



## 2026 RADIO MERCURY AWARDS

Now celebrating our 35th year, the Radio Mercury Awards honors and celebrates creative excellence in radio and audio.

The Radio Mercury Awards was established in 1992 to encourage and reward the development of effective and creative radio commercials in the U.S. and its territories.

The Radio Creative Fund (RCF), a nonprofit corporation funded by the radio industry, governs the Radio Mercury Awards. RAB produces the Radio Mercury Awards.

Our juries will use the following criteria in judging:

- Does the work have a clear message?
- Does the work harness the full potential of audio to tell a compelling story?
- Does the work communicate the main message creatively and successfully?
- Note: Juries will consider additional criteria in judging specific categories. See specific entry categories for guidelines.

## 2026 TIMELINE

- **Tuesday, January 13:** Call for Entry opens
- **Monday, April 6:** Entry Deadline
- **Early May:** Finalists announced
- **Wednesday, June 3:** Radio Mercury Awards event
- **January 1, 2025 - April 6, 2026:** Entry eligibility period

# 2026 AWARDS SLATE

- **Single Spot Categories:**
  - Single Spot: Locally Produced – Agency/Production Company/Audio Company/Advertiser
  - Single Spot: Locally Produced – Radio Station/Group/Network
  - Single Spot: Promotional – Radio Station/Group/Network
  - Single Spot: PSA / Purpose-Driven – Agency/Production Company/Audio Company/Advertiser, Radio Station/Group/Network
  - Single Placed Spot: Podcast – Agency/Production Company/Audio Company/Advertiser, Radio Station/Group/Network
  - Single Spot: Agency/Production Company/Audio Company/Advertiser
  - Single Spot: Radio Station/Group/Network
  - Single Spot: Spanish-Language – Agency/Production Company/Audio Company/Advertiser, Radio Station/Group/Network
- **Campaign Categories:**
  - Campaign: Agency/Production Company/Audio Company/Advertiser
  - Campaign: Radio Station/Group/Network
  - Multi-Platform Campaign: Agency/Production Company/ Audio Company/Advertiser, Radio Station/Group/Network
- **Craft Categories:**
  - Use of Directing & Performance (Single Spot): Agency/Production Company/Audio Company/Advertiser, Radio Station/Group/Network
  - Use of Humor (Single Spot): Agency/Production Company/Audio Company/Advertiser, Radio Station/Group/Network
  - Use of Radio / Audio Technology (Single Work): Agency/Production Company/Audio Company/Advertiser, Radio Station/Group/Network
  - Use of Songs or Music (Single Spot): Agency/Production Company/Audio Company/Advertiser, Radio Station/Group/Network
  - Use of Sound Design (Single Spot): Agency/Production Company/Audio Company/Advertiser, Radio Station/Group/Network
- **Student Category:**
  - Student-Produced Script

## **2026 ENTRY FEES**

- Agency, Advertiser, Production Company, Audio Company:
  - \$180 for single/noncampaign entries
  - \$360 for campaign entries

# BEFORE YOU BEGIN YOUR ENTRY

Read the categories and their individual guidelines first to find the best matches for your work.

Have the following information ready before you begin the entry process:

- The actual physical work, i.e., radio or streaming audio file, video file, etc. in a downloadable format. Note: Any MP4 files must be sent to [mercury@rab.com](mailto:mercury@rab.com).
- A written description of the work and an explanation of how it delivered the main message creatively and successfully. Note: Do not include your agency/company/station's name or names of creative team members in the description, as judging is anonymous.
- Complete credits, including the people who produced the work, e.g., writer(s), producer(s), talent, production company. Important: Check your credits for spelling, proper name(s), capitalization and accuracy. We will use these credits if your entry becomes a finalist.
- You will also need to provide the following additional information along with your entry:
  - Work Title
  - Client/Brand
  - Client Category
  - Length of work
  - How the work was delivered: You will select from a dropdown list, e.g., radio, streaming audio.
  - Launch Date: The month and year in which the work first ran, aired or was transmitted.
  - Advertising reach of work: Local, regional, national, student
  - Translation to English: Required for all entries which are not originally in English.
  - Payment information:
    - We accept payment via the following methods:
      - ACH: Email [mercury@rab.com](mailto:mercury@rab.com) and we will send you instructions.
      - Credit card: We accept all major credit cards. We will add a 2.5% credit card processing fee for all credit card payments.
    - Important: We must receive complete payment by the entry deadline in order for your entry to be valid.
  - A qualified representative must complete a signed agreement form once you've submitted your entry(ies) that you can find at the end of your entry process along with the substantiation documentation upload link.

**Note: Your entry must be completed and submitted no later than the entry deadline.**

# CALL FOR ENTRY

During the entry process, you will be asked to provide the following information:

## Select the type of work you are entering:

- **Radio:** For the purposes of the Radio Mercury Awards, “radio” means U.S.-licensed\* AM and FM broadcast radio stations owned and operated by U.S. radio stations and groups. The work ran on-air on a U.S.-licensed\* radio station(s). The work can also have run on a combination of on-air and digital on a U.S.-licensed radio station(s).
- **Streaming audio:** For the purposes of the Radio Mercury Awards, “streaming audio” means U.S.-based\* streaming platforms (music streaming service or streaming radio station), e.g., Spotify and Pandora.
- **Spectrum/airwaves:** For the purposes of the Radio Mercury Awards, “spectrum/airwaves” means work that aired or ran on a U.S.-licensed\* satellite-only service, e.g., SiriusXM or a U.S.-licensed\* Citizens Band (CB), Ham or amateur radio stations.
- **Podcasts and placed podcast spots:** Podcast or streaming audio work that aired or ran in the U.S.\* during the entry eligibility period.  
Email [mercury@rab.com](mailto:mercury@rab.com) with any questions.
- **Nonbroadcast audio:** Work such as experiential audio; U.S.-licensed\* smart speakers, e.g., Amazon Echo or Google Nest; site-specific audio and other forms of audio that are not radio or streaming audio.

*\*Includes the U.S. and its territories.*

## Notes:

- If an entry ran on radio, streaming audio and spectrum/airwaves channels, you can enter the work in an eligible category as long as you can substantiate that the work ran on these channels during the eligibility period. At the time of entry, you will be required to submit appropriate paperwork, as defined above.
- You can enter work into more than one category. See individual categories for eligibility.
- You can enter non-English language work in any category.
- Non-English language work should be originally produced in that language, and the final produced work should be predominantly in that language.
- You will need to submit a side-by-side audio translation of the work included in the entry, and for any printed or visual copy that is not in English.
- The Use of Radio or Audio Technology and Multi-Platform entry categories can also include spectrum/airwaves work, podcasts and nonbroadcast audio.
- Work that does not comply will be returned, and you will be asked to resubmit it in the correct format, length and/or type, as per our guidelines.

Entry fees are nonrefundable. However, Radio Mercury Awards reserves the right to transfer a 2026 entry into next year's competition.

## Submitting your work:

- Submit work in its original release version, in its original language. Note: For certain categories, we may ask you to submit an excerpt.
- Radio, streaming audio, spectrum/airwaves and nonbroadcast audio entries: MP3 or WAV format – 256 kbps minimum, 44100 hz stereo – no slate.
- Nonaudio entries:
  - **Images or .pptx files:** JPEG files; PDF of .pptx files.
  - Video:
    - One .mov or .mp4 file, 1280 x 720 resolution, H.264 video codec.
    - *Note: Any MP4 files must be sent to [mercury@rab.com](mailto:mercury@rab.com).*
- Campaigns: Please put two to three spots together into one audio file with no more than two seconds in between each individual spot.

Note: If your entry does not comply with our guidelines, we will return the entry, and we will ask you to resubmit it to conform with our guidelines.

## Substantiating your work:

In order to finalize your entry and before the entry deadline, you must provide the following substantiation based on the type of work you enter:

- **Radio:** Provide proof that the work was broadcast, aired or ran on a U.S.-licensed\* broadcast radio station(s) or group during the entry eligibility period. This substantiation could be Proof of Air/Traffic Log, an invoice from a radio station or a written and scanned letter from the media-buying agency with dates.\*\*
- **Streaming audio:** Provide proof that the work aired or ran on a U.S.-based\* streaming platform (music streaming service or streaming radio station) during the entry eligibility period. This substantiation could be Proof of Air/Traffic Log, an invoice from a streaming platform or a streaming radio station, or a written and scanned letter from the media-buying agency with dates.\*\*
- **Spectrum/airwaves:** Provide proof that the work aired or ran on a U.S.-licensed\* satellite-only service, e.g., SiriusXM or a U.S.-licensed\* CB, Ham and amateur radio stations.\*\*
- **Podcasts and placed podcast spots:** Provide proof that a podcast aired or ran in the U.S.\* during the entry eligibility period. This substantiation could be a Proof of Air/Traffic log or a written and scanned letter from a media-buying agency with dates. For podcast work, send in a screenshot of when the podcast aired.\*\*
- **Nonbroadcast audio:** Provide proof that the work was released, aired or transmitted in the U.S.\* during the entry eligibility period. This substantiation could be Proof of Air/Release or a written and scanned letter from a media-buying agency with dates.\*\*

\*Includes the U.S. and its territories.

**\*\*Email [mercury@rab.com](mailto:mercury@rab.com) with any questions.**

**Note:** Upload your substantiation documents and paperwork to the link at the end of the entry process. If you have any questions, please contact Madison Wright at [mercury@rab.com](mailto:mercury@rab.com).

# OVERALL ENTRY GUIDELINES

## Who can enter:

- Agency/Production Company/Audio Company/Advertiser: Work that was primarily produced by an agency, production company, audio company or advertiser in the U.S. and its territories.
- Radio Station/Group/Network: Work that was primarily produced by a radio station, group, network or a radio station's, group's or network's production/creative services department in the U.S. and its territories.
- Students: Written work that was created by a student or group of students at a U.S.-accredited college, university, college-level radio station or trade/specialty school in the U.S. or its territories.

# WORK ELIGIBILITY PERIOD AND WHAT TYPE OF WORK YOU CAN ENTER

## Work eligibility period:

- Work that aired, ran, was released or transmitted between January 1, 2025, and April 6, 2026, initially in the U.S. and its territories.
- If we extend the entry deadline, we will extend the eligibility deadline. For example, if the deadline is extended to April 15, 2026, eligibility will be extended to that date.
- Note: Although works released in early 2025 may have also been eligible for entry in last year's Radio Mercury Awards, any work that won a Radio Mercury Award last year is not eligible to win again this year.

## Type of work that can be entered:

- You can submit radio, streaming audio and/or spectrum/airwaves work into most categories; see individual entry categories for guidelines.
- You can submit podcasts and nonbroadcast audio work into specific categories. See individual entry categories for guidelines.

# JUDGING AND PRIZES

## Judging:

Our juries will use the following criteria in judging:

- Does the work have a clear message?
- Does the work harness the full potential of audio to tell a compelling story?
- Does the work communicate the main message creatively and successfully?
- Note: Juries will consider additional criteria in judging specific categories. See specific entry categories for guidelines.

## Prizes and Trophies:

- Best of Show:
  - The final round jury has the discretion to award a Best of Show, along with a trophy and a \$10,000 prize.
  - In accordance with the original mission of the Radio Mercury Awards to encourage and reward the development of effective and creative radio commercials, Best of Show is eligible only to work that includes radio and/or podcasts that aired or streamed within the radio ecosystem, i.e.:
    - U.S.-licensed\* broadcast radio station(s) or group and/or its digital radio station component(s);
    - Podcasts that streamed through U.S.-licensed\* broadcast radio station(s) or group digital component(s);
  - The radio and/or podcast components should be an integral part of the winning work.
  - Best of Show winner can include streaming audio, spectrum/airwaves and/or nonbroadcast audio work as long as the above criteria are met.
- All other categories:
  - Winners in all other categories will receive a trophy.
  - Notes: Final round judges have the discretion to split an award between two winners.
  - Entrants have the opportunity to win in multiple categories. However, each entrant can only win once within a single multi-award category, e.g., campaign category with two possible winners.

## **2026 RADIO MERCURY AWARDS ENTRY CATEGORIES**

### **CATEGORIES OPEN TO AGENCY/PRODUCTION COMPANY/AUDIO COMPANY/ ADVERTISER ENTRANTS**

#### **SINGLE SPOT**

A single commercial spot.

#### **SINGLE SPOT: LOCALLY PRODUCED**

Single spot created and produced by a local advertising agency or local in-house advertiser team for a local advertiser.

#### **SINGLE SPOT: PSA/PURPOSE-DRIVEN**

Single PSA or purpose-driven spot created for an advertiser, organization or nonprofit that brings awareness of relevant social issues, e.g., poverty, justice, gender equality, health and well-being, the environment and communicates the main message creatively and successfully. The work can be created by the entrant on its own or in partnership with an advertiser, organization or nonprofit.

#### **SINGLE PLACED SPOT: PODCAST\***

A sponsored spot within a podcast. The spot can be pre-produced or a live read by the host(s), guest(s) or talent on the podcast, and can feature voice talent, influencers or spokespersons. The spot should be integrated contextually within the podcast.

- The spot can be a commercial or a PSA.
- The spot can also be part of a branded podcast for the same brand, company or service that is featured in the sponsored spot.

\*Entry open exclusively to podcast work.

#### **SINGLE SPOT: SPANISH-LANGUAGE**

Single commercial, PSA or purpose-driven spot originally and primarily written and produced in Spanish, that authentically speaks to a Spanish-speaking audience as a featured element to communicate the main message creatively and successfully.

## **CAMPAIGN**

Campaign consisting of at least two commercial spots. Note: Submit two to three spots from the campaign with your entry.

### **MULTI-PLATFORM CAMPAIGN\***

Multi-platform campaign, in which radio, streaming audio and/or spectrum airwaves work is an essential and driving media of the campaign. Additional media channels can include nonbroadcast audio, TV, social media, podcasts, branded content, experiential audio, etc. The campaign should deliver a consistent brand message across all the channels. In addition, the radio, streaming audio and/or spectrum airwaves work component(s) should be able to stand on their own.

Entry requirements:

- If you are sending a video case study, it should be no longer than four minutes in length, and it should include examples of the radio and/or streaming audio used in the campaign. We suggest you review your video case study and revise it as needed to meet our requirements.
- In the description section, insert a description that clearly states how the radio, streaming audio and/or spectrum/airwaves work was utilized to crucially communicate the main message creatively and successfully.
- In the description section, you can include links to additional media used within the campaign, which judges will be able to access to judge your work.
- If you have any issues uploading your video case study, please reach out to [mercury@rab.com](mailto:mercury@rab.com).

\*Entry is also open to podcast and nonbroadcast audio work as part of the overall entry.

### **USE OF DIRECTING & PERFORMANCE (SINGLE SPOT)**

Single commercial, PSA or purpose-driven spot that demonstrates outstanding use of directing and performance as a featured element.

### **USE OF HUMOR (SINGLE SPOT)**

Single commercial, PSA or purpose-driven spot that utilizes humor as a featured element. Humor can be featured in one or more elements of the spot, e.g., the script, voice talent, sound effects or music.

## **USE OF RADIO/AUDIO TECHNOLOGY (SINGLE WORK)**

Single work that utilizes radio, streaming audio, spectrum/airwaves, podcast and/or nonbroadcast audio work in an innovative way. In addition, the work should be successfully integrated within the radio, streaming audio, spectrum/airwaves and/or nonbroadcast audio space, depending on the media used.

Eligible examples include:

- Radio and/or streaming audio with visual and/or digital components.
- Dual screen digital audio with audio/video integration.
- Use of AI (Artificial Intelligence).
- 3D audio production.
- Use of sound effects and soundscapes.
- Experiential audio.
- Proximity-based audio.
- Use of audio to communicate visual elements to visually impaired persons.

## **USE OF SONGS OR MUSIC (SINGLE SPOT)**

Single commercial, PSA or purpose-driven spot where song(s) or musical compositions are a featured element. Eligible entry examples include jingles, sonic branding, a song or a musical composition with or without lyrics. Songs or musical compositions can be original works, or they can be repurposed or rearranged through new lyrics and/or performances, including vocals or style.

## **USE OF SOUND DESIGN (SINGLE SPOT)**

Single commercial, PSA or purpose-driven spot where sound design is a featured element. Eligible entry examples include the use of sound effects, foley, live performances or remote recording, sonic branding, soundscapes and editing of previously composed or recorded audio.