



FILE 11 · THE SAFETY NET

Free & Low-Cost Resources.

Free classes, sliding-scale services, scholarships, and the NYC nonprofits that exist specifically to keep artists in the game.

NEPA·PRO TALENT

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The safety net you didn't know existed.

New York has more free and low-cost resources for working artists than almost anywhere else in the country. Most of them are quiet about themselves. Below: the ones that matter.

FREE AND DISCOUNTED CLASSES

SAG-AFTRA Foundation Conservatory (for SAG-AFTRA members)

sagaftra.foundation · 247 W 54th St (NYC) and Robin Williams Center

If you're a SAG-AFTRA member, the Foundation runs free programming — workshops with directors, casting director conversations, on-camera classes, voiceover programs. Their NYC "Robin Williams Center" runs hundreds of events per year. Membership in the union automatically qualifies you.

Actors' Equity Foundation (for AEA members)

Through actorsequity.org

Equity members can access scholarships, classes, and emergency grants through the foundation.

BRIO (Bronx Recognizes Its Own)

bronxarts.org/brio · Bronx Council on the Arts

Annual cash awards to Bronx-resident performing artists. Modest amounts but cash, no strings.

NYFA (New York Foundation for the Arts)

nyfa.org

Fellowships, fiscal sponsorship for projects, professional development, and regular free or low-cost workshops. The fiscal sponsorship pathway lets independent artists raise tax-deductible donations for their projects.

The Drama League

dramaleague.org · 171 W 18th St

Director-focused programming, but their building hosts many free actor-relevant industry events. Membership is reasonable.

Theater Resources Unlimited (TRU)

truonline.org

Producer-focused but actor-friendly. Their newsletters list free and low-cost workshops, panels, readings, and networking events constantly.

FREE AUDITIONS & PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES

- Equity Principal Auditions (EPAs) — free for Equity members and Equity Membership Candidates. Required by contract
- Equity Chorus Calls (ECCs) — same as above, dance/singer focus

- Open calls — many indie productions hold true open calls. Find on Backstage and Playbill
- The Drama League Director-Actor Project — performer participation in director showcases
- NYC Department of Cultural Affairs grants and programming
- Public Theater Open Call — recurring; check publictheater.org
- Roundabout Theatre Company programs — including the Roundabout Underground for new artists
- Lincoln Center Theater Directors Lab — for directors but performers participate

SCHOLARSHIPS & GRANTS

- Carnegie Hall Actor Therapy Initiative — through the Lader/Caplan voice teachers
- Actors' Fund Looking Ahead Scholarship for young performers
- Various private foundations — the Actors Fund and SAG-AFTRA Foundation maintain regularly updated lists of grants and scholarships current at the time you apply
- School-specific scholarships — HB Studio, Stella Adler, Strasberg, Atlantic, Maggie Flanigan and most major schools have scholarship pathways. Apply

FREE SPACES TO REHEARSE OR WORK

- NYPL Performing Arts Library at Lincoln Center — quiet study, free recordings of thousands of plays and musicals (the Theatre on Film and Tape Archive — call ahead, requires an appointment, but is unbelievably valuable for research)
- Bryant Park Reading Room — quiet enough for line memorization on warm days
- NYU Bobst Library — if you're NYU-affiliated
- Public libraries — the New York Public Library system has practice/study rooms across the city
- The Drama Book Shop (Times Square) — long-running scripts-and-coffee bookstore; comfortable to read in

FREE OR DISCOUNTED THEATER TICKETS

If you can't see other people's work, you can't learn from it. NYC has more free and discounted theater than any actor needs:

- TDF (Theatre Development Fund) membership — deeply discounted Broadway, Off-Broadway, dance, music tickets. Annual fee, but pays for itself in two months
- TKTS booth — same-day discounted Broadway tickets. Times Square, Lincoln Center, Brooklyn
- BroadwayWorld & Playbill rush/lottery — daily updates of which shows have lottery, rush, and standing-room
- Public Theater FREE Shakespeare in the Park — line up in Central Park or use the digital lottery
- Shakespeare in the Parking Lot (LES) — outdoor free Shakespeare
- NYC SummerStage — free outdoor performances

- BAM — rush/student tickets for major international work
- St. Ann’s Warehouse, Soho Rep, Theater for the New City, La MaMa, Public Theater — all have low-cost programming or industry comp policies
- Industry comp tickets — many small theaters give free seats to industry on slow nights. Email, ask politely. The worst answer is no

FOOD & ESSENTIALS WHEN MONEY IS TIGHT

- Entertainment Community Fund Emergency Financial Assistance — rent, medical, utilities help
- NYC SNAP (food stamps) — if you qualify, apply at nyc.gov/snap. Self-employed performers often qualify even with intermittent income
- City Harvest, Food Bank for NYC — food pantries; not just for the homeless
- Catholic Charities, Met Council, UJA — emergency assistance regardless of religion
- NYC 311 — navigates city services for housing, food, mental health, etc.

DISCOUNTED PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

- VLA (Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts) — vlany.org — free and low-cost legal help for working artists. Contracts, copyright, immigration, taxes
- NYFA Source — database of nonprofits, grants, and discounted services for artists
- Brooklyn Arts Council, Bronx Council on the Arts, Queens Council on the Arts, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, Staten Island Arts — borough-specific arts councils with grants and programming

INDUSTRY READING — FREE

- The Drama Book Shop — you can browse for free for hours. Sit, read, leave
- NYPL Performing Arts Library — thousands of plays, books, and trade publications
- Backstage online articles — free, generally good
- Howard Sherman’s columns and the Theatremania archive
- Entertainment industry trades (Variety, The Hollywood Reporter, Deadline) often have free articles before paywalls; even free is better than not reading them at all

The principle: in NYC, asking is free. Email the theater, the foundation, the school. Half the resources actors don’t access exist because nobody asked. Ask.
