

**The American Theatre Archive Project (ATAP) supports theatre makers in archiving records of their work for the benefit of artists, scholars, patrons, and the public.**

The following goals fuel ATAP's mission:

- To preserve records of current theatrical process and product for future generations.
- To employ theatre legacy to develop theatres' fiscal health and support new work.
- To promote a better understanding of theatre as a vital element of cultural history.
- To encourage scholarly research in contemporary American theatre.
- To increase funding for establishing and maintaining theatre archives.
- To support collaborations among theatre archivists, practitioners, and scholars.

An initiative of the American Society for Theatre Research ([www.astr.org](http://www.astr.org)), ATAP is a grassroots network of professional and student archivists, practitioners, and scholars dedicated to preserving the legacy of the American theatre by developing archival resources for theatre companies.

ATAP is guided by the work of four committees, which help develop partnerships, facilitate communication, create guidelines, seek funding, and disseminate best practices. Local and regional teams help individual theatre companies evaluate their records, develop an archiving plan, and secure funding to support long-term archives health. Once created and made accessible to theatre makers, scholars, patrons, and funders on premises, online, and/or in a repository, a theatre's archives support institutional integrity and development.

Since its inception in 2009, ATAP has recruited members from across the country, developed an organizational structure, created a website for sharing reports and best practices, developed assessment and training tools, partnered with the University of Minnesota and Theatre Communications Group (TCG) to disseminate a national archival survey to theatre companies, and secured a grant for starting archives in three off-Broadway theatres.

ATAP has formed partnerships with several organizations and funders, including Theatre Library Association (TLA), Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (LMDA), The Performing Arts Roundtable of the Society of American Archivists (SAA), Theatre Communications Group (TCG), and the Lucille Lortel Foundation.

[www.americantheatrearchiveproject.org](http://www.americantheatrearchiveproject.org)

# Why Theatre Archives Matter

**The records that your theatre generates** in the course of creating, producing, and publicizing a production are of immediate value to you in conducting your day-to-day business.

After the show has closed, these records serve as evidence of the important work that went into the making of that production. **Maintaining your records** in a consistent and organized way will help to preserve them and enable current and future staff and other researchers to identify and access the records that document your company's history.

Although the records that individual staff and departments produce will vary, listed below are examples of the **types of records** that are commonly generated by theatre companies. The list illustrates the wide range of documentation that is most often useful for administrative, artistic, and historical research:

- advertising mock-ups, plans, and schedules
- articles of incorporation
- annual reports
- appointment calendars
- audience surveys, summaries, etc.
- awards
- brochures
- by-laws
- cast lists
- contracts
- correspondence (paper and electronic)
- financial records (budgets, reports,

box office statements, concession sales reports, invoices, etc.)

- grant applications
- insurance policies
- job descriptions
- license agreements
- mailing lists
- meeting minutes and agendas
- newsletters
- newspaper articles
- performance programs
- performance reports
- photographs
- posters
- press kits
- press releases
- production documentation (costume, lighting, scene designs, etc.)
- prompt books
- schedules of rehearsal, performance, and touring
- scripts
- sheet music
- video

Your company may already have the resources to hire a **records manager and/or archivist** to organize and maintain your records. If this isn't possible, there are alternatives. ATAP archivists are available to assist in surveying your records, setting up an archival program for your company, and providing basic archival training to your staff. Local college and university theatre professors,

working in conjunction with consulting archivists, might offer a seminar that includes assisting in organizing and listing your records. Or, you may consider placing the records you no longer need on a regular basis in an archival repository.

An **archival repository** is a place where professional archivists and curators care for and preserve historically significant documents. Historical repositories, also called **archives**, are frequently found in historical agencies or libraries whose mission is to ensure the protection and accessibility of the materials they house. A repository can provide environmentally secure storage for your inactive records and thus free valuable space for current production and business. It can also safeguard your records by monitoring their handling and use. Most importantly, an archival repository can provide research access to your records, both to members of your organization and to the public.<sup>i</sup>

**By archiving your records today**, whether on premises or in a repository, you take an important step toward their preservation – allowing others to share the memories that they contain.

**If your company would like to begin establishing an archival program**, visit [www.americantheatrearchiveproject.org](http://www.americantheatrearchiveproject.org) and contact your local or regional ATAP team to discuss next steps.

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<sup>i</sup> "A Guide to Donating Your Organizational Records to a Repository," excerpted with permission from the Society of American Archivists ([www.archivists.org](http://www.archivists.org)).