



2026-27 SPOTLIGHT AWARDS

PARTICIPATION HANDBOOK

PART 1 – OVERVIEW AND REGISTRATION

Tennessee Performing Arts Center
505 Deaderick Street
Nashville, TN 37243

SpotlightAwardsNashville@gmail.com

Cassie LaFevor – clafevor@tpac.org
Georgia Leming – gcleming@tpac.org
Joseph Kent – jkent@tpac.org



ABOUT THE SPOTLIGHT AWARDS PROGRAM



The Spotlight Awards program is an arts education initiative of the Tennessee Performing Arts Center (TPAC) which celebrates, supports, and grows the artistry and community within 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, inclusion, celebration for the arts, and a growth mindset.

Program Goals

- To strengthen our community by instilling values of artistic excellence, creativity, a growth mindset, and collaboration in our participants
- To provide high quality, enriching educational experiences in dance, theatre, and music for students, directors, and school arts programs
- To celebrate, support, grow, and advocate for high school theatre education by recognizing excellence in area high school theatre productions
- To grow and develop artists, theatre audiences, and arts advocates in Tennessee by building a rich and collaborative high school theatre community
- To engage community members, schools, and families in an inclusive celebration of theatre

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Special thanks to our Founding Sponsor, Lipscomb University's College of Entertainment and the Arts.

National High School Musical Theatre Awards – The Jimmy Awards

The Spotlight Awards program is one of over 65 regional awards program affiliated with The National High School Musical Theatre Awards® (the Jimmy Awards®), presented by the Broadway League Foundation. The Jimmy Awards® are a national celebration of outstanding student achievement, recognizing individual artistry in vocal, dance, and acting performance and elevating the importance of theatre arts education in schools. For more information on the Jimmy Awards, visit www.jimmyawards.com.



The depth, scope, and education-centric mission of the Jimmy Awards® coupled with its extensive television and media exposure has made participating in the program an aspiration for a growing number of high schools. Based on feedback from participating theatres, school administrators are now directing both human and financial resources to improve the quality of theatre arts education in their districts. This renewed enthusiasm for the performing arts in schools is already helping to invigorate local theatres and the communities they serve.

SPOTLIGHT AWARDS PROGRAM VALUES

Community

We know that the lure of competition may be hard to ignore, but the Spotlight Awards is designed to be **celebratory rather than competitive** in nature, and the awards are only a fraction of the program. We are an Awards Ceremony 1 day of the year, **but we are an Education and Community program every day of the year** focused on goals such as encouraging collaboration and creativity, strengthening our community, championing inclusion, celebrating and supporting arts education and achievements, and developing a growth mindset.

The Spotlight community is a loving and safe place to learn about yourself and the arts industry we all love. We invite you to attend workshops, interact with us digitally, and find ways to engage with our community – it was created for you.

Respect and Belonging

We believe every young artist has value and potential, and every participating student and educator should **contribute to an environment that is empowering, educational, exciting, and welcoming** to all. All participants should be treated with dignity and respect, and in turn should treat others with dignity and respect. The Spotlight Awards seeks to build community amongst our region's high school theatre programs, all of which are **worthy of celebration** for the value they bring to our youth and our communities.

Growth

Participating schools challenge themselves to **continually grow and create the best work** in their unique circumstances. We are never done learning. **So enjoy the journey, celebrate your achievements and the achievements of others, and find ways to continually learn and grow along the way.** Work hard, push yourself, challenge yourself, take a step out of your comfort zone - it's in these moments that growth happens.

Inclusion

To enrich the artistic experience, we strive to make room on the stage, around the production table and behind the scenes to students and community members. **Our wish for each of our participants is that they see the light in this world, in themselves, and in others.** Everyone is unique and special, and it's those unique qualities in each of us that make the world so beautiful. Be the best possible version of yourself, and choose to find the good in everyone around you and to celebrate with them.

Creative Excellence

The Spotlight Awards readily recognizes that artistic excellence provides new insights into the world around us, leading us to question and appreciate what we have never experienced. Excellence in the arts occurs when **an experience affects and changes us in novel ways, providing both fresh and relevant perspectives.** We celebrate the creativity and outstanding work happening in our high school arts programs.



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SPOTLIGHT AWARDS – THREE KEY PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Learning Opportunities and Community Building are an essential part of all participation tracks.

We feel that bringing participants together for community events will strengthen everything about our program, the community, and the arts in Tennessee.

All participants, regardless of their participation level, receive access to learning and community building opportunities offered throughout the year. Learning opportunities are designed to help students and directors hone their skills and advance their understanding of the craft.

Professional Review is a valuable learning and growth opportunity for all participation tracks.

- Schools and individuals in all tracks may request professional review for video auditions, focused in-school Q&As or workshops, audition feedback, or other professional reviews any time during the school year. These specific requests will generally be handled by full-time TPAC Staff members to eliminate any cost to the school.
- Schools participating in the Adjudication track and Show Review track will have a panel of arts professionals (adjudicators) attend their performance to provide written feedback. Teachers and students use these insights to make their next show even stronger. Schools participating year over year have seen dramatic transformations in skill, student enthusiasm, and community support.

Recognition Opportunities and Scholarships are provided for all participation tracks to celebrate the outstanding work happening in Tennessee school theatre programs.

All Participation Tracks (Adjudication, Show Review and Community)

- Scholarships will be awarded to students based on student audition submissions and or teacher recommendations.
- Student Designers' work will be displayed at the annual Design Symposium at TSU in the Spring semester.
- Performance opportunities for students in all participating schools/all participation tracks during the Awards Ceremony in May.

Additional Recognition for the Adjudication track

- The school year culminates in a professionally produced Awards Ceremony held in TPAC's Jackson Hall. The Spotlight Awards Ceremony is a 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. Over 30 awards are presented to schools, directors and students in the Adjudication track.
- Scholarships are provided for several award categories including Outstanding Lead Performer award recipients. Additional scholarships may be provided including scholarships to summer theater camps or fellowships.
- Every school in the Adjudication track will have at least 1 Lead Performer Nominee (no more than 4) included in the Closing Number performance at the Awards Ceremony. Lead Performer Nominees will also attend the Lead Performer Intensive weekend and may choose to submit an audition video to be considered for further award opportunities.

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REGISTRATION GUIDELINES – PARTICIPATION TRACK DETAILS

Registration opens on August 10 for the 2026-27 Season for all participation tracks.

- Registration Link - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Spot27>
- Scholarship application - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ScholarSpot>
 - Adjudication track registration is open 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM on August 10 only
 - Show Review and Community Tracks remain open through January.

At registration, participants will select a participation track. Here is an overview of the available tracks:

- ✓ **Community Track – School and Individuals (FREE)** - The Spotlight Awards strives to encourage and support all school arts programs. We acknowledge that not all schools produce a musical or have a theatre program, and we want to support and provide educational experiences for any student who loves the arts regardless of their school participation. Community participation is open to all Tennessee schools and individual students, regardless of distance from TPAC.
- ✓ **Show Review Track – School Participation (\$150 per show)** - Two artists attend a performance and provide written feedback (no scores or awards presentation) to help schools continue to grow and improve their artistic work. Schools participating in the Show Review track can request a review for any show (play, musical, one-acts) in their season. Multiple show reviews can also be requested, with a discounted option for the 2nd and 3rd shows in a season. (Schools participating in the Adjudication track can request a review as an add-on to their registration for other shows on their season NOT being adjudicated.) Show Review is a great option for Middle and High Schools with new teachers, new theater programs, plays and shows not included in the Qualifying Show list, and anyone interested in a low-stress, no-risk option to participate.
- ✓ **Adjudication Track – School Participation (\$350)** - Schools that register for Adjudication will have 3 artists adjudicate their musical, receive written feedback for their performance, and are eligible for award nominations at the Spotlight Awards Ceremony. (Schools participating in the Adjudication Track can also add a Show Review option for a second play or second cast for \$100.)



Dance Master Class with & Juliet cast members, including Josh Jordan – Spotlight Alumni

All Participation tracks include:

- Invitations to all master classes, community events and invited dress rehearsals throughout the year
- Free headshot opportunity for students
- Eligibility for students to apply for other opportunities and scholarships, such as Rising Star Scholarships, Arts Leadership Scholarships, Design Symposium and more.

Adjudication and Show Review Participation also include:

- Adjudication of their school musical with written feedback provided.

Adjudication Participation also includes:

- Inclusion in the Awards Nominations and Ceremony (Eligibility for over 30 awards including Lead Performer which moves forward to the Jimmy Awards, as well as students included in the Lead Performer Intensive weekend and performers in the closing number)
- 25 free seats to the Ceremony for cast and crew
- Adjudication has additional program requirements which are detailed in Part 4 of the Handbook.

REGISTRATION GUIDELINES – COMPLETING THE REGISTRATION

Complete Registration for ADJUDICATION and SHOW REVIEW Tracks

The director of the high school production should submit a complete online application by the registration close.

Applications will require the following information to be considered complete.

- Two adult contacts - 1) Show Director (must be full-time faculty member at the school); and 2) Administrative Contact (a second adult to be in charge of all administrative communication related to Adjudication requirements) - This contact must have access to phone and email and be able to serve as a liaison between Spotlight and the director.
- Show title and proof of licensing request
- All performance dates and times, within the provided date range (*Show Review registrants will request a specific date for review*)

For Adjudication Track - Confirmed availability to attend required events

- Director Orientation, August 24 or 26, 5-8 PM
- Director Refresher meetings, 2-3 weeks before show
- Ceremony Week Virtual Welcome, May 10, 3:30 PM
- Ceremony Run Through (required for all schools performing at the Ceremony), May 15
- Awards Ceremony, May 16, 3:00-6:30 PM

For Show Review Track - Acknowledgement of required events

- Community Orientation (September 1, 5:00 PM, Virtual) for those registered by this date. Late registrants will schedule a Virtual Meeting with Admin in their schedule.



Registration for School and Individual COMMUNITY TRACK – Schools will need:

- At least 1 adult contact - Theatre Director, full-time faculty member at the school. This contact must have access to phone and email.
- For schools that want their school's show information to be included in the participating school list on the TPAC website, registration should also include Show title, dates and times, and proof of licensing request.

Individuals:

- Students that wish to participate on their own (without school participation) can register for the Individual Community Track.
- This is a free registration that gives access to all Community Track events and opportunities during the school year.
- Students should reach out to education@tpac.org with their interest and the application link will be provided. Registration will require parent/guardian contact information as well.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

It is imperative that efficient communication be present between participating schools' educators, students and TPAC Spotlight Awards Administration. There is a lot of information being shared, sometimes with quick deadlines and turnarounds. To ensure efficiency and ease for everyone involved, we will outline below some methods of communication and information sharing that will be utilized throughout the school year.

TPAC Website (<https://www.tpac.org/spotlight>) - All participation documents and submission links are available on our website.

Primary and Secondary Contact - We ask each school to identify a primary and secondary contact person on the online registration form. The secondary contact could be another staff/faculty member or parent volunteer. The primary contact should have regular access to phone and email as all major correspondence regarding the program will be directed to this person. It is the primary and secondary contact's responsibility to pass on all program information to students, parents, and their school community.

Pods and Pod Leaders - All participating schools will be grouped into small pods. Each pod will have a pod leader that will help field questions and reminders to their group. Pod leaders will be directors that have participated in the Spotlight program for at least 2 years previously and volunteer to be a pod leader.

Monthly email newsletter - Monthly emails will be sent out at the beginning of each month with important updates, workshop opportunities, social events, etc.

Student Liaisons - Each participating school is strongly encouraged to select one student to represent their program and serve as a liaison between the Spotlight Awards and their classmates. This will allow for a clearer line of communication regarding events and ensure that students have a voice in the opportunities offered and growth of the awards program. Student Liaisons will be copied on the event specific emails sent to Directors and will be included in communications about Instagram highlights and poster drops.

Parent/Administrator Letters - What does it mean to be involved in a show participating in the Spotlight Awards program? Many parents and administrators don't know the answer. We will provide letters of support and information about the program for you to share with anyone you wish.

Social Media Account - @SpotlightAwards Instagram page - The Spotlight Awards program encourages all teachers and students to join our community on Instagram (@SpotlightAwards) to get all updates and added events throughout the year. Please follow us, and feel free to send us any ideas for what content you would like to see included.

The TPAC website and social media platforms will highlight our participating schools, and we encourage schools, teachers, staff, parents, community and students to follow our accounts. Please tag @spotlightawards when posting rehearsal photos, show photos or updates about your production or program, and include @tennesseepac for any events in our building.

Public Relations - If you are contacted by any media outlets regarding your participation in the Spotlight Awards or the Jimmy Awards, please promptly let us know. Schools should not speak on behalf of the Spotlight Awards without contacting us first.

SPOTLIGHT AWARDS – PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS

Rights and Royalties

The Spotlight Awards program expects all participating schools to acquire the necessary rights and royalties for their performances during the school year.

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 signed by a responsible party (principal, media manager, theater director, etc.) by Director Orientation on August 24 or 26. Show Review and Community Participation are required to submit a school media release by September 10 or within 1 week of registration after this time.
- **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. Additional releases may be requested for events during the year as well. *(Due 3 weeks after show closing or March 31, whichever comes first.)*

Time Commitment

We know that many hours of hard work go into preparing a theatre production. We hope to provide educational tools for growth and visibility for the work being produced. However, there will be some additional time commitment required of the directors/students participating in our regional chapter of the National High School Musical Theatre Awards program. If your show or students are selected to perform at the Awards Ceremony, it may require additional time committed to re-staging or performance rehearsals. While we make every effort to minimize rehearsals and mandatory elements, some additional time requirements are needed to produce a professional Awards Ceremony event. School groups that cannot commit to the extra time may opt out of consideration in specific award categories that will require more time.

Conduct Expectations

All participants are expected to demonstrate respect for the Spotlight Awards goals and values as well as other Spotlight participants throughout the year. Schools are expected to complete all submissions and requirements of the program and to engage with the program throughout the year, whether it is through master class attendance or hosting an event at their school. Directors will sign a contract at orientation outlining the expected conduct and what it means to be in good standing for the program. Schools that do not follow the guidelines or demonstrate respect for the Spotlight Awards program, participants, and goals could be put on probation or removed from participation during the school year, and/or will not be accepted into the program the following year.

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Other Requirements Per Participation Track

Each participation track has the requirements listed above, and each also has their own requirements. For additional submissions and other requirements please look at the details for the specific track.



ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR ADJUDICATION TRACK PARTICIPANTS

General Adjudication Guidelines

- Schools must be within 2 hours drive from TPAC (505 Deaderick Street, Nashville).
- High schools participating in the Adjudication track are required to select a musical included on The Jimmy Awards list of Qualifying Shows. For a full listing of the Qualifying Shows, visit www.jimmyawards.com.
- Performances should be no more than 2 hours, 45 minutes in length, including intermission.
- Adjudication of musicals must take place in the show window – October 15 through April 11.
- Up to 10 tickets provided on opening night of your performance for Adjudicators and Spotlight Administration to attend your musical.
- All participants must be a registered high school/student located in Tennessee and may not participate in another Jimmy Awards regional awards program during the same school year.
- Attendance to 5 mandatory events – Director Orientation, Director Refresher Meetings, 1 Community Event, Ceremony Week Virtual Welcome, and Awards Ceremony (*Details can be found in Part 4 of the Handbook*)
- Registration fee of \$350 is due within a month of registration. Scholarships (partial or full) are available on request by application - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ScholarSpot>.

Capacity and Wait List Process

Adjudication Track capacity is limited to 40 schools. Additionally, participation may be limited based on performances happening in High-Volume Weekends. Please be advised: a finite number of schools per production weekend will be accepted for adjudication due to adjudicator capacities. If a production registers after capacity has been met for its weekend, the school will be waitlisted until program staff determines if there are adequate adjudicators to increase weekend capacity. In some cases (based solely on adjudicator availability) we will be able to send adjudicators for the second performance in your run instead of opening. Schools will be notified by August 11 of their application status and whether they are invited to participate in the current season for Adjudication.

Musical Submissions

The Spotlight Awards only accepts 1 musical submission per school, per year for adjudication. Schools interested in feedback for a second show on their season may consider adding a Show Review to their registration for additional shows.

Double Casting

If a school is presenting multiple casts for the musical submitted, they will select which show/cast to submit for judging at the time of registration. School playbills should be clearly labeled with each cast, their roles and which performances include which cast. Schools interested in feedback for a second cast may want to look into adding a Show Review to their registration for the second cast.

License Extensions

The Spotlight Awards program expects all participating schools to acquire the necessary rights and royalties for their musical during the school year. 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.*

Additional submission requirements and event participation are included in each participation track section of the Handbook.

SHOW SELECTION AND CASTING

Show Choice/Casting and Scoring

Schools participating in Adjudication must select a production on The Jimmy Awards list of Qualifying Shows. School show selection and casting is solely up to the school's discretion. Please note, however, that show choice is one of the most important elements that affects adjudication, as characters and storytelling arcs influence the entire rubric process. Show choice and cast are included in the scoring elements of Outstanding Direction's Overall Experience, which may affect the Outstanding Musical score for your school.

Show Choice

We acknowledge the educational value of using the classroom to explore a wide range of stories and experiences that expand students' worldviews. At the same time, we encourage schools to thoughtfully reflect on their own communities and audiences when selecting shows and casting performances. With an abundance of musicals to choose from, directors are encouraged and expected to select works and make casting choices that authentically honor a variety of cultures and lived experiences, while ensuring that scripts and direction avoid perpetuating stereotypes or exclusionary narratives.

Character Representation

When selecting a show, directors should thoughtfully consider the representation of characters in the story and how these portrayals will impact both students and the audience. It's important to select shows that respect all individuals by avoiding objectification and stereotypes and ensuring that the script and costuming do not perpetuate harmful or limiting portrayals.

Inclusion and Access

The Spotlight Awards is dedicated to celebrating, uplifting, and honoring the unique experiences of individuals across Tennessee. We strive to create a welcoming environment where every student, teacher, and adjudicator feels valued, appreciated, and empowered to express their authentic selves. Through ongoing dialogue and meaningful engagement with all communities, we are committed to amplifying a wide spectrum of voices, stories, and experiences, ensuring that everyone is seen, heard, and represented in this program.

Ideas for Cultivating your Theatre Program

- Invite a Myriad of Voices: Bring in guests from the community to enrich your classroom and rehearsal spaces with varied perspectives. This allows for a broader representation of experiences and helps create a more inclusive environment.
- Broad Representation in Your Program: Ensure that multiple perspectives are reflected not only in the actors on stage but also in your designers and crew. Collaborate with other faculty members to engage participants from other clubs and subject areas, elevating your theater program with varied talents and viewpoints.
- Create a Welcoming Environment: Foster an inviting and inclusive space in your classroom and theater. When everyone feels welcomed, valued, and respected, it enhances the growth and success of your program.
- Evaluate Casting Needs: As a director, consider what elements of each character is central to the story and consult the script for relevant information. This will guide your casting decisions and ensure thoughtful, informed choices. Research and understand the issues presented in the show to create a more authentic and positive environment.
- Adapt Scripts Thoughtfully: Collaborate with licensing companies to modify any problematic lines or songs in your script. Many shows offer options for updating content that may not work in every school setting. Small adjustments can make a significant impact in creating a more respectful and enjoyable production.

LEARNING AND COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES

Community Kickoff Celebration – September 12

All participating schools are invited to celebrate the start of a new season with us. Join us for lots of fun, games, workshops, free headshots and more.

Monthly Events

Each month we provide opportunities for students, teachers, and/or school and community groups to attend fun and engaging events such as Virtual Q&As with TPAC Staff or Broadway performers, Workshops and Master Classes with brilliant artists, Invited Dress Rehearsals and College Visits. Some of these are included in the participation calendar of events, but others may be added along the way. Watch for your monthly email newsletters and @SpotlightAwards on Instagram for information on new additions.

Director Peer Review

The Director Peer Review program is a pathway for schools to invite another school's director to attend a rehearsal and give feedback. Visiting directors serve as another set of eyes to affirm what is working, make suggestions for improvement, etc. Requests for a peer review, scheduling and other details will be worked out between the participating directors and not through the Spotlight Awards administration. *(Interested directors must sign up for this element by September 1 to be included in the contact list for other directors.)*

School Ticket Exchange

The ticket exchange program encourages students and teachers to see other productions and to lend support to their peers. Reservations will be made between schools and not through the Spotlight Awards administration. *(Interested directors must sign up for this element by September 1 to be included in the contact list for other directors.)*

Technical Design Symposium

Applications for the Outstanding Student Designer and Outstanding Original Design and Creation awards will be used to create a gallery of student work in the TPAC lobbies during the Awards Ceremony weekend. All-Star Crew members will also be highlighted at this gallery. Additionally, interested students in all participation tracks can apply for this gallery separately by creating their "Dream Production" designs. Details can be found in Part 2 of the Handbook.

Encore Ensemble

Community and Show Review track participants will have the opportunity to include students in the Encore Ensemble performance during the Spotlight Awards Ceremony. Students in the Encore Ensemble will be required to attend rehearsals for this performance where they will work with professional artists as well as Spotlight alumni (many of whom are professional artists as well). Additional ensemble members from other schools may also be asked to join this amazing community performance.

Spotlight Society (Student Alumni Association)

Spotlight students are invited to join our Alumni Group after they graduate to continue engaging with our program and the arts community. Spotlight Society members will enjoy many of the perks of participating schools, including discounts to performances and invitations to Master Classes. Additionally, special events will be created specifically for our Alumni during the year as well, including a Reunion event every May, and our Spotlight SINGS! Cabaret performance in December.

Photo by MA2LA Photography.



ADVOCATING FOR VISIBILITY

One of our goals is to advocate for our participants, and we hope to raise the visibility of performing arts programs throughout Tennessee, and showcase the talented students involved in them. We ask participating schools to mention involvement in the Spotlight Awards in their show playbills and encourage high schools to announce their participation in school newspapers, websites, social media sites, newsletters and other materials produced by the school.

Public Relations

During the year TPAC will submit stories and press releases to various sources about our program and participants. After the Awards Ceremony, there will also be several stories and media appearances with our winning students. If you are contacted by any media outlets regarding your participation in the Spotlight Awards or the Jimmy Awards, please promptly let us know. Schools should not speak on behalf of the Spotlight Awards without contacting us first.

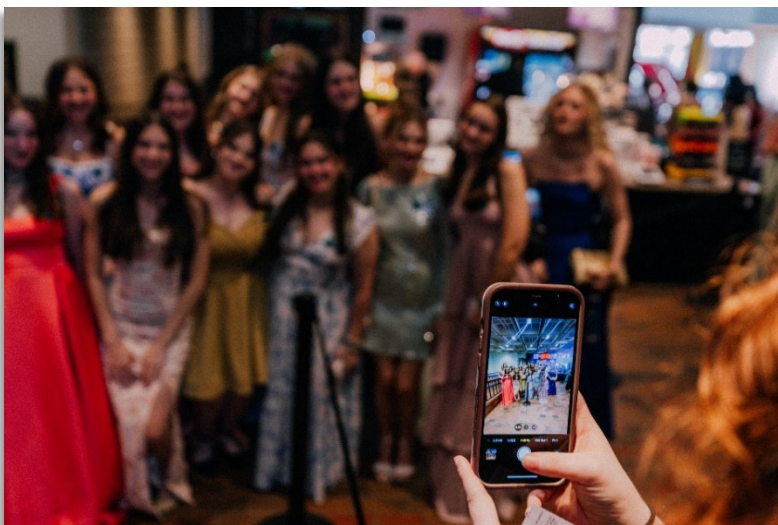
TPAC Website (<https://www.tpac.org/spotlight>)

All participating schools, show titles and dates will be listed on our website by September 1. Schools that provide a link for show information or tickets sales by this time will also be linked from the list. *Please make sure any announcement you wish to make happens before the September 1 publish date.*

Instagram - @SpotlightAwards

Throughout the year we will use our Instagram page to share information on upcoming events and offers, as well as share relevant opportunities within the community. Although we are no longer able to let schools takeover our account, we will still highlight the theatre programs for your school if you send us the information. Below are the ways you can provide information that we can post

- Tag us in your posts – While we will not share everything that we are tagged in, we do share quite a lot of it! Tag us in any of your theatre program posts about shows, rehearsals, tech work, etc.
- Show Poster – Any show posters uploaded by the Monday of your show week will be posted on Tuesday.
- Production Images, Backstage video content, etc. – Can be uploaded to us to share. Please note that depending on the schedule of posts, we may not be able to post immediately or post all content submitted but will try to find times to highlight your program.
 - Student Liaisons - Each participating school is strongly encouraged to select one student to represent their program and serve as a liaison between the Spotlight Awards and their classmates. Student Liaisons will be copied on the event specific emails sent to Directors and will be included in communications about Instagram highlights and poster drops.



Advocating For You

What else can we do to support and advocate for your program? Whether it's meeting with principals or sending information to central office staff, let us know what would benefit you the most!

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