5 minutes. Factors such as weather, traffic delays, etc. can affect patrons' ability to arrive on time.
- When there are 5 minutes to the start of the performance, make an announcement to patrons, and then again at 2 minutes to curtain.
- Connect with the box office manager and then the stage manager / venue technician to ascertain if they will be ready to go on time. Collectively make a decision as to whether you will be starting the performance on time or if you will hold the house (and how long you will hold).
- If you NEED to hold the house for longer than 10 minutes, let the stage manager / venue technician know and make an announcement to patrons informing them and thanking them for their patience.
- When it is time to close the doors, **HAND THE HOUSE OVER TO THE STAGE MANAGER / VENUE TECHNICIAN.**
- 'Handing over the house' essentially tells the stage manager / venue technician that they are now in control of the theatre space and can begin the performance. When the FOHM has handed the house over, any and all activities in the theatre are controlled by the stage manager and/or the venue technician.
- **CLOSE THE DOORS TO THE THEATRE.**

When the doors to the theatre are closed:

- Collect any and all ticket stubs from the ushers and send them into the theatre (before the performance begins, so this needs to be done quickly) to assist any patrons that may need to leave during the performance and/or to watch out for any emergencies during the performance. They can also, of course, enjoy the performance!

- IF THERE ARE ANY EMERGENCIES DURING THE PERFORMANCE THE FOHM MUST BE AVAILABLE to assist. The FOHM is not to leave the venue or the immediate area around the theatre. If an usher spots an emergency they will search out the FOHM who will decide what course of action is to be taken. If the show needs to stop, it is the FOHM responsibility to inform the stage manager and/or venue technician if they are not already aware of the situation.
- Fill out the front of house report with all the information available.
- Count the ticket stubs and/or use the scanner to get the final number of patrons that were admitted into the theatre. Check this number against tickets sold with the box office manager and record both of these numbers in the FOH report.
- Watch out for any latecomers and seat them at the appropriate latecomers call if there is one. As well, prevent any individual that is not permitted in the theatre from entering during the performance.
- Keep track of time so you do not miss the end of the performance.

When the performance is over and the doors to the theatre reopen:

- When the performance is over, the ushers that are in the theatre will reopen the theatre doors. They will stand at the exit and thank patrons for attending. The FOHM should do the same.
- NOTE THE END TIME OF THE PERFORMANCE. This will be necessary for the front of house report.
- At this point, it is assumed that the stage manager and/or venue technician has turned the house back to the FOHM. If this is not the case (i.e. there is a post-show talkback onstage), continue to assist any patrons that are exiting, but do not disturb the theatre area. Wait for the stage manager or venue technician to turn the house over to you.
- When you have the house and the theatre is empty begin to clean the space with assistance from the ushers. You are looking to pick-up any rubbish left behind by patrons. Unless instructed otherwise, any large spills that require a vacuum and/or mop will be the responsibility of the venue, FOHM and ushers are responsible for any refuse that can be picked up.
- Remember that festival guides can be reused. If there are any left behind and if they are in good condition, please return them to the festival guide stock so other patrons can use them.
- Complete the front of house report.
- Once the theatre space is tidy and any other tasks are complete, you may dismiss the ushers.
- Say goodnight to the stage manager and/or venue technician. Your shift is complete!

General notes:

- If there are any complaints and/or a patron is dissatisfied and you cannot resolve the issue please ensure you communicate that you are listening to their concern. If the patron is willing, please take their name and telephone number. Add this information to the front of house report and communicate to the patron that a member of the Festival staff will be in contact as soon as possible to assist them.
- If there is an emergency and/or an incident or near-miss, COMPLETE AN INCIDENT REPORT.