YALSA Board of Directors
2021 Annual Conference, Virtual
June 26, 2021

Topic: Award Committee Attendance Requirements

Background: Traditionally, YALSA Book Award committees have been required to meet at the Annual Conference and at the Midwinter Meeting. Due to the pandemic, committee work shifted to virtual work. Over the past number of years, fewer applicants to serve on the award committees had been available, resulting in committees that favored those with the means and availability to attend two in-person events annually. A survey of the 2021 Printz, Nonfiction, Morris, and Alex Award committee chairs and members was conducted to determine the benefits and pitfalls of virtual award committee work. Immediate Past-President Todd Krueger has brought forth this document for consideration.

Action Required: Action

Proposal Discontinue the current requirement that Printz, Nonfiction, Morris, and Alex Award committees meet in-person at the Annual Conference. As the Pura Belpré and Odyssey Awards are co-administered with other bodies, these would not be affected by this action. The Edwards Award would continue to meet entirely virtually.

Rationale Over the past number of years, it has become difficult for the President-Elect to identify and appoint a diverse pool of volunteer members who are able to attend two in-person meetings. Many members have indicated that the two-meeting attendance rule is a barrier to service. The increased facility and familiarity of online platforms during the pandemic has provided the possibility to expand opportunities to more members interested in serving on YALSA Award committees.

Financial Implications Members on award committees would not have to attend in-person Annual at a cost-savings to them and/or their institution; YALSA may require fewer conference room reservations at Annual. Virtual platforms have become ubiquitous and often available without YALSA’s involvement.
Evaluation/Measuring Impact

A four-question survey went out to the 36 members, including chairs, of the 2021 Printz, Nonfiction, Morris, and Alex Award committees (9 each). Twenty-five were returned, with the overwhelming responses to the questions indicating that not being able to meet as an in-person committee did not notably detract from the experience. While some wished that they could meet each other in-person, having consistent virtual meetings throughout the year allowed committee members to get to know each other. Almost all indicated that an end-of-year in-person meeting should be continued for final decision-making. Most importantly, aside from the issue of publishers being unable to get titles out to the committees early in the pandemic, respondents indicated that the virtual setting had no impact on the selections that their award committee made.

Alignment to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Goals

Removing the two-event in-person requirement will provide opportunities for participation from various populations, including those historically underrepresented (by race, ethnicity, class, and geography, among others) on award committees. Persons from libraries with less staff development funding would also be more likely to be able to participate.

Proposed Board Action

The Board directs YALSA Staff to update the Policies, Procedures, and/or Committee Calendar for each of the four awards to strike the in-person attendance at the Annual Conference. The Board directs the President to communicate this decision and rationale to the membership.

Additional Information

YALSA Book Awards:
http://www.ala.org/yalsa/booklistsawards/bookawards

Survey questions:

1 How do you feel that your overall experience as an award committee member was affected by the virtual setting of committee work, if at all?

2 How do you feel that your committee’s selections were affected by the virtual setting of your committee work, if at all?

3 What are your thoughts of a recommendation that would allow virtual participation on all YALSA Award committees throughout the year, including at the Annual conference, with the only in-person
requirement of award committee members being at the final, decision-making winter event?

4 What other comments would you like to provide to the YALSA Board with regard to your award committee experience, if any?