



Membership Overview

Who We Are

Recognizing theater excellence and honoring theater artists has been our mission at the Jeff Awards for more than 50 years. As a member of the vibrant arts community, the Jeff Awards celebrates the vitality of Chicago area theater with its recommendations, awards, and honors. We are the most active and engaged theater awards organization in the country. Annually, the Jeff Awards evaluates over 250 theatrical productions and holds two awards ceremonies highlighting artistic and technical excellence over the past season. These initiatives help foster the growth of companies, encourage artists, bring new appreciation to diverse storytelling, and cultivate civic pride in the achievements of the Chicago theater community.

Our members come from a variety of backgrounds that give them a unique perspective to evaluate theater and ensure the integrity of our [annual awards](#) within the Equity and Non-Equity theater community. We are an all-volunteer, non-profit organization with members who are working theater artists, many with academic and training backgrounds and significant professional experience, as well as those with a history of theater involvement, and/or years of consistent theater attendance in Chicago and in other major theater capitals of the world. We believe the beauty and wonder brought to life by theater expands our world of understanding and how we live our lives.

What Productions Qualify for Jeff Awards Consideration

Equity theaters (within 45 miles of downtown Chicago) and Non-Equity theaters within Chicago city limits can invite the Jeff Awards to evaluate their productions. The designation of "Jeff Recommended" is given to a production when, after the opening night of its run, a tally of ballots indicates at least one award category of the show is deemed excellent by the Jeff Awards opening night judges. Then the rest of the members see the production and cast votes for any and all artistic and technical aspects (30+ potential categories) they deem noteworthy. At the end of the season, ballots are tallied to determine award nominations. Jeff members vote on final nominations to select each year's recipients. More details on eligibility are available on our [website](#).

Our Commitment to Inclusion and Respect

Our members are invigorated by what is happening in the world and the vital need for diverse voices. That requires that we remain committed to infusing equitable perspectives in how we champion theater excellence. We stay engaged through training on dismantling racism and issues of social justice, as well as initiatives focused on equity, diversity and inclusion. To remain a valued resource for the community we support, our Jeff Awards membership must reflect the diversity of the Chicago theater community. We welcome all interested and qualified candidates, regardless of sex, age, ethnicity, disability, race, color, national origin, sexual orientation or gender identity, or any other basis prohibited by law.

Background for Membership

With a vast range of productions to evaluate each year, members need a deep background and interest in theater. Expertise among current and former members comes from theater artists, directors, designers, musicians, theater company leaders and staff, arts faculty, and many other professional levels, as well as those with an exceptional commitment and exposure to all forms of theater. Members must be able to critically analyze all areas of production and meet time commitments related to attending performances. A spouse or domestic partner of a current member is not eligible.

Opportunities to Participate

We recognize there are a lot of choices people have in how to spend their time and that Jeff Awards participation requires a significant commitment. Our new membership opportunities offer a range of time commitments while still maintaining the theater excellence authenticity and credibility of the Jeff Awards. Members can vote on the final ballot each season only if they have met their responsibilities for that complete year.

Full Membership:

Members rotate for 3-4 opening nights a month assigned randomly based on availability and also attend and evaluate Equity and Non-Equity productions that have received a Jeff “recommendation.” All members must attend and vote on a minimum of 50% of Jeff Recommended productions. At the end of each season, members are eligible to vote on the final nomination ballot if they have seen a majority of the nominees in each category.

Rotation Membership

To reduce overall time commitment and still have the opportunity to participate with both wings (Equity and Non-Equity), rotation membership is another option. This enables you to focus exclusively on one wing, with a six month hiatus between, and then rotate to the other. This membership requires a commitment of two and a half years so members spend one year in each wing where they are randomly assigned to openings in their designated wing and must attend and vote on a minimum of 80% of Jeff Recommended productions. During a specific wing term, members are not eligible as a Jeff Awards official to see or evaluate recommended shows in the wing they are not covering. When on hiatus, members can choose to take a break or attend and vote on a minimum of 50% of Jeff Recommended productions in either wing.

Short Run Productions Membership

The Jeff Awards has established a new category to recognize and honor productions with shorter runs (9-17 performances) at eligible Equity and Non-Equity theaters. Full or Rotation Members can apply to supplement their duties as part of a specially designated team focusing on Short Run productions. While opening night assignments are randomly assigned across the Jeff Awards membership, this team of 12 Jeff members is committed to attend and vote on a minimum of 80% of productions that are Jeff Recommended. Members covering this category serve for an 18 month term to ensure coverage of full Equity and Non-Equity seasons.

Dues and Other Duties

Members pay annual dues, which help cover award program, administrative and operating expenses (\$600 in one or two installments). In addition to theater attendance, members are required to participate in quarterly membership and education meetings and serve on at least one subcommittee to support activities of our all-volunteer organization.

Consideration Process

Interested in membership? Complete an application online via this [link](#). Once your application is reviewed, we will contact you and this may include an interview with the membership committee. Need more information or have recommendations on prospective candidates? Please reach out to membership@jeffawards.com.