

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
November 8 – 10, 2015
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 Hilton Atlanta in 2016, the Oregon Convention Center (Portland) plus two hotels in 2017, and the Marriott Wardman Park in Washington, DC, in 2018.

2015 SAA Annual Meeting in Cleveland

For previous reports on the 2015 Annual Meeting, see [1114-VIII-E-5](#), [0515-VII-E-5](#), and [0815-1-V-E-5](#).

The 2015 Annual Meeting at the Cleveland Convention Center was our first foray into use of a convention center in conjunction with multiple hotels. Total paid attendance at the conference was 1,705 (against a budget of 1,700); total number of attendees was 1,759.

Significant time was spent from late August through early October on reviewing and reconciling the several master bills for the conference (convention center, separate convention center catering, and each hotel), applying charges, and billing affiliate organizations appropriately. As noted in a previous report, 19 affiliate groups/organizations chose to meet in conjunction with the SAA Annual Meeting (some of which required bill-backs). Although this is a very positive development, interest from affiliates complicates the schedule and the apportioning of meeting space. We will continue to track this carefully.

Participation in the [evaluations of ARCHIVES 2015 in Cleveland](#), was excellent, with 726 total respondents, about 41% of the total participants (compared to 18% for the 2014 Joint Annual Meeting). These survey results have a margin of error of 3%. Following is a general overview.

- Overall feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Ninety-one percent of respondents reported being “Extremely Satisfied” or “Moderately Satisfied” with the event overall.
- The All-Attendee Reception, Preconference Workshops, Education Sessions, Plenaries, and the Mobile App stand out as getting particularly good reviews. The All-Attendee Reception

was particularly praised, receiving an “Excellent” rating from 40% of respondents (12% more than in 2014).

- Areas for improvement are the Networking Café, Poster Presentations, and the Expo.
- Pop-Up Sessions, in their first year, were well-received, but there is a lot of room for improvement in how they are facilitated.
- Using a convention center versus a hotel, another first this year, was also well-received. Most respondents did not strongly prefer one over the other, with a slight preference overall for convention centers.
- The most common themes among suggestions for improvement were scheduling conflicts/flow, food and beverage, and issues with the convention center.

Staff will be conducting a thorough analysis of the survey results and sharing them with various groups and individuals so we can continue to improve implementation of the Annual Meeting.

2016 Joint Annual Meeting in Atlanta

The 2016 Program Committee is experimenting with a new schedule for program proposal submission and review as a means of 1) giving proposers more time to confer and develop their proposals, and 2) giving staff time to implement a new platform for the proposal submission and review process. (Also new this year: Proposers are encouraged to use an [informal spreadsheet](#) to connect with others when developing proposals.) Proposals submitted by the November 13 deadline will be considered at a January 14-16 Program Committee meeting, compressing the period from proposal acceptance to launch of conference registration to just short of 90 days. (Lots of experimenting going on!)

We are not yet able to provide a draft schedule for the 2016 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. We can tell you that the All-Attendee Reception will be held on Friday night, August 5, at the [World of Coca-Cola](#) and the [National Center for Civil and Human Rights](#).

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 2015)**

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 2015

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: Conducted very successful conference in Cleveland using the Cleveland Convention Center plus three hotels for 2015. We have signed contracts 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 and 2015 conferences, 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 Atlanta in 2016 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 (2016-2018) 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 (2016-2018) 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 and 2015 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 in 2014 and 2015. For the 2015 conference it was launched in November 2014, and we intend to do the same for the 2016 conference. 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: All recordings from 2006 to 2013 are freely available via the SAA website. We expect that the 2014 recordings will join this list before the end of the calendar year.]

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

[Progress: We have moved to inexpensive access to the current year's recordings by contracting for MP3 production and selling via the conference app and website. For the 2014 conference, MP3s were made available for \$29.99 members / \$39.99 nonmembers and SAA broke even on the sales. For the 2015 conference MP3s were made available for \$19.99 members / \$29.99 nonmembers. We have not yet broken even on this project, so it is likely that we cannot sustain the sale of recordings at these price points.]

- **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, 2014, and 2015. Although a significant proportion asked for a paper copy onsite in 2013 and 2014, far fewer did so in 2015 as familiarity with the mobile app is increasing. We are using recycled and recyclable 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. In 2015 the opening plenary featured awards and two speakers who addressed one aspect of SAA's Goal 1:

Advocacy. Plenary 2 featured the presidential address as well as the Vice President's incoming remarks and a presentation by a Council member on another of the Society's strategic priorities.]

- **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 2015 we set aside a room of 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 were 60 or 75 minutes long rather than the "traditional" 90-minute time blocks in the hope that this would 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.]