

**Society of American Archivists Foundation
Board Meeting
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Atlanta, Georgia**

**Grant Application Evaluation Procedures
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BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION

The SAAF Board requested at its May 2016 meeting that the 2016 Grant Review Committee (Review Committee) prepare a set of policies and procedures to regulate the intake, review, and evaluation process for grant applications. The request grew out of the committee's first-year experience in assessing grants. The committee found their work hampered by the absence of agreed-upon procedures for sifting through proposals, routine workflow, quality input in areas beyond their expertise, and a convincing way to move from individual reviews to a group recommendation on proposals. The procedure recommended here begins to address these gaps from our inaugural year. Future committees are encouraged to fine tune the process as experience warrants.

The 2016 Review Committee operated largely as an *ad hoc* capacity. Going forward, the committee recommends that the Grant Review Committee be appointed annually by the SAAF President subject to the approval of the board.

RECOMMENDATION 1

THAT, in consultation with the Board, the SAAF President annually appoint a Grant Review Committee to be comprised of no fewer than three SAAF Board members and the Executive Director (*ex officio*); and

THAT the purpose of the Grant Review Committee be to receive, evaluate, and recommend to the Board applications for grant funding according to Board-approved standard assessment criteria.

Support Statement: The 2016 Review Committee operated largely as an *ad hoc* capacity. Going forward, the committee recommends that the Grant Review Committee be appointed annually by the SAAF President subject to the approval of the board.

Fiscal Impact: None.

RECOMMENDATION 2

THAT the proposed Grant Application Evaluation Procedures be adopted as a standard set of guidelines for use by the Grant Review Committee, and THAT they be used to implement an evaluation process that is as transparent as possible while maintaining appropriate confidences, maximum flexibility in application, and a record of fairness in the treatment of all applicants.

SAAF Grant Application Evaluation Procedures

- 1. The Grant Review Committee.** The Grant Review Committee (Review Committee) is an appointed body of the SAA Foundation Board. The SAAF President will appoint members of the Review Committee from among Board members no later than the close of the annual business meeting. The committee consists of the SAAF President and no fewer than three additional members of the Board appointed by the President, subject to approval by the Board. The Executive Director shall serve *ex officio* with voice, but without vote. The Review Committee is a working body of the Board. Its responsibilities include:

 - a. Review the evaluative criteria (including strategic initiatives identified in the Development Plan) for new grant proposals.
 - b. Receive and solicit direction from the SAAF Board on the annual funding allocation and any special program priorities that support the SAAF or SAA mission and strategic plan.
 - c. Assist the Executive Director to issue the Call for Proposals before December 1.
 - d. Be prepared to meet as a group and to work individually to analyze, evaluate and, if necessary, contact others to gather information for a recommendation on grant applications submitted to SAAF.
 - e. Report to the Board and make recommendations for funding recommended grants, including a list of proposals not recommended for funding and the reason(s) why.
 - f. Monitor the submission of impact statements or reports from previous award winners.
- 2. Requirements Checklist.** The Committee will review annually a **Requirements Checklist** that will guide all applicants and committee members in producing the information that must accompany all proposals. The checklist is an administrative tool that may be distributed to inquirers and be used as part of the overall **Evaluation Form**.
- 3. Initial Letter of Inquiry.** Applicants are encouraged to inquire about the suitability of their proposals with the requirements of the Foundation's grant program. An initial letter of inquiry may be a one-page, 750-word statement of interest that provides at a minimum the following five pieces of information:

 - Applicant's identifying information (acting as an individual or for an institution)
 - Description of project or activity and product.
 - Specific reason(s) for applying with reference to SAAF's funding priorities.
 - Amount requested and expected expenses.
 - Other relevant information.

- 4. First-Pass Review.** The Executive Director and/or the Review Committee will conduct an initial review of each Letter of Inquiry. The Executive Director will distribute inquiries as soon as possible with a recommendation to proceed or decline further consideration of the proposal based on her/his first-pass review. The Committee will consider the Executive Director's recommendation and respond with an "up or down" decision on the appropriateness of the proposal. The key criteria to be considered at this stage are:
- a. The proposal requests funding within the award guidelines (e.g., \$500-\$5,000). If not, the Committee may consider the proposal if a compelling reason exists to exceed the funding guidelines.
 - b. Unambiguous evidence has been provided to identify the individual and/or the entity that will be the recipient of the funds and who will conduct the work.
 - c. The proposal addresses the overall mission and priorities of SAAF and /or SAA.
 - d. The applicant pointedly addresses how the proposal implements or advances at least one of the goals or activities of the SAA strategic plan.
 - e. The activity being funded does not replicate established SAAF activities (e.g., scholarships, travel to annual meeting, etc.) nor does it ask for funds that are excluded by the SAAF Board (such as travel and internships).

The Executive Director will inform the proposer(s) of SAAF's decision to receive a full proposal, to decline the proposal, or in some cases to reapply after revision.

- 5. Application,** the committee chair will assign a member to be the key contact to solicit from the proposer any additional information that may be needed to clarify the work/activity under review (methods, product, sponsor, budget use, qualifications, impact, etc.). The key contact will provide an overall assessment to the Review Committee on the basis of any additional findings that bear on the grant proposal. The key contact and the Review Committee may agree that no additional information is needed and the committee's assessment may proceed immediately. The chair will assign proposals to each committee member and no member will be assigned an additional proposal before all other members have been asked to take an assignment.
- 6. Conflict of Interest Reminder.** No committee member may serve as a key contact if he/she is familiar with the applicant or could be perceived as having a conflict of interest in fairly assessing or representing the applicant's proposal. Committee and Board members are expected to announce a potential conflict and to recuse themselves from any decision-making role or vote on a grant proposal that originates from or benefits an entity with which the member has a personal or other association. The association merely has to be one that a reasonable person could perceive as leading to favorable or unfavorable treatment on any basis other than a strictly professional and unbiased evaluation.
- 7. Expert Review.** The Committee, in consultation with Board members, may consider the input of individuals who can lend expertise to the review process for proposals that involve a specialist's knowledge, technical skills, methodologies, and/or similar unfamiliar domains. The key contact will gather this input in those cases in which it is deemed necessary. The Review Committee is not required to seek outside opinion if the substance of the proposal is within their professional competence to evaluate.

The Review Committee's key contact may also seek one or more expert opinions and report their observations as part of an assessment report back to the full committee for the final grant review. These inquiries should make every attempt to: (a) evaluate statements of fact and declarative statements made by the proposer/proposal, and (b) assess the overall value of the proposed activity to the profession. Such inquiries should protect the confidentiality of the application process for both the applicant and reviewer. Neither the Review Committee nor the key contact is required to seek external input if all important aspects of the proposal are clearly stated and no additional information or expert commentary is warranted.

- 8.** The Review Committee will evaluate and make a recommendation to the Board on every grant application that it receives after an invitation to apply. The committee will use, but not be limited by, the following criteria in making its recommendation:
- Appropriateness of the methods (reliability, validity, population, etc.);
 - Overall impact of the product on the profession or a segment thereof;
 - Uniqueness of the activity and/or product (has it been done before);
 - Availability of other equally useful routes to achieving a similarly valuable outcome;
 - Value of a specific archival product (e.g., supporting records of enduring value); and
 - Soundness of the work plan, techniques, tools, and human resources.

- 9. Formal Evaluation.** The Evaluation Form is the formal written tool used by the Review Committee to record its assessment of each application and prepare a recommendation to the Board. The formal evaluation should not precede an assessment report from the key contact if the committee has requested additional information.

The committee will review the common Evaluation Form annually and adjust it as necessary to preserve its usefulness as a standard ranking tool. The form should make provision for both the assignment of a rank and the committee member's supporting comment, if explanation is deemed appropriate. The evaluations are anonymous and confidential in source beyond the Review Committee; however, the Executive Directory may share the contents of the reviews with the applicant upon request.

- 10. Committee Recommendations.** The Review Committee will confer at least once to review and vote on all pending grant proposals and to prepare final recommendations to the Board. A final decision on how to allocate the available funds in the annual distribution should not occur until all proposals have been received and evaluated in the annual grant cycle. An exception to this rule would be an expedited request from the SAA Council or Executive Committee to meet an extraordinary contingency situation. All votes of the Grant Review Committee to recommend (or not to recommend) a grant to the SAAF Board shall be by secret ballot. All voting members of the committee are required to vote unless excused for reasons of conflict of interest.

- 11. Schedule.** The application deadline is February 1. The Review Committee will consider applications, conduct its review, and report its recommendations to the Board by March 30. The Board will consider and vote on the committee's recommendations before May 1. The President will notify the applicants of the Board's decision by May 15.

12. Post-Award Accountability. In consultation with the Executive Director, it is the duty of the Review Committee to prepare a brief report to the Board on the work of the Committee, including its recommendations on improvements to the grant application and review process and other useful observations that will assist the next Committee.

The Committee will work with the Executive Director to examine and monitor the previous grant awards for successful expected outcomes and measures. If deemed necessary, the committee (or the Executive Director) will report to the Board on the recipients' grant activity within 12 months of the conclusion of the grant cycle.

Support Statement: The Review Committee appreciates the paramount need to apply standard criteria and methods that demonstrate to the SAA Council, SAA members, and other professional stakeholders the care and diligence assigned by the Foundation to its grant program. Although these procedures will be publicly available and may be helpful to applicants, their true value lies in the continuity they will bring to the SAAF in managing its grant program as committee memberships change from one year to the next. The Grant Review Committee devoted considerable discussion to how staff and committee members could best filter through a variety of possible requests to reduce the impact on volunteers' time. All committee members agreed that the grant program must be conducted as an exercise in efficiency and accountability. The procedure asks applicants to start with an initial inquiry on the appropriateness of their proposal to SAAF's requirements. Some clarification at this early stage will allow the committee to focus attention on worthy proposals and increase the likelihood of a more complete overall evaluation.

Fiscal Impact: None.