

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
January 23 – 26, 2014  
Chicago, Illinois**

**Petition to Develop a Code of Conduct for SAA Annual Meetings, SAA-Sponsored Events, and Online SAA Spaces**  
(Prepared by SAA Members Mark Matienzo and Rebecca Goldman)

**BACKGROUND**

Over the past several years, the Society of American Archivists has worked toward becoming a diverse and welcoming organization to archives and records professionals of varying backgrounds. In the 2013-2018 Strategic Plan, SAA states its commitment to “continue to enrich the association and the profession with greater diversity in membership and expanded leadership opportunities” (strategy 4.3). However, SAA meetings and events may be intimidating, and at times might feel unsafe. As an organization, SAA should consider ways in which it can stand with and behind its members and participants in its events and public communications forums, like email lists.

**DISCUSSION**

As archivists working at the intersection of archives and technology, we realize that this is a common problem for some of our colleagues in the tech professions. There have been a large number of troubling incidents at other conferences, and one response has been to develop anti-harassment policies or codes of conduct for those events. Some may wonder if an anti-harassment policy is necessary for SAA, but one of the positive aspects is that it sets a standard of behavior for an event, and it can provide guidance on how to handle incidents of harassment, should they occur. The [Ada Initiative](#) and the [Geek Feminism Wiki](#) have worked together to develop [resources and sample policies](#) that organizations like SAA can use to develop their own policy. Within the cultural heritage community, anti-harassment policies have been adopted by groups like the [Digital Library Federation](#), [Code4lib](#), and [US OpenGLAM](#). And just in November, ALA announced a new [Statement of Appropriate Conduct at ALA Conferences](#).

ALA’s code of conduct is instructive as an example not only of what a code for SAA might look like, but of what the response from SAA members might be. On January 2, ALA member Andromeda Yelton wrote [a post on Library Journal](#) explaining the rationale behind the code and how it benefits the organization. Some commenters are supportive of the new code, while others have concerns that the code will result in

ensorship and inhibit intellectual freedom. In our view, ALA's code does not ban speech; it provides members who find certain speech to be harassing or offensive with a mechanism for reporting it.

Although we both see a code of conduct as a necessary component of SAA's commitment to diversity, we recognize that other members may not share our viewpoint. In drafting a similar document for SAA, we must be transparent in our writing process, receptive to suggestions and concerns from all members, and mindful that our own experiences with SAA may differ from those of other members.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT the SAA Council, in cooperation with SAA staff and with input from SAA component groups and the membership at large, develop and implement a code of conduct for SAA events and websites. The code of conduct should include examples of harassing or otherwise inappropriate behavior and specify mechanisms for reporting harassment to SAA staff.**

**Support Statement:** SAA's own mission statement declares that it "promotes the value and diversity of archives and archivists." Its core organizational values include "ensuring the diversity of its membership and leaders, the profession, and the archival record" and "providing an open, inclusive, and collaborative environment." However, SAA has no policies in place to ensure that its members feel welcome, or to address harassment at its events or in its online spaces. A code of conduct would send a message to current and prospective members that SAA not only welcomes and encourages diversity, but has procedures in place to make sure all attendees feel and are welcome and safe--regardless of gender, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, or religion.

**Relation to Strategic Plan:** A code of conduct would support Goal 4 of SAA's Strategic Plan: "SAA is an agile association that delivers outstanding service and *fosters a culture of inclusiveness and participation*" [emphasis ours].

**Fiscal Impact:** A code of conduct will require SAA staff time to assist with writing the code, develop policies and procedures for enforcement, and respond to any incidents reported under the code.