

The Center for Fiction

15 Lafayette Avenue · Brooklyn, NY 11217
www.centerforfiction.org

The First Novel Prize 2026

Guidelines

The Center for Fiction is pleased to announce that submissions are now being accepted for our twenty-first annual First Novel Prize. This annual award was created in 2006 to honor the best first novel of the year. The winner receives a \$15,000 prize with each shortlisted author receiving \$1,000. The longlist will be announced in the summer of 2026 and the shortlist will be announced in the fall. The prize will be given at The Center for Fiction's Annual Awards Benefit held in December of this year.

SUBMISSION PROCESS

Any U. S. publisher may enter books that will be published between January 1, 2026 and December 31, 2026. We prefer that these be submitted as finished copies, if available. Bound galley and bound, edited manuscripts are also acceptable. In addition to 10 physical copies, we also require the submission of a readable PDF. You may apply and pay the \$100 entry fee per submission online at <https://centerforfiction.org/fnp-submissions>. Please mail books to:

ATTN: Sebastian Mazza
The First Novel Prize
The Center for Fiction
15 Lafayette Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11217

All books **must be postmarked** no later than **March 13, 2026**. All entry forms **must be submitted online** no later than **March 13, 2026**. The Center for Fiction must receive **ten copies** of each book, bound galley, or bound, edited manuscript, as well as a PDF. Small independent publishers may apply for a fee reduction; please contact our Writing Programs Associate, Sebastian Mazza, at sebastian@centerforfiction.org for more information.

Publishers are urged not to hold submissions until the last possible date, but to send books, bound galley, or bound, edited manuscripts (as well as PDFs) **AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE**. Our reading process begins immediately upon receipt.

ELIGIBILITY

Only first-time novelists who are American citizens or permanent residents are eligible for this award. Authors who have previously published novels in other countries are NOT eligible, even if the book in question is their first to be published in the U.S.

Only full-length first novels written in English are eligible. Translated works, novellas, collections of short stories, whether related or unrelated, and YA novels are NOT eligible. Otherwise, novels in ALL genres are welcome.

Only books published for the first time in the United States between January 1, 2026 and December 31, 2026 are eligible.

Books previously published elsewhere are NOT eligible. This includes self-publishing the book previously.

Self-published books and eBook only editions are NOT eligible.

There is no limit on the number of books entered by each publisher, provided each submission complies with the rules as above.

In the event of a dispute as to eligibility, The Center for Fiction will decide whether a book is eligible, and its decision will be binding.

Any books entered for the Awards process by the publishers that are subsequently determined to be ineligible, will still be subject to the stated entry fee of \$100 per title.

The Center also may request titles that have not been submitted by publishers.

SELECTION PROCESS

Members of The Center's network, including writers, librarians, booksellers, staff, and members of The Center for Fiction, will act as first-tier readers. The longlist recommended by these readers is then forwarded to a committee of distinguished American writers. From those recommended novels, our panel of judges chooses the shortlist and the winner. (Our judges in 2025 were Xochitl Gonzalez, Adam Haslett, Tracy O'Neill, and Joseph Earl Thomas)

ADDITIONAL CONDITIONS OF THE AWARDS

Publishers of the winning and shortlisted books must agree:

A. To indicate that the book is a finalist or winner of the First Novel Prize by including approved text on future editions.

B. To inform authors of entered books that if chosen for the shortlist they must be present at The Center for Fiction's Annual Awards Benefit in New York City and The First Novel Fête, both held in December. Travel and accommodations for each shortlisted author are the responsibility of the publisher. Publishers are also responsible for purchasing or arranging for the purchase of a ticket to the Annual Awards Benefit for their shortlisted author and any guests, or for seating their shortlisted author at a table they've reserved.

C. To inform authors that, if shortlisted, they must agree to participate in The Center's related publicity, including being interviewed as part of The Center's promotion of the Prize, as well as a finalist reading (The First Novel Fête), just prior to the Annual Awards Benefit. The shortlisted

authors agree that their readings may be used in audio and/or video formats on The Center for Fiction's website.

D. The recipient of the Award must agree to allow their acceptance speech to be published in print, audio or video formats by The Center for Fiction on its website or podcast, and to be published in The Center newsletter and in a future anthology of first novelists' interviews.