Society of American Archivists
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Survey Results: Feedback on SAA Strategic Plan
(Prepared by Governance Manager Felicia Owens)

BACKGROUND

In anticipation of the upcoming review of the 2014-2018 SAA Strategic Plan, the Council solicited feedback from the SAA membership on the current strategic plan. A survey was put forward to all SAA members in early October via the SAA website, social media, and an all-member email blast. (See the call for feedback at: https://www2.archivists.org/news/2017/give-your-feedback-on-the-saa-strategic-plan.) The following are all responses that were received by the October 27, 2017, close date.

Looking ahead to 2018-2020, do you think the current goals and objectives are/will be relevant?	Do you have suggestions for revising the goals or objectives?	Other comments/feedback:
Yes	no	The term "agile association" reflects professional infrastructure and adaptability to meet future technological changes.
Yes, with some revisions and updates that continue the trend of decolonizing our profession and working to improve equity.	Goal 1. I think we need to do more work to advocate for archivists and archives in library settings; too many of our colleagues don't understand the value or nature of our work. I hope regular membership surveys of some nature are included in this. Goal 3. We need to include communities and users in how we think about and work on "identify[ing] the need for new standards, guidelines, and best practices." Support an archives workforce that reflects the diversity of the communities in which we're set. Goal 4 needs to be taken further, I think, with goals around actions taken to not only diversify but deepen acceptance of people, especially women, of color and other underrepresented groups in our field.	Good luck! Thank you to SAA administrators, leadership, and councilors for your engagement with these complex concerns.

Yes	To #1 & #2, I would add that SAA needs to advocate for stable funding and appropriately valued salaries for archivists. That includes helping and encouraging SAA members to write grants and project jobs in ways that support some of the most vulnerable new members of our profession, and considering how to structure work in a way that it is good for all and not just for the institution. Additionally, I would like to see more about how we as a profession can support archivists and records managers who are doing difficult work and who may need additional support during this administration-- that includes folks working at all levels of government, as well as NGOs dealing with human rights and other issues suddenly at the fore.	

I have long believed the 2014-18 strategic plan reflects a fundamental contradiction. SAA's vision is to enable archivists "to achieve professional excellence and foster innovation to ensure identification, preservation, and the use of records of enduring value." That seems a straightforward statement that, with a few changes in wording, could describe the vision of any professional organization. However as we work our way through the strategic plan that very direct vision has some rather challenging freight attached to it in the mission statement and core values.

Note first the mission statement that promotes "the values and diversity of archives and archivists." Not to put too fine a point on it, diversity is not included in the vision, but appears in the mission statement. That is, I believe, defensible, but also begins a slippery slope.

The core organizational values continues down this slope. While many of the core values do fit well under the rubric of professional excellence, diversity is now supplemented with the additional phrase "social responsibility." Diversity at least has a reasonably easy definition to make it transparent and one can certainly argue persuasively that archives and archivist should be diverse. But social responsibility?

Ignoring, for the sake of argument, how social responsibility squares with the vision statement, there is an immediate definitional problem. The term is totally opaque in that "social responsibility" has very, very different definitions to a person who reads, and more importantly believes, Breitbart News in contrast to the Huffington Post. To whom and for what is SAA socially responsible? Having made that selection --which in the name of transparency it seems Council is required to do -- what exactly are we supposed to say to members who disagree? You're just wrong? Exactly who within SAA has the moral authority to make that pronouncement?

I find a sharp distinction between member's personal convictions regarding social responsibility, or for that matter Council's collective opinion on the subject, and the legitimate authority of Council to translate those opinions into SAA policy. SAA is a professional organization, not an organization with a definable social agenda. As our vision statement says, SAA "enables archivists to achieve professional excellence." While one can rather easily square diversity within the profession to that phrase, one cannot easily square supporting one set of cultural values over some other set of cultural values.

Having raised these issues, it is interesting to note that in reading the professional goals and key performance indicators in the 2014-18 document, they largely revert to the vision statement, with some references to diversity and literally not a single word that directly addresses social responsibility – although I admit you could read that objective into some things if you wanted to. And before someone says it, "Advocacy" doesn't cut it, since advocacy as defined by the goals and performance indicators is for archives and archivists, not for some broader social goal.

This is a rather long way of saying Council tacked in "social responsibility and the public good" into the 2014-18 core organizational values in what appears to be a way to perhaps make themselves feel good, and certainly to appease some members, but failed to follow through in a meaningful way within the rest of the document.

In drafting a new strategic plan council faces a difficult choice – follow through regarding social responsibility and the public good through goals and indicators (and probably a revised vision statement to justify doing this), or remove social responsibility and stop pretending that maybe, sort of, kind of when we can, SAA will address those issues without any specific goal to do so or performance indicators to see if SAA actually succeeded.

If Council decides to include social responsibility I believe that transparency will require a profession-wide discussion to define the term as it is to be understood within SAA. I will argue as part of such a discussion that the fundamental premise of engaging in social responsibility is both a needlessly divisive and fundamentally alien goal

within a professional organization. SAA's core mission is about making archives and archivists professionally better. The rest, including social responsibility broadly defined, is a distraction from the organization's core goal.

I encourage archivists to embrace social responsibility and indeed endeavor to save the world. I encourage them to do so by joining other organizations of their choice that will seek to do that in a way individual archivists believe appropriate. Just don't ask SAA to do it. Despite the endless comparisons to ALA's political arm, that isn't what SAA is about.

yes	no	no
Yes.	Objective 3.1 Identify the need for new standards, guidelines, and best practices and lead or participate in their development: A key component of the health of standards is maintaining them over time. This objective makes it sound like SAA identifies needs for new standards, creates standards when appropriate, and then walks away when a standard is published at version 1.0. I know that is not what SAA means, but inserting a few words about maintaining/managing standards as appropriate would go a long way.	**A. KPIs** I'm a little unclear about how the KPIs are being evaluated. A lot of the metrics hinge on the term "increase" but it's not clear what that means in terms of actual measures. If sales of SAA publications by one book in 2018 over 2014 does not mean that SAA has "successfully" met that KPI? To take another example, does the KPI "SAA members indicate that they are confident in speaking with the media and advocating for archives" mean that all SAA members indicate this, or just a portion of the membership. How are people supposed to indicate this confidence? More broadly, do the KPIs pivot on increases from 2014 to 2018 or is this a year-over-year comparison? I recognize that there is always a danger of packing in too many details into a strategic plan. Perhaps this is asking a strategic plan document to carry too much weight. Perhaps these details belong in a separate KPI evaluation document (or something similar). More generally, I do have the question of how Council will evaluate the effectiveness of SAA's performance over the 2014-2018 time frame against its Strategic Plan and KPIs. **B. Core Organizational Values** I know this feedback form didn't ask for comments about the Values statement, but: All of the values statements have verbs except "Social responsibility and the public good." It seems like this value could be easily misread as being committed to social responsibility and the public good being pervasive in American society (which turns this into a wish rather than an action) rather than what I think is intended which is more along the lines of "SAA is committed to being socially responsible and contributing to the public good." **C. Thank you** Most importantly: Thank you. Thank you for creating the Strategic Plan and reevaluating it. It indicates a healthy and strong Society!
Some of these will continue to be. I think advocating for archives and creating engaged membership will be critically important. I think archivist doing more research and publishing in the field will continue to be important.	I noticed that one of the values is "Ensuring the diversity of its membership and leaders, the profession, and the archival record." but none of the goals or objectives spoke to this. I think this should be incorporated somehow.	

Yes, but - as an archivist in the last 10 years or so of employment, I honestly feel left out of much that SAA is doing. I have a smaller budget at work and the conference is more expensive; for me the conference has become too large and less collegial - partly because hearing issues make it very hard to move between sessions and noisy hallways. So my response is, are you also thinking about how to continue to engage older archivists who continue learning and updating how we do our work but for whom many of the sessions are less and less relevant?	4.1 - I don't find SAA agile; I have never received a response to a concern, and it has become far too competitive in the last 5 or so years to have sessions accepted. If SAA is going to have a larger and larger membership, the conference should offer double the number of simultaneous sessions (like an academic conference). Also, there have been too many library school graduates in the last decade, and not enough permanent full-time positions. Focus on library programs in regions of the country where the jobs are. I don't see SAA doing enough advocacy for PERMANENT jobs (i.e. not temporary grant-funded work), and graduates can spend 5 or more years going from short term project work to short term project work with no sense of continuity or ability to plan for the future. This is the biggest problem I think the profession faces.	Make it easier to be involved in SAA if it is impossible to attend the conference. Otherwise, more of us will spend more time and energy on our regional associations and SAA will become less relevant.
I feel all four goals are still relevant and have ongoing objectives to be accomplished. I do feel the Society has made progress in many of the areas and acknowledging the progress is important. As the membership of the Society continues to change, Goal 4 is growing in importance.	Continue work to diversify the profession and the Society with perhaps some new goals. The current goals are so broad it is difficult to see items that would not fall under one or more of them.	Having served on Council, I know how challenging communicating and getting input on the plan from the membership can be. Working to keep it in front of the leadership and discussed regularly is important for the plan to continue to be relevant.
I do.	I wonder if "3.3. Participate actively in relevant partnerships and collaborations to enhance professional knowledge." could be enhanced to indicate that partnerships outside of the archival/GLAM community would be very valuable and worth working towards.	Please keep finding ways to share presentations and courses virtually and as part of the base cost of a membership. It should be easy and simple to stream every session at SAA's meetings. Please work towards diversity of the profession through encouraging members from underrepresented communities to pursue graduate studies - while also finding ways to help fund their studies and support their job searches.

Yes, these goals remain relevant, but could be expanded.	I think it would be helpful to place more emphasis on inclusion and equity. Besides focusing on diverse records and diverse people, I think trying to create opportunities that are more attainable to a wider variety of people would be helpful. Lots of people can't make it to the annual meeting or afford the educational offerings - what are some other ideas the society could work on that could create more accessible opportunities for education/networking/advancement? We are also very stuck in a system rooted in oppression; are there ideas floating around that could open that up? Rather than trying to force diverse people into our closed system, should we not try to open up the system a bit?	
Yes.	Get out of POLITICS!!!! Latest statement about government employees using private emails was good...up until you name dropped. This is not a partisan issue, so you should not go out of your way to name an individual from this or any other previous administration.	GET OUT OF POLITICS!!! The mere introduction of the so-called bathroom bill nearly prompted a relocation of the annual meeting away from Texas and that was shameful. You cannot foster an "open, inclusive, and collaborative environment" when you take a position of a divisive issue such as this. You end up offending one side or another. Promoting public awareness about archives and the value of archival records is important, but you distract from the issues at hand when you engage in these issues. You may also wish to consider your positions on issues such as that may conflict with the religious ministries that house archival records as well. There is an entire section for archivists of religious organizations, which would indicate you value their contributions to the profession, however, you seem willing to exclude them when it comes to these contentious public policy issues. Additionally, quit being so partisan! I do not much care who is a Democrat or who is a Republican, and neither should you. The goal is to advocate for archivists and the archival association, not to take a shot at Republicans. Remember, not everyone in SAA agrees with your partisan position. Moreover, taking shots at the current administration gives you nothing, and can only serve to undermine your position when you need to work with those in said administration. It is a positive thing, to be sure, to advocate for archivists and the archival profession, but you do not seem to know what you are doing and I find that quite troubling.
The four main goals are clearly what is most important.		

Yes, I believe the current four goals will still be relevant and attainable.	I think all the goals are broad enough and encompass what members desire from SAA.	It would be great if SAA can somehow make more efforts into broadcasting the work done by its various sections. We all tend to be siloed within our focused sections and it would be nice if SAA can push efforts for members to crossover and look to see what other colleagues are doing in the organization. For instance, the BAS has so many great resources available for all SAA members but most non-BAS members would never consider venturing into their microsite.
Yes, partially.	At the risk of being seen as an outlier, I would humbly suggest that you invest more time and energy in advocating for aggressive action to protect coastal city archives from the predictable and inevitably results of climate change. I think this is going to be one of the leading issues facing archives by the end of the next decade, if not sooner.	For example, this mainstream article: http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/10/why-this-isnt-the-new-normal-for-climate-change.html
Yes, though one core value sticks out as being unsupported by the Goals and Objectives--"Social responsibility and the public good." This may be because it is not directly tied to the profession, but rather the interest of many members to be politically engaged and involved through their professional organization.	SAA's past use of the value statement "Social responsibility and the public good" for "big P" political purposes makes justification of institutional membership difficult in many government archives. These activities also cause significant angst among professional government archivist and records managers who cannot, and should not, be professionally involved in Political organizations. My issue is not with the value statement, which I support, but rather how the past Political application of it has negatively impacted government archives' building projects, administrative reorganizations and other situations where SAA has released statements without understanding the context or checking the facts. This makes SAA look very, very unprofessional.	SAA should only endorse statements that directly relate to Archives. Possibly the best example is our recent infatuation with sunshine requests which we have re-branded "transparency". The upcoming conference has this as its theme, there was an advocacy release this summer related to voter rolls--but oddly, this is not an archival issue. In government, corporate and university archives this is either a matter for institutional attorneys or a non-issue because the records are already open for investigation. I can recall similar local issues in CA, WI, GA and many others where we our social responsibility has made us feel good, but at the expense of our profession's reputation and the reputation of our professional colleagues. All I am asking is to please use more discretion when rushing to be the first to issue a press release on "records issues".

Yes	No	In the late summer of 2017, I was alarmed by a discussion that appeared on the Archives listserv that was dominated by radical left-wing members of the SAA. It appeared as though the SAA was transforming from a professional organization to a political one. As a political moderate, I felt was though the SAA was being commandeered by left-wing activities and that they wanted those members who disagreed with their views to leave the SAA. I hope that this is not the way the SAA is going. I also hope that acceptance of diverse views is made clear in the SAA Strategic Plan.
Largely, although there is a strong need to emphasize linkages to records management, particularly in the public sector.	Include more on lifecycle management and identification of archival records early in the same, providing support for records management programs, especially in the public sector, where appraisal often takes place through retention schedules.	Diversity is important, yes...but SAA may be touting it a little too loudly. I liked the use of synonyms like inclusive - most sponsors of archival programs already have diversity programs - if there is a sense that SAA has in some way or other no supported diversity in the past, I would disagree. SAA has been in the vanguard of professional groups supporting diversity.
Yes	NO	
yes and no By being so vague the goals can be interpreted a number of ways which gives more flexibility. But the vagueness can also lead to inaction due to lack of defined benchmarks	I would like to see follow through on the commitment to making more educational opportunities accessible to those with limited financial means.	Thanks to Council for the continued effort to constantly improve and grow our profession.
Probably	No	SAA membership is basically a very expensive journal subscription.
Yes	I think that there should be a goal that clearly states how SAA is planning to support increased diversity and inclusion in the organization and profession. While both the mission and core organizational values highlight diversity of the profession and the collections under our stewardship, none of the goals specify how SAA is working to increase diversity and create a more inclusive, supportive profession for those who have been marginalized historically. Specific goals and measures of success that highlight how SAA is creating a more supportive environment would help me to see how SAA is actually working in ways that align with its core organizational values. Some suggestions that I have are more support for those who are interested in professional service. This could include paying a stipend to those who serve in the organization or creating more scholarships for people to attend the annual conference.	We should not expect people who to participate in professional organizations without pay. This creates a profession in which we under value our work.

Yes	Add: 2.4. Create low-cost and no-cost educational programs and workshops to attract new members and raise the level of collections care and the level of awareness of archives and the work that archivists do.	
Yes.	How about actually doing something to meet them rather than hand-wringing over them and then failing miserably do take appropriate action, as in the case of the decision to hold a meeting in Texas. How does that comport with the "inclusiveness" mandate?	

yes, but --- Would like to see more in Goal 1 to address government accountability, archives as a way to ensure a "people's right to know", and more direct civic activism and archives and archivists as a way to ensure the safety and accountability of democracy. Honestly, I'd like to see all of that as an explicit and formal Goal. The times are perilous -- we need to ensure that our profession is recognized for the important role we play when it comes to government transparency and accountability. Esp. in the era of "fake news."
Other than that, all's good!

I do think we need to emphasize "marketing" our profession to the outside world. I know we say "advocating" which is very good, however we need the general masses to get on board with who we are and what we do. We need to market ourselves in fun and unique ways to get the public to know what we do. Think in terms of what Jack Hanna did for the Columbus Zoo. He was a personality that was seen in the general public who made animals fun to learn about. The archives profession needs something similar. Also, think about Neil De Grasse Tyson and his role in bringing astrophysics to the public. We need to network with History Channel, Discovery Channel, Social media platforms, etc. to get a personality out there to get the public behind the work we do.

I think they are relevant goals and offer a good starting point.	I think the goals should be revised, maybe goal 2 of enhancing professional growth. I think SAA is great for archivists who are already established. I do not think it does enough to help archivists looking for jobs, either to enter the field or obtain a new job within the profession.	I love being an archivist, but I'm facing the reality that I might not be one for much longer. I think people only really stand a chance of getting a job if they are local, know someone, and have weirdly specific subject experience. I have over five years of experience; I have two master's degrees; I'm a certified archivist; and I'm willing to relocate myself. But if I look at the past two years alone, out of all the jobs I've applied for (and there have been dozens upon dozens), I have only received an initial callback from one. What is the point in getting the experience and education that is "required" if it doesn't actually help you get an interview, let alone a job?

I think the goals and objectives are and will be relevant, with some modifications. For example, I think it will become more important (and difficult) to provide affordable, accessible professional development options.	I think it will become increasingly important to reach Goal 1 ("Advocating for Archivists and Archives") under the current administration.	I'm not sure that Goal 4 ("Meeting Members' Needs") is being met. Maybe it needs to be reworded? The listserv is a mess and does not provide an opportunity for MEMBERS to participate. I think there should be more opportunities for only people who are active members of SAA to interact and communicate with each other -- a forum maybe? I'm all for being accessible and open, but I do wish there were more members-only benefits to my membership....
No, but that is because I am retired and my goals are personal, i.e. writing history and processing my family's personal papers.	Yes, for goals 1 & 3. SAA talks a lot about diversity, but only demonstrates it in a limited way. We should be partnering with records managers, local recorders and clerks, and technology agencies. And, we should be inclusive of political and social conservatives--they, too, are part of society.	None.
Yes and no. See specific feedback below. Note that we met as a group to discuss and I have compiled all of our feedback.	**Overall:** • The general tone could be improved to be more accessible and inclusive. As it stands, it reads somewhat stuffy (e.g., use of "cadre" and other erudite word choices). • KPIs are often too vague to be measurable • Missing ideal of democratization of the record and ensuring that Americans have equal access to the record **Core Organizational Values:** • Suggest changing "association" to "profession" in third bullet (Fostering a culture of… across the PROFESSION) **Goal 1:** • Prioritize ARCHIVISTS over ARCHIVES (also note there is a difference between what is displayed on website v. printable PDF • In KPIs consider the following--- Growth in archivist salaries, outreach to early career archivists and even young adults who haven't settled on a career path yet • Include something about sustainability—project and grant based funding is not sustainable. This needs to be acknowledged and addressed. **Goal 2:** • Include development of allied professionals and collaboration with allied	Very specific feedback from our developer, who is not an archivist but often searches for info on archives and archival work and functions: I think crowd-sourcing (wiki/reddit/stack exchange) the knowledge base should be a core goal of SAA, as it would help SAA meet goals 1, 2, 3, and 4. I spend a lot of time googling around for resources related to standards that I need to meet, and I've never felt that SAA was a central hub for archive-related information. Especially not in the digital-technical side of the spectrum. Perhaps SAA can take that title by hosting a wiki for all archive-related technology. Something similar to the way TVTropes.org works, in that you can spend a few hours just clicking around different rabbit-holes and find out about things you wouldn't have otherwise heard of.

professions. We'd all be stronger and better, and more effective, together.
• Remove focus on publication sales. Is there another way to track impact? Citations? Retrieval and access to online pubs and website? Downloads? Site traffic and consumption of resources?
Goal 3:
• No substantive feedback however collaboration with other standards making bodies should be highlighted/prioritized/
Goal 4:
• Vague. Define inclusivity and/or provide tangible and specific KPIs for measuring this.
• Reversing the negative perception that many early career archivists have of SAA (and especially the forums/list serves).
• KPIs somewhat outdated and will need to be revised re: changes in Society affinity groups.