

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
March 17, 2021
Virtual Meeting**

**Discussion: Council Listening Sessions
(Prepared by Executive Director Nancy Beaumont)**

BACKGROUND

In the spring of 2020 the Council began discussing the idea of presenting a series of listening sessions as a means of engaging more directly with members. At its May 2020 meeting, in the context of the pandemic, social unrest, and the transition to a virtual Annual Meeting, it had a robust discussion of specific ideas for bi-monthly listening sessions.

The Council has conducted or delegated five listening sessions/forums on a variety of topics:

- **On Friday, June 12:** The Council hosted [SAA Community Reflection on Black Lives and Archives](#), moderated by SAA President Meredith Evans and featuring speakers Zakiya Collier, Dorothy Berry, Courtney Chartier, and Erin Lawrimore, with closing remarks from SAA Vice President Rachel Vagts. Per the description of the event, “The SAA Council is convening a forum of reflection to move toward healing and understanding. We invite the archives community to participate in a reflection on the continuation of anti-Black violence and an affirmation of the importance of Black lives.” Promotion for the event noted that, “The magnitude of support and interest from the archival profession toward the development of tools and resources to dismantle structural racism in our work is inspiring and powerful. We will also be hosting a facilitated planning forum to gather constructive feedback and develop anti-racist goals in July 2020. We look forward to continuing this work with you.” [Registered: 1,187; Attended: approx. 800.]
- **On Friday, July 17:** The Council hosted [SAA Forum: Investing in Your Membership](#)—a “conversation about SAA’s financial outlook, budget, and how it all works,” led by Evans and Treasurer Amy Fitch, with support from staff and closing remarks by Vagts. [Registered: 132; Attended: 128]
- **On Friday, July 24:** At the request of the Council, the Diversity Committee facilitated [Black Lives and Archives Listening/Strategy Session](#), “to reflect on the [SAA Council Statement on Black Lives and Archives](#) and brainstorm ideas about creating change from top to bottom within the Society, with a particular emphasis on ensuring accountability to reduce harm to Black and brown people and begin repairing centuries of violence committed against Black people in our society and in our profession.” [Registered: 703; Attended: 491]
- **On Friday, August 7:** At the request of the Council, the Diversity Committee devoted its Annual Meeting forum to [Black Lives and Archives Strategy Session](#), a continuation of discussions begun at

the July 24 open forum. [Registered: 1,135; Attended: Unknown]

- On December 9, 2020: SAA Vice President Courtney Chartier hosted [SAA Forum: It's Volunteer Season, Archivists!](#), a forum on volunteering and the appointments process featuring Appointments Committee Chair Audra Eagle Yun, members of the Appointments Committee, and individuals who addressed their experience serving in SAA leadership. [Registered: 125; Attended: Unknown]

The subject of conducting listening sessions or forums has been included on three Council agendas (on the August 2020 meeting agenda, in the context of a debrief of the Council's summer 2020 forums; on the November 2020 meeting agenda, in the context of the Strategic Plan dashboard; and on the January 2021 agenda as a separate discussion item). To date, no plan exists for conducting forums or listening sessions going forward.

DISCUSSION

The listening sessions and forums conducted to date have attracted significant registration and attendance, suggesting that they are welcome and an effective communication tool.

Ideas that have come up in various settings, including the Executive Committee, weekly calls with Vagts and Chartier, and in the Strategic Plan dashboard, are:

- SAA's member dues structure.
- SAA budgets/financial outlook (a reprise and update of the 2020 session).
- A*CENSUS (to develop an understanding of what the original A*CENSUS was all about, with the potential for updating regarding A*CENSUS II).
- The executive director search.
- From Strategic Plan dashboard, Goal 4.1.: "Short 'themed' polls instead of short surveys; in alignment with listening sessions/forums/town halls, Council communications, annual meeting, etc.; polls could come out prior or during and we can talk about the results during the forum."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Would the Council like to conduct open forums or listening sessions in 2021? If so:
2. What topics do you think are most important and/or most urgent?
3. How frequently should they be conducted? Monthly? Every other month?
4. Would you volunteer to take the lead on planning and implementing a forum or listening session?