

NEA Jazz Masters Fellowships Guidelines

Submit an NEA Jazz Masters Fellowship Nomination

The NEA Jazz Masters Fellowship is the highest honor that our nation bestows upon jazz musicians. Each year since 1982, the program has elevated to its ranks a select number of living legends who have made exceptional contributions to the advancement of jazz.

Musicians who represent a range of styles and instruments will be honored. In addition, one fellowship—the A. B. Spellman NEA Jazz Masters Fellowship for Jazz Advocacy—will be given to an individual who has made major contributions to the appreciation, knowledge, and advancement of the American jazz art form. In 2005, this award was designated in honor of A. B. Spellman, a jazz writer, accomplished poet, innovative arts administrator, and former NEA Deputy Chairman who has dedicated much of his life to bringing the joy and artistry of jazz to all Americans.

The NEA Jazz Masters Fellowships are awarded to living individuals based on nominations from the public including members of the jazz community. We encourage nominations of a broad range of individuals who have been significant to the field of jazz through vocal and instrumental performance, creative leadership, mentorship, and education. Successful nominees will demonstrate significant contributions to the art form through their body of work in the field of jazz.

Important Information for Nominators:

- Nominees must be living U.S. citizens or permanent residents of the United States.
- Nominations of deceased individuals will not be considered.
- Self-nominations are not accepted.
- “Petition drives” for nominees are not acceptable. Only one submission is needed for an individual to be nominated.
- Incomplete nomination files are not reviewed. Components of a complete application are described below.
- Nominators may submit nominations for one or more nominees each year.
- Individuals who are previous recipients of any other NEA lifetime honor award (e.g., National Heritage Fellowships) are not eligible for an NEA Jazz Masters Fellowship.
- Individuals who are National Medal of Arts recipients are eligible for an NEA Jazz Masters Fellowship.
- Awards are for up to \$25,000 each recipient and may be received once in a lifetime.
- Nominations remain active for five years from the date of submission unless a nominee is selected for a Jazz Masters Fellowship or passes away during that time.
- In the event a recommended Jazz Master passes away before award funds are disbursed, no payment may be made to the estate or heirs of a deceased award recipient.

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How to Submit a Nomination

- **Nominations must be submitted online.** Materials that are emailed, mailed, or faxed will not be accepted.
- Nominations must be submitted in English.
- Upload the two required documents (a nomination letter and a resume or biography, both in PDF file format) as described below. The file size limit for each document is 1 MB. **Nominations missing either the nomination letter or the resume or biography will not be accepted.**
- Nominations missing the nominator's name and contact information will not be accepted.
- These two items are required:
 1. **A one-page nomination letter:** Describe the reasons why your nominee should receive an NEA Jazz Masters Fellowship. Briefly state or list the nominee's contributions to the field of jazz and explain why they deserve this national recognition. Bullet point/list format is acceptable for the listing of achievements. The nominator must include their full name and contact information (email address and preferred phone number) in the letter.
 2. **A resume or a biography outlining the nominee's career** (not to exceed two pages; without hyperlinks to artists or other websites).

Nomination Deadline

Nominations may be submitted online between April and October. To be considered for the 2027 NEA Jazz Masters Fellowship round, a nomination must be received by 11:59 p.m. (ET) on Thursday, **October 29, 2026**. Fellowship recipients will be announced in 2027.

In the event of a major emergency (e.g., a hurricane or NEA systems technological failure), the NEA Chair may adjust application deadlines for affected nominations. If a deadline is extended for any reason, an announcement will be posted on our website.

Nomination Review

Selection criteria:

- **In the Performers Category:** The artistic excellence and merit of a nominee's contributions to the development and performance of jazz.
- **In the Jazz Advocate Category:** The artistic excellence and merit of a nominee's contributions to the appreciation, knowledge, and advancement of jazz.

Nominations are reviewed by an advisory panel of jazz experts and at least one knowledgeable layperson. Panel recommendations are forwarded to the National Council on the Arts, which then makes recommendations to the Chair of the NEA.

The NEA Chair reviews the Council's recommendations and makes the final decision on all Fellowship recipients.

Agency Contact:

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If you have any questions while preparing a nomination, please reach out to NEA jazz specialist Xavier Boudreaux at neajazzmasters@arts.gov or 202-682-5786.

Individuals who need assistance accessing these instructions or the associated form may contact the accessibility@arts.gov.

Privacy Act

The following notice is furnished in accordance with the Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. 552a. This information is solicited under the authority of the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act, 20 U.S.C. 951 et seq. and is primarily used for the purpose of application review. Personal data, such as home address or personal cell phone number, may not be released, either in entirety or in part, as exempt from disclosure under FOIA exemption (b)(6). Failure to provide the requested information could result in rejection of your application.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement

The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated at an average of 1 hour per response including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. We welcome any suggestions that you might have on improving the guidelines and making them as easy to use as possible. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to: webmgr@arts.gov, attention: Reporting Burden. Note: Applicants are not required to respond to the collection of information unless it displays a currently valid U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) control number.

OMB No. 3135-0112 Expires TBD