

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

Discussion Item: Draft Advocacy Agenda
(Prepared by Thomas Frusciano, Donna McCrea, and Dennis Meissner)

BACKGROUND

The Government Affairs Working Group (GAWG) was created by the SAA Council in August 2008. First among its duties and responsibilities was to “Develop an advocacy agenda for Council approval.” GAWG submitted a draft Advocacy Agenda to the Council at its May 31–June 2, 2009, meeting (Agenda item III.F.). At that meeting the Council adopted the following motion:

THAT the “Advocacy Agenda 2009-2010 (version 053109)” as drafted by the Government Affairs Working Group and revised by the Council, be adopted as a working document that will be distributed to the SAA membership from June to August 2009 for comment and refinement; and

THAT a revision incorporating member comment be reviewed by the SAA Council at its August 10, 2009, meeting; and

THAT the Government Affairs Working Group develop a series of issue briefs, beginning with those Advocacy Agenda issues that are of the highest priority for member, policymaker, and public awareness, and submit those briefs for Council or Executive Committee review and comment as they are completed, with a goal of completing an issue brief for each issue identified in the Advocacy Agenda by the time of the May 2010 Council meeting.

The draft Advocacy Agenda was then submitted for member comment. These comments were compiled and presented to the Council at its August 10, 2009, meeting as Agenda Item III.C: “Discussion Item: Feedback on SAA’s Advocacy Agenda.” GAWG did not submit to the Council an Advocacy Agenda revision incorporating member comment.

In March 2012 SAA President Gregor Trinkaus-Randall sent the following questions to the Council:

1. Do you think that we can move ahead with the Advocacy Agenda as it was drafted (with modifications from the member comment period) and focus on developing issue briefs to flesh it out?

2. If we cannot move ahead with the Advocacy Agenda as drafted, what changes do you think are needed in it?

Following an e-mail discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of the existing draft, Trinkaus-Randall asked Council members Frusciano, McCrea, and Meissner to “rework and draft a concise, lucid set of advocacy issues starting with the SAA Strategic Advocacy Goal and the previous draft Agenda.”

DISCUSSION

Frusciano, McCrea, and Meissner created the Draft Advocacy Agenda (below) based on GAWG’s original draft, member feedback on that draft, and comments from Council members in an online discussion in March 2012.

This Advocacy Agenda is intended to provide a set of core advocacy issues that will be supplemented and enhanced by issue briefs endorsed by the Council. These briefs will most likely be created by SAA component groups.

DRAFT

Society of American Archivists Advocacy Agenda 2012

Because archival records ensure the protection of citizens’ rights, the accountability of organizations and governments, and the accessibility of historical information, the Society of American Archivists (SAA) believes that archivists must take an active role in advocating for the public policies and resources necessary to ensure that these records are preserved and made accessible. This Advocacy Agenda identifies a limited set of broad priorities that serves to guide the Society’s advocacy efforts in the public policy and legislative arenas. Requests for SAA’s commitment to a specific advocacy issue will be more vigorously pursued if that issue has national consequences and fits within these priorities.

The Public’s Right to Equal and Equitable Access to Government Information

American citizens have a right to know the actions and intentions of their government and its leaders. Government officials at all levels should assume that the public has the right of access to any document prepared by a government official or entity, including communications between government officials or entities. To ensure access, government officials have an obligation to preserve such records properly until they are appropriately reviewed, appraised, and declassified when appropriate. This preservation requirement applies to all records, regardless of format.

The Public’s Need for Strong Institutional Stewardship of the American Historical Record

The records found in our nation’s archives contribute to a more open and pluralistic society. Records are used by citizens in the pursuit of public accountability, transparency, civil rights,

protection of corporate rights and responsibilities, continuity of civil operations, and good governance. To hold government accountable and to provide evidence of the diverse and complex elements of the human experience, it is essential that concerted efforts are made to preserve and make accessible a comprehensive and trustworthy American historical record.

The Public's Right to Timely and Reasonable Use of Information

America's first copyright act (1790) made published works freely available for public use after a maximum of 28 years. Today works do not enter the public domain until 70 years after the death of the author. This dramatic extension of copyright protection contradicts the Founders' intent. A more appropriate balance must be struck between the right of authors to benefit personally from the fruits of their labor for a limited time and the right of the public to make use of material freely for the greater benefit of society.

The Public's Right to Personal Privacy in Certain Categories of Records

An individual's right to privacy with regard to certain information—for example, records mandated by government, lawyer-client records, and medical records—historically has been weighed against the public's right to information. Personal privacy should be respected throughout an individual's lifetime in appropriate ways. Documents recording private information about living Americans should be disclosed involuntarily *only* when disclosure accomplishes a greater public purpose.

The Public's Interest in Adequate Funding of Our Nation's Archives and Archival Programs

The records found in our nation's archives ensure administrative continuity, help hold government officials accountable for their actions, and create documentary sources through which we come to understand our society. Because of the importance of these functions, archival institutions at all levels of government and throughout society must be adequately funded. Funding should include sufficient resources both to renew and invigorate undervalued operations and to support innovative and transformative projects that enable archives to preserve extraordinary documentary resources for the public.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Does this draft require more input or refinement before the Council can adopt it?
2. If so, from whom should input be sought?
3. If not, can we move ahead with adoption and ask for one or more draft issue briefs to be available for the August 2012 Council meeting?