

Society of American Archivists
Leadership Orientation and Forum
Wednesday, August 8, 2012, 10:30 am – 11:30 am
San Diego, California

Remarks of SAA Executive Director Nancy Beaumont

Good morning. May I take a quick scan of who's here?

- Who is here today representing a Council-appointed group, such as a Committee, Working Group, or Task Force?
- Who is representing a Section or Roundtable?
- Please raise your hand if you're a current leader of a component group.
- And who are our incoming leaders of component groups?

Looks like we have a good balance of current and incoming leaders and broad representation among types of component groups....

My assigned topic – “SAA’s Governance Structure and How To Make It Work for You” – is rather broad, so I’ll talk a bit about governance in general and then point you to some practical tips, all of which can be found in this small guide. [Refer to *2012 Guide for SAA Leaders* at <http://files.archivists.org/governance/leaders/SAA-LeaderManual-2012.pdf>.]

The primary purpose of governance of an organization like SAA is to ensure that the organization complies with the legal and financial obligations of its charter documents.

Beyond that: Governance should provide a framework within which knowledge-based decision-making can take place effectively.

Increasingly we expect governance to be transparent. How are decisions being made? Who is accountable for those decisions? What processes, procedures, or “rules” are being followed?

That's it. That's governance in a nutshell.

In my view governance should be a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. It should – fundamentally – provide a framework for accountability and a structure for making good decisions.

SAA now has some 60 component groups, by which I mean boards, committees, task forces, working groups, sections, and roundtables.

The benefit of having so many and such varied groups is that there is the opportunity to tap into the grassroots – the broader knowledge base that can contribute to the best possible decisions. The downside of having so many and such varied groups is that chaos can ensue....

Having in place some governance processes and procedures can help mitigate the chaos. In my opinion, simpler is almost always better when it comes to governance processes and procedures.

My best advice for how to make SAA's governance structure work for you is to begin by reading some basic and practical resources that we've put together for you. Bill Landis will address these in more depth during his talk, but I would point you to two documents to get you started:

The first is the *2012 Drupal Manual* [<http://files.archivists.org/governance/leaders/SAA-DrupalManual-2012.pdf>].

The second is this *2012 Guide for SAA Leaders* [<http://files.archivists.org/governance/leaders/SAA-LeaderManual-2012.pdf>].

Both can be found on the SAA website under About Us / Policies and Procedures / Leadership Resources [<http://www2.archivists.org/governance/leaderresources>].

In the *Guide for SAA Leaders* we have provided some very basic information that is sort of a "cheat sheet" for the larger SAA Governance Manual. Rather than being an exhaustive policy guide, this document provides an introduction to common questions that you may encounter and tips on where to find additional information and resources. Sections of the 16-page guide address your responsibilities as a component leader, important dates and deadlines, working effectively with the SAA Council, how leader rosters are

updated, group email lists, group websites and online communications, records management for component groups, and a contact list for assistance.

What are the different types of component groups? How do Council-appointed groups (like committees and working groups) differ? What's the difference between Sections and Roundtables?

What are your responsibilities as a component leader? The requirements are pretty simple:

- You must provide an annual report to the governing body of the organization – i.e., the Council – at the end of each year.
- In the case of Sections and Roundtables, you must elect leaders and, new for Roundtables per a Council action in June, you must adopt bylaws.
- And you really, really should engage your members in discussion of the topics for which your group was created.

What are the important dates of which you should be aware during the year? This guide provides a calendar of key dates.

How can you work most effectively with the Council to bring forward your ideas for consideration? We provide a schedule for getting your ideas before the Council and a very simple template for preparing action items, discussion items, and reports that is available on the website and that is intended to help you focus your discussion so that the Council can easily understand your issues. [For the Council Report Template, see <http://www2.archivists.org/governance>.]

This year we've added to the guide two items that may be of particular interest to you:

- We provide full language and explanation of a new policy, adopted by the Council in June, to allow component groups to establish an auxiliary website or start a social media account as a means of supporting your communication objectives. However, all auxiliary sites must be cross-referenced with the group's official Drupal microsite to ensure the continuity of the record through leadership changes.

- And we provide an example of effective communication by the Business Archives Section as its steering committee attempted to drum up nominations for BAS leader positions. The communication is lively and fun – and it worked!

The guide also points you to who to contact for assistance on a variety of topics.

With little time remaining, I'd like to make a plea – particularly to Section and Roundtable leaders:

Please try to do more than hold an annual meeting at which you decide on a topic for your next annual meeting or elect officers whose only task turns out to be running the next annual meeting.

Please use your discussion list and your microsite to communicate knowledge and information and to stimulate discussion among your members. Allow your governance activities to take a backseat to your reason for being – which is to connect your members throughout the year on topics of interest to them.

I worry when a Council meeting has more agenda items about governance matters than about how to make the world safer for archives and archivists – which is, after all, the reason why SAA exists.

If you have ideas for streamlining governance processes and requirements, please contact your Council liaison or me. Our goal – always – is to help you spend less time worrying about how to manage your group and more time focusing on your goals!