



**THE BLUES  
FOUNDATION**

# INTERNATIONAL BLUES CHALLENGE

*RULES AND GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL  
AFFILIATED BLUES SOCIETY CHALLENGES*

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most important benefits of being an affiliate of The Blues Foundation, in addition to being part of the international blues community, is having the exclusive rights to conduct a local IBC challenge and send the winning acts to the International Blues Challenge in Memphis.

The benefits of running a local IBC challenge are considerable. Most importantly, it promotes local blues talent and their development. It also demonstrates to the general public the great work that the local affiliate is doing. This, in turn, often results in greater recognition and membership growth.

The spirit of the IBC is to promote the blues and blues musicians on the local scene.

The purpose of this guide is to explain the basic rules and suggested guidelines for running a successful challenge.

The following two conditions that must be met before an affiliate can sponsor an act in the IBC are:

1. A blues society must be affiliated with The Blues Foundation no later than the conclusion of the IBC of the preceding year to be eligible to sponsor an act for the IBC, (i.e., to sponsor an act in the 2018 IBC the affiliate must be a member of The Blues Foundation prior to the conclusion of the 2017 IBC).
2. Affiliates in the United States and Canada must conduct an open, judged, live music competition during the year leading up to the IBC in which an act will be sent to Memphis to represent your organization. Affiliates in these two countries may not appoint an act. Exceptions, if any, will be subject to advance approval by The Blues Foundation.

Note: While it is recommended that affiliates in all other countries conduct a live music competition, they may appoint acts as long as they make The Blues Foundation aware of their plans.

## BASIC RULES AND GUIDELINES

Once an affiliate is eligible to conduct a local challenge there are five basic rules that must be met in order for the results of the challenge to be accepted by The Blues Foundation.

### 1. Announced to Members of the Affiliate and the General Public in Advance

The date(s), time(s) and location(s) of local challenge events must be made public prior to the challenge taking place. This can be accomplished by a number of means including hard copy or electronic newsletters, notices on the affiliate website, e-blasts, media ads, and/or social media such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.

The event must be clearly presented as a challenge. Entrants and those attending must be made aware of this. Simply picking the "best of" a local blues festival is not an acceptable approach to selecting an act for the IBC.

### 2. Open to Local Acts

An act is eligible as long as it, or any member of the act, has never received a Blues Music Award nomination.

An act may enter the IBC a maximum of 3 times, after which they are no longer eligible. They may not participate in the IBC in three consecutive years, i.e., there must be a break of at least one year after competing in a first or second IBC.

The Blues Foundation reserves the right to determine what constitutes a new act on a case by case basis. (e.g., a band leader would not be eligible for another 2 attempts by changing one or two back up musicians and changing the band's name. Similarly, a solo musician could not enter the solo/duo category after 2 attempts by adding a partner to form a duo.)

A musician may not compete in the band category and the solo/duo category in the same year

at the IBC, even if the musician represents a different affiliate in each.

Affiliates may set their own rules regarding musicians playing in more than one act in their local challenge.

Any act, band or solo/duo, that has won first place at the IBC in Memphis may not enter a challenge in that same category in the future.

An individual musician who has won the IBC as a solo performer may not re-enter as part of a duo, nor can a member of an IBC winning duo then enter as a solo performer.

The winning act in a particular category in the local challenge must enter in that same category for the IBC, i.e., if a band wins the local challenge, one or two musicians from the band cannot enter the solo/duo category at the IBC.

Acts must enter the challenge of their own/home affiliate first (or the closest affiliate based on distance). If they are not successful, they may enter the challenges of no more than 2 affiliates in that year provided those affiliates are within 250 miles (425 Km) of the home affiliate. Acts are not permitted to enter the challenge of the 2 distant affiliates if either is held prior to the home challenge.

Affiliates may establish their own regional boundaries as long as those boundaries do not exceed The Blues Foundation's 250 mile radius.

Acts may be invited to participate in the challenge, but they may not be "pre-selected" and must compete in a fair event.

If a winning act withdraws before registering for the IBC, affiliates may send the act that placed second in the local challenge. If the act withdraws after registering for the IBC, a replacement may not be entered.

All members of the winning act must attend the IBC. Should unexpected circumstances arise (i.e., illness, family emergencies, etc.) no more than one member of any band may be replaced.

Affiliates may only sponsor acts that have won their local challenge which must be held after the conclusion of the most recent IBC..

Affiliates may determine their own criteria to screen entries in their local challenge should the number of entries be greater than what can be accommodated.

## 3. Rules and Judging Criteria Established and Public

The Blues Foundation encourages affiliates to use the IBC rules and judging/scoring criteria in their local challenges, but affiliates may use their own provided such criteria are established in advance and made public.

Note: While not mandatory, experience has shown that acts that have competed under the IBC rules and scoring criteria in their local challenge are better prepared for competing in the IBC.

### SCORING CATEGORIES AND DEFINITIONS

**Blues Content:** The sound and feel of the music should be true to any of blues' sub-categories: traditional blues, country blues, soul blues, blues rock and/or contemporary blues. Judges will be listening for inspired and original song selections or new takes on blues standards. Creative reach is encouraged.

**Originality:** Original work is encouraged. Cover tunes are allowed but playing the recorded rendition lick by lick is discouraged, will not be looked upon favorably by the judges, and will be reflected in scoring.

Acts must indicate if their songs are their own original material (this can be done at the start of the set or before each song as appropriate) and/or identify the covers that they are playing and acknowledge the originator.

**Vocals:** The act's vocal skills to include concepts of tone, musicality, meaning, and expression

**Instrumental Talent:** Ability level on all instruments featured within the act.

**Stage Presence:** The ability to command the attention of the audience by the impressiveness of one's manner and appearance on stage. Judges will consider how an act connects with and engages the audience in the music. Proper use of microphones and amplification will be considered.

## BASIC SCORING CALCULATIONS

Judges will score acts on a 10 point scale, with 10 points being the highest score received and 1 point being the lowest. The following weights will be used in calculating final scores:

- ★ Raw scores for Blues Content will be multiplied by four

- ★ Raw scores for Originality will be multiplied by three
- ★ Raw scores for Talent and for Vocals will be multiplied by two
- ★ Raw scores for Stage Presence will be multiplied by two.

The maximum Total Weighted Score/ judge that an act may receive is 130.

#### PENALTY POINTS

An act will be penalized one point from its Total Weighted Score for each of the following:

- ★ Missing the online application deadline or not completing the online application completely or accurately by the deadline.
- ★ Missing act check-in or act orientation on the first day of the event
- ★ Each night the act neglects to check in with its Venue Coordinator at least 20 minutes before the first performance begins at the assigned venue.
- ★ Excessive time loading-in before and/or loading out after a competition performance
- ★ Failing to acknowledge that a song is a cover and/or not giving credit to its originator.
- ★ Each ten seconds that it runs overtime during a competition performance.
- ★ Finishing 3 or more minutes before its allotted performance time expires.
- ★ Showing up late and/or missing Finals Orientation
- ★ Showing up late and/or not being ready to perform on time at the Finals
- ★ Performing in any other venue in the city of Memphis during formal IBC hours and in direct conflict with The Blues Foundation's programmed activities

The Blues Foundation strongly suggests that after meeting with their Venue Coordinator for their required check-in each night, each act remain in their assigned venue in order to be immediately available to perform at the Venue Coordinator's direction. The Venue Coordinator will be responsible for assessing Penalty Points based on IBC rules.

#### 4. Impartial Juried Results at the Local Level

While the results of such competitions are always subjective, impartiality, whether real or perceived, is of the utmost importance.

##### ISSUES TO CONSIDER

- ★ There should be a minimum of 3 judges for each preliminary round and the finals.
- ★ To the extent possible, judges should be selected based on some level of knowledge of or involvement in the blues.
- ★ Any individual preliminary round or finals must have the same panel of judges, i.e., every band or solo/duo act should be evaluated by the same judges in each round.
- ★ Judges with obvious conflicts of interest, such as family, or other personal or professional relationships with any act, should not be seated to evaluate any of the challengers.
- ★ It is recommended that board members or officers of the affiliate not be members of the judging panel.
- ★ Judges should not be encouraged to support or oppose specific acts. Fairness is critical.
- ★ Judges should be made aware of the scoring criteria in advance. The acts should be evaluated according to the scoring criteria, not compared with the other competing acts. Under the IBC scoring criteria, there is clear guidance provided for assigning numeric scores.

#### 5. Minimum Number of Acts Required at the Local Level

The minimum number of acts in each category (bands and solo/duo) is two (2). Affiliates may run a combined challenge where bands compete against solo/duo acts but in such cases there would be only one winner selected to go to the IBC.

The affiliate may choose to have both band and solo/duo entrants evaluated in the same challenge event, by the same panel of judges. In such cases, so long as there is a minimum of two entrants in each category, the affiliate may send entrants to the IBC in each category. If there is only one solo/duo or band entrant, they may compete with entrants in the other category but the affiliate

may only send a single entrant to the IBC.

Note: As part of the registration process, affiliates will be required to complete a form that documents the final round of their local challenge, i.e., date, location, participants, judges, etc.

#### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

##### 1. Backline and Equipment

The following is how backline and equipment is managed at the IBC. Affiliates may determine how they wish to manage backline and equipment at their local challenge; however, they should make their winning acts aware of the following information before going to Memphis.

The Blues Foundation will provide backline and sound. The setup on stage will include a drum kit with snare drum, amps, keyboards and mics. The backline in each venue will be based on the act's registration information. Drummers should bring their own cymbals and kick pedals, and harmonica players may (but are not required to) bring their own harp amp. Keyboard players are allowed (but are not required) to bring their own keyboards and keyboard amps. Keyboard stands will be provided. Effects racks and other auxiliary equipment are permitted. Musicians must include on the online registration form any additional or special equipment needed.

Competitors are prohibited from bringing their own guitar amplifiers (harp amps and keyboard amps being the only exceptions). Musicians should bring their own DI boxes. Every effort will be made to provide suitable equipment. Exceptions to this prohibition may only be granted pursuant to a formal written petition submitted in writing and received via email by the Event Producer (joe@blues.org) no less than 60 days prior to the quarter-finals competition. Make sure to also include a request in the act's on-line registration. With the number of bands participating in each venue, it is impossible for us to allow every player to bring an amp, space considerations prohibit it. Thus, any petition for an equipment waiver must include a compelling reason for exclusion.

##### 2. International Musicians

It is highly recommended that affiliates from outside the United States ensure that musicians that are participating in their local challenge have a

valid passport or that there is sufficient time to obtain a passport before coming to Memphis should they win the local challenge.

Affiliates should also ensure that musicians do not have any legal issues that would deny them entry to the United States.

#### 3. Participation in Showcases and other Events

There are a number of showcases, jams, and other programs happening on Beale Street during the IBC. Musicians are free to participate in these events should they be invited but they should ensure that such events are not interfering with official IBC activities.

#### YOUTH SHOWCASE ACTS

Affiliates may also sponsor one youth act to participate in the IBC Youth Showcase. Affiliates can decide for themselves whether to appoint a youth act or have a local competition using whatever criteria they choose.

Should you ever have any questions or concerns as you plan your local challenge, The Blues Foundation staff is always just an email or a phone call away to assist you. Please do not hesitate to call on us.

**Patty Wilson Aden**  
**President & CEO**  
 patty@blues.org  
 (901) 527-2583, ext. 12

**Joe Whitmer**  
**Production Consultant**  
 joe@blues.org  
 (901) 527-2583, ext 11

#### OUR MISSION

To preserve blues heritage, celebrate blues recording and performance, expand worldwide awareness of the blues, and ensure the future of this uniquely American art form.

421 South Main Street  
 Memphis, TN 38103  
 www.blues.org