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# 2025-2026 SPOTLIGHT AWARDS

# PARTICIPATION HANDBOOK

## PART 4 – ADJUDICATION TRACK OVERVIEW

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## ADJUDICATION OVERVIEW

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Adjudicators will evaluate each school independently based on how well a school is meeting or exceeding their own potential with their unique resources and challenges, regardless of budget or size of the production. Different teams of adjudicators attend each production, however, to ensure consistency at least one Adjudication Advocate will attend each school's performance. Adjudicators are asked to provide valuable feedback, **not in comparison**, but rather in the hopes of celebrating the achievements of each production and offering insights for strengthening future shows.

### Community Over Competition

The Spotlight Awards is designed to be celebratory rather than competitive in nature. Participating schools are not directly competing against each other but rather challenging themselves to continually grow and create the best possible work they can in their unique circumstances regardless of budget or size of the production. The Spotlight Awards strives to embody a spirit of camaraderie, inclusion, celebration for the arts, and a growth mindset.

### Opening Night Adjudication

Every effort is made to send all adjudicators to the same performance – Opening Night of your show. This guideline is set for several reasons –

1. Nothing beats the energy of Opening Night, and adjudicator scores reflect this positively.
2. Sending all adjudicators to the same show allows scoring to be based on the same experience instead of varying based on incidents on different nights.
3. Student health and voices are still at their best at Opening. By the end of a show run, student voices start to strain affecting their scores. Additionally, understudies may be performing by the end of a run due to vocal strain or illness, which may affect scoring and nomination eligibility.

If the adjudicators cannot be scheduled for Opening Night, we will let you know as soon as possible. During High-Volume show weekends in March and April, it is likely that several schools will have a mix of attendance dates. In this situation, attendance dates and which schools have this variation will be based solely on adjudicator availability.

### Written Feedback

Each adjudicator is asked to focus their feedback in a positive way, with the goal of encouraging and growing the arts in our community in mind. Adjudicator feedback is meant to serve as an educational tool, for teachers and students to use these insights to make their next show even stronger.

The ballot includes two parts, a scoring sheet and written feedback. The scoring sheet is an internal form. We do not share scores with schools or nominees, just as the Tony Awards do not share the numbers of votes each nominee gets. It is up to the discretion of the director to share any or all feedback with their students. Adjudication feedback is at the discretion of the Spotlight Awards administration, which reserves the right to amend rules as necessary to maintain a fair process.

*Adjudicators have up to 1 week to submit ballots to the Spotlight administrators. Every effort will be made for schools to receive their feedback within 2 weeks of their performance close. However, March and April performances should expect some additional delay due to show volume. All feedback will be provided before the nominee announcement.*

### Specific Feedback Requests

Do you have specific feedback requests that you want adjudicators to focus on, or areas you do not want to be adjudicated in? You will have the option to note this in your Production Detail Form before your show opens.

# ADJUDICATION – ROLES AND PROCEDURES

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## About our Adjudicators

Spotlight Administration conducts an open application period, pre-screening, demo adjudication review, and holds a Spotlight-specific training every year for all adjudicators. Our adjudicators have substantial education, experience, and passion for the performing arts. The Spotlight Awards administration makes every effort to send adjudicators skilled in various areas of theatre production to each school and to rotate the pool so that the same adjudicators do not attend shows at the same school in consecutive years.

Spotlight Awards Adjudicators will have:

- Demonstrated experience in or knowledge of musical theatre
- And/or a degree in a relevant field (music, theatre, dance, etc.)
- And/or extensive work experience in one of those disciplines on a professional or academic basis
- And/or are professional artists or educators with knowledge of the American musical theatre canon

## Adjudication Advocates

To ensure consistency across the process, at least one Adjudication Advocate will attend each school's performance. Adjudication Advocates are a subset of program staff and adjudicators who help ensure consistency across the scoring and will be part of the nominee selection process as an advocate for each performance they attend. In some cases, one of the assigned adjudicators may also be an Advocate; in other cases, a fourth adjudicator or a member of program staff will attend as the Adjudication Advocate. Regardless, only three sets of adjudicator scores will be used for any school. Since they are not scoring, Adjudication Advocates will not always be scheduled to attend your opening night performance.

## Spotlight Awards Administration

Please note that Spotlight Administration facilitates adjudication of school shows but will not be the adjudicator submitting ballot scores for your musical. You will see us at many of your shows - we try to see as many as we can! We may ask to attend on opening night, or another performance, or even a rehearsal or school performance to allow us to see as many as possible. Spotlight Administration might be an Adjudication Advocate, but we will never be adjudicating at our schools.

## Conflict of Interest

Adjudicators and/or School Directors are required to alert the Spotlight Awards administrators immediately if there is a conflict of interest with a participating school. Adjudicators having a relationship, either professional or personal, with a particular school are not assigned to evaluate that school's production. If an Adjudicator and/or Director are seen speaking to each other after the performance, this will be viewed as indicator of a conflict of interest, and the adjudication will be null. Contact the Spotlight office immediately if this happens so another adjudicator can be sent to a different performance.

## Adjudicator Communication

Directors have 2 ways to communicate show information to adjudicators prior to the performance – production detail form and program notes. We encourage you to use these to opportunities to share relevant information about your process, concept, successes and challenges. Directors should not reach out to adjudicators or send information after the performance.

## Determining Nominees

To determine nominations and recipients of each award, the nominee selection panel considers a variety of factors, and looks at all eligible candidates with a fresh perspective by thoroughly reviewing the Adjudicator feedback, scoring, photos, and mandatory support material. The selection panel includes Adjudication Advocates, which combined will have viewed all performances and advocate for each school. All decisions of The Spotlight Awards administrators and nominee selection panel are final.

## REQUIRED EVENTS – ADJUDICATION TRACK

The Adjudication Track participation includes 4 required events – Director Orientation Meeting, Director Refresher meeting, Ceremony Week Kickoff Virtual Event, and the Spotlight Awards Ceremony.

### **Director Orientation – August 19 or 20, 6:00-8:30 PM**

Adjudication Track directors are required to attend a Director Orientation meeting each year to review the year’s requirements, learn about new opportunities, and visit with other directors in the community. Directors will select which date they will attend at the time of registration. This is a requirement for the director, no substitutions. A secondary contact may choose to attend with the director but cannot attend in their stead.

### **Director Refresher Meetings – 2-3 weeks before your show opening**

A couple weeks before the school’s show opening directors will have a mandatory refresher meeting with Spotlight Administration. This brief check-in will provide important reminders and a chance to ask questions before the craziness of show week takes over. Directors will select a date and time that works best in their schedules.

### **Ceremony Week Kickoff – Virtual Event – May 18, 2026 at 4:00 PM**

Participating Schools will join us for a celebration to kick off the ceremony week and to get important information about the ceremony. Participants will celebrate and interact with other schools, play games and win prizes, and cheer for scholarship awards and other recognitions.

### **Spotlight Awards Ceremony**

The Spotlight Awards Ceremony is an inclusive community celebration of arts education that acknowledges outstanding achievement, growth, and artistry in high school musical theatre and provides an opportunity for students to share their art with each other. The Spotlight Awards Ceremony is a red-carpet event that will take place May 24, 2026, 3:00-6:30 pm in TPAC’s Jackson Hall (505 Deaderick Street, Nashville). *All performances in the ceremony will also have a mandatory tech rehearsal/sound check on Saturday, May 23.*



Photo by Caitlin McNaney for MAZLA Photography.

## REQUIRED SUBMISSIONS

### Licensing Information

All schools are expected to acquire the necessary rights and royalties for their performances during the school year. Participating schools are required to share proof of licensing request at the time of registration. Approved licensing is required in order to be included in our website listing or social media posts. Adjudication track participants are required to submit a copy of the full agreement (Fall shows by October 15, Spring Shows by November 10).

### Media Releases – School and Individual

During the year, Spotlight Awards administrators may photograph/video students, faculty, and others involved with your production or attending events. Please be aware that participation in this program gives full rights and permissions to the Spotlight Awards and Tennessee Performing Arts Center for the use of such video and photos.

- **School Release** - Each participating school is required to submit a media release by September 30, signed by a responsible party (principal, media manager, theater director, etc.).
- **Individual Release** - Individual media releases (one release form for every individual involved with your show) are required for anyone who may be in your photographs or on stage for the ceremony. Media Releases should be submitted by March 31 at the latest but are preferred by opening night of your show with Playbill Submission.

### Production Detail Form

2 weeks prior to their show opening, schools submit this form to be shared with adjudicators attending their show. This form provides detailed show information such as eligibility for awards, show title, etc., as well as supplementary information on your production such as resources available, director's notes, and rationale of artistic choices. Submit form online here – <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ProdDetail26>

### Performance Playbill Submission

Each school must submit their show program by the opening night of their performance. It is strongly encouraged that show programs **include headshots of actors to assist in nominations**. Programs are used to verify titles, spelling, names, etc., so inform Spotlight Administration immediately if anything on your program is incorrect.

#### How to submit:

1. Submit a digital copy to Spotlight Administration in a PDF format and include any notes on pronunciation or spelling that the Spotlight Awards administrators may need. **\*\*A link to a digital playbill does not meet this requirement. Please print a PDF version of the pages to submit digitally.**
2. For adjudicators, please ensure that a printed hard copy is available with their tickets when they attend the performance. **\*\*If you use a digital playbill, directors should print a hard copy of program pages for each adjudicator to pick up with each set of tickets.**

### Participation Statement Graphic for Playbills

Schools are required to include the Participation Statement Graphic in their performance playbill to highlight their participation in the Spotlight Awards program. A copy of the graphic will be provided digitally to directors. Please ensure that you are using the **current year's graphic** when creating your playbill.

This production is part of the Spotlight Awards presented by Tennessee Performing Arts Center. The Spotlight Awards program is an arts education initiative which celebrates, supports, and grows the artistry and diverse community of high school theatre programs in Tennessee while developing confidence, creativity, empathy, and collaboration among schools. The Spotlight Awards strives to embody a spirit of camaraderie, diversity, and inclusion, celebration for the arts, and growth mindset.



*Example graphic only – Please use the digital file provided to you.*

### Ceremony Information Form

As the ceremony nears, additional information will be required such as attendance count, transportation, arrival, etc. This form is due by May 5 - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CeremonyInfo26>

## REQUIRED SUBMISSIONS (CONT.)

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### Performance Photos

Schools should submit production photos which show any standout design elements of the production (such as special lighting, costume or set pieces, especially student designed/created items), as well as production images highlighting your students that represent the overall feel of the performance. See below for details.

- Photos must be received no later than March 31, no exceptions. (Shows that take place after March 31, should plan for photographs during the rehearsal process. Please reach out to discuss your options.)
- Photos should be in a .jpg format, horizontal, at least 300 dpi (preferable 600 dpi). Submitted photos may be used during Spotlight events, by panelists when selecting nominees, and during the Awards Ceremony.
- To submit your photos, please title the files PRIOR to uploading to this link. Please label all files with School Name and what file you are uploading (Ex. Production Photo 1; Student Lighting Design Image, etc.). Once your files have been titled correctly, use the dropbox link to upload directly to Spotlight Administration.
- Submit Photos by using this request link - <https://www.dropbox.com/request/5e4xE19nioDhmjNJaB7i>

### Required Photo Submissions:

- Production Photos (1-2 images) – can be a cast photo or an image from the performance showing an iconic moment that represents the overall feel of the show
- Set and Lighting (1-3 images)
- Special design elements or student created elements (1-3 images)
- Backstage Crew (1-3 images)
- All-Star Crew members (1-2 images) – can be submitted as 2 individual images (headshots or backstage in their element) or as one image of them together

Optional Photo Submissions: Additional show images and videos may be submitted for social media advocacy. Details for how to submit this content will be provided after registration.

### Performance Information Form

Performance Information Form will be submitted by any individual or school group that will be performing at the Ceremony, including the School Nominees for Outstanding Musical, Crowd Pleaser selections, and by each of the Outstanding Lead Finalists individually. This form is due by May 5, and should be submitted using the online form - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Perform26>

### Sheet Music and Tracks for Ceremony Performances

Schools that are performing during the Spotlight Awards Ceremony will submit digital sheet music (marked with performance needs) and digital tracks by May 5.

- To submit, title the files PRIOR to uploading to this link. Please label all files with School Name, Show Name, Song Title. Once your files have been titled correctly, use the dropbox link to upload directly to Spotlight Administration.
- Submit Photos by using this request link - <https://www.dropbox.com/request/5e4xE19nioDhmjNJaB7i>

Spotlight Administration will request an extension to your contract from the licensing house for the purposes of retaining your materials to prepare for performance at the awards ceremony, allowing you to keep any provided physical materials until the end of May. All schools are to retain their show materials (scores, librettos, etc.) until nominations are announced. If a school returns their materials prior to nominations being announced, the school will be charged a fee from the licensing house to have their materials sent back to the school. *\*Note – Licensing companies often decline to extend digital content licenses, so please prepare ahead of time for track usage needs.*

***\*Failure to submit all required items may result in disqualification from nominations.***

## ADJUDICATION – SHOW TIME

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### Performance Tickets and Playbills

Up to 10 complimentary tickets should be placed at will call for Opening Night of your performance. These tickets will be used by adjudicators, Spotlight Awards administrators, Adjudication Advocates, and their guests. Please remember to respect the anonymity of the adjudicators. Do not provide preferential treatment (*i.e., if your seating is General Admission, do not save seats*). Seating on aisles or towards the rear of the theatre is preferred.

Tickets should be listed under the name Jimmy Ward and separated into groupings of 2. Each set of 2 tickets should have at least one **printed playbill** included with it for adjudicators to pick up.

### Headshots Requested

Please include student headshots (with their name and role listed) in the program or in the lobby to help with nominations. Having this element will allow more of your students the chance for nominations, especially those in ensemble roles that may be more difficult to identify from a cast list alone. Free headshots will be provided for students during the Community Kickoff event on September 6.

### Anonymity

The Spotlight Awards strongly recommend schools allow the adjudicators to attend performances anonymously, so they can fairly evaluate the production without lobbying from cast members' families and friends or other school representatives. Adjudicators should not receive preferential seating, treatment or gifts of any kind. Schools may be disqualified for providing special treatment.

### Spotlight Administration Attendance

Please note that Spotlight Administration facilitates adjudication of school shows but will not be the adjudicator submitting ballot scores for your musical. You will see us at many of your shows - we try to see as many as we can! We may ask to attend on opening night, or another performance, or even a rehearsal or school performance to allow us to see as many as possible. Spotlight Administration might be an Adjudication Advocate, but we will never be adjudicating at our schools.

### Questions for the Director

After the show closes, adjudicators may have questions. If so, you will hear from Spotlight administration with those questions. Please answer them as quickly as possible so that ballots and feedback can be completed. Adjudicators will often leave during the curtain call and will NOT stay after the performance to speak to school representatives.

### Confidentiality

Adjudicator feedback is submitted through a secure online form. Adjudicators will not provide oral critiques following the performance, nor should teachers or students expect to speak to the adjudicators at all. Adjudicators are not allowed to discuss the results, evaluations, scores, or feedback with anyone other than Spotlight Awards administrators in any format. This includes, but is not limited to: faculty, staff and students from a participating high school, other adjudicators, colleagues, social media networks, etc.

*If an Adjudicator and/or Director are seen speaking to each other after the performance, this will be viewed as indicator of a conflict of interest, and the adjudication will be null. Contact the Spotlight office immediately if this happens so another adjudicator can be sent to a different performance.*

**All questions or comments about adjudication should be directed to Spotlight Awards administration – not to adjudicators.**

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