

NATS NATIONAL STUDENT AUDITIONS



NSA Appeal Process

The purpose of this section is to provide NATS member-teachers a limited, independent process to seek review of a determination that a student has been declared ineligible to advance (ITA) in NSA or ineligible to win a placed award or cash prize. This process reviews whether an NSA Regulation was correctly applied to the available record of a particular entry. It does not review, alter, or reconsider any adjudicator's score, ranking, or artistic evaluation.

Scope: National NSA Rounds Only

This appeal process applies **only to determinations made in the national rounds of NSA** — the National Preliminary/YouTube Auditions, the National Semifinals, and the National Finals.

It does **not** apply to determinations made at the chapter, district, or region level. A limited appeal of a sub-national determination may instead be taken to the **NSA Team**, as set out in the “Sub-National Appeals” section at the end of this document. The independent Eligibility Review Panel created in this section is reserved for determinations made in the national rounds.

1. What May Be Appealed

An appeal under this section is limited to a determination that a student is ineligible to advance to the next level of NSA, or is ineligible to win a placed award or cash prize, on one or more of the following grounds:

- 1. Misapplication of a Regulation** — the NSA Regulation cited in the determination was applied incorrectly to the entry.
- 2. Findings not reasonably supported by the record** — the facts as researched and found do not reasonably support the conclusion reached.
- 3. Category, subcategory, or repertoire eligibility** — a determination concerning the correct category of entry, the eligibility or classification of repertoire (including, but not limited to, Commercial Music and Musical Theatre disambiguation, “double-dipping,” judicious cuts, original-language and arrangement requirements, and approved spiritual

repertoire) was not reasonably supported under a consistent application of the Regulation.

2. What May NOT Be Appealed

The following are never subject to appeal under this section:

1. **Adjudicator scoring, ranking, or artistic evaluation of any kind.** An adjudicator's professional judgment of a performance — including any score, rank, tick-line marking, or written comment — is final and may not be appealed, reviewed, or reconsidered through this process. There is a separate process for reporting problematic adjudication [here](#).
2. A request that an NSA Regulation be **waived or excepted**. Requests for exceptions to any NSA Regulation are not appeals; they remain solely within the authority of the NSA Team as provided elsewhere in these Regulations (see "NSA: Adjudication" and Appendix A). An appeal asks whether a Regulation was *correctly applied*; an exception asks whether a Regulation should be *set aside*. The two are separate, and the Eligibility Review Panel created below has no authority to grant exceptions.

3. Who May File

Only the NATS member-teacher who entered the student in the NSA event may file an appeal. Students, parents, guardians, chaperones, collaborative pianists, or other persons may not file. The entering teacher acts on behalf of the student, consistent with the teacher's existing responsibilities under these Regulations for entries, forms, and communication with students and families.

4. How and When to File

1. An appeal must be filed **in writing via email** with the **NATS Vice President for Auditions**.
2. The written appeal must be filed **within seven (7) days after delivery** of the initial written determination of ineligibility. A determination is "delivered" **when it is sent** in writing to the entering teacher (e.g., the date an email is sent) by the officer who made the determination. The seven-day period runs from the date the determination is sent, regardless of when the teacher opens or reads it. Appeals filed after seven days will not be considered.
3. The written appeal must state: (a) the student and NSA event involved; (b) the specific determination being appealed; (c) the specific NSA Regulation(s) at issue; and (d) the ground(s) for appeal under Section 1 above. The appeal should attach or reference the written determination received.

5. Role of the Vice President for Auditions

The Vice President for Auditions/NSA Coordinator serves only as the point of intake for appeals and as the administrator who convenes the Eligibility Review Panel. The Vice President **does not decide the appeal, does not sit on the Eligibility Review Panel, and does not direct or influence its outcome.** If the Vice President for Auditions made, participated in, advised on, or was consulted regarding the original determination, the Vice President is conflicted and must promptly refer intake and convening duties to the NATS President, who will designate an alternate, unconflicted NATS officer to perform these administrative duties.

6. The Eligibility Review Panel

Each appeal is reviewed by an **Eligibility Review Panel** of three (3) NATS members, constituted for that appeal. To ensure the Panel is genuinely independent of the decision under review — not merely independent in appearance — the following requirements are mandatory and may not be waived:

- 1. No prior involvement.** No person who made, participated in, advised on, researched, reported, or was consulted regarding the original determination — including the auditions chair, region governor or president consulted, and any adjudicator involved — may serve on the Panel.
- 2. No NSA Team members on the Panel.** Members of the NSA Team (the National NSA Coordinators, the Vice President for Auditions, and the NATS Coordinator of Auditions and Competitions) may not serve on the Panel for any appeal. This separates the body that researches and confirms violations, and that holds the exceptions power, from the body that reviews the application of the Regulations.
- 3. No institutional or studio conflict.** No person who currently teaches at, studies at, or is affiliated with the same school, college, university, or studio as the entering teacher or the student may serve on the Panel.
- 4. Drawn from a standing, rotating pool.** Panel members are drawn from a standing pool of experienced NATS members maintained by the **Vice President for Auditions in collaboration with the NATS President**, none of whom holds an NSA Team office during their service in the pool. Members typically will come from the relevant advisory panels for the genre in question. Members typically will rotate so that no individual reviews a disproportionate share of appeals. The appellant has no role in selecting or constituting the Panel, so that Panels are formed consistently across all entrants.
- 5. No consultation among decision-makers and reviewers.** There must be no consultation, spoken or written, between Panel members and any person involved in the original determination concerning the merits of the appeal, except for the limited written exchange of statements provided in Section 8.

- 6. Standard of Review** — The Eligibility Review Panel will not substitute its judgment for that of the original decision-maker, but will determine whether the Regulation was applied in a reasonable and consistent manner based on the available record. The existence of alternative reasonable interpretations does not, by itself, provide a basis for reversal.

7. Use of Advisory Panels as Subject-Matter Experts

When an appeal requires genre-specific expertise — for example, Commercial Music or Musical Theatre classification, classical repertoire questions, or American Negro Spiritual and Hall Johnson repertoire — the Eligibility Review Panel may request (but is not required to obtain) a written advisory opinion from the relevant NSA Advisory Panel (Musical Theatre, Commercial Music, American Negro Spiritual, or Children & Youth) or from a designated repertoire vetter named in these Regulations. The advisory opinion informs the Panel's review; it is **advisory only**. The Advisory Panels do not decide appeals, and an Advisory Panel member who participated in the original determination of the entry under review may not provide the advisory opinion for that appeal.

8. Review Procedure

1. The review is conducted on the written record. There is no live hearing.
2. The Panel reviews the entry, the cited Regulation(s), the written determination and its stated findings, and the written appeal.
3. The Panel may request a brief written statement from the entering teacher and from the officer who made the determination, and may request a written advisory opinion under Section 7. Any such request will set a short deadline appropriate to the audition cycle's timeline.
4. The Panel decides by majority.
5. All appeals must proceed exclusively through the processes defined in this policy. External evaluations, independently assembled panels, or parallel adjudicative processes will not be recognized as part of the official review or decision-making. Attempts to influence outcomes through such means fall outside the governance framework of NSA Regulations and the NATS Board of Directors.

9. Decision and Timing

1. A written decision will **normally be delivered within ten (10) business days after receipt** of the appeal by the Vice President for Auditions. When the Panel must obtain statements or an advisory opinion, or when the appeal is filed near a national deadline, the Panel will act as promptly as the audition cycle permits and will communicate any necessary extension in writing.

2. The Panel may **affirm** or **reverse** the determination:
 - **Affirm** — the determination of ineligibility stands.
 - **Reverse** — the determination is set aside and the student’s eligibility is restored as if the determination had not been made, subject to all other Regulations and deadlines.
3. The written decision will state the ground(s) considered and the reason for the outcome, with reference to the Regulation(s) at issue, and will reflect application of the standard of review described in Section 6.

10. Limits on the Panel’s Authority

The Eligibility Review Panel may only affirm or reverse the eligibility determination before it. The Panel may **not** create new awards or prizes, reorder or re-rank finalists, alter any score or ranking, change a Regulation, grant an exception to a Regulation, or decide any matter beyond the determination appealed.

11. Finality

The decision of the Eligibility Review Panel is **final within NSA**. There is no further appeal, and an eligibility determination reviewed under this section is not appealable to the NATS Board of Directors or any member of the NATS staff, including the Executive Director. Nothing in this section limits the separate authority of the NSA Team to grant exceptions to the NSA Regulations, or the continuing right of any NATS member to submit concerns, questions, or recommendations for changes to vpauditions@nats.org as provided in Appendix E. of the NSA Regulations.

12. Effect on Deadlines

Filing an appeal does not by itself pause or extend any NSA deadline, including the region’s March 30th submission of national qualifiers or the national entry deadline on the second Friday in April. Because eligibility determinations may arise close to these deadlines, teachers are urged to file promptly upon delivery of a determination, and all officers involved are urged to act with the dispatch the audition cycle requires.

COMPANION PROVISION

Appeals at the Chapter, District, or Region Level

Determinations made in chapter, district, or region NSA events are not reviewed by the independent Eligibility Review Panel. Instead, a limited appeal may be taken to the **NSA Team**

(the National NSA Coordinators, the Vice President for Auditions, the NSA CM Coordinator, and the NATS Coordinator of Auditions and Competitions) on the following terms.

1. **What may be appealed — ineligibility to advance only.** A sub-national appeal is limited to a determination of **ineligibility to advance (ITA)** — that is, a determination that a student is ineligible to advance from a chapter, district, or region event to the next level of NSA. No other determination is appealable under this route. Please note that not all regions are progressive from the chapter level.
2. **What may never be appealed.** As in the national process, an adjudicator's **score, ranking, written comment, or artistic evaluation of any kind is final and may not be appealed, reviewed, or reconsidered.** A request to waive or except a Regulation is not an appeal and remains within the NSA Team's separate exceptions authority.
3. **Standard of Review:** The NSA Team shall determine whether the Regulation was applied in a reasonable and consistent manner based on the available record, and shall not substitute its judgment for that of the original determination solely on the basis of alternative interpretations.
4. **Who may file.** Only the NATS member-teacher who entered the student may file.
5. **How and when to file.** The appeal must be filed **in writing** with the **Vice President for Auditions within seven (7) days after delivery** of the initial written determination. As above, a determination is "delivered" **when it is sent** in writing to the entering teacher; the seven-day period runs from the date sent, regardless of when the teacher opens or reads it. The written appeal must identify the student and event, the determination of ITA being appealed, the specific Regulation(s) at issue, and the ground(s) for appeal.
6. **Grounds.** The same grounds available in the national process apply — misapplication of a Regulation, findings not reasonably supported by the record, or an incorrect category/subcategory/repertoire eligibility determination — applied to the determination of ITA.
7. **Review and decision.** The NSA Team reviews the written record and may request brief written statements or a genre-specific advisory opinion from the relevant NSA Advisory Panel. A written decision will **normally be delivered within ten (10) business days after receipt** of the appeal, acting as promptly as the audition cycle permits when a deadline is near. The NSA Team may affirm or reverse the determination of ITA to the entity that made it.
8. **Finality and deadlines.** The decision is **final within NSA** and is not appealable to the NATS Board of Directors. Filing a sub-national appeal does not by itself pause or extend any NSA deadline, including the region's March 30th submission of national qualifiers.