

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
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**Standards Committee: Revision of Committee Procedures
(Prepared by Co-Chairs Cory Nimer and Lisa Miller)**

The Standards Committee, upon the request of the Technical Subcommittee for *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*, proposes modifications to the established standards development procedures to allow for ongoing review of adopted standards, and submits these proposed changes for Council's review and approval.

BACKGROUND

Following the Council's decision of January 23, 2013, to adopt the second edition of *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (DACS), steps have been taken to make the new standard available in both print and electronic formats. With the flexibility provided by electronic publication, the Technical Subcommittee on DACS proposed that their charge be changed to allow them to update the standard on an ongoing basis. Although the proposal seemed reasonable to the Committee, it was recognized that this would require a revision in existing procedures.

The current version of the "Procedures for Review and Approval of an SAA-Developed Standard" were adopted in 2010, with revisions in January 2012. These procedures, as well as the overall re-missioning of the Standards Committee, were established in order to allow the Committee to take a more active role and to be more responsive to a rapidly changing standards environment. However, the approved procedures place each standard on a set review cycle, slowing their response to changes in that environment.

In order to accommodate the TS-DACS request, the Committee reviewed the existing procedures and proposes a series of changes in the document to allow for ongoing review (see **Appendix A**). With these changes, technical subcommittees interested in changing their approved maintenance plan would need to propose changes in their charge for consideration by the SAA Council.

DISCUSSION

With the movement toward electronic texts and online distribution of standards, the barrier to updates presented by print publication is less of an issue. In the past, small changes have been made on an *ad hoc* basis in electronically distributed standards such as EAC-CPF. Changing the procedures would allow a framework for such updates to be

made in the future, and allow the Council to remain apprised of such actions by the technical subcommittees.

The proposed changes to the procedures (see **Appendix A**) establish a means for the technical subcommittees, as well as external groups, to propose changes to standards that have been approved for ongoing review and guidelines for those groups to respond. They require transparency and community review of proposals, while allowing changes to be made as they are needed—rather than waiting for the end of an established review cycle. The proposed changes also retain the SAA Council's role in approving changes to approved standards.

These procedural changes should enable technical subcommittees to be more responsive in their maintenance of standards approved for ongoing review. In providing this option, however, some care will need to be taken to ensure that it is used appropriately. Although incremental changes to descriptive standards will generally affect only descriptive practice, changes in technical standards such as Encoded Archival Description also affect the ecosystem of computer systems supporting the standard. The SAA Council will need to consider these questions when technical subcommittees are established or petition for changes in their charge.

The provision of ongoing review status may also increase requests for SAA Council action. As the Council is the only group within SAA with the authority to approve standards, change proposals will also ultimately need to be approved by the Council on an ongoing basis.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the revised procedures for the Standards Committee, as provided in Appendix A, be adopted.

Support Statement: Revision of the Standards Committee procedures will provide the option for ongoing review of standards, allowing technical subcommittees to respond to change proposals in a more timely fashion.

Impact on Strategic Plan: The changes in procedure support the Society's strategic goals of participating in new standard development (3.1), participating in collaborations (3.2), and providing up-to-date publications (2.1).

Fiscal Impact: No anticipated direct costs associated with the changes.

Appendix A: Revised Draft of Standards Committee "Procedures for Review and Approval of an SAA-Developed Standard"

[Only the affected portions of the document are provided below. Additions are in blue underlined text, with deletions in blue strike-through. The full version of the current document is available online at

<http://www2.archivists.org/governance/handbook/section7/groups/Standards/Procedures-Review-Approval-SAA-Developed-Standard.>]

III.B.4. Maintenance and review plan.

The development and review team must recommend a plan for maintenance and review of the standard it has developed. Standards developed by SAA will be assigned to a component group, such as a technical subcommittee, for necessary maintenance and review. Each will be either assigned to a review cycle of no more than 5 years, or approved for ongoing review. At the end of a set review cycle, at which time the SAA Council will be asked by the Standards Committee to reaffirm, revise, or rescind the standard. The "Maintenance and Review Plan" will suggest the appropriate subgroup for assignment and type of review process length of the review cycle. (See V.C-V.E.)

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V.C. Maintenance of the standard

Immediately upon adoption of an SAA standard, the following actions shall occur:

V.C.1. Technical subcommittee responsible for maintenance and review assigned.

As part of the approval process, the SAA Council will assign the standard to an ongoing SAA component group for maintenance and review. An SAA technical subcommittee may be established for this maintenance and review. The Standards Committee co-chairs will prepare a draft charge for the subcommittee and make recommendations for its membership. In most cases, the members of the development and review team who were actively involved in the development of the standards will be included in the recommendation for membership of the technical subcommittee. The charge must then be approved by the SAA Council before the vice president / president-elect appoints the chair(s) and members of the subcommittee.

V.C.2. Review cycle set.

All adopted SAA standards will be either assigned a review cycle of no more than five years, with a formal review commencing no later than three years following adoption or reaffirmation (section V.D.), or approved for ongoing review (section V.E.). However, in both situations comments and revisions to the standard and proposals to revise adopted

standards may be submitted at any time. At the end of an assigned ~~the~~ review cycle, the SAA Council will be asked to reaffirm, agree to revise, or rescind the standard.

V.C.3. Monitoring and promulgating use begins.

The maintaining technical subcommittee will be responsible for promoting the proper and effective use of the standard and will regularly obtain comments and feedback on the standard for future review and revision.

V.D. Cyclical r~~Review~~ of the standard

At least two years before the review cycle expires, the Standards Committee will notify the maintaining technical subcommittee that it should initiate a formal review of the content and use of the standard. The following actions shall be taken:

V.D.1. Review plan prepared.

In consultation with the Standards Committee, the technical subcommittee will prepare a plan that will ensure consensus using the same kinds of broadly based consultation and review that occurred when the standard was originally developed. The plan may include:

- Other SAA subgroups and interested organizations outside of SAA that the technical subcommittee plans to consult;
- Proposed joint meetings with some of these subgroups and/or organizations to discuss proposed revisions;
- Proposed public hearings at the SAA Annual Meeting;
- Proposed publications, websites, or other communication media via which comments and proposed revisions will be submitted and be made publicly available; and
- Financial resources needed for review, such as travel or editorial support.

V.D.2. Standards Committee and SAA Council review plan.

The technical subcommittee will submit the plan to the Standards Committee, at which point the Standards Committee will decide whether the review process is adequate. If significant financial resources are required for review, the Standards Committee will forward the plan to the SAA Council with a recommendation for funding.

V.D.3. Recommendation to revise, reaffirm, or rescind the standard.

Once the review plan has been approved, the technical subcommittee will commence the formal review. When adequate consultation has taken place, the technical subcommittee will recommend one of the following:

Revise the standard: Revision will be necessary if substantial changes to the standard are required.

Reaffirm the standard: The technical subcommittee may decide that a standard does not need revision at this time if comments are relatively minor and the standard is still current and widely used. The technical subcommittee may also delay revision while awaiting the development or revision of another standard or project that may affect the standard under review.

Rescind the standard: The technical subcommittee may recommend rescinding the standard if the standard is no longer relevant or another standard has replaced it.

V.~~D~~.~~4E~~. Recommendation to the SAA Council.

~~V.E.1.~~ The maintaining technical subcommittee will submit a package to the Standards Committee containing its recommendation to reaffirm, revise, or rescind the standard along with documentation about the review process (as in III.). If the technical subcommittee recommends revision, the technical subcommittee will also submit a completed proposal form (as in I.A.2.).

V.~~DE~~.~~52~~. The Standards Committee will review the package to ensure that the review plan was adequate. Assuming that no procedural questions remain unresolved, it will forward the package to the Council with the recommendation to reaffirm, revise, or rescind.

V.~~DE~~.~~63~~. The SAA Council votes on whether to reaffirm, revise, or rescind the standard.

If the Council votes to *revise* the standard, the technical subcommittee will continue the revision work. Once the revision has been completed, the technical subcommittee will follow the same process for submission and approval of a new standard, as outlined in sections III.B. and later.

If the Council *reaffirms* the standard, a new review cycle will be set, which may be shorter than five years. A new technical subcommittee may be appointed, if necessary. The technical subcommittee and the Standards Committee will inform all relevant parties that the standard has been reaffirmed and does not require revision at this time.

Should the Council vote to rescind the standard, the technical subcommittee and the Standards Committee will inform all relevant parties that the standard has been rescinded. The Standards Committee will then either remove the standard from the standards webpage or mark the standard as "rescinded."

V.~~DE~~.~~7~~. Notice and publication of reaffirmed, revised, or rescinded standards.

An information dissemination process similar to that outlined under V.A. and V.B. for new standards will be followed to ensure broad awareness of SAA actions concerning reaffirmed, revised, and rescinded standards.

V.E. Ongoing review of the standard.

Proposed revisions to a standard approved for ongoing review are reviewed and addressed as they are received by the assigned technical subcommittee. Ongoing review is particularly conducive to standards that are electronically published and thus easy to update. In order to respond adequately and in a timely manner to proposals for change, the following actions should be taken:

V.E.1. Proposal for changes received.

Proposals may be submitted by SAA component groups (i.e., sections, roundtables, committees, task forces, or working groups), by interested external organizations (e.g., the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section), or may be generated by the technical subcommittee itself. Proposals should include:

- Name of the sponsoring group;
- Identification of the component of the standard to be changed;
- Brief description of the proposed change, and justification;
- Expected effect/impact on individuals, institutions, and supporting systems;
- Known related standards affected by the proposed change.

All proposals should be submitted to the chair of the technical subcommittee responsible for the maintenance of the standard.

V.E.2. Technical subcommittee reviews proposals.

Upon receiving a proposal, the chair of the technical subcommittee shall:

- Conduct a preliminary review of the document to ensure that it is complete. Incomplete proposals will be returned to the submitting body. If there are no problems with the document, the chair will acknowledge receipt to the proposing body.
- Distribute copies of the proposal to the other members of the technical subcommittee for their review and comment.
- Determine the extent to which the proposal should be distributed for public comment.

V.E.3. Consultation with other SAA subgroups and external organizations.

External groups, particularly those directly impacted by a proposal, must be consulted during the review process. This should include informing the Standards Committee co-chairs of the proposal submission. Consultation should be pursued through several means, which may include:

- Publication of the proposal on the technical subcommittee's SAA microsite.
- Letters sent to heads of organizations or organizations, or to individuals, inside and outside of SAA, known to have an interest in the standard under revision, inviting their comments on a particular proposal.

- Publication of notices in the newsletters or on the websites of these organizations about the proposed change.
- Publication of the proposal in appropriate SAA media.
- Publication of the proposal in external publications.
- Joint meetings with interested organizations to discuss the proposal.
- Open forums or hearings at the SAA annual meeting.

V.E.4. Recommendation to revise the standard.

Based on comments received from the community, the technical subcommittee may either reject the proposal, or develop a recommendation for revisions to the standard. The draft revisions may be based on both the original proposal and amendments developed during the review process. Revision proposals should document changes in the standard in relation to the current text. Significant changes in the initial proposal by the technical subcommittee may require an additional period of consultation. The review and consultation process should be completed within six months of the submission of a proposal.

Once the draft revisions have been finalized, it should be forwarded to the Standards Committee together with documentation of the submission and consultation process.

V.E.5. Standards Committee review of recommended changes.

The Standards Committee will review the package to ensure that it is complete and that adequate consultation and review have taken place. It may return the package to the development and review team if significant elements are missing.

V.E.6. Recommendation to the SAA Council.

The Standards Committee will send to the SAA Council a report on the process and a recommendation. This may be either a recommendation to consider implementation of the draft revisions, or a recommendation against adoption. The decision to accept changes to official standards of the Society of American Archivists can only be made by the SAA Council.

When the draft revision documentation is deemed complete, the Standards Committee will publish a notice in the appropriate SAA media announcing that the draft revision has been forwarded to the Council.

V.E.6. Promulgation of revised standard.

If a draft revision is accepted by the SAA Council, the Standards Committee will publish a notice of the approval of the changes in the appropriate SAA media.

V.E.7. Major revisions or rescinding the standard.

In addition to managing proposals for revision, the technical subcommittee may also determine that the standard is no longer relevant or has been superseded, and may recommend that the standard be considered for major revisions or rescinded. The guidelines for cyclical review should be followed in developing such recommendations (see section V.D.). The SAA Council may also establish a deadline for reviewing the applicability and maintenance of standards at their discretion.