



ESSENTIALLY ELLINGTON

2026 ESSENTIALLY ELLINGTON COMPETITION & FESTIVAL RECORDING AND APPLICATION GUIDELINES

This chart will guide you through the *Essentially Ellington* Competition & Festival application process. Please read through the Guidelines carefully before completing your application form and recording submission. Feel free to contact us if you have any questions concerning your entry at 212.258.9861 or ee@jazz.org.

New in 2026 *Essentially Ellington* will accept the top 20 bands from across the globe to the Competition. International bands are now eligible to submit applications and participate in the event and we will welcome 20 bands to the Competition & Festival. There will be no region or category system; we will invite the top 20 bands from around the world to NYC each May.

You are encouraged to make a recording of your band performing three charts, no matter what your level of ensemble or experience. Application and recording submissions are FREE and each entry receives thorough qualitative and quantitative comments from our recording adjudicators.

All bands are expected to fund their travel to and accommodations in NYC for the duration of the festival; however, financial concerns should not prohibit any band from submitting a recording for the Competition. Limited travel reimbursement is available based on the needs of your ensemble and we are happy to provide fundraising ideas to assist you should your band be selected.

SUBMISSION DUE DATE

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 7, 2026 BY 11:59PM EST

FESTIVAL DATES

APRIL 30-MAY 2, 2026 IN NEW YORK CITY



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TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Applications must be submitted via [Acceptd](#).
- Each tune must be its own track.
- Each piece must be recorded live, with the track beginning just before the band performs and ending immediately afterwards. Any editing, including splicing, overdubbing or double tracking will result in disqualification.
- The recording should be of the best quality possible, though not necessarily professionally recorded.
- No artificial recording techniques (i.e. reverb, echo, etc).
- Total performance time must not exceed 17 minutes.

REPERTOIRE, PERFORMANCE AND PERSONNEL

REPERTOIRE OPTIONS

Bands must select three (3) tunes from the *Essentially Ellington* library for their Competition application. These three selections must meet the following guidelines:

- **At least one (1) tune must be selected from the 2025-26 *Essentially Ellington* repertoire.**
You may select more than one if you feel it best suits your band. NOTE: Two of the titles from the *Essentially Ellington* library – “The Tattooed Bride” and “A Tone Parallel to Harlem (Harlem Suite)” – are considerably longer than the rest of the charts in the library. Should you choose to record and/or perform either tune for the Competition & Festival, it will count as two (2) tunes. Only in this situation should you submit two (2) instead of three (3) tracks as part of your application. When recording “The Tattooed Bride” for the Competition, it will be scored from the opening through one measure before II and again starting at II through the end of the chart. “A Tone Parallel to Harlem” will be scored from the opening through mm. 185 and again beginning mm. 186 through the end.
- At least one (1) tune must be a Duke Ellington transcription.

All titles published through the *Essentially Ellington* library are eligible for submission. You may include the music of Benny Carter, Melba Liston, Mary Lou Williams, Count Basie, Dizzy Gillespie, Tadd Dameron, Chick Web, Machito, Benny Golson and Gerry Mulligan with your application. For a full list of music in the *EE* library, [click here](#). Choose pieces that best display the strengths of your band. Pieces must be performed in their entirety.



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INSTRUMENTATION AND SUBSTITUTIONS

All performances should be one player per part; you may include all players by rotating them among the pieces. Substitution of instruments is acceptable as long as parts are not transposed and ensemble parts are played as written. Be aware that substitutions will have an impact on the sound of the band.

Improvisation is an essential part of performing this music. Choose soloists based on what is best for your band and be strategic about how solo sections are used.

CHANGING THE ARRANGEMENT

You may make changes to arrangements, so long as they maintain the integrity of the original piece and the style of that composer. If material is added that does not produce the same spirit and intent as the original, the power of the music is weakened.

You may choose to:

- Feature soloists other than those indicated;
- Extend solo sections; and/or
- Add introductions as is appropriate to this style of music.

However, you do not need to make these types of changes to have a successful recording— more is not necessarily better. You want to make choices that best showcase your band.



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REPERTOIRE, PERFORMANCE AND PERSONNEL (CONT'D)

STUDENT & DIRECTOR ELIGIBILITY

The number of students listed on your application and attending the festival must not exceed 25. Students listed on the application must be the same as those who attend and perform at the Competition & Festival. There will be no exceptions. Finalist students and directors must be in attendance for all Festival activities. Students must be in grades 9–12, enrolled in high school through the 2025-26 school year, and between the ages of 13 and 19. If necessary to complete parts, up to two eighth grade students may be used. Dancers are not permitted to perform during the competition or final concert.

Note that should your ensemble attend the Competition & Festival, the maximum number of official chaperones with each ensemble is four (4). This includes the band director(s). Any additional adults traveling with the group must purchase tickets to attend public festival events.

Should you share a student(s) with another ensemble (i.e. the student is in a community band as well as a high school band), and both ensembles are accepted, the student is only to appear with one ensemble and will need to choose which group to perform with. If this scenario applies, please be sure to list a second performer on that student's instrument on your application in the event the student elects to perform with the other band. If a director submits two (2) applications for two (2) different ensembles, they must list an assistant or co-band director on both applications.

Please note that no director may appear on stage more than once at the Competition & Festival. In the event that both ensembles are invited to compete, the director must select one (1) group to lead.

A conglomerate or community band is defined as an ensemble created to meet the educational needs of a specific community that follows a course of study and sequence. These ensembles will have a weekly rehearsal/class and a schedule of concerts that are publicly available throughout a school year or "season". All-star bands, all-region, and all-state bands are not eligible, nor are ensembles created specifically for the purpose of submitting to the *Essentially Ellington* Competition & Festival. JALC staff may request additional documentation regarding the status of a community band and an ensemble may be disqualified from the process at the discretion of our staff.



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SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION AND RECORDING

COMPLETE THE APPLICATION FORM AND UPLOAD YOUR RECORDING

You must fill out the entire application form online via Accept'd. You will not be permitted to submit your applications if any fields are left incomplete.

Once you have created an account through Accept'd and begin an application, you will be prompted to upload your recordings. Please be sure to include appropriate recording information, including title, composer, personnel and soloists. Recordings will become property of Jazz at Lincoln Center and they will not be returned.

NOTE: Sound files should be titled using the name of the piece being performed. Please be sure not to indicate your school or director name when naming the sound file for upload to Accept'd.

SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION

Submit recordings and application form through Accept'd.

All submissions must be submitted online by 11:59PM EST on Wednesday, January 7, 2026.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How is my application scored?

Bands are judged in five categories—Soulfulness, Rhythm Section, Soloing/Improvisation, Interpretation and Basic Musicianship/Technique on a scale of 1 to 10. *Essentially Ellington* has created detailed adjudication rubrics, which provide a narrative of the scoring system used by our adjudicators and Festival judges. That document is available on the *EE* webpage under the [Competition and Festival tab](#).

What is the screening process?

All entries are judged in a two-part blind screening process by prominent jazz educators and musicians. All entries are initially evaluated by two adjudicators. The top scoring ensembles then move onto a second round of screening, conducted by all four of our screeners. From these, twenty (20) bands are selected as finalists.

How and when will the finalists be announced?

The 20 finalists will be posted to the [EE website](#) on Wednesday, January 28, 2026.