



2026 Bill Riley Talent Search Local Show Rules and Guidelines

The program is best presented as a “Free Admission” event for a local celebration or county fair. Young people cannot be charged a fee for participation in the talent show. We encourage shows to comp admission prices to the show/event if there is one, but this is not required. All participants must be legal residents of Iowa.

The Talent Search is a statewide program. We encourage competition in your local show to be open to anyone in Iowa. **Please do not limit the competition to a specific county or area. This is a program for all young Iowans, not just from your hometown.** Winners from earlier shows around the state can compete in any subsequent local shows to get as much experience as possible. If an act in your show is already qualified for State Fair competition, and that act wins first place in your show, they receive the cash award. The second place act will advance, unless they have already qualified at an earlier show, then the third place act will advance, and so on. **The emcee must ask the acts if they have already qualified for the State Fair Talent Search.**

1. You must register your show with the Iowa State Fair by filling out the Show Application. Failure to do this will result in having an unsanctioned show and your winners will not advance. To register your show, call 515-262-3111 x4791 or email rileytalentsearch@gmail.com.
2. There must be three acts signed up ahead of time in each division to qualify as an Iowa State Fair sanctioned show. We suggest no more than fifteen acts in each division. If you have less than three acts in a division, you are not allowed to hold a competition for that division. For instance, if you have 10 Sprout acts and 3 Senior acts you will only be allowed to have a Sprout division and you will only send a Sprout act qualifier to the Iowa State Fair. In the event of last minute cancellations, please reach out to the Iowa State Fair Special Events department and exceptions to this rule may be made.
3. No more than five persons are allowed in an act. Piano accompanist is NOT included in an act and may be any age. No more than three accompanists permitted per act. Drums, amps, etc. are discouraged due to the one-minute set-up time. No combos, rock bands or similar musical groups permitted.
4. Vocalists can perform with an accompanist or prerecorded track on a USB flash drive. Prerecorded tracks should be instrumental only. Any prerecorded track with backing vocals is not allowed, and the act will be disqualified.

5. **Set Up:** The stage should measure 16' by 32' or larger to accommodate acrobatic dance acts, and it should have a smooth surface; no carpet please. This is very important to the dancers. Please provide them with a quality stage area. Provide a well-tuned piano with a full keyboard. Please provide an excellent public address system, with a competent sound engineer. You must also provide a way to play prerecorded tracks on USB flash drives or CDs through the PA system. If you are unable to provide any of these, please reach out to the Iowa State Fair Special Events Department in case allowances can be made.
6. **Check In:** Acts should meet with your show coordinator or emcee a minimum of 45 minutes to an hour prior to the show to get checked in.
7. Use the registration sheets provided and collect all the information on the form.

You will need name, complete address, birth date, age, phone number (include area code), email address and type of talent. **DO NOT ASK FOR SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS.**

Please only send contact information for the act themselves or their parent/guardian to Iowa State Fair staff. DO NOT take coach or instructor information, we want to work directly with the parent or guardian.

To help us schedule the acts as they advance to the Iowa State Fair, please categorize as follows:

Vocal: classical, country, contemporary, musical theater, etc.

Dance: tap, jazz, ballet, pointe, acrobatic, baton, lyrical, etc.

Instrumental: classical or contemporary categories.

Other: Please specify type of act (Examples: magician, martial arts, hula hoop)

Multiple member acts need one of the group members to act as a contact person with all information going through them. Additional members of the act need only birth date, age and town.

8. Contestants may only appear once in any given show. This applies to qualifying shows as well as the competition at the Iowa State Fair. They may not perform "solo" and then return in the same show in a duet or trio. Contestants are allowed to perform in different acts in different shows, but they may only qualify for the State Fair Show with one act. **Once a performer has qualified for the State Fair they are not allowed to perform in local shows as part of another act.** They may keep competing in local shows with the qualifying performance.

9. **Age Groups:**
Sprouts: Ages 2 through 12 Seniors: Ages 13 through 21

Seniors and Sprouts must qualify within the age requirement at local shows. For example, if you are 21 and don't qualify before you are 22 you are ineligible. All Sprout acts must qualify for the State Fair at the age of 12 or under.

The following applies only to the competition at the Iowa State Fair, NOT local shows:

A person's age for the Iowa State Fair competition is determined at the time they win a local show. A 12 year old who wins a local show (or 21 year old) could turn 13 (or 22) by the State Fair and still be eligible in the Sprout (or Senior) division, as they met age requirements at the time of qualification at a local show.

This applies to individuals or anyone in a group who qualifies at a local show at age 12 but turns 13 before the State Fair. If more than one performer in a group turns 13 before the State Fair, thus making the Sprout act have two or more 13 year olds, that act will automatically become a Senior act.

10. Professionals are NOT permitted to compete. This includes Union musicians and anyone whose principle source of income is from their talent. Compensation for performing at weddings, etc. does not constitute principal source of income.
11. **Show Format:** No preliminary rounds are allowed at the local level. The Sprout division performs first followed by the Senior division. Judging is to be done between each division in order to give the judges plenty of time for their decision. Awards can be done after each division or all at once after the Senior division. This is to be decided by the show coordinator.
12. **Judges:** A minimum of three judges are required, and up to five is advised. Shows can usually be broken down into four basic areas; dance, vocal, instrumental and other. We strongly advise judges with a background in dance, vocal and instrumental (judges should have enough performance experience to be able to judge acts that do not fit into the dance, instrumental or vocal categories). **Please access music, dance, and vocal teachers from the area; but they cannot have direct ties to the competitors.** Additionally, if possible do not use multiple judges from 1 studio (example; multiple judges who all coach at the same Dance Studio). College students may be used, if need be, but they must have a declared major in one of the areas. No high school students or relatives of participants are allowed to judge. Current BRTS competitors are not allowed to be judges.
13. **Judging Comments/Criteria:** The Bill Riley Talent Search presents a nice opportunity for professional judges to help foster growth and improvement with all the young Iowans that compete in the program. Please use the judging sheets provided. Make the second page of judges comments available to performers. These do not have to be lengthy, just some brief, constructive comments.

Only share judges comments with performers. Scores should NEVER be shared with performers.

14. **Timing Acts.** Acts must keep the performance to three minutes. Acts timed past three minutes are subject to **possible** disqualification or point deduction. Five seconds over would be a starting point to begin deductions, ten seconds over or longer can be considered for disqualification. This is at the judges' discretion and should be monitored closely. At the local level this would be a great opportunity to let an act know that they were over the time limit. Please don't allow an act to advance to the State Fair competition only to be disqualified at that level. Set up time is not included. Limit set up time to one minute. Official time starts when music starts and ends when the music is done.
15. **Appropriate music/lyrics:** Foul language is not allowed in the Bill Riley Talent Search. Acts performing to or singing pieces with inappropriate lyrics should be disqualified and the show coordinator should encourage them to compete with a different song.
16. **Winners:** Only one qualifier from each division (Sprout and Senior) of a local show is permitted to advance to the Iowa State Fair. **NO TIES** are permitted in all placing.

The local sponsoring group is expected to provide prizes, which may include ribbons or trophies. The suggested range is:

 SPROUTS: Low range: \$15, \$10, \$5 High Range: \$50, \$25, \$20.

 SENIORS: Low range: \$25, \$15, \$10 High Range: \$100, \$50, \$25.

17. Upon completion of your program it is your responsibility as show coordinator to fill out the google form (link is emailed to coordinators) to send in your results. If that is not an option, you may email or call in the results to Liz Ley at 515-262-3111 x282. It is very important that the results are sent in immediately as scheduling is a detailed process. **PLEASE HAVE ALL RESULTS SENT WITHIN 48 HOURS.**
18. Exceptions may be made at the discretion of Iowa State Fair staff and/or Bill Riley Jr.

Competition at the Iowa State Fair

- Preliminary rounds: First 7 days
- Semi finals: Days 8, 9, and 10
- Championship show: Day 11

Semi-Finalists: Semi-finalists from the 2025 Iowa State Fair Bill Riley Talent Search are automatically qualified for the 2026 Iowa State Fair competition. You do not have to re-qualify by winning at the local level show, but you are encouraged to compete at local shows. If you win at the local level show, you are entitled to the prize money, but you must inform the emcee that you have already qualified for the State Fair. The second place winner will then be able to advance to the State Fair competition.

Birthdays and Semi-Finalists: 2025 semi-finalists returning in 2026 will perform in the division for their current age as of the last day of the 2026 Iowa State Fair.

Iowa State Fair Championship Show:

Sprout Division Champions: There will be 6 Sprout Champions showcased in the Championship Show. Sprout Champions in the Sprout division must sit out one year of competition. They also must re-qualify when returning after the one-year absence and be 12 years old or less to compete in the Sprout division. Sprouts may compete the next year IF they have aged up to the Senior Division. In order to do this, they MUST requalify at a local show.

Senior Division Championship: There will be 9 finalists in competition. All finalists in the Senior division must sit out one year - they cannot perform as an individual or in a group during the next year. They also must re-qualify when returning after the one-year absence and be 21 years old or less. The "Grand Champion" of the Senior division is no longer allowed to compete in the Bill Riley Talent Search at the local or Iowa State Fair level.

Liz Ley, Tonya Cook, Bill Riley Jr.

Please email any questions to rileytalentsearch@gmail.com or call 515-262-3111.