

Policy for Reviewing Potentially Objectionable Content

Policy Statement

This policy is intended to provide guidelines for reviewing entries for the Romance Writers of America's Golden Heart Awards and Diamond Heart Awards that potentially contain content that may be deemed insensitive, offensive, or inappropriate to specific cultural groups. The aim of this policy is not to enforce censorship; its primary purpose is to uphold and promote the core values of the Romance Writers of America (RWA). It is designed to foster an environment of respect, inclusivity, diversity, and cultural sensitivity, which aligns with RWA's commitment to celebrate and advocate for all voices within the romance genre.

Scope

This policy applies to all persons involved in the Golden Heart Awards and Diamond Heart Awards, including entrants, committee members, board members, judges, administrators, and any other related parties.

Reviewing Guidelines

Cultural Sensitivity and Respect

All submissions and reviewers must commit to a high level of cultural sensitivity and respect. It is essential that everyone involved consider the possible impact of a submission's content on diverse audiences, specifically regarding racial, ethnic, religious, gender, sexual orientation, people with disabilities, or other forms of cultural diversity.

Cultural Sensitivity and the Entrants

Entrants should consider whether the material within their book could be considered objectionable. If an entrant is unsure about the nature of their content, they should consult with a sensitivity reader prior to submitting their book or manuscript.

Cultural Sensitivity and Judging

As part of their responsibilities, judges are tasked with identifying and flagging any content in the entries that could potentially be deemed as objectionable, offensive, or culturally insensitive. Judges should carefully consider the author's intent, the overall context of the story, and the potential impact on readers.

Consistent Approach

All reviewers should employ a consistent and fair approach in reviewing entries, ensuring that each work is evaluated based on its individual merit and not influenced by personal biases or prejudices.

Training and Education

All judges and involved parties must undergo training in cultural sensitivity, inclusivity, and diversity to ensure they can effectively evaluate potentially offensive or insensitive content. Entrants are welcomed to evaluate the training judges receive but entrants are not required to complete the training.

This training should be updated annually to provide all involved parties to keep them updated about the evolving cultural sensitivities and to reinforce the importance of cultural respect and understanding in literary works.

Responsibility and Accountability

Judges

Judges are accountable for applying these guidelines in their review process.

Committee

The committee is responsible for ensuring all judges are trained and familiar with this policy, and that it is consistently applied.

Identifying Objectionable Content

Definition

Objectionable content is any material that may demean, stereotype, or misrepresent a cultural group, promote hate speech or discrimination, or any material that is potentially disturbing or offensive to specific cultural groups.

Handling Objectionable Content

Judges Role

In the event that potentially objectionable content is identified, judges should raise the issue on the rubric when they submit along with a description of the potentially objectionable material. Please refer to specific instances within the book or manuscript including page numbers to ensure evaluation at the next level can happen quickly.

Review Subcommittee's Role

Works identified as containing objectionable content will be reviewed by a specially appointed review committee. The committee will consist of three people: a member of the RWA committee, a sensitivity reader (preferably one who has specialization in the cultural group identified in the objectionable content), and an external member of RWA who is not currently a board member, judge, or entrant in the Golden Heart Awards or Diamond Heart Awards. The review committee should report their evaluation of the material to the RWA Contest Committee within 15 business days of the material being flagged.

The Contest Committee's Role

This committee will evaluate the subcommittee's evaluation and make a final determination. If the review committee deems the content objectionable, a decision must be made on whether to communicate with the author or their representative to clarify intent, seek an understanding, or

disqualify the entrant. The committee may decide to disqualify the entry from the Golden Heart Awards or Diamond Heart Awards by a two-thirds majority secret ballot vote.

Communication to the Author

The author or their representative should be notified in a professional and respectful manner about the disqualification, with reasons clearly stated. This communication should uphold the dignity of the author and respect their right to create, while clearly explaining the objections raised in line with this policy.

Training and Education

Training

All judges and involved parties must undergo training in cultural sensitivity, inclusivity, and diversity to ensure they can effectively evaluate potentially offensive or insensitive content. Entrants are welcomed to evaluate the training judges receive but entrants are not required to complete the training.

Continuous Education

This training should be updated annually to provide all involved parties to keep them updated about the evolving cultural sensitivities and to reinforce the importance of cultural respect and understanding in literary works.

Responsibility and Accountability

Judges

Judges are accountable for applying these guidelines in their review process.

Committee

The committee is responsible for ensuring all judges are trained and familiar with this policy, and that it is consistently applied.

Policy Violations

Violations of this policy will be addressed in accordance with the severity of the infraction, and may lead to removal from the review process.

Appeals Process

Right to Appeal

Entrants or their representatives have the right to appeal the disqualification decision.

Appeals Committee

An independent appeals committee should be set up to review appeals. This committee should not include any current judges, entrants, board members, or members involved in the original review or disqualification decision. The formation of the committee will be overseen by the Executive Director or their designee. The appeals committee should contain at least one cultural sensitivity reader familiar with the allegedly maligned cultural group.

Appeals Process

An entrant who wishes to appeal the RWA Contest Committee's decision must do so in writing within 5 business days of being notified that their entry was disqualified. After an appeals committee is constituted, the appeals committee will have 15 days to respond to the entrant in writing. The appeals committee's decision is final. The appeals process should be fair, transparent, and respectful.

Transparency and Documentation

All steps and decisions in the review and disqualification process should be well-documented to provide a transparent record of all decision making. This documentation may be necessary for handling appeals or for future reference.

The confidentiality of all parties involved should be respected throughout this process. Personal information and details about the review, disqualification, and appeal should not be disclosed outside the committee unless required by law.

Policy Compliance

All members involved in the review and judging process of the Golden Heart Awards and Diamond Heart Awards entries must comply with this policy. Non-compliance may lead to removal from the committee, and other consequences as deemed appropriate by the Romance Writers of America's governing body.

Review and Amendment of the Policy

This policy should be reviewed at least annually and may be amended as necessary to reflect evolving cultural norms, sensitivities, and legal requirements.

Policy for Rescinding a Golden Heart Award or Diamond Heart Award After Presentation

Policy Statement

This policy provides guidelines for the unlikely and exceptional circumstance in which a Romance Writers of America (RWA) Golden Heart Award or Diamond Heart Award must be rescinded after it has been presented. This policy aims to ensure a fair and transparent process, maintaining the integrity of the award and the dignity of all involved parties.

Scope

This policy applies to all recipients of the Golden Heart Awards, Diamond Heart Awards, the awards committee, the RWA Board, and any other parties involved in the award process.

Criteria for Rescinding an Award

An award may be considered for rescindment if:

1. The awarded work is subsequently found to contain content that is significantly objectionable, offensive, or culturally insensitive, and this was not identified during the review process.
2. The author of the awarded work is found to have acted in a manner that substantially contradicts the values of the RWA, such as by promoting hate speech, discrimination, or other forms of harmful behavior.
3. It is discovered that there was a significant error or bias in the judging process, or violation of the rules and regulations of the awards.
4. The awarded work is subsequently found to have been created using artificial intelligence (AI) tools, such as text generators, plot generators, paraphrasers, summarizers, or translators, in the preparation and submission of contest works.

Rescinding Process

Investigation

Upon receiving credible information that may warrant rescindment, an investigation should be conducted by the RWA Contest Committee and Executive Director. The same procedure for evaluating potentially objectionable material described in the Policy for Reviewing Potentially Insensitive or Objectionable Content will be followed.

Communication with the Award Recipient

If the investigation validates the concerns, the author or their representative will be notified and given an opportunity to appeal the decision. The same process for handling appeals described in the Policy for Reviewing Potentially Insensitive or Objectionable Content will be followed.

Decision Making

After thorough consideration of the investigation results and the author's response, if applicable, the appeals committee should make a final determination on whether to rescind the award. This decision should be fair, unbiased, and based on the principles and values of the RWA.

Notification of Rescindment

If the decision to rescind the award is made, the author or their representative will be notified in writing of the final outcome. The reasons for rescindment will be clearly stated.

Policy Compliance

All members involved in the Golden Heart Award and Diamond Heart Awards process must comply with this policy. Non-compliance may result in removal from the committee or other consequences as deemed appropriate by the RWA governing body.

This policy is to be used exceptionally and with great discretion, to maintain the prestige and integrity of the Golden Heart Awards and Diamond Heart Awards while upholding the values and reputation of the Romance Writers of America.