

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
August 14, 2024
Chicago, IL
Hybrid Meeting**

**Awards Committee: Recommendations for Changes to Awards
(Prepared by Alexander Duryee and Jane LaBarbara)**

BACKGROUND

Throughout the current awards season (2023 - 2024), a number of individual award subcommittees encountered a variety of issues relating to the awards themselves. These problems ranged from subcommittee membership to application requirements to award eligibility; each required intervention from the Awards co-chairs, and delayed or disrupted the committee's regular activities. Some of the issues are long-standing, and have impacted past award seasons; others (primarily relating to application eligibility) are new to this year. The following recommendations are being made to ameliorate these issues for future award seasons.

DISCUSSION

This season, the Awards Committee (and its subcommittees) encountered three broad categories of issues: too few nominees for certain awards, ambiguity around subcommittee rosters, and unclear language regarding eligibility and requirements.

Overall, the number of nominees for awards has more or less stabilized after the COVID-19 pandemic. However, a few awards received zero or very few nominees, resulting in either an uncompetitive award or no award at all. The subcommittees for these awards reviewed their activities, and are improving their advertising for next season; in addition, they identified potential barriers to nomination in their awards. The recommendations from the Distinguished Service Award and Mark A. Greene Emerging Leader Award reflect the subcommittees' goals of minimizing obstacles to nomination.

The timeline and activities of the Awards Committee are outlined in the [Calendar of Activities](#). Ideally, the Committee and subcommittees finish tasks such as finalizing appointments in September. This season, there was confusion specifically regarding the Harold T. Pinkett Student of Color Award, which delayed completing its subcommittee roster until November. The issue is that the award names the (singular) chair of the Archivists & Archives of Color Section as a member, but the Section is helmed by two co-chairs. The subcommittee thus recommends

resolving this discrepancy by aligning the award language with the existing structure of the Section.

Three awards are recommending clarifying their application and eligibility requirements. The Preservation Publication Award has received no nominees the past two years, and wants to make its existing practice of recognizing digital preservation publications explicit. The Harold T. Pinkett Student of Color Award has ambiguous application requirements, which is a source of confusion for applicants and reviewers alike. The Waldo Griffin Leland Award's eligibility requirements are ambiguous regarding date of publication. These recommendations aim to clarify who can apply, and how, as part of our broader efforts to increase participation in awards and minimize ambiguity for applicants.

With regard to awards with no or few nominees over the past few seasons, it may be tempting for SAA to cease issuing them. The Awards Committee would strongly recommend doing so. The Mark A. Greene Emerging Leader Award and Preservation Publication Award historically have had robust nominee totals, indicating that there is strong interest amongst SAA membership in these awards. The Distinguished Service Award historically attracts few nominees; the subcommittee is cognizant of this and is very proactively making changes for future seasons. Dissolving these awards would be premature at best, and limit SAA's ability to recognize outstanding individuals, organizations, and publications.

With regard to the recommendations for the Harold T. Pinkett Student of Color Award, the Committee and subcommittee recognize that this is an award with restricted funding, and thus may not be flexible regarding the changes that we recommend. If the recommendations are in conflict with the award's agreement with the donor, the Committee and subcommittee can reassess the recommendations ahead of the Council meeting. Since both recommendations relate to clarifying existing practices, resolving ambiguities one way or another is more important than the specific recommendations, although the subcommittee would prefer its recommendations be accepted.

RECOMMENDATIONS

THAT the SAA Council adopt the following revision to the Distinguished Service Award: "letters of support from three SAA members" be changed to "three letters of support, of which at least two are from SAA members".

Support Statement: In recent years, there have been very few applications submitted for this award. While there may be a range of factors behind this trend, The DSA subcommittee has identified one in particular that may impede prospective applicants from completing their submission. The requirement that all three letters of support for an application be written by SAA

members could be hampering the subcommittee's efforts to increase applications. Previous DSA chairs raised the feasibility of only two of these letters being from members, with the option of the third being from a nonmember. This proposed change would improve access to eligibility and be more equitable, allowing for a broader range of individuals to provide insight about an applicant.

Fiscal Impact: This change will have no fiscal impact on SAA.

THAT the SAA Council adopt the following revision to the Mark A. Greene Emerging Leader Award: "Three letters of support" be changed to "two letters of support".

Support Statement: Currently, the award's application requires three letters of support from colleagues familiar with the applicant's work. Most other awards that require letters of support only need two letters. The subcommittee has found that the third letter provides little value to the selection committee but increases the difficulty of applying. Given the low number of applicants for the award over the past few years, the subcommittee would like to reduce barriers to application when possible. Thus, it proposes reducing the required number of letters from three to two. This proposed change would both align the Mark A. Greene award with other award requirements and encourage more applicants to submit nominees.

Fiscal Impact: This change will have no fiscal impact on SAA.

THAT the SAA Council adopt the following revision to the Preservation Publication Award: "Submissions may address topics related to digital preservation as well as analog preservation" be added to the Purpose and Criteria for Selection.

Support Statement: The Preservation Publication Award has had zero nominees for the past two years and is proactively seeking ways to increase the number of applications. The award has historically recognized publications in digital preservation; however, its Purpose and Criteria for Selection does not mention this field at all. The subcommittee wants to make it explicitly clear that digital preservation publications are eligible for the award, as it believes that potential applicants do not know that they are eligible.

Fiscal Impact: This change will have no fiscal impact on SAA.

THAT the SAA Council adopt the following revisions to the Harold T. Pinkett Student of Color Award: "The committee consists of the chair of the Archivists and Archives of Color Section" be changed to "The committee consists of the senior co-chair of the Archivists and Archives of Color Section" AND "and the strength of their letter of recommendation" be removed.

Support Statement: The award’s selection committee membership currently lists “the chair of the Archivists and Archives of Color Section” as its chair; however, the AAC Section has two co-chairs. As a result of this ambiguity, the co-chairs have to decide which of them will serve as the award chair. This leads to delays and confusion in filling out the committee roster, which negatively impacts both the Pinkett selection committee and the Awards Committee overall.

Thus, the subcommittee proposes that references to “chair” in the selection committee definition of the Pinkett award be changed to “senior co-chair”. The senior co-chair has filled this role for the past two years, thus setting a precedent for this revision. Additionally, the junior co-chair also serves on the Brenda S. Banks Travel Award; an additional chair responsibility would be unnecessarily burdensome. Given that the senior co-chair is the most congruent position to a singular chair, this change will maintain the spirit of the position while updating it for current practice.

Additionally, there is ambiguity regarding the application requirements for the award. The Purpose and Criteria for Selection section mentions “the strength of their letter of recommendation” as something the subcommittee considers in their selection. However, the Application Deadline and Requirements section does not mention any letters at all. This causes confusion for both reviewers and applicants, who do not know if a letter should be supplied or considered. When the letters are supplied, the subcommittee does not find them to be particularly valuable in selection and would prefer to remove barriers to application. Thus, the subcommittee recommends removing the mention of the letter from the Purpose and Criteria for Selection.

Fiscal Impact: This change will have no fiscal impact on SAA.

THAT the SAA Council adopt the following revision to the Waldo Gifford Leland Award: “published during the preceding calendar year” be changed to “first published during the preceding calendar year.”

Support Statement: Monographs are regularly published in a variety of formats, which may be issued in different years. For example, an ebook may be issued at the end of the year, but the print edition may not be released until the next one.¹ This causes confusion for reviewers and nominees alike, who are unsure if a work is eligible for recognition when it has multiple dates attached to it. The subcommittee thus recommends that the eligibility criteria be amended to include “first published” to clarify which monographs can be recognized in a given year.

¹ For example, WorldCat lists three different years of publication for *Managing Digital Records in Africa*

(<https://search.worldcat.org/formats-editions/1328142059>)

Fiscal Impact: This change will have no fiscal impact on SAA.