



## **Frequently Asked Questions about the ALSC Policy for Service on Award Committees February 2007**

### **Why is ALSC revising the policy at this time?**

In recent months, ALSC's leadership learned of several situations in which award committee members had potential conflicts of interest. It was obvious to us that the existing policy needs some clarification, so that potential and already seated committee members can understand what is expected of them. Because ALSC Awards have such high visibility, our members and the general public exhibit great interest about how and why committees select award books. It is important for the process to be completely above suspicion.

### **When will it go into effect?**

The revised Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policy went into effect on February 3, 2007 when the ALSC Board adopted it electronically. The policy applies to current committee members who are just beginning the process of selecting the 2008 award winners. The chairs of these committees are committed to ensuring that their committee members understand the new policy, and will direct any members who feel that they may have a conflict of interest to contact the ALSC Executive Director immediately. The policy revision may also affect some potential committee members on the 2008 ballot that ALSC members will vote on in spring 2007. The ALSC Executive Committee is in the process of contacting each nominee to ascertain if any conflicts of interest exist. We will ask any nominees with a conflict of interest to step down should they win the election, and the ALSC Vice President/President Elect will appoint a replacement member.

### **How will it be publicized?**

We posted the policy on the ALSC website and circulated it via our listserv, ALSC-L. We will include it in the ALSC Handbook of Organization and in all pertinent award manuals, which are posted on the website. In addition, we will ask all potential award committee nominees and appointees to read and sign the document before they accept an appointment or nomination. The accompanying yes/no questionnaire will help members identify potential problem areas to disclose and discuss with the ALSC Executive Director.

### **Why do we need such a rigid policy? Doesn't ALSC trust its members?**

We have a great deal of trust in our members and we respect their dedicated service for ALSC on award committees and in other capacities. However, the awards draw public scrutiny because they can translate into real financial benefits for authors, illustrators, and publishers. In order to protect the integrity of the awards, the Board believes that it is important that the award process be above suspicion or reproach, and above allegations that any member had a personal interest in the outcome of the award.

**Don't you think members would take extra precautions to be impartial if they had some sort of connection to a book under consideration?**

If we permit a member with a personal or family connection to a book, an author, an illustrator, or a publisher to serve on an award committee, it would be as unfair to the very books, authors, illustrators, or publishers with whom the member has a connection as it is to the rest of the books under consideration. Members may feel it necessary to bend over backwards to appear impartial and to recuse themselves from all discussions or votes relating to a particular book, but such actions are unfair both to the book and to the committee process, since the process is based on consensus building. We understand the frustration of those who feel strongly that we can trust members to self-monitor and act ethically to prevent their personal or family connections from affecting their service on award committees. This policy helps to prevent a third party, who doesn't know the member personally, who has no way of knowing how ethical and fair he or she is, and who is not present at a committee's confidential deliberations, from questioning the legitimacy of the committee's decision.

**All of the language in this policy pertains to books. Does it apply to the Carnegie and Odyssey Awards?**

We are working on a separate policy for the Carnegie Award, which will be essentially the same as the policy for book award committees, with necessary changes in language. Since the Odyssey Award represents a joint endeavor between ALSC and YALSA, both Boards will need to approve any policy changes for that award.

**How does this policy apply to the Notables committees?**

Since all of the Notable committees are an open process, many parts of this policy do not apply to those committees. Notable Committee members will have a separate statement to read and sign.

**What does this mean for reviewers?**

Committee members who review for professional journals may continue to do so, as long as they do not review books in the context of the awards. ALSC leaders advise that committee members avoid reviewing eligible books during their term of service. Since we understand that this is not practical for those who review full time, we leave this to the judgment of individual committee members.

**I've heard that ALSC is going to ask award committee members not to blog. Is that true?**

No. #7 in the policy reminds committee members who blog or participate in other forms of social networking to observe the same standards for confidentiality that they would for any other kind of written or oral communication related to the awards. Committee members cannot discuss award committee work and cannot discuss eligible books in the context of the awards.

**I critiqued a manuscript for a children's novel last year because the author wanted my opinion of her book while it was a work in progress. However, I have no idea when the book will be published. What should I do about accepting an appointment to the Newbery Committee?**

If there is a good chance that the book will be published in the year in which you have been invited to serve, it would be best to decline a nomination or appointment. In a case such as this, contact the ALSC Executive Director to discuss the ways in which you can verify a book's publication date.

**I am writing a professional book about children's literature that will come out in the year I'll be serving on Caldecott. Will I have to step down?**

No, members are not disqualified from serving on an award committee if they write, edit, or contribute to a book about children's literature that is aimed at professionals or other interested adults.

**What about writing teachers' guides about specific children's books?**

Since it falls under the category of serving in an advisory capacity to a trade publisher, the policy does not permit members to write teachers' guides or readers' group guides for children's trade book publishers. If a member wants to serve on an award committee, he or she must forgo writing these sorts of items during the term of committee service.

**The author of an eligible book acknowledged me in her introduction because I helped her track down a folktale variant when she called my library. Does that count as serving in an advisory capacity?**

No, providing assistance as part of ordinary library reference duties does not disqualify a member from serving on an award committee

**There is a children's book being dedicated to me that will come out during my term of service. Is that a problem?**

Yes. You may not accept appointment or nomination if the book in question is eligible for consideration by your award committee. If you learn of the dedication once your term begins, we expect you to resign as soon as you find out.

**If I have a friend who is a children's book author. Does this mean I can never serve on an award committee?**

It might, if the author is a close personal friend who publishes an eligible book every year. If it happens that your friend does not have a book coming out in your year of service, there's no issue.

**How do you define close personal relationship?**

We define a close personal relationship as one that could be reasonably be seen by an outsider as having an influence on your decision-making process. This would include close friends and co-workers, for example. It would not include authors or illustrators with whom you have a casual acquaintance, such as those who have been speakers at your library or those who sat next to you at a dinner during a professional conference. We want to avoid a situation in which after illustrator X wins the Caldecott Medal, the grumbling begins: "It's no surprise illustrator X won! His best friend was on the Caldecott Committee!" If you are at all in doubt about the degree of a friendship, please discuss the specifics with the ALSC Executive Director.

**What about accepting dinner invitations from publishers?**

Publishers often invite award committee members, as well as other ALSC members, to be their guests at meal events and social gatherings at professional conferences. It is fine for you to accept such invitations, as long as they do not conflict with your committee meetings. You should be very vigilant about maintaining confidentiality in these sorts of gatherings, because many people will hang on your every word. You may want to take the opportunity to relax by talking about something other than books during these occasions.

**My wife works for a trade publisher, so I can't serve on an award committee. But my colleague's brother is a book editor, and that doesn't keep her off committees, even though they are very close. What's the difference?**

ALA's attorneys advised us that only parents, children, spouses, and partners must be included in the definition of "immediate family." Siblings and other relatives, such as cousins, aunts and uncles, fall outside this narrow definition. Relationships with siblings may be personally significant but legally, a relationship with a parent, child, spouse, or partner is more susceptible to claims of conflict of interest because those relationships are much more likely to have strong emotional and direct financial ties.

**I am the author of an adult book that is scheduled for publication while I'll be on an award committee. Will I be able to serve on the Sibert Committee?**

Yes, since an adult book is ineligible for any of the ALSC awards.

**I've got a manuscript for a children's book that is being considered by a publisher, though it's not yet under contract. Should I withdraw it temporarily from consideration if I want to be on the committee?**

It's not a problem as long as the book will not be published in your term of service. According to the policy, only those books published during a committee member's term of service are at issue.

**I was on the Caldecott Committee more than 20 years ago. Can I talk about that now?**

No. You may discuss your own opinion of that year's books, but not those of other committee members, and you cannot reveal any details of the decision-making. This protects the freedom of committee members to speak without reservation in committee deliberation, knowing that no one will EVER discuss their comments or opinions with anyone who was not on that committee.