

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
November 9 – 12, 2014  
Chicago, Illinois**

**Staff Report: Annual Meeting  
(Prepared by Nancy Beaumont)**

**“Principles and Priorities for Continuously Improving the SAA Annual Meeting”**

For an update on progress made toward the Council-adopted “Principles and Priorities for Continuously Improving the SAA Annual Meeting,” see the Appendix. As noted there, we have signed contracts with the Cleveland Convention Center plus three hotels in 2015, the Hilton Atlanta in 2016, the Oregon Convention Center (Portland) plus two hotels in 2017, and the Marriott Wardman Park in 2018. In negotiating the 2018 agreement with the Marriott, we were able to gain free wireless throughout the 2014 conference meeting space.

**2014 Joint Annual Meeting in Washington, DC**

The 2014 Joint Annual Meeting in Washington, DC, had the highest attendance of any SAA-only or joint conference to date: 2,579 paid attendees.

Significant time was spent from late August through mid-September in reviewing the hotel master bill for the conference, applying charges and billing other organizations appropriately, and determining NAGARA’s share per the Council-approved memorandum of understanding.

Attendee evaluations of the 2014 Joint Annual Meeting in Washington, DC, were collected via the mobile app and distributed to the Council, the Program Committee, the Host Committee, and the general membership in October. See the evaluation survey results on the conference web page here: <http://www2.archivists.org/2014#.VEfTkvnF-PU>.

From the executive summary:

Participation in the evaluations of the conference was excellent, with 445 total respondents (about 18% of the total attendees). These survey results have a margin of error of 5%.

Overall feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Ninety percent of respondents reported being “Extremely Satisfied” or “Moderately Satisfied” with the event overall.

Preconference workshops, the all-attendee reception, education sessions, and the mobile app stand out as receiving particularly good reviews. The all-attendee reception was particularly praised, receiving an “Excellent” rating from 28% of respondents.

The clearest area for improvement was the Plenary Sessions, which received the most negative ratings and comments. This was the only aspect of the conference to have less than 50% of respondents rate it as either “Excellent” or “Very Good.”

The venue and location were rated “Good” by 21.5% of respondents, “Very Good” by 47% of respondents, and “Excellent” by 23% of respondents.

The top two motivations for attending were professional development (44.2% of respondents) and networking/meet with colleagues (21.6%). More than 92% of respondents indicated that the information presented at the conference was “Moderately Useful” (33.49%), “Very Useful” (42.43%), or “Extremely Useful” (16.74%) to their jobs.

The online schedule/mobile app received very positive feedback and the most “Excellent” ratings. Nearly 75% reported using it. However, the few negative responses were very strong. There were many actionable suggestions for improvement.

Eighty-nine percent of respondents visited the Exhibit Hall, with more than 44% spending 2 hours or more in the hall.

The most common theme among suggestions for improvement was to mitigate overcrowding in education sessions.

## **2015 Annual Meeting in Cleveland**

***Education Sessions:*** The Program Committee received 143 session proposals and 29 professional poster proposals by the deadline of October 8. This compares with previous years as follows:

- 2014 (with CoSA and NAGARA): 163 session proposals / 32 poster proposals
- 2013 (with CoSA): 137 session proposals / 23 poster proposals
- 2012 (SAA only): 150 session proposals / 17 poster proposals

The Program Committee will meet at SAA Headquarters from November 14 to 16.

Because the Council is meeting earlier than in past years, we are not yet able to provide a draft schedule for the 2015 conference, an update on exhibit/sponsor sales, or information about the plenary(ies). We have begun looking into child care options for the conference site. And we can tell you that the All-Attendee Reception will be held on Thursday night, August 20, at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum!

As always, I welcome your questions, comments, and suggestions.

## **Principles and Priorities for Continuously Improving the SAA Annual Meeting**

**(Adopted by the SAA Council, August 12, 2013, with  
Updates as of November 2014)**

*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. Going forward, the Council expects that there will be ongoing reporting on the extent to which these Principles and Priorities are put into play for the Annual Meeting. [See "Progress on Priorities as of January 2014" beginning on page 2, as well as Agenda Item 0813-1-VI-E-5-AnnMtg at <http://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/0813-1-VI-E-5-AnnMtg.pdf>.]*

### **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.

## Progress on Priorities as of November 2014

### 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.**  
*[Progress: Contracts signed with Cleveland Convention Center plus three hotels for 2015, with Hilton Atlanta for 2016, with Oregon Convention Center plus two hotels for 2017, and with Marriott Wardman Park in Washington, DC, for 2018. Going forward, SAA will consider alternative to quadrennial meetings in Washington, DC.]*
- **We will offer inexpensive alternative housing (such as dormitories) whenever feasible.**  
*[Progress: Staff actively pursued options for the 2014 conference, but found that all local colleges, universities, and other institutions with dorm space discontinue availability of dorms beginning in early August. Will continue to pursue this option for Cleveland in 2015 and beyond.]*
- **We will stipulate in all Requests for Proposals (RFP) that free wireless access in meeting spaces is a key component of our needs.**  
*[Progress: This stipulation is covered in all current contracts (2014-2018) and will be included in all future RFPs.]*
- **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.**  
*[Progress: This stipulation is covered in all current contracts (2014-2018) and will be included in all future RFPs.]*

- **Staff will actively monitor information about labor contracts and potential labor actions affecting the hotel sector.**

*[Progress: This is being done on an ongoing basis.]*

### **Priorities for Delivery of Meeting Content**

- **We will deploy a mobile conference app for access to program information via smart phones and tablets.**

*[Progress: The app launched in 2013 was refined for 2014 based on user feedback. We will continue to refine going forward.]*

- **We will ensure that each year's conference website includes effective functionality and navigation.**

*[Progress: The conference website was retooled for 2013 and refined for 2014; in 2015, the conference website will launch in November 2014. Remaining work will be done as quickly as possible in the context of redesigning SAA's overall website.]*

- **We will seek to provide free access to recordings made of important sessions from past conferences.**

*[Progress: The 2006-2008 recordings were posted on the SAA website immediately prior to the 2013 Annual Meeting; the 2009-2011 recordings were posted immediately after the 2013 conference; and the 2012 recordings were posted immediately prior to the 2014 conference.]*

- **We will investigate and incrementally implement online access to meeting content by various means as technology and resources permit.**

*[Progress: Staff has been discussing approaches and costs with several companies that offer these services.]*

- **We will implement sustainable practices in our production of conference materials.**

*[Progress: As of 2013, registrants may opt out from receiving the onsite program in paper. Approximately 10% of attendees selected this option in advance for both 2013 and 2014, although a significant proportion asked for a paper copy onsite. We expect that as the app is adopted more widely, more attendees will forego the print program. We are using recycled materials for name badges and badge holders.]*

### **Priorities for New Approaches to Meeting Content and Structure**

- **We will experiment with new approaches to plenary sessions.**

*[Progress: In 2013, the opening plenary featured a panel of two speakers moderated by the SAA president. The Vice-President/President-Elect presented her inaugural address at the Business Meeting on Saturday. The 2014 opening plenary featured the sponsoring organizations' awards and a panel discussion about open access to government records. Plenary 2 featured a presentation by National History Day Executive Director Cathy Gorn; the presidential address was presented to a private group and videotaped for distribution via the SAA website. Those attendees who completed evaluations of the 2014 conference generally did not favor this approach to the plenaries. Roe currently is considering how she wishes to handle the 2015 plenaries.]*

- **We will identify and implement new approaches to structured and unstructured networking.**

*[Progress: Per the request of the Annual Meeting Task Force, from 2012 to 2014 we set aside a room with ten or more round tables that small groups could reserve for informal meetings on an ad hoc*

*basis. The rooms generally have been undersubscribed. Special attention has been paid to promoting the benefits of networking in all collateral materials.]*

- **We will experiment with new formats and content for education sessions.**

*[Progress: The 2014 Call for Proposals invited individuals to propose new session formats of any kind. Sessions will be 60 or 75 minutes long rather than the “traditional” 90-minute time blocks in the hope that this will open up time for other possible conference activities. For 2015, the Program Committee continued the notion of “alternative” formats as well as 60- or 75-minute sessions. They also initiated the idea of “Pop-Up Sessions” with a much later proposal deadline – including the possibility of requesting a “Pop-Up Session” onsite at the conference.]*

- **The Program Committee charge will be revised to encourage Program Committees to innovate in additional ways.**

*[Progress: The Council adopted a revised charge at its August 2013 meeting. (See 0813-1-III-A-2-ProgComm.)]*

- **We will actively publicize to members all efforts to consider, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of new approaches.**

*[Progress: This document – with updates – will be provided on an ongoing basis as a component of the Annual Meeting staff report. In addition, Program Committee and Host Committee reports will address the “Principles and Priorities” as appropriate.]*