

AFTRA and SAG

What is AFTRA?

AFTRA is the performers' union that covers taped and digital radio and television programming. AFTRA negotiates and administers contracts for network, local and public television and radio programs, television and radio commercials, sound recordings, interactive programs, Internet, animation, music videos, and non-broadcast industrial and educational programs.

What is SAG?

SAG is the performers' union that covers film. SAG negotiates and administers contracts for prime-time television programs, theatrical features and television films, television commercials, public television, non-broadcast industrial and educational films, animation, interactive programs, and music videos.

Neither AFTRA nor SAG has jurisdiction over print modeling, live trade shows, or live theatre unless the performance has a broadcast or recorded aspect.

Where are the offices for AFTRA and SAG?

In New England, AFTRA and SAG are administered out of a joint office at:

535 Boylston Street
Boston, MA 02116
617.262.8001
Fax: 617.262.3006
boston@aftra.com

The AFTRA National office is located in New York at:

260 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10016
212.532.0800
www.aftra.com

The SAG National office is located in Los Angeles at:

5757 Wilshire Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90036-3600
213.954.1600
www.sag.org

What do AFTRA and SAG offer their members?

AFTRA and SAG offer protection under collectively bargained contracts between employers and the unions to ensure those members are protected from arbitrary and unfair treatment.

AFTRA and SAG National and Local Collective Bargaining Agreements ensure that:

- Members are paid at least a professional wage (minimum scale);
- Members are paid in a timely fashion;
- Members are paid for overtime, re-use fees, weekend premiums, travel time, etc.;
- Safe working conditions are upheld;
- Established grievance and arbitration procedures allow members to pursue claims and complaints without fear of harassment or discrimination;
- Qualified members have medical, dental, and pension plans.

What other benefits does the Boston office of AFTRA and SAG offer its members?

- Access to the AFTRA/SAG Hotline, up-to-date listing of casting for AFTRA and SAG employment, as well as information regarding union events and activities;
- Regular membership meetings and orientation services for new members;
- Eligibility for inclusion in the New England AFTRA/SAG Talent Guide—a casting tool used by producers, agents, and casting directors;

- Monthly conservatories, with training and informational seminars on such subjects as audition tips, preparation of tax returns, and video and film performance techniques;
- The New Englander, the newsletter published quarterly by the Boston office, as well as national magazines published by each union;
- A listing of current “signatories” (see below), casting companies, and franchised talent agents in the Boston area;
- Eligibility to join the AFTRA/SAG Federal Credit Union, which provides savings accounts and loans at generally more favorable interest rates than most banks (located at 6922 Hollywood Blvd., Suite 304, Hollywood, CA 90028, 800.826.6946;
- Eligibility to serve on AFTRA/SAG committees that address various areas of concern and/or interest to the members, including the Equal Employment Opportunity Committee, Conservatory Committee, Member Communication Committee, Outreach Committee, Wages and Working Conditions Committee, and many others.

How do I join AFTRA?

Anyone can join AFTRA at any time, contract or no contract. One word of caution, however: don’t join too soon. If you’re untrained and inexperienced, you may find it hard to compete with other AFTRA members for jobs. After you join AFTRA, you can only work on union jobs. When you are ready to join AFTRA, all you need to do is contact the local office to make an appointment to join.

How do I join SAG?

Screen Actors Guild does not have an open-membership policy. To join, you must have worked under a SAG contract, earning SAG wages, either for one day as a principal or three days as an extra. Contact the local SAG office to make an appointment to join. You may also join SAG through the “back door.” That is, you qualify to join SAG if you have been a member of a SAG “sister” union (AEA, AFTRA, AGVA, or AGMA) for at least one year and you can provide proof of principal work under that union’s jurisdiction.

What is considered a “principal” or an “extra” role?

Although the specifics of each contract vary, generally a principal role is a speaking part and an extra (or background performer) is a non-speaking part. In some contracts, a non-speaking part may be a principal part if it is distinct and recognizable. The AFTRA/SAG office can assist you with these types of questions.

Will I ever be required to pay the initiation fees and dues?

Yes. When you first work as a principal under either AFTRA or SAG jurisdiction, or when you work up to three days as an extra under SAG jurisdiction, you are not required to join that union. For the next thirty days, you may accept as many union jobs as you wish. However, as of the thirty-first day (after your first day of principal work or your third day as a SAG extra), you become a “must-pay.” That is, you must pay the initiation fees and dues of the union under whose jurisdiction you have worked before you accept any additional work under that union’s jurisdiction. The union office will not clear you for work once you are a “must pay.”

If I join either AFTRA or SAG, can I accept a role in a non-union production?

No. Rule One of membership in AFTRA and SAG requires members to work only for companies that have signed a collective bargaining agreement with the unions. These companies are known as signatories. Rule One is also expressed as “no contract, no work.” No member may perform any work that would fall under the union’s jurisdiction without a written agreement with the union.

What do I get paid on an AFTRA or SAG job?

There are many different kinds of contracts. Each type of job, whether a commercial, film, industrial, or voice-over, has a different pay scale and a different arrangement for reimbursement, transportation, mileage, residuals, and other considerations. The AFTRA/SAG office can supply you with rate sheets and summaries of some of the more common contracts.

What is an AFTRA/SAG signatory?

An AFTRA/SAG signatory is an advertising agency, production company, or client that has signed an AFTRA/SAG code (or contract) requiring them to adhere to the working conditions and methods of payment set forth in that code. Under certain circumstances, a paymaster may also be a signatory.

What is an AFTRA/SAG paymaster?

A paymaster is a payroll company hired by the production company or ad agency to assume the payroll obligations for the job. This includes paying your salary and taking proper deductions, handling pension and welfare contributions, keeping track of residuals, and processing unemployment and W-2 forms.

Can I work on a job if the paymaster is a signatory but the ad agency and the Production Company are not?

If the job is under an industrial contract, yes. If the job is under a commercial contract, no. When the job is a commercial, the paymaster cannot be the only signatory. The production company or ad agency must also be a signatory. The paymaster can handle the payments, but the production company or ad agency remains responsible for all-future cycles and uses. An industrial is different: industrials are usually one-shot payments, not cycles, so the union allows the paymaster to be the only signatory.

Who are the paymasters in New England?

American Residuals and Talent
Hedgehog Hill
Madison, NH 03849-0150
603.367.9955

Can a casting company or agent be a paymaster?

No. AFTRA and SAG do not recognize casting companies or talent agents as signatories because they do not hire union talent.

How do I know if my employer is a signatory?

Ask! If in doubt, call the union office. It is the member's responsibility to ensure that a company is a signatory or, for an industrial, that the company is using a signatory paymaster.

Where can I get a list of signatories in the Boston area?

The AFTRA/SAG office will send *members* a list upon request.

Can an AFTRA/SAG signatory hire non-union actors, too?

On any SAG or AFTRA job, all actors must be union members, unless the union contract specifically permits the use of non-union performers or allows a waiver (called a Taft-Hartley Waiver) to the signatory. If you are a union member and you think that non-union people are working on a union job improperly, notify your union office immediately. All actors on a union job must be paid the same wages unless the union contract permits a certain ratio of union members to non-union members (for example, a certain number of non-union extras may be used).

A producer asks me to waive part of my contract. Can I?

Absolutely not. A union member may never waive any part of a contract or payment. A producer who desires a waiver must petition the union for approval. The union, in consultation with the actor, will decide.

When do I sign the contract?

You must sign a talent contract or voucher on the day of the job. The talent contracts that the Boston office has designed allow you to keep one copy for your records and send one copy to the union office as your member report of work done.

Who is responsible for supplying the actual talent contract on the day of the job?

Your employer. However, it's wise to have a blank contract with you on the day of the job just in case.

Should I expect any other paperwork?

Your own. Keep full and accurate personal records of every job you do: when, where, who, dates, which union, and times. Keep copies of your contracts forever.

How do I qualify for medical/dental benefits from AFTRA or SAG?

You qualify for medical benefits by reaching certain earning levels. Since these levels change frequently, you should check with the health fund offices for the most up to date information. For AFTRA www.aftrahr.com or call 800-562-4690; For SAG: www.sagph.com or call 800-777-4013. Both unions' Health and Pension Funds are funded by contributions made on your behalf by your signatory employers. The Health Funds require premium payments for participation. To maintain coverage, you must continue to earn the annual minimum, and pay the required premium on time. If your earnings drop below that minimum in one year, or you do not pay the required premium on time, your coverage will stop, but you will have the option of continuing coverage for a specified period of time under a self-payment plan.

Who can answer questions about health or pension benefits?

Call the AFTRA Health and Retirement Fund at 800.562.4690, or www.aftrahr.com or the SAG Pension and Health Plan at 800.777.4013, or www.sagph.com

What is the "AFTRA/SAG Talent Guide?"

The Boston AFTRA/SAG office publishes a book listing union talent in New England. For a nominal fee, union members can have a picture and some resume information included. The book is made available to union producers, signatories, and casting directors and film offices throughout New England at no charge.

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