

The Technical Director Manual

Daily Duties

Day-to-day, the Technical Director is responsible for (literally and figuratively) ensuring that the Playhouse is not on fire. The TD is generally the first point of contact for any building/department/technical problems, and the most frequent task they undertake generally involves fixing something, replacing something, or having something done. Most of this is close work with the business manager, department chairs, producers, and knowledgeable alumni to keep things working as smoothly as possible.

Monthly/Weekly Duties

The primary long-term job of the technical director is helping to write the budget. The TD is responsible for the technical end of the budget, ensuring that the proper things are provided for. This is where the TD can make an enormous difference--they can start reserve accounts for equipment upgrades, they can allocate money for new tools or supplies, and they can effect pretty major changes to the technical side of the Playhouse.

On a production basis, the TD is generally responsible for approving roles (especially technical ones, but TD input on cast choice is valued as well) and managing building access. As many of you know, getting people card access/keys can be quite a task, and it's probably one of the more arduous responsibilities of the TD. It's also a good idea to be present at work parties--if you want to be TD, you should plan on being in the Playhouse or on-call for every Friday night during the production season.

The Technical Committee

First of all: The RPI Players Constitution makes no mention of the Technical Committee. While TDs have always had them, it is technically up to the TD's discretion, and their Technical Committee may be determined however they please. The rest of the Executive Committee will most likely not approve if you choose not to have a Technical Committee, and they also hold the power to create a Committee if they so choose, so it is in your best interest to choose your own.

Deciding on a T-Comm

This starts with sending out a call for submissions. Usually this call is sent out sometime in late March, and closes in April. Interviews are usually conducted as part of this process--this is not required (because nothing about this procedure is, constitutionally speaking, required!) but they are highly recommended--they will show you a lot more about the applicant than their application. For the 85th season and 87th season Technical Committees, everyone who put in for the committee was interviewed, but you may choose to screen applicants first. Below are the questions asked of the 85th Season T-Comm applicants and the reasoning behind each:

What do you think the T-Comm chair for this department does?

In spite of the clear and thorough description you will write for the call email, and your pleas for people to ask you or former T-Comm chairs about the role, you will be surprised at what people will think the T-Comm does. This question allowed for any confusion about the role to be cleared up at the very beginning.

What experiences have prepared you for these responsibilities?

This is usually a restatement of whatever you have asked for in the submission in terms of experience but usually more detailed. If you want more details about any of their experience, ask it here as well.

Why do you want to be the T-Comm chair for this department?

This just helps you gauge who is really interested and why. Some people just really want an officer position or feel like they “should” be on T-Comm because of whatever. They won’t actually say that but you can probably tell.

If an inexperienced person was having difficulty in a show role, what would you do?

This is an important part of being a T-Comm chair- you have to take responsibility for the department during shows.

How would you balance outside opinions from others with your own experience when making decisions?

This question was asked particularly focusing on the Sound department, which has a reputation for having a very opinionated Committee. However, all departments struggle with this- too many people offering opinions can be confusing and difficult to handle, especially for a younger T-Comm chair trying to deal with an Old Timer or upperclassman.

Do you have experience working with a budget?

Some people have no idea what you mean when you say “work with a budget”- knowing exactly what someone has done with money is a good idea because they will be responsible for it. Hint: If someone answers “Yes” to this question and offers no elaboration, that’s a bad sign.

Do you have experience acting as a teacher or instructor?

This is an important part of TComm duties that some people overlook- they should be willing and able to train people in their department.

How do you think you can improve this department?

Some TDs decide ask people to prepare for this in advance so that people can come up with good ideas/plans- for the 85th season, I elected to just ask this cold in the interview- my reasoning was that if they don’t know enough about the department to come up with a reasonable answer off the top of their head, that’s a bad sign- they don’t know/aren’t involved enough in the department to be knowledgeable about it. I was also looking for excitement and passion about the department- saying something like “Well, to be honest, I think this department is perfect as it is!” is a bad sign because they should really want to make it better in some way.

What is your availability for the next year? (i.e. other extracurriculars, course load, etc.)

Purely practical question here. I didn’t take this into consideration as much as I should have- having tough schedules to work around posed a problem later. If you want your T-Comm to be available for building opening/monitoring responsibilities, make sure you are really considering this. Hint: RAs have obnoxious scheduling needs. This is not their fault, but it’s a fact of their job.

Do you have any questions about this role?

Some people say that not having questions is a bad sign. I don’t think that’s the case, but you can really gauge someone by the questions they ask.

The questions you ask are up to you, obviously. Keep in mind that the T-Comm is your opportunity to fill in any knowledge that you don’t have about any departments- everyone comes in with a different level of experience in each of the departments so it is a good idea to focus on

finding people who really know what they were doing for each of the positions. Even if you are very experienced in a particular department, you don't want to take on T-Comm responsibilities alongside your own; organizational/administrative skills and responsibility are important for every chair, even in departments you know.

Asking other people about potential chairs is also an option. Be discreet about this and ask the other person to do so as well. Former chairs who have worked with the person will be your best resource because they know what the T-Comm position requires and will be able to give their perspective on how the person will do in that role (ask them for their opinion!). Producers who have worked with the person and people who have had the applicant as an assistant for a show will often have a good perspective on the person's skills. Don't ask someone who is putting in for the same role.

You can also ask the Executive Committee for their opinions on the people you are picking. You will be picking the T-Comm during the elect period, so the old TD will be able to help you; definitely ask them if you have re-applicants for positions. Also ask if any applicants put in for the T-Comm last year, and ask about why they weren't picked then. You will also have 8 or so other E-Comm members who can provide an opinion. Remember that some E-Comm members will not have T-Comm experience, and temper their opinions accordingly. The old Technical Committee will also be a good resource.

Co-chairs can sometimes present an issue. In general, the role is not so demanding that one person cannot successfully do it, and bringing in more people can be confusing and hard to manage. On the other hand, however, the Set Chair position was co-chaired for several seasons in a row, usually with a more experienced second-year chair and a younger first-time chair (the idea was that the older one would be able to train the newer person). Whether you want co-chairs or not will absolutely depend on your applicants and whether you think two people will work well together and handle the role better than 1 person alone. Be prepared to argue for them if you want them.

Managing the T-Comm

T-Comm meetings should be held roughly monthly. I personally had success with holding them immediately after General Meetings, but your mileage may vary. T-Comm meetings will generally consist of updating the T-Comm on any general business for the month. Some TDs like to have departments give reports. It is a good idea to have a sense of what is going on in each department, but you may decide that hearing an individual report from each department every month is unnecessary (I found it more helpful to talk to T-Comm chairs individually and check up on spending with the Business Manager). In addition to TComm meetings the TComm should be including you on quotes they send to the business manager so that you can double check on things and so that you know what is going on.

The Union

If there is anything you will learn while being TD, it is how to deal with bureaucracy, in the form of the RPI Union. We are dependent on the Union for our budget and other club resources, and more often than not, they are happy to oblige us. Part of your job is communicating with the

Union regarding issues with the building that need to be fixed, so you will become very close with our SARP and the facilities director (Joe Campo).

Tips for Talking with Union People:

-Start from the beginning: Things that seem obvious to you may not be. Without being patronizing or impatient, explain your problem fully. As an example: A problem like “The house doors don’t lock” might just not register as a problem for the Union admin. “We need the house door locks to be fixed so that we can close the House and fully lock away our supplies and resources, and so that we don’t have to worry about people’s safety when the House is unattended.” is much better: it explains why this is a problem and why it should be fixed.

-Ask where they’re coming from: If you don’t understand a decision (or even if you think you do), ask about the rationale behind it. They may have misconceptions that need to be cleared up, there may be a better way to address their concerns, it might just be a big misunderstanding, - come into discussions ready to talk.

-Speak their language: First and foremost, the Union cares about money, namely, spending as little of it as possible. Secondly, they also care about safety and liability, because if they got sued, they would lose a lot of money. They also care about the overall campus community. If you can, explain why the Union should care about Players’ problems in these terms.

-Keep an open mind: Because they don’t know the way we “always do things”, people at the Union often will make suggestions or ask questions that will seem silly or unworkable or just wrong to you. Don’t just dismiss them outright: often, the Union staff are looking at it from a different perspective (see item 2) and will make suggestions that might in fact be better than the way we “always do things”.

-Get a map: There are hills to die on. There are many more hills that should not be died upon. Learn the difference and save your time and energy for the big ones.

-Be nice: This seems obvious, but it’s good to remember: you’re on the same side! On some level, you and the Union want to do the same thing! The nicer/more understanding/more respectful you are with the Union staff, the more they will be willing to work with you to accomplish your goals. If you can’t muster up genuine enthusiasm and excitement at arguing about building access, at least put on your most professional face.

A Note About The Union: People love to bitch about how awful the Union is. True, they do some infuriating things sometimes. True, we’d love to have unlimited money to spend in any way we want it. True, it sometimes feels like the Union just personally hates us. But they give us money, they support us with other resources and advice, and like it or not, we are part of the Union. The bottom line is, it is unprofessional and disrespectful and just generally unpleasant to complain about the Union at every opportunity, and as an officer, you should keep a good perspective on our benevolent overlord and encourage others to do so as well.

The Young Actors Guild (YAG)

YAG has used the playhouse for their Winter and Summer programs for about 30 years, up until this past year the director of the program (Mary D'Amico) was an employee of RPI. Because Mary is no longer an employee of RPI when YAG uses the Playhouse they are an outside group that signs a contract with the institute for a set number of days that the TD and president decide with Joe Campo. Joe Campo and the TD are the only people who can directly contact Mary because legally you represent the institute if you contact her. For most situations, just work through Joe Campo and everything will work out all right. The TD can contact Mary to find out if YAG wants to reuse any set pieces prior to closing of the Fall mainstage and musical.

In accordance with the contract, YAG pays us money to use the building, that money goes towards building renovations and repairs as they are needed. The TComm should take inventory before and after YAG uses the Playhouse. This way everything is accounted for before they are there and if anything goes missing or is broken YAG can be held accountable. While YAG is leasing the building Joe Campo will check in to make sure that safety precautions are followed and that the proper lock up procedures are followed.

Outside Groups

At a few times during the year outside groups may ask to use the Playhouse. It is the responsibility of the TD to schedule their time as to not conflict with shows, rehearsals, or times where tech needs to work on things. It is also the TD's responsibility to make sure that they can access the Playhouse. Either by being there themselves or by finding someone else who they trust to be there. If the group is looking to use equipment (LRC, Genericon, etc.) it is a good idea to either offer or suggest that the people operating the equipment are safety trained so that nothing is mishandled or unsafely handled. Outside groups may also request certain things for the times that they will be there (clear stage, scaff being built, etc.) in most cases they will make it clear to the TD what they need but if not it is a good idea to ask and be around so that if they forgot something or end up needing something they didn't know they needed to ask for you can get everything situated.

Managing Issues with Tech in Shows

Sometimes in a show there is either a disagreement or misunderstanding between member(s) of the central production team and member(s) the production crew. If this problem escalates to the point where the member of the prod team is unable to do their job due to either the producer being unable to step in or because the producer is the central prod team member in question, it is the responsibility of the TD to step in and make sure that

1. The tech is being run safely
2. That the director or other member of the central prod team is not inhibiting another prod team member's ability to do their job

If either of these points are true, The TD should step in. The TD can make sure that the central prod team member and the prod team member can reach a compromise that allows the prod team member to do their job and that they stick to the compromise. This can mean being at any meetings to discuss the situation to ensure that both parties stick to the plan and being at work

parties to check in with the department. It may be a good idea to bring in the respective TComm officer for support especially if the issue is in a department you are not as well versed in, but ultimately the decision is up to the TD and what they feel most comfortable with. But no matter what, the TD should work to stop the issue asap.