

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
May 28 - 30, 2015  
Chicago, Illinois**

**Archives and Archivists (A&A) Discussion List  
(Prepared by Council Members Geof Huth and Lisa Mangiafico  
and A&A List Coordinator Melanie Mueller)**

**BACKGROUND**

In June 2014, in response to dissatisfaction from many SAA members and other list participants regarding conduct on the A&A list, the SAA Council appointed a short-term working group that brought forward a [discussion item for the August 11-12, 2014 Council meeting](#). This item included the results and analysis of a survey conducted in July 2014, and proposed revised Terms of Participation in reaction to the survey results. (Please review the results of the survey with the May 2015 agenda item.) After robust discussion (see [Minutes August 11-12, 2014 Council Meeting](#), pages 12-18), the Council determined the following:

1. SAA would continue to host the listserv;
2. SAA would retain the A&A Listserv as a general archives forum not restricted to SAA members;
3. List behavior would be guided by the SAA Code of Conduct and strengthened Terms of Participation approved by the Council at that meeting;
4. The outcome of these changes would be reviewed and evaluated by the Council at its May 2015 meeting, in order to determine the continuing value of the list to the Society.

The changes were in the Terms of Participation were implemented in August and early September 2014. Implementation led to a rather rocky September; that month ended with the list in full administrative moderation by Executive Director Nancy Beaumont for several days after a thread was discontinued due to its continued violations of the Terms of Participation. Throughout September and into early October, the Executive Committee, Geof, Lisa, and particularly Melanie were responding to numerous emails critical of the changes in Terms of Participation, or, in compliance of the Terms of Participation by not voicing them on the list, communications from participants citing examples of violations of the new Terms. Beginning in mid-October, there was less back-channel traffic on this topic and the list itself settled into what appeared to be a “new normal.”

## DISCUSSION

### List Climate and Professional Engagement

Since mid-October, the postings have been mostly confined to announcements (jobs, conferences, etc.), news postings (mainly from Peter Kurilecz, reduced in number from mid-2014 levels but still a large proportion of the postings), and request for practical information/assistance. Melanie noted in a May 8 conversation with the Council monitors, “For a while, the list seemed to fall silent but I really think things are turning around. The last month or two seems to have more interaction than before.”

In spite of the recent uptick in list interaction, engagement is an issue. This is in spite of changing the Terms of Participation to address areas that were cited as highly important to respondents:

- In “What changes, if any, would you suggest for the structure and/or management of the A&A List? Of the 600 individuals who responded to this question,
  - “Move to closer moderation of the list” ranked highest with approximately 188 respondents; SAA’s list coordinator is now charged with a closer monitoring of the site and being the point of contact for initial citations by list participants of Terms of Participation violations.
  - “No change” ranked second with approximately 142 responses.
  - “Curb negative behavior of participants” was third, with approximately 110 respondents.
- To the query “Please share any other comments you have about the A&A list or professional communication forums in general,” there were 519 respondents:
  - “Behavior of participants has a negative impact” ranked as the top response and had approximately 162 respondents.
  - “No change” was ranked second and had approximately 78 respondents.

### Technology Upgrades

The current technological platform (Lyris) contributes some barriers to effective participant engagement. A software solution has recently emerged as a primary contender to possibly replace Lyris (please review Agenda Item VII.E.6.-Technology). This solution would affect not only the A&A listserv, but other listservs as well, and has additional features the Society may find useful. This new solution has the ability to interface with the current membership database system, and would work with a new system when deployed.

Unanswerable at this time is whether a technological change to some other platform would increase engagement. While a new solution might mitigate some barriers, it is unknown how this will translate into actual list engagement.

## List Value

The main question at hand is the value of the list to the profession and to SAA. In last summer's survey, the following questions gauged this value within the profession:

- Question 9: "How important is it to you that there be a forum like the A&A list that serves the broader archives community?"
  - 71.24% said it was very important; 26.14% said it was somewhat important; 2.61% said it was not important.
- Question 10: "If you answered anything other than "Not important" for the last questions, how important is it to you that SAA host the forum serving the broader archives community (including non-members)?"
  - 38.98% responded it was very important; 37.77% responded it was somewhat important; 23.26% responded it was not important.

These responses show that survey respondents overwhelmingly defined the list as an important asset in the broader archives community, and a large majority defined SAA's involvement with the list as important.

For the Society the question becomes: Is the A&A List important enough to SAA to consume current SAA resources and additional resources in the future?

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The recommendation of the A&A Council monitors and A&A coordinator is for the Society to continue hosting the list.

- If the Council agrees with this recommendation, then this is the recommended plan:
  - In response to feedback to the A&A List Coordinator, update the Terms of Participation to eliminate ambiguity (remove terms such as "should not" and "discourage"), and to help list participants evaluate content. A draft update of the Terms is attached (Appendix A).
    - Prepare the communication plan for feedback and implementation
    - Post the updated Terms of Participation for feedback.
  - The Council asks staff to provide a feasibility study for a platform upgrade within 6 months, and a communication plan to accompany any upgrade; feasibility study to be presented at the August 2015 Council meeting. Focus of the study should present a solution for the A&A list, and by extension the various other listservs as the priority, with implementation of additional features in any solution package as future work.
- If the Council disagrees with the recommendation, then how does the Council want to divest itself of responsibility for hosting and coordinating the A&A list?
  - To whom, where, and when?
  - Communication plan for doing so?

## **SUPPORT STATEMENT**

Respondents to the 2014 survey find the A&A list an important professional asset and believe SAA should have involvement with this asset. The list climate has been evolving and the list at this point does not display behavior which reflects poorly on the organization, while levels of engagement in queries/response appears to be increasing.

## **IMPACT ON STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

This recommendation substantially serves SAA's Goal 4 statement: Meeting Members' Needs: SAA is an agile association that delivers outstanding service and fosters a culture of inclusiveness and participation. Particularly, the recommendation enhances Goal 4.1. Facilitate effective communication with and among members; and Goal 4.2. Create opportunities for members to participate fully in the organization.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

- Current resources include the A&A Coordinator's salary, as well as staff time and volunteer time to deal with any emerging issue, including technology breakdowns or violations of the Terms that rise to administrative levels.
- Future resources would include the current resources plus a portion of the implementation costs for any technology upgrade.

## Appendix A.

### Proposed Archives & Archivists (A&A) List Terms of Participation

#### **Instructions for the Archives & Archivists List**

Please read the *Terms of Participation* below before subscribing to A&A. By subscribing, you agree to these terms.

**To post to A&A (active subscription required), address your email message(s) to:**  
[archives@forums.archivists.org](mailto:archives@forums.archivists.org)

**To read A&A online, visit:** <http://forums.archivists.org/read/?forum=archives>

#### **To subscribe to A&A:**

Visit <http://www.archivists.org/listservs/change.asp>, and log in via your SAA profile. If you do not have a profile or if you are not sure, click on the link to "Find/Create an SAA Profile."

#### **To unsubscribe or to modify your subscription settings (set digest, etc.):**

Log in at <http://www.archivists.org/listservs/change.asp>

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#### **Background and Mission**

The Archives and Archivists (A&A) List was established in 1989 by Donna Harlan and John Harlan as an open forum for all topics relating to archival theory and practice. Over the years, A&A has had various homes. In late 1993, the list was migrated to Miami University. In 1998, the Society of American Archivists (SAA) assumed sponsorship of the list as a service to the archives profession. It remained hosted at Miami University under the stewardship of Robert M. Schmidt until September 2006, at which time SAA assumed full ownership of the list and responsibility for its ongoing maintenance.

#### **Audience**

The principal audiences include archivists, archival educators, and students enrolled in graduate archival education courses and programs. The list is open to all individuals with an interest in the archives profession and in the preservation and promotion of archival materials. SAA membership is not required for participation in the list. Participants are required, however, to “register” with the Society of American Archivists. Please see “Responsibilities of Participants” below.

## Scope of the List

The purpose of the list is to foster discussion of archives and archives issues, including all aspects of the theory and practice of the archives profession.

*Messages that are unrelated to the archives profession are off topic and are prohibited.* Prohibited subjects include the following:

- General interest posts unrelated to archives.
- Discussion of the listerv itself or the behavior of individual posters. (Direct complaints or concerns about the list or individuals on the list to the list administrators.)
- Commercial advertisements for goods and/or services. (Vendors are not prohibited from posting *responses* to list messages, but such postings must contribute in a useful way to an existing discussion or line of inquiry without attempting to sell goods or services.)
- Messages directed to specific individuals. (Instead, contact them directly).
- Personal attacks.
- Political speech unrelated to archival issues, including, but not limited to endorsing or attacking a particular political candidate or party, or the views of any candidate or party.
- Virus warnings.

For those interested in following archives-related news content, we recommend the “Archives in the News” list: <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/archives-in-the-news>.

## General Rules

All list subscribers must follow these general rules to help ensure the value of the list to all subscribers:

- Do not post more than three original postings to the list in any twenty-four hour period.
- Do not include the full text of long messages. Delete extraneous text from the previous messages to make reading the message easier for the other subscribers.
- Do not post shortened hyperlinks to the list (such as those produced by bit.ly, Google URL Shortener, or TinyURL). Always use the entire URL on the original site, which allows subscribers to see where the link is sending them.
- To help other subscribers quickly evaluate their interest in a posting, include the following headings, when appropriate, at the beginning of the subject lines of relevant postings:
  - “ANNOUNCE” at the front of any announcement for a conference, workshop, exhibition, or other event or release.
  - “JOB:” at the front of any job posting
  - “NEWS:” at the front of any news item

- “QUERY:” at the front of any posting asking a question of the list
- Note that these headings must be used for all relevant postings, but headings do not otherwise need to be used. However, participants can create short headings if they believe them to be helpful to others.
- Links to external content (such as articles, news, blog posts, and announcements) without relevant commentary intended to promote discussion are prohibited.

## Netiquette

Participants are expected to follow the core rules of netiquette. See an excerpted version from the book, *Netiquette*, by Virginia Shea at <http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html>. Some key points are summarized below (*based on the SAA Visual Materials Section List Terms of Participation*):

- Messages must be designed to trigger discussion through a question or observation, or must further a discussion by adding something new.
- Participants must keep in mind that other readers receive messages in a different context from the author.
- Messages, especially responses, must be long enough to be understandable, and they must include enough of the original message to provide context.
- Avoid inflammatory remarks of a personal nature. Similarly, when reading a message, be slow to take offense. In general, assume that an individual has good intentions when posting a message but that the rapidity of the medium, the lack of visual cues, and other factors may make an otherwise innocent message seem insulting.
- Participants must consider whether their reply is of interest to the list as a whole.
- Avoid posting styled text (messages formatted with HTML code) to the list, as many email readers and the digest readers are unable to read these messages easily.

## Copyright

As a professional association concerned with protecting intellectual property rights of authors whose works are held in archival repositories, SAA expects participants to set a high standard of respect for copyright. Copyrighted material beyond brief quotations must not be posted to the A&A List without first securing the appropriate permissions.

## Responsibility of Participants

Participants agree to restrict their messages to the scope of the list; to follow SAA’s Code of Conduct (<http://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-code-of-conduct>) and generally accepted principles of netiquette, to respect the interests and rights of other participants and of the Society of American Archivists, and to respect the law. Participants are solely responsible for their postings.

By subscribing to the A&A List, participants grant SAA permission to record essential contact information (e.g., names and email addresses) in its central database. Personal contact information will be administered in strict accordance with SAA's Privacy and Confidentiality Policy (<http://www.archivists.org/privacy.asp>).

The Archives & Archivists List is a professional forum. SAA reserves the right to block or permanently remove participants if off-topic or abusive messages threaten to disrupt the functioning of the list. SAA may also block or remove participants for violating the copyright of others or for any other actions that do not conform to these Terms of Participation. Punitive action is rare and generally follows wanton and/or persistent disregard for these Terms of Participation. In order to ensure due process, punitive action shall take place only after formal notification of an infraction and initiation of a 90-day probation period. Upon additional misconduct within the 90 days, an individual may be banned by approval of the Council. Misconduct after the 90 days will result in a one-year probation. (Upon misconduct within this longer probationary period, an individual may also be banned by approval of the Council.) A banned subscriber may petition the Council for reinstatement after one year. Such appeals must be accompanied by a written and signed statement agreeing to comply with the Terms of Participation.

### **List Ownership**

The Archives & Archivists List is owned by the Society of American Archivists. The SAA Council is charged with setting policy on the list. Two Council members are assigned the responsibility of monitoring the list and making recommendations for responses on behalf of the Council when issues arise. The A&A List Coordinator, reporting to SAA's Executive Director, oversees the daily operations of the list, including assisting participants with their subscriptions and enforcing the Terms of Participation.

*A&A List Coordinator:* Melanie Mueller ([mmueller@archivists.org](mailto:mmueller@archivists.org))

### **Disclaimer**

The opinions expressed on the Archives & Archivists List do not necessarily represent those of SAA and are not endorsed by the Society.

*Revised and approved by the SAA Council, August 1, 2006. Revised August 10, 2009; May 16, 2013; August 12, 2014; [draft for consideration, May 20, 2015].*