

TORONTO ARTS _ FOUNDATION

2026 TORONTO ARTS FOUNDATION AWARDS BREAKTHROUGH JAZZ ARTIST AWARD

DESCRIPTION & ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES

Nomination Deadline: November 26, 2025

The Toronto Arts Foundation Awards are designed to increase public awareness of arts in Toronto by recognizing artistic excellence and achievement. The awards celebrate artists, cultural leaders, and organizations whose work contributes to the artistic and cultural life of Toronto.

The Toronto Arts Foundation Awards are presented in recognition of a body of creative accomplishment rather than for specific works or achievements. The awards are generously funded by individuals and sponsors.

Toronto Arts Foundation presents the Breakthrough Jazz Artist Award (formerly the Emerging Jazz Artist Award) annually in partnership with the TD Toronto Jazz Festival.

Award Description

The Toronto Arts Foundation **Breakthrough Jazz Artist Award** is a \$10,000 cash prize with finalists receiving \$2,000 each. The award celebrates either an outstanding Toronto-based jazz* artist with two to seven years of experience in the field, or an artist who previously devoted their career to supporting other artists and are now able to focus on their own solo work. The intention of this award is to further the career of a breakthrough jazz artist. Examples of how this award could support career advancement include, but are not limited to professional development, projects, or marketing/promotion.

Established in 2014 as the Emerging Jazz Artist Award, it was renamed the Breakthrough Jazz Artist Award in 2024 and the age restriction was eliminated in recognition that many artists embark on their jazz career at various points in their life. The Breakthrough Jazz Artist Award is presented every year at the TD Toronto Jazz Festival. The recipient and finalist prizes are generously supported by Michael Bourgeois and Marilyn Legge. The award was previously supported for 10 years by Cheryl and Manuel Buchwald.

*Recognizing that “jazz” includes many different styles and artistic interpretations, this award is open to nominations for individuals who perform jazz and jazz-influenced music.

Note: Preference will be given to artists who are in the process of creating or promoting original repertoire, rather than those who perform standard material or established works in the jazz idiom.

Basic Eligibility Requirements

Nominees for the Breakthrough Jazz Artist Award:

- must be an artist in the early stages of their professional career (two to seven years of experience) who has produced a small body of work and achieved some local

recognition and/or has limited public exhibition experience. OR: Nominees who have more experience as an artist in the jazz idiom who have not had the opportunity to pursue their own individual/solo interests.

- Nominees for the Breakthrough Jazz Artist Award will be asked to explain how this award will further their career at the time of nomination
- must have completed training (not necessarily at a formal educational institution) in their discipline.
- must have contributed to arts and culture in Toronto and have demonstrated an ongoing association with Toronto.
- may self-nominate. However, it is strongly recommended that the nominee is nominated by a nominator. Ideally the nominee and the nominator will work together to submit a nomination.
- undergraduate and college students pursuing degrees in music are not eligible. If the nominee has already completed basic training in jazz, but is pursuing other academic interests, they are eligible.
- are not eligible to nominate or receive Toronto Arts Foundation awards while serving as executive board member or staff of Toronto Arts Foundation or Toronto Arts Council

With the exception of the Newcomer Artist Award, no person or organization may be selected for more than one Toronto Arts Foundation Award within any given year, and no person or organization may receive the same Toronto Arts Foundation Award twice. This does not preclude a recipient from being considered for a different Toronto Arts Foundation award in the future.

Nominations for Multiple Awards

Please note that nominees are not eligible to be nominated for more than one award in a given year. If the same individual or organization is nominated for multiple awards, the nomination that was submitted first chronologically will be the one considered. All other nominations will be considered ineligible and removed from the submissions.

Individuals or Organizations with Multiple Nominations for the Same Award

Due to the volume of nominations, Toronto Arts Foundation is no longer accepting multiple nominations of the same individual or organization for each award. We encourage you to reach out directly to the artist or organization you would like to nominate to ensure they are aware of your submission on their behalf. The nomination that was submitted first chronologically will be the one considered for the given award. All other nominations will be considered ineligible and removed from the submissions.

How to Nominate

To nominate an individual for the Breakthrough Jazz Artist Award you must:

- Visit the [Toronto Arts Foundation Nomination Portal](#)
- Register an account on Toronto Arts Foundation's Nomination Portal or sign into your existing account
- Submit the nomination online, complete with supporting material.

Notes

Along with the name of the individual you are nominating, the Nomination Portal will ask for a biography, a nomination rationale, and accompanying support material in the

form of visual, audio or text-based attachments. Nominators can save their application at any time before submission by clicking 'Save Draft.' Nominators can log in and out of Toronto Arts Foundation's Nomination Portal as many times as needed before clicking 'Submit.'

*Please ensure you are on/register through **Toronto Arts Foundation's** Nomination Portal and not Toronto Arts Council's Grants Online.

Award Selection Process: Policies and Procedures

Appointment of Awards Assessors

An Award Panel of up to five assessors selected by the Award Manager will review nominations and recommend a shortlist and a recipient for final approval by Toronto Arts Foundation's Board of Directors. Participants in each panel include practitioners of the arts, organizers, programmers, producers, curators, critics, commentators and lay specialists. Panelists must have recognized expertise, credibility, and experience along with a sense of history and perspective.

The final list of assessors is made public in the form of an announcement distributed to media and Foundation stakeholders and posted on the Foundation's website.

Details of Nomination and Selection Process

Members of the arts community and general public are invited to nominate individuals and arts organizations to be considered by the assessors. Nominations must be submitted through Toronto Arts Foundation's Nomination Portal. Where appropriate, nominations may include accompanying support material in the form of visual, audio or text-based attachments. Awards Assessors are precluded from participating in the nominating process.

The assessors will be informed of Toronto Arts Foundation's criteria, the unique aspect of the award and its relationship to the Foundation's mission and vision.

Deliberations will be guided by the following assessment criteria:

- meeting eligibility requirements as detailed above.
- demonstration that the nominee is at a breakthrough point in their career.
- demonstration of how the award and award funds will further the nominees' career (for examples, see award description above).
- artistic strength and achievement
- strength of the candidate's artistic goals and objectives.
- contribution to the development of arts and culture in Toronto.
- the nominee's overall public impact including community engagement and animation

The assessors endeavor to reach unanimous decisions in its selection process. In the event that unanimity is not achieved, a decision may be reached by majority vote. All deliberations are strictly confidential.

Following deliberations, the Assessors will recommend a shortlist and recipient for each award. The shortlist will be made public in advance of the official awards presentation. The recipient will be announced the day of the official awards presentation event.

Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest refers to a situation in which private interests or personal considerations may affect an Award Assessor's judgment in the assessment process.

Specifically, a conflict of interest exists where an Assessor has a financial interest in the

success or failure of a candidate; has a personal interest in a specific candidate or has any other reason which makes them unable to objectively evaluate the candidate. If in the course of the Award Assessors deliberations, any Assessor has a conflict of interest, that person is expected to declare such conflict and withdraw from the selection/voting process.

Toronto Arts Foundation reserves the right to amend these Policies and Procedures, without notice to any party.

For questions about the awards and eligibility please contact:

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