



2016

# Publicizing and Promoting Your PCSF Play Reading



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*Congratulations!*

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Congratulations! Your play was selected for a Staged or Developmental Reading. The benefit you will get from seeing it read by actors will be invaluable. The feedback from the audience can be even more valuable. Now it's time for you to help make sure that feedback is valuable and your reading is as successful as it can be. This guide provides some general information about things to consider and simple things you can do to help promote your reading in order to get the most from the experience.

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*Contents of the Guide*

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## WHAT PCSF DOES

PCSF will do some general promotion for the reading series and some broad announcements for each reading.

- ★ Listing in the weekly newsletter and on the website
- ★ Announcements at other PCSF events
- ★ Listing in Theatre Bay Area
- ★ Other general promotion for the season

PCSF's responsibility is to build interest in PCSF programs and events in general and their marketing is geared toward this goal. Your responsibility is to build interest and get an audience for your specific play and your publicity should work in conjunction with PCSF's toward that goal. Only you know the answers to the questions we explore in this guide.

## PURPOSE OF THE READING

In the excitement of getting selected, don't forget the purpose of these readings in your development process:

### A Staged Reading

- ★ Hear and see how well the play works
- ★ Get feedback from an audience
- ★ Find out what (hopefully) minor work is needed to get it "production ready"
- ★ Experience a bit of the play production process
- ★ Get it seen by theatre makers who might want to produce your work

### A Developmental Reading

- ★ Hear how well the play works
- ★ Get feedback from an audience
- ★ Find out what you need to do to bring it to the next level and hopefully get it production ready

Just having the play read, and in the case of Staged Readings, working with a director through the casting, rehearsal, and performance process, will give you a feel for how well the play works and give you a truncated experience of the production process.

- ★ PCSF handles getting the director, ensures there are actors, and provides the place for the reading.
- ★ PCSF will also do some very limited and very general publicity to help get an audience in the door.
- ★ The director and actors will help you understand things about your play which you could never have discovered without them.

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*Developmental &  
Staged Readings  
serve different  
purposes*

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*Just having the  
play read isn't  
enough. You  
need the  
audience.*

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**BUT it's not enough and it's not ALL you should get from the process!!!!!!**

## **PUBLICITY IS THE PLAYWRIGHT'S RESPONSIBILITY**

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*Only you know what you want to get out of the reading and who you want in your audience.*

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Let's repeat that. Publicity is the playwright's responsibility.

Promoting your work is the business side of play writing. Learn to embrace it and do it with as much dedication as you did your writing. Unless you get a production with a company that has a large publicity budget – and even then – you will always need to promote your work.

With staged and developmental readings, you will get as much out of this process as you put into it. However, it's not just getting enough people to fill the house. It's getting the RIGHT people into the theatre, which can make a difference in the kind of experience you have.

### **Why fill the house?**

You get feedback by:

- ★ Discussion with your Producer (for Developmental Readings) and Director (for Staged Readings)
- ★ Observation of the play being read in front of people
- ★ Getting the solicited feedback from the audience members who participate
- ★ Paying attention to how your audience reacts during the reading

Besides making you feel good, filling the house as much as you can, serves a very crucial role in your reading. It is well-documented that the more people in the audience and how closely they sit together will impact how much they respond to what they are watching. Five people spread out might think something is funny, but not laugh, for example.

Note: It is also true that different audiences react differently (i.e. one night to another), so be cautious in how you interpret the audience reactions.

## YOUR PUBLICITY STRATEGY

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*Know what you want out of your reading and then figure out who can help you get that.*

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So, what is your publicity strategy? Answering these questions will help you begin.

- ★ Who do you want to come see your play?
- ★ What do you hope to get out of your reading?
- ★ How much time, money, energy are you willing to put into publicizing your reading?
- ★ What is your play about? Why would people be interested in seeing it?

Let's look at these in more detail in the next sections. Take some time to really think about and answer these questions, before you do anything else.

### Who do you want at your reading?

Ideally the audience for your Staged Reading should include a good mix of:

- ★ supportive people you trust,
- ★ theatre professionals and frequent theatre goers who “know” plays and what makes them work and what doesn't,
- ★ peers and fellow writers, and
- ★ people you hope will be interested in producing or directing your play.

Friends and family will fill the seats, and give you the support and good “vibes” we all want when something good happens with our work. Getting a reading is something good. No one is going to tell you not to invite friends and family.

BUT, beware they probably won't give you the most useful feedback. “I'm just so proud of what she's done.” Might feel great, but what does it tell you about the work itself? And remember these people like you and want to make you feel good, they aren't necessarily going to be completely up front if something doesn't work.

For Developmental Readings your audience mix might be a little different, because Developmental Readings serve a different purpose. You want the same kind of mix, but be more cautious about inviting from that potential producer / director pool. At this stage you want to get feedback about complexity of directing the piece, problems there might be in getting it produced, and other technical components, not necessarily market and promote the play as something they would like to produce.

Ultimately, who you target will also depend on what you are hoping to get out of your reading....

## What do you hope to get out of your reading?

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*Are you concerned about how well a particular element works? Think it's nearly ready for production? Looking for craft feedback?*

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In general, you want a good mix of audience members, but for certain things you will want to target specific types of people more than others. Be honest with yourself and where in the development process you feel your play lies. What do you want to get out of your reading, specifically?

Are you concerned about how well a particular element of your play is working? Is it funny? Is it too long? How is the pacing? When x happens, does it make a big impact? How believable is the dialogue? The situation? The characters?

★ People who go to a lot of theatre should be on your list.

Do you think that with some minor tinkering it will be ready for a production?

★ Exposure to targeted artistic directors, producers, and directors should be high on your list.

Are you looking to see how understandable the play is? Is what you are trying to do with it effective? Does the structure work? Do the plot elements all line up? How strong is the writing? What kind of production issues might it have?

★ Peers you respect and other theatre professionals should be a big part of your target list.

Regardless of your mix, you should have a clear idea of what you want to achieve with your reading before your reading, BUT remember to be open minded to discovering things you never would have thought to think about.

## How much are you willing and able to put into your publicity?

How much time you are willing to put into your publicity is going to determine a lot about what methods you use.

On the most fundamental level you should do a minimum of the following:

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*Don't step on the toes of the PR person for the organization. You should be supplementing not duplicating their efforts.*

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- ★ If you are on social media, announce the reading and post a few times
- ★ Send an email to those people close and familiar to you. Something simple, brief, and enthusiastic.
- ★ Post announcements in any of the member group sites you are involved in.
- ★ Bring it into conversations at parties or gatherings, especially when you meet new people and are discussing what you “do.”

The following sections discuss these and other methods in more detail.

### **Some etiquette rules to keep in mind:**

- ★ If a production company issues any official content (i.e. images, descriptions, etc.) for the series and/or your reading you should use them rather than making up your own.
- ★ DO NOT post or publicize anything until the organization has told you it's ok to do so. This is usually tied to notifications and acceptances that they need to have in place. I.e. They need to notify personally anyone who was not selected before postings start going up. It is horrible to find out you weren't selected by seeing people posting that they were selected. It also damages the relationship the organization has with those individuals, so do everyone a favor and be patient.
- ★ If you come up with your own content, you might want to check in with the producer before posting. As a courtesy you want to make sure you're in alignment with anything else they need or want consistent for the organization.
- ★ Be sure to properly credit everyone: directors, artwork, actors, photographers, producers, the company etc. i.e.
  - PCSF or Playwrights' Center of San Francisco NOT San Francisco Playwright's Center,
  - photo by Jim Norrena (c) 2015, or
  - directed by Laylah Muran de Assereto not Laylah Muran etc.
 In some cases, there are potential legal ramifications to the production company for not doing this, so take the time to get it right.
- ★ Link back to the production company.

## TARGETING THE GENERAL AUDIENCE

The following are some ideas for targeting a general audience, as well as including your personal network of friends and family.

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*Many of these methods are applicable to all possible audience members, but these have the broadest reach.*

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- ★ Facebook Posts & Events
- ★ Twitter
- ★ Email
- ★ eVites
- ★ Your Website
- ★ Posting on Member Group Bulletin Boards
- ★ Community Calendars or press release to local or special interest publications
- ★ Fliers or postcards left around the neighborhood and local haunts

Your focus should be on a personalized and specific promotion.

### Facebook Posts & Events

Facebook Posts & Events are a good way to keep your network informed. Keep in mind that this will most likely gain attention from people in your friends list who follow you, interact with your posts in general, or actively seek out information on you. Facebook's algorithms mean that not everyone will see what you post. But the people who are the most likely to be following you and to come to the show will probably be the ones to see it.

Be sure to:

- ★ If PCSF creates an individual event for your reading, invite people to it and share it on your page
- ★ If PCSF does not create an individual event, create your own and invite people to your reading, share it on your page, and repost it a few times. Especially the day of your reading!
- ★ Post about the reading more than once
- ★ Make the posts personable and something more than "come see my reading", did you attend a rehearsal? Post about it. Did you make a major discovery about the play? Post about it.
- ★ Tag the producer, director, actors, in your posts about the play (once you've got the go ahead that it's ok to post about them)

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*It's likely that you have people in your network who never use Facebook or never use Twitter or never check email anymore. You need to gauge your target audience and go where they are to get the information to them.*

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## Twitter

Twitter is similar to standing out in the market square and shouting “hey! I’ve got a show”, while a hundred other people are shouting about their interests. Most often if they aren’t online when you post they won’t see it. While it’s not as likely that they’ll take action, it’s another way to keep yourself visible. Your chances increase if you:

- ★ Tag @PlaywrightsSF
- ★ Tag @ ... anyone who is involved in your reading
- ★ Use # (hashtags) relevant to the subject of your play or the play title
- ★ Include a URL to the PCSF website calendar

## Email

Email is great for people you already know and are familiar with.

- ★ Email is not as good for people you don't know and aren't familiar with.
- ★ The content of your email should be personable, enthusiastic and SHORT.
  - Tell people it's happening.
  - Give them the details for when/where/how much
  - Ask them to come see it and thank them
  - Include a little teaser about the plot.
- ★ Consider sending an announcement a month or so before the reading and a reminder the week before.
- ★ Mention the feedback session and how important to you their feedback in particular would help you in your process

## eVites

For some people this will be redundant to the Facebook events or seem outdated. For others, the preferred way their friends still gather is using eVites. Generally, use this for a set of your closest friends and family. Include getting dinner or drinks in advance, make it social. Don’t use this if you are using a Facebook event.

## Your Website

If you don’t have a playwright/theatre maker website, consider having a simple one. There are dozens of free and easy to use services. At a minimum it should include your bio, something about what you write, a listing of plays you’ve completed, projects you are working on, and productions you’ve had or are coming up. Readings fall in that last category.



## Posting on a Member or Group Website

Do you participate in a member group online? Member groups could be a perfect place to blow your own horn and get people who share your interests to come out and see your play.

Put together a little press release that includes the name of your play, an eye catching and interesting tag line, your bio if appropriate, and the details for when and where the reading will be. You can explain a little bit about what the reading is for and how people can help you develop your play by coming to see it.

## Local or Special Interest Publications

Especially in a metropolitan area like San Francisco and the Bay Area, chances are that in addition to a plethora of neighborhood newspapers, if you can think of an interest or hobby or trade, you can find a local newsletter, blog, or paper dedicated to it.

- ★ What is your play about? Would it appeal to one of these papers?
- ★ Most of them have community and event calendars. Look into having your reading posted there.
- ★ Neighborhood papers are also frequently looking for stories about their inhabitants. It might be a perfect opportunity to pitch a story and get a few moments of local fame too.
- ★ For the community calendar check their guidelines for how and when to get things listed.
- ★ For a story pitch, you can check guidelines, a press release is usually a good way to catch their attention. “Local playwright is having a reading of their latest work about xyz.” Make sure to slant the information in the press-release to appeal to the publication's readership.

## Around the Neighborhood and Your Local Haunts

Do you frequent a local café, restaurant, bookstore, laundromat, or bar? Are you on speaking terms with your neighbors? Do you go to a regular meeting after work on Thursdays?

Consider putting together a little flyer or printing up some post cards. Many establishments will let you leave or post them and you can mail them or give them to your neighbors.

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*Relationships  
relationships  
relationships!  
Support the people  
you are seeking  
support from.*

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## **TARGETING A KNOWLEDGEABLE AUDIENCE OF PEERS AND THEATRE PROFESSIONALS**

This is an easier group to make aware of your reading, and a harder group to get to come to your reading. They have their own shows and lots of conflicts. Many people in this group have a certain amount of burn-out or fatigue for attending development performances. Your best approach is to build relationships and go to their shows. Foster a group of peers and theatre makers who you collaborate with, support, and share interests with.

It's easier to make them aware of your reading, because chances are most of the items listed in the section above apply to them as well and they are already interested parties. But don't take it for granted that they are aware of your reading just because you both follow PCSF's Facebook page or have 200 friends in common.

If your play has technically challenging components, do you know a technical director or lighting designer or set designer who you trust? If your play has a lot of complex language and classical reference, who do you know who regularly works in that genre? Is there a director or playwright who you admire? Reach out to them specifically and personally and invite them.

Go to other readings and talk with the playwright and other attendees. Be interested in and support their work and solicit support from them.

## TARGETING POTENTIAL PRODUCERS, THEATRES, AND DIRECTORS

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*Producers, Artistic Directors, and Directors are generally busy, pursuing specific interests, and bombarded by requests. Be professional and use a light touch.*

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This is possibly the most difficult group to target. It is as bad to send out blanket announcements to every theatre as it is to not target any at all.

Even if you don't plan on asking them yet or don't have much hope that a particular artistic director or producing director will attend, you should have a feel for where your play would be a good fit. Not every play is a good fit for every theatre.

Think about productions you've seen at different theatres.

Where would you like to see your work produced? Do they normally produce your type of work? Does the theatre produce new work?

If you decide to invite any of these professionals, make sure you know who to direct your communications to. If you don't already know, take the time to contact the theatre and get the appropriate information. This could be the dramaturge, the producing director, art director, an assistant, or someone else. It is going to depend on the theatre, its size, and how it operates. Take the time to find out.

Be sensitive to how busy these people are and how often they are being contacted. Be professional. Do not take it personally if they don't come or don't respond.

## HAVE A LITTLE FUN

Publicity doesn't have to be somber; have a little fun. Let your imagination give your materials or methods a little boost.

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*How can you connect people to what your work is about, quickly and imaginatively?*

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- ★ Use artwork. Collect postcards from theatre productions and other promotions to get a feel for how others have put their materials together. Pay attention to fonts, white space, layout, colors, content.
- ★ Is there a tie-in to current events or cultural phenomena that you could take advantage of?
- ★ Use humor (when appropriate). The tone of your material should match the nature of your play.
- ★ Spend the time to come up with a great tag line and teaser; one that makes people say "hmmm that sounds interesting, I want to see that."

Some notes on tag lines, teasers, summaries, and synopses:

- ★ A tag line is something used after the title of the play to characterize the play and is usually only a sentence or phrase.
- ★ A teaser is generally a couple of sentences that provides enough information to tantalize the potential audience member and make them want to know more – i.e. come and see it!
- ★ A summary is a paragraph that describes the events of the play at a very high overview level and may describe what the playwright is attempting to achieve, what inspired the play or other illustrative information.
- ★ A synopsis is a scene-by-scene or act-by-act breakdown of the action and plot points of a play.

For publicity purposes you want both a tag line and a teaser in particular (though a summary is useful as well in some circumstances). Of the two the teaser is more important. Here are some do's and don'ts about teasers.

#### **DO:**

- ★ Be short and to the point, keep it below 50 words
- ★ Use humor where appropriate
- ★ Build curiosity by including plot cues
- ★ Provide words or phrases that tell the potential audience that this play is new or different or unexpected, without saying “new” “different” or “unexpected”
- ★ Aim to get a reaction and surprise the reader
- ★ Read as many play teasers as you can get your hands on
- ★ Write a few and have a trusted friend(s) and / or peer(s) look at them and tell you which they like best – which would most pique their interest

#### **DON'T**

- ★ Be too vague or too generic
- ★ Be too specific or revealing
- ★ Brag or make claims about how 'great' the play is
- ★ Use cliché phrasing or descriptions

## **PUBLICITY DOESN'T STOP WHEN THE PLAY REDING IS OVER**

### **Make Publicity Part of Your Skill Set And Routine**

- ★ Chances are your reference library contains dictionaries, how-to guides on formats and how to tighten dialogue, and reference books about your given subject. Add marketing and publicity reference to your library.
- ★ Make it a habit when submitting a play to sit down and develop a strategy for publicizing it if it were selected.

- ★ Keep a list of your network and people you'd like to keep abreast of your progress. Keep it up to date and use it.

## After the Reading

Publicity for your play doesn't stop once your play reading is over, in fact you should look at the play reading as the START of your publicity strategy. Here are some things you should do at the reading and beyond to keep momentum and interest and continue publicizing your play.

### Immediately after the reading, before people leave:

- ★ Mingle with the audience members who stayed for the feedback session. Meet them, thank them, ask them who they are if you don't know them, give them your contact information or ask for theirs.
- ★ Thank the actors, talk to them, ask them what other shows they are in, ask if you can add them to your email list.
- ★ Write down some notes about what people said, was any of it quotable? Find out if you can quote them and get the necessary information (name & email primarily).

### The next day:

- ★ Add all those new people you met at your reading to your distribution list – they've now made it to your email category – and can get more frequent (though not obnoxiously so) and more casual announcements from you.

### No more than three days after your reading:

- ★ Remember the website you created? Post the quotes, provide an update on how the reading went, give people insights into what you learned and what you are going to do next.
- ★ Post positive quotes from the feedback after the reading on your website

### Anytime and always:

- ★ Make a point to go to other playwright's readings, ESPECIALLY if they came to yours. Build a relationship with your peers and they will help promote your work and you should help promote theirs.
- ★ Make a point to support the actors who were in your reading, go to their shows, publicize their work to your network and chances are very high they'll do the same for you. When you publicize their work add the statement: "The actor who played Mira in the reading of "That Play I Wrote" in September is in a play at..."
- ★ Do the same for your director if it was a Staged Reading.

## our mission

The mission of the The Playwrights' Center of San Francisco is to encourage and develop local playwrights and promote script writing, audience development, and related arts.

PCSF is a proud member of Theatre Bay Area



The Playwrights' Center of San Francisco

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