

# The Role of Extras Casting

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Many people who are hired to appear in front of the camera—either on set or on location, in deep background or near-camera foreground—are confused about the nuances of how casting works. It's not surprising, given the various, and often erroneous, terminology used.

For instance, there's no such thing as a "casting agent." Agents represent actors, and are not normally involved in casting, but rather recommend their clients to be cast. In general, agents aren't really interested in working with extras because of the low pay. This article will lay out information about several types of casting

professionals, and will provide some focus on extras casting. But first, here's a quick terminology breakdown:

Casting directors are the people who cast the big-ticket stars, usually out of L.A. or New York. They work through actors' agents exclusively and work for a film's producers. "Locals casting" companies often cast locals for smaller speaking roles, sometimes interacting with the stars, and sometimes just as supplemental actors.

Then there are "extras casting" companies, often called casting coordinators. These are the people who work for the production company to hire non-speaking background extras. In some cases, they may work with locals casting, or even individual actors' agents to get local actors with lines.

If you're an extra, chances are you'll be working with an extras casting company or a casting coor-

dinator. However, you may also end up communicating with a casting assistant. These are people hired by the casting coordinator to help find warm bodies to provide background ambience.

Casting coordinators should have a commitment to honesty and integrity in business practices. For instance, it's easy to give preferential treatment to those who have paid the extras casting company's "fee to register." Granted, it costs to set up, manage, and maintain Web sites and databases, but business owners should consider whether or not they can afford the costs of doing business instead of passing such costs on to minimum wage extras. For every extra who doesn't register and, consequently, isn't hired, that is lost income for the casting company.

When soliciting for extras, casting coordinators' assistants should be clear that they are assisting the

casting company, and are not casting or serving as the casting coordinator themselves. To that end, it's always best that extras be directed to contact the casting coordinator for call times, wardrobe information, etc., and not rely on assistants who may not be privy to such information.

Communicating with casting coordinators' assistants can, and occasionally does, result in extras missing call times and getting inaccurate information, therefore losing the opportunity to be in a film. In some cases, because of day jobs, this may have been their only opportunity for background stardom. ■

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