



Non-Equity Theater Community Update

July 1, 2026

The Jeff Awards has been meeting and listening to the community we serve. We acknowledge that recent events have caused disappointment, frustration and a fracture in trust within the Non-Equity community whose vital work we respect and champion. Specifically, we apologize for the distress caused when established ceremony rules for award acceptances were not followed during the recent Non-Equity celebration. To ensure fair treatment of all award recipients going forward, we are fortifying our procedures to consistently respect all ceremony rules and our mission.

Our members' focus remains strictly on evaluating artistic and technical excellence on stage, rather than serving as a governing body or investigative group for the production process. For that reason, we stand firmly behind our annual award nominations and honors. While we understand the deep feelings surrounding past honors, we believe our most impactful path forward is to focus on the future – with an emphasis on establishing greater clarity in our internal procedures and actively supporting the Non-Equity community's efforts to foster a safer, more supportive environment for all creative minds to develop their craft.

Our Progress During This Evaluation Hiatus

To ensure our policies are clear and meet demands of the moment, we are using the current hiatus from evaluating Non-Equity productions to be focused on continuing the rigorous work we started this spring:

- **Deep-Dive Theater Company Outreach:** Our interviews with leadership from Non-Equity theaters are ongoing and will continue through the summer. We publicly thank the dozens of leaders who have already shared their insights with us and invite awards-eligible companies still interested in engaging in conversation to reach out to us at nonequityjeffawards@gmail.com.
- **National Research:** We remain in conversation with dozens of peer arts awards and theater service organizations to explore best practices for supporting our local theater community.
- **Eligibility, Criteria and Policy Review:** In addition to reviewing our policies and procedures, we are investigating how to improve the frequency and content of our communications to be more transparent and keep the community better informed about our organization.

Next Steps and Looking Forward

We are committed to continued action and reflection in support of self-governance of Chicago theaters. Based on discussions with theaters, this may include enhancements to our eligibility requirements for companies to have a system in place for reporting abuse and/or a conflict resolution in order to be adjudicated. Any proposed policy updates and other developments will be shared with awards-eligible Non-Equity theater companies before a public announcement.

Throughout the summer and fall, we will also be attending industry and community meetings to remain engaged and informed. If opportunities arise to be part of ongoing Non-Equity theater discussions, please reach out to us to discuss the best way for us to participate at media@jeffawards.org.

Through our ongoing conversations with theater companies, we have repeatedly heard that the Jeff Awards play an important role in our collective ecosystem. We acknowledge and fully own that responsibility. We remain deeply grateful for the input from both the community and our dedicated volunteer members as we work together to sustain a vibrant Chicago theater industry. The Non-Equity community is a vital part of Chicago theater, and we look forward to opportunities for further collaboration and partnership. A final report with recommendations about the Non-Equity Wing awards program will be available during the Fall.