

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
May 15 – 17, 2013
Chicago, Illinois**

**Create Task Force to Study Member Affinity Groups
(Prepared by Kate Theimer and Dennis Meissner)**

BACKGROUND

During the January 2013 Council meeting, the Council briefly discussed issues regarding the composition, requirements for, expectations of, and effectiveness of section and roundtable component groups as they currently exist. To some extent, this issue surfaced in response to the ongoing deliberations of the Metadata and Digital Objects Roundtable, which is weighing the possibility of applying to become an SAA Section. We were requested to consider how the Council might go about studying the status quo, considering other options, and reporting back to the Council in May with a recommendation for how to best approach such a study.

DISCUSSION

We see a need for two kinds of study or exploration regarding this topic. We see one set of issues that relate to a more traditional policy perspective, but we also think there is a need for a more creative and exploratory aspect as well.

From the policy perspective, we think it is time for SAA to consider (or re-consider) some of the rules that govern groups like sections and roundtables. There is a wide variety of levels of activity among these groups, with some being very active in providing value for members while others appear to do little more than meet the minimal criteria and probably provide little value for members. At a time when there is more demand than ever for SAA resources, including both staff time and attention from Council members, it seems responsible to examine whether our current system is providing the most value for members. We think a group should consider questions such as: Should there be a higher threshold for groups continuing to get support from SAA? Should groups below a certain activity threshold be allowed to continue but get less support? Does the current distinction between sections and roundtables make sense anymore? If not, what would make more sense—a single category of group or multiple kinds or tiers?

In addition to these kinds of rules and policy questions, we think it's also important for a group to think about how SAA can most effectively allow members to organize into groups to carry out the kinds of work they want to do. In other words, how can we

encourage more flowers to bloom? Can we encourage groups to do more, perhaps based on models of success from more active sections and roundtables? Should there be looser structures allowing more informal groups to get together around topics? How could we pilot that? (We don't even know if that's really wanted, but it might be.) What could help groups to succeed better than they do now? More resources? Different kinds of support?

We believe it is important to explore these issues in the near term, and so we recommend the formation of a task force charged with delivering recommendations about both possible policy changes and with proposals about how SAA could do a better job supporting the needs of members who want to organize into groups around common interests. Ideally the task force should be composed of some members with previous experience leading active sections or roundtables, as well as perhaps some members who might bring some knowledge or ideas about how new technologies can help members communicate amongst themselves.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the SAA Council appoint a Task Force on Member Affinity Groups with the following purpose and description:

Task Force on Member Affinity Groups

I. Purpose

The Task Force on Member Affinity Groups is charged with examining the current level of activity among SAA's sections and roundtables as well as the policies that currently govern them and the level of resources needed to support them. The task force should consider whether the current organization of member affinity groups into sections and roundtables is still effective and whether a different structure, such as having only one type of group or adding more types of groups, would better serve SAA's members. The group is also charged with identifying what kinds of support and resources are needed to allow these groups to work most effectively.

II. Task Force Selection, Size, and Length of Term

Following an open call for participation, the SAA Vice President/President-Elect shall appoint five members of varying lengths of membership in SAA, including some members with past leadership experience with active sections or roundtables. One of those members shall serve as the chair. All appointments are effective from July 1, 2013, through September 1, 2014.

III. Reporting Procedures

The task force will provide regular updates prior to each Council meeting. A preliminary report and recommendations should be delivered to the Council by its Spring 2014 meeting, and a final report and recommendations should be delivered by the August 2014 Council meeting.

IV. Duties and Responsibilities

The task force will deliver to the Council a final report with recommendations as to whether or not SAA's policies regarding the structure and support of member groups such as sections and roundtables should be modified in order to make more effective use of SAA's resources and best

meet member needs. The group should evaluate whether the current requirements for section and roundtable activity are effective, and if they are not, recommend new requirements. The task force should also evaluate what kinds of resources and administrative structures are best suited for encouraging member participation in SAA-sponsored affinity groups.

In addition to other research and activities the task force deems necessary to meet its charge, the task force shall:

Examine data about the current level of activity across sections and roundtables, such as:

- In-person attendance at annual meeting meetings;
- Number of messages posted on SAA-provided lists;
- Current membership levels (and historical levels, if possible);
- Other activities, publications, programs; and
- Problems getting groups to turn in required information to SAA office.

Consider general issues such as:

- Threats and opportunities associated with disrupting the status quo;
- Estimated cost to SAA of supporting a section/RT;
- Estimated administrative time required of Council members for liaison responsibilities;
- Results from any surveys sections/RTs have conducted of their memberships; and
- Interviews with leaders of successful RTs and not so successful ones.

V. Meetings

The task force will accomplish its work primarily via email, conference call, Skype, Google+ hangout, and perhaps an in-person meeting at the 2013 Annual Meeting.

Support Statement: The time seems ripe to perform a serious study of this large and growing issue. We believe this is an issue that should not be deferred because: 1) There seems to be member interest in forming new roundtables, 2) at least one roundtable is contemplating petitioning to change its status to a section, 3) the need for considering this issue has consistently come up in Council discussions, and 4) the need to be more responsive to member needs and creative in the ways we support them fits squarely into emerging strategic goals 4.3 and 4.4.

Fiscal Impact: The task force may require some research assistance from SAA staff, and SAA may need to fund multiple conference calls or web meetings, though most likely no in-person meetings (outside of at SAA2013) will be required.