

Briefing Paper: Constitutional Amendment Regarding Institutional Member Primary Contact Eligibility to Hold Elected Office in SAA

1. Motion¹

THAT the SAA Constitution, Article III.A.4., be amended as follows:

Institutional membership shall be open to institutions or agencies responsible for or substantially interested in the custody, study, teaching, control, or use of records, archives, and/or private papers. Institutional members are eligible to receive the publications of the Society. Each institutional member may identify a primary contact person, who is eligible to vote, ~~hold office,~~ and serve on appointed groups. (Strikethrough indicates deletion.)

2. Effect of the Amendment

Primary contacts of institutional members would no longer be eligible to hold elected office in SAA (i.e., President, Vice President, Treasurer, Council, Nominating Committee) without first joining as individual full members. Individual membership may be obtained at any time, which immediately confers eligibility to be elected to office in SAA.

3. Summary Analysis

In favor of the motion: Individual membership and institutional membership are qualitatively different, and it is appropriate to tailor benefit packages to these different member categories. Primary contacts represent an institution's interest in SAA and the profession, which appropriately manifests itself in the right to vote and the eligibility to serve on appointed groups. Eligibility to hold elected office, however, should accrue to individual members and is not appropriate benefit for institutional members, including primary contact representatives.

Opposed to the motion: Eligibility to vote and to hold office are fundamental rights in representative governance and should not be decoupled. Primary contacts of institutional members have served SAA in many capacities, just as have individual members, and have had the privilege to vote, hold office, and to serve on appointed groups. Retaining the right of institutional member primary contacts to hold elected office provides equity between and among members. The rights afforded to the primary contact should be comparable or equal to those of individual full members.

4. Proposed By

SAA Council.

5. Background

In September 2007, Article III.A.4. of SAA's Constitution was amended to add the following sentence: "Each institutional member may identify a primary contact person, who is eligible to vote, hold office, and serve on appointed groups." The primary contact role was instituted for two reasons:

¹ The motion that was passed by the Council in January 2011 was as follows: "THAT the SAA Council recommend at the Society's 2011 Annual Membership Meeting a constitutional amendment that eligibility to run for elected office requires that the candidate be an individual member when slated and throughout the individual's term in office." (Motion 18) The motion for consideration at the Business Meeting has been rephrased to reflect the actual constitutional language that would result from the amendment.

- 1) to clarify who is entitled to receive and exercise benefits on behalf of an institutional member; and
- 2) to extend appropriate leadership opportunities to those individuals.

This amendment created an inconsistency in that institutional member primary contacts enjoy all of the benefits otherwise associated with full individual membership except the eligibility to be elected as SAA Fellows. In February 2008, the Council reaffirmed by a 6-4 vote “the current constitutional provision that Fellows must be individual full members of SAA, and therefore a primary contact of an institutional member is not eligible to become a Fellow unless that individual is also an individual full member who meets all other eligibility requirements.”

In February 2010, the Committee to Select SAA Fellows raised the question again. In its report, the committee expressed its discomfort with the current guidelines, observing “that primary contacts have all the other rights of full (individual) membership—including the right to be appointed to committees, to be named as official SAA representatives, and to stand for election to SAA offices—even to be elected as SAA President.”

In response, the Council charged the Membership Committee to investigate “what changes and/or constitutional amendments may be required to reconcile the apparent inconsistency identified by the Committee to Select SAA Fellows.” The Membership Committee concurred with the Committee to Select SAA Fellows that the right to hold office and the ineligibility to be nominated as an SAA Fellow constitutes an inconsistency. A majority of committee members held that eligibility to hold elected office and eligibility to be nominated as an SAA Fellow are not appropriate benefits for primary contacts. By a 6-2 majority vote, the committee recommended that the right of institutional member primary contacts to hold elected office be rescinded.

6. Analysis

Consistent with SAA’s strategic objectives as articulated in Article II of the Constitution?

The Society’s objectives include “cooperat(ing) with other professional organizations, cultural and educational institutions, and international organizations having mutual interests in the preservation and use of recorded heritage.”

- ***In favor of motion:*** Facilitating cooperation at the institutional level requires building relationships with stakeholders throughout an organization rather than focusing on the benefits of a single individual. Conversely, eligibility to hold elected office is a privilege that should accrue to individual members and not to institutions.
- ***Opposed to the motion:*** Eligibility to vote and to hold office are fundamental rights in representative governance and should not be decoupled.

Consistent with SAA’s legal and financial interests?

Institutional members currently comprise 9% of SAA’s membership and contribute 21% of total dues revenue. The fiscal impact of the proposed change in member benefits is unclear.

Benefit to the Society’s members as a whole?

Not applicable to full individual, student, or associate members. As above, the potential impact on institutional members has not been measured.

Corrects an error or omission or adds clarification to existing policies?

The adoption of the motion would resolve an apparent inconsistency identified by the Committee to Select SAA Fellows (i.e., that current policies allow primary contacts to hold office but not to be selected an SAA Fellow) and would help clarify the nature of institutional membership.