

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
August 1, 2019
Austin, Texas**

**Creation of Task Force to Review the Fellows Selection Process
(Prepared by 2019 Fellows Selection Committee Chair Danna Bell)**

BACKGROUND

As noted in the SAA Governance Manual, the [Committee on the Selection of SAA Fellows](#) “selects Fellows of the Society in accordance with criteria and procedures established and approved by the Council and in accordance with the Society's Constitution and Bylaws. From time to time the committee also performs other tasks assigned by the Council.”

“The committee is composed of the five most recent past presidents of the Society and three Fellows who are elected by the Council at its winter meeting and who serve one-year terms. Past presidents, current members of the Council, and Society staff members are not eligible for election. The president who has served the longest on the committee serves as chair....

“The Committee ... elects new Fellows from individuals nominated by members of the Society.... Nominations must include complete biographical information, including academic degrees and honors, pertinent professional and technical training, professional publications, Society activities, and a narrative description of the professional contributions that merit designation as a Fellow.

“... In approving nominations, the Committee shall be guided by achievement in each of the following criteria:

- Appropriate academic education and professional and technical training in any of the fields of the Society's interest;
- Professional archives experience in any of the fields of the Society's objectives for a minimum of seven years, which shall include evidence of professional responsibility;
- Contributions to the profession demonstrating initiative, resourcefulness, and commitment;
- Writings, presentations, and/or educational services (such as workshops or webinars) of superior quality and usefulness contributing to the realization of the Society's objectives;
- Contributions to the archives profession through active participation in the Society of American Archivists and innovative or outstanding work on behalf of the Society.

“A 75% favorable vote by members of the Committee on the Selection of SAA Fellows is required for election as a Fellow.”

The 2019 Committee completed its work to select the 2019 class of Fellows in late April.

DISCUSSION

As the committee proceeded through its selection process for 2019, we noted a number of issues that warrant resolution so that we can provide more consistent and effective guidelines to assist the selection committee in making decisions.

- Some of the nominations did not clearly document service to the Society. Some of the work they did may have shown initiative, resourcefulness, and commitment in archives at the state or regional level, but there was little to no indication of active participation in the Society or innovative or outstanding work on behalf of the Society. How strongly should we rate activity in the Society? These people are Fellows of the Society. Should work performed in support of regional and local associations be accounted in some way? How is it evaluated in relationship to service to SAA?
- There is also concern about those people who were nominated to be Fellows who work for the federal or state government, where papers and presentations must be approved by supervisors and other senior-level staff. Some evaluators felt that could that hinder publication, which is something that we do measure, and keep people in government agencies from the opportunity of being a Fellow.
- The extent and type of publications was also a point of discussion. For example, should publications be considered more appropriate if they are articles in major national or regional journals (*American Archivist*, *Provenance*, etc.)? How are such articles/books evaluated in comparison to blogs or other social media offerings? Writings in non-archival publications such as public or local/state history? Standards documents? And how much is a “significant” number?
- We also discussed the issue of invisible labor. There are some people who work behind the scenes who contribute greatly to the Society. They may not hold more visible leadership positions, but contribute to such things as standards documents, representation of SAA on international committees, conducting workshops, etc. How do we measure that work that may benefit SAA, but is unseen and perhaps unknown? And how do we rate that work?
- We felt that the presentation of at least one nomination this year may have hindered that nomination’s success. We have experienced this before. How do we rate someone whom we know may have done more, but the nomination does not do justice to the full range of contributions made by the nominee? This relies in part on someone on the committee “knowing” more about the nominee’s background. But occasionally a nominee is not as well-known by the evaluators—so if evaluator knowledge of unstated qualifications is taken into account, how do we ensure that opportunity exists for all nominees?
- The committee also expressed concern about the lack of consistency in the selection process. Some evaluators have valued publications more heavily, others have felt contributions in related fields such as history or digital access have equal weight, and frankly sometimes being “known” to evaluators seems to tip the balance in their recommendations.

- It was also suggested that we move beyond conference calls to other meeting software such as WebEx that allows for the sharing of documents, scores, and a hand-raising function to provide better opportunities for discussion and collaboration among committee members.
- Discussion also considered whether there was some type of numerical rating approach that might be employed to help guide evaluation.

The Fellows Selection Committee recommends that a task force be created to review the process of selecting Fellows. The Task Force should review the guidelines for the selection of Fellows and work to revise this process. This should include providing clearer criteria, additional details for nominators, and a clearer set of guidelines for the committee to follow. Given that this is one of the honors awarded to individuals in our profession, ensuring a more even and consistent approach to evaluation is extremely important. The task force should also work to develop a short video or webinar for nominators to show them how to create or improve the nomination package. We would like to complete our work no later than December 31, 2019.

Submitted on behalf of the 2019 Committee on the Selection of Fellows:

Danna C. Bell, Chair, Past President, 2013-2014
 Kathleen Roe, Past President, 2014-2015
 Dennis Meissner, Past President, 2015-2016
 Nancy McGovern, Past President, 2016-2017
 Tanya Zanish-Belcher, Past President, 2017-2018
 Amy Cooper Cary
 Anne Gilliland
 Rachel Vagts

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Council appoint a task force, per the following description, to examine various questions about the Fellows selection process posed by the 2019 Fellows Selection Committee, with a final report with recommendations to the Council by December 31, 2019.

Task Force to Review the Fellows Selection Process

I. Purpose

The purpose of the task force is to review the process of selecting SAA Fellows and recommend any appropriate changes, clarifications, or guidelines that the task force thinks are warranted in administering this program in the future.

II. Size, Composition, Selection, Length of Term

The task force will comprise five individuals, each of whom is a Fellow of the Society of American Archivists, and will include the 2019 chair of the Committee on the Selection of SAA Fellows, three

current or past members of the Committee who have also served as SAA President, and one Fellow who has not served as SAA President.

The task force will be appointed by August 6, 2019, and its term will end with submission of a final report and recommendations on December 31, 2019.

III. Duties and Responsibilities

The task force will review the questions put forward by the 2019 Committee on the Selection of SAA Fellows (in the Discussion section of Council Action Item 0819-TK-TK-SelectFellows) and make recommendations to the SAA Council about any changes or additional guidelines to be included in the Committee's charge going forward.

IV. Reporting

The task force will prepare a final report with recommendations to the Council by December 31, 2019.

Support Statement: The 2019 Committee on the Selection of SAA Fellows encountered a number of issues and questions as it reviewed the Fellows nominations, and believes that a concerted effort by a task force to consider the issues that it raised will result in a more consistent and efficient process going forward.

Relevance to Strategic Priorities: Addresses Strategic Goal 2: Enhancing Professional Growth; and Goal 4: Meeting Members' Needs.

Fiscal Impact: No direct expense. Estimated 10 hours of staff time to research questions that arise and provide staff support to the task force.