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# Awards Update

## ACRL Awards Program to Resume in 2025–2026

T he ACRL Awards Program recognizes and assists outstanding members of the academic and research library profession through three types of awards: achievement and distinguished service awards, research and travel grants, and publication awards and grants. The ACRL currently has 20 awards and grants, which are juried by 16 award committees appointed by the award or grant's administering unit.[1]

In 2021, the ACRL Board of Directors paused the ACRL Awards Program to explore how it could better align with the association's principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and to evaluate its overall effectiveness. Since then, ACRL has convened two task forces to review the program and recommend strategic improvements. Recommendations from these task forces have resulted in several changes in the awards program as well as the formation of an Awards Coordinating Committee that works with award and grant committees to administer the program. Following a review of the association's awards that took place in spring 2025, ACRL is poised to resume granting awards in 2025–2026.

## Awards Task Force

The Awards Task Force was, convened in 2021 and charged with reviewing the awards program. Throughout the year, task force members surveyed division and section-level award committee members and stakeholders, conducted an environmental scan of other associations, and analyzed the demographics of past ACRL award winners.

The Awards Task Force's review concluded in January 2022 when the task force submitted a final report to the Board, presenting 13 recommendations to enhance the awards process.[2] Key recommendations included:

- Streamlining the awards program with processes managed by a division-level award committee.
- Integrating EDI best practices into all aspects of the awards program.
- Removing the requirement that award nominees and winners must be ACRL members.
- Creating a process to ensure individuals are only awarded one division or section-level award for the same project or program in a single year.
- Changing the award winners' recognition from plaques to certificates.

The Awards Task Force also identified ongoing challenges with funding the awards program.

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## Awards Process Implementation Task Force

Based on the recommendations from the Awards Task Force, the Board created the Awards Process Implementation Task Force in August 2022. The Implementation Task Force was charged with streamlining the awards process and addressing the program's financial challenges. The Implementation Task Force conducted surveys and focus groups with division- and section-level awards committee members and other stakeholders. It researched recommended practices for awards programs—particularly processes that supported equity—and further researched the financial challenges facing the program.

The Implementation Task Force's work concluded in January 2024 when the task force submitted a final report and recommendations to the Board.[3] Some of these recommendations reinforced ideas from the previous task force, such as allowing award nominees and winners to be nonmembers of ACRL and/or the sections. New suggestions included keeping the responsibility of soliciting and selecting award recipients with individual award committees, while establishing a division-level awards coordinating committee to provide leadership and oversight for the entire program. Additionally, the task force recommended creating an ACRL-wide virtual ceremony to celebrate and recognize award winners, similar to the current ceremony held by RUSA. Lastly, the task force proposed implementing the previous task force's recommendation to provide award winners with certificates and also suggested discontinuing monetary awards due to limited ACRL staff resources for processing cash awards and managing vendor sponsor relationships.

## Awards Coordinating Committee

In 2024–2025, ACRL established the Awards Coordinating Committee to continue implementing recommendations from the two task forces and, in the long term, provide oversight and leadership for the awards program. Committee members included:

- Melissa A. Wong, Chair, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
- Jodie Borgerding, Vice-Chair, Washington University
- Samantha Bishop Simmons, University of Kansas
- Kelly Diane Blessinger, Louisiana State University
- Erin L. Cassity, University of the Incarnate Word
- Kaitlin Kehnemuyi, North Carolina State University
- Priya Kizhakkethil, Texas Woman's University
- Stephanie S. Rodriguez, Tennessee State University
- Carrie Forbes, Board Liaison, Illinois State University
- Brian Lim, Staff Liaison

Melissa Wong, chair of the committee, and Jodie Borgerding, vice-chair, had both served on the Implementation Task Force, which facilitated a smooth transition from the work of the two task forces to the launch of the new committee.

The committee began its work with a lengthy charge:

1. Review the ACRL awards program on a regular basis (every five years), including the awards and grants given, financial support, and division policies that address or impact awards and grants, and make recommendations for needed changes to the ACRL Board of Directors.

2. Establish a process for reviewing awards and grants, including their purpose, description, and selection criteria, and recommending changes as needed.

3. Provide annual training and resources on awards-related equity practices for members of awards committees.

4. Work with ACRL staff to provide a standardized submission platform for nominations.

5. Assist award and grant committees in identifying potential nominees and soliciting nominations.

6. Establish and oversee a process to ensure that an individual or group does not receive more than a single award for the same publication or program.

7. Collect and share data on award nominees and winners.

8. Work with ACRL staff to hold an annual, division-wide ceremony for award and grant recipients.

9. Develop and maintain a calendar of the committee's work.

10. File an annual report on the committee's activities with the ACRL Board.

For its first year, the committee prioritized actions that would allow ACRL to resume distributing awards and grants in 2025–2026. Our goals included developing guidelines for avoiding implicit bias in award processes; creating a review process for individual awards and grants; and designing and offering training to award committee members on best practices, avoiding implicit bias, and the new review process. Coordinating Committee members also began developing a submission platform for nominations and created a guidance document for collecting data on award committee membership, award nominees, and winners. As part of its work, the committee sought input from award committees, stakeholders, and the ACRL Board of Directors; posted regular updates to ALA Connect; and created a LibGuide with information about the committee's work and the ongoing review process.[4]

## Awards Review

A major task for the Awards Coordinating Committee has been to work with award committees to review the purpose, description, and selection criteria for all awards and grants. The goal of this process was to ensure all awards and grants have a clear purpose and description and that committees' nomination and selection processes are robust, transparent, and fair.

The review process began in February 2025 with a required training for award committee members, which covered changes in the awards program, the new "Guidelines for Avoiding Implicit Bias in ACRL Awards," and the review process. Following the training, committees were asked to read the recently updated "Chapter 12: Awards" in the ACRL Guide to Policies and Procedures along with the "Guidelines for Avoiding Implicit Bias," and then evaluate, and as needed, update their award's description, selection criteria, and nomination and selection processes.[5] Finally, the award committees submitted a report to the Awards Coordinating Committee.

Award committees that completed a successful review were authorized to resume giving their awards or grants in 2025–2026. By the end of June, committees for eleven awards had completed the review process and will resume giving an award in 2025–2026; three reviews are in-process and should be completed in time to give an award in 2025–2026; three grants

were seeking new sponsors and will complete the review process once a sponsor is identified; one award plans to complete the review process in 2025–2026 and resume giving an award in 2026–2027; and two awards are on a long-term pause.

## Looking Forward

The ACRL Awards Coordinating Committee is delighted to announce the relaunch of the 2025–2026 awards program for committees that have completed their review process. Award nominations will be invited later this fall through various channels, including ACRL and section communications, ALA Connect, listservs, and other relevant sources.

Over the coming year, the Awards Coordinating Committee will introduce several enhancements to the awards program. Collaborating with ACRL staff, we will develop a centralized nomination portal for all division- and section-level awards. This portal will allow award committees to tailor the nomination form according to their specific criteria and guidelines, streamlining the submission process and facilitating the collection of essential nominee data. These data will help ACRL assess the impact of program changes on the diversity of award winners and nominees. Recognizing the annual turnover within awards committees, we will provide yearly training for new members. This training will focus on best practices for jurying awards and strategies for avoiding implicit biases during nominations and selections. This initiative underscores the ACRL's dedication to integrating EDI principles throughout the awards program.

### Guidelines for Avoiding Implicit Bias in ACRL Awards

The following list provides highlights of the recommendations in ACRL's new "Guidelines for Avoiding Implicit Bias in ACRL Awards." The full document is available in the Awards Coordinating Committee LibGuide.[6]

- Appoint diverse committees and committee chairs, including members' personal identities (e.g., racial and ethnic identity, disability status), years of professional experience, and/or library and institutional types.
- Review award descriptions and selection criteria for gendered, racialized, or overly restrictive language.
- Simplify the nominations process by making it transparent and limiting requests for information to that which is necessary for making a decision.
- The call for nominations should be widely publicized, including to underrepresented groups within the profession, in order to generate a large pool of nominees. Use a rubric or other process that minimizes implicit bias to select a winner.
- Have individual committee members rank nominees prior to the committee's discussion to avoid groupthink.
- Create short lists via inclusive rather than exclusive methods.
- Ensure all committee members participate in the decision-making process using formal and informal methods.
- Schedule adequate time to carefully review nominations and make a thorough decision.

Furthermore, we will implement a mechanism to prevent the same individual or institution from receiving multiple division- or section-level awards for the same project or program. This measure addresses concerns that awards frequently go to well-funded institutions and that certain individuals tend to win multiple awards.

We invite those who wish to support the new vision for the ACRL awards program to volunteer for a division- or section-level awards committee or the ACRL Awards Coordinating Committee. The 2026–2027 volunteer application will be available on ACRL's website in December 2025. If you have any questions, please contact Jodie Borgerding, 2025–2026 chair of the ACRL Awards Coordinating Committee, at jodieb@wustl.edu.

## Notes

1. "ACRL Awards Program," Association of College and Research Libraries, accessed July 8, 2025, https://www.ala.org/acrl/acrl-awards-program.

2. ACRL Awards Task Force, "Report," *ACRL Virtual Board Update Information Session,* Documents 8.0 and 8.1. January 25, 2022, https://connect.ala.org/HigherLogic/System/DownloadDocumentFile.ashx?DocumentFileKey=d20690f3-8366-401b-9406-fbe0d3c1d2aa.

3. ACRL Awards Implementation Process Task Force, "Final Report," *ACRL Virtual Board Update*, Document 17.1. January 26, 2024, https://connect.ala.org/HigherLogic/System/DownloadDocumentFile.ashx?DocumentFileKey=6fe954fd-7b6e-4b4a-9821-40b372b4c755&forceDialog=0.

4. "ACRL Awards Coordinating Committee," Association of College and Research Libraries, last modified March 6, 2025, https://acrl.libguides.com/awardscoordinating.

5. "Chapter 12: Awards," *ACRL Guide to Policies and Procedures*, last modified January 26, 2024, https://www.ala.org/acrl/resources/policies/chapter12; "Guidelines for Avoiding Implicit Bias in ACRL Awards," last modified February 3, 2025, https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FM70qH33Mg2T3L1il4gJf5t7UP42uoUB/.

6. "ACRL Awards Coordinating Committee."