

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

**Program Theme and Structure for 2017 Annual Meeting
(Prepared by 2017 Program Committee Chair Terry Baxter)**

BACKGROUND

Section VII of the SAA Governance Manual encourages the Program Committee (§IVB), in consultation with the President and the Executive Director, to determine such issues as program theme, number of sessions, and new and innovative session formats.

The 2013 [*Principles and Priorities for Continuously Improving the SAA Annual Meeting*](#) promotes:

- Exploring new locations, structure, and content for the Annual Meeting;
- Embracing a culture of experimentation with respect to the Annual Meeting;
- Encouraging diversity among the people attending the meeting, contributing to its content, and benefiting from its results.

DISCUSSION

As Program Committee chair for the 2017 SAA Annual Meeting I propose the following:

1. That the conference theme be *Alike/Different*;
2. That the meeting include roughly 50 sessions—presented on Thursday and Friday—that focus on the issues that are common to most archivists; and
3. That Saturday’s sessions be presented as a symposium titled “Decolonizing the Archive.”

The theme *Alike/Different* acknowledges that we archivists sit under a very large tent and, while we have many similarities, there ways in which we differ, sometimes fundamentally.

The 2017 Annual Meeting structure as proposed also responds to SAA President Dennis Meissner’s [*observation*](#) that “Diversity is a fact. Inclusion is a choice.” It presents educational opportunities that seek to move beyond acknowledging that diverse voices exist to including those voices on equal footing.

The Annual Meeting has traditionally had roughly 20 educational sessions on Thursday, 30 on Friday, and 20 on Saturday. The 2017 Annual Meeting would maintain the traditional Thursday and Friday configuration. The 20 Saturday sessions would be replaced with a day-long symposium. There will be a need to fit the symposium with some meetings, most notably the SAA Annual Membership (Business) meeting. This could be accomplished by moving the business meeting earlier on Saturday and having the symposium follow it.

Structuring the program this way allows plenty of opportunities for learning about current archival practice and theory that most archivists have in common while at the same time exposing archivists to practice and theory that may be unfamiliar and perhaps even uncomfortable.

There is enough extant work on other community archives (Jeanette Bastian's [work](#) comes immediately to mind, but [Manilatown](#), [Lesbian Herstory](#), and other communities have similar desires and opportunities) to believe that a symposium could be constructed that addresses decolonization broadly and in a way that would appeal to many archivists.

There is also reason to believe that this symposium would appeal to non-archivists who have interest in issues of self-determination and sovereignty and the relationship of documentary and cultural heritage to them.

The work of the Program Committee would also require some flexibility. Nancy McGovern has appointed the 2017 Program Committee and its members will assume their terms in August 2016. I would like to create a committee to structure the symposium. It would be a small subcommittee (3 members) of the Program Committee, chaired by a member, but could possibly include one non-SAA member.

The educational sessions on Thursday and Friday would be selected in much the same way as in previous years – a call for proposals and competitive selection of sessions. The subcommittee would have wide latitude in planning the symposium, which may include a call for proposals, invited presentations/speakers, or a combination of both.

As this is a different look for the Annual Meeting program, I would provide the SAA Council and the executive director with regular updates about the development of the program, including the symposium.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Will the benefits of trying a new structure for the 2017 Annual Meeting outweigh any possible impacts of meeting attendance or negative member satisfaction?
2. Is there a potential for lost revenue and, if so, is SAA willing to accept that risk as a consequence of innovation?