



## **2025-2026 ADJUDICATOR GUIDELINES**

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## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Iowa High School Musical Theater Awards, presented by EMC Insurance Companies, is an initiative of Des Moines Performing Arts that celebrates the extraordinary achievements of young musical theater artists. The program aims to create visibility and support for high school musical theater programs and to highlight the importance of arts education.

The program consists of four main components:

### 1. Learning Opportunities

Participating schools receive access to exclusive learning opportunities offered throughout the year that are designed to help both students and directors advance their understanding of the craft. Workshops and master classes addressing performance, technical and creative topics are led by theater professionals from the state of Iowa as well as by Broadway industry experts.

### 2. Adjudication

Panels of adjudicators comprised of performing arts educators and professionals review each adjudicated school's musical production. Students and directors receive valuable feedback that can be used to grow and strengthen their future work.

### 3. Awards and Recognition

Based on adjudication results, schools receive awards that honor their achievements in performance, technical, and creative categories.

The Iowa High School Musical Theater Awards is designed to be celebratory rather than competitive in nature. Any student or school at an outstanding level is recognized for their achievement. Multiple honorees may be named in each category as achievements merit.

### 4. Awards Showcase

The year culminates in a professionally produced Awards Showcase event held at the Des Moines Civic Center – Iowa's top destination for touring Broadway productions. The Awards Showcase is a full evening featuring excerpts from award-winning productions.

In addition to being a celebration of student achievements, the Awards Showcase allows students to watch and learn from their musical theater peers, as well as to work directly with a guest choreographer and music director from New York City to rehearse several special medley performances for the Awards Showcase.

## PURPOSE

Adjudicators' primary role is to attend high school musicals and to offer educationally focused, constructive feedback on all elements of the productions. This includes but is not limited to students' theatrical performance, instrumental and vocal music execution, choreography, behind-the-scenes elements, and direction. Feedback is given to schools with the dual intent to educate participants and to serve as a tool to determine merit-based awards.

## ADJUDICATOR SELECTION

All adjudicators are selected by Des Moines Performing Arts based on their applications, qualifications, and experience in musical theater, directing, acting, vocal music, technical theater, and related fields. All adjudicators complete training **each year** before evaluating productions.

## RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTIES

Training will be provided virtually through a series of asynchronous modules. Training must be completed within the specified timeline.

Adjudicators **must** be willing and available to review at least four school productions per school year and complete the adjudication process. The adjudication process consists of completing a written evaluation and score assessment within **5 days** of viewing the production. In cases where adjudicators view two or more shows in a weekend, adjudicators may have **one week** to turn in completed adjudication materials.

On average, the electronic Evaluation Form (consisting of scores and written comments) takes our adjudicators approximately three to four hours total to complete.

Adjudicators must have a valid email address and check it routinely for program-related communications throughout the year. Email is the primary method used to communicate with adjudicators.

Iowa High School Musical Theater Awards staff may contact adjudicators throughout the year with further clarifying questions, if needed.

In addition, adjudicators are required to communicate conflicts of interest, including but not limited to:

1. Having an existing personal relationship with a member of the director team or student in the cast
2. Serving as a personal coach or voice teacher of a student in the cast
3. Being a recent alumni of the high school (5 years or less)
4. Being a former student of a current member of the director team
5. Other personal connections that a member of the public could question as having affected your ability to be an impartial responder to the production

Adjudicators review school productions anonymously. As such, adjudicators should not publicly share what schools they have been assigned to review.

## FEEDBACK CRITERIA

Adjudicators must be able to provide written feedback that meets the following criteria:

- Celebrates students, directors, and schools wherever they are on their journey as performers, technicians, or other applicable role in the theater.
- Gives constructive criticism that focuses on the next steps for growth and improvement, based only on what you observed at that performance as a member of the audience. Provided feedback avoids assumptions about the rehearsal process nor references other productions.
- Justifies the rating given on the Evaluation Form against the rubrics within the Adjudication Standards by giving concrete, specific examples rooted in the viewed production or performance. Does not make comparisons between students, schools, or other versions seen of the same title.

## FEEDBACK CRITERIA, cont.

- Respects the various levels of resources that each individual student and school has available to them and provides feedback based on what the school is able to accomplish within those resources.
- Communicates clearly through use of full, grammatically correct sentences and accurate spelling.

## SUPPORT AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

In order to cultivate an equitable, growth-minded adjudication process, the Iowa High School Musical Theater Awards provides the following supports and checks for members of the adjudicator pool:

### 1. Training/Planning

Program staff establish the adjudication procedures and goals at the beginning of the year. Adjudicators will be trained at the beginning of every year according to these principles and their tenure with the program.

### 2. Coaching and Revision

Program staff will regularly check in with adjudicators to provide coaching and feedback. Throughout the season, adjudicators will receive a short, written feedback report from program staff to support continued learning. *Fall consists of productions produced in October-November, Winter encompasses December-March productions, and Spring is April productions.*

Please note that program staff will ask for revision to scores and/or written feedback on an ongoing basis if a completed evaluation does not meet the scoring and feedback guidelines. Adjudicators may also request the opportunity to discuss their work with program staff via a video call for their continued learning and development.

### 3. Performance Improvement, if Needed

All adjudicators are expected to perform at acceptable levels. If performance problems persist, adjudicators will be counseled up to and including being asked to step down from the adjudicator team. In general, when adjudicator performance falls below acceptable levels, program staff may begin performance improvement steps.

#### Re-Coaching Steps

- First Step:* A member of program staff will discuss performance after informal coaching has already taken place. This discussion is: (a) stating and defining the issue; (b) developing an action plan with adjudicator input and consensus, and (c) establishing a date for follow-up assessing adjudicator progress.
- Second Step:* Occurs when performance has not significantly improved subsequent to first re-coaching (at least one adjudication must have been completed since the first step). This discussion will include: (a) formalized reflection on previously developed action plans; (b) further formalized coaching; and (c) establishing a reintegration plan to resume adjudicating.
- Release from Adjudicator Team:* If sub-standard performance continues the adjudicator may be released.

## STEPS TO THE ADJUDICATION PROCESS

### BEFORE ATTENDING THE PERFORMANCE:

Approximately one week prior to opening night, program staff will send an email with all pertinent information and forms to adjudicate the upcoming production. This email will include the following access to the following materials, which adjudicators should thoroughly review:

#### 1. Adjudication Form and Cast List

Please review the adjudication form prior to the production. Included you will find the performance address and parking information for in-person performances, access information for virtual performances, a list of the individual students to be evaluated as principal roles, as well as other cast and technical information. The director may also note certain elements about which they are particularly interested in receiving feedback, may give insight into the resources available to the school, and any other information they would like to communicate with the adjudicators. Please note that individual roles adjudicated are typically limited to six and are a mix of required roles and those chosen by the director. (Titles with more than six awards that qualify for the Jimmy Awards may be granted an exemption and submit more than six principal roles.) When possible, a school may send a cast list as well to provide additional role information.

#### 2. Adjudication Standards and Evaluation Rubrics

This document is what you will refer to as you fill out the evaluation form. As this document is foundational to the entire adjudication process, please alert program staff if you have any remaining questions about how to appropriately use it after program training.

Adjudication Standards and Evaluation Rubrics can be found online here:

[ADJUDICATOR RESOURCES](#)

#### 3. PDF of Evaluation Form

For adjudicator convenience, a PDF version of the school's customized Evaluation Form can be found on AwardForce.

Some adjudicators like to print this document and take it with them to directly take notes on or to help them anticipate the various aspects and areas they will be asked to evaluate. (The actual Evaluation Forms are filled out online using a link provided in the pre-production email.)

#### 4. One-Pager: Key Reminders, Comment Check List & Sentence Starters

This one-page document has been developed to serve as a quick resource for adjudicators to use when formulating and reviewing their written comments. We recommend that adjudicators use the checklist when re-reading their comments before submitting and revise as needed.

### PRODUCTION ATTENDANCE:

#### 1. Arrival at Performance Location

Please double-check the performance location listed on the Adjudication Form prior to departure. Remember that some productions are not held at the actual high school. Productions may take place in affiliated elementary or middle schools, community theaters, churches or other community centers. **Please plan to arrive at least 15 minutes early to ensure that you are in your seat by curtain. If you are running late, please inform program staff once it is safe to do so.** This will help us communicate with schools if any questions come up.

#### 2. Picking Up Tickets

For each production reviewed, adjudicators will receive two complimentary tickets – one for the adjudicator and one for a guest. Schools are directed to hold your pair of tickets at Will Call under "Iowa High School Musical Theater Awards." Specific adjudicators' names are not shared with the school in advance. (As such, reminder that adjudicators should also not publicly share what schools they have been assigned after the schedule has been released.)

## PRODUCTION ATTENDANCE, cont.

Schools are encouraged to provide adjudicators with seats on an aisle in a location that still provides an optimal viewing experience. In the event the seats set aside do not work for you, please alert the appropriate parties and politely make your request for new accommodations.

### 3. Professionalism And Etiquette

Please remember that you **and any guests** are representing the Iowa High School Musical Theater Awards at all times while you are at a school. Engage with school staff, volunteers, students, parents and fellow audience members with a positive and respectful attitude.

Please refrain from discussing the production (either positively or negatively) during the performance, at intermission or directly afterwards. **Always assume that parents, grandparents, school faculty, etc. are listening.**

You may exit the performance space once the bows begin. You may stay for curtain speeches, talk-backs, or meet-and-greets after the show, but are not required to do so.

## AFTER THE PRODUCTION:

After the performance's conclusion, the following forms must be completed **within 5 days following the performance\***

### 1. Evaluation Form

Fill out the online Evaluation Form using the provided "Adjudication Standards and Evaluation Rubrics" to evaluate the elements of the production.

For each element on the survey, there is a comment section. Your written comments are **required** for each element.

- You must write a minimum of 4-5 complete sentences in paragraph form for each comment section. Please keep a maximum of 10 sentences per comment.
- Comments should be written directly addressing the adult or student in the specified role. Think of it as a conversation rather than a review.
- Please be mindful of the wording of your feedback so that the evaluation can be used as a supportive educational tool. Students often read adjudicator comments directly, so address them as such.

Program staff will collate the completed Evaluation Forms from the team of adjudicators who saw the production and share the results with the director. The director is encouraged to further share the feedback with their students, production team, and administrators.

### 2. Nominations

Within the Evaluation form, you will have the opportunity to give direct recommendations for which students and elements to honor. You will be asked to recommend whether each element or performer should receive an Outstanding Achievement Award or no recognition.

You will also be asked to nominate the production for the following production-wide awards: Distinguished Scene, Outstanding Overall Performance, Outstanding Overall Technical and Creative Achievement, Outstanding Musical Production. (Explanations for each production-wide award type will be given during training.)

Nominations are seen by program staff only; they are not shared with schools.

*\*Adjudicators seeing two or more productions in a weekend will be given one week to complete their adjudications from the date(s) they attended each production.*

## COMPENSATION, MILEAGE, & HOTEL REIMBURSEMENT

### Honoraria

Serving as an adjudicator is considered a volunteer position. In appreciation of adjudicators' time, efforts and expertise, adjudicators receive an honorarium of \$105 for each production reviewed. Honoraria will be issued at the conclusion of each adjudication term:

- October-November productions: honoraria issued in December
- December-March productions: honoraria issued in April
- April productions: honoraria issued in May

### Mileage

Adjudicators will receive the prevailing IRS mileage rate for each mile traveled beyond a 25-mile radius from the adjudicators' home location. To receive mileage reimbursement, program staff will prompt you to fill out an online Mileage Reimbursement Form **at the conclusion of each term**. The form should only be filled out once per term. This form will be due concluding each term:

- Fall: October-November productions: Friday, December 5, 2025
- Winter: December-March productions: Wednesday, April 8, 2026
- Spring: April productions: Wednesday, May 6, 2026

Along with honoraria, mileage reimbursement will be issued on the following schedule:

- Fall honoraria issued in December
- Winter honoraria issued in April
- Spring honoraria issued in May

### Hotel Reimbursement

The statewide nature of the program may require adjudicators to travel to distant productions. As such, adjudicators traveling more than 90 miles one way to review a production may apply for reimbursement up to \$155 for overnight accommodations for one hotel room per qualifying night.

To receive reimbursement, submit an electronic Hotel Reimbursement Form and an accompanying receipt **by the communicated due date**:

- Fall: October-November productions: Friday, December 5, 2025
- Winter: December-March productions: Wednesday, April 8, 2026
- Spring: April productions: Wednesday, May 6, 2026

### *Additional Conditions of Reimbursement:*

- The maximum amount of hotel reimbursement for each stay/production adjudicated is \$155.
- Hotel reimbursement is for one room and tax only; adjudicators are to cover any incidental charges personally.
- To be eligible for reimbursement, you must have traveled 90 or more miles one-way to adjudicate the production.
- All reimbursement requests **must be received by the communicated due date**. Fill out a separate form for each reimbursement.
- Adjudicators may elect to receive a \$25 per diem with your reimbursement to go toward meal expenses, when submitting the Hotel Reimbursement Form. Per diem is intended for the adjudicator only.

## ADDITIONAL ADJUDICATOR OPPORTUNITIES

### **Adjudicator Stewards**

To ensure consistency across the Evaluation Rubrics, the Iowa High School Musical Theater Awards has created an additional adjudicator subset of adjudicators known as the “Adjudicator Stewards”.

Each adjudicated school production participating in the Iowa High School Musical Theater Awards program will ideally be reviewed by a minimum of one adjudicator steward, comprised of Iowa High School Musical Theater Awards program staff and this small group of adjudicators.

Adjudicator stewards invest additional time in attending productions, traveling, and meeting with program staff. Stewards will attend an increased volume of productions over the course of the year and will need to have availability to attend productions on high-volume weekends in the fall and spring.

There may be additional training and communication between adjudicator stewards and program staff. Adjudicator stewards receive an honorarium in the amount of \$35 for each production they attend as a steward only.

*This opportunity is available for returning adjudicators only.*

### **Behind-The-Scenes Awards Selection Panelists**

Behind-The-Scenes Awards are given for individual and team contributions by students. Contributions in these areas are evaluated and awarded based on student-created portfolios and virtual interviews.

A sub-set of adjudicators will serve as Behind-The-Scenes Awards selection panelists. These adjudicators review the portfolios submitted by students independently and then conduct a brief virtual interview with the applying student(s) about their work to determine whether to designate an award.

Selection panelists will conduct interviews on the following dates:

- October through November productions – Interviews scheduled December 4-5, 2025
- December through March productions – Interviews scheduled April 9-10, 2026
- April productions – Interviews scheduled April 30 – May 1, 2026

Selection panelists may participate in one or more days of interviews, dependent on availability.

Panelists will receive \$55 honoraria for each section\* of interviews they complete. Honoraria will be issued in December, April and May based on timing of completed interviews.

*\*Sections typically run about 4 hours. 8am-Noon, Noon-4pm, 4pm-8pm.*

### **Triple Threat Audition Panelists**

The Triple Threat Award program is an advanced track for students in principal roles to participate in during the end-of-year showcase activities. In addition, to provide advanced learning opportunities, the track is used to identify students to represent Iowa at the National High School Musical Theater Awards. Additional prizes, such as theater camp scholarships, may also be announced.

A select team of adjudicators will serve on the Triple Threat Award audition panel and will review and score students' solo audition pieces. Please note that a high level of discernment is needed to successfully assess students who qualify at this level.

Triple Threat auditions will occur in late May 2026, date to be announced. Each adjudicator serving on the audition panel will receive an honorarium in the amount of \$105. These honoraria will be issued in June 2026.

Please note: Serving on this selection panel has become a coveted opportunity. Program staff strives to rotate panelists from year to year fairly, while also creating balanced panels to determine the Triple Threat Award recipients.