



Association of Writers
& Writing Programs

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Association of Writers & Writing Programs (AWP) Announces 2026 AWP Award Series Judges

Norfolk, VA — AWP is delighted to announce the judges for the 2026 AWP Award Series! This cycle, AWP invites book-length entries between January 1 and February 28, 2026. Judges will select one winning manuscript each in creative nonfiction, poetry, the novel, and short fiction by late summer 2026. Winning authors receive an honorarium between \$2,500 and \$5,500 and publication by one of AWP's partner presses. Read about this year's judges below.

[Kiese Laymon](#) will judge the Sue William Silverman Prize for Creative Nonfiction.

Kiese Laymon is a Black Southern writer from Jackson, Mississippi. Laymon is the Libbie Shearn Moody Professor of English and Creative Writing at Rice University. Laymon is the author of *Long Division*, which won the 2022 NAACP Image Award for fiction, and the essay collection *How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America*, named a notable book of 2021 by *The New York Times* critics. Laymon's bestselling memoir, *Heavy: An American Memoir*, won the Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Nonfiction, the Christopher Isherwood Prize for Autobiographical Prose, the Barnes & Noble Discover Award, and the Austen Riggs Erikson Prize for Excellence in Mental Health Media, and was named one of the "50 Best Memoirs of the Past 50 Years" by *The New York Times*. The audiobook, read by the author, was named the Audible 2018 Audiobook of the Year. Laymon is the recipient of a 2020–2021 Radcliffe Fellowship at Harvard. Laymon has also written *City Summer*, *Country Summer* and is at work on *Good God* and a number of other film and television projects. He is the founder of the [Catherine Coleman Literary Arts and Justice Initiative](#), a program based out of the Margaret Walker Center at Jackson State University, aimed at aiding young people in Jackson to get more comfortable reading, writing, revising, and sharing on their own terms, in their own communities. He is the cohost of [Reckon True Stories](#) with Deesha Philyaw. Kiese Laymon was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship in 2022.

[Maggie Smith](#) will judge the Donald Hall Prize for Poetry.



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Maggie Smith is the award-winning, *New York Times* bestselling author of nine books of poetry and prose, including *A Suit or a Suitcase*, *Dear Writer*, *You Could Make This Place Beautiful*, *Good Bones*, *Goldenrod*, *Keep Moving*, and *My Thoughts Have Wings*. A 2011 recipient of a Creative Writing Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, Smith has also received a Pushcart Prize and numerous grants and awards from the Academy of American Poets, the Sustainable Arts Foundation, the Ohio Arts Council, the Greater Columbus Arts Council, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. She has been widely published, appearing in *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, *The Nation*, *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, *The Best American Poetry*, and more. You can find her on social media at @MaggieSmithPoet.

Justin Torres will judge the James Alan McPherson Prize for the Novel.

Justin Torres is the author of *Blackouts*, which won the 2023 National Book Award for Fiction, as well as the California Book Award, and was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize, and the Lambda Literary Award. A 2024 Guggenheim fellow, he's also received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard, and the New York Public Library's Cullman Center. His first novel, *We the Animals*, was a national bestseller and was adapted into a feature film. He lives in Los Angeles and is an associate professor of English at UCLA.

Weike Wang will judge the Grace Paley Prize for Short Fiction.

Weike Wang is the author of *Chemistry* (Knopf, 2017), *Joan Is Okay* (Random House, 2022), and *Rental* (Riverhead, 2024). She is the recipient of a PEN/Hemingway Award, a Whiting Award, and a National Book Foundation 5 Under 35. Her work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *Harper's Magazine*, and *The Best American Short Stories* and has won an O. Henry Prize. She earned her MFA from Boston University and her other degrees from Harvard. She currently lives in New York City and teaches at the University of Pennsylvania, Columbia University, Barnard College, and Boston University.

For full submission guidelines and a complete list of prior winners and judges, visit the [AWP Award Series](#) page on AWP's website.



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About AWP

AWP is a professional association of creative writers and writing programs. AWP provides support, advocacy, resources, and community to individual writers, academic creative writing programs, and organizations. The AWP Conference & Bookfair is the annual destination for writers, teachers, students, editors, and publishers of contemporary creative writing. It includes thousands of attendees, hundreds of events and bookfair exhibitors, and four days of essential literary conversation and celebration.

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