



When it comes to landing and maintaining union acting jobs, difficult times call for innovative measures. Screen Actors Guild leaders and staff are constantly finding ways to deliver SAG-signatory productions for a membership eager to work.

The roadblocks are not new. Producers have always had misconceptions about doing business with the Guild. So-called “right to work” laws have been in place for years. Production has spread out across the country, but it can be a matter of rain or drought, even for film-friendly states with substantial incentives.

The good news is there is indeed work out there, and it can be turned to your benefit.

“While it’s true that not every production starts out with the intention of being SAG-signatory these days, nationally we’re seeing more production activity of all kinds than ever before,” according to Nayla Wren, Screen Actors Guild’s director of organizing. “That translates to opportunity if we act fast and make a compelling argument for using professional talent.”

The following are some recent creative and resourceful ways that the Guild has made work available for members.

MAKING THE MOST OF REFERRALS

Independent production remains brisk, despite the economy. But don’t assume all of those filmmakers know much, if anything, about SAG. In many cases, simply referring a producer to the Guild can start a conversation that leads to great things.

Screen Actors Guild has a contract that fits any production, including the recently revised New Media Agreement, and business representatives and Branch executives stand ready to help.

“A filmmaker was referred to me by a member who has proven hugely successful in turning non-union work union through auditioning and sending the lead to me,” said Seattle and Portland Branch Executive Dena Beatty. “She contacted the filmmaker, who was looking to hire crew for a \$2.3 million feature, and asked him if he had any need for actors. He did, and he auditioned her and wanted to hire her. She gave me his name and number and I called him to help him through the process.”

But the producer was still fundraising and wasn’t ready to start paperwork. First, he needed a product to put in front of investors and audiences to create interest. He did not want to do a promo or trailer.

“I suggested that he should do a Web series to accomplish that goal,” Beatty said. “He loved the idea because he was able to do character development and back stories and have another product to add to his franchise while keeping his feature story intact. He said he would have never done this without his interaction with me. Just recently, he created a second Web series unrelated to the first.”

Two SAG-signatory new media productions, possibly more, and a feature film in the works—all because a member expressed interest in auditioning and shared information. (For more about auditioning to help turn jobs into union work, see page 58.)

UTILIZING EVENTS AND INCENTIVES

Beyond the benefits contained in SAG contracts themselves, becoming signatory entitles producers to an increasing list of opportunities for content promotion and professional enrichment.

In Hollywood, the MOVE Committee collaborated with the New Media Department in August to offer a class on digital marketing, exclusively for SAG-signatory producers.

“We were able to create a forum in which producers could learn to market their productions through new media approaches such as interactive websites, apps and the like,” said National New Media Director Mark Friedlander.

In addition, the Organizing Department sponsors a “For Your Consideration” industry ad that highlights SAG new media productions. The exposure helps them get a boost in votes for both the Streamy Awards and the Independent Television Festival Awards.

Screen Actors Guild, of course, participates in industry panels and events on an ongoing basis across the country. SAG Manager of Organizing Marlena

ROLE
REVERSAL:

Turning
Non-
Union
Acting
Jobs
Into
Union
Work

Fitzpatrick-Garcia is stationed in the New York office, which was the site of a New York International Latino Film Festival networking luncheon in July. There, the Guild screened a trailer of *Miracle of Spanish Harlem*, a SAG-signatory low budget film that utilized the Diversity in Casting Incentives.

“Our participation in NYILFF catapults our organizing and outreach efforts,” said Fitzpatrick-Garcia. “By inviting the *Miracle* filmmakers and actors to speak and exhibit their trailer, we showcased emerging Latino talent and promoted our diversity incentives.

“In doing so, we also inspired a whole new set of filmmakers, many of whom will become SAG-signatory for their future projects.” (For more about the Diversity in Casting Incentives, see page 59.)

actors to others outside the state. “The depth of talent in the Northwest is extraordinary,” Devlin reported. “We had grossly underestimated how many gifted actors we’d find there.”

Soon the number of SAG-franchised talent agents in Oregon grew from zero to four.

As the community conversation continued, the OMPA incorporated the feedback. Today, actors have a full stake in OMPA member activities, of which advocating for film incentive legislation is a huge part.

To unveil this new member type, OMPA and SAG sponsored the “Oregon’s Got Talent” party and networking event in September that counted more than 300 people in attendance.

“I’m proud to say it was an incredibly well attended event,” said SAG National Board Member Mary McDonald-Lewis. “The message the OMPA took away, which was received loud and clear, was that actors are poised to take their place at the table; that we’re a resource as valuable as Oregon’s gorgeous locations, as appealing as its incentive program and as much contributors to the process as our highly skilled crew.”

The party was a symbolic celebration for actors, but local efforts—like those across the country—continue.

MAXIMIZING SAG HIRES

With all the attention the Guild spends on turning non-union productions union, you might think SAG spends less time on ones that are already signed, but that’s not the case. One of the ways Screen Actors Guild increases work for members is by simply maximizing existing opportunities.

“It’s an actor’s dream to walk into a room full of fellow actors and be singled out by a casting director who holds out her hand saying, ‘I want to meet you!’” said actor Becky Maltby, who attended a “meet and greet” in mid-July set up exclusively for SAG members interested in working on the film *Battleship*. Hawaii Branch Executive Brenda Ching invited casting director Judy Bouley to mingle with members in hopes of boosting SAG hires.

“Bouley asked some with the right look for one of a handful of speaking roles to call the next day to set up an

audition,” said Maltby. “She and assistant casting director Katie Doyle were very encouraging throughout the process, clearly making every effort to use as many union members as possible in the film, which had need for some 3,500 background actors throughout September and October.”

Bouley herself expressed her appreciation to SAG for taking the initiative to host the event—the first time, she said, that a union has brought its talent directly to her.

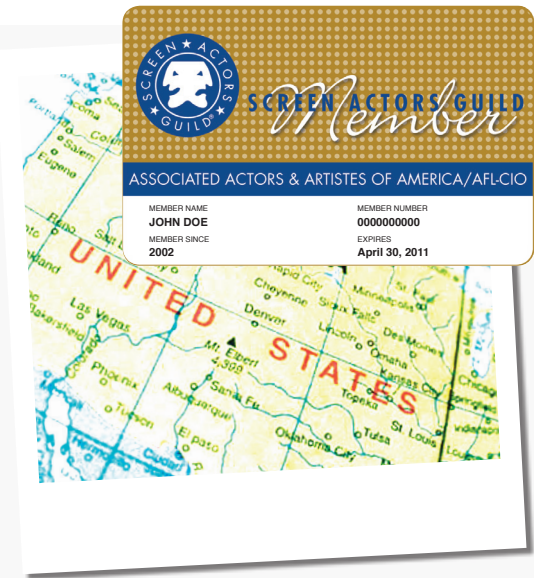


LEVERAGING INDUSTRY RELATIONSHIPS

Needless to say, nothing great was ever accomplished without a fair amount of teamwork, and the Guild quite frequently relies on a little help from its friends.

In Portland, a longstanding problem was a lack of awareness among visiting filmmakers that SAG has a strong pool of acting talent there. In fact, it has only been recently that the Oregon Media Production Association (OMPA) has begun marketing local actors the way it has other production resources.

The process toward achieving greater job empowerment began with conversations between SAG and the local production community, which was already aware of its best kept secret. Famous producers such as Dean Devlin soon began to sing the praises of Oregon’s



INCORPORATING INDUSTRY FEEDBACK

As always, it is part of Screen Actors Guild’s ongoing mission to make the business of show business easier. Guild leaders and the Organizing Department are currently interviewing producers, casting directors, actors, agents and directors for suggestions on how to make signing a SAG contract even more appealing.

Staff members recently collected useful feedback in the Detroit market regarding the Industrial Agreement and will continue to fan out in the three divisions to have more conversations about the contracts you work.

In the meantime, if you or someone you know (union or non-union) has a suggestion for the Guild, feel free to send those thoughts to nayla.wren@sag.org. You may also phone the National Organizing Department at (323) 546-6592 or speak to your local business office directly.



10 WAYS TO TURN A PRODUCTION UNION



#1 Take action by auditioning

Every actor at some point has probably had the same thought: I'd love to act in that production, but it's not SAG-signatory. I'd be breaking Rule One.

The biggest problem with this scenario is actors perceive the situation as a problem. In actuality, it's a tremendous opportunity.

"It's important for Guild members to remember that you and your professionalism are the best organizing tools that the union has," said Nayla Wren, Screen Actors Guild's director of organizing. "Whenever you hear that a project is non-union, you should feel empowered to ask yourself, 'What can I do to change that?'"

One such member who does that on a regular basis is Diane Matson of the Seattle Branch, who has gotten work in her home state and across the country simply by identifying projects and finding out if she can audition.

Matson said her policy is to tell the producer up front that she is a SAG member, because she feels it gives her an edge, but others may wish to wait until after they've been offered the role.

No matter what happens with the audition, "I always offer to introduce them to my SAG rep," she said. "That way, they can hear reasonableness instead of

rumors. Half the time the filmmakers are not sure, or they say, 'If we hire you, we'll go SAG.'"

Matson said prospecting for new employers is something everyone can do.

"I'm very persuasive! I'm trying to get the job, right?" she said. "I sell myself, and part of me is SAG."

Here's a breakdown of how you can make the process work as well as Matson does:

- Audition. Although **Rule One requires that you do not accept non-union work**, nothing prohibits you from auditioning for this work and seeking the opportunity to turn non-union work union.
- Get the part. You're likely to stand out in a non-professional, non-union crowd. Do your best audition, develop a friendly relationship with the producer, and once you're offered the role...
- Explain, in a kind and professional manner, that you can't do the role unless it's union. Let the producer know that going union is not nearly as complicated or expensive as they might imagine.
- Get your SAG staff involved. At every Regional Branch office and in the New York and Los Angeles offices, there are staff members waiting to help you. These staff members can find the right agreement for a production at any budget level. They also can reach out to the producer and address any concerns.
- Keep the dialogue going—among SAG staff, the producer and you. Almost every producer prefers working with professional talent, but many producers don't realize how easy it is to work with SAG contracts. The more open you and the producer are about mutual plans and concerns, the easier it is for SAG to find the right contract for the job.

#2 Make dollars and sense arguments

Another SAG member who's dedicated to making every production union is Justin

Kreinbrink, an Arizona Branch alternate council member. He said some indie producers get turned off if an actor uses the words "professionalism" and "union" because of the misconception that these words translate to "expensive." You have to approach the conversation carefully and with tact.

Producers basically just need to know that actors like you will save them takes, which will save them time (and all the production costs associated with it). In the end, they're going to want a quality product they can sell—not to mention a clean chain of paperwork.

"Remind the producer that without a SAG contract, it is nearly impossible to get the completed film placed with a reputable distributor," Kreinbrink said. "This is due to the legal protection distributors feel a union provides. With non-union productions, there's no double check to make sure the proper releases and paperwork for each actor are in place. However, if the project was done under a SAG contract, SAG verifies that all paperwork was properly submitted. As a result, distributors feel it is safer for them to take on the responsibilities of distributing the film."

Which brings us to our third thing you can do to help us turn a production...

#3 Hand them a contract digest

You've probably seen the small red pamphlet that summarizes each of Screen Actors Guild's low budget agreements. They are available upon request, and are meant for your use, but they are also available to producers who you think might be willing to use you. Just send an e-mail to your Branch executive or nayla.wren@sag.org and copies will be sent to you.

"One of the best lines you may ever say is, 'I am a member of Screen Actors Guild, and would you like to know how easy it is to hire me?'" Arizona and Utah Branch Executive Don Livesay wrote in a recent Branch newsletter. "Have a digest on hand,

so when employers want to know more, you'll be able to provide some answers right on cue."

Here are more ways you can improve the amount of union work available:

#4 Refer them for more information

Producers typically find SAG contracts simple and cost effective. Let everyone know how easy it is to work with SAG, and refer interested parties to SAG.org, SAGIndie.org or your local Branch or Division office.



#5 Build bridges between producers

You or your local staff can put the producer in touch with a SAG-signatory producer who's proud to have gone union. This producer-to-producer dialogue builds confidence and alleviates fears the non-union producer might have.

#6 Get producers to participate

Every SAG Branch has workshops, seminars and social events that will help both you and producers. At these events, producers will gain knowledge and tools to forward their careers. They'll also have a positive experience with the union. So invite them! We're always happy to answer their questions.



#7 Start'em young

Every SAG Branch does comprehensive outreach to colleges and arts high schools in their area. Ask your local staff about how you can help; it's a great way to meet the filmmakers of tomorrow.

#8 Build relationships with other unions

Participate in local labor events. Other unions often give the Guild information about productions, often ones they're partners in. Making a positive connection with these union members can help us keep an eye out for new opportunities.

#9 Build relationships within the industry

The more contacts you have, the easier it is to get in touch with producers who might have misinformation about the union, which you can help correct.

#10 Don't forget to mention the added benefits

Aside from the top-quality talent available, there are many other benefits that make SAG appealing to producers. The Guild can help them reach a wider audience, facilitate the casting of their productions and even increase their industry connections.

DIVERSITY CASTING INCENTIVES

What do *Guns, Girls & Gambling*, filmed in Utah, *Coming Up Roses*, filmed in Colorado, and *Rites of Spring*, filmed in Mississippi, have in common? They all took advantage of the Diversity in Casting Incentive, which is available to producers of feature films that shoot under either the Low Budget or the Modified Low Agreements.

That means that in return for hiring a specified percentage of performers from certain protected groups under contract, a production is permitted to expand its budget beyond what is limited by the regular Low Budget Agreement by 50 percent. This same incentive is also available under the Modified Low Budget Agreement.

Here is what the Diversity in Casting Incentive looks like. The total production cost maximum may be increased to the following amounts: Modified Low Budget Agreement—from \$625,000 to \$937,500; Low Budget Agreement—from \$2.5 million to \$3.75 million, if the producer has demonstrated diversity in casting by meeting the following criteria:

A) A minimum of 50 percent of the total speaking roles and 50 percent of the total days of employment are cast with performers who are members of the following four (4) protected groups:

1. WOMEN
2. SENIOR PERFORMERS (60 OR OLDER)
3. PERFORMERS WITH DISABILITIES, OR
4. PEOPLE OF COLOR (BLACK/AFRICAN-AMERICAN, ASIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER AND SOUTH ASIAN, LATINO/HISPANIC, ARAB/MIDDLE EASTERN AND NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN)

B) A minimum of 20 percent of the total days of employment is cast with performers who are People of Color.

For more information about SAG's Diversity in Casting Incentive and the Diversity, Special Skills and Talent Bank, e-mail diversity@sag.org or call Yuisa Gimeno (323) 549-6644.