

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
May 19, 2021
Virtual Meeting**

**Create Sustainability Task Force
(Prepared by Governance Manager Felicia Owens)**

BACKGROUND

At its March 2021 meeting, the Council discussed a proposal submitted by the Preservation Section to create a standing group on sustainability ([0321-V-C-SustainabilityComm](#)). As noted there:

The Preservation Section of the Society of American Archivists has spent the last few years looking at sustainability and what other cultural heritage member institutions have done to study and encourage sustainable practices. Of the major cultural heritage groups in the United States, the Society of American Archivists is the one organization that lacks a formal body focused on issues of sustainability. Individual members, institutions and sections have done some amazing work examining specific aspects of sustainability, but sustainability as a focus has no home within SAA itself.

Over the last few years sustainability has been understood even more broadly than initial concepts of it as an environmental issue, evolving to include much broader concepts of equity and balance in systems.

DISCUSSION

Further, from the Preservation Section's report:

“The creation of an SAA Sustainability Task Force would affirm the organization's commitment to doing its part to help support individual archivists, archival institutions, and the communities in which they live and work to make progress toward larger sustainability goals. It would help SAA as an organization and individual members and institutions answer the following questions:

- How do our actions, as archivists and a body that advocates for archives, need to be adjusted moving forward?
- How do we interact with our communities and other groups?
- What can cultural heritage as a community do to participate in these goals?

“It would provide SAA with a portal/space for efforts and resources to be shared, a space for discussion of the issues, and a space to coordinate advocacy. Moreover, as sustainability is a set of challenges that extends beyond the archival profession alone, a task force (and potential standing body) within SAA would allow better coordination with other member organizations and their sustainability work. In fact, many SAA members already have experience working on these issues in other member organizations, which may make cross-organization collaborations easier.”

There are significant pros and cons to consider in creating this task force. As is clearly articulated in the Preservation Section’s initial report, sustainability is critically important across the profession and only grows more urgent with the evolving climate crisis. Creating an initial task force will allow for ample discussion and planning to properly establish a standing body, should that be needed. This approach was used for the Committee on Research, Data, and Assessment and the Crisis, Disaster, and Tragedy Response Working Group with great success.

Creating a task force will, however, require substantial effort and costs to establish and support, both in terms of a dedicated Council liaison and staff liaison time. This will add new actions to the Strategic Plan Dashboard and will likely draw time and attention from other stated priorities. The Council should seriously consider what may be de-prioritized to allow space for this task force.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT a Sustainability Task Force be charged per the following description, with a final report date of not later than January 2023.

SAA Task Force on Sustainability

I. Purpose

The Sustainability Task Force is responsible for exploring the feasibility of creating a standing body within SAA to develop a broad definition and understanding of sustainability for the SAA community, gather/generate resources about the issues, and collaborate within and outside of SAA to advocate, educate, and develop sustainable practices for the profession. The Task Force may take on one or more pilot projects if it believes that this experience would aid in making recommendations about a standing body.

II. Selection, Size, and Length of Term

The Task Force is charged for an 18-month period that begins in July 2021 and continues through January 2023.

The Task Force will comprise six SAA members, one of whom will serve as chair. Task Force members will be appointed by the vice president/president-elect.

III. Reporting Procedures

The Task Force chair will prepare a written status report for each of the Council’s spring and winter meetings, and will prepare for Council consideration at its winter 2023 meeting a final written report with recommendations. Should the Task Force recommend that a standing group be created, it should include in its final report a draft charge/description for that group.

IV. Duties and Responsibilities

To fulfill its purpose as described above, the Task Force is specifically charged to:

- Determine whether sufficient need exists to justify the effort and costs associated with establishing a standing body to create a broad definition and understanding of sustainability for the SAA community, gather/generate resources about the issues, and collaborate within and outside of SAA to advocate, educate, and develop sustainable practices for the profession.
- Determine how such a standing body should be structured, staffed, and governed.
- Determine how such a standing body might be financed and supported.
- Propose how such a standing body might interact with other SAA groups as well as external groups.

V. Meetings

The Task Force will carry out its charge primarily via e-mail, conference calls, online meetings, and face-to-face meetings held in conjunction with the SAA Annual Meeting. Should the Task Force determine that an additional face-to-face meeting would be beneficial, it must apply to the Council (through the Executive Office) for funding.

Support Statement: The work of a Sustainability Task Force would assist in addressing Goal 2.2 of Enhancing Professional Growth by providing content that reflects “the latest thinking and best practices in the field”; could provide that content in accessible, affordable ways as directed by Goal 2.3; and foster communities for professional interaction on this topic, as described in Goal 2.4. This task force would also support Goal 3.1 to identify the need for new standards, guidelines, and best practices related to sustainability and lead and participate in their development; it would support Goal 3.2 to foster and disseminate research in and about the field of sustainability; and could address goal 3.3 by participating actively in relevant partnerships and collaborations related to sustainability to enhance professional knowledge.

Fiscal Impact: This description/charge would not require dedicated funds, other than the standard administrative support provided to other task forces. The estimated staff time associated with this activity would be typical for that which SAA provides to task forces. The task force may request funding through the standard process for a face-to-face meeting or other activities, as needed.