

**Society of American Archivists
Council Conference Call
January 20, 2015
2:00-4:00 pm EST**

**Constitutional Amendment: Council Vacancies
(Prepared by SAA Governance Program Coordinator Felicia Owens)**

BACKGROUND

SAA's current constitution, regarding Council vacancies, states: "If a vacancy shall occur among the Councilors or in any of the offices except the presidency, it may be filled by the Council. The persons designated shall hold the position until the next annual election, at which time the position will be filled by election for the remainder of the term, if any."¹

DISCUSSION

Concerned with the process required to fill the recent Council vacancy, Bill Landis emailed Dennis Meissner, Nancy McGovern, and Nancy Beaumont to discuss amending the constitution to simplify the process. His recommendation is as follows:

From: Bill Landis [mailto:pogonippy@gmail.com]
Sent: Wednesday, October 21, 2015 8:49 PM
To: Nancy Beaumont; Dennis Meissner; Nancy McGovern
Subject: Fwd: A special request from your SAA colleagues...

Nancy, Dennis, and Nancy,

After emailing with Tim and Helen, I'm sympathetic about the tortured process that Council and SAA will have to go through to tap someone to fill in the remainder of Jamie's term. SAA staff and the remaining members of Council are the ones who bear the brunt in this type of situation, and I think our Constitution lets us down in terms of its prescription for replacing an elected Council member through the annual election process. As all of you know, in this case, at best, Council will be down one person for half a year, with everyone else on Council and the staff doing their best to absorb the impact.

In my email with Tim and Helen I noted the following:

¹ <http://www2.archivists.org/governance/handbook/section1/constitution>

Beth, Terry, and I really thought this wrinkle in the Constitution, forcing Council to stage a pseudo-election for the remainder of a term to which someone was appointed, should have been addressed when we reviewed/revised the Governance Manual a few years ago with a referendum to revise this part of the Constitution. I again think it is time to do that in order to give Council the freedom to just appoint a successor when a member of Council resigns after the first year of her/his term. If they resign during the first year, then I think you can go back to the 4th highest vote-getter in the last election when they were elected and ask that person to serve the remaining term. SAA and Council are currently forced to waste a lot of time in an unproductive process that very few members actually care about if you take the % that vote in elections each year as an indicator. Time to rip the bandaid off and fix this part of the Constitution, that's what I say. I'd be happy to volunteer to write the support brief for a referendum to fix the last two sentences of V.A.2.a in the Constitution!

I think the current situation, and the quote from Dennis in the press release about Jamie's resignation points out eloquently the bind in which the SAA Constitution puts Council. I also think this is a great time to move forward with amending the Constitution to give Council more leeway in appointing a successor for a resigned member of Council without having to then subject that person to an election. I don't want to spring this on Council at a stressful time, but I also am very serious about being disappointed that we collectively didn't have the stomach to deal with a constitutional referendum to fix the problematic process outlined in V.A.2.a in the Constitution when we were approving revisions to the Governance Manual.

Per article X of the Constitution, I assume that a first pass at doing something about this would be to use the Council report template to submit an action item to Council in advance of its meeting? If that's the case, would it be burdensome to Council if I submitted this for the November Council meeting (assuming the meeting will be in November - I can't find a meeting date in searching the SAA website)? Or would it be preferable to do this for the Spring meeting instead? I'll be happy to have your counsel about timing for this, but I would like to propose an amendment altering the language of V.A.2.a to prescribe a process that doesn't require holding an election to replace a resigning member of Council, which I think will benefit all concerned: members of the Society and Council.

Best to all of you in the process of replacing Jamie for the final year of his term,

Bill Landis

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Does the Council wish to propose an amendment to the SAA Constitution that would address a different process for filling Council vacancies?
- If so, do you wish to ask Bill Landis to draft an action item and briefing paper?

Staff Note: An online, all-member referendum would be required to finalize this amendment; this would come at a cost of \$3,895.