

Frequently Asked Questions about the Policy for Service on Award and Evaluation Committees

Why are there ALSC policies for service on award and media evaluation committees?

Every year, ALSC leadership is approached about situations in which award and media evaluation committee members have potential conflicts of interest. Because ALSC awards and notable lists have such high visibility, our members and the general public exhibit great interest about how and why committees make their selections. It is important for the process to be completely above suspicion.

How are the policies publicized?

The policies are posted on the ALSC website and also appear in the ALSC Handbook of Organization and in all pertinent award and notable manuals, which are also posted on the website. In addition, all potential award committee appointees and media evaluation appointees are required to read and sign the document before they accept an appointment. A [checklist for prospective award committee members](#) is emailed to every potential appointee to help them identify problem areas to disclose and to discuss with the ALSC Executive Director and, when necessary, the Executive Committee, prior to accepting the appointment.

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 to ALSC on award and media evaluation committees and in other capacities. However, the awards and notable lists 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 and notable lists, the Board believes that it is important that the selection process be above suspicion or reproach, and above allegations that any member had a personal interest in the outcome of the selection. For additional insight, particularly in relation to the award committees, please refer to 2013–2014 ALSC President Starr LaTronica's editorial, "[The Voice of Reason](#)," that appeared in the August 2014 issue of *Horn Book Magazine*.

The book award committees' guidelines for print and electronic communication differ from that of other media evaluation committees. Please review 2015–2016 ALSC President Andrew Medlar's June 27, 2014 [blog post](#) for the history and rationale of the Award Service and Social Media task force's work and recommendations that were adopted by the ALSC Board in January 2014.

Don't you think members would take extra precautions to be impartial if they had some sort of connection to the materials or persons under consideration?

If we permit a member with a personal or family connection to a book, author, illustrator, or 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 materials or persons 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 particular materials or persons, but such actions are unfair both to the contenders 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 or media evaluation 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 they are, and who is not present at

a committee's confidential deliberations, from questioning the legitimacy of the committee's decision.

What about social media?

The evolution of social media outlets and other opportunities for the wide dissemination of information electronically necessitates the consideration of responsibilities and confidentiality that did not exist in the past, and members of award committees should bear in mind the inherently public and sometimes uncontrollable nature of these forums. The potential for committee members' appropriate statements to be disseminated widely and quickly, resulting in the unintended consequence of them being misinterpreted, utilized improperly, made available indefinitely, and/or creating the appearance of a breach of confidentiality or conflict of interest, must be taken into account and eliminated whenever possible.

Members should not use social media or electronic forms of communication in relation to eligible titles during their term of service. Of course this excludes the virtual committee work that takes place in closed forums among members, ALSC staff, and ALSC leadership, such as email and private ALA Connect groups or Zoom meetings. Prohibited forms of communication include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Goodreads, Library Thing, blogs, and review websites.

What does this mean for reviewers?

Award committee members may not publish bylined articles or signed reviews that feature titles that are eligible for their particular award during their term of service in professional journals (print and/or electronic) or other professional and personal outlets because, as committee affiliation is public information, any published reviews attributed to specific committee members are susceptible to the same issues as discussed with other social media above. There are many ways that committee members may contribute their thoughts about materials. The following is a list of possible options as identified by past-President Starr LaTronica in the *Horn Book* [editorial](#) referenced above:

- Members of all committees may write and publish unsigned reviews of any book.
- Members of all committees (except the Batchelder) may write signed reviews or discuss via social media any book previously published in other countries or by an author or illustrator who is not an American citizen or resident.
- Batchelder committee members may write signed reviews or discuss via social media any book that has not been translated and published in the United States in the previous year.
- Books with no illustration provide a wide field for members of the Caldecott committee.
- Books with no text are available for Newbery committee members (and seeing that all three Caldecott Honor Books qualified for that category in 2014, it would seem a rich field).
- Belpré committee members are welcome to write signed reviews or discuss via social media any books by non-Latinx authors and illustrators.
- Members of the Sibert committee may write signed reviews or discuss via social media all works of fiction.

- Geisel committee members may write signed reviews or discuss via social media any books beyond the scope of a beginning reader.
- The wide and wonderful world of YA literature is available to all of us who value and evaluate literature for older youth.

Does this mean I may not blog or tweet?

Award committee members may not blog or otherwise communicate electronically (outside of the committee process) regarding any aspect of eligible titles during their term of service. At no time during or after their service may committee members discuss the status of books as having been or not having been a consideration, suggested, and/or nominated for the award.

When do I need to cease writing signed reviews and/or other social media activity?

ALSC policy indicates that you may not engage in print or electronic communication regarding eligible titles* during your “term of service,” which officially begins July 1 of your appointment year. If appointed after July 1, your term of service begins immediately. However, once your committee’s selections have been announced at the LibLearnX Youth Media Awards Press Conference, you may begin reviewing (bylined), writing articles, and blogging again even though the term does not end until the following Annual Conference.

*Please note: This prohibition includes any and all new fall publication books that would be reviewed in galley form. Official publication dates are sometimes delayed, meaning that a book could potentially become eligible for an Award/Medal the following year. As such, to be on the safe side, ALSC uses the July 1 cut-off date for books in galley form. This also ensures consistency among all committee members. In the time between July 1, and when the committee’s year under consideration begins, you may still review finished, published books of that year, books published in previous years, and imports, all of which have no chance of being eligible. (The exception to this is for members of the Batchelder Committee.) Of course, after January 1, you can review any books published in the previous year.

For example, a 2021 committee member could review any 2019 book in its final form, but NOT any galleys produced after July 1, as publication could be delayed, and the book could become eligible for that committee year.

What about writing teachers’ or readers’ group 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 one wants to serve on an award committee, one must forgo writing these sorts of items during the term of committee service.

The author of a book about volcanoes acknowledged me in her introduction because I helped her do research 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 an appointment if the book in question is eligible for consideration by your award or media evaluation 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 or media evaluation 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 reasonably be seen by an outsider as having an influence on your decision-making process. This would include close friends and co-workers. 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! Their 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 or media evaluation 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, etc., 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 a book award committee?

Yes, since an adult book is ineligible for any of the ALSC awards or media evaluation committees.

I have 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?

Yes, members must avoid any appearance of conflict of interest. A manuscript under contract would infer a financial tie to a publishing house.

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 the book will be published in the year in which you have been invited to serve, it would be best to decline an 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.

How can I obtain a variety of critical opinions about books under consideration throughout the year without violating confidentiality guidelines?

Committee members are strongly encouraged to speak with others—children and adults alike—regarding eligible books, to benefit from informing themselves about a variety of perspectives on titles. When participating in such verbal, in-person discussions, committee members are encouraged to:

- Practice active listening.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Share public information about the award process and the terms and criteria of the awards, as this serves an educational and outreach purpose and the information is publicly available in the committee manuals at www.ala.org/alsc.
- Keep in mind that you are gathering opinions from others and keep your own comments at a minimum, especially negative comments, which will be remembered more readily than positive comments.
- Use sensitivity and positive frameworks when discussing material that you personally don't consider strong.
- Be careful to not publicly dismiss a book.
- Try to avoid entering into discussions in which two eligible titles are being directly compared. This has the tendency to suggest that the committee is considering each title against the other. When titles are taken individually, or as a large group, it is easier to establish context. Allow points of discussion to arise naturally in conversation rather than soliciting comparisons between titles. Set the context before discussion on any particular title. For instance, "Remembering that as a committee member I have to consider and compare all eligible titles, I am interested in reader response to Title A."
- Only express your own personal opinion and be clear that you are not speaking on behalf of the committee. Use "I" rather than "we."

What about Mock Award discussions?

- Committee members are allowed, and even encouraged, to participate in local book discussions, especially with children, but they must be vigilant in maintaining confidentiality of any committee proceedings while also ensuring separation from the selection of, discussion of, and voting on materials eligible for the award on which they serve.

- In summary, while committee members are encouraged to participate in book discussions, members are NOT to participate in mock elections. A committee member may observe the discussion at a mock discussion, but should not themselves discuss eligible titles or vote.
- If a committee member is required to hold a mock election as part of their employment, members should discuss this with the Chair, just as they should discuss any other uncertainties regarding book discussion with the Chair and the PGC.

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.

How is the four-year waiting period determined between service on the Batchelder, Caldecott, Geisel, Newbery, Sibert, Legacy, or Notable Children's Books Committees?

The four-year period shall begin from the last year of the term of service regardless of length of term and will follow the Olympic model. For instance, a member serving on the 2018 Newbery Award Committee may not serve on any of the committees indicated above until the 2022 committee. In February 2018, the ALSC Board approved an operational practice that allows for the four-year period to be suspended in the event that an emergency, mid-year replacement has to be made. This will provide the appointing officer the necessary flexibility and a greater pool of experienced candidates.

Additionally, the appointment to a Chair position may occur within the four-year period to ensure qualified leadership. However, it does not work in reverse. A prior Chair may not be appointed to a member position within the four-year period.

Revised April 2018; abridged here in March 2023 to reflect specifically Book Award Committees. The complete document can be found here:

<https://www.ala.org/alsc/aboutalsc/governance/alsc-handbook-organization>