MEMO TO: Survey Respondents

CC: Independent Review Committee Members

FROM: Virginia Dodge Fielder, Ph.D.

SUBJECT: GCLS Nominators Survey – Topline Results

DATE: November 21, 2016   (Revised on 6/6/2017 to include only summary results)

First, let me thank each of you for responding to our survey, sent via email earlier this month. As you know, at the GCLS conference last July, I agreed to chair an independent review committee to make recommendations for how the Goldie Awards process might be improved for 2018. Seven other GCLS members also agreed to participate: Donna Brown, Jane Chen, MJ Lowe, Elaine Lynch, Leigh Howell, Rosa Moran and Sharon Owens. None of us is currently on the GCLS board, nor are we judging books submitted for 2017 awards – thus fulfilling the requirement for an independent "external" review as sanctioned by the GCLS Board of Directors.
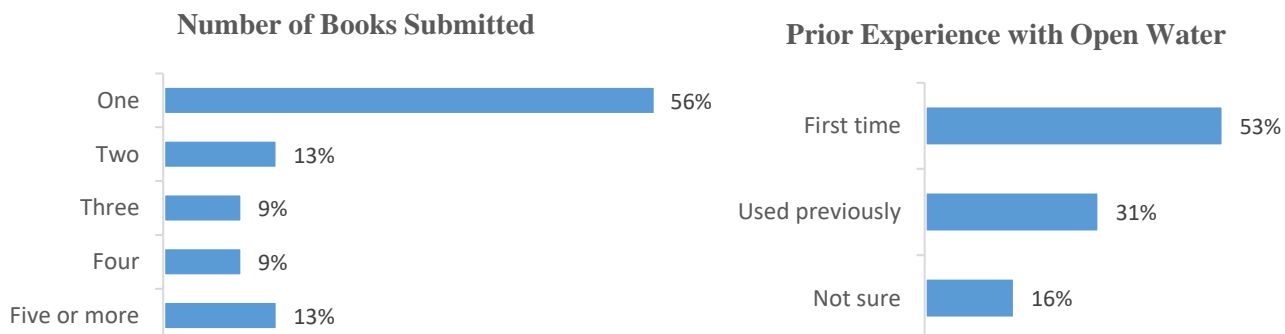
We are sending you this memo because you responded to the GCLS Nominators Survey and provided your email address to receive a topline summary of results. Below, you will find a discussion of the methods employed and a summary of findings. Please note that this memo does not contain recommendations based on the findings, since committee members believe results from key stakeholders surveyed so far – former and current awards administrators and board liaisons, and some publishers – should be considered prior to a final report. Also, we plan to ask former Goldie judges for input and, most importantly, the entire GCLS membership (including you a second time) for reaction to proposed ideas. Thanks again for your help!

METHODS

GCLS has a "tiered" deadline for books published from 1/1/16 to 8/31/16 to be submitted for a 2017 Goldie Award in the GENRE and DEBUT AUTHOR judged categories. Specifically, nominations for these books, plus payments, must have been finalized by 10/15/16. Deadlines were later for books published after 8/31/16 and for GCLS specialty awards, most notably the Ann Bannon Popular Choice Award and Tee Corrine Award for Outstanding Cover Design.

In early November, 2016, this note was sent by the committee chair via email to 107 potential respondents: *"The reason I am writing today is because GCLS records show you recently submitted one or more books for a 2017 Goldie Award in the GENRE and/or DEBUT AUTHOR judged categories. Given your participation, we are particularly interested in your opinions about the nominating process and how it might be improved. Please help us by taking a few minutes to complete our NOMINATORS SURVEY at this link: https://goo.gl/forms/BUJqX9nW41npOPCr1...Please answer the questionnaire only once, no matter how many books you may have submitted in the GENRE and DEBUT AUTHOR judged categories."* A second, follow-up note was sent a few days later.

By November 15, 32 responses had been received, for a 29.9% response rate. All 32 had submitted in at least one of the thirteen GENRE categories, and 17 had submitted in DEBUT AUTHOR. About half of all respondents (56%) had submitted only one book, while 53% were first-time users of the OpenWater awards software system.

Number of Books Submitted		Prior Experience with Open Water	
One	56%	First time	53%
Two	13%	Used previously	31%
Three	9%	Not sure	16%
Four	9%		
Five or more	13%		

FINDINGS

Overall, respondents had highly favorable opinions about eligibility requirements, category definitions and judging guidelines currently posted on the GCLS website. More than nine of ten – at least 92 percent – rated two of the six items assessing these dimensions either a "3" or "4" on a four-point scale running from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Similarly, more than eight of ten – at least 84 percent – agreed with three of the six items, while the sixth was rated positively by more than three-quarters (78 percent).

Moreover, at least half of respondents "strongly agreed" with each of the six items, meaning they gave it a rating of "4" on the 1-to-4-point scale. Here are the specifics:

- Six in ten "strongly agreed" that:

   - ✓ *Eligibility requirements for books to be nominated for a 2017 Goldie Award were clear and easy to understand.* (60%)
   - ✓ *The explanation of how many finalists and winners will be named in the GENRE and DEBUT AUTHOR judged categories made it easy for me to submit my books.* (60%)

- More than seven in ten of those submitting in the DEBUT AUTHOR category "strongly agreed" that:

   - ✓ *The description of the DEBUT AUTHOR judged category was clear and easy to understand.* (71%)
   - ✓ *Judging guidelines for the DEBUT AUTHOR category were thoroughly spelled out.* (71%)

- Ratings were not as high for the GENRE judged categories. While five in ten "strongly agreed," approximately two in ten "disagreed" that:

   - ✓ *Judging guidelines for the GENRE categories of interest to me were thoroughly spelled out.* (56% strongly agree/22% agree/22% disagree)
   - ✓ *Descriptions of the thirteen GENRE categories made it easy for me to know where to submit my books.* (50% strongly agree/34% agree/16% disagree)

- Judging from averages on the four-point scale, people submitting multiple books were more critical on all six dimensions. Even so, ratings averaged a 3.00 or higher for all groups analyzed.

AVERAGE RATINGS BY NUMBER OF BOOKS SUBMITTED (1-to-4 scale, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 4 means "strongly agree")	**Total Results**	**One Book**	**Two or More Books**
Description of DEBUT AUTHOR category clear, easy to understand	3.65	3.88	3.44
Judging guidelines for DEBUT AUTHOR thoroughly spelled out	3.59	3.88	3.33
Eligibility requirements clear, easy to understand	3.47	3.67	3.21
Explanation of how many finalists and winners clear, easy to understand	3.41	3.61	3.14
Descriptions of GENRE categories made it easy to know where to submit books	3.34	3.61	3.00
Judging guidelines for GENRE categories thoroughly spelled out	3.34	3.44	3.21
AVERAGE OF ALL SIX ITEMS	**3.47**	**3.68**	**3.22**

Respondents had extremely favorable opinions about the submissions process they undertook to nominate books for the 2017 Goldie Awards. In fact, approximately 95 percent gave positive "agree" ratings on six of the ten items, and at least 88 percent gave positive ratings on three additional items. Only one item received positive ratings from fewer than eight in ten (78 percent).

Moreover, at least half of respondents "strongly agreed" with eight of the ten items, meaning they gave it a rating of "4" on the 1-to-4-point scale. Here are the specifics:

- Six in ten "strongly agreed" that:

  ✓ *Information on entry fees was adequate for my purposes.* (69%)*
  ✓ *It was easy to upload my EBOOKS submissions in one of the required formats.* (68%)
  ✓ *Instructions on how to submit a nomination were clear and easy to understand.* (66%)
  ✓ *The GCLS call for nominations on 7/12/16 gave me enough time to prepare and submit my entries by the deadline.* (63%)

- Five in ten "strongly agreed" that:

  ✓ *It was easy to fill out the "Nominator Information" page when I submitted my nominations.* (59%)
  ✓ *It was easy to fill out the "Submissions Materials" requests when I submitted my nominations.* (56%)
  ✓ *The OpenWater awards software system functioned well as a way to accept and process nominations.* (53%)
  ✓ *It was easy to create a separate GCLS account so I could submit my nominations.* (50%)

- Respondents were less complimentary when evaluating communication from GCLS about the awards. Fewer than five in ten "strongly agree" and at least one in ten "disagreed" that:

  ✓ *Awards administrators provided sufficient mechanisms for me to ask questions and express concerns* (47% strongly agree/41% agree/12% disagree)
  ✓ *I have received sufficient communications about my entry so far in the awards process.* (41% strongly agree/37% agree/22% disagree)

- Judging from averages on the four-point scale, people submitting multiple books were more critical on all ten dimensions. Even so, ratings were positive for all groups analyzed. (***NOTE:** A similar analysis by prior experience with OpenWater showed little difference in ratings.*)

AVERAGE RATINGS BY NUMBER OF BOOKS SUBMITTED (1-to-4 scale, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 4 means "strongly agree")	**Total Results**	**One Book**	**Two or More Books**
Easy to upload submissions in required eBook format	3.65	3.71	3.57
Adequate information on entry fees*	3.63	3.78	3.43
Instructions on how to submit nominations clear, easy to understand	3.59	3.67	3.50
GCLS call for nominations on 7/12/16 gave enough time to prepare, submit entries by deadline	3.53	3.78	3.21
Easy to complete "Submissions Materials" requests	3.53	3.61	3.43
Easy to fill out "Nominator Information" page	3.47	3.78	3.07
OpenWater functioned well to accept, process nominations	3.47	3.61	3.29
Easy to create separate GCLS account to submit nominations	3.34	3.39	3.29
Awards administrators provided sufficient mechanisms for questions, concerns	3.28	3.50	3.00
Have received sufficient communications about entry so far	3.13	3.28	2.93
AVERAGE OF ALL TEN ITEMS	**3.46**	**3.61**	**3.27**

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*NOTE: The original item was stated this way: *Information on entry fees <u>and late fees</u> was adequate for my purposes.* However, it was a mistake to reference "late fees," as explained by GCLS Awards Administrators: *"Actually there are no late fees. The only difference is between ebooks ($30) and physical books ($35). We encourage people to stick to the tiered deadlines but we are flexible. No one has ever been turned away for being late."*

Only about one-third of respondents looked at the "2017 Goldie Evaluation Questions" for all fourteen judged categories posted in PDF format on the GCLS website. Four in ten didn't know the questions used to judge entries were posted, while two in ten presumably knew but didn't look at the questions.

2017 Goldie Evaluation Questions

Didn't know about questions	41%
Yes, looked at questions	37%
No, did not look at questions	22%
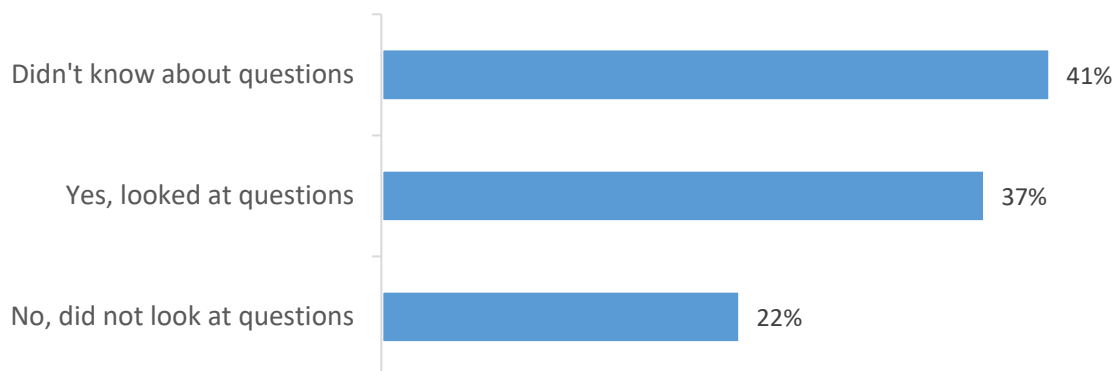
Several respondents had suggestions for changes in eligibility requirements, category descriptions and/or guidelines for the GENRE or DEBUT AUTHOR judged categories. These included greater clarity on the role of lesbian content in judging; additions and revisions in various categories; and more knowledgeable judges.

- Comments on <u>lesbian content</u>:

  ✓ *Categories for mainstream books by lesbian authors.*
  ✓ *Is there a process for those books to have substantial lesbian content? If so how are books and poetry with no, or no-defined lesbian content, processed? Defining that requirement and how those books will be eliminated is important to know.*
  ✓ *Making sure that "Content must include significant lesbian characters and/or themes and meets ONE of the following criteria: the main character identifies as a lesbian; the main character is or ends up in a lesbian relationship; the theme or plot deals with lesbian issues and/or lesbian life" is adhered to.*

- Comments on <u>categories</u>:

  ✓ *There's no category that adequately fits romances that aren't contemporary and aren't old enough to fit historical.*
  ✓ *I'd rather have the Mystery category separated from the Thriller category.*
  ✓ *From a purely self-serving point of view, I think the mystery genre might be split into noir/police procedural and traditional/humorous. I think it's hard to have those two types of books competing against each other.*
  ✓ *I wish it was possible to enter as both YA and SFF but I understand if that's not the way GCLS wants to do things.*
  ✓ *As a publisher submitting for one of my authors, I found the Debut category to be light on information. I had to reread it a couple of times.*
  ✓ *It's just way too complicated. Fewer categories would be better.*
  ✓ *Clarify the definition of what the Ann Bannon award is. Is it an author award or specific book award?*

- Comments on <u>judges</u>:

  ✓ *From the guidelines: Judges must be well read in the genre as well as be knowledgeable about writing structure, storyline, plot, POV, and other critical aspects that make a book successful. -- What makes a judge "knowledgeable"? Who judges the knowledge of the judges? Is a judge considered knowledgeable just because she says she is?*
  ✓ *More thoughtful consideration given to the choice of judges as the same people seem to win year after year.*
  ✓ *Judges should be OUTSIDE the GCLS membership and not know the title or author, just the submission and genre.*
  ✓ *All submissions should be assigned a number and be anonymous. No author, no title.*

For the most part, respondents had favorable opinions about the submissions process they undertook to nominate books for the 2017 Goldie Awards. Still, some had comments about confusing timelines, processes that need to be streamlined, and more effective communication with GCLS.

- Comments on <u>timelines</u>:
  - ✓ *It might be clearer if there was a time frame for each submission period - beginning at x date and no later than y date, for example.*
  - ✓ *The timeline for submissions is also frustrating. No other award has a tiered system. This leaves one to wonder how some books are put in, considering some didn't follow the timeline.*
  - ✓ *I was aware of the tiered deadlines because I attended the conference this year, but I think you should have a final deadline allowing publishers and authors to submit later if they missed the earlier deadline. The advantage of early submission includes longer exposure and an advertising value, but being excluded if someone missed that early deadline seems harsh.*
  - ✓ *There was some confusion about the publication date of one of my books because Amazon had the wrong date on their website. I think the date as it appears on the publisher's website should be the one that determines eligibility.*
  - ✓ *Even though I made the deadline for 8/31, I did have a bout of procrastination.*

- Comments on <u>streamlining</u>:
  - ✓ *Being able to upload a spreadsheet with all books would be helpful. Currently the process is daunting and time consuming. Lambda allows a spreadsheet to be sent with all book info and categories which is much easier to use.*
  - ✓ *As a publisher, the fact that I had to create a separate account to submit is frustrating and not necessary. This should be revisited and changed. Too many steps leave me frustrated and ready to throw my hands up wondering why it has to be so difficult. I'm paying to submit, so making it easier is in your best interest, if you want to keep us submitting books.*
  - ✓ *Maybe I was having a bad day but it did feel as if I was going from page to page to read into how to submit my book. It wasn't all on one page.*
  - ✓ *Some authors might not know all the requested data regarding their publisher, but I think some of that information is optional, so that's okay.*
  - ✓ *I did submit a book to the Goldie Awards for a fellow author who did not want her real name connected to her pen name. Most authors in that situation might have a hard time submitting to the awards.*
  - ✓ *I submit if an author wants me to. It's a lot of work, but I love my authors.*
  - ✓ *This year's guidelines indicated that ebook submissions were preferred. This was inexpensive (a plus), but the formatting of ebooks does not always reflect the quality and graphic excellence that print versions of books can demonstrate.*

- Comments on <u>communication</u>:
  - ✓ *I would just say overall that the GCLS website is a little hard to navigate. It's a little hard to find things, but maybe I just haven't used it enough.*
  - ✓ *No follow-up communication was received from GCLS once I submitted (multiple) books, so far, for the award. GCLS needs to do a better job if they want to continue getting our money.*
  - ✓ *The process was easy to use and easy to understand. Communication with administrators was personal, quick, and efficient.*
  - ✓ *The submissions process seems to be working adequately.*