

MEMO TO: Survey Respondents
CC: Independent Review Committee Members
FROM: Virginia Dodge Fielder, Ph.D.
SUBJECT: Topline Survey Results – 2015 GCLS Awards Judges
DATE: December 12, 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 in mid-November. 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.

As judges for the 2015 (but not 2016) Goldie Awards, you were thought to be important stakeholders in the GCLS awards process – a point of view borne out by your helpful responses. Our committee is indebted to the fifteen of thirty-one former judges surveyed who responded to our open-ended questionnaire by the early-December deadline.

As promised, this memo contains highlights of your perceptions of the primary strengths and weaknesses of the GCLS awards process, as well as your suggestions for improvement.

Now, a few points to consider:

- ✓ Inclusion of specific highlights does not necessarily constitute an endorsement of those points of view by our committee. Rather, our intent here is to report the *range* of opinions expressed by former 2015 judges, not the statistical *weight* of those opinions. This will come next month in a quantitative survey of 2016 Goldie judges, some of whom also judged in 2015. In fact, your input will significantly shape the content of that quantitative survey.
- ✓ This memo does not contain specific recommendations based on the findings, since committee members believe results from other key stakeholders surveyed so far – current and former awards administrators and board liaisons, select publishers, and people submitting titles for the 2017 awards – should be considered prior to a final report. Also, we plan to survey the entire GCLS membership (including you once again) for reaction to proposed ideas to improve the awards process.

So, with these points in mind, here are the topline results of opinions expressed about the GCLS awards process by the fifteen GCLS Awards judges who responded:

Primary Strengths

- The number and diversity of volunteers recruited to be judges is mentioned as a plus by several former 2015 judges, as is the anonymous nature of the judging process.
- Training and support for judges are considered essential, and some give GCLS awards administrators good marks for their efforts.
- Though daunting for some, the detailed questions used to rate entries are viewed as positives by others. Some mention the importance of specific criteria to ensure the process is consistent from judge to judge and category to category, and to show that judges did indeed read the books.
- Recent changes are thought to have improved the awards process for judges, most notably being able to rate the books “online” via the OpenWater awards software. Some endorse the move to ebooks, though others still prefer print. Having books delivered in waves rather than all at once is considered a plus.

Primary Weaknesses

- Former judges cite too many entries as a major concern, given the amount of time required to read and properly evaluate each title. This is particularly true of some categories and discourages future participation in the judging process.
- For some former judges, the evaluation forms are too long, too repetitious and too complicated, requiring a level of expertise beyond their own. Having to write remarks at the end of each major section is particularly time consuming.
- Former judges express concern that books aren’t always entered in the correct category, and that the evaluation questions for some categories aren’t specific enough or appropriate to the category.
- Despite having participated in 2015, former judges have questions about the requirements for being a judge, the “fan girl” nature of some results, and specific aspects of the judging process itself.
- Some former judges complain about how they were treated by GCLS personnel. They also wish they had received an official “thank you” for all their time and effort.
- While understanding the move to ebooks, some no longer participate as a judge because they prefer print.

Suggestions for Improvement

- Find ways to reduce the burden on judges. Suggestions include setting a maximum number of books for each judge to read and rate; dividing judges into subgroups that come together to determine finalists and winners; splitting large categories into two or more smaller categories; allowing judges to proclaim a book unworthy of an award early in the judging process; increasing the amount of time judges have to complete their books and ratings; and providing more aids, such as reminders and printable worksheets.

- Reduce the number of questions on the evaluation forms. Revise questions so they are appropriate for judging a given category or set of categories. Limit the number of sections on the evaluation forms that must be summarized in open-ended comments. Ensure that rating scales are appropriately aligned with the specific questions asked. To the extent possible, simplify the questions so they can be answered more competently by volunteer judges without a writing or editing background. Be more explicit about what constitutes an award-worthy book.
- Educate GCLS members about the judging process and requirements. Make sure judges know their hard work is appreciated.

Other Observations

- Former 2015 judges mentioned several reasons for opting out the following year, most notably the significant time commitment required. Some felt their skills weren't up to the complicated judging task, while others felt underappreciated.
- Despite concerns, several former judges thanked GCLS for its service to the lesbian reading and writing community.