

International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE)

What is IATSE?

Chartered in 1893, IATSE is officially known as the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts of the United States, Its Territories and Canada. A member of the AFL-CIO, IATSE (also called the International Alliance—IA) is the labor union representing technicians, artisans, and craftspeople in the entertainment industry, including live theatre, film and television production, and trade shows.

About 100,000 people across North America are members. IATSE has hundreds of independent locals, including a number in the Boston area and elsewhere in the region. Their jurisdictions range from traditional stagehand work to wardrobe, ushering, film projection, and other skills and crafts needed to produce theatre, films, videos, commercials, industrial events, television, concerts, or any other form of entertainment. Depending upon your qualifications and interests, contact the local's business agent for an interview and policy information.

In the Boston area, IATSE locals include, for example, Local B-4, which represents Boston-area telephone operators, ticket takers, "splitters," ushers, matrons, and porters, and Local 753, which represents Boston-area treasurers and ticket sellers. Members of Local 775, the Boston-area theatrical wardrobe local, are involved in every aspect of wardrobe, costume, and accessories management. Local 182 represents projectionists, Local 481 represents studio mechanics, IATSE/USA 829 represents scenic artists and painters, and ATPAM Local 18032 represents theatre managers and press agents. Local 11, representing Boston-area stage carpenters, electricians, props, riggers, and soundpersons, is one of North America's oldest theatrical unions. It has provided theatrical, film, and convention industries with stagehands and technicians since 1893 as an original charter member of the International Alliance.

If you plan a career in a technical area of entertainment, you will eventually either join the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees or work extensively with IATSE members. It is wise to understand each local's purposes, methods, contracts, and viewpoints.

How do I find my local and get more information?

Contact information for all locals is available on the IATSE Web site. To find out which New England local applies to you, contact:

General Office:

1430 Broadway, 20th floor
New York, NY 10018

212.730.1770

www.iatse.lm.com

Boston Office:

James E. Flanders, District 3 Secretary
90 Tyler Street, 1st Floor
Boston, MA 02111-4611

617.426.5595

Fax: 617.426.6252

jflanders@iatse11.org

How do I become an IATSE member and what are the benefits?

IATSE oversees working conditions, pay, and the safety of its members. IATSE uses collective bargaining to gain fair and equitable wages, guaranteed payment for performed labor, good working conditions job safety, and pension and health benefits.

Membership to IATSE is through a local union. Initiation fees range from \$150 to \$1,500. In addition, each local union has a yearly flat rate, and some also take a percentage of the gross when you work on some union contracts. Contact the business agent at the specific local you are considering joining for information.

The traditional method of joining IATSE is to get a job with a company that has a collective bargaining agreement with that local union. Another method is for the employees to ask the local union to organize the company. If the local union refuses to organize the company, the employees can petition the International to charter a new local. Apprenticeship programs may also be available at the various locals. Contact the business agent of a specific local for application information.

Most IATSE local unions have some form of pension and welfare fund that is at least partially employer contributory. In addition, most contracts include worker's compensation insurance from the employer, but it's always wise to check. Wages vary widely depending on the job, the skills required, and the union's jurisdiction. As you become more skilled in a specialty, you can expect to negotiate your own salary.

Several IATSE funds are administered by the International. In this way, individual unions can negotiate employer contributions to funds that provide member benefits that can't be provided on a local level. For example, IATSE maintains pension funds for various categories of members. In addition, because many members are freelance workers, the Annuity Fund serves members who are not eligible for the pension plans. IATSE also offers various health insurance plans, as well as a National Vacation Fund for IATSE members who would otherwise be deprived of vacation benefits because of the nature of their employment.

IATSE offers a range of educational programs. Among the programs administered by the International are Modern Technology

in Theatre Seminars and Education-On-Location Seminars. The Modern Technology Seminar, an intensive, week-long program, familiarizes members with various new technologies, ranging from automation and pyrotechnics to the latest in theatrical lighting equipment. The one- or two-day Education-On-Location Seminars provide basic skill training and retraining in local venues. Among the topics covered in these programs are basic electrical, rigging, and stage carpentry. The International also assists local unions in developing their own educational programs.

To reach out to local unions and members and keep them informed of developments in the organization as well as the entire industry, IATSE publishes a quarterly magazine entitled *The Official Bulletin*.

Does membership in the union guarantee work? Can I work non-union? For other unions?

In Massachusetts, no one can be prevented from working because he or she is not a member of a union. In other words, union membership cannot be a prerequisite to being hired.

Membership in any IATSE union is not a guarantee of work. You can also accept non-union or other union work. However, if the employer has been declared unfair, you may have to quit the job or resign from your union.

This article is adapted from a chapter by Jeff Gardiner appearing in The Source before 2002. It originally appeared in the second edition of The Source, in 1992. Gardiner is a Boston-area set and lighting designer. Thanks to James Flanders for assistance in compiling this information.