Gulf Coast Writers Association
Executive Committee Meeting
February 17, 2026 by Zoom
Minutes

Meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m. EST by President Mary Charles.
Attending: Mary Charles, Ginger Wakem, Lori Swick, Laura Fuller, Christie Zarria, Jeanne Meeks, Claudia Geagan, Laura Schueneman
Absent: Mary Beth Leopold
Corporate Board: none

Reports from Officers:
Secretary: Minutes had been submitted via email prior to the meeting. Jeanne moved and Ginger seconded to approve the minutes as submitted. Motion passed.
Membership: Jeanne Meeks reported our roster currently stands at 152 members, including honorary and lifetime members. We have added 17 new members since the beginning of the year. We attribute our much-improved website and the more active Facebook page to this rising growth. Mary thanked both Laura Fuller and Ginger for their efforts in those arenas.
Treasurer: Mary Beth provided an abbreviated report via email prior to the meeting, showing our current bank balance of $17,498.07. She will provide a regular report when she is able.
Programs: Lori Swick reported the following speaker schedule:
This month: Carol Abrahamson, Book Award Mastery, on demystifying the book awards process.
March: GCWA member Marty Ambrose on surviving and thriving in a changing publishing world.
April: Poetry Slam — Lori will remind members at Saturday's membership meeting.
May: Anne and Robert Jacobs, president and past president of FAPA (Florida Authors and Publishers Association) and owners of Popin Edits, on industry standards.
June: Mary Charles will share tips on writing memoirs.
July: Lori hopes to organize a collaborative meeting on a topic to be decided.
Web Manager: Laura Fuller reported the following:
- Julie Moore has volunteered to coordinate snacks for monthly meetings.
- Contest information has been moved higher on the website for greater visibility.
- New member Deana Plaskon has expressed interest in serving as a group leader. Laura has asked her to compile a list of potential group types to be presented on the website for member sign-ups.
- A dispute appeared on the Stripe account involving a cancelled credit card used by a member for a contest entry. Laura filed the necessary paperwork with Stripe to resolve it; no other Stripe transactions are affected.

- Further investigation into the PayPal account revealed it remains open despite being closed, at PayPal's discretion. Christie will contact Mike Cole to help with getting the account shut down. *The following has been added for clarification on this issue, as further info became available after the EC meeting concluded:* ***PayPal/Stripe Clarification:** PayPal should remain active, as it is a valid payment option through the website and must stay open to process member payments. The earlier issue stemmed from members accidentally paying dues twice — once via automatic PayPal renewal and once through the website. Laura has added a website notice recommending that members cancel automatic PayPal payments, and Jeanne includes a reminder in monthly renewal notices to pay once only.*

Communications: No report as we are currently without a chairperson for this position. Mary is covering the press releases for publications.

Special Programs: Regarding the writing contest, Claudia G reported that we have received 35 entries to date. She also updated us on the Reading Festival, which is coming up on March 7. Jeanne Meeks has withdrawn due to a schedule conflict, so Donna Weyland has been substituted from the standby list. The local author marketplace has been moved this year to the back of the event, next to the Books-A-Million tent and across from the featured speaker's tent. Mary encouraged everyone to support our group by attending if possible.

Officer at Large: Ginger reported that she has been approached by the owners of Floral Artistry, which is a local artisan marketplace, asking for copies of "Storm Stories" to carry in their shop. After discussion, we agreed that per our current policy with other vendors who carry/sell "Storm Stories," we will provide copies to them at a flat rate of $10/book, and they may resell at whatever price they choose. Ginger added that Floral Artistry is developing a book nook in their studio and has invited members of GCWA to sell their books on consignment. She will coordinate with the studio owner and members about this.

New Business: Nominating Committee chair Jeanne Meeks presented the slate of officers for the 2026 Executive Committee and Board, as follows:

Executive Committee Officers:
President: Christie Zarria
Treasurer: Mary Beth Leopold (pending)
Secretary: Laura Schueneman
Program VP: Lori Swick
Special Projects VP: Claudia Geagan
Membership VP: Jeanne Meeks
Communications VP: Ginger Wakem (assisted by Mary Charles and Cheryl Lynn Dratler)
Web Manager: Laura Fuller
Officer at Large: Amie Raterman.
Corporate Board Members: Andrew Conlyn, Mike Cole, Claudia Volkman, and Dave Kratzke.

Mary thanked Jeanne for her efforts in putting the slate together. According to our bylaws, we will present the slate to the membership at our meeting this Saturday, February 21 and invite any other nominations to be submitted to Jeanne prior to our March membership meeting. We will vote on the slate at the March membership meeting, and the new officers will assume their positions at the beginning of April.

Christie reported that the new PA system has been purchased and will be broken in this Saturday at the membership meeting. We are hopeful that this will enhance our meetings especially for those attending by Zoom, as well as those attending in person since we now have two wireless microphones for easier audience participation.

Finally, we agreed to call a separate meeting in a couple of weeks to review suggested changes to our Constitution and Bylaws. Christie will post the current document on Google Docs for collaboration prior to this meeting, date/time to be decided on via email.

There being no further business, Jeanne moved and Laura S seconded that the meeting be adjourned. Motion passed.

Next Executive Committee Meeting: March 17, 2026

Respectfully submitted by Christie Zarria