**TO:** PLA Board of Directors

**RE:** Awards Program Revision

**DATE:** April 21, 2020

**ACTION REQUESTED/INFORMATION/REPORT:**

Action Requested

**ACTION REQUESTED BY:**

Scott Allen, Deputy Director, and Megan Stewart, Program Coordinator

**DRAFTS OF MOTION:**

The PLA Board of Directors appoint a working group to review the PLA awards program and make recommendations for its future.

**BACKGROUND**

The PLA awards program has been fairly consistent for many years. PLA appoints award juries, promotes and collects applications for ten awards and grants (expanded from nine in 2018 with the addition of the Singer Group Helping Communities Come Together Award) in the late summer/early fall, approves recipients early in the year. A press release is issued in the spring announcing the recipients, and those recipients and sponsors are invited to attend the PLA Member Breakfast at the ALA Annual Conference, where they are briefly acknowledged.

Staff noted some challenges in recent years. Sponsorships, which were already very modest and generally only support the award itself and other costs, have been reduced. At its highest point, PLA was receiving nearly $30,000 in sponsorships (including $1,500 in product) with about $5,000 going to administrative fees and the rest pass-through to recipients. A few sponsors (LS&S, Innovative) have dropped out, so PLA has covered the costs of those awards.

Applications were falling, so a few years ago, PLA worked harder to solicit applications, and we did see a small bump due to increased promotion and social media.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Award Name | FY16 | FY17 | FY18 | FY19 | FY20 |
| Allie Beth Martin Award | 3 | 10 | 7 | 7 | 3 |
| Baker & Taylor Entertainment Audio Music/Video Product Award | 21 | 13 | 17 | 8 | 14 |
| Charlie Robinson Award | 9 | 5 | 8 | 6 | 6 |
| Demco New Leaders Travel Grant | 8 | 3 | 9 | 2 | 4 |
| EBSCO Excellence in Rural Library Service Award | 6 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 2 |
| Gordon M. Conable Award | 0 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 9 |
| John Iliff Award | 8 | 14 | 11 | 15 | 7 |
| Romance Writers of America Library Grant | 28 | 22 | 17 | 26 | 21 |
| The Singer Group Helping Communities Come Together Award | n/a | n/a | 8 | 9 | 3 |
| Upstart Innovation Award | 14 | 29 | 34 | 29 | 21 |
| Total | 97 | 105 | 121 | 115 | 90 |

PLA has not established any measures through which to judge its awards program, making it difficult to assess whether or not the program is successful and/or meeting its goals. Anecdotally, we believe the awards are appreciated by recipient libraries and do give them the opportunity for community-level recognition. Also, serving on juries provides another mechanism for PLA members to be involved, at a lower commitment level than serving on a committee or task force. A few of the awards are named after prominent public librarians and advocates, which is important to honor their work. But also anecdotally, the PLA awards don’t garner much attention in the library field, particularly in comparison to more well-known awards such as those offered by Library Journal and even some of those awarded by other ALA divisions. PLA has not tried to generate more attention for the awards, through additional media outreach or providing awardees with tools for community level promotion. As noted above, the effort to manage the program may not be worth the diminishing returns, financial and otherwise.

Therefore, staff recommend that the **PLA Board of Directors appoint a working group to review the PLA awards program and make recommendations for its future.**

Following is some background that may be of interest in considering this motion and may inform the working group’s discussions, if a working group is convened.

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***About PLA Awards and Travel Grants***

Allie Beth Martin Award

* This award, which honors a librarian with knowledge of books and other library materials, receives a decent number of applicants, and support from Baker & Taylor is likely firm. This award has been presented since 1979. Allie Beth Martin was the first director of the Tulsa City-County Library, from 1963 until her death, and was known for her ground-breaking library improvement programs.

Baker & Taylor Entertainment Audio Music/Video Product Award

* Although this award has been criticized as simple product promotion for Baker & Taylor, it does receive a large number of applicants, and it is also a way that PLA is supporting smaller and under-resourced libraries. Support is anticipated to be renewed.

The Singer Group Helping Communities Come Together Award

* This award was new in 2018. PLA has offered three cycles, as funded by the initial grant. While nominations have been few, they’ve showed the breadth of areas in which libraries support their communities. For instance, FY2019 applications included stories of libraries that responded to a shortage of affordable housing; supported the merger of two school districts; held programs on respectful dialogue techniques to encourage civil discussions of hot-button issues such as climate change, immigration, race, women’s rights, LGBTQI issues, and income inequality; supported a community with the healing and recovery process following a shooting in a local high school; partnered with an LGBTQ nonprofit organization to host a drag queen story hour despite backlash from community residents; provided community relief after Hurricane Florence; assisted the community to care for individuals with dementia; and provided services to young adult inmates at a local detention center.

Romance Writers of America Library Grant

* There has been consistent interest in this award, evidenced by the number of applications, and the sponsor is on board to continue. This award also helps PLA serve smaller and under-resourced libraries by building their collections.

Demco New Leaders Travel Grant

* Submissions have been surprisingly low for basically a cash award, and PLA has not attempted to leverage this grant further by, for instance, asking funded “new leaders” to document their experiences or otherwise contribute to PLA communications or publications. Demco discontinued sponsorship in 2018. PLA has increased its support of young and diverse leaders through sponsorship of ALA programs and the new fund for scholarships for PLA 2020 in Nashville.

EBSCO Excellence in Rural Library Service Award

* Supporting rural libraries is important to PLA leadership. However, submissions are fairly low, and the sponsor has expressed dissatisfaction with the return on their contribution to support the award, so continued sponsorship is unlikely.

Gordon M. Conable Award

* This award lost sponsorship in 2017 and receives very few applicants. It is somewhat duplicative of the [ALA Intellectual Freedom Award](http://www.ala.org/aasl/awards/if), and the Freedom to Read Foundation also has an [award](https://www.ftrf.org/page/Conable_Scholarship) named after Gordon Conable. Gordon Conable was a librarian and intellectual freedom champion in Michigan and California who served several terms as president of the Freedom to Read Foundation and died unexpectedly in 2005.

John Iliff Award

* While there is decent interest in this award (which honors a library worker or library for its use of technology in the name of John Iliff, a technology pioneer), Innovative discontinued sponsorship in 2018. LITA offers multiple awards related to technology.

Upstart Innovation Award

* Despite the high number of applicants for this award, the sponsor (Upstart/Demco) discontinued sponsorship in 2018.

Charlie Robinson Award

* This award is likely to continue to receive Baker & Taylor support. However, it receives comparably fewer applicants than other awards, and applicants often do not meet the award’s criteria, which require that the recipient be a director (not deputy or other administrator) for at least 7 years and be active with national associations.

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***About Library Journal Awards (for Comparison)***

Compiled by Megan Stewart, PLA Program Coordinator

Discussion of PLA awards is often accompanied by consideration of how they don’t have the same impact or attention as Library Journal awards. Library Journal currently offers five awards for public libraries and public library workers, each of which is described in more detail below.

**Award name:** [**Jerry Kline Community Impact Prize**](https://www.libraryjournal.com/?detailStory=jerry-kline-community-impact-prize-submission-guidelines)

Awarded since: 2019

Honorarium granted: $250,000

Sponsored by: the Gerald M. Kline Family Foundation

Brief description: The Jerry Kline Community Impact Prize, developed in partnership between the Gerald M. Kline Family Foundation and Library Journal, was created in 2019 to recognize the public library as a vital community asset. When libraries, civic entities, organizations, and the people they serve become close partners, their communities thrive.

Eligibility requirements: All U.S. Public Libraries are eligible for the prize, whether in a single building in a small town or a multi-branch system serving an entire region. Previous winners are asked to take a ten-year hiatus from submitting again for consideration.

**Award name:** [**Library Journal Librarian of the Year Award**](https://www.libraryjournal.com/?page=Librarian-of-the-Year-Guidelines)

Awarded since: 1988

Honorarium granted: unknown

Sponsored by: Library Journal

Brief description: The *LJ* editors are seeking nominations for the 33rd annual *Library Journal* Librarian of the Year Award to honor a professional librarian for outstanding achievement and accomplishments reflecting the loftiest service goals of the library profession. These include:

* free access to information for all
* the encouragement of reading and the creation of inducements to greater use of books and other library materials and information sources
* the enhancement and expansion of library service to all areas and constituencies in the community
* the strengthening of the library role and position in the community whether that community is a city or town, college or university, school, company, or corporation.

Eligibility requirements: Any working professional librarian in any type of library anywhere in North America (United States, Canada, Mexico) is eligible. “Professional” means a person in possession of a master’s degree in Library and/or Information Science and/or holding a position designated “professional” in a library or library service.

**Award name:** [**Library Journal/Gale Cengage Learning Library of the Year**](https://www.libraryjournal.com/?page=Library-of-the-Year-Guidelines)

Awarded since: 1992

Honorarium granted: $10,000

Sponsored by: Library Journal/Gale Cengage Learning

Brief description: All libraries are good, some are great. *LJ* is looking for role-model libraries to vie for the honor of being the 2020 *Library Journal*/Gale Cengage Learning Library of the Year. The $10,000 prize celebrates the library that most profoundly demonstrates the following:

1. Service to the community.
2. Creativity and innovation in developing specific community programs or a dramatic increase in library usage.
3. Leadership in creating programs that can be emulated by other libraries.

Eligibility requirements: Any library in the United States or Canada can apply. Libraries that have previously won the award will not be eligible until five years after winning. (For example: the 2015 winner will not be eligible until the 2021 award year.)

**Award name:** [**Library Marketer of the Year**](https://www.libraryjournal.com/?page=Marketer-of-the-Year-Guidelines)

Awarded since: 2016

Honorarium granted: $2,000

Sponsored by: Library Ideas

Brief description: The award recognizes the importance of innovative approaches to marketing of library services, the role of marketing in building library engagement, and the value of quality marketing collateral to help build a vibrant sense of the library and define its relevance in the community. The award places a special emphasis on an individual (or team) working for a library who has instituted or reinvigorated a marketing strategy in the past two years that has:

* had measurable impact on some aspect of the library’s use,
* created a new understanding of the community served via market research,
* improved the prominence of the library in community, and/or
* driven the marketing around a successful funding initiative that enables the library to reach new audiences or secures deeper sustainability.

Eligibility requirements: Any full- or part-time marketer employed by a public library, public library organization such as a consortium or state library in the U.S. or Canada is eligible to be nominated.

**Award name:** [**Movers & Shakers**](https://lj.libraryjournal.com/movers/index.php)

Awarded since: 2002

Honorarium granted: unknown

Sponsored by: Library Journal

Brief description: Movers & Shakers profiles 50 or more up-and-coming, innovative, creative individuals from around the world--both great leaders and behind-the-scenes contributors—who are providing inspiration and model programs for others. From librarians and non-degreed library workers to publishers, vendors, coders, entrepreneurs, reviewers, and others who impact the library field, Movers & Shakers 2020 will celebrate those people who are moving all types of libraries ahead.

Eligibility requirements: Not listed.