

# Expelled Recording Academy CEO Says 'Grammy Voting Process Is Ripe With Corruption': Here's How

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In suspended Recording Academy president/CEO **Deborah Dugan's** blockbuster Equal Employment Opportunity Commission complaint filed Tuesday (Jan. 21) that includes allegations of sexual harassment, business improprieties and rape by the organization's former chief, the most damaging claims in the long run may be about voting irregularities for the Grammy Awards.

Though putting on the Grammy Awards is not the only function of the Recording Academy, it is the one for which it is best known and through its current \$500 million, 10-year deal with CBS, the awards show provides the majority of funding for much of the nonprofit organization's educational and philanthropic endeavors.

Some industry insiders have carped about the lack of transparency in the nominations and voting process, but Dugan's allegations lay bare possible conflicts of interest and other dealings that threaten the integrity of the process and the very foundation of the Academy.

"Grammy voting process is ripe with corruption," says Dugan's complaint, describing it as shrouded in secrecy, and beset with conflicts of interest.

That process works as such: The Academy's 12,000 voting members vote on the first-round candidates from thousands of submissions. Then, the top 20 selections are reviewed by nomination review committees, whose members are chosen by Bill Freimuth, the Recording Academy's head of awards, along with the board chair.

From there, the nomination review committees take the 20-slot lists and whittle them down to five or eight artists they feel are best representative of the list. (The list is 20 for the four main categories -- album, song, record and best new artist -- which contain eight final nominees -- and 15 for the other categories, which have five final nominees.)

But if Dugan's allegations are true, they threaten to undermine the awards' supposed impartiality and the Grammys' credibility as a whole.

Below are a number of her specific allegations. In parentheses are further explanations, not included in her suit, about how the process works.

- "The Board uses these committees as an opportunity to push forward artists with whom they have relationships. Indeed, it is not unusual for artists who have relationships with Board members and who ranked at the bottom of the initial 20-artist list to end up receiving nominations."

(The members of the nominations review committees are selected months before the ballots go out because the members must be approved by the board.)

- "The Board also manipulates the nominations process to ensure that certain songs or albums are nominated when the producer of the Grammys [**Ken Ehrlich**] wants a particular song performed during the show."

- "To make matters worse, the Board is permitted to simply add in artists for nominations who did not even make the initial 20-artist list. Naturally, the members of the Board and the secret committees chose artists with whom they have personal or business relationships. This year, 30 artists that were not selected by the membership were added to the possible nomination list."

- "Moreover, in an outrageous conflict of interest, the Board has selected artists who are under consideration for a nomination to sit on the committee that is voting for the category for which that have been nominated. As a result, one artist who initially ranked 18 out of 20 in the 2019 'Song of the Year' category ended up with a nomination. This artist was actually permitted to sit on the 'Song of the Year' nomination committee. Incredibly, this artist is also represented by a member of the Board."

(According to a source with detailed knowledge of the voting process, any person on a nominating committee who has worked on a selection under review must recuse themselves and leave the room during the discussion of that project.)

- "As a result of the foregoing, it is not surprising that many high caliber artists who could have taken home the award in a specific category, have, at times, not been nominated at all. For instance, Ed Sheeran and Ariana Grande, who had been voted for by the membership, missed out on nominations in the 2019 'Song of the Year' category in part because the aforementioned artist who ranked 18 out of 20 was nominated instead."

The Recording Academy did not respond to a request for comment beyond what it already provided, addressing the complaint as a whole -- not these specific allegations. Read that in full [here](#).

Ehrlich did not respond to a request for comment at time of publishing.