

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
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Communications Task Force Update and Discussion Questions
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This is the second interim report by the Communications Task Force (CTF) to inform the SAA Council on the progress and actions of the CTF. The Task Force invites the Council's comment and requests that the Council note any directions or changes to be made before the final report that will be submitted in July 2013 for the August 2013 Council meeting. The term of the Communications Task Force ends on August 16, 2013.

BACKGROUND

The Communications Task Force was established in August 2012 with a mandate to advise the SAA Council "on practical ways to enhance SAA's communications with a focus on three areas: intended audiences, content/messages, and tools/channels." To address this charge, the CTF conducted a survey of SAA's communication channels, held a discussion with staff, reviewed Google Analytics provided by staff on SAA communications, and completed a detailed review and analysis of the 2012 member survey, in addition to research and review of literature on effective organizational communication. A mini-environmental scan of five organizations was done for the January 2013 Council report and the results of those scans, in conjunction with the other research done by the Communications Task Force, were used as the basis for preliminary recommendations.

An update and request for comments from the CTF was shared via the Council list in October 2012 and January 2013. Those comments indicated that the Communications Task Force should continue with its work as outlined in the updates. The purpose of this report is to provide a third and final update before the Task Force's final report in August, to update Council members on the Task Force's progress, and to request Council members' feedback. At this point, the CTF believes that their work is on track to meet the Council's expectations for the final report and recommendations and would like feedback to confirm this.

DISCUSSION

Since the January 2013 Council meeting, the Communications Task Force has moved ahead with the goal of seeking SAA membership feedback. Achieving this goal led the Task Force to focus recent attention on the development, writing, and revision of preliminary recommendations based on the CTF charge.

On April 9, 2013, the CTF announced nine preliminary recommendations for SAA membership review and a survey related to those recommendations. These were the recommendations that the Task Force agreed were ready for comment and would elicit the most helpful comments from the membership. At present, the CTF has fourteen additional recommendations in progress (labeled with letters A-N below). These recommendations are included in preliminary form in this report. The recommendations that were not included for public comment either needed additional research and refining by the Communications Task Force and/or are items that need the Council's consideration before being put before the membership.

An introductory blog post discussing the preliminary recommendations was posted to *Off the Record* by CTF member and SAA Council Liaison Beth Kaplan. The preliminary recommendations were posted to the Communication Task Force's microsite. In keeping with the CTF's mission and charge, the posts were broadcast on the SAA main website, *Off the Record* blog, Facebook, Twitter, and *In the Loop*.

As of April 22, 2013, 75 SAA members have responded to the survey. There was one "like" to the Facebook page, 14 comments on the CTF microsite where the preliminary recommendations are located, two emails to a specially created email address (ctf@archivists.org), two comments on the *Off the Record* blog post, and three participants on Twitter. See Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 for compiled responses.

Of the 75 respondents to the survey, 25% (19 of 75) added additional comments at the end of the survey.

Considering that SAA members have been asked to participate in three surveys and one election in the past month, the CTF is very pleased about the SAA membership's response to our preliminary recommendations. The preliminary recommendations are open for comments until May 4.

Preliminary Recommendations

Recommendations Posted for Public Comment

- **Recommendation 1: Enhance *Archival Outlook***

Archival Outlook provides an opportunity for members to participate in the organization through brief, commissioned articles and profiles. We suggest two low-cost improvements: Transition AO to an electronic publication with an annual "opt in" option to receive a print copy (at no extra charge) and reformat the existing electronic AO so that readers can link to and cite individual articles.

- **Recommendation 2: Sharpen *In the Loop***

ITL provides timely information but it has suffered from scope-creep over the last year or so. We suggest that SAA focus on brevity and clarity in ITL, employ use of "view more" and "view less" to ensure a concise visual flow, consider a less conversational writing style, and dispense with the Miscellaneous section. One option would be to move some of the content

in ITL to the SAA website or blog (see below), and use ITL to provide links to the fuller content.

- **Recommendation 3: The SAA website: tweak now, overhaul soon**
The SAA website is due for a major overhaul. We see this as a very high priority, one that is supported by data from the [2012 Member Survey](#)¹ and ample anecdotal information. We strongly advise that the Council allocate the resources necessary to undertake this thorough revision- even if it comes at the expense of other programs. Just as importantly, the Council needs to identify and allocate ongoing resources (not one-time funds) to expand SAA's technological capacity over time. In the short-term, members would be well-served if SAA could solve the dual log-in problem on the website and reorganize content for basic usability, such as increasing visibility of the Search box and links to social media, and moving most frequently used content toward the top of the homepage.
- **Recommendation 4: Consider an official SAA blog**
We would like to see SAA launch an official blog to complement, but not replace, the existing unofficial *Off the Record* SAA leadership blog. A "News" link on the homepage could link to the blog, which would corral the content currently on the homepage, freeing up real estate on the homepage to showcase important information about the organization and resources for members and potential members. An SAA blog would provide more functionality than the current homepage, affording members the ability to customize the ways in which they receive information from SAA -- a significant need, according to the [2012 Member Survey](#).
- **Recommendation 5: Emphasize aggregation of relevant content**
Any tool that makes it easier for members to use all of the rich content produced by SAA and its component groups would be a hit. We would like to see an aggregator built into the SAA home page (or blog) to pull together, highlight, and contextualize social media accounts used by the organization and its component groups. This could be as simple as a list, or something more sophisticated (see, for example, the *New York Times*' [Twitter feed](#)² and [blog aggregators](#).³ Other aggregators could be used for Twitter, RSS feeds, and for new and/or less-widespread communication channels.
- **Recommendation 6: Use social media to build on the success of *Off the Record***
SAA members have made it abundantly clear that they want to get to know their elected leaders better and to engage with them more directly. At less than a year old, [OTR](#)⁴ has provided a much needed space for this conversation. This is a first step and it raises the bar for future elected leaders. Twitter provides another effective means for elected leaders to listen to and participate in timely discussion of SAA issues, as exemplified by Jackie Dooley's and other elected leaders' active presence on Twitter.
- **Recommendation 7: Make more extensive use of blogs for the SAA conference**

¹ <http://files.archivists.org/membership/surveys/saaMemberSurvey-2012r2.pdf>

² <http://www.nytimes.com/twitter>

³ http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/blogs/directory.html?_r=0

⁴ <http://offtherecord.archivists.org/>

By all accounts, the San Diego Host Committee's blog was a great success and provided an excellent model for future Host Committees to adopt. Why not make a blog a requirement for all future Host Committees? (Staff note: This is now a requirement, per a December 2012 revision to the Host Committee's charge. See IV.C. at http://saa.archivists.org/4DCGI/committees/SAAC-HOST.html?Action=Show_Comm_Detail&CommCode=SAA**C-HOST.) We'd also love to see a Program Committee blog populated by attendees' session reviews and comments. The Midwest Archives Conference provides a very well-received [model](#)⁵ that SAA could adopt.

- **Recommendation 8: SAA's Twitter use - more than a broadcast channel**
Building on the recommendation of the 2011 [Communications Technology Working Group](#),⁶ we recommend that SAA continue to expand its Twitter use to a more interactive model, as well as using it for promotion and to broadcast announcements. We've noticed that SAA staff members have started to use signed tweets to respond to comments and questions posed by the membership on Twitter. This is an effective and not too labor-intensive way to respond to a growing Twitter community. The goal is to make SAA's Twitter feed more of a two-way communication channel while preserving its current functionality.
- **Recommendation 9: LinkedIn, carry on without expending resources; Flickr and Facebook, low-cost reevaluation.**
We believe that SAA's LinkedIn presence works as designed. No changes are recommended at present. This should be revisited in 6 months or as the LinkedIn portal changes. Facebook and Flickr are two communication channels that SAA has not fully embraced. SAA should evaluate whether these communication channels are an asset to SAA, and if so, how best to maximize their use. One suggestion is to use Facebook to enhance the Host Committee and (anticipated) Program Committee blogs and to use it as a social networking tool for SAA conferences and other conferences that SAA members attend.

Areas That Might Give Rise to Additional Recommendations:

SAA's communications, like those of many organizations, are spread over numerous channels. While each of these has an audience, it is the job of SAA to determine whether the communication channel is providing optimal service to the organization. SAA should carefully consider whether a communication channel is effective, and be willing to reexamine and possibly end use of any communication channel that does not meet current needs.

The CTF is researching additional areas:

A. *The American Archivist*: Add a Layer of Social Media

While not all SAA members are social media-savvy or interested, many new archivists are frequent users of Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, and other interactive communication channels. *The American Archivist* is one of SAA's strongest assets. The CTF believes that adding a layer of social media may encourage new SAA members who might not already read AA to do so.

⁵ <http://2011mac.wordpress.com/>

⁶ <http://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/0112-V-P-CTWG.pdf>

Author talks through Twitter, Reddit, or another web service that would connect readers with the authors outside of the Annual Meeting could be a short-term, relatively low-cost option.

B. Member Publications: Greater Encouragement of and Resources for New Authors

Another area of additional research is related to the encouragement of new archivists to publish across all SAA publications. While this is not directly part of the CTF's mandate, it does address the goal of getting more SAA members involved in communications as well as making more communications interactive.

C. Archival Outlook: Beyond Opt-in

Preliminary Recommendation 1 focuses on the opt-in digital option for AO. With a more robust digital AO, it might be possible to consider adding additional technological tools to AO. This is an area that the CTF will continue investigating and report on for the August Council meeting.

D. In the Loop: Additional Research

Preliminary Recommendation 2, addressing *In the Loop*, is only one of a number of ideas that the CTF has for this channel. The final recommendation will reflect SAA member comments as well as CTF member experience and research on ITL and other email blast services. If SAA adopts the preliminary recommendation for ITL, a solution should address the "wall of text" problem that many users have mentioned. In addition to the recommendations posted on the CTF microsite, SAA might want to consider a new hierarchy for ITL that involves rotating the various topics to the top of ITL and an "ITL top news" above or just below the deadline items. More discussion is needed to determine the best option for improving ITL in the long term and whether this will complement a greater blog presence for SAA.

E. Blogs

Areas under consideration for additional recommendations include standardization of blog updates, development of an official SAA blog (this is linked to further work on ITL), increased presence of Section and Roundtable leaders in the blogs, and more specific ideas for the Host and Program Committee blogs that are included in Preliminary Recommendation 7.

F. SAA Global Newsfeed, News Items, Press Releases, Position Statements and Resolutions

The CTF will be examining the role that these communication channels play for SAA. Questions to be answered include: What purpose does the newsfeed serve? How does it differ from ITL, SAA main website page, etc.? The CTF is currently focused on ensuring that the content on these pages is up-to-date and easily accessible to the membership.

G. Facebook

The CTF is continuing to research whether SAA needs to reevaluate its Facebook presence and determine whether the Facebook page serves a distinct function from other communication channels. It will be up to SAA to decide what, if any, change should be made to how content is sent to the Facebook page and what role it has for the organization.

H. Twitter

The CTF has additional ideas for how to improve and expand the use of Twitter, including something that the CTF is currently calling a "Designated Tweeter" program. This would be for all SAA panels and sessions at the SAA Annual Meeting. Designated Tweeters do not displace

the role that Twitter has played so far for SAA; it would be in addition to those who tweet on a regular basis. Details and additional explanation will be provided in the final report.

I. RSS Feeds

Another area of further development is the RSS feed feature for SAA, particularly the need to increase member awareness of currently available RSS feeds and how members can benefit from using them.

J. SAA Listservs and Sections/Roundtables

The CTF intends to focus some of the work of the next three months on how to improve the experience of SAA members who rely on the listservs, Sections, and Roundtables. The goals will be similar to those for the SAA website, including streamlining the login experience and ending the “Out of Office” email barrage. The Task Force is also interested in putting forth for consideration the creation of a “best practices in social media” document for Sections and Roundtables.

Next steps for the CTF:

- Continue and systematize the analysis of the completed environmental scans, looking at both cautions from their experiences and new ideas that SAA might benefit from to add to the final CTF recommendations.
- Complete analysis of the SAA communication channels survey conducted by the CTF.
- Consider and make a recommendation for the future status of the Communications Task Force.
- Begin work to set up the ability for SAA to consider systematically assessing the effectiveness of communication channels in use in the future.
- The Council’s comments in response to our preliminary recommendations and additional areas of research, as well as the SAA member feedback we receive by May 4, 2013, will provide additional and essential guides for the Task Force’s final recommendations and report.

CTF Comments Summary Data

Total narrative responses as of 4/24/13: 37

Total comments from Twitter (general supportive): 3

Total comments from Microsite: 15

Total comments from Off the Record: 3

Total comments from ctf@archivists.org email: 2

Total comments from Survey: 19

Positive Mentions of Specific Recommendations

1. Enhance Archival Outlook : 11 mentions
2. Sharpen In The Loop: 7 mentions
3. SAA Website: Tweak Now, Overhaul Soon: 17 mentions
4. SAA Blog: 7 mentions
5. Aggregation: 7 mentions
6. Social Media and Elected Leaders: 1 mentions
7. Blogs for SAA Conference: 3 mentions
8. SAA Twitter: 2 mention
9. LinkedIn, Flickr, Facebook: 3 mentions

Neutral or Negative Mentions of Specific Recommendations

1. Enhance Archival Outlook: 2 mentions
2. Sharpen In The Loop: 1 mention
3. Social Media and Elected Leaders: 1 mention
4. SAA Twitter: 2 mentions
5. SAA Blog: 1 mention
6. All other recommendations: no mentions

Other/Unique Suggestions from Comments

- "...If SAA is going to expand its use of social media, please make sure that vital information is also pushed out through non-social media-based modes of communication, such as In the Loop or the section/round table listservs."
- "Although Off the Record has filled a leadership conversation void, I think that the focus should be on continuing to build up the blog before branching out. Perhaps having more frequent posts by more leaders is the way to go. Especially since not everyone is on Twitter."
- "You can't update all of these sites with everything all the time, so you end up siloing information and people miss things. The solution, one that my organization and many others have found, is to CHOOSE ONE and master it. Maybe two, if you have a lot of demand. Drop the Flickr and YouTube accounts and post photos and videos to Facebook. Make the front page of the website into a blog with headlines and teaser text, and add the option that people can subscribe to that feed with RSS. Use "If This Then That" (IFTTT.com) so that whenever something new gets posted to the blog and therefore the RSS, it updates the Facebook page."

- “As SAA evaluates current or new communication channels, it should ask: is this reaching members where they want to be reached and in the most direct and frictionless way possible?”
- “IMHO, to be properly responsible to the SAA membership, the Council must consider the importance that members assign to having some exclusive benefits. To me, that’s the chief issue in looking at possibly making the three most recent issues to AO freely available beyond the membership.”
- “Roundtables make far better use of social media tools than the organization as a whole. There should probably be some coordination efforts so as to not create competing interests and repetitive content.”
- “There are TOO MANY ways that SAA "tries" and fails to communicate. American Archivist is the only place where SAA truly succeeds at meeting its publication goals - it is a top-rate journal. As for social networking, pick ONE and master that one before trying to add any other - stop Flickr and use Facebook, which has great photo hosting now.”
- “I’d like to see SAA pick a focus, a place where I can one-stop it.”
- “Concentrate communication in a few areas. Do not spread too thin. Do not use social media.”

Initial Impressions

As expected, the recommendations for enhancing Archival Outlook via online publication and for redesign of the SAA website were by far the two most mentioned recommendations in the narrative comments, a trend which is echoed in the quantitative survey results thus far. The emphasis in most of the comments about the website was the difficulty of finding key documents on the site and/or the difficulty engendered by the dual sign in, suggesting that our thoughts on these areas are on target. In The Loop, Official SAA Blog, and content aggregation all received a moderate number of mentions, suggesting that attention could be profitably focused on these areas as well. Surprisingly, only 2 mentions, supportive or otherwise, were made regarding our Twitter recommendation, which may suggest that Twitter is in less general use by members of the Archival profession than originally anticipated. This result may also, however, be a result of selection bias by those archivists who chose to answer the survey or comment on the microsite.

What is also striking in the initial review of the narrative responses is the number of responses suggesting *less* action on SAA’s communication tools. At least three comments suggested that SAA should pick one platform and become extremely adept in using it, rather than attempting to become fluent in a number of platforms. Of these comments, one suggested that a main account could link to other accounts via a content aggregator such as IFTTT, which would allow content dissemination to focus on that one account; however, this type of communication was specifically complained about in a number of other comments (and at the CTWG open forum in 2011). Several comments reminded the task force that not all archivists are on social media and that SAA should not lose sight of the traditional communications channels, such as listservs. One comment was even blunter, directly instructing: “Do not use social media”. Again, these comments do not necessarily tell us anything about the feelings of the membership at large due to selection bias. On the other hand, the “plugged in” nature of the members of this Task Force may be giving us confirmation bias in the other direction. This issue deserves more consideration.

Source	Date	Recommendations	Recommendations	Other Comments
		Mentioned Positively	Mentioned Neutral / Negatively	
Microsite	4/15/2013	4,5		
Microsite	4/14/2013	1,3		Just a general statement/request about social media: If SAA is going to expand its use of social media, please make sure that vital information is also pushed out through non-social media-based modes of communication, such as In the Loop or the section/round table listservs. There are some of us who don't wish to sign up for every platform under the sun, or we may wish to maintain a separation between our professional and private lives. Of course, this will shut us out of some discussions. This is a given and to be expected.
Microsite	4/13/2013	2,3,4	6	Although Off the Record has filled a leadership conversation void, I think that the focus should be on continuing to build up the blog before branching out. Perhaps having more frequent posts by more leaders is the way to go. Especially since not everyone is on Twitter.
Microsite	4/12/2013	2		You can't update all of these sites with everything all the time, so you end up siloing information and people miss things. The solution, one that my organization and many others have found, is to CHOOSE ONE and master it. Maybe two, if you have a lot of demand. Drop the Flickr and YouTube accounts and post photos and videos to Facebook. Make the front page of the website into a blog with headlines and teaser text, and add the option that people can subscribe to that feed with RSS. Use "If This Then That" (IFTTT.com) so that whenever something new gets posted to the blog and therefore the RSS, it updates the Facebook page. Build from there.
Microsite	4/11/2013	7	8	Wait, SAA has a Facebook page? Obviously needs to be publicized/used more!
Microsite	4/11/2013	1,2,3,4		All communications from SAA should put a premium on readability. ... As SAA evaluates current or new communication channels, it should ask: is this reaching members where they want to be reached and in the most direct and frictionless way possible?
Microsite	4/10/2013	1,5	2	
Microsite	4/9/2013	3,7		Finding a way to make certain of the content, such as the standards portal, easier to find, would also be good. I often have to do a keyword search and hope for the best when I'm looking for something specific on the website, often a resource I want to share with other people.
Microsite	4/9/2013			
Microsite	4/9/2013	8		I *love* the idea of having to opt in to Archival Outlook. In fact, I think it would benefit from being an online publication only -- one that can readily incorporate links and multimedia, as opposed to simply being a PDF of a publication specifically designed for print. Even if the articles are broken into individual PDFs to allow linking to specific articles, you still aren't fully utilizing the online publishing format. You're doing the digital equivalent of the early printed books that were created to look like manuscripts. If the focus for AO shifts from being a print publication to being an online publication, you open up a host of new opportunities for how you distribute information.
OTR	4/8/2013	4,5		
OTR	4/9/2013	1		"reformat the existing electronic AO so that readers can link to and cite individual articles." Would that mean that people would be able to share the information with people who are not SAA members? (This would be a change from the current model in which the content of the three most recent issues are available to members only.) If so, I'm certainly in favor of it. SAA should not be hiding its good work, and that of its members, under an electronic bushel.
OTR	4/11/2013		1	IMHO, to be properly responsible to the SAA membership, the Council must consider the importance that members assign to having some exclusive benefits. To me, that's the chief issue in looking at possibly making the three most recent issues to AO freely available beyond the membership.
Survey	4/15/2013		1	I really like the newsletter. I read the online version and then again in the print edition. I feel that there is just so much information in it. It is my favorite SAA publication by far.

Survey	4/13/2013			Roundtables make far better use of social media tools than the organization as a whole. There should probably be some coordination efforts so as to not create competing interests and repetitive content.
Survey	4/12/2013	1,2,3		There are TOO MANY ways that SAA "tries" and fails to communicate. American Archivist is the only place where SAA truly succeeds at meeting its publication goals - it is a top-rate journal. I agree with the suggestion that Archival Outlook could be an online-only publication or blog, and that In The Loop should be tightened up. As for social networking, pick ONE and master that one before trying to add any other - stop Flickr and use Facebook, which has great photo hosting now. The SAA website is an appalling mess, and I didn't even know about the roundtable/section subsites.
Survey	4/9/2013			The process of updating my address to receive publications in the mail is HORRIBLE!!!! I have submitted a request 3 times to update my address and it has not been done. I can't justify renewing my membership if SAA can't handle simple record-keeping procedures.
Survey	4/9/2013	5		With Google Reader shutting down in July, the (very welcome) development of news feeds (RSS or ATOM) should be sure to consider new trends in the consumption of RSS feeds.
Survey	4/9/2013	9		I don't think SAA uses its Facebook presence as effectively as other organizations & professional associations. I appreciate seeing educational offerings posted and the occasional article of interest, but I think SAA could do more with its news feed and getting its page onto members' (and other interested individuals' and organizations') news feeds.
Survey	4/9/2013	3		The need to log into the SAA website is prohibitive. I ranked the SAA website a "5" because of this - lots of potential, but this feature should be re-examined.
Survey	4/9/2013	3		I really dislike the extranet / intranet and especially the fact that there are places for me to log into both. Very frustrating and waste of time!
Survey	4/9/2013	3		At the present time, the SAA website is the main central source for SAA information (as are many organization websites). It's improved a bit, but the SAA website still needs a lot of work and better organization.
Survey	4/9/2013	3,4,9		Completely agree that the SAA website needs major overhaul, that SAA would benefit from a strong Facebook presence, and that blogs from the President, Exec Director, and Council would promote two-way communication between leaders and members. That's where I would place my emphasis.
Survey	4/8/2013	3		I agree the website needs much work. I think it still needs to be the central location but a blog and links to SM can be featured there.
Survey	4/8/2013			SAA's current practice severely limits the amount of information made available to those who do not provide SAA with an e-mail address (because of SAA's past history of misusing this information). Please ensure that essential information (elections, governance, issues to be voted on) is made available to members through off-line channels as well as on the website