

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
August 14, 2024
Chicago, IL
Hybrid Meeting**

**SHAWG: Expand and Formalize Working Group
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BACKGROUND

Due to the administrative work required to maintain 47 sections, the Section Health Assessment Working Group (SHAWG) was established in May 2022 to look closely at the Sections, their compliance with Governance, and to find ways to lower the administrative lift of maintaining so many sections. The membership of the working group has since undergone several iterations. Following the SHAWG's May 2024 Council update, the group formally seeks approval from Council to increase the Working Group roster by recruiting up to 5 additional volunteer members at large. We anticipate that 2 Council members (including one 2nd or 3rd year Council member) will also serve on the Working Group; the group will have no more than 7 members total. Note that ultimately we envision that this Working Group will be structured like the Dictionary Working Group: it will have staggered terms of leadership and will go through the standard call for appointments starting in the 2026/27 cycle. What we have proposed in this action item is an interim step.

Rationale: the scale and scope of the section health work is massive. Increasing the working group roster will add "more brains on deck" to help us think through some very complex topics and strategically advance our work. By specifically seeking input from non-Council members, we aim to get additional current perspectives on the needs of section leaders, on pain points, and on opportunities for sections.

DISCUSSION

It is apparent from the group's May 2024 Council update that the efforts of the SHAWG cannot entirely be considered a "win." Simply seeking to sunset sections that didn't meet governance compliance was problematic because creating and sustaining communities of practice entails complex and emotional work. Furthermore, it's not sufficient to simply cut down on the number of sections, as there are deeper issues at play in section maintenance and vibrancy which require more holistic changes.

Ultimately, SHAWG has come to the conclusion that the entire model of sections must be reconsidered and reimaged. SAA's current conception of sections was founded during pre-internet times and yet now are discouraged from holding physical meetings during

the SAA Annual Meeting. If sections are going to operate under new terms of engagement, in a virtual (mostly) environment, then the tools, procedures, and structures that support sections must be reimagined to better fit evolving member needs, communication styles/preferences, and cultural changes to prioritize content and connection over procedure.

By building this proposed expanded SHAWG and incorporating current section leaders and others who care strongly about communities of practice within SAA, we seek to chart a new path towards greater connection and open imagination of communities of practice and affinity within SAA.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

The SHAWG recommends the following actions:

1. That Council approve the proposed SHAWG charge (see below)
2. That the SHAWG be added to the official list of working groups and be given a page on the SAA website to disseminate information, build trust and confidence through transparency, and promote accountability. The SHAWG will have the ability to edit the page in real time.
3. That the SHAWG will be given a Google drive or other electronic collaborative workspace to store our working documents as members rotate beyond this group.
4. That the SHAWG be involved with reviewing and potentially updating the annual report questionnaire that is required for all sections. Primary emphasis is intended to focus and streamline questions to continue to gather valuable feedback but also lessen the administrative burden of filling out a lengthy form.

Support Statement: Establishing the expanded SHAWG will allow the group and the organization to be more people-centered. It will support us in our efforts to ensure that our members and colleagues feel respected and supported, particularly in an environment in which they are volunteering their time, labor and expertise. Expanding the SHAWG as proposed also presents the possibility of improving transparency, ensuring more open member communication, and improving the collaborative working relationship between Council and staff in their shared support of the sections.

Impact on Strategic Priorities:

Sections and supporting communities of practice align with GOAL 4: MEETING MEMBERS' NEEDS of the [SAA Strategic Plan](#).

Fiscal Impact:

Expanding the SHAWG in order to dedicate thoughtful and holistic revisions to the section model has the potential to reduce staff time in maintaining governance requirements. By finding ways that communities of practice can be nimble, with both springing up to meet emerging member needs and sunseting when their relevance has

run its course, we will reduce effort in maintaining systems that don't return sufficient benefits.

Working Group Charge:

I. Purpose

The Section Health Assessment Working Group (SHAWG) will pursue envisioning a new, *remote-first* model for Sections which support the following foundational principles:

- a) Sections are valuable communities of practice that foster information-exchange, creativity of expression, and support for members.
- b) The model for sections needs to be sustainable in terms of funds, staff and volunteer time, and administrative maintenance.
- c) Council liaisons have a responsibility to support their sections through proactive communication and orientation to SAA's governance requirements. This allows us to hold section leaders and the associated Council liaison collectively accountable for compliance with governance responsibilities.

II. Working Group Selection, Size, and Length of Terms

The SHAWG will include up to five volunteer members and two Council members, at least one of whom will be in their second or third year on Council.

The volunteer members will be selected by the current Working Group members after a Call for Expressions of Interest and will be appointed for the 2-year interim span. Expressions of interest and selection of members should include the consideration that at least two volunteer members should have recently served on a section steering committee.

III. Duties and Responsibilities

As part of their envisionment work, the SHAWG will review the full spring 2023 section health survey responses closely, with particular attention to the ideas generated for future models of sections. They may conduct focus groups to gain broader feedback and buy-in. As a new section/communities of practice model are developed, the Working Group will lead a Town Hall or other membership communication efforts to communicate the model and form a transition plan from the current model.

SAA Council working group members are responsible for facilitating the [Guidelines for SAA Sections on Merging, Transitioning to a Discussion Group, and Sunsetting](#).

IV. Reporting Procedures

The SHAWG reports to the Council and will submit regular updates to that group, in addition to ensuring that SAA members are aware of their ongoing work.

The Council Liaison(s) will regularly report to Council on the work of the group as well as ensure that regular meetings occur and deliverables are produced.

The SHAWG is also responsible for ensuring that minutes of the group's meetings are prepared and posted on the group's microsite to inform SAA members of its activities and comply with SAA's record-keeping requirements.

V. Meetings

The working group shall meet virtually as needed to conduct its work. The working group may conduct its business by email, telephone, or virtual meeting during the course of the year.