Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
May 11–13, 2016
Chicago, Illinois

Member Affinity Groups
(Prepared by Executive Director Nancy Beaumont)

BACKGROUND

In May 2013 the SAA Council created a Task Force on Member Affinity Groups to "consider the most effective structures to encourage flexible, inclusive, and participatory opportunities for the membership. This should include an evaluation of the effectiveness of current affinity groups (sections and roundtables*)* and consideration of whether a different structure would better serve SAA's members. The group is also charged with identifying what kinds of support and resources are needed to allow current and potential affinity groups to work most effectively." The task force made its final recommendations in November 2014, at which time the group was disbanded with thanks.

At that same meeting, the Council created a Council Working Group on Member Affinity Groups (comprising Mark Duffy, Lisa Mangiafico, and James Roth) charged to, "…explore options for simplifying component group structure while preserving the advantages and services provided by existing Sections and Roundtables. The internal working group will assess the impact of a flatter organizational structure, provisions for sun-setting component groups that become inactive, and support for virtual groups as an alternative way of organizing within SAA." In May 2015 the Working Group presented to the Council a proposal for changes in member affinity groups that the Council agreed to distribute for member comment before and during the 2015 Annual Meeting.

In light of significant concerns expressed at the August 22, 2015, Annual Membership Meeting, the Council extended the deadline for member comment to September 15 and, at its November 2015 meeting, reviewed some 60+ member comments received via the SAA website, the Leader List, and the Headquarters email box, and by Council members directly. Through its discussion, the Council provided direction regarding general "themes" in the Working Group proposal and passed the following motion:

> **THAT the Council Working Group on Member Affinity Groups be reconstituted with the following members: Lisa Mangiafico (chair), Pam Hackbart-Dean, Rachel Vagts, and Nancy Beaumont (or other SAA staff representative).**
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> **Support Statement:** Given the significant level of concern expressed by members regarding the initial recommendations of the Council Working Group on Member Affinity Groups, it is clear

that more work remains to be done. The newly reconstituted Working Group will consider the consolidated member feedback as well as Council members' response to the discussion questions and prepare a revised set of recommendations.

Fiscal Impact: Significant volunteer and staff time to develop recommendations, estimated at 20 hours per volunteer and 40 hours of staff time.

The Council Working Group asked the staff to consider member comments as well as staff members' own perspectives on affinity groups and to prepare a set of proposals for the Council discussion in May 2016. Staff members who participated in this process are Beaumont, Web and IT Systems Administrator Matt Black, Finance/Administration Director Peter Carlson, Governance Coordinator Felicia Owens, and Service Center Manager Carlos Salgado.

DISCUSSION

Creation of the 2013 Task Force resulted from discussions by Council members and staff—dating back to at least 2005—focusing on two concerns about SAA's sections and roundtables:

1. That some groups are inactive—over sometimes long periods of time—resulting in lack of engagement with their members and list participants; and

2. That at some point a proliferation of sections and roundtables will overwhelm the capacity of the Annual Meeting schedule and venue.

In 2012 several Council members added a third concern to the list:

3. That the ways in which some roundtables govern themselves (for example, leadership selection and succession) were not transparent.

The latter issue was resolved to the Council's satisfaction in 2012-2013, when the executive director, working with Council liaisons to various roundtables, determined which groups were without bylaws, notified those groups that bylaws were required, prepared a bylaws template, and worked with the groups to have their bylaws adopted by their individual members and then submitted to the Council for approval. The previous concerns, discussed repeatedly, have remained unresolved.

In discussing a way forward regarding member affinity groups, our staff group considered these long-standing concerns, reviewed the previous reports, read and analyzed the 60+ member comments received, and developed our own "guiding principles" in framing this discussion paper. We agreed that SAA should:

1. Be responsive to the many thoughtful comments of members in regard to the initial proposal.
2. Foster an environment in which groups can—and are encouraged to—spend more time on their missions and less time on governance.
3. Increase the opportunity for participation by nonmembers.
4. Seek to implement simpler, more efficient systems/processes and to minimize "legislation" of groups.

5. Develop a better and more logical schedule for group processes.
6. Allow for more flexibility and space at the Annual Meeting.

Proposed Changes for Discussion

Based on member feedback and on our consideration of the issues, we propose for the Council's discussion the following modifications in the current component group structure:

That the distinction between sections and roundtables be eliminated. Although SAA has a long tradition of distinguishing between these groups, that distinction no longer seems meaningful or useful. All groups are assigned meeting space at the Annual Meeting and for the past two years SAA has funded audiovisual support for all roundtables, effectively eliminating the one "real-life" distinction between the group types.

One benefit of this proposed change: SAA typically has had access to 10 meeting rooms per time slot at the Annual Meeting. Because there are just 13 sections, we have had unused meeting rooms during the two section meeting slots. With 32 roundtables, however, we have been pressed to find meeting space for three tracks of roundtable meetings. The proposed change would allow us to schedule our 45 interest groups across 50 meeting room slots (10 rooms x 5 time slots). The downside, of course, will be trying to ensure that every attendee is able to attend the meetings that s/he wishes to attend and that conflicts are minimized or avoided.

That SAA members be invited to join as many interest groups as they wish. Currently SAA members may join an unlimited number of roundtables but are asked to choose just two sections. This would broaden their options.

That nonmembers be permitted to be list participants on up to three interest group discussion lists. Currently nonmembers may be "list participants" on roundtable lists ("Nonmembers of SAA may participate in a roundtable by joining in its electronic communications list and engaging in discussions of and work on issues of interest to its membership"). This privilege would be extended to all interest groups, but would be limited to a reasonable number of lists (i.e., three). As now, nonmembers would not be permitted to hold office, serve on a steering committee, or vote in interest group elections or referendums.

That the following be required of all interest groups:

1. Standardized bylaws based on the SAA template. All current bylaws that are not in this format (primarily Section bylaws) would be simplified based on the template.

2. Submission of a proposal for the group's annual meeting (including agenda, description, preference for onsite/offsite location, AV needs, duration, and indication of whether it is a solo or joint meeting) by March 1 each year.

3. Conduct an online election for group leader(s) using SAA's process, with submission of the slate due by June 1 each year. Inclusion in each election and/or referendum conducted at this time a simple questionnaire asking for member feedback on the effectiveness of the group or

posing a question such as, "If you have suggestions for improving the effectiveness of the group, note them here."

4. Submission of an annual report and a complete leader roster by <u>August 30</u> each year. The report would be prepared by the outgoing chair. SAA will create an online form to make it easier to provide the required information – including an indication of how the group addressed SAA's strategic priorities in the past year.

5. Responsiveness to SAA Council requests for assistance in conducting research, drafting expert comments, or undertaking other activity related to the group's area of special interest.

That new interest groups may be formed much as they are now, with submission to the Council of a petition, signed by a specified number of SAA members (100?), that includes a statement of purpose and goals and a statement of why a separate interest group would be beneficial to SAA.

That interest groups may be discontinued if they do not meet one or more of the requirements stated above. Inability to meet a requirement would lead to a conversation between/among the interest group chair and/or steering committee, the Council liaison, and the executive director to determine 1) why the group is unable to complete an activity, 2) what might be done to assist the group in moving forward (e.g., combine with another group, change leadership), and 3) whether the group might function more effectively as a special interest discussion list. (See the next item.) The Council would decide if a group is to be discontinued.

That the proposed creation of "virtual community groups" be placed on hold and that instead we create discussion lists for members who request one. Nonmember participation would be welcome. The staff is exploring transitioning all discussion list functions from Lyris to Higher Logic, which is the leading vendor of software for association-based online communities. Online communities integrate features of email discussion lists, online forums, member directories and rosters, and document storage. Higher Logic would replace not only Lyris, but also our current systems for member directories and some aspects of our group microsites. Online communities generally are celebrated for increasing member engagement and membership growth. We expect to transition to Higher Logic within the next 3-6 months.

To be determined is a simple and logical method for requesting creation of a discussion list. For example: What is the threshold? Is a petition to the Council (or the staff) by, say, 25 SAA members sufficient to justify development of a special interest discussion list? Should a list be discontinued if there is no activity on it for a period of, say, six months?

If the Council chooses to move forward with changes to the current structure – whether those suggested above or others – member feedback should certainly be sought.

In addition the Governance Manual will have to undergo significant review and revision, a process that we hope will retain the notion that groups are organized to advance professional practice within areas of common archival interest and affiliation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which, if any, of the proposed changes does the Council favor?

2. What additional considerations should the Working Group pursue?

3. At what point should additional member feedback be sought?

Other questions?