2027
National Veterans Creative Arts Festival

Competition Handbook

2027 Competition Theme = GROWTH

Presented by

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GENERAL INFORMATION	PAGE NUMBER
About	2
How to Engage	2
Competition Categories and Theme (Growth)	2
Eligibility	3
General Rules	3
How to Submit an Entry and Application	4
Evaluation Criteria	4
Results	5
Awards	5
National Medalists Festival Invitations	5
ART DIVISION	6-11
Rules and Categories	
Entry Submission Information	
Tips for Taking Better Art Images	
Judging Criteria, Timeline, Display/Shipping Artwork	
CREATIVE WRITING DIVISION	12-14
Rules and Categories	
Entry Submission Information	
Judging Criteria, Timeline, Booklet/Banner	
DANCE DIVISION	15-17
Rules and Categories	
Entry Submission Information	
Tips for Taking Better Video Recordings	
Judging Criteria, Timeline, Performance	
DRAMA DIVISION	18-20
Rules and Categories	
Entry Submission Information	
Tips for Taking Better Video Recordings	
Judging Criteria, Timeline, Performance	
MUSIC DIVISION	21-23
Rules and Categories	
Entry Submission Information	
Tips for Taking Better Video Recordings	
Judging Criteria, Timeline, Performance	

ABOUT

Co-presented by Department of Veterans Affairs and the American Legion Auxiliary, the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF) empowers Veterans to improve their mental and physical health through therapeutic creative arts experiences.

The NVCAF is one of six national rehabilitation events and reinforces the VA's commitment to whole health, recovery-oriented care, and Veteran-centered services by celebrating resilience, achievement, and personal growth. Showcasing the intersection of artistry and healing, the event features national Veteran medalists invited for their artistic achievements and therapeutic use of the arts.

The NVCAF provides a creative space to focus on healing, growth, collaboration, and connection through the power of the creative arts.

Veterans who engage in the creative arts at the NVCAF build a sense of community and belonging, impacting their overall health and wellness goals. They participate in a variety of rehabilitation-focused therapeutic workshops and education sessions and may exhibit their winning artwork and original writings or perform musical, dance or dramatic selections in show performances.

HOW TO ENGAGE

Veterans apply online by submitting their entries and an application for juried consideration. The 2027 application/entry submission window will be accessible through the NVCAF website (www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov) February 1 – March 15, 2027. Applications and their respective entries will be reviewed for completeness and evaluated on the following:

- Creative Arts Entry
- Theme Alignment (2027 Theme = GROWTH) – short narrative
- Wellness Through the Arts – short narrative

COMPETITION CATEGORIES

2027 Competition Theme = GROWTH

Division	Categories
Art Division	2D and 3D
Creative Writing Division	Poetry and Prose
Dance Division	Solo, Partner, and Group
Drama Division	Existing Content and Original Creation
Music Division	Music Solo and Music Group

ELIGIBILITY

Veterans must be eligible for VA health care **and** enrolled in the VA health care system **PRIOR** to submission of their entry/application. Veterans with a dishonorably discharged status and/or humanitarian status may not participate in the competition/Festival.

Veterans entering their own submissions: A VA Health Identification Card is required to be uploaded with the application/entry submission into the competition. This serves as verification the Veteran is enrolled and eligible for VA health care.

VA staff assisting Veterans with their submissions: Staff will be able to attest in the application that the Veteran is an eligible participant in the competition (enrolled and eligible for VA healthcare). The Veteran's VA Health Identification Card will not be required.

How to Apply for VA Health Care: https://www.va.gov/health-care/how-to-apply/
VA Form 1010EZ: https://www.va.gov/forms/10-10ez/

GENERAL RULES

For division specific rules, be sure to read each division's rule list carefully to ensure your entry complies and remains eligible for the competition.

1. Entries submitted into the 2027 competition must have been completed after October 1, 2025.

2. **Veterans may submit a maximum of three (3) entries into the competition.** (Not 3 entries per division.) This includes their participation in any group entry. Veterans may not expand the number of their entries using a different name. (For example: pen names, stage names, different artist names, etc.)

   Examples:
   - A Veteran may submit 3 sculpture entries.
   - A Veteran may submit 2 black and white and 1 color photography entry.
   - A Veteran may submit 1 watercolor, 1 writing prose entry, and 1 music solo entry.
   - A Veteran may submit 1 partner dance entry and 2 group dance entries.
   - A Veteran may submit 2 music solo entries and 1 music group entry.

3. Entries submitted into the competition must be created solely by the Veteran(s). Submissions created with artificial intelligence, including ChatGPT, will not be accepted. Artist, writer, performer guarantees the accuracy of the description of the work presented and the authenticity of the work as a creation of their own.

HOW TO SUBMIT AN ENTRY AND APPLICATION

1. Application and entry acceptance: February 1 to March 15, 2027.
2. Access the National Veterans Creative Arts competition application link through the NVCAF website: www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov
3. Complete the application form and all required fields. Incomplete applications will not be reviewed.
4. Upload your entry(ies) via JPG (visual art entries), Word document (creative writing entries), or video (dance, drama, music entries).
5. Sign VA Form 10-3203 consent form (Consent for Production and Use of Verbal or Written Statements, Photographs, Digital Images, and/or Video or Audio Recordings by VA) must be completed and signed by every Veteran submitting an application/entry.
6. Upload a photo of your VA Health Identification Card.

The VA's Office of National Veterans Sports Programs & Special Events is committed to providing the best possible care to Veterans. Information collected through participation in the application/entry process helps the office better understand and serve Veteran needs throughout the competition and Festival planning processes. Only information provided by the Veteran is collected. Please take a moment to review the VA Privacy, policies and legal information webpage. https://www.va.gov/privacy-policy/

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Applications and their respective entries will be reviewed for completeness and evaluated on the following:

- **Creative Arts Entry:** An evaluation of the entry itself. Refer to each division section for judging criteria.
- **Theme Alignment:** In addition to the entry, a short explanation (no more than 250 words) of how the entry connects to the central defined theme of the year.

  2027 Theme = GROWTH
- **Wellness Through the Arts**: A narrative (no more than 500 words) describing how you engage in the creative arts for your overall health, rehabilitation, resilience, achievement, mental health recovery, physical health recovery, personal growth, etc.

  ***TIP:** This is not a competition on how well you write (other than entries submitted into the Creative Writing Division). For the application narratives, we want to know the therapeutic role the creative arts plays in your life. Be self-reflective, describe your journey, what matters to you when it comes to your creative process, the value of creating, etc.

RESULTS

Results of the national competition will be posted to the NVCAF website in June 2027. Veterans who win gold, silver, or bronze medals will be invited to attend the NVCAF November 16-21, 2027, in Orlando. (www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov).

No judging feedback will be provided by the jurors.

AWARDS

Celebrating and recognizing the creative spirit, artistic achievement will be honored with gold, silver, and bronze competition medals.

NATIONAL MEDALISTS ATTEND THE FESTIVAL

Invitees – Veteran attendees must commit to participating fully in the Festival week to the best of their ability. Veterans should not view their attendance as a vacation experience. Attendance and participation are required at all scheduled events. This is a requirement to maximize therapeutic outcomes and to best utilize the resources invested in planning.

Funding Support for Travel – Funding support and arrangements for travel to and from the NVCAF for Veterans invited to attend is the responsibility of the Veteran and/or their VA facility.

International Travelers – Veterans who are actively enrolled in the VA and live abroad who win first place at the national level will be required to fund their own travel expenses to/from the Festival location.

Lodging, Meals, Ground Transportation – Lodging, meals and ground transportation during the Festival may be provided through national Festival funds. These expenses may be provided for up to 5 Veterans in any group entry.

Veteran Artists, Writers, Performers who are also VA Employees – VA employees who are also Veterans eligible to compete in the competition and if invited to attend the Festival event, must use annual leave (AL), compensatory time off (CT), sick leave (SL) or disabled veteran leave (DVL) (SL and DVL are only appropriate when the individual's participation is part of their required medical treatment/ordered by their provider), travel CT, or, leave without pay (LWOP). Normal leave approval procedures and rules, as outlined in VA Handbook 5017 and applicable labor agreements apply.

Prior to submitting entries in the competition, eligible Veterans who are also VA employees are encouraged to discuss leave options/restrictions with their supervisor in the event they are invited to attend the NVCAF.

ART DIVISION RULES

The Art Division rules apply to ALL visual art entries. Interested applicants are encouraged to review the Art Division rules to ensure their entry complies and remains eligible for the competition.

Veterans who are invited to the NVCAF and accept the invitation to attend must commit to participating fully in the Festival week to the best of their ability. The Festival week is structured with daily workshops, seminars, rehearsals and exhibitions. Veterans should not view their attendance at the Festival as a vacation experience. Attendance and participation are required at all scheduled events.

1. All entries must be created solely by the Veteran and/or Veterans submitting the art entry.

2. Submissions created with artificial intelligence, including ChatGPT, will not be accepted in the competition. Only Veteran's original artwork is accepted, no reproductions. Work that is copied or required assistance by an instructor is not eligible. 3D printing and laser printing will not be accepted.

3. **All visual art entries must be made by hand.** CNC machines, laser engravers and 3D printing are not allowed.

4. All artwork entered must have been **completed/photographed after October 1, 2025**.

5. GUNS, BLADES, KNIVES or other WEAPONS of any kind (including replicas) **will not** be accepted due to VA regulations banning these items from VA facilities.

6. Chess sets, dipped art, and jigsaw puzzles **will not** be accepted.

7. Entries that include personal collections such as spoons, medals, or coins (where the content of the entry is not created by the Veteran) will not be accepted.

8. Sets (diptychs and triptychs) may contain **no more than three pieces, even when arranged into one frame**. The pieces must relate to one another in an obvious way for the judges to classify as a set. Diptychs and triptychs should be uploaded as a single image.

9. Artwork must be durable, stable, and designed for long-term display without degradation.

10. **File Size/Image Format** - For more detailed information see Art Division-Entry Submission Information.
    - **File Size:** Optimal image file size is 1 MB or greater but no larger than 10 MB.
    - **Image Format Required:** JPG/JPEG
    - Artwork images must be submitted **exclusively** in JPG/JPEG format. Any submission in an alternative format (e.g., DOC, PNG, TIFF, GIF, PDF, HEIC, etc.) will render the application and entry ineligible and it will not proceed in the competition.

11. **Artwork Size Restrictions**
    Entries must be able to fit into **one box**. The art piece, including the box can be up to 150 lbs., up to 165 inches in length and girth combined. Length cannot exceed 108 inches.

    Use the following formula to measure your artwork when placed inside the mailing package: **length + 2x width + 2x height.**

    Entries that exceed the weight and size measurements indicated above may not be submitted into the competition.

    Step 1 Determine Length - Measure the longest side of the package, rounding to the nearest inch. This is your length.

    Step 2 Determine Girth (2x Width + 2x Height) - Measure the width of the package, rounding to the nearest inch. Multiply this number by 2. Measure the height of the package, rounding to the nearest inch. Multiply this number by 2. Add these two numbers together. This is your girth.

    Step 3 Add the length and the girth together. This is your package measurement.

12. Prior to submitting entries in the competition, eligible Veterans who are also VA employees should discuss leave options/restrictions with their supervisor in the event they are invited to attend the NVCAF.

ART DIVISION CATEGORIES

Veterans are allowed to enter up to **three (3)** entries into the competition **in artistic types that meet the rules and criteria of the competition.** This includes their participation in any group entry.

ART CATEGORIES – 2D and 3D

Two-dimensional (2D) and three-dimensional (3D) artwork are allowed as submissions into the competition. When completing the entry application, Veterans will choose if their piece is 2D or 3D and then indicate the art type that most accurately reflects their piece. (See listing below for examples.)

***Note:** We appreciate the incredible creativity shown in multiple forms of art. However, due to logistical constraints regarding storage, display, and potential shipping risks, we cannot accept perishable/degradable and oversized entries into this competition.

- **Two-dimensional (2D)** – Two-dimensional (2D) artwork is created on a flat surface, defined strictly by two dimensions: height and width.

- **Three-dimensional (3D)** – Three-dimensional (3D) art is defined by its occupation of physical space, characterized by measurable height, width, and depth. 3D art can be experienced from multiple angles allowing it to be experienced in 360 degrees.

Examples of art types/categories that have been entered in prior competition years:

Acrylic Painting
Assemblage
Beadwork
B&W Photography
Carving
Collage
Color by Number Kit
Color Photography
Colored Drawing
Craft Coloring Kit
Crocheting
Knitting
Knotting
Digital Art
Diorama
Fiber Arts
Figurine Painting Kit
Glasswork
Jewelry
Leather Carving
Leather Tooling/Stamping
Leather Kit
Metalwork
Mixed Media
Model Building Kit
Monochromatic Drawing
Mosaic
Mosaic Kit
Needlework
Oil Painting
Pastels
Pottery
Printmaking
Pyrography
Scroll Saw/Fretwork
Sculpture
Slip-Cast Ceramics
Stained/Painted Figurines
Suncatcher
Transfer/Engraving Art Kit
Watercolor
Wood Building Kit
Woodworking/Lathe Work

ART ENTRY SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Veterans are allowed to enter up to **three** entries into the competition. This includes their participation in any group entry.

- **File Size:** Optimal image file size is 1 MB or greater but no larger than 10 MB.
- **Artwork Image Format Required:** JPG/JPEG

  Artwork images must be submitted **exclusively** in JPG/JPEG format. Any submission in an alternative format (e.g., DOC, PNG, TIFF, GIF, PDF, HEIC, etc.) will render the application ineligible and it will not proceed in the competition.

  - **2D Artwork** - Two electronic JPEG images may be submitted for each 2D (flat art) entry.
    - One image of the artwork entry in its entirety.
    - One image of the artwork entry in more detail.
  - **3D Artwork** - Three electronic JPEG images for each 3D entry will be accepted.
    - One image from the front of the art entry in its entirety
    - One image from the back or side of the art entry in its entirety.
    - One image of the art entry up close in more detail.
- All artwork must be exhibition ready (ready to hang; ready for display).
- Do not submit supplemental documents (newspaper clippings, awards, articles, etc.). These items will not be shared with the national judges.

TIPS FOR TAKING BETTER ART IMAGES

- **Two-dimensional pieces may submit two images**. One image must show the total presentation (including frame) and one image showing more detail.

- **Three-dimensional pieces may submit three images.** One image from the front, one image from the back or side and one in more detail.

- Sets/diptychs/triptychs and Group entries must include one image of the entire piece/set.

- Take a photo of the finished piece prior to framing and again after framing.

- **Frame the piece using a neutral background.** Colorful backgrounds can alter the color of your piece by reflecting color onto it. The art entry should be the only item in the submission photo.

- **Be alert for glare**. Try changing the direction and location of the lighting or soften the light by bouncing it off a wall or screen. You can also try removing the protective layer to reduce glare.

- **Watch for shadows**. Move the item being photographed away from the background to eliminate shadows.

- **Include the framing and matting of pictures**. These items are part of the total presentation. Pedestals or bases that are part of the artwork should also be included in the digital image.

- **Only the art piece should be in the photo uploaded for the competition.** Take the photo as close as possible so the art piece fills the viewfinder of the camera; crop out background items.

- **Do not include** a title card, art award ribbon, Veteran's name, category, facility information, etc. in the photo.

- If using a smartphone to take artwork photos be sure the **national competition acceptable file type (JPG, JPEG)** is selected in your settings.

ART JUDGING CRITERIA, TIMELINE, & DISPLAY/SHIPPING ARTWORK

Visual Art Judging Criteria:

- Creativity/Originality – Exhibits originality and creative expression in the design.
- Skill – Use of techniques, materials, and artistry.
- Total Presentation – Consider the elements of art: line, space, color, form, media, texture, composition, balance, and unity. Also consider title, mounting, and framing.
- Theme Alignment and Wellness Through the Arts narratives

Judging Timeline – The national judging will occur March through May with results being announced via the NVCAF website in June. All medalists from the national level of the competition will be invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. No personal judging feedback will be given by the jurors.

Display of National 1st Place Artwork – First place artwork is displayed at the Festival in an Art & Writing Exhibition. Following the competition results, Veteran artists will be notified of when and where to ship their artwork. Shipping the artwork is optional and would be a cost incurred by the local VA facility or the Veteran. The cost to insure artwork for shipping purposes is the sole responsibility of the Veteran. Artwork not shipped will be displayed via collective banner or posterboard image.

Dioramas and entries that are fragile and delicate should not be shipped and will instead be displayed in the Festival art exhibition as collective banner or posterboard image.

Entries must be fully assembled when shipped.

NO GLASS PROTECTIVE LAYER (on flat art) – Absolutely no glass protective layer may be used when shipping national first place artwork to the Festival. If a protective layer is needed, PLEXIGLASS can be used. Artwork placed under protective glass and shipped to the NVCAF host VA facility **WILL NOT BE REMOVED FROM THE PACKAGE AND WILL NOT BE DISPLAYED IN THE ART EXHIBITION. VETERANS WILL ALSO FORFEIT THEIR PLACEMENT IN THE NATIONAL COMPETITION**. This strict rule and requirement is in place due to the risk of potential damage to the artwork and for the safety of those who will be unpacking the artwork.

CREATIVE WRITING DIVISION RULES

The Creative Writing Division rules apply to ALL creative writing entries. Interested applicants are encouraged to review the Creative Writing Division rules to ensure their entry complies and remains eligible for the competition.

Veterans who are invited to the NVCAF and accept the invitation to attend must commit to participating fully in the Festival week to the best of their ability. The Festival week is structured with daily workshops, seminars, rehearsals and exhibitions. Veterans should not view their attendance at the Festival as a vacation experience. Attendance and participation are required at all scheduled events.

1. All creative writing entries must be original works written entirely by the Veteran submitting the art entry. Submissions created with artificial intelligence, including ChatGPT, will not be accepted in the competition.

2. All entries must have been completed after October 1, 2025.

3. The National Veterans Creative Arts Festival is not liable for any copyright infringement on the part of the entrant and will not become involved in copyright disputes.

4. Entries **must be** submitted as Microsoft Word documents in 12-point font. Do not send PDF attachments. **Entries submitted as file types other than Word documents will render the application ineligible and it will not proceed in the competition.**

5. Creative Writing entries must be submitted as text only. Do not send documents with pictures or graphics. Only the text of the entry will be judged.

6. Collections of poems, essays, stories, etc. submitted as one entry will not be allowed.

7. Prior to submitting entries in the competition, eligible Veterans who are also VA employees should discuss leave options/restrictions with their supervisor in the event they are invited to attend the NVCAF.

CREATIVE WRITING CATEGORIES

Veterans are allowed to enter up to **three (3)** entries into the competition **in artistic types that meet the rules and criteria of the competition.** This includes their participation in any group entry.

CREATIVE WRITING CATEGORIES – Poetry and Prose

- **Poetry** – A verse composition that sometimes uses rhythmic qualities. No longer than 48 text lines.

- **Prose** – Prose is a writing style that doesn't follow a structure of rhyming or meter, but a structure arranged into sentences and paragraphs. No longer than 1,000 words.

Important Creative Writing Entry Reminders:

- Entries **must be** submitted in 12-point font.
- Entries **must be submitted as Microsoft Word documents.**
- Entries submitted as file types other than Word documents will render the application ineligible and it will not proceed in the competition. No exceptions.

CREATIVE WRITING ENTRY SUBMISSION INFORMATION

- **Font Size: 12-pt font**

- **File Type: Microsoft Word documents only.** Entries submitted as file types other than Word documents will render the application ineligible and it will not proceed in the competition. **No exceptions.**

- Creative Writing entries must be submitted as text only. Do not send documents with pictures or graphics. Only the text of the entry will be judged.

- Do not include headers/footers with identifying Veteran information on the entry (ex. Veteran name, title of entry, facility information, etc.). This information is removed for the national judging process.

- Do not submit supplemental documents (newspaper clippings, awards, articles, etc.). These items will not be shared with the national judges.

CREATIVE WRITING JUDGING CRITERIA, TIMELINE, & BOOKLET/BANNER

Creative Writing Judging Criteria:

- Creative Content
- Message Clarity
- Use of Language
- Originality of Topic or Idea
- Overall Strength of Composition
- Theme Alignment and Wellness Through the Arts narratives

Drama Entry vs. Creative Writing Entry – Veterans who choose for their original work to be judged by **performance criteria** (stage presence, expressiveness, and interpretation) should submit the entry into the **DRAMA** division. Veterans who choose for their **original work** to be judged based upon the **merit of the composition** (creative content, message clarity, use of language, and originality of topic or idea) should submit the entry into the **CREATIVE WRITING** division.

Judging Timeline – The national judging will occur March through May with results being announced via the NVCAF website in June. All medalists from the national level of the competition will be invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. No personal judging feedback will be given by the jurors.

Creative Writing Booklet and Banner – **First-place** winning writing entries at the national level of the competition will be printed one-time in a 2027 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival Creative Writing Booklet and will have an excerpt of the piece printed one-time onto a banner for use during the Festival Writing Exhibition. This banner, excluding the display stand, will become the property of the Veteran post-event.

DANCE DIVISION RULES

The Dance Division rules apply to ALL dance entries. Interested applicants are encouraged to review the Dance Division rules to ensure their entry complies and remains eligible for the competition.

Veterans who are invited to the NVCAF and accept the invitation to attend must commit to participating fully in the Festival week to the best of their ability. The Festival week is structured with daily workshops, seminars, rehearsals and exhibitions. Veterans should not view their attendance at the Festival as a vacation experience. Attendance and participation are required at all scheduled events.

1. All entries in the dance, drama and music divisions must have been recorded after October 1, 2025.

2. Performance entries should be approximately 3 minutes or less in length.

3. Submissions created with artificial intelligence, including ChatGPT, will not be accepted in the competition.

4. **Entries MAY NOT be expanded with non-eligible Veterans or any other individual unless it is a partner dance where the partner is necessary to perform the dance movements.** Although the National Veterans Creative Arts program recognizes the therapeutic value of participation of staff, volunteers, and ineligible Veterans in groups, it is essential in keeping with the fairness of the competition that **only eligible Veterans** are competing against each other.

5. Audio files of the dance division entries are not required to be submitted with the entry application. Should the entry place first in the national competition, the audio file must be sent to the NVCAF show planning team.

6. Prior to submitting entries in the competition, eligible Veterans who are also VA employees should discuss leave options/restrictions with their supervisor in the event they are invited to attend the NVCAF.

DANCE CATEGORIES

The Dance Division is inclusive for Veterans who are ambulatory or use assistive devices for movement (i.e. wheelchair, crutches, walkers, etc.).

Veterans are allowed to enter up to **three (3)** entries into the competition **in artistic types that meet the rules and criteria of the competition.** This includes their participation in any group entry.

DANCE CATEGORIES – Solo, Partner, and Group

- **Solo** – An individual performance by one eligible Veteran. Examples include ballet, tap, hip-hop, freestyle.

- **Partner** – Two individuals moving together in performance of the dance. The duo should maintain physical contact with each other for the greater part of dance. Examples include ballroom, waltz, tango, foxtrot, lindy hop, swing, and country-western partner dancing.

- **Group** – A performance where two or more people dance together simultaneously, focusing on synchronization, teamwork, and shared rhythm. Examples include structed group tap or jazz dances, line dances, and square dancing.

DANCE DIVISION ENTRY SUBMISSION INFORMATION

- **File Types Accepted:** MP4, MOV, Unlisted YouTube link
- **Length of Performance**: Approximately 3 minutes or less
- Do not submit supplemental documents (newspaper clippings, awards, articles, etc.). These items will not be shared with the national judges.

TIPS FOR TAKING BETTER VIDEO RECORDINGS

- **Be sure to check that all videos play with video and audio before submission.**
- **Focus on the performer**. Avoid taping from the back of the room. Stage presence cannot be judged if you cannot clearly see the performer.
- When video recording dance acts, it is necessary to include the whole-body in the entire recording, including the feet.
- **Sound control** is important! Clear audio makes a performance much easier (and enjoyable) to judge. Make sure your sound is good and balanced.
- Be aware of the accompaniment being positioned too close to the recording device.

DANCE DIVISION JUDGING CRITERIA, TIMELINE, PERFORMANCE

Dance Judging Criteria:

- Technical Skills - body placement, quality of movements
- Musicality - rhythm, timing/phrasing, movement related to music, group cohesion
- Stage Presence - confidence, focus, artistic expression, mastery of choreography
- Theme Alignment and Wellness Through the Arts narratives

Judging Timeline – The national judging will occur March through May with results being announced via the NVCAF website in June. All medalists from the national level of the competition will be invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. No personal judging feedback will be given by the jurors.

Performance – **First-place** winning performers invited to attend the Festival will have the opportunity to perform their piece during the event week. This could occur at a lunch, a dinner, an evening social, during the Expo, or in the community. Performance costumes are the responsibility of the performer.

Audio files of the dance division entries are not required to be submitted with the entry application. Should the entry win place first in the national competition, the audio file must be sent to the NVCAF show planning team in advance of the Festival week.

DRAMA DIVISION RULES

The Drama Division rules apply to ALL drama entries. Interested applicants are encouraged to review the Drama Division rules to ensure their entry complies and remains eligible for the competition.

Veterans who are invited to the NVCAF and accept the invitation to attend must commit to participating fully in the Festival week to the best of their ability. The Festival week is structured with daily workshops, seminars, rehearsals and exhibitions. Veterans should not view their attendance at the Festival as a vacation experience. Attendance and participation are required at all scheduled events.

1. All entries in the dance, drama and music divisions must have been recorded after October 1, 2025.

2. Performance entries should be approximately 3 minutes or less in length.

3. Submissions created with artificial intelligence, including ChatGPT, will not be accepted in the competition.

4. The **addition of staff, volunteer(s), and/or Veterans who are not eligible Veterans to any entry will result in disqualification.** However, if a drama entry requires a female character and no eligible female Veterans are available, the part may be read by a female volunteer or staff member. Although the National Veterans Creative Arts Program recognizes the therapeutic value of participation of staff, volunteers, and ineligible Veterans in groups, it is essential in keeping with the fairness of the competition that **only eligible Veterans** are competing against each other.

5. All Veterans must contribute significantly to the presentation in a dramatic way

6. **All Veterans involved in a group entry (including video recordings) must be physically seen on the video** for an entry to be submitted into a group category. **Entries submitted and all Veterans are not identified and physically seen on the video will render the application ineligible and it will not proceed in the competition.**

7. Prior to submitting entries in the competition, eligible Veterans who are also VA employees should discuss leave options/restrictions with their supervisor in the event they might be invited to attend the NVCAF.

DRAMA CATEGORIES

*Reminder: Entries in the drama division are judged on stage presence, expressiveness, creativity, and interpretation. Entries may be read from paper however the Veteran should be aware of the criteria for judging: stage presence, expressiveness, creativity, and interpretation.

Veterans are allowed to enter up to **three (3)** entries into the competition **in artistic types that meet the rules and criteria of the competition.** This includes their participation in any group entry.

DRAMA CATEGORIES – Existing Content and Original Creation

- **Existing Content** – Existing content is when the Veteran performer(s) is/are interpreting established text. Content may include excerpts from plays, scripts, novels, screenplays, or historical speeches.

- **Original Creation** – A new and unique performance that is created entirely by the Veteran(s).

DRAMA DIVISION ENTRY SUBMISSION INFORMATION

- **File Types Accepted:** MP4, MOV, Unlisted YouTube link

- **Length of Performance**: Approximately 3 minutes or less

- Do not submit supplemental documents (newspaper clippings, awards, articles, etc.). These items will not be shared with the national judges.

TIPS FOR TAKING BETTER VIDEO RECORDINGS

- **Be sure to check that all videos play with video and audio before submission.**

- **Focus on the performer**. Avoid taping from the back of the room. Stage presence cannot be judged if you cannot clearly see the performer.

- **Sound control** is important! Clear audio makes a performance much easier (and enjoyable) to judge. Make sure your sound is good and balanced.

- Be aware of the accompaniment being positioned too close to the recording device.

DRAMA DIVISION JUDGING CRITERIA, TIMELINE, PERFORMANCE

Drama Judging Criteria for Solo and Group Performances:

- Stage Presence
- Expressiveness
- Creativity
- Interpretation
- Theme Alignment and Wellness Through the Arts narratives

Short Video Judging Criteria:

- Structure & Organization
- Originality & Creativity
- Total Presentation
- Theme Alignment and Wellness Through the Arts narratives

Drama Entry vs. Creative Writing Entry – Veterans who choose for their original work judged by **performance criteria** (stage presence, expressiveness, and interpretation) should submit the entry into the **DRAMA** division. Veterans who choose their **original work** to be judged based upon the **merit of the composition** (creative content, message clarity, use of language, and originality of topic or idea) should submit the entry into the **CREATIVE WRITING** division.

Judging Timeline – The national judging will occur March through May with results being announced via the NVCAF website in June. All medalists from the national level of the competition will be invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. No personal judging feedback will be given by the jurors.

Performance – **First-place** winning performers invited to attend the Festival will have the opportunity to perform their piece during the event week. This could occur at a lunch, a dinner, an evening social, during the Expo, or in the community. Performance costumes are the responsibility of the performer.

MUSIC DIVISION RULES

The Music Division rules apply to ALL music entries. Interested applicants are encouraged to review the Music Division rules to ensure their entry complies and remains eligible for the competition.

Veterans who are invited to the NVCAF and accept the invitation to attend must commit to participating fully in the Festival week to the best of their ability. The Festival week is structured with daily workshops, seminars, rehearsals and exhibitions. Veterans should not view their attendance at the Festival as a vacation experience. Attendance and participation are required at all scheduled events.

1. All entries in the dance, drama and music divisions must have been recorded after October 1, 2025.
2. Performance entries should be approximately 3 minutes or less in length.
3. Submissions created with artificial intelligence, including ChatGPT, will not be accepted in the competition.
4. **Music entries must be video recorded live.** No voice-over dubbing will be allowed. No lip syncing to a pre-recorded track will be allowed. **MP3 files (audio recordings without video) will not be accepted.**
5. A medley of songs in an entry must be continuous/overlapping. Editing video compilations or starting/stopping songs to combine multiple songs as one entry will not be allowed.
6. If an accompanist is needed for an entry, they may only provide background accompaniment and not take instrumental leads or solos. (Example: A group entry may consist of eligible Veterans taking leads on saxophone, trumpet and guitar accompanied by VA staff or volunteers on piano, drums, and bass. The VA staff or volunteer accompanying the entry may not take a lead or solo.)
7. Original entries are encouraged to include typed lyrics with their entry. Entries submitted without a typed copy of the lyrics may be more difficult for the judges to understand and score.
8. Only one voice/performance instrument may be present to be considered a solo. When a second voice/performance instrument is added the **entry becomes a group entry and performers must meet eligibility requirements.** If back-up voices are present, they must be eligible Veterans and their inclusion would make the entry a **Group entry.** Back-up singing by VA staff, volunteers, and ineligible Veterans will result in an entry becoming ineligible to move forward in the competition.
9. Back-up tracks that have the Veteran's voice dubbed in, vocalizers, and harmonizers are not allowed.
10. Prior to submitting entries in the competition, eligible Veterans who are also VA employees should discuss leave options/restrictions with their supervisor in the event they might be invited to attend the NVCAF.

MUSIC CATEGORIES

Veterans are allowed to enter up to **three (3)** entries into the competition **in artistic types that meet the rules and criteria of the competition.** This includes their participation in any group entry.

MUSIC CATEGORIES – Solo or Group

- **Music Solo** – One Veteran singing or playing an instrument.
- **Music Group** – The group must have more than one eligible Veteran singing or playing an instrument.

MUSIC DIVISION ENTRY SUBMISSION INFORMATION

- **File Types Accepted:** MP4, MOV, Unlisted YouTube link
- **Length of Performance**: Approximately 3 minutes or less
- Do not submit supplemental documents (newspaper clippings, awards, articles, etc.). These items will not be shared with the national judges.

TIPS FOR TAKING BETTER VIDEO RECORDINGS

- **Be sure to check that all videos play with video and audio before submission.**
- **Focus on the performer**. Avoid taping from the back of the room. Stage presence cannot be judged if you cannot clearly see the performer.
- **Sound control** is important! Clear audio makes a performance much easier (and enjoyable) to judge. Make sure your sound is good and balanced.
- Be aware of the accompaniment being positioned too close to the recording device.

MUSIC DIVISION JUDGING CRITERIA, TIMELINE, PERFORMANCE

Music Entry Judging Criteria:

- Technical Proficiency (examples: pitch, rhythm, tone, intonation, and diction)
- Artistic Interpretation (examples: expression, phrasing, dynamics)
- Stage Presence
- Blend & Cohesiveness (if group)
- Theme Alignment and Wellness Through the Arts narratives

Judging Timeline – The national judging will occur March through May with results being announced via the NVCAF website in June. All medalists from the national level of the competition will be invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. No personal judging feedback will be given by the jurors.

Performance – **First-place** winning performers invited to attend the Festival will have the opportunity to perform their piece during the event week. This could occur at a lunch, a dinner, an evening social, during the Expo, or in the community. Performance costumes are the responsibility of the performer.