

ACTRA Toronto Town Hall Meeting Notes

Date: Tuesday June 3rd 6-8:30pm

Location: East End United Church

Chair: ACTRA Toronto President Kate Ziegler

1. Welcome

- Chair welcomed attendees and outlined the purpose of the meeting.
- Reading of Equality Statement and Land Acknowledgement

2. Room Rules

- Basic guidelines for discussion and participation were shared:

Room rules are especially useful here because – for some – feelings around the referendum are running high. But this is not a meeting to simply express and vent emotions.

What will help us move forward is information, ideas and arguments that are **pertinent to the subject of financial reporting within our constitution.**

Which means:

- Aspersions, personal denunciations, attacks, emotional rebukes are not welcome;
- Same with speculative, unsubstantiated claims which will be noted and if necessary, called out of order.
- If, however, a member shares information and someone objects and has a factual counter argument, you are free to bring those up as well.

At the core of our discussion today is a question of financial reporting and the administration of our dues.

It could be but does not need to be overly dramatic. We are entitled to have a debate over the rate of our dues, how they are administered, spent and reported.

3. Chair Report: Kate Ziegler

ACTRA Toronto Context:

- Several bylaw changes were proposed by ACTRA Toronto Councillor John Cleland be moved at the national level after analysis revealed difficulties in obtaining detailed financial reporting.
- ACTRA Toronto worked on and approved the proposed changes be advanced to but encountered delays.
- Last fall, branches collaborated on a dues increase proposal; some National Councillors, including ones from Toronto sought membership consultation.
- A letter from national suggested Toronto's input would slow the dues referendum process.

- 270 emails from members regarding dues were received by ACTRA Toronto President and ACTRA National Officers with the following asks:
 - Spreadsheet analysis assessed the impact of dues across different income brackets;
 - Minutes from dues referendum roll out meeting;
 - National strategies for cost reduction.
 - Notable: many senders signed the petition months later.
- Despite requests, no formal response from national was provided.

Petitioners' Requests and Responses:

- Petitioners requested written communication rather than in-person meetings.
- Toronto drafted a written proposal and submitted it to National Council.
- National council showed no interest unless it was a formal meeting, otherwise defaulting to a referendum.

Key Discussion Points:

- Questions arose regarding the size and legitimacy of the petitioner group.
- Concerns were raised about whether requested reports already exist, and whether their absence impacts branch functionality.
- Financial accountability and transparency were debated, including the necessity of CPA audits.
- Constitution provides right of eligible voters have the right to disagree with current financial reporting rules, or any such element.
- Importance of protections for specific worker categories, such as stunt professionals, were emphasized.
- The necessity of financial solvency to support union objectives was discussed.
- Jamie Jones was invited to speak

Petitioner Speaker: Jamie Jones, Stunt Committee Chair

- 371 petitioners supported the initiative, viewing it as a positive step toward increased transparency.
- Emphasized the importance of open communication, noting that similar requests had been raised for 40 years.
- Expressed surprise that the petition faced resistance despite being aligned with constitutional provisions.

- The second petition was temporarily set aside.
- Proposed the introduction of quarterly financial updates for members.
- Reiterated that the petition was not intended to undermine ACTRA but rather to strengthen it.
- Emphasized the significance of maintaining ACTRA's legacy for future generations of members.
- Highlighted that dismantling the union would be counterproductive, as it plays a crucial role in securing work opportunities for members.

Examples of ACTRA's Positive Impact:

- Cited ACTRA's intervention in resolving underwater work regulations:
- A labor board ruling required all performers to be certified commercial divers.
- ACTRA successfully negotiated with the minister to ensure members could continue working.
- The resolution affected not only stunt professionals but also actors required to perform water scenes.

Legal Considerations:

- A lawyer advised petitioners to submit written proposals, cautioning that verbal statements can be forgotten while written records remain permanent.

5. Q&A/Statements

Financial Transparency & Costs

- **Question:** Why would quarterly financial statements cost \$250,000-300k?
 - **National Representative:** The cost was never assessed before; national finance manages 10 sets of books across six branches, along with PRS and banking processes. Consolidation isn't straightforward.
 - **August Lew, ACTRA Toronto, Director of Finance:** ACTRA Toronto operates as a non-profit and can generate monthly reports for its council. Quarterly reporting would require more effort but not necessarily more staff.

Understanding Financial Documents

- **Statement:** Some members struggle to interpret financial reports. What resources can assist with understanding them?
 - **Jamie Jones:** Members are more knowledgeable now; a stunt performer within ACTRA has experience with financial oversight.

- **Steve “Shack” Shackleton:** Accountants are available, but without real-time access to documents, assessments remain difficult.
- **Kate:** Transparency could improve through a bylaw compendium; ACTRA Toronto has plans to expand financial clarity; will ask Treasurer Paul Constable to expand.
- **National Representative:** Volunteer recruitment has been challenging, but Variant reports could simplify financial education.
 - **Kate:** National councillors have sought representation on financial boards but has been denied. Plans for utilizing financial information remain uncertain.
- **Paul Constable, ACTRA Toronto Treasurer:** Monthly breakdowns and treasurer’s talks could improve accessibility and member education.
- **Follow-up:** Concern that financial complexity could result in excessive time spent addressing misinterpretations.
 - **Paul:** Treasurer statements should be directly incorporated into treasurer talks for clarity.

Union Governance & Communication

- **Question:** How should the union address transparency issues if the proposal is rejected?
 - **Kate:** ACTRA Toronto has attempted to pass bylaws addressing these concerns for over a year.
 - **National Representative:** Multiple meetings were held on the petition; open to ideas.

Handling Petition Processes

- **Question:** Why didn't ACTRA seek independent accounting firms for financial verification before the petition surfaced? Why did petitioners retain legal counsel instead of presenting concerns individually?
 - **Shack:** Petitioners lacked formal organization and leadership. With 370 dissatisfied members, legal assistance ensured proposed changes reached the referendum stage. One petition was rejected, reinforcing the necessity of legal representation.
 - **National Representative:** ACTRA operates with minimal financial flexibility. Internal CPAs are trusted, but external firms unfamiliar with union operations could present challenges. An assessment of alternative accounting options hasn't been conducted yet.
- **Kate:** ACTRA Toronto assessed costs differently—indirect costs include labor distribution. Members must decide if dues should fund the projected \$250K–\$300K expense.

Financial Costs & Distribution

- **Statement:** Petition has led to deeper financial scrutiny, audit analysis revealing balanced budgets until 2020, followed by rising executive costs and a deficit over the past two years.
- **Question:** Can leadership address the surge in executive costs?
 - **National Representative:** Expansion of council and calls for greater member engagement.
 - **Other Factors:**
 - Meeting pay increases.
 - Extended national council meetings.
 - Travel expenses for flights and hotels.
 - **Kate:** Asked for consideration of a second national town hall where pointed questions could be asked as some questions were not answerable from ACTRA Toronto or our National Treasurer alone.
- **Follow-up:** Trust is built through action—while executive costs have risen, concerns over financial deficits remain.

Financial Reporting & Producer Advantage

- **Question:** National rejects the petition citing weakened negotiations and annual audit concerns. If variant reports are snapshots, why would they be useful to producers?
 - **Alistair Hepburn, ACTRA Toronto Executive Director:** Real-time financial data could give producers leverage in negotiations, unlike retrospective reports.
- **Follow-up:** Contrary to some information being shared, is strike fund Information publicly available.
 - **Alistair:** Yes. The strike fund isn't the issue; dues revenue depends on active vs. inactive members.

Transparency in Expense Reports

- **Question (National Councillor):** Requested expense reports (specifically FIA) multiple times over 18 months. ACTRA National claimed transparency but delayed providing details.
 - **National Representative:** National council receives expense reports twice a year via variance reports. Individual breakdowns (flights, hotels, food) require time. A custom report was prepared once upon request, but the necessity of such breakdowns is unclear.
- **Follow-up:** Variant reports compare budgeted vs. actual expenditures.

Proposed Trial for Transparency

- **Question:** Would petitioners accept a one-year trial of financial disclosure? Could national consider a compromise instead of ongoing disputes?

- **Shack:** Cannot speak for all petitioners but would entertain any written proposal. No response was received.

Engagement & Petitioners' Representation

- **Statement (National Councillor):** Efforts were made to ensure financial documents were accessible. Uncertain why concerns were not raised to the full council before legal involvement.
- **Question (National Councillor):** Why didn't petitioners make request through representatives to speak before the town hall?
 - **Shack:** Reached out to Eleanor Noble requesting an opportunity to speak and answer questions; was assured petitioners would be heard. Emails to the president and Marie Kelly confirmed participation.
 - **Kate:** Individual petitioners were not invited to speak.

Concerns About Producers Accessing Financial Reports

- **Question:** If the petition passes, could access codes mitigate concerns about producers viewing reports?
 - **Kate:** Password protection could be implemented through AMS as it already exists.
 - **Alistair:** Some members are also producers.

Dues Allocation & Financial Contributions

- **Question:** Can Toronto reduce its financial contributions to national, and what would be the ramifications?
 - **Paul:** Toronto sends \$2.3M to national—any changes would require a referendum. Currently, ACTRA Toronto contributes a little over 50% of total funds.
 - **Alistair:** Cost per member is \$42.50.

Rebuilding Trust Among Members

- **Follow-up Question:** What steps can be taken to restore trust?
 - **Kate:** Encouraging councillors to actively engage with members and respond to concerns helps build trust.
 - **National Representative:** Supports openness in discussions; has looked at practices from peer organizations.

Financial Uncertainty & Reporting Challenges

- **Statement:** Financial figures for Toronto remain unclear.
 - **Alistair:** The primary cost isn't direct expenses but rather staff time required to develop a fulsome and accepted reporting system (estimated 6–12 months).

- **Concerns:** Unaudited statements lack reliability; transparency is needed but must also respect member privacy.
- **Outcome:** The petition's specificity may limit negotiation flexibility if it passes.

Connection Between Dues Referendum & Transparency Referendum

- **Question:** Is there a link between past dues referendum and the current transparency proposal?
 - **Shack:** While not speaking for all petitioners, many members began closely examining financial matters following the dues referendum—wanting clearer answers on union spending.

Framing Discussions & Showing Both Sides

- **Statement:** Limited context in the referendum contributed to polarized viewpoints, but both sides may be closer than they think.
- **Question:** Would better communications not be helpful here?
 - **Kate:** It is not always ACTRA Toronto's information to share ahead of a National announcement but agree that we could do better and that it would help.
 - **Approach:** Communication timelines should be examined on our end to determine the best way to present information in line with National.

Concerns About Transparency & Dues Increases

- **Question:** Why vote yes when financial transparency is lacking? Why are dues increasing while services and work opportunities decline?
 - **Kate:** Explained dues structure, difference between basic dues and working dues.
 - **Follow-up Concern:** Dues increases are unsettling for members, will National do this without telling anyone?
 - **Kate:** Impossible to raise dues without a referendum.

Trust & Transparency

- **Statement:** Trust is a common concern. ACTRA National plays a role in this, and rebuilding trust requires transparency.
 - **Proposal:** Open financial records, allowing members to identify concerns and ask specific questions.
 - **Kate:** This ask, to be presented financial figures clearly and be provided a meeting to ask questions is one of several tonight to take with us as we move forward.

Alignment Between Toronto & National Communications

- **Concern:** Disconnect between ACTRA Toronto and ACTRA National communications creates a perception of opposition rather than unity.
 - **Question:** How can Toronto leverage its financial contributions for stronger representation?
 - **Alistair:** Constitutionally, no branch can hold more than 50% of the vote.
 - **Kate:** Your question, how could ACTRA Toronto build greater consensus and unity around the National table. Heard, speakers want ACTRA Toronto National Council working together to lead and build unity at the National level.

Finding a Path Forward for Transparency

- **Statement:** Petitioners seek transparency without jeopardizing union integrity. Can a compromise be reached?
 - **Kate:** Questioned Alistair, whether a bylaw could provide constitutional clarity.
 - **Alistair:** Referred to constitutional regulations governing union structure and bylaws being available to speak to the structural elements.

Meeting Concluded with a piece written by Adrienne Maree Brown from her book Emergent Strategy:

PROTOCOLS:

How we believe in doing this work

Organize Our People

Strive for a strategic diversity of tactics so all who want can play a role

Build Trust & Practice Transparency

Move Boldly and Swiftly: Take Risks, Make Mistakes, Share Lessons

Embody self care & humility, community accountability, collective healing

We submit these principles and protocols with humility and openness.

We don't have it all figured out, but we are committed to taking a stand, and learning as we go.

We will not wait to be perfect, because we believe the time is now and we would rather be held accountable for our mistakes than forgiven our inaction.