

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
August 3, 2020  
Virtual Meeting**

**Proposal for Diversity Statement Requirement for  
SAA Position Applications  
(Prepared by Council Member Ricky Punzalan)**

**BACKGROUND**

The increasing manifestations of hate and abuse in the form of outright racist, homophobic, transphobic, sexist, classist, and ableist actions in recent years requires us to develop means to create a more inclusive, equitable, and diverse Society of American Archivists. SAA must find ways to constantly ensure that those who hold positions within the organization will support and advance its core values of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and that we attract leadership that will remain committed to DEI. A “diversity statement” is an instrument that can encourage such reflection and engender specific actions.

This report recommends that the SAA Council move to require all those applying for SAA positions (staff positions such as Executive Director, elected officers of the Society such as President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and Council, and appointed positions such as the *American Archivist* Editor and Publications Editor) to submit a “diversity statement” as part of their application or nomination materials.

**DISCUSSION**

SAA as an organization is committed to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion as reflected in its [Core Values of Archivists](#), [Code of Ethics for Archivists](#), [Code of Conduct](#), [SAA Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#), and [Strategic Plan 2020-2022](#), among others. As archivists living in the current climate of divisiveness and distrust, we understand that archival work has much to contribute in documenting and dismantling white supremacy, anti-black violence, and institutional and structural forms of racism, bigotry, and hate. Recent Council statements on [Black Lives and Archives](#), [SAA 2020 Election](#), and the publication of [Editor’s Comments about Brown Bag Lunch Article Controversy at SAA Annual Meeting: Listening and Learning](#) remind us of the necessity of restating SAA’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

Submitting a diversity statement is becoming widely adopted as part of the recruitment and hiring processes of academic and non-profit organizations. *What is a diversity statement?* A diversity statement is a written personal reflection that outlines an individual’s position

or approach as an archival professional and/or scholar to promote DEI in the work that they do. No longer than two pages, a diversity statement is an opportunity to express one's awareness of current DEI issues in archival scholarship and practice, and more importantly, a person's own position with regard to those issues. The statement embodies a person's past, present, and future engagement in promoting and supporting DEI in all aspects of their professional, personal, and scholarly activities. It is also a document that explains how an applicant plans to use their position to advance SAA's commitment to DEI as outlined in the Society's [Core Values of Archivists](#), [Code of Ethics for Archivists](#), [Code of Conduct](#), [Equal Opportunity/Non-Discrimination Policy](#), [SAA Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#), and [Strategic Plan 2020-2022](#).

### **Components of a Diversity Statement**

A diversity statement reflects on how one's identity and experience contributes to diversity; demonstrates awareness of DEI issues and how to frame and approach them; and identifies specific DEI strategies that apply to the position they apply for. Thus, it responds to the following questions:

1. What is your own definition of diversity, inclusion, and equity?
2. How have your own personal, academic, and professional experiences and expertise prepared you to advocate for inclusive, equitable practices?
3. Are you aware of your own implicit biases? How have you come to this realization and how do you continue to grow as an advocate for DEI?
4. How do you reflect DEI in your work? How will you model a trauma-informed and inclusive practice, and mentor others who will work with you?
5. What are your specific plans and strategies that will use the position you are applying for to advance DEI within your immediate SAA unit, SAA as a whole, and beyond the organization?

### **Pros and Cons of Requiring a Diversity Statement**

Aside from reiterating a candidate's commitment to SAA's values, the creation of a diversity statement allows for the development of specific DEI strategies even before assuming a position within the organization. A statement will also allow for a candidate to reflect on their own positionality, their own contributions to diversity, and how every position within SAA is an opportunity to contribute to advancing DEI. With a diversity statement, we can guarantee that SAA is appointing a candidate best positioned to promote DEI in SAA and beyond.

The requirement might be perceived as onerous and discourage some individuals from applying or running for positions that require a diversity statement. In particular, this might impact those who do not identify as belonging to a historically underrepresented or marginalized community. For Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and activists, a requirement to reflect on their identity and account for their advocacy efforts can further add to the already overwhelming and exhausting nature of anti-racist work. It is important to clarify, however, that a diversity statement is not meant to discourage any

individuals from applying for SAA positions. Rather, it sets an expectation that DEI work happens at all levels of the organization.

SAA's [Equal Opportunity/Non-Discrimination Policy](#), as reiterated in [SAA Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#), "declares that discrimination on the grounds of age, color, political and religious beliefs, ability, family relationship, gender identity/expression, individual life style, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status is prohibited within the Society." This declaration demonstrates a wide variety of conceptions about diversity, and thus a diversity statement will encourage applicants to celebrate the diversity they bring, in many forms, to SAA and the profession.

More resources on developing a diversity statement are available here:

- [The Effective Diversity Statement](#) (Inside Higher Ed)
- [Diversity Statement Resource Guide](#) (American University School of Law)
- [Developing and Writing a Diversity Statement](#) (Vanderbilt University)

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT the SAA Council support and pursue the following actions:**

1. Require all those applying or running for SAA positions (staff positions such as Executive Director; elected officers of the Society such as President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and Council; and appointed positions such as the *American Archivist* Editor and Publications Editor) to submit a "diversity statement" as part of their application/nomination materials;
2. Develop guidelines for writing and submitting such a document; and
3. Create opportunities for mentoring and teaching SAA leadership and membership on how to develop and evaluate a diversity statement.

**Support Statement:** SAA's Core Organizational Values include "Ensuring the diversity of its membership and leaders, the profession, and the archival record." SAA fosters a "Welcoming Environment" and strives to advocate for advancing DEI in all areas of the Society as indicated in its [Core Values of Archivists](#), [Code of Ethics for Archivists](#), [Code of Conduct](#), [Equal Opportunity/Non-Discrimination Policy](#), [SAA Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#), and [Strategic Plan 2020-2022](#). Requiring a diversity statement will guarantee that SAA is appointing a candidate best positioned to promote DEI in SAA and beyond. It will also encourage applicants to see the diversity they bring to SAA and the profession.

**Impact on Strategic Priorities:** The proposed recommendations address Goal 4.3. of the Strategic Plan 2020-2022: "Foster an inclusive association and profession through educational and leadership opportunities."

**Fiscal Impact:** None.