

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
August 13, 2018
Washington, DC**

**Principles and Priorities for Continuously
Improving the SAA Annual Meeting
(Prepared by SAA President Tanya Zanish-Belcher)**

BACKGROUND

In March 2018, the Council had an online discussion about the current [Principles and Priorities for Continuously Improving the SAA Annual Meeting](#), to add language that would explicitly encourage diversity and inclusion on session panels. One member noted: “It’s too late for the 2018 program and that selection process, but I hope that we can have conversations in the next Council meeting about articulating some expectations for proposals for 2019 which are in the vein of CLIRDLF (just released its call for papers with a no “MANEL” statement) and other organizations who have indicated that all male panels will not be accepted. I’d go so far as to state that we would expect no all white panels either. It would be a way of backing up our diversity and inclusion statement and a push for folks to work harder at putting together inclusive panels.”

I posted a Google document to which I invited Council members to comment on how the Principles and Priorities might be updated and revised. One Council member provided suggested changes, which are included in the draft revision below. Another Council member asked if/how we would collect demographic information to ensure that requirements are being met.

The revised version was then shared with SAA members for comments, and those comments are attached below (Appendix).

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION

[DRAFT REVISION]

**Principles and Priorities for Continuously
Improving the SAA Annual Meeting
(Approved by the SAA Council, August 12, 2013)**

This document presents a summary of the Council's principles and priorities for ensuring the continued development of the Annual Meeting, based on the excellent work of the 2011-2013 Annual Meeting Task Force. Since adoption, the Council receives a report at each meeting on the extent to which these Principles and Priorities are put into play for the Annual Meeting. [See the agenda for each Council meeting, typically under "Staff Reports," beginning in August 2013: <http://www2.archivists.org/groups/saa-council>.]

[Underline = addition, strikethrough = deletion.]

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.
- We will actively pursue ways of making meeting content available online.
- We will integrate a commitment to social responsibility and sustainability into all aspects of meeting planning and execution.
- We will continuously seek feedback from both attendees and non-attendees on all aspects of the meeting.

Priorities for Site Selection and Contract Requirements

- We will experiment with meeting in cities of varying sizes using a combination of a convention center and room blocks in several hotels at varying price points.
- We will reevaluate site selection criteria based on member input.
- We will facilitate inexpensive alternative housing (such as dormitories) whenever feasible.
- We will stipulate in all Requests for Proposals (RFPs) that free wireless access in meeting spaces is a key component of our needs.
- We will stipulate in all RFPs the importance of fair labor practices, sustainable ("green") practices, and donation of excess food and beverage to worthy causes.
- Staff will actively monitor and report to the Council information about labor contracts and potential labor actions affecting the hotel sector.

Priorities for Delivery of Meeting Content

- We will deploy a mobile conference app for access to program information via smart phones and tablets.
- We will ensure that each year's conference website includes effective functionality and navigation.

- We will seek to provide free and easy access to session content from past conferences.
- We will investigate and incrementally implement online access to meeting content by various means as technology and resources permit.
- We will implement sustainable practices in our production of conference materials.

Priorities for New Approaches to Meeting Content and Structure

- We will experiment with new approaches to plenary sessions.
- We will identify and implement new approaches to structured and unstructured networking.
- 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.
- We will assess and review our meeting content and structure in order to constantly improve.
- We expect panels to be diverse and inclusive. This includes bringing balance to the panels, such as *individual* diversity (gender, race, age, length of time in profession, ability), *institutional* diversity (academic, government, corporate/business, non-profit, large, small), and *geographic* diversity.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Are there other changes that should be made based on member comments?
2. Does the Council wish to approve the proposed changes in this document?

**Member Comments:
Principles and Priorities for Continuously Improving
the SAA Annual Meeting
May 2018**

WEBSITE

[astankra](#) says:

[Meeting Locations](#)

I appreciate the opportunity to contribute thoughts here! I want to plug the idea that SAA consider so-called "second-tier" cities as locations for the annual meetings. These cities oftentimes cheaper than the oft-used "major" American cities that SAA gravitates to to hold the annual meeting time-and-again - both for SAA as an organization and thus also SAA members in registration costs, etc. Further, these cities have repositories, museums, institutions that have fascinating and important materials and collections that pose awesome opportunities for partnerships for events, etc. Thanks for considering this idea!

SUBMITTED BY [ASTANKRA](#) ON MAY 23, 2018 - 9:28AM.

[Schaa1819](#) says:

[Tracks](#)

I do like the idea of Tracks - the time has come. With so many sessions being held at the same time, I think it would be easy to categorize (and label) them to allow people to focus on one aspect of discovery. Years ago we tried learning sessions for newbies (kind of like free workshops). Why not bring them back? There could be preservation, visual, digital, management tracks (to name a few) - across all the days of meetings, or just a day. And if there aren't enough session to fill out a track, then there is always a miscellaneous category.

As an added bonus, tracks might allow sections to come up with a panel, or endorse them as we did in the past.

SUBMITTED BY [SCHAA1819](#) ON MAY 17, 2018 - 3:44PM.

[swoodland](#) says:

[Assisted listening technology](#)

I am in agreement with the major points in the document. Thank you for putting this together.

However, I don't recall any membership surveys in my 20 years as a member that asked about hearing issues. I can no longer attend the annual conference because the sessions are inadequately miked and have not made use of relatively standard technology to make it easier to hear at and participate in sessions.

And outside of sessions a common problem for those of us with hearing problems is we cannot tolerate the noise level in the exhibition area, the networking areas and the

receptions. Taking away every opportunity to network, meet new people, interact with vendors at the conference.

I would like to see SAA address this issue with every venue you speak with, preferably with someone who is knowledgeable about the technology on your committee. Call for volunteers! You'll see how many people this would help.

SUBMITTED BY [SWOODLAND](#) ON MAY 12, 2018 - 5:39PM.

[kwilliams](#) says:

[Livestreaming options for annual meetings](#)

Has Council considered livestreaming a portion of its annual meeting? I am thinking of events such as the plenary/plenaries, presidential address, awards ceremonies, or the business meeting. This can help members who cannot travel to a meeting stay informed with as-it-happens experiences, rather than reading or seeing it later.

SUBMITTED BY [KMWILLIAMS](#) ON MAY 11, 2018 - 9:13AM.

[eiratansej](#) says:

[More clarity needed for sustainability mentions](#)

I'm very glad to see SAA revisiting its principles for continuously improving the annual meeting and am generally supportive of the changes.

Although it's not within the scope of the existing changes, I would like to see SAA deliberate more specifically in the future on the following mentions of sustainability:

- We will integrate a commitment to social responsibility and sustainability into all aspects of meeting planning and execution.
- We will implement sustainable practices in our production of conference materials.
- We will stipulate in all RFPs the importance of fair labor practices, sustainable ("green") practices, and donation of excess food and beverage to worthy causes.

Sustainability is a very ambiguous words that can mean a lot of things to different people. An accountant might view sustainability through the lens of profits and losses, someone like me views it through the environmental definition. So on that note - what exactly does sustainability mean in this context given the fact that conference travel is inherently a massive contribution to professional carbon footprints?

Location and access to public transportation is a major component of conference travel environmental sustainability. I was thrilled that SAA provided light rail transit passes to attendees at the 2017 conference in Portland. I would like this to become standard in the future. Conference locations that have many direct flights and Amtrak access (instead of locations that require multiple flights) is also important.

Many academic conferences are exploring many creative means to reduce their carbon footprints. Some resources on this topic that I hope y'all will consider:

[Nearly Carbon-Neutral Conferences](#)

[Flying Less](#)

SUBMITTED BY [EIRATANSEY](#) ON MAY 11, 2018 - 7:54AM.

MyNameIs says:

[Meeting locations / panel diversity](#)

1. On the last new section - meeting locations. If you have an axe to grind on "religious liberty" or "right to work" laws just come out and say it rather than put in this overbroad statement. One might assume that laws and policy on **RECORDS** would have the most relevance to **ARCHIVES** though I doubt this is being put here in order to score locations based on information governance, open government, sunshine laws, secrecy, retention policies, or the like. If this is about social policy not records related then be honest and spell it out.

2. On panel makeup, I think this is backwards. The problem is not sessions that are too narrowly focused. We should have tracks. Every other big conference has these. If you want a social justice track make one, or a digital preservation / e-records track make one. Often there are 2-3 sessions on related topics at the same time. Then there are times where there is nothing really of as much interest (for others this may be their conflict time.)

Sessions are most often made up of people who know one another and are sometimes geographically or institutional-type centric, based on their network. The people that tend to have the broadest and most diverse network to make these broad panels are large, national-focused, academic institutions - and we really don't need to have more influence by large academic institutions here - they are already overrepresented. If SAA wants this level of diversity then it needs to create a formal platform for soliciting participation across the entire society, as some groups do, and have the committee create the panels based on subject and diversity criteria.

SUBMITTED BY [MYNAMEIS](#) ON MAY 11, 2018 - 7:36AM.

D'Ent2918 says:

[Reply to MyNameIs](#)

These are all good points. Agree that the policy should spell this out more specifically, maybe adding a catch-all phrase like - and other policies in accordance with SAA statements. At first blush, I read this as meeting in a place that followed open records laws, take steps to preserve their records, etc., which would be cool, but don't think that is what the clause really means. Also, by spelling it out that may actually give the stance more weight (e.g. we are explicitly saying we are avoiding places with poor labor laws or whatever).

I appreciate diversity in presenters. I understand including geographic diversity, but am not quite sure if it belongs on the list with the others. I expect panels to be skewed towards the region where the meeting is being held. Most people cannot afford to go to SAA unless it is

nearby. Therefore, by including geographic diversity, we may inadvertently be giving more weight to the same people every year.

SUBMITTED BY [D'ENT2918](#) ON MAY 11, 2018 - 2:14PM.

[michelle](#) says:

[general comments](#)

The pre-conference always has workshops that are pay-to-participate; I'd love to see some free workshops during the conference time as part of the registration fee.

More structured mingling time; make it easier for newer members to meet each other and older members. By using structured activities making new connections easier.

Calm spaces: the conference can be very hectic and for those of us with anxiety issues having a quiet room to 'escape' to would be really great.

More diveristy. In the panels, in the vendors, and in the attendees.

SUBMITTED BY [MICHELLE](#) ON MAY 10, 2018 - 12:53PM.

[Gallo6585](#) says:

[Diversity and inclusion](#)

This phrase is an easy one to use, but everywhere it is used, I am old enough to see that ageism is rampant without anyone's being disturbed. Also, the implication with respect to technology is that people will continue to bash into one another while checking their smartphones on their way to the next session: I hope that paper programs will continue to be available. Finally, I don't see anything about whether there are plans to archive all the data that are generated by the meeting as more goes digital--and especially, can attendees opt out of having it saved by anyone. Do we know what the provider is doing with it?

Pat Galloway

SUBMITTED BY [GALLO6585](#) ON MAY 10, 2018 - 11:15AM.

[jennyj](#) says:

[Diveristy, Inclusion, Equity Checklist for Annual Meetings](#)

Has SAA given any thought to developing or adopting a Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Checklist for annual meetings? OpenCon has shared theirs, and it would be worth considering adopting something similiar. I think additions could be made to improve such a checklist for SAA meetings. <https://sparcopen.github.io/opencon-dei-report/>

SUBMITTED BY [JENNYJ](#) ON MAY 10, 2018 - 10:59AM.

SAA HQ INBOX

[Response 1]

My comment has to do with language. In the first underlined section change it to "...structure to improve continuously."

[Response 2]

I like the additional language added and think it's necessary, but I would like to see a balance struck between host cities sharing our values/ethics and ensuring that overall expenses for those attending are reasonable.

Economic accessibility to the meeting should take priority over all else. Perhaps a tiered registration cost (similar to annual membership) and a travel award specifically for low-income working members could be established. I would hate to see state-level laws limit accessibility by choosing to relocate to somewhere more costly when the reality is most major cities are already fairly liberal.

[Response 3]

Thanks for sending this out for comment. I agree with the suggested edits (deletions and additions) and have a couple supporting comments/thoughts.

We will assess and review our meeting content and structure in order to improve continuously.

- I think it's very important for the program committee chairs/co-chairs, and even committee members, to see previous year's surveys as they begin their work on the upcoming meeting. As co-chair, I did receive the 2017 survey results, which were helpful. Looking back, it might have also been helpful for the entire committee to see the survey results. Just a thought/suggestion for future chairs/co-chairs.

We will encourage structuring of panels that are diverse and inclusive with regard to the individuals (gender, race, age, length of time in the profession, ability), institutions (academic, government, corporate/business, non-profit, large, small), and geographic regions represented.

- Very much agree with this statement. Additionally, I think the CFP should state this and that panel composition/structure will be evaluated along with the proposal/session content and educational objectives. DLF took a firm stance on this for their 2018 meeting and I am glad to see SAA also acknowledging the need for more diverse panels at our meetings.

[Response 4]

Dear SAA Council,

Could there be included a guiding principle which says the following?

We will strive to make the conference planning process as transparent to members as possible, including making the percentages of accepted panelists and/or panels available on the website.

This year's rate of acceptance was just under 40% (185 applicants and accepted 73 proposals), but I don't believe this statistic is currently made available to members. It would be useful to know the rate of acceptance for the last ten years, if not over a longer period of time.

There might be other issues regarding conference planning transparency which could be addressed.

[Response 5]

Council, Officers, and SAA staff,

I think these are excellent general principles on which to base the management of SAA's annual meeting. They were the foundation for the work of the Annual Meeting Task Force several years ago, and they appear to have been well-followed since their creation in 2013. There does seem to be some repetition in several points, but I'm sure that will be ironed out as the principles are revised over the years. I see that accessibility is addressed in the first point. I would be glad to offer a more specific phrase to cover disability access, when these principles are updated again.

Thanks for all the work that went into these guidelines - and especially to the SAA staff who guide those of us who volunteer to shape the annual meeting each year!