



2025 Theatre Workplace Culture Report

*A Survey of Working Conditions, Safety, and Accountability
Across the American Theatre Field*

April 2025

theatreadvocacyproject.org

Executive Summary

Theatre Advocacy Project (TAP) conducted its 2025 Theatre Workplace Culture Survey to document the lived experiences of theatre practitioners across the American theatre field. With 48 responses from actors, administrative staff, directors, designers, front-of-house workers, and executive leaders, this report offers a data-grounded portrait of the structural conditions shaping workplace safety, accountability, and equity in theatre organizations today.

The data reveals a field in which systemic accountability gaps remain widespread. Respondents were predominantly employed by nonprofit and regional theatre companies. These accounts surface patterns that reflect structural failures in policy implementation, training, reporting infrastructure, and organizational culture.

TAP is committed to translating this evidence into structural change – through education, community, advocacy, and accountability infrastructure – as supported by the data.

Key Findings at a Glance



About This Survey

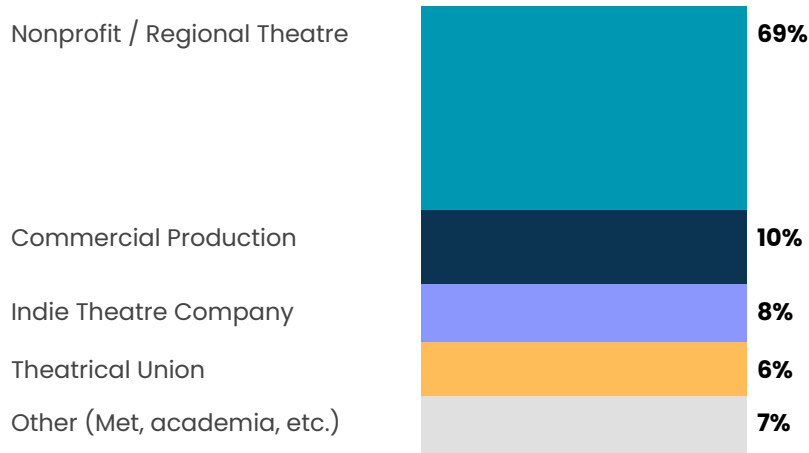
TAP launched the 2025 Theatre Workplace Culture Survey in February 2025 as part of its ongoing effort to build an evidentiary record of working conditions across the American theatre field. The survey was distributed to theatre practitioners through TAP's networks and collected responses through June 17, 2026.



Respondent Profile

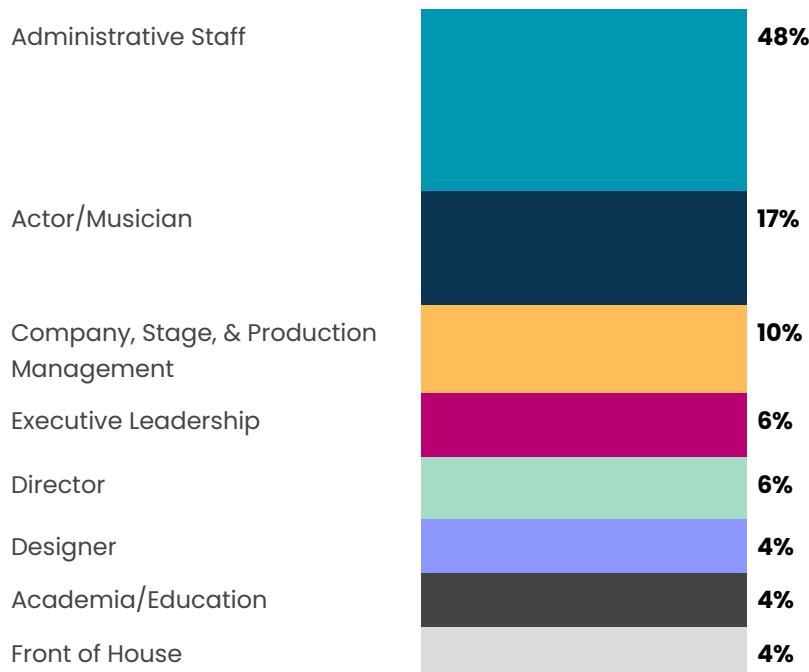
The survey captured 48 responses from practitioners across a range of organizational types and professional roles. Note that responses are rounded up to the nearest whole number.

Organization Type

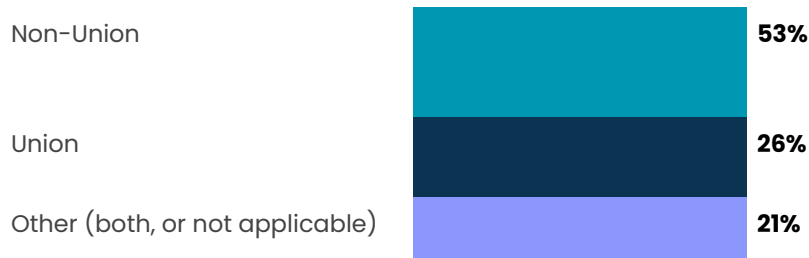


Practitioner Role*

* Note that some denoted more than one category, but were placed into the first category listed for simplicity



Union Status



Administrative staff make up the largest respondent group, representing nearly half of all responses. This is significant: administrative workers often sit at the intersection of institutional power and worker vulnerability, with unique insight into organizational culture, policy gaps, and leadership dynamics.

Section 1: Workplace Culture Ratings

Respondents were asked to rate the overall health of the workplace culture at their most recent theatre employer on a five-point scale. The results reveal a field in which positive and negative experiences co-exist — but where experiences of harm are far more prevalent than the industry's public-facing narrative tends to reflect.

Rating	# of Respondents	% of Total
5 – Extremely Positive	4	8%
4 – Positive	12	25%
3 – Neutral	10	21%
2 – Poor	15	31%
1 – Extremely Poor	7	15%

46% of respondents rated their workplace culture as Poor or Extremely Poor. Only 33% reported a Positive or Extremely Positive experience.

When nearly half of practitioners describe their most recent employer's culture as poor or extremely poor, the problem is systemic — not situational. 21% of respondents report neutral experiences. Neutrality often reflects disengagement, resignation, or uncertainty about what better should look like.

"Industry wide there is [a] deep classism and empathy gap for technical and production workers. This has spanned my 30 year career from LORT, to midsize, to small independent. This spreads into institutionalized toxicity, misogyny, and other hierarchical power structures."

— Survey Respondent

"Companies that are small, and companies that have existed for a long time hinge a lot on their reputation of excellence, but simultaneously glorify 'this is how it's always been.'"

— Survey Respondent

Section 2: Safety, Reporting, and Accountability Infrastructure

A healthy workplace requires not only the absence of harm, but the presence of systems that allow workers to identify, report, and seek resolution if and when harm occurs. This section examines the state of those systems across respondents.

Reporting Procedures and Awareness

Respondents were asked whether clear and accessible procedures exist for reporting discrimination, harassment, and other forms of harm.

Clear Reporting Procedures in Place?



65% of respondents either said no clear reporting procedures exist or were unsure whether they do. Only 36% could confirm that clear, accessible procedures are in place.

A reporting structure that workers cannot locate or confirm is not, in practice, a reporting structure. When a majority of practitioners are unable to affirm that a pathway exists, the infrastructure fails its core purpose — regardless of what may or may not appear in an employee handbook.

Conflict Resolution Awareness

Respondents were also asked whether they know what conflict resolution and incident reporting structures are in place. A slight majority — 52% — were unaware or unsure, with 48% confirming awareness. Even among those who answered yes, qualifications were common.

"Yes and no. Mostly yes, but our executive leadership is challenging, unapproachable, and often condescending."

— Survey Respondent

"The structures are there but not always followed."

— Survey Respondent

These qualifications matter. Formal structures that exist on paper but are not reliably accessible, enforced, or trusted by workers do not constitute adequate accountability infrastructure. This could produce worse outcomes than no formal structure at all — creating the appearance of accountability while providing insufficient protection.

Policy and Training Adequacy

Respondents were asked to assess whether their organizations have adequate policies in place, and whether adequate training is offered to prevent and address discrimination and harassment.

Measure	Disagree / Strongly Disagree	Neutral	Agree / Strongly Agree
Adequate policies in place	35%	21%	44%
Adequate training offered	46%	23%	31%

Training gaps are more pronounced than policy gaps. 46% of respondents said their organization does not offer adequate training, compared to those reporting inadequate policies (35%).

Policy without training is not uncommon. Organizations may have written harassment policies in place – sometimes required by funders or unions – while doing little to ensure staff understand them, know how to invoke them, or trust that they will be enforced. The result is a compliance culture rather than an accountability culture.

"We had an HR that was an outside org [...] poorly communicated and followed up on. And so we had no way to really keep our leadership in check."

– Survey Respondent

"No HR to report to."

– Survey Respondent

Section 3: Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation

The survey asked respondents directly about their experiences of discrimination, harassment, and retaliation. The findings reveal that harm is not rare – and that the systems meant to address it frequently fail to protect those who attempt to use them.

Discrimination and Harassment

Witnessed or Experienced Discrimination / Harassment



More than half of respondents – 54% – reported having witnessed or experienced discrimination or harassment in their theatre workplace.

When a majority of workers in any industry report having witnessed or experienced discrimination or harassment, the field has a systemic problem. In theatre, where hierarchical power dynamics, limited HR infrastructure, and economic precarity compound one another, these conditions are structurally produced.

Retaliation

The survey assessed retaliation through two lenses: direct experience or witness of retaliation after reporting a workplace issue, and perceived culture of fear of retaliation.

Measure	Yes	No	Unsure
Experienced / witnessed retaliation	35%	48%	17%
Measure	Agree / Strongly Agree	Disagree / Strongly Disagree	Neutral
Culture of fear of retaliation	40%	37%	23%

55% of respondents experienced or witnessed harm, and 34% experienced retaliation. This may mean that some reporting is successful and retaliation is not permitted, or it may reflect that many practitioners choose not to report at all, given the structural risks of doing so in a small, relationship-dependent field.

"Retaliation and blacklisting is a real issue. People who have committed harm are being welcomed back, but not the people who have blown the whistle. This deters people from speaking out."

"I was reprimanded for talking about pay and I believe I was fired after [leadership] discovering I have a disability."

— Survey Respondent

"As a woman in a leadership position, consistently treated like I should stay in my lane or [I am] overreacting to issues raised."

— Survey Respondent



Section 4: Compensation, Hours, and Effective Pay

Respondents shared compensation and hours data in a range of formats. After standardizing figures to annual equivalents, 44 of 48 responses yielded parseable pairs that allow a direct comparison of compensation against hours worked.

Compensation Overview

A note on methodology: compensation figures were reported in a range of formats – annual salaries, weekly rates, monthly stipends, and in one case a range. All figures were standardized to annual equivalents for comparison. Some positions (e.g. summer seasonal roles, limited-run actor contracts) were not year-round; annualizing those figures overstates actual yearly earnings, but is included here for consistency and to illustrate what those compensation rates would yield on a full-year basis.

Metric	Value
Lowest annual equivalent reported	\$2,400 (\$200/month)
Highest annual equivalent reported	\$208,000 (\$4,000/week)
Median annual compensation	\$50,000
Mean annual compensation	\$55,153
Median effective hourly rate	\$23.80/hr
Mean effective hourly rate	\$26.96/hr

The highest earner in the dataset is a union actor whose \$4,000/week rate annualizes to \$208,000 – but that reflects union scale for a limited engagement, not year-round employment. The median annual pay across all parseable responses was \$50,000, with a median effective hourly rate of \$23.80.

Compensation reported by respondents ranged widely across role and context:

- Administrative staff salaries (excluding one intern respondent) ranged from \$36,000 to \$120,000, with a median of \$62,500 and a mean of \$64,785 across 22 respondents
- Non-union performers received stipends ranging from \$350–\$475/week – annualizing to \$18,200–\$24,700 for a full year, though most engagements are seasonal
- One intern reported \$75/week (\$3,900/year annualized)
- One FOH respondent reported \$200/month (\$2,400/year)
- Executive leadership salaries ranged from \$30,000 to \$70,000 – in at least one case less than their administrative staff

Hours Worked vs. Effective Pay

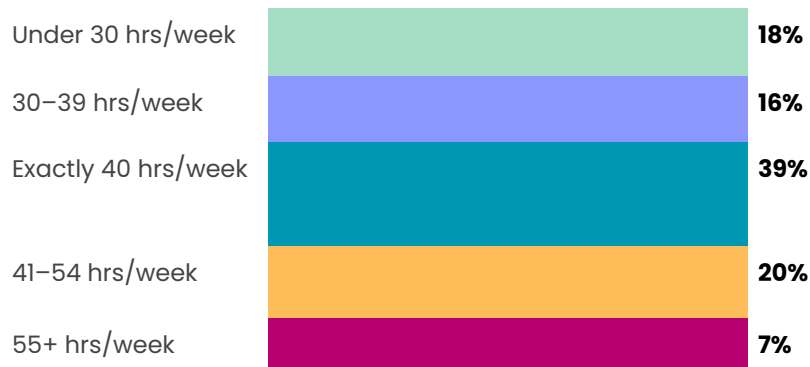
When compensation is weighed against actual hours worked – not contracted hours – a significant pay compression emerges for those working over 40 hours per week. Across 44 parseable respondent pairs, working longer hours in theatre does not correlate with meaningfully higher pay.

Hours/Week Bucket	# Respondents	Median Annual Pay	Median Effective Hourly
Under 40 hrs/week	15	\$24,856	\$17.58/hr
Exactly 40 hrs/week	17	\$58,000	\$27.88/hr
Over 40 hrs/week	12	\$75,000	\$27.26/hr

Workers putting in more than 40 hours per week earn a higher median annual salary (\$75,000 vs. \$58,000) – but their effective hourly rate is nearly identical (\$27.26 vs. \$27.88). The extra hours are largely uncompensated, and the gap widens significantly during tech-period overwork that is not reflected in these base figures.

The pattern is particularly striking for those in the over-40 bucket: their higher stated salaries mask the fact that additional hours are absorbed without additional pay. Multiple respondents noted tech and load-in periods of 50–72 hours per week with no overtime compensation, compressing effective hourly rates well below what annual figures suggest.

Distribution of Hours Worked Per Week



39% of respondents work exactly 40 hours per week. Nearly 27% work over 40 – and 7% report working 55 hours or more regularly. Several respondents noted that their official contracted hours (often 35–40) do not reflect actual expectations, particularly during tech and load-in.

"50–60 hours/week, 70+ during tech and load-in."

– Survey Respondent

"40 (paid for 35)."

– Survey Respondent

The gap between contracted and actual hours is a structural wage issue. When workers are formally engaged for 35 hours but consistently expected to work 40 or more, the uncompensated hours represent real income losses – disproportionately affecting administrative staff, production workers, and stage managers in organizations without strong union protections.

Section 5: Voices from the Field

Alongside quantitative data, the survey collected open-ended reflections and four live interviews, on what practitioners believe the industry is doing well, where the most urgent gaps remain, and what changes would most meaningfully improve workplace conditions. A selection of those perspectives follows.

What the Industry Is Getting Right

- Growing awareness of the need for HR infrastructure, even among organizations that have not yet fully built it
- Increased attention to trans and non-binary inclusion in casting and production processes
- Greater use of pay transparency and compensation disclosure in job postings
- Community-centered and culturally specific organizations modeling accountability-forward cultures

Where the Gaps Are Most Urgent

- Lack of independent, accessible HR infrastructure – especially in small and mid-sized organizations
- Power concentrated in founders and major donors rather than distributed to artists and workers
- Financial incentives that push organizations to suppress harm reports rather than address them
- Blacklisting of workers who report harm; reinstatement of those who caused it



- Absence of a licensing or credentialing system that creates accountability for theatre leadership
- Scarcity mindset and competitive funding structures that undermine solidarity and systemic reform

The following are paraphrased from responses during live interviews:

If you are a lawyer and you misact, you lose your license. There is no equivalent in American theatre.

Getting the grant by showing how happy your artists report being – this creates perverse incentives that push organizations to suppress harm rather than address it.

I think we need to find a way to get rid of the scarcity mindset. Maybe the system of competitive grants creates a dangerous battle where we feel like only one can win.

Section 6: Recommendations

The data presented in this report point to a set of structural interventions that the field must undertake to meaningfully address workplace harm. TAP offers the following recommendations to theatre organizations, funders, unions, and field conveners.

For Theatre Organizations

- Establish or contract independent, accessible HR infrastructure – not internal committees alone
- Create and communicate clear, multi-pathway reporting procedures to all staff and artists
- Invest in mandatory, recurring training on discrimination, harassment, and bystander intervention
- Implement pay transparency practices, including published salary ranges and overtime policies
- Conduct regular, anonymous workplace culture assessments and share results with boards



- Ensure boards have policies, training, and structures to hold executive leadership accountable

For Funders

- Require evidence of functional HR infrastructure and accessible reporting procedures as a condition of funding
- Move beyond aggregate satisfaction metrics that can lead to organizations suppressing harm that has occurred
- Fund multi-year organizational accountability infrastructure, not just programs
- Reframe success metrics to center worker safety and equity alongside artistic output

For Field Conveners and Unions

- Develop field-wide standards for conflict resolution and incident reporting
- Create shared, independent reporting and investigation infrastructure accessible to workers across organizations
- Establish credentialing or conduct standards for theatre leadership that carry consequences for harm
- Support whistleblower protection frameworks that prevent retaliation and blacklisting

A Note from TAP

Theatre Advocacy Project is committed to building the field-wide accountability infrastructure that this data demands. The patterns documented in this report show the accumulated weight of structural failures that have persisted for decades. What is new is the growing willingness of practitioners to name them, document them, and insist on something different.

This survey is one part of TAP's evidentiary work. It will be used to inform our work with individuals and theatre organizations, our facilitation of board governance and leadership accountability, our advocacy with funders and field leaders, and our continued development of tools and resources for the field.

To learn more about TAP's work, engage us for consulting or facilitation, utilize our educational tools, join our growing community, or contribute to future surveys, visit theatreadvocacyproject.org.

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