

# OpenCultureWORKS

Bringing Live Performing Arts to Public Space

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## **Outdoor Performance Handbook** (18 Feb 2021)

**A how-to guide for artists and arts groups to organize and manage events and performances as part of New York City Council's *Open Culture* initiative in NYC streets and other public spaces**

This step-by-step handbook has been created by [OpenCultureWORKS \(OCWORKS\)](#), a new producing and production company that brings live performing arts programs and events to city streets, parks, plazas, and other public spaces. OCWORKS grew out of a desire to help ensure the smooth launch and continued success of New York City's *Open Culture* initiative.

*Open Culture* allows artists, arts groups, and cultural institutions to apply for a city permit to use designated city streets for arts events and performances. And the permit allows the applicant to charge admission. Modeled after the city's successful *Open Streets* initiative, which opens some streets to pedestrians and adjacent restaurant seating and prohibits vehicular traffic, the New York City Council created the *Open Culture* legislation to allow a plethora of performing arts events to happen on many city streets in all five boroughs. New York City also gives permits for events in parks (through the Parks Department), and for events on city plazas (through the SAPO). [OpenCultureWORKS](#) supports artists applying through all of these departments and processes.

With decades of outdoor arts producing and production management expertise, the [OCWORKS](#) collective of arts professionals quickly

recognized the urgent need for affordable consulting and access to high-quality production equipment and personnel to help artists and arts groups that may not have extensive resources to mount their work outdoors.

[OCWORKS](#) partners with artists and arts groups throughout the city's five boroughs to plan and produce their programs and events. We provide a wide breadth of creative outdoor arts and culture services that can help these artists turn any park space, public plaza, or street into a safe and secure performance venue.

[OCWORKS](#) believes that the arts are a vital and integral part of a healthy society. We connect artists and arts groups to and collaborate with local cultural partners, arts councils, arts and culture advocacy organizations, community groups, tenant associations, businesses and BIDS to promote diverse and equitable performances and staffing.

This handbook helps artists produce a great performing arts event, class, or rehearsal outdoors in any DOT designated NYC *Open Culture* street. In addition, this information can be used to produce performing arts events in other outdoor spaces such as the city's vast number of parks, POPS, and plazas. By using this information we hope that you can be confident while immersed in the preparations for your events.

If you'd like to work with OpenCultureWORKS on your event, we are here to help with consultations, planning, production support, curation and more, all at the lowest cost and highest quality possible.

[OpenCultureWORKS](#) helps you focus on the *work*. We'll plan all the rest.

***NOTE: At the end of the Handbook are crucial best practices to follow and strategies to consider as you prepare for your outdoor event.***

## Applying for the Open Culture permit

### The Open Culture Permit

1. Apply to NYC's Street Activities Permit Office (SAPO) for a permit to hold a specific performance in a designated location at a specific time
2. Cost of permit is \$20
3. Up to 4 events per location per month can be requested by each applicant (though not on consecutive days)
4. Each and every event day requires its own application
5. Permit allows a 12 hour occupancy of the outdoor site by permittee starting no earlier than 9am and ending no later than 10pm, including setup and breakdown
6. Permit allows the ability for permittee to charge admission to each event

### The OC Permit Application Requirements

1. Link to [NYC Open Culture Guidelines](#)
2. Proof of eligibility to apply/Sponsor's letter.
3. Description of event, including artists, musicians, guests, performance/rehearsal/class, timing of event, and setup and breakdown timing
4. Layout of the event (a plan or map), including fire hydrants, fire lane, stage and backstage areas and audience area ([link to template when available](#))
5. Submission of [a COVID-19 Safety Affirmation Plan](#) .
6. Commercial general liability insurance or insurance waivers as part of the permit ([link to template when available](#))
7. Link to the permit application: ([link when available](#))
8. Apply for and obtain a [NYC Sound Permit](#) from the [NYPD Precinct](#) that has jurisdiction for your site.

9. Description of all equipment and vehicles being brought to designated location

### How the Application and Approval Process Works

1. Applications must be submitted to SAPO no fewer than 15 days before event date
2. A permit or denial will be provided within 5 business days after the submission of application
3. A Sound Device Permit is necessary for amplified sound (for an additional cost) and must be applied for at the NYPD precinct serving the designated site.

### Liability Insurance

1. If applicant has general liability insurance, then "The City of New York" must be added as an additional insured on the policy
2. If applicant cannot afford insurance, then a letter addressed to the SAPO Director must be included to request a hardship waiver. This letter should include a statement outlining that the cost of insurance would exceed 25% of the anticipated revenue of the event. ([Link to template when available](#))

### Other NYC Permits

1. [Parks Permits](#)
2. [Plaza permits](#)

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Beyond these application requirements, you should plan to provide some other items for your event, these might include: marketing, signage, prep for performance, additional safety procedures, transporting gear and personnel to and from the site, setting up the site, finding restrooms and food at the site, ticket taking and house management, etc.

## Outdoor Performance Checklist

[OpenCultureWORKS](#) can help you complete the checklist below, and then help you to create an overall event plan, including site plans, load-in and load-out plans, and run of show, as well as gather materials, personnel, and gear needed for the event. Contact us for a consultation about a particular site and possible partnerships that might already exist with *Open Street* groups, community organizations, cultural partners, local businesses, and BIDs.

### **A. Choose the right site/location based on the performance to be presented**

1. Review the Open Culture map to find the best eligible sites for event
  - a. What to look for:
    - i. Streetscape: space shape and size, vehicle parking, proximity to buildings, parks, schools, playgrounds, churches, hospitals, intersections, transportation, food, toilets, etc.
    - ii. Resources: electrical power, storage, restrooms, private ‘dressing room’ areas, vehicle access for ease of load-in/load-out
    - iii. Street space condition (including any construction planned or is occurring adjacent to the street)
  - b. Determine best layout of performers and audience, including equipment or structures needed (e.g. raised stage for better sight lines)
  - c. Measure site to estimate audience and performer space layouts in accordance with New York State and New York City laws and rules concerning COVID-19 (e.g. 6-8 feet between chairs)
  - d. Ensure that the event site allows for the mandated 15 foot fire lane on the street and the 5 foot pedestrian lane on the sidewalk
2. Things to consider about the event location:
  - a. Accessibility
  - b. Transportation
  - c. Who lives and works in area and are there any connections between you, the performers, and them?
  - d. Potential community partnerships and sponsorships
3. If a site not listed as an eligible *Open Culture* location is of interest, especially in a park, there may be other ways to get a permit for that location

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## Outdoor Performance Checklist

### **B. Determine Equipment and Setup Needs for the Site**

#### 1. **General needs** to consider for outdoor ticketed events and performances

- a. Barricades, fences, or markers to demarcate the space between performer and audience/participant areas
- b. Include ADA compliant areas in seating plan
- c. Amplified sound
- d. Walkie-talkie communication
- e. Lighting, for theatrical purposes or for safety
- f. Staging or defined stage area: ADA compliance may be a consideration here
- g. Portable storage/backstage area with shade/rain protection
- h. First Aid Kits
- i. Emergency contact phone numbers for NYPD, EMT, etc
- j. Garbage removal and disposal plus brooms to clean site and “leave as it was”
- k. Signage for event and possibly for Venmo or other service for tickets and donations
- l. Injury plan in case of medical emergencies for performers, staff, or audience
- m. Staff required, including security, ushers, box office, tech, stage management, etc
- n. Restrooms at site
- o. Sanitation and other supplies for COVID-19 protocols
- p. Water (and food?) for performers and staff

#### 2. **Specific needs** for the event or performance

- a. Audience area: chairs or standing
  - i. For chair setup, use the seating formula below, based on state mandates

- ii. How is the audience area demarcated from the performance area and general public?
  - iii. What is the plan to maintain clear paths for passersby to move around the site?
  - iv. What is the plan for passersby who stop and watch the event?
  - v. What is the plan for entrance to and flow through the site for ticketed audience?
- b. Performance area: stage or no stage
    - i. Issues include cost, amplification, and requirement to return street be cleared and returned “as it was” by 10pm
    - ii. Backstage area with security of performer and staff belongings needed?
  - c. Performance amplification: sound system or no sound system
    - i. Issues include city restrictions, cost, additional staffing needed, and additional Sound Device Permit required from local NYPD precinct
  - d. Safety and security plans required for performers, staff, gear, and audience
  - e. Staffing needed in addition to the performers and producing staff or volunteers
    - i. Professional drivers to transport gear and personnel
    - ii. Experienced front of house, box office, ushers, COVID-19 captains
    - iii. Experienced production crew
    - iv. Equipment installation and breakdown
    - v. Talented sound, lights, and stage management personnel
    - vi. Experienced site setup and cleanup crew
    - vii. Potential security and safety staffing

## Outdoor Performance Checklist **Equipment and Setup Needs con't**

### **3. Contact businesses and community organizations** nearby the

site in advance

- a. Share performance schedule and information about setup and cleanup
- b. Research other planned events in the area
- c. Research city agency activity in the area on event day
- d. Determine one or more locations that could be a “cultural hub”
  - i. For restroom use and changing areas
  - ii. For power use
  - iii. To borrow or store equipment
- e. Seek out empty storefronts which could function as changing or storage areas
- f. Support local businesses with a ticket exchange and cross promotion

### **C. Apply for an Open Culture Permit and Plan the Event**

1. Determine if you or your organization is eligible to apply for a permit.
  - a. If you receive funding from a NYC borough arts council or from the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA), then you should be able to follow the application procedure
  - b. If you don't have a relationship with an arts council or DCLA, you might be able to be sponsored for your application by one of the borough arts councils or a DCLA funded organization
  - c. Contact the most appropriate organization for this sponsorship, or OCWORKS can help you with this

2. What is the event? A class, performance, rehearsal, or another kind of activity?
3. What is the desired date?
4. Is the plan to hold more than one event or performance on one day?
5. Can a rain date be added to application in case of adverse weather?
6. Who is the “applicant” or “permit holder”?
7. How many people will be performing, setting up, cleaning up, staffing the event(s) in any capacity?
8. What are the desired hours of use of the site and length of performance?
9. How many performances or activities are desired at the site?
10. What are the tech set up/needs (see below for detailed guides)
11. What is audience space including check in, pre-performance, seating, and post performance?
12. What is the staging and technical needs including stage, backstage, sound, and lights (see below for detailed guides)
13. What is expected audience size?

## Outdoor Performance Checklist

### **D. Plan for the Day of the Event or Performance**

1. Contact/outreach to community partners
2. Schedule all personnel needed
3. Schedule arrival, setup, rehearsal start and end times, performance start and end times, audience admission and exit, breakdown, and clean up
4. Reserve needed production and other equipment
5. Arrange for delivery, pick up, and possible storage of equipment
6. Schedule onsite rehearsal and tech time, if possible
7. Determine possible ways to reduce costs (e.g. sharing equipment with another event)
8. Form a weather plan in the case of rain, wind, storms, cold, heat, etc
9. Determine how the weather plan will be decided: who, what, when

### **E. Outreach in Advance of Event Will Generate Interest and Support**

1. NYPD
2. FDNY
3. NYC Department of Sanitation
4. Police dept
5. Community boards, community centers, nearby park or community garden groups, tenant associations, etc.
6. OpenCultureWORKS can help plan and provide resources

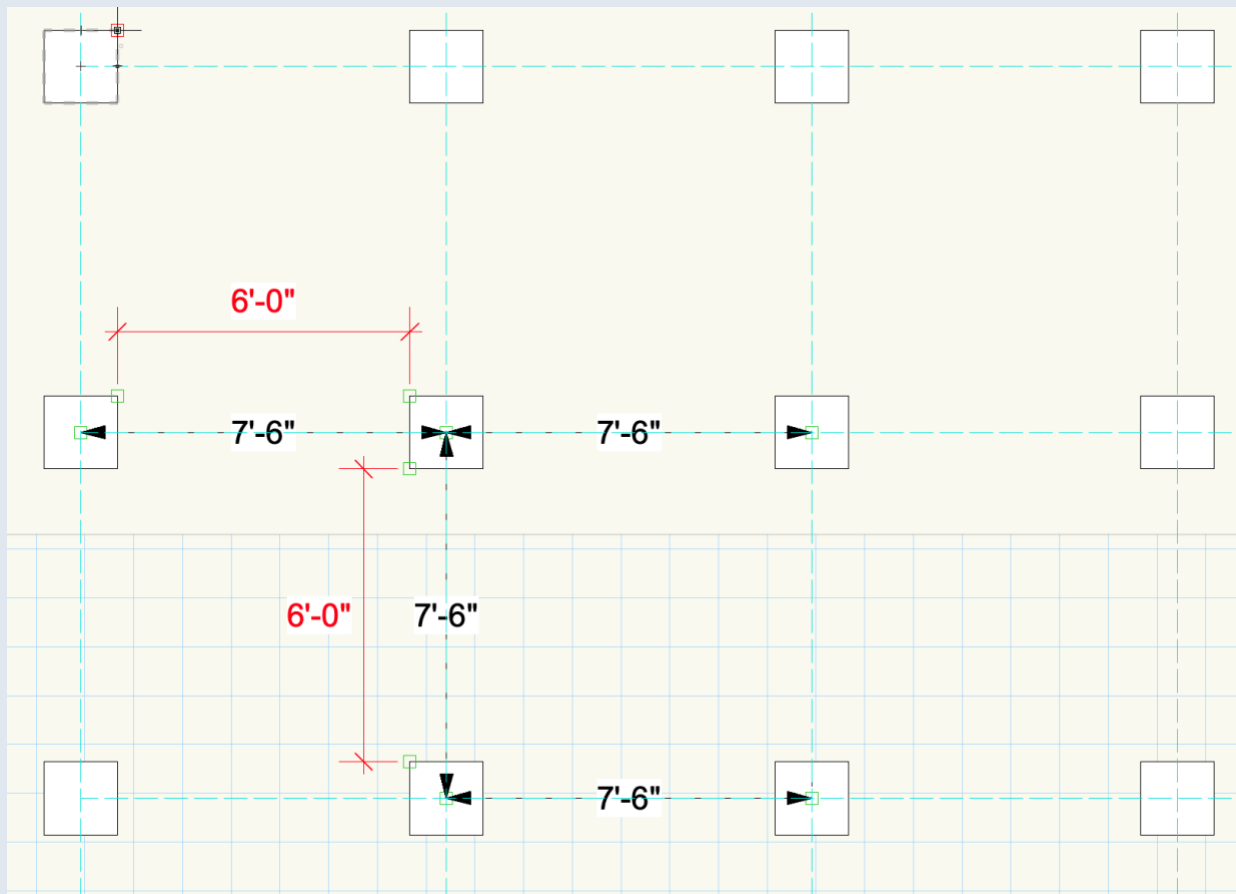
### **F. Seating, Front of House, and COVID-19 Protocols**

1. Seated or standing audience setup
  - a. Map and arrange for physical distancing, including seating, flow of staff and audience through site, and site edges
  - b. Plan for ADA access inside and outside of site
  - c. Arrange for ease of entry in and out of event area
  - d. Plan for a fire lane in the street and pedestrian access to the sidewalk
2. Front of house
  - a. Manager of front of house must be very personable and patient and there may be need for more than one person
  - b. Manage the ticketed audience/participants and the ticketing process
  - c. Plan for smooth check in of audience/participants, and tracking of attendance
  - d. Monitor safety of site, including state COVID-19 mandates
  - e. Address community feedback and concerns as they arise
  - f. Security
    - i. Manage backstage access (and safety of personnel and personal items)
    - ii. Monitor disruptions and interruptions that may occur with calm and grace so they do not compromise event or disturb audience, staff, or performers
  - g. Plan for donations or additional ticketing onsite

## Some NYC Rules and Regulations for Open Culture

### Seating formula for outdoor events during pandemic

1. New York State is currently mandating that 50 people is the maximum event attendance
2. Seated audience guidelines:
  - a. Measure at least 6 feet between the edge of one chair and the edge of another
  - b. Measure at least 6 feet between each row of chairs, from the back edge of one chair to front seat of another
  - c. Measure at least 6 feet from the edge of a row of chairs to the site barrier
  - d. To increase density of seating, sell tickets in pairs to people who share a household pod
  - e. To improve sight lines, stagger the chairs using the grid below (Staggered seating resembles a diamond pattern that uses these same measurements).



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## Some NYC Rules and Regulations for Open Culture

### **ADA Compliance of the Site Plan (in Addition to COVID-19**

#### **Protocols**

1. A 6 foot wide pathway must be in place for easy movement around event site
2. Sidewalk cuts or ramps for wheelchair, carriages, etc. cannot be blocked for any reason
3. Access to participate in event or view the performance must be unobstructed
4. Access to the event site or to view the performance must not involve a step up or down
  - a. If there is a step up or down, a ramp must be installed or built

#### **Fire Lane**

1. All city streets must maintain a 15 foot fire lane for emergency vehicles
2. All *Open Culture* event sites must include a 15 foot clear pathway in the street as a fire lane
3. Nothing can be in the fire lane; no chairs, no stage, no equipment, no signs
4. People can stand or walk in the fire lane and must move expeditiously if an emergency vehicle requires access

#### **Amplified Sound Regulations**

1. Employing amplified sound at an event normally requires approval by the local NYPD precinct and that continues during *Open Culture*
2. NYC regulations governing amplified sound levels are very difficult to measure and enforce
3. Sound measurements are based on an average decibel level over time and at various distances from the source
4. Sound levels for outdoor performances, especially in residential neighborhoods should have a good clarity of sound (within the noise of the cityscape) without being painfully loud for the neighborhood
5. Signage should be displayed in advance to alert the neighborhood that the event is going to use amplified sound



## Best Practices and Some Words of Wisdom for Presenting Events and Performances in Public Spaces

1. A permit may provide exclusive use of a site, but the street does not belong to the event producer
2. The street is for everyone, from the people who walk on it home from work to the kids who ride their bikes on it, from the people meeting friends and family on it to the people running their businesses on it and next to it, and from the casual exercisers to the people who live on it
3. Public spaces are for the public
4. Performers can attempt to block out the cacophony of the city or embrace it
5. This is what it means to perform outdoors
6. Presenting events outdoors in public spaces is a truly wonderful and exciting opportunity
7. The world becomes a player in the production
8. The cityscape is the backdrop to the event
9. Passersby become the audience
10. The unexpected adds to the entire experience and the spontaneity of the performance
11. The street space that's been defined as a performance area, cordoned off with chalk, ropes, and signs feels safe and secure, with only those invited allowed to enter, but what goes on around this manufactured space is out of control of the event producer
12. The sounds, smells, and energy of New York City are part of the show: the rush of traffic, honking trucks, low flying airplanes, insects, people talking or yelling or laughing, dogs

barking, and birds flying around and into the performance space

13. The changing direction and intensity of the sun, the heat off the street surface, the position of the clouds, the fluctuating temperatures, the sudden and unexpected rain, all will impact the event, the performers, and the audience
14. These are just a few of the feelings and reasons why everyone loves to experience a wonderful outdoor event, now more than ever, and what an outdoor event producer must remember.

## Some Final Considerations.....

1. No matter how much is done to create a perfect event venue and what is done to accommodate those who live or work nearby the site, there may be detractors and people who don't like what is happening on their street
2. Despite community outreach, conversations, door to door interactions, signs, and assurances, when an event comes to their neighborhood, there will always be people for whom it is too loud, too long, too ugly, or too much.
3. There will be many more people in the neighborhood who are happy to experience an event in their neighborhood and see something special
4. Those people will be the champions of the event and are happy to see their street being used creatively and are excited to watch a live performance after so many months
5. The event is happening "only in New York" and if the advice listed in this guide is followed, it will be embraced and loved by New Yorkers.

## How can **OpenCultureWORKS** help you?

**We start with a consultation, and as we learn what you want to do and what your event needs, we develop a plan with you. We can also source high quality materials at the lowest possible cost, and the experienced personnel you need to put on a great event. We are also very happy to consult with and support artists with minimal needs.**

[OpenCultureWORKS@gmail.com](mailto:OpenCultureWORKS@gmail.com)

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**OpenCultureWORKS** is:

- Will Knapp, an independent production director for almost 40 years, and has worked with illustrious performing artists and organizations, including Merce Cunningham Dance Company and Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival.
- Ethan Lercher, director of events and producer of performing and visual arts at Bryant Park for 19 years, and previously director of Binghamton Summer Music Festival, manager of a jazz band, and director of a foreign and independent film series.
- [Roderick Murray](#), lighting designer and production manager for dance, opera, and music internationally and throughout NYC since 1988, has also performed with Circus Amok in the streets of NYC from 1991 to 2000, and has been a part of dozens of outdoor NYC performance festivals. He is a native New Yorker and is excited to bring performance to the streets of every borough.
- Robin Schatell, director of Museum Mile Festival for 20 years, founder and artistic director of Riverside Park's Summer on the Hudson Festival, executive director of River To River Festival, programmer of Madison Square Parks' Mad Sq Art program, and most recently, curator of public programs for the Van Alen Institute.
- Janet D. Clancy, (Rigging and technical consultant and specialist) a technical and rigging wizard with over 25 years of experience in the performing arts and corporate events.
- Monique Martin, (Parks Department specialist) programming director of thousands of events, most recently at Harlem Stage, and previously, Summerstage, River to River Festival, and LMCC.

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