

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
August 11 – 12, 2014  
Washington, DC**

**Discussion Item: Committee on Public Awareness  
(Prepared by COPA Chair Peter Gottlieb)**

**BACKGROUND**

The SAA Council created the Committee on Public Awareness (COPA) in February 2014. The Council's charge to the committee is: "... provide[s] strategic information and advice to the SAA Council to enhance SAA's capacity to promote the value of archives and archivists to institutions, communities, and society. The Committee recommends to the SAA Council the public awareness priorities on which SAA should focus its attention and resources, within the context of the Society's mission and strategic plan. In addition, the Committee works with staff and outside counsel to develop programs that promote the value and role(s) of archivists and archives nationwide."

Vice President Kathleen Roe appointed the following SAA members to COPA: Peter Gottlieb (chair), David Carmicheal, Scott Grimwood, Shaun Hayes, Bergis Jules, Erin Lawrimore, Samantha Norling, and Jill Severn.

The committee held its first meeting in Chicago on July 12 and 13.

**MEETING HIGHLIGHTS**

Recommendations from the meeting include the following:

- That SAA focus public awareness work on two key audiences: SAA members and the general public.
- That SAA develop messages that members can use in their own communications to boost awareness and appreciation of archives and that SAA can use in public awareness campaigns (see below for a first draft of message).
- That as vehicles for these messages, SAA continue American Archives Month (AAM) but retool resources developed for AAM, *I Found It In The Archives!*, and other programs and develop a public awareness toolkit for members. Other vehicles for public awareness messages should be the redesigned SAA website and the SAA Annual Meeting. The 2015 Annual Meeting should include a significant public awareness component.
- COPA members should engage 2014 Annual Meeting attendees – and all SAA members – by inviting them to communicate their ideas on how best to answer the question "What is an archivist?"

- SAA should discontinue *I Found It In The Archives!* as a discrete program.

## SUMMARY OF COMMITTEE DISCUSSIONS

Based on the goals for COPA that are outlined in SAA's strategic plan (primarily goals 1.1. and 1.4.), the discussions at the meeting concentrated on prioritizing audiences, drafting messages for those audiences, and identifying vehicles for conveying the messages to the audiences. Assisted by Dorothy Pirovano, a principal in the firm PCI Communications in Chicago, the committee selected two priority audiences: SAA members and the general public. Although we discussed many other audiences (e.g. "influencers," funders, archives users, potential SAA members, and regulators), the committee decided that SAA members and the general public are groups with strategic value that SAA can begin to reach within the time and resources that are likely to be available.

Much of the meeting time on July 12 and 13 went toward drafting words, phrases, and statements that SAA can use in messages for members and for the general public. Ms. Pirovano guided the work on messaging by emphasizing the need for brevity, positive feeling, simplicity, and audience focus. Messaging work focused on helping SAA members communicate compelling answers to the question "What do archivists do?" within the context of a "messaging tree." Committee members agreed that different versions of a core answer would result in messages for the general public, for archivists working in a variety of institutions (who would then customize the message with specifics related to their own settings), and for SAA as a professional association. The core message answering the question "what do archivists do" that the committee drafted by the end of the meeting reads: *Archivists are the professional experts who do the exciting work to protect and share important historical materials and to save today's vital records for our future needs.*

The committee also discussed at length ways to bring messages to both SAA members and to the public. Although much further work on vehicles for both audiences will be needed, the committee saw potential in using tools and resources that have already been developed for American Archives Month and for *I Found It in the Archives!*, refashioned appropriately for use with SAA members. For work with the general public as well as SAA members, committee members agreed that the redesigned SAA website will provide a good opportunity that is also appropriate and practical. Even more promising, they responded excitedly to Ms. Pirovano's description of how other professional associations develop consistent public awareness messages at their annual meetings and use those messages in ways that garner maximum public attention (street banners, news feeds, keynote speeches, Twitter themes, Facebook posts) and member enthusiasm.

The committee saw great potential for a major public awareness effort at the 2015 Annual Meeting, though it deferred for future months the detailed planning (including budget decisions) on such a campaign. To capitalize on its progress and energy at the Chicago meeting, the committee proposed that it start reaching out to 2014 Joint Annual Meeting attendees and to all SAA members by asking them for their answers to the question "What do archivists do?" If the Council agrees, COPA members will staff an information table and invite attendees to write their favorite answers on butcher paper (as was done at the 2012 and 2013 meetings by the Annual

Meeting Task Force). To reach SAA members who are not at the meeting, COPA will also invite Twitter responses and tweet promising contributions from its conference table to #archivistsare.

Before we adjourned, committee members also assessed *I Found It In The Archives!* and recommended that SAA discontinue it as a discrete effort while adopting any useful elements from the campaign that may contribute to future public awareness work. Without making specific plans or recommendations, the committee also reviewed American Archives Month and considered its potential for helping meet the committee's goals. Detailed plans for this will come through future committee work and will be focused on the 2015 American Archives Month campaign.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Does the Council agree that it is appropriate for the committee to staff a table at the 2014 Joint Annual Meeting to gather feedback on "What is an archivist," to involve non-attendees via social media, and to continue the effort after the Annual Meeting?
2. Does the Council have any feedback for the committee on the other ideas posed in this report?