

USHER POLICY GUIDE

Thank you for volunteering at Northern Stage!



Your service and commitment are vital to operations; we couldn't do this without you.

Below is a reference guide for usher policies.

Questions? Contact volunteer@northernstage.org or (802) 296-7000.

Before we start: *Why require orientation every year?*

Where you stand may not change, but customer service policies do. We continually track feedback to assess our greatest needs. Each year, we update orientation to reflect vital changes. If you have a suggestion to improve policy, **PLEASE email us instead of carrying out the change yourself.** We value your opinion but want to maintain a streamlined, consistent team.

MINIMUM AGE: Ushers must be 16 years or older

Ushers should be self-sufficient, mature, and able to get to the theater on their own. If you have special exception requests, let us know.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE: **Please arrive ONE HOUR prior to showtime and be ready**

Running late? Call (802) 296-7000 (leave a message if no one picks up). Need to leave early? Let us know in advance (at least 24 hours' notice is ideal). We rely on ushers to prep materials before the play and be our eyes inside the theater through the end of the play and need to make necessary preparations if you cannot fulfill either role.

DRESSCODE

- White tops & black bottoms (Black apron & supplies are provided by NS)
- Clothes must be appropriate for customer service: no miniskirts/shorts, rips, dirt, or stains. General cleanliness and hygiene is a must.
- Coming straight from work and need to change clothes? Totally fine. Please alert the box office if you're going to be late.

NEW! PHOTO RULES

- Patrons may take photos in the theater before and after the performance and during intermission. If you post photos, you must credit the production's designers

(names will be listed in the playbill). Please note: Photos are strictly prohibited during the performance. Photos of the stage are not permitted if an actor is present. Video recording is not permitted at any time in the theater.

UPON ARRIVAL AT THE THEATER

- Names of spaces: the Barrette Center for the Arts has within it the Roesch Lobby, and Byrne Theater, among others.
- Check in with the House Manager (HM) when you arrive. They will often be in the HL Vom, or *House Left Vomitory*, which is the entrance to the Byrne Theater on the left as you enter from the lobby. The doors will be propped open, and programs will be set up for sorting into baskets.
 - Pick up your usher apron (top right drawer in HL Vom) and check that it has: volunteer badge/Evacuation Duty Card Holder, seating map, flashlight, post-it pad, and pen. Replace flashlight batteries if needed.
 - Get assigned a pre-show project
 - Only check in with the Box Office if the HM is not present.

PRE-SHOW

- Count and stuff playbills (inserts & donation envelopes in HL Vom drawers)
- Lightly clean areas of patron use including but not limited to:
 - Bathrooms (wipe counters, pick up trash, stock each stall with 2 rolls of extra toilet paper, empty trash if full, check soap and paper towels)
 - Use glass cleaner to wipe down main and side entrance doors
 - Sweep, vacuum, and tidy upper & lower lobbies
 - Voms (entrances & exits into theater space)
 - Theater space (seating only - stage management cleans the set, please pick up trash and unused playbills in space)
- Circle up with HM (*at least 15 mins. before house open*):
 - HM will discuss show specifics (synopsis, runtime, house count, intermission length, SM requests re: policies during show, evacuation procedure) and will assign usher duties & check walkies-talkies
 - Ask any questions about ushering, the show, or other info at this time

HOUSE OPEN

- **Ticket-takers (3 TTs total)**
 - HM will tell you when to open your door. Do not open before HM gives the OK (give SM/actors time to prepare onstage)
 - **1** usher at each lower lobby entrance and **1** usher at the top of the stairs will tear tickets, hand out playbills, and tell patrons which way to go inside the theater

- HM will tell you when it is time to close your door. Do not close until HM gives the OK. If there is no intermission, give your ticket stubs to HM at this time. Close inner and outer doors, then head to your seat.
- Top of stairs ticket-taker is responsible for ALL upstairs doors.
- **Way-finders (4 WFs total)**
 - **1** usher at end of each handrail downstairs and **2** at top of upper lobby on either side of TT's basket: greet patrons and ask if they need help finding seats (do not point, gesture with an open hand)
 - You may head to your seat when HM tells you or when you see ticket takers closing downstairs doors
- **NEW! Concessions (1 CS total)**
 - **1** usher to staff concessions: set up counter display, sell snacks & drinks (no alcohol), count cashbox, etc. Stop selling snacks 5 minutes before showtime (except intermission pre-orders). Remind patrons only bottled water allowed in theater. There will be a more detailed how-to at the concessions counter that you will follow.
- **NEW! Usher seating assignments**
 - Downstairs Wayfinder for 100s/200s: A101
 - Downstairs Wayfinder for 200s/300s: A306
 - Concessions: H101
 - Other usher seats: H102, H305, H306, H307, H308
 - Please note: the HM has ultimate discretion over seating assignments.

DURING THE SHOW

- Ushers must sit in assigned seats. Ushers are strategically placed in the theater and may not switch seats without HM permission.
- Ushers must be in theater during show unless HM makes a special exception (except restroom breaks / feeling unwell / emergencies).
- Please always be aware that you are representing Northern Stage at all times during your shift. Particularly for ushers in the front row, who are especially visible to actors and audience members, it is important to be aware of your facial expressions and body language.
- No cell phone calls, eating, or leaving your post, except for emergencies. Catching up with friends is wonderful, but don't get too distracted!

Addressing Situations You May Encounter

- Patron asks if they can sit in a different seat
 - Short answer: **no**. The box office continues to late-seat past the start of the show. If patrons move, we lose track of available seats, making front of house look disorganized and disrupting patrons enjoying the show.

- If there is a dispute, kindly ask to see the tickets of both groups. Double-check show date, time, and seat numbers. Reseat accordingly, or get your HM.
- If a patron needs to move seats, send them to the box office.
- Patron gets up during show
 - Use your flashlight to guide them up any stairs to the closest exit. It is crucial to let the door closest to the theater close before opening the outer door. We do not want outside light to slip onstage.
- Patron has accessible needs or special accommodations
 - Connect with your HM. We train all staff on the accommodations we provide.
- Patron needs medical attention
 - Remain calm
 - Find your HM in the lobby. HM will report to Stage Manager if we need to stop the show & vice versa
- Patron enters theater with food/drink
 - Respectfully tell them it is against policy to bring anything but bottled water into the theater.
 - Patrons are welcome to leave food and drink at the box office, a cafe table, or window sills in upper lobby
 - If a patron puts a snack in their bag, we trust them. If they do begin to eat during the show, quietly and politely tell them to put their snack away
- Patron takes pictures during the performance (when an actor is onstage)
 - Respectfully tell them this is against union rules. We enforce this out of respect for the actors.
 - Kindly ask them to delete the photo. You do not need to watch them, trust that the patron will understand and follow our rules.
- Patron stays late in the theater
 - Once most of the audience is out, please begin your End of Shift tasks. Patrons will notice that you are closing down the theater and will head out on their own.
 - HM will ask patrons to leave the theater if necessary.
- Fire alarm goes off - refer to your **Evacuation Duty Card Holders**
 - Stand up and direct patrons to the lower vom exits
 - Follow immediately after the last patron in your area
 - Gather patrons outside the theater by the rain garden
 - Wait for further instructions from HM
 - HM will let you know if there are any immediate changes, such as an alternate exit route
 - If there is a patron in the back row who is unable to exit the theater using the stairs, they should exit through the upper lobby and “safety and shelter”

outside of the elevator. Please let the HM know if a patron is doing this so that they can communicate with the fire department. Do not wait with the patron.

INTERMISSION

- Ticket-taker Ushers
 - Prop open your inner and outer doors, then resume your post.
 - Assist patrons with questions and make sure no food or drink (except water with a cap) enters the theater
 - Give HM your ticket stubs and any patron feedback.
 - If you need to go to the restroom, please try to do so as soon as intermission starts, so you do not get stuck in a line
- Way-finder Ushers
 - You all become Stage Guardians during intermission (keep patrons from stepping onto the stage, touching props, etc.)
 - Keep an eye out in the theater for food or beverages
 - Answer patron questions
 - There must always be 2 wayfinders guarding the stage during intermission
 - If you need to go to the restroom, please try to do so as soon as intermission starts, so you do not get stuck in a line
- Concessions Ushers
 - Return to your post the moment the act is finished and run concessions during intermission. Call the HM if you need assistance. If you need to use the restroom, please do so right before the second act starts.
 - Please do not consume food or beverage while interacting with patrons (except water). We recommend that you eat and drink before your shift so you do not need to eat and drink while ushering.

POST-SHOW

- As patrons exit, thank them for coming
- Have baskets at your doorway to collect playbills
- Do a sweep of the house to pick up playbills, tickets, and debris (give HM any lost and found items. Check your usher aprons for any items before leaving!)
- Check in with HM to see if any tasks needed before you leave
- Return aprons to the HL vom

THREE-STRIKES POLICY

When you volunteer, you represent Northern Stage, and we expect ushers to provide excellent customer service. If we observe you acting in a way that is not appropriate or representative of Northern Stage, we may issue you a strike. We will always let you know any issues we observe. Once an usher receives three strikes, they cannot usher the

remainder of that season (though they are often welcome to return the next year). We continue to strive for the best customer service in the Upper Valley, and are grateful for your help in supporting and being attentive to our policies.

Examples of behavior that does not adhere to our policies:

- Permitting patrons to change seats without confirming with the box office
- Not showing up without calling or emailing the box office in advance.
- Cancelling within three hours of the start of your shift, except during extreme weather as determined by Northern Stage/National Weather Service
- Showing up 10 or more minutes late
- Not wearing appropriate attire
- Having physical or verbal altercations with patrons
- Rudeness to fellow ushers, house manager, or box office staff
- Arriving for your shift under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Linger in lobby during intermission instead of being at your post guarding the stage (wayfinders), helping patrons at doors (ticket takers), or selling concessions.
- Eating or drinking during your shift (except water or emergency/medical foods).
- Falling asleep, talking loudly, or presenting distracting facial expressions or body language during the show, especially if sitting in the front row.
- Not sitting in your assigned usher seat
- Disrespecting actors' time and space.
 - Our actors are here performing a job. Shows are physically and mentally draining, so time offstage is crucial for actors to rest and recuperate. A quick "great show!" or "break a leg!" is fine, but please do not engage in lengthy conversations with the actors before, during, or after the performances. If you see our actors out and about in town, please feel free to approach them and chat with them further!
 - NEVER give actors negative comments, such as "you look tired" or "I didn't like the show." Such comments can affect actors' performances and discourage them from returning to Northern Stage in the future. Other actors may also overhear and be hurt. Even if you have rapport with a certain actor or if an actor is on staff or is your best friend, we ask you not to make these comments.

IMPORTANCE OF ORIENTATION

Importance of Orientation, Canceling Shifts, and Signing Yourself Up Online

In order to sign up for an usher slot, you **MUST** attend an orientation each season. Your sign up link will be emailed to you after we have completed all summer usher orientations in September. If you share the link with a friend or family member who does **NOT** attend orientation, we will remove them from the sign up and ask them

to come to the next orientation. Orientation provides a consistent level of customer service and safety training specific to Northern Stage policies. We will have orientations between shows to onboard new ushers throughout the season. Please check northernstage.org for specific dates.

SIGNING UP TO USHER

We ask you to sign up for your own shifts online through the link we send you. If you do not have internet or need help signing up, please email volunteer@northernstage.org or call (802) 296-7000.

HOW TO USE THE **NEW!** SIGNUP:

- Once you have attended an usher orientation, we will send you an email with the link to sign up for all ushering spots this season. Click on the link.
- The link will take you to our website page with all available spots displayed. Click on the sign up link for your desired spot(s) and fill in all necessary information. If you are signing up a group, each volunteer must have their own name and accurate contact information entered so we can properly keep track of all ushers.
- **PLEASE NOTE: All ushers must attend an orientation annually. Sign-ups from volunteers who have not attended orientation will be cancelled, and the box office will contact them to ask them to attend our next orientation.** If you have signed up correctly, you should receive a reminder email the week of and phone call the day before your scheduled shift. If you have not received these notifications, please contact us - you may not have successfully signed up or changed your shift. Also contact if you receive reminders, but have cancelled.

CANCELING A SHIFT

To cancel an ushering shift, please email volunteer@northernstage.org or call (802) 296-7000. Do not find your own replacements. We appreciate your desire to help, but we already have a substitute usher list and want to be fair to them.

NEW! MINIMUM SHIFT REQUEST

For any shows that run **5 weeks or longer** (*Matilda* and *Once*), we ask all volunteers to sign up for a **minimum of 2 shifts**. For shows with a shorter run, we ask that each volunteer initially signs up only once, and then adds extra shifts through our substitute usher emails when extra slots open up. (These requests aim to fairly balance the load of work and give all ushers the opportunity to see each show.)

FINAL POINTS

- If you don't know the answer to something, stay positive, calm, and confident and find someone who does. Always ask if you're not 100% sure of the answer. _

- Gesture with an open hand rather than pointing your finger.
- Ushering does not end once the show starts. We need eyes in the theater to:
 - Stop patrons from eating, drinking (except capped water), or taking pictures of the actors
 - Help in case of emergencies during the show
 - Usher during intermission
 - Help with post-show clean-up
- If you have any questions, please contact us at volunteer@northernstage.org or (802) 296-7000. We will respond within 1 business day.
- Want to volunteer in other ways? We are always looking for Backstagers!
- Last and most importantly...HAVE FUN! It may seem like we ask a lot, but you know what? We love what we do. We hope you do too! Thank you for being here and becoming part of our mission to change lives, one story at a time.