

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
November 5 – 7, 2017
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 Marriott Wardman Park in Washington, DC, in 2018; the JW Marriott in Austin for 2019; and the Chicago Hilton for 2020. For discussion at this November meeting is an update on site selection for 2021 through 2023.

2017 Annual Meeting in Portland

For previous reports on the 2017 Annual Meeting, see [0717-1-VE-5](#), [0517-VI-E-5](#), and [1116-VI-E-5](#). Total paid attendance at the conference was 2,053, making it the second largest conference in SAA’s history.

Staff spent significant time from early August through late September reviewing and reconciling the master bills for the conference, applying charges internally, and billing affiliate organizations appropriately.

Participation in the [evaluation of ARCHIVES 2017](#) was good, with approximately 25% of total attendees responding to the survey (compared with 23% in 2016, 41% in 2015, and 18% for the 2014 Joint Annual Meeting). These survey results have a margin of error of 4%. Following is a general overview.

- Overall feedback was very positive. Eighty-two percent (82%) of respondents reported being “Extremely Satisfied” or “Moderately Satisfied” with the event overall (compared to 87% for AM2016 and 91% for AM2015).
- The Mobile App, Preconference Workshops, Education Sessions, and Poster Presentations stand out as getting particularly good reviews.
- The All-Attendee reception scored relatively low this year. Although more than half of attendees (52%) rated it “Excellent” or “Very Good,” a significant minority (22%) rated it “Fair” or “Poor.”

- For the question “What was the most important reason for your decision to attend the Annual Meeting?” the top answer by far was “Professional Development,” as it has been consistently for years. A noticeable difference this year was an increased number of respondents who answered “To Get Inspired/To Get New Ideas,” which may indicate a new trend. Also notable was a significant percentage (17%) who responded “Host City.” Indeed, Portland received very strong praise as a host city in this survey.
- The most common suggestions for improvement related to scheduling conflicts/flow, food and beverage, and the distance of hotels from the convention center.

A [summary of survey results](#) is available on the SAA website. Staff will be conducting a thorough analysis of the survey results—including extensive verbatim comments—and sharing them with various groups and individuals so that we can continue to improve implementation of the conference.

2018 Joint Annual Meeting in Washington, DC

The 2018 Program Committee has adopted the 2016 and 2017 schedule for [program proposal submission](#) and review, with proposals due on November 15 to allow ample time for collaboration and proposal development. The Committee will meet in Chicago from January 8 to 10. As in the past few years, proposers are encouraged to use an [informal spreadsheet](#) to connect with others when developing proposals.

I conducted a site visit of the hotel and several possible reception sites with Conference and Logistics Consultants on October 17-18. We are gratified that the Marriott Wardman Park is working closely with us to expand our meeting space (slightly) to accommodate the complexity of a conference with three co-hosts.

We will report out as progress is made on the draft schedule, exhibit/sponsor sales, plenary development, and other aspects of the conference planning.

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 2016)**

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 November 2016" 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 2017

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 reverted to a more traditional approach in one hotel (the Hilton Atlanta) for 2016. The 2017 conference was held at the Oregon Convention Center plus two hotels in Portland, and the 2018 conference will take us back to the Marriott Wardman Park in Washington, DC. The 2019 conference in Austin and the 2020 conference in Chicago will be held entirely in hotels. Going forward, we will consider alternatives to quadrennial meetings in Washington, DC.
- **We will offer inexpensive alternative housing (such as dormitories) whenever feasible.**
Progress: Staff actively pursued options for the 2014-2017 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 in the future.
- **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 (2018-2020) and will be included in all future RFPs and contracts.
- **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 (2018-2020) and will be included in all future RFPs and contracts.

- **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 is refined annually based on user feedback and new releases. We will continue to refine going forward, with an emphasis on solving the problem of being able to create a full personal schedule on the app.

- **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 each year since then.

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

Progress: All recordings from 2006 to 2016 are freely available via the SAA website.

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

Progress: Beginning in 2016, we have provided free MP3 downloads of all recorded sessions to all registrants and have sold the downloads at a very reasonable price to non-registrants. We are continuing to monitor the industry to watch for opportunities to provide virtual conferencing and streaming options.

- **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 the 2013-2016 conferences. We are using recycled and recyclable materials for name badges and badge holders. The Oregon Convention Center, site of our 2017 annual meeting, required compliance with a rigorous “green” policy for all conference materials.

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. In 2016 we reverted to a more “traditional” approach, with a keynote speaker during Plenary 1, the Presidential Address and awards during Plenary 2, and the incoming President’s remarks at the

Annual Membership Meeting. This format was repeated in 2017.

- **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 and we discontinued this option in 2016. 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. In 2016 we tweaked the Pop-Up Session selection process by inviting all proposals in advance of the conference and then inviting members to vote for their top five sessions; the “winners” were slated during regular programming hours. Pop-Up Sessions were invited in 2016 and 2017 as well. And the 2017 conference featured “The Liberated Archive Forum: A Forum for Envisioning and Implementing a Community-Based Approach to Archives,” which invited members of the Portland community to interact with archivists.
- **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.