

YALSA Board of Directors Meeting
ALA Annual Conference, New Orleans
June 22 – 26, 2018

Topic: RBA: Edwards Award Policy Change

Background: Currently, the Handbook for the Margaret A. Edwards Award Committee Chair states that, “*Winners will be required to attend the YALSA Awards Luncheon at the Annual ALA Conference to accept the award and make an acceptance speech.*” Jonathan Hunt and Nichole O’Connor have presented the following request for the board’s consideration.

Action Required: Action

Proposal

Eliminate the requirement for an author to accept the Edwards Award in person as a condition of the award, provided the sponsor is supportive of the change.

Rationale

1. An author’s ability and/or willingness to attend an award ceremony should not determine their worthiness of being recognized. Yet, committees cannot help but consider this factor when discussing potential candidates, as the condition for receiving the award is being there in person. Committees should be free to explore all qualified candidates without being deterred by a potential rejection—or rumors of past rejections—due to the travel requirement. On more than one occasion, an author was not extended the award because the committee feared they would not be able to attend Annual.
2. There is no way to guarantee that the winner will be at the award ceremony, regardless of their best intentions. For example, Terry Pratchett had every intention of attending the Edwards luncheon when he accepted, but ultimately his pre-existing condition (coupled with the long distance) prevented his attendance.
3. No other YALSA award requires attendance as a condition of the award.
4. Award committees must keep their deliberations confidential, but the same level of discretion does not necessarily apply to publishers, and if it’s necessary for the committee to identify an additional author, it widens the circle of people who can breach the confidentiality, undermining the integrity and legitimacy of the award. It should be noted that in some cases, 3-4 publishers are contacted per author (authors are being honored for past works, so multiple publishers need to be contacted to verify books and author’s attendance).
5. The goal of the committee is to reach consensus, and it can often be a difficult process. The necessity of selecting a different author because a previous choice has declined due to the travel requirement detracts from this process, essentially undoing the consensus the

committee worked so hard to achieve. Moreover, reading widely from eligible bodies of work is laborious and time-consuming. It is demoralizing for members to invest time and energy in a fruitless cause. In recent history, committees have had to reconvene 4 times to determine the winner, due to issues with the travel requirement.

6. Striking the attendance requirement could allow the award to embrace a more diverse pool of candidates for whom travel is expensive and difficult because they are not geographically close to the U.S. Also, it may open the award to those who write “adult” books that are read widely by teenagers, and/or celebrity authors who are difficult to get in-person commitments from.
7. The integrity of the award is compromised by the travel requirement. Looking over the present roster of Edwards winners, it’s easy to come up with several glaring omissions. If those authors have been offered the award but have not accepted due to the attendance requirement, what kind of effect does that have on the integrity and legacy of the award?
8. Allowing for deceased authors could better position the award as an award for significant and lasting achievement. The current criteria stipulate that an author may win multiple times for subsequent work, but that has never actually happened, probably because it’s hard to give somebody the award a second time when so many deserving authors have yet to win it once.

Proposed Next Steps

- The Board directs the Executive Director to consult the award’s sponsor regarding this proposal and share the results of the discussion with the board.
- Based on the initial sponsor feedback, the board could:
 - move forward with eliminating this requirement
 - engage in further discussions with the sponsor
 - cease to pursue the matter

Funding

While there is no expense other than staff and member leader time involved in engaging the sponsor in discussions and possibly re-writing the policy, removing the requirement to attend the award event could negatively impact ticket sales for the Edwards Award Lunch. However, ticket sales have fallen steadily since the recession, a fact that already points to the need to evaluate the event as a viable source of revenue.

Ticket Sales

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014*	2015	2016	2017
Edwards	250	148	226	129	144	190	135	135	130

Evaluation

An evaluation would not be warranted unless the board and sponsor agreed to move forward with changing the policy.

Additional Resources

- Edwards Award policies and procedures: www.ala.org/yalsa/bookawards/edwards/policies
- Edwards Award winners: www.ala.org/yalsa/edwards-award#previous