ACTRA MEMBERSHIP

For more info, check the ACTRA websites: **Main:** http://www.actra.ca/actra/control/main

Toronto: http://www.actratoronto.com/

Vancouver: http://www.ubcp.com/become-a-member/

The Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television, and Radio Artists is a Canadian national organization of more than 23,000 performers. They have 10 branches that act semi-independently. The most active two are in the production hubs of Toronto and Vancouver.

Founded in 1943, ACTRA has jurisdiction over all English language production, no matter what the method of distribution. This includes commercials, television and film, voiceover, etc.

Theatre in Canada is handled by Canadian Actor's Equity Association (CAEA).

When to Join

ACTRA has an Apprentice system of membership (see How to Join) below. This system allows actors to get the benefits or the union while working toward a full membership. The key is to determine if acting will be a career choice for your child and if so, when it is most advantageous to start the Apprentice process. Like SAG-AFTRA for the US, ACTRA is a requirement for a long-term professional career in Canada.

There are lots of considerations to WHEN you join, including where you live, if you have enough resume credits to compete in a professional market, if you are truly ready to leave the non-union world behind, and the financial trade-offs of paying for individual work permits vs. the initiation fee. Once you join, there is no going back, so make sure to choose carefully.

For most kids a good strategy is to book a few non-union roles to build the child's resume and experience. Once you book a union job, you will purchase a permit. At that point, you have six weeks to make the decision to enter ACTRA through the Apprentice Program. If you don't choose to join ACTRA within 6 weeks, your credit becomes null and void and you must wait till you book another union job to be eligible for the ACTRA process again.

An additional thought: while your agent is a good source of advice, keep in mind that they may be making 30% on non-union jobs, thanks to an unadvertised policy of taking an additional 15% "booking fee" (especially in Vancouver) on non-union projects. So the agent may have a financial motivation to keep you non-union. Make your own decision!

Work Permits

Work permits have a different intent in Canada vs. the US. In the US, work permits are intended as a control of child labor and apply only to children. In Canada, they are a regulation of union vs. non-union, and apply to actors of all ages.

Permits are required for non-union people to work on any project within ACTRA's jurisdiction. Those permits must be purchased from ACTRA, and may be obtained a few ways depending on the circumstances: you may mail the application, pay by phone with a credit card or you can go into the ACTRA office. Occasionally, an agent or production may arrange for it on your behalf. The key is to obtain a permit number.

Permits are good for varying lengths of time, depending on the location and the type of job. Generally, they are good for a week on one job. Subsequent weeks on the same job require more permits at a discounted rate.

Permit fees vary by the child's age, location and the type of job.

Permits and credits are not the same thing. You must purchase a Work Permit in order to work on a Project under ACTRA's jurisdiction. You earn Credits toward ACTRA membership for having done the work – see How to Join below.

How to Join

There are three primary ways to join ACTRA. You must be a Canadian citizen or landed immigrant to be eligible for ACTRA membership, no matter what path you take to join.

Fees and specific requirements may vary from location to location, so make sure the contact the ACTRA office near you for more information:

Apprentice Member – An actor who has recently paid for a permit to work on a ACTRA production, may choose to begin the Apprentice Program. The Apprentice program allows you to work toward Full ACTRA membership a little at a time, using "credits" which you earn for each job. Once you accumulate 3 eligible credits (you will continue to pay permit fees for each of these 3, although in some locations they are discounted once you join the Apprentice Program), you may apply for Full ACTRA membership.

Members tell us it can take an average of 2 years to accumulate the 3 union credits. This is the most common way child actors join the union. Apprentice Members get most of the benefits of ACTRA membership, including preference of engagement, but they cannot vote in union elections. Apprentice Members MAY NOT DO NON-UNION WORK. Annual dues for Apprentice Members are about $75.

Background -- You may join as a Background Extra member if you have worked 200 days or 1600 hours (times may vary by location).

Sister Unions -- If you are a member in good standing of an ACTRA sister union (CAEA, SAG-AFTRA, or MEAA (Australia)), you may also be eligible to join ACTRA as a full member.

Full ACTRA Members. Once you have fulfilled one of the three requirements above, and take a membership class from ACTRA, you can apply for full ACTRA membership. At that point, you would pay the initiation fee of $1600.

There is no legal requirement that you must join ACTRA. However, there is a sliding scale of "penalties" added to the cost of work permits for those that do not join. Eventually, the cost of permits would outweigh the cost of membership, even if you are looking at the issue as purely financial.

More on the modernized membership rules here: http://www.actra.ca/uncategorized/2010/11/actra-members-say-yes-to-modernized-membership-rules/

Cost of Membership

If you join via the Apprentice Program you will need to pay for 6 work permits of varying costs, plus the yearly Apprentice Fee of $75.

Then, when you are eligible for Full Membership the initiation fee is $1600.

Responsibilities of Membership

Once you are accepted into a membership program, even into the Apprentice Program, YOU MAY NOT DO NON-UNION WORK. Ever. There are no exceptions to this, so make sure that when you join, you are committed to the organization and ready to leave the non-union world behind.

Also be aware that once you hit $5000 of income under ACTRA's jurisdiction, the Minor's Trust kicks in, requiring 25% of the child's paycheck to be placed in a blocked trust.

Benefits of Membership

ACTRA, like other unions, offers health insurance, pension and other benefits. They do have a special Child Advocacy program that provides parents with someone to ask if things get confusing or tough to handle. The Child Advocacy program also works aggressively to protect the safety and rights of child performers. The current Advocate is Theresa Tova. ACTRA also requires academic education on set for their members.