

POLARIS MUSIC PRIZE

2026 Rules and Regulations - Album Prize

The Polaris Music Prize is a charitable organization that annually honours and rewards artists who produce Canadian music of distinction. A select panel of music critics judge and award its Prizes without regard to musical genre or commercial popularity.

All genres of music are considered for the Polaris Music Prize and no entry fee is required.

A Long List of 40 nominated Albums of the Year will be selected by an independent jury made up of music scrutineers from across Canada and related unceded Indigenous lands. This same jury will vote for a Short List of 10 titles that will be announced to the media in the summer of the award year. The jury then conducts a third round of voting (“The Final Vote”) to determine the winning album, which gets announced at the annual Polaris Concert & Award Ceremony.

1. Eligibility.

1a. Criteria.

Polaris Music Prize nominees and winners will be selected solely on artistic merit without regard to genre, sales history or professional affiliation.

1b. Album length.

An album is defined as one release of at least 20 minutes of music, or at least 5 songs.

1c. Release definition.

Qualifying releases consist of previously unreleased recordings that have been made available by any of the following methods:

- a) via free or paid music streaming services that are available in Canada.
- b) for purchase in Canada from any digital retailer or artist website.
- c) for purchase in Canada at any physical retailer.
- d) for free with the artist's consent. Promotional advances (i.e. media streams or watermarked copies) will not be considered released until they are made available to the general public.
- e) for purchase or giveaway directly from the artist at performances, appearances or online.

1d. Compilations.

Compilations of previously released recordings such as "greatest hits" or "best of" packages or similar are not eligible. At the discretion of the Executive Director and the Jury Foreperson, Polaris may allow compilations of previously released recordings if the curation is deemed to be of historical importance.

Multi-artist releases of newly recorded material will be considered.

Should a compilation album win, the prize money will be awarded to each Canadian artist featured on the compilation, prorated to the number of tracks by each Canadian artist who contributed to the recording.

1e. Collaboration Albums

Collaboration albums between two musical acts must be considered at least 50% Canadian to qualify for consideration. Criteria to determine Canadianness includes, but is not limited to, songwriting and production credits as well as marquee presentation and promotional positioning. Such eligibility shall be determined by the Executive Director and the Jury Foreperson. All rulings are final.

1f. Qualifying period.

To qualify, albums must have been released in full between April 1, 2025 and May 1, 2026.

1g. Canadian definition.

The artist or artists must be Canadian citizens or Canadian landed immigrants. For duos or groups, at least 50% of members must qualify as Canadian. Proof of Canadian status includes:

- a) Valid Canadian passport.
- b) Canadian citizenship papers.
- c) Canadian Birth Certificate.
- d) Landed immigrant status via a Canadian Permanent Resident Card.
- e) Secure certificate of Indian status.

2. Selection Process.

Artists or their representatives may submit their music to the Polaris Submission Portal for consideration at no cost. An independent panel of jurors recommends and considers eligible releases. The results of their voting will produce 40 albums for the Polaris Music Prize Long List, and 10 albums for the Polaris Music Prize Short List.

2a. The jury.

The volunteer jury is selected annually and includes Canadians who regularly curate, review or program independent and major label artists, both locally and nationally. Jurors can include journalists, broadcasters, bloggers, programmers, playlist creators, academics, podcasters, DJs and other active music scrutineers who display a wide breadth and depth of knowledge of Canadian music and passion for discovering new albums.

2b. Conflict of interest.

A jury member that professionally or otherwise represents an artist, or has a personal relationship with an artist or artists, or who is a recording artist, must disclose these conflicts to Polaris. In the event that there has been a conflict of interest, they will not be allowed to submit the related artist on their list or mention the associated artists in any internal Polaris jury discussions. Lack of disclosure of a conflict of interest may result in the loss of voting privileges and lifetime exclusion from the jury.

2c. Voting.

Jurors submit a ranked list of what they consider to be the five best Canadian albums. These picks are vetted for eligibility and tabulated to form a Long List of 40 nominees.

The jury then selects from this Long List to comprise the 10-title Short List. The jury then conducts a third round of voting (“The Final Vote”) to determine the winning album.

3. Polaris Music Prize Winner.

The Polaris Music Prize Album winner will be announced at an event in the fall. The winning artist or group will receive a cash prize.

4. Additional interpretations.

Any additional interpretations of the rules, including rulings on the eligibility of individual recordings or the status of jury members, shall be at the sole discretion of the Executive Director and the Jury Foreperson. All rulings are final.