

Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
February 5-6, 2024
Virtual
Committee on Public Policy: 2023 Annual Report
(Prepared by: Brad Houston)

The Committee on Public Policy (COPP) humbly submits its annual report for 2022-23, with additional information on activities in 2023-24. The Committee would like to thank SAA Council for their patience and forbearance of the tardiness of this report.

Activities

2022-2023

- With the Joint Working Group on Issues and Awareness, the Committee helped to coordinate the 2023 Archives on the Hill event in conjunction with the 2023 Annual Meeting in Washington, DC. Participants were able to meet with staffers for over 50 U.S. House and Senate members and discuss archival public policy issues of interest.
- Conducted a thorough review of the COPP communications plan with SAA Council and members. Implementation of changes is ongoing.
- Advised SAA Council on questions for and response to AOTUS Colleen Shogan confirmation hearings and statement on confirmation
- Developed a legislative tracker for reviewing items in archives and record public policy at the state, local, and national level
- Discussed potential SAA responses to Donald Trump and Joe Biden presidential/vice presidential records mishandling cases

Current Activities/Planning for 2024

- Reviewing SAA COPP work plan and guiding documents and developing subcommittees to update
- Reviewing and responding to requests for SAA endorsement, e.g. on Librarians with Palestine statement (no official recommendation, but assisting individual with putting together action item)
- Reviewing and revising Legislative Agenda and Public Policy Agenda for 2023-2025, including listening session planning and changing of revision cycle
- Continue collaborating with other SAA-internal advocacy groups (I&A session, COPA, RAAC) to identify points of convergence/potential cooperation
- Continuing COPP microsite/SAA statement revisions
- Continue monitoring local, state, and federal government developments about policies that affect archives and then bring those issues, as well as possible solutions, to the attention of SAA leadership.

Discussion

There has been a recurring thread of discussion among members of COPP regarding the role that the committee should play on a day-to-day basis in relation to the public policy positions of the Society for American Archivists, and of SAA's Council in particular. Members of COPP are selected for their knowledge of and passion for issues of public policy related to archives and records, and in a general sense our priorities are set out at the strategic (Public Policy Agenda) and tactical (Legislative Agenda) levels. At an operational level, it has been challenging to proceed with action items, given the need to tread carefully in the current political landscape.

To a large extent, the operational challenge is one of communication with Council and SAA's professional staff. For most of 2022 and 2023, COPP did not have a dedicated Council Liaison to facilitate communications to and from Council and the rest of the organization. The lack of a direct channel to/from Council has cut off our ability to effectively advise SAA on matters that are deserving of their attention.

This report is, in part, an attempt to ameliorate that particular problem, but it is not by itself sufficient. We need to re-establish routine, regular communication between the Committee on Public Policy and SAA Council/Leadership to allow us to bring items for consideration for approval by the full Council and receive direction on Council priorities in turn.

Recommendations

The Committee on Public Policy recommends:

- That the SAA Council Liaison to COPP consistently attends monthly COPP meetings and is prepared to communicate items related to public policy discussed by Council for the committee's consideration/action. [I should be clear that Conor Casey, our most recent council liaison, has been doing this; we want it to continue.]
- That the chair and vice-chair of COPP meet virtually with the SAA President and Vice President and the Executive Director of SAA on at least a quarterly basis, or as needed when there is a pressing policy issue, to confer and communicate on public policy issues that require Council feedback and/or for which Council requests additional public policy expertise.
- That Council affirm that COPP is empowered to bring important matters to Council/Exec. Comm.'s attention with the expectation that Council/Exec. Comm. will consider them and act on them as appropriate.

COPP further solicits endorsement of SAA Council of certain issue-related operations in fulfillment of the public policy and legislative and agendas, including but not limited to:

- development of guidelines for policy advocacy on archives labor issues
- development of the 2021 Judiciary Records Brief (<https://www2.archivists.org/statements/issue-brief-judiciary-records>) into a statement of policy/potential action

- development of updated statements/issue briefs on other components of the legislative agenda, including declassification and strengthening the Federal and state/local Freedom of Information laws

Support Statement

SAA's renewal of its communications strategy with the Committee on Public Policy will allow the organization as a whole to be more nimble in responding to major public policy issues affecting archivists and records managers within its membership.

Impact on Strategic Priorities

The activity of the Committee on Public Policy is directly related to Strategic Priorities

- 1.1 ("Provide leadership in promoting the value of archives and archivists to institutions, communities, and society."),
- 1.2 ("Educate and influence decision makers in any setting about the importance of archives and archivists",
- 1.3 ("Provide leadership in ensuring the completeness, diversity, and accessibility of the historical record."),
- 1.4 ("Strengthen the ability of those who manage and use archival materials to articulate the value of archives.")