

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
February 16, 18, 2022  
Virtual Meeting**

**SAA Sections Structure  
(Prepared by Courtney Chartier)**

**BACKGROUND**

For many years, the SAA Council has been discussing the needs and health of Sections. Beginning with the 2019-2020 annual reports, all Sections were asked to reflect and respond to the current state of their group respond via a set of questions prepared by the SAA Council Working Group on Sections (made up of members Eric Chin, Ricardo Punzalan, and Audra Eagle Yun). The same questions were used for 2020-2021, giving Council a healthy amount of information about the health of individual sections and their opinions about potential changes.

In August 2020, the Council Working Group prepared a set of recommendations and next steps to continue assessing the health of current SAA Sections and the general framework for special interest group engagement for members. See the report at: [https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/0820-IV-D-SectionAssess\\_0.pdf](https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/0820-IV-D-SectionAssess_0.pdf).

In the SAA Governance Manual, Sections must fulfill annual requirements to remain in good standing. (Briefly: post standing rules; submit a proposal for annual meeting; conduct an online election; submit an annual report; respond to Council. The full requirements can be found In Section 9.C.2 of the manual, <https://www2.archivists.org/governance/handbook/section9>.) The manual also outlines a process by which Sections may be discontinued if they do not meet requirements.

**DISCUSSION**

SAA currently has 45 Sections, provide an important space for members to network, learn and find support, and generate projects that benefit members, the organization, and the profession. While some sections are active and healthy, others are unable to fill elections slates, complete projects, or attract members to meetings. These sections pose a risk to member experience and ultimately member retention.

Each Section requires support from a Council liaison and staff members. Support includes technology (discussion list, microsite), Annual Meeting (virtual space, physical

space, presentation technology), governance (annual elections, mid-term vacancies), financial requests, and more.

In the [2020-2021 Section Annual Reports](#), many sections wondered why the evaluation questions were being asked again, and if the Council had plans to change either the structure of sections (through topical umbrellas, for example) or reduce the number completely. Many expressed concern that eliminating/combining the section would erase their visibility as a special interest within the profession or the membership.

Example comments:

- “I think that disability need to stand on its own; by lumping the section with another one it will dilute the goals and outcomes for the section.”
- “We view our sections foci as broad and impactful. We do not see it fitting under an umbrella of affiliation with other sections.”
- “I don’t think merging is a good idea...By having these divisions I think it helps ensure that people are being heard and properly represented something that one large group couldn’t do.”
- “We do not see a pressing need to merge or affiliate; we would need to know more before being able to react in a concrete way.
- “We’d like to know more about what being part of an umbrella of affiliation would entail before making any further determinations.”

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What experiences and opportunities are necessary for fostering strong membership engagement through Sections? What critical need(s) do Sections provide?
- Should the structure of Sections be changed to? If so, how?
- Should the governance requirements (their responsibilities, the type of support benefits outlined in their governance, discontinuance thresholds) of Sections be changed? If so, how?
- How should Council address “unhealthy” Sections, should they be resolved or combined where appropriate? If so, what is the process (an evaluation process)?