

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
August 11-12, 2014  
Washington, D.C.**

**Final Report: 2014 Program Committee**  
(Prepared by Co-chairs Arlene Schmuland, Rachel Muse, and Jami Awalt)

When the SAA staff approached us to prepare a final report of the 2014 Program Committee we realized that our “interim” report to the January 2014 Council meeting (appended for the record) contained all the data, perspectives, ideas, and thanks that we have to share with the Council. Since preparation and submission of that report we have focused on working with Program Committee members, presenters, and staff on promotional materials, speaker communication, and logistics.

We are pleased and proud that the 2014 Joint Annual Meeting appears (at press time) to be the largest in our combined history. We are grateful for the opportunity to serve on the Committee.

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
January 23 – 26, 2014  
Chicago, Illinois**

**Interim Report: 2014 Program Committee**

(Prepared by Co-chairs Arlene Schmuland, Rachel Muse, and Jami Awalt)

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**COMMITTEE SELECTION**

**CoSA:** Jami Awalt was invited to serve by CoSA President, Jim Corridan. The other two CoSA committee members were chosen by the CoSA Board.

**NAGARA:** Rachel Muse was invited to serve by NAGARA President Daphne DeLeon. The other two NAGARA committee members were appointed by the NAGARA Board.

**SAA:** Arlene Schmuland was invited to serve by SAA President Danna Bell. The other six SAA committee members were appointed by Danna Bell in consultation with Arlene Schmuland, with respect to ensuring diversity in professional expertise, based on responses to the SAA call for volunteers.

## **2014 Program Committee Members**

Jami Awalt, Co-chair (CoSA)  
Rachel Muse, Co-chair (NAGARA)  
Arlene Schmuland, Co-chair (SAA)  
Matt Blessing (CoSA)  
Jillian Cuellar (SAA)  
(Chair of Student Program Subcommittee)  
Adriana Cuervo (SAA)

Leanda Gahegan (SAA)  
Susan McElrath (SAA)  
John Metz (CoSA)  
Arian Ravanbakhsh (NAGARA)  
Ted Ryan (SAA)  
Michael Sherman (NAGARA)  
Steven Szegedi (SAA)

## **SESSION PROPOSALS**

In response to the “larger criticism of traditional approaches to conference meetings” as expressed in the final report of the SAA Annual Meeting Task Force, as well as the specific call for “new programming that focuses on attendee involvement, relies on session leaders who are adept at eliciting discussion, and strives for group consensus,” the committee issued a call for proposals that encouraged alternative formats and shorter session lengths and pushed for broader and more active participation from attendees.

The Program Committee received 163 session proposals and 32 poster proposals. Sixty-six session proposals (plus 10 alternates) and 30 poster proposals were provisionally accepted and placed into scheduling tracks during the November 15-17, 2013, committee meeting in Chicago. Each committee member was assigned five or six accepted sessions to shepherd through the remaining process. During the period of November 19-27, proposers and chairs of 37 provisionally accepted sessions were contacted with required changes by their assigned committee liaisons. Most required changes were not changes but clarification: Due to an error in the proposal form that allowed proposers to select 90-minute sessions, the committee and staff of SAA thought it prudent to confirm that all who had chosen that option understood that 75 minutes was the maximum session duration. One accepted session was retracted by the proposer in this period and replaced with one of the alternates. Once the required revisions were confirmed, liaisons notified session chairs and proposers of accepted status. The PC co-chairs, in addition to their liaison duties for accepted sessions, notified the chairs and proposers of all 87 declined sessions of that status. This notification work was completed by December 19. Decline letters were individually tailored based on committee member rankings and comments in order to provide proposers with some constructive feedback.

## **Sessions by Format**

Given the interest in expanding the session types, the co-chairs wish to provide some information regarding how the expansion of session types beyond the four previously offered (traditional, panel, special focus, and lightning) played out in terms of the proposed sessions and accepted sessions. Additional notes and suggestions regarding session types are found in the additional material below.

Session Format	# Proposed	# Accepted
Traditional	38	19
Panel	60	24
Special Focus	25	6
Lightning	12	8
Incubator	5	0
Alternative	23	9
Alt-Pecha Kucha	2	1
Alt-Town Hall	1	0
Alt-Hands-on training	2	2
Alt-split session (pres/disc)	4	3
Alt-World Cafe	4	0
Alt-Discussion	1	0
Alt-Show (entertainment)	1	0
Alt-Fishbowl	4	1
Alt-Lightning variant	2	1
Alt-Demonstration	2	1

### Sessions by Topic

The general topics as indicated by the session proposer as their primary and secondary choices, based on the options presented on the proposal form. Please note: There are many overlaps in the topic choices. A complete table of the proposed session topics can be obtained from the SAA office.

Topic 1 & 2	# Accepted	# Accepted Pending Revision	# Alternate
0 / access, ethics		1	
Access / Audio/Visual	2	1	
Access / Diversity	2		
Access / Electronic records	1	1	
Access / Ethics	2		
Access / Facilities/Security	1		
Access / International	3	1	
Access / Management	1		
Access / Methodology		1	
Access / Other: Crowd Funding	1		
Access / Other: Data Management		1	
Access / Other: Women and Labor	1		
Access / Outreach	3		
Access / Preservation	1		
Access / Privacy	1		
Access / Records Management		1	
Access / Social Memory	1		
Access / Web Access		1	
Advocacy / 0		1	
Advocacy / Professional Education	1		
Appraisal / Management			1
Appraisal / Methodology	1		
Audio/Visual / Access		1	
Audio/Visual / Outreach			1
Description / Access			1

Topic 1 & 2	# Accepted	# Accepted Pending Revision	# Alternate
Description / Other: Web Access	1		
Description / Web access	1		
Diversity / Other: Recruitment	1		
Electronic Records / Access	2		
Electronic Records / Advocacy		1	
Electronic Records / Methodology		1	1
Electronic Records / Preservation		3	
International / Description	1		
Management / Diversity	1		
Management / Other: Leadership		1	
Management / Other: Archival Backlog Projects		1	
Management / Professionalism		1	
Methodology / Electronic Records	1		
Other: Assessment / Access		1	
Other: Copyright / Audio/Visual	1		
Other: Declassification / Other: Government Policy	1		
Other: Fundraising Skills / Advocacy		1	
Other: Intellectual Property / Digitization		1	
Other: Oral History / Access	1		
Outreach / Access			1
Outreach / Advocacy	1		1
Outreach / Methodology		2	
Outreach / Reference		1	
Preservation / Electronic Records	1		
Preservation / Facilities/Security		1	

Topic 1 & 2	# Accepted	# Accepted Pending Revision	# Alternate
Privacy / Access		1	
Professional Education / Outreach	1		
Records Management / Access	1		
Records Management / Professional Education		1	
Reference / Access			1
Reference / Other: historical methodology			1
Social Memory / Preservation	1		
Standards / Other: Information Governance			1
Web Access / Description			1
Web Access / Outreach	1		
<b>Grand Total (representing the final selection)</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>10</b>

### Sessions by Duration

Please keep in mind when reading the below numbers that sessions did not carry across rows in the table. For example, the sessions with unstated durations if accepted were assigned a duration (with the agreement of the proposer/chair). Additionally, 12 of the proposed 75-minute sessions were either accepted as a 60-minute session or accepted as a 60-minute alternate and one of the proposed 60-minute sessions was accepted as a 75-minute session. The numbers below also do not include the four sessions set aside: the Student Paper session (75 minutes) and the three sessions to be determined by each individual organization (60 minutes each).

Duration	Proposed	Accepted	Alternates
60 minutes	97	37 (9 were required reductions from proposed 75-minute sessions)	8 (3 were required reductions from proposed 75-minute sessions)
75 minutes	61	29 (1 was a required expansion from a proposed 60 minute session)	1
Unstated	5	n/a	n/a

## Thanks

Keeping organized throughout the process, particularly with such a large number of proposals, was an enormous task which could not have been managed by the co-chairs without the constant assistance and direction of the SAA staff. Program Coordinator René Mueller kept a tight schedule and managed to keep us on track. Executive Director Nancy Beaumont would regularly chime in to be sure we understood what was happening and to provide context from past meetings when it was valuable to our work. Web and Information Systems Administrator Matthew Black kept our Chicago meeting running smoothly and free of technological glitches. Tom Jurczak's mastery of spreadsheet software provided us with answers to many of our questions, and often before we thought to ask them. We are truly grateful to have had the support of such a great team and are impressed by their ability to so smoothly plan such a massive event.

The above is a summary of the activities of the Program Committee thus far. The remainder of the report consists of responses or feedback to requirements outlined in governance documents. This includes the Principles and Priorities document, the PC committee charge, and the Annual Meeting Task Force report. As the documents overlap with each other as well as with the activity report above, excerpts for each include only those points not covered elsewhere in this report.

## **Response to Principles and Priorities for Continuously Improving the SAA Annual Meeting (adopted by the SAA Council 8/12/13)**

### **Guiding Principles**

- We will make every meeting as useful, affordable, accessible, and enjoyable as possible for all attendees.
- We will explore new locations, structure, and content for the Annual Meeting on an ongoing basis.
- We will embrace a culture of experimentation and will be willing to take calculated risks with respect to the Annual Meeting. No aspect of the meeting will be off limits based on "tradition."
- We will encourage diversity among the people attending the meeting, contributing to its content, and benefiting from its results.

**PC Response Summary:** The Committee worked diligently to ensure that the program will prove useful and enjoyable for as diverse a group of attendees as possible. The call for proposals was deliberately designed to encourage experimentation in session structure.

**Detailed Response:** Ensuring diversity in content and participation included occasionally turning down highly ranked proposals in favor of less well-ranked sessions that covered content not reflected in other proposals. Many accepted proposals were given required or suggested changes, most of which were either intended to diversify the slate of participants or to ensure sessions were as comprehensive on their topic as possible.

Program Committee members evaluated all 163 session and 32 poster proposals within a two-week period using the following established criteria and instructions:



***Evaluative Criteria.*** *Committee members should use three sources for making their judgments about the value of a particular proposal. These are:*

*Session proposals are welcome on any aspect of archives and records management practices—local, national, and international—as well as their intersections with other professions and domains. Proposals will be evaluated on the strength of the 150-word abstract, the diversity of the speakers and their experience, the completeness of the proposal, and relevance to the meeting theme. Session proposals should incorporate one or more of the following:*

- *A strong connection to the program’s theme (ARCHIVES\*RECORDS: Ensuring Access).*
- *Inclusion of diverse or international perspectives and initiatives.*
- *Relevance to CoSA, NAGARA, and SAA members and other interested attendees.*
- *An intention to address the impact of the given topic for CoSA, NAGARA, or SAA members and/or the archives and records management professions.*

*Your knowledge and keen judgment about such factors as speakers, trends, specializations, and professional concerns.*

*CoSA’s priorities which include promoting educational and training collaborations, developing young leaders, advocacy, and advancing the State Electronic Records Initiative (SERI) as a leading source of information and training for the preservation of, access to, and advocacy for electronic records; NAGARA’s priorities which focus on the effective use and management of federal, state, and local government records and information in all formats; and SAA’s strategic priorities, which emphasize advocacy, professional growth, advancing the field, and meeting members’ needs as areas worthy of constant professional attention.*

The rankings were compiled by the SAA staff. The co-chairs set arbitrary ceilings and floor ranking settings for provisional acceptance and decline. During the committee meeting in Chicago in November, the primary work of the Friday and Saturday sessions was to review and discuss all sessions between the floor and ceiling scorings using the above criteria, plus sessions above or below the provisional settings “championed” by individual committee members. Because the committee members reflected a wide diversity of professional interests, this allowed sessions of high value to move forward when that value may not have been recognized by other committee members. Over the course of Saturday, we also reviewed all provisionally accepted sessions and most of the provisionally declined sessions to ensure as diverse a slate of topics as possible. For example, AV materials and education with primary sources were two topics on which we received many session proposals (12-14 AV-focused sessions, 9 using primary source materials in education). Although many in both topics were highly ranked, the overall program would have been skewed to those topics—at the cost of other subject coverage. The discussions of individual sessions ranged from very brief to more than 25 minutes in one case, with most falling in the 5- to 15-minute range. Some of this work was reviewed and reconsidered on Sunday as the committee established the tentative session tracks for the schedule, in order to

ensure that sessions likely to have overlapping audiences were not placed concurrently and at this time another subject review was completed.

#### **Priorities for New Approaches to Meeting Content and Structure**

- We will experiment with new formats and content for education sessions.
- The Program Committee charge will be revised to encourage innovation.
- We will actively publicize to members all efforts to consider, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of new approaches.

**PC Response:** The call for proposals encouraged a wide variety of session types. Due to limitations of the proposal form structure, committee members occasionally found it difficult to comprehensively evaluate sessions that fell outside of or skirted the edges of defined formats, such as traditional, panel, lightning, Pecha Kucha, fishbowl, and incubator. Those were often the sessions that resulted in a great deal of discussion because the committee members were aware of this deficiency and did not wish for those proposals to be declined primarily on a functional basis. In the case of some accepted sessions, follow up was done with proposers and chairs to ensure that the session format would best match the intent of the proposers and that the eventual session description would provide conference attendees with sufficient information about the session. In the cases of declined proposals, if a format issue factored into the decline (extremely rare), that information was passed on to proposers in the hope that future proposals could be clarified to account for this difficulty.

#### **Response to the Program Committee Charge (Revised August 2013, excerpted)**

##### **I. Purpose**

The Program Committee selects, oversees, and reports on the education sessions for the Annual Meeting for which it is established. It maintains liaison with the SAA President, appropriate SAA staff, and the Host Committee.

**PC Response:** We have not interacted directly with the Host Committee as of December 2013, although the SAA staff has provided excellent liaison service in this regard.

##### **IV. Duties and Responsibilities**

**IV.B.** In consultation with the President and Executive Director, the Program Committee reaches decisions early in its term about such issues as:

- Is there to be a program theme?
- How many sessions and session tracks should be scheduled?
- Should certain topics be emphasized?
- What types of new or innovative session formats should be tried?

**PC Response:** The theme (Ensuring Access) was chosen by the CoSA, NAGARA, and SAA leadership and co-chairs of the Program Committee in June 2013. The topic was left relatively open so as not to limit proposal topics. At the June Co-Chair meeting, additional session types were added to the call for proposals, which was finalized by the end of June.

(<http://www2.archivists.org/conference/2014/washington/call-for-session-proposals-archives-records-ensuring-access>) The number of sessions was determined at the PC meeting in

November 2013, based on past practice. Four sessions were left TBD: one each for CoSA, NAGARA, and SAA presidents (or boards) to populate, one for the Student Paper Session.

**IV.C.** To ensure the broadest possible participation in the meeting, individuals serving on the Program Committee may not participate on education sessions for that conference, and no individual may be included on more than one session proposal.

**PC Response:** The SAA Council's August 2013 revision to this item ("no individual may be included on more than one session proposal") was completed after the call for proposals was released so the committee was unable to require this change.

**IV.D.** The Program Committee solicits suggestions for sessions from the membership and appropriate internal and external groups (e.g., SAA component groups and regional and affiliate organizations) using the following methods:

- Circulate copies of session proposal forms as widely as possible, including distribution at the preceding Annual Meeting and via SAA's various communication channels.
- Contact all SAA component groups to encourage them to submit proposals.
- Prepare articles for *Archival Outlook* and other appropriate communication channels.
- Reach out to contacts in regional and other affiliated organizations to encourage submissions.

**PC Response:** Bullet 1 was completed. Bullet 2: The SAA office sent an offer to all steering committee chairs for a PC member to present at S/RT meetings at the 2013 conference. Eight requests were made, plus one request for talking points. Bullet 3: We provided an update regarding the proposal deadline extension as well as a series of proposal FAQs in a September 25 "Off the Record" blog post. The CoSA and NAGARA co-chairs liaised with the leadership of their respective organizations to promote the call for proposals.

**IV.H.** The Program Committee engages members in the proposal process by inviting SAA sections, roundtables, committees, and working groups to provide endorsements of Annual Meeting program proposals. Endorsements by these groups are one factor among many that the Program Committee considers during the process of developing a balanced, diverse program. An endorsement by a group is not a guarantee that a proposal will be accepted.

**PC Response:** Endorsements remain a somewhat confusing area for proposers, or perhaps more accurately stated, some proposers believe that endorsements should carry more weight than they traditionally have in the selection process. The co-chairs note that during a joint conference year, endorsements--though still important--will not always carry the same weight because NAGARA and CoSA have no equivalent endorsement process and we need to make sure that their topic needs are met as well. That means that a certain proportion of the session slate may not be eligible for the endorsement process. Even in a non-joint year, the number of endorsements can vary. While it's unlikely, with 45 roundtables and sections within SAA plus the number of other committees (Membership, Standards, CALM, and so forth) that can endorse sessions, the Program Committee could receive well over 100 proposals with endorsements. This year we received 58 sessions with endorsements, 19 of those had multiple endorsements. Of the 58 sessions with endorsements, 36 were accepted with three more accepted as alternates. A few roundtables and sections submitted no endorsements, which either meant that proposals were not forwarded to them or, in at least one case this year, the steering committee missed the deadline

for submission of their endorsements. In the end, the Program Committee still needs to choose as topically balanced a program as possible and though endorsements can support that, in practice this has rarely been the case. Endorsements are a factor in committee deliberations and this year is no exception. Proposals with endorsements were reviewed and discussed at length but the endorsement was not the topmost criterion for whether a session moved forward. At some point, the SAA Council may wish to consult with S/RT steering committees to improve the functionality of the endorsement process.

**IV.L.** The Program Committee provides participants with guidelines for session formats.

**PC Response:** This--or at least a primer to it--should be available at the time the call for proposals goes out. Current practice is to make this available after the sessions have been accepted. See notes above regarding proposals and session formats.

### **Response to the Final Report of the SAA Annual Meeting Task Force**

Many of the Task Force's recommendations are outside the purview of the Program Committee. The Content Subcommittee was the most closely aligned to the work of the PC.

#### ***Scenario 1: Presidential Plenary Converted to Priority-Focused Educational Session***

We have assigned each sponsoring group a dedicated session and have encouraged the organizations to consider this recommendation. However, we'll add that the rest of the text makes it clear that the SAA President is expected to bring the proposed session to the PC and we are to be involved in the development/execution of that session. Our take is that we'd be happy to do this, but we have not yet discussed how this might work.

#### ***Scenario 2: Structured Sharing Sessions and Unconference Events***

The committee briefly discussed the possibility of setting aside some sessions TBD (aside from the group sessions detailed above). In a year in which we received nearly 2.5 times the number of proposals as we had possible session slots, and in a joint meeting year, the will of the committee was to accept as many of the proposals as possible. We have opened the door to non-standard events, although we received relatively few such proposals. The committee members expressed concern that the current proposal form is not sufficient to meet the needs of multiple session types. If this continues, the proposal form will need significant restructuring. For example, it is non-functional for sessions with more than four participants (i.e., lightning sessions). The committee members also expressed some concerns with the confusion they perceived on the part of some proposers in regard to session types—not just the new types like fishbowl or Pecha Kucha, but traditional and panel sessions as well. As future committees expand the opportunities for proposers to suggest non-traditional session types, further communication and clarification would be in order.

#### ***Scenario 3: Addition of Focused Debate and Juried Paper Sessions***

We did not make progress on this. The (“juried”) student paper session is continued in 2014.

#### ***Scenario 4: Allow More Concurrency in the Program***

This level of scheduling is not usually within the Program Committee's mission. If it were to happen, the committee would need to take it into consideration when setting up the tentative tracks lists.

#### ***Scenario 5: Structured Networking***

Not within the Program Committee's purview at this time.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY**

- **Poster Proposals:** The committee does not disagree with the general intent for poster sessions to serve as an entry-level (or advanced) method of engaging new participants in conference participation. However, concern was expressed that some quality control standards be enacted. We did not accept all proposals this year, which was a change from previous years. At least two committee members noted their concern that in an academic institution, posters are often accepted as proof of an employee's research/creative work quality, and they themselves had assumed that some peer review had gone into the acceptance of those proposals. Next year's co-chairs were made aware of this issue and expressed a desire to work toward a resolution.
- **Feedback with Declines:** Co-chairs are reliant on comments provided by committee members when preparing decline letters, particularly when declining a proposal that was not discussed at the Chicago meeting. Committee members should be encouraged to comment on every session proposal they review, so that co-chairs have that commentary to refer to when preparing declines.
- **Guidelines for Session Formats:** Proposers do not always have a good grasp on what kind of session they are proposing. Guidelines for session formats, or at least a primer to such guidelines, should be available at the time the Call for Proposals goes out.
- **Special Focus Sessions:** This was a particularly competitive year, and committee members did everything they could to ensure that as many voices as possible will be heard at the conference. This meant that single-institution special focus sessions tended to be rated quite low. This type of session may not be appropriate for a large, joint conference.
- **Endorsement Process:** The endorsement process is confusing, particularly to committee members from outside SAA, and there seems to be disagreement on how much weight endorsements should be given. The SAA Council may wish to consult with S/RT steering committees to improve the functionality of the endorsement process.
- **Retool Proposal Form:** The current proposal form is not sufficient to meet the needs of multiple session types and will need significant restructuring. For example, it is non-functional for sessions with more than four participants (i.e., lightning sessions).