

YALSA Board of Directors
ALA Annual Conference
June 25-30, 2020

Topic: Morris Award Manual Task Force review and update

Background: The Morris Award has had unofficial chair manuals and unclear policies and procedures which have been updated over the years of the award’s existence in a piecemeal fashion. A group of interested parties, many of whom are former chairs or members of Morris Award committees have been appointed to a task force to clarify the manual, policies and procedures. Kim Dare, chair of the Morris Award Manual Task Force, brings forth this document, with additional information from Todd Krueger, YALSA President.

Action Required: Discussion and Action

Overview:

Attached to this document is a link to the .pdf of the first draft of the Morris Award Manual Task Force’s attempt to codify the various elements into a complete manual.

Sources and further explanation:

The task force relied most heavily on the William C. Morris Award Policies and Procedures webpage, and on the Excellence in Nonfiction Manual (2012).

- Definition—verbatim from the webpage. Nonfiction Manual also opens with this.
- [Purpose will be added in using the Nonfiction Manual as a template]
- Committee Charge—based on the section and wording from the Nonfiction Manual; wording changed where appropriate.
- Committee Members—verbatim from the webpage. The only difference is that on the webpage, the paragraph beginning “Committee members must not solicit publishers” appears twice, so we removed the duplication. The order of appearance immediately after Committee Charge mirrors the Nonfiction Manual.
- Division Consultants and Communication—borrowed from the revisions to the Odyssey Manual. These three sections are not included in the Nonfiction Manual, but we appreciated the inclusion in Odyssey, and felt that it should be specified that members can also go to the oversight committee liaison if they have not been able to get satisfaction from the chair.
Work with Chair—borrowed from the revisions to the Odyssey Manual
Work with Committee Members—borrowed from the revisions to the Odyssey Manual
- Committee Calendar—based on the section and wording from the Nonfiction Manual; wording changed where appropriate. The wording under the December section sets the expectation for regular virtual meetings: “These expectations should include an agreement among committee

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members about a consistent virtual meeting time, at least once a month. Committee members are expected to take these virtual meetings as seriously as they would in-person meetings at Annual or Midwinter Conferences.”

- Eligibility—verbatim from the webpage. The only change is to bullet #4 (number 4 on webpage)—webpage erroneously states “For 2016, books must have been published between January 1 – October 31 of 2015.” We updated this in manual to November rather than January, and made the years more current. The order of appearance immediately after Committee Calendar mirrors the Nonfiction Manual.
- Immediately following the Eligibility section, we’ve noted, “Appendix A offers further, detailed guidance on eligibility questions.”
- Criteria—verbatim from the webpage. The order of appearance immediately after Eligibility mirrors the Nonfiction Manual.
- Confidentiality—verbatim from the webpage. The order of appearance immediately after Criteria mirrors the Nonfiction Manual.
- Nominations—verbatim from the webpage, except that in bullet 4, the date was changed from December 1 to November 1.
- Suggestions for Reading and Nominations—we appreciated the “Suggestions for Reading and Nominating” section in the Nonfiction Manual and feel a similar section in the Morris Manual would be helpful. We felt it was especially important to point out that reading should not be limited to books that publishers are sending, and that members should seek out books that were getting favorable attention.
- Field Nominations—we made sure that the pertinent information from the “Field Suggestions” section of the Morris webpage was carried over, but changed the wording slightly to bring it more in line with the wording in the Nonfiction Manual.
- Voting Procedures and Honor Titles—these two sections draw heavily from the sections of the same name in the Nonfiction Manual.
- Final Voting of Award Title at Midwinter Conference—again, because the two committees are so similar in structure, we drew heavily from the wording in the Nonfiction Manual. We left out their third bullet (“Members are reminded that they’re voting for the winner, not honor titles) because we felt that this was evident; and we chose to modify the “voting procedures” bullet so that it is clear that the method listed is a suggestion and is not mandated.
- Relationship with Publishers—based on the section and wording from the Nonfiction Manual
- Chair Responsibilities at the Midwinter Meeting—based on the section and wording from the Nonfiction Manual. We realize this will need to be modified once more is known about plans for a yearly January gathering.
- Appendix A—covers eligibility questions that are discussed in the unofficial Morris chair guide.
- Appendix B—frequently-asked questions based on things we all would have liked to know when we were new to the Morris Award Committee (really any of the award committees) and didn’t know to ask. Again, with the changes to the January programing, some of these may turn out not to have relevance.

Special Note:

The work that the Nonfiction Task Force did in 2012 was invaluable to our efforts. We were fortunate to have Angela Carstensen as part of our team as she was involved with that one. We all agreed that, given the similarity of the two awards in announcing finalists in December, the manuals should have as much common language and common layout as possible.

Recommendations:

- 1) Send the first draft back to the Morris Award Manual Task Force chair with direction to include a Purpose statement and with the suggestions provided in discussion by the Board, and any other modifications they would like to pursue, or
- 2) Send the first draft to YALSA Staff with the suggestions provided in discussion, along with the template from the Nonfiction Committee manual's Purpose statement to be modified for the Morris Award manual.

Additional resources:

ALA Connect link for Board members to Morris Award Manual Task Force first draft:

https://higherlogicdownload.s3-external-1.amazonaws.com/ALA/692d3fe0-6579-4a1a-9502-b29ee31af630_file.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAVRDO7IEREB57R7MT&Expires=1592922688&Signature=N2ebLtmTYkGXzqf1zi6w8d9V0pg%3D