

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
May 18-20, 2022
Chicago, Illinois**

SAA Sections Structure

(Prepared by Courtney Chartier, Jasmine Jones, and Dominique Luster)

During the February 2022 SAA Council meeting, Council held a strategic planning session focused on the structure and expectations for SAA sections, with particular consideration of the membership engagement experience and the resources needed to best support these groups. Luster, Jones, and Chartier met virtually on Tuesday, April 26, 2022, to develop a recommendation for a clear plan to achieve these goals.

BACKGROUND

The large number of affinity groups (specifically, 45 sections) in the Society presents a challenge to the SAA Council and staff in terms of responsiveness to elections, assistance with governance, fiscal oversight, and other support. This has been a recurring issue in the Society for many years, exacerbated by ongoing concerns about member involvement in section leadership, as well as active member participation in these sections. Some sections struggle to identify a slate of candidates to run for positions. Others have a small group of active volunteers, which makes it appear harder for newer members of the profession to step up into leadership positions.[1]

In the 2020 Working Group on Sections, the members proposed the following recommendations:

1. Modify the 2020 Leadership Orientation and Forum to foster conversations with new/continuing leaders about “creating our future” in terms of ways to connect as sections, gather ideas about shifts in the governance structure, etc.
2. Have Council liaison conversations with section leaders more informally, with talking points, to encourage leaders to do general exploration of the “health” of their sections; create a shared space for Council members to continue the assessment process.
3. Work with SAA staff to create a section leadership survey oriented to determining the health of the sections or consider modifying the section annual reports to include question(s) about health, future plans, and needs.
4. Ask the Executive Committee and staff to consider providing space, in 2021 or 2022, for “affinity groups” to have joint sessions at a larger scale as a pilot, without expectations for permanent changes. Section leaders should be involved in identifying affinity groups.

5. As a Council, continue to explore models for affiliated groups to be consolidated and more broadly affiliated, as member input and leader participation is incorporated and better understood.

The current Council working Group, consisting of Luster, Jones, and Chartier seeks to resurface the previously reported recommendations as well as provide a plan for identifying Sections that potentially qualify for sunseting.

DISCUSSION

This group proposes that the SAA Council conduct a meaningful assessment of Section health. The goal of this assessment is to focus on how Sections bring fulfillment and connection to members and to make recommendations of Sections that would make suitable candidates for sunseting.

The first portion of the health assessment would look at the overall health of SAA Sections. Metrics would include:

- Number of active Sections
- Total number of SAA Members registered in each Section
- Total number of SAA Members registered in any Section
- A membership-wide survey on their participation in SAA Sections
 - Membership participation rate in the SAA Sections survey

The second portion of the health assessment would look at each Section's health. This assessment would be conducted by reviewing the previous 3-5 years of annual section reports combined with an interview with each Section's steering committee. Metrics would include:

1. Strong leadership
2. A clear sense of purpose
3. A history and continuation of self-assigned or counsel assigned work
4. A sense of camaraderie and enjoyment from its members
5. Section membership attendance and participation in self-driven programming and Annual Business Meeting.
6. Section's ability to hold a full election ballot over the previous 3-5 years.
 - a. Section membership's participation in the Section election.

The resulting information would provide a list of SAA Sections that might better be served as a Discussion Group rather than a Section. We propose the following pathway to sunset:

1. Publicly share health assessments with the Section Steering Committee and receive their feedback.
2. Offer to convert the Section to a Discussion Group.
3. If the Steering Committee agrees with the assessment and wishes to convert to a Discussion Group, a vote will be put to the Section members.

- a. If the Section members vote in the affirmative, or the vote does not receive a predetermined participation rate, SAA Staff can begin migrating the Section to a Discussion group in SAA Connect.
4. If the Steering Committee disagrees with the assessment and wishes to remain a Section, Council will request the Steering Committee to provide a working plan on how they plan to improve upon the metrics identified in their specific assessment.

**The working group would provide Council members with an Assessment template in order to evaluate the Sections they liaise to.*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Does the Section Health Assessment as described above make sense and seem to be an ethical and equitable path forward?
- The listed criteria for Section health are based on the Council's conversation during the February 2022 meeting. What metrics best evaluate the criteria above?
- Are there any metrics that should be added or subtracted from the proposed plan?
- How should the plan be communicated with Section leadership?

[1] Council Working Group: Sections Assessment (Prepared by Audra Eagle Yun, Eric Chin, and Ricky Punzalan), August 3, 2020. Agenda Item IV.D.

https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/0820-IV-D-SectionAssess_0.pdf