

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
June 8 – 10, 2012
Chicago, Illinois**

**Action Item: Charge for Communications Task Force
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BACKGROUND

At its January 2012 meeting, the Council reviewed the report of the Communications Technology Working Group (CTWG), an advisory group whose charge had morphed over time, and decided to disband the group with thanks. It was discussed that a new group could build on the recommendations in the CTWG's final report to develop specific recommendations for advising SAA on its communications, defined here as internal communications with the SAA membership and external communications with nonmember audiences, including (but not limited to) supporters and potential supporters, allied professions, and public officials.

The Council charged the authors to develop a draft charge for an SAA Communications Task Force. [See Council To Do list item #E57: "draft charge for new group that focuses on communications (*ITL*, member survey results, AMTF results, Social Media Forum results).]

The proposed task force, as described in the attached draft charge, is intended to provide the Council with a set of recommendations on practical ways to enhance SAA's communications in the areas focused on analysis of audience, content, and tools.

The draft charge was distributed to the Council list on April 24, 2012, for comments with a subsequent request for additional comments. Two comments were received. One was a suggestion that a Council member or two be included in the task force's membership. The draft charge was amended to include this suggestion. A second comment asked for the rationale of creating the group as a task force rather than a working group. The charge as drafted leaves open this possibility.

DISCUSSION

The information provided by the Communications Technology Working Group in its report of the results of the Social Media Forum held at the 2011 Annual Meeting were reported on at the January 2012 Council meeting (Agenda Item V.P.). While many of the recommendations made by the group (such as the effective use of Twitter hashtags and

better use of RSS feeds) are easily implemented, larger issues were raised about the relationship between various SAA communication channels and the way SAA communicates overall.

In considering these findings, as well as the anticipated results of the Member Satisfaction Survey, the time seems right to have a group focus on how SAA is communicating and through what tools. This group would be composed of people with different expertise than that of those involved with the CTWG, which for the most part required people with knowledge of software (such as Drupal). The group will review how other similar organizations are utilizing new tools, examine the results of the Member Satisfaction Survey as well as the Social Media Forum and other inputs, and make recommendations. The work of this group could be timely given the current discussions about the use of blogs and other social media by SAA component groups. Establishing a task force will allow one group to focus on the communication issues being identified in many different places.

This group is proposed as a task force rather than as a working group because we cannot anticipate with any certainty just how the need for input and analysis of communications will play out over the longer term. As defined by Section VIII of the Governance Manual: “Task forces are given specific charges to study and evaluate certain issues, prepare reports and study documents, and, when deemed appropriate, make recommendations for action by the Council.” In contrast, as defined by Section XIV, a working group is “a standing body of experts in a particular issue area.” Part of the work of the task force will be to determine if a working group is needed. It seemed wiser to start out with a group with a more limited mission than to charter a group with an open-ended assignment. As discussed on the Council email list, formulating the group as a task force rather than working group does not limit who may participate on it, except that non-SAA members may serve on working groups but not on task forces.

Suggestion: Recruit one or two current Council members to serve on the task force.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT a Communications Task Force be appointed, with the following purpose, description, and timeline:

SAA Communications Task Force

Reports to: SAA Council
Established: June 2012
Final Report Due: August 2013

I. Purpose

In support of SAA Strategic Priority 1 Desired Outcome #3, “SAA will make increasingly effective use of current and emerging technology to enhance communication with internal and external audiences and stimulate collaboration among its constituents,” the Communications

Task Force is charged with advising the SAA Council on practical ways to enhance SAA's communications with a focus on three areas: intended audiences, content/messages, and tools/channels.

II. Task Force Selection, Size, and Length of Term

Following an open call for participation, the SAA Vice President shall appoint seven members, all of whom should have expertise in the topics defined in the Purpose statement and who should collectively include both newer and more experienced archivists. At least one member should be drawn from the active membership of the now-disbanded Communications Technology Working Group. One member shall serve as chair. The length of term of members shall be one year from their appointment with a possible extension should the task force need more time or be re-constituted as a working group.

III. Reporting Procedures

The task force will provide an update on its progress prior to each Council meeting. A preliminary report and recommendations shall be delivered to the Council by the time of its spring 2013 meeting, with a final report and recommendations made by the time of the August 2013 Council meeting.

IV. Duties and Responsibilities

The task force will deliver to the Council a final report with recommendations as to which of SAA's current communication venues and practices should be maintained, revised, or discontinued and why, and which (if any) new venues or practices should be implemented. In addition to other research and activities the task force deems necessary to meet its charge, the task force shall:

- Become familiar with current SAA communication channels and how they are used, including *In the Loop*, Twitter stream, Facebook presence, website, *Archival Outlook*, email blasts, press releases, and LinkedIn presence.
- Conduct a mini-environmental scan of similar organizations' communications and uses of communication technology, seeking out effective and realistic models that might be incorporated into its recommendations.
- Gather information from SAA component groups that have a social media presence about the use and effectiveness of their communication tools.
- Become familiar with relevant SAA policy documents and reports, including, but not necessarily limited to, the Communication Technology Working Group final report, SAA's Uniform Guidelines for SAA Websites and Online Communications, and the 2012 SAA Member Needs and Satisfaction Survey results.
- Submit a final report with recommendations to the Council addressing at least the following questions relating to audiences, content, and technology:
 1. What audiences or stakeholders do SAA communications currently target? Are there additional audiences that we need to reach?

2. What types of content are pushed out to which audiences and by whom (SAA staff, member volunteers, etc.)? Is this a good match? Are there others who could or should participate?
3. What technologies are used to target those audiences and by whom? Are these good matches?
4. What peer organizations might serve as good models as SAA seeks to enhance communication with internal and external audiences and stimulate collaboration among its constituents? What are the qualities that make them successful?
5. What are the most pressing changes to be made?
6. What barriers exist to improving SAA's communications? What can be done to mitigate them?

- Provide a recommendation to the Council as to whether there is a need for a group such as this one to continue to act in an ongoing advisory role by transitioning into a working group.

V. Meetings

The task force will accomplish its work primarily via email, conference call, Skype, Google+ hangout, and perhaps an in-person meeting at the 2012 Annual Meeting.

Support Statement: SAA, like other organizations at this time, is challenged to adjust its existing communications style and tools to meet the expectations of a diverse membership. Increasingly there is an expectation that new forms of communication technology will become part of the organization's communications landscape. SAA has adopted several of these new tools, but norms and expectations for their use are constantly changing. The Communications Task Force is intended to add focused, member-driven expertise to existing staff expertise to ensure that communications efforts reach intended audiences, to identify the communications tools that are best matched to SAA's communications goals, and to identify the specific investments (in technology, training, or time) that will be necessary to implement recommendations if they are adopted. The relatively short turn-around time for the group's work is intended to foster an intensive, focused, and motivated group effort on the part of task force members.

Impact on Strategic Priorities: The work of the proposed task force would assist in achieving SAA Strategic Priority 1 Desired Outcome #3: "SAA will make increasingly effective use of current and emerging technology to enhance communication with internal and external audiences and stimulate collaboration among its constituents."

Fiscal Impact: The direct expense of convening this task force and supporting its work are expected to be minimal, as most of the group's communication can be done via email and Skype or Google+ hangout. The indirect expenses associated with staff time to assist the task force cannot be estimated. (Note that the recommendations of this proposed task force, if adopted for implementation, could have fiscal implications that would need to be assessed separately.)