

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
August 3, 2020
Virtual Meeting**

***American Archivist* Editorial Board:
Proposal for a Strategy to Address Professional
Mediation, Facilitation, and Conflict Management
(Prepared by Editorial Board Members Katharina Hering and Bethany Anderson)**

Note: This item was first presented on the August 3, 2020, Council meeting agenda, but time during the meeting did not allow for adequate discussion. This document represents the original discussion item as submitted.

BACKGROUND

In response to the debates about and controversy resulting from the Brown Bag Lunch event at the 2019 SAA Annual Meeting and pre-publication of Frank Boles' article, the *American Archivist* Editorial Board has embarked on a review of its internal procedures and processes to ensure the publication of scholarship in an ethically-centered and inclusive framework. The Board has also launched a number of initiatives to address structural weaknesses the conflict exposed, such as the need for better mechanisms for facilitating discussions and managing and mediating conflicts within and between SAA component groups and members, including among members of the *American Archivist* Editorial Board, between the Editorial Board and the SAA Council, and between the SAA Council and SAA members and component groups, including SAA Fellows. While the SAA Council has a [Personnel Grievance Committee](#), we believe it would be beneficial for component groups and members to have guidelines, procedures, and/or a list of informational and training resources to reference for support and advice in regards to professional discussion facilitation and conflict mediation. The *American Archivist* Editorial Board seeks to promote the journal as a respectful and inclusive space for discussion and debate; likewise, we seek to foster productive and respectful discussions among and between the Board and the Society.

The events that unfolded around Boles' article present an opportunity to revisit SAA's Bylaws and Governance Manual, including the [American Archivist Editorial Board Bylaws](#).¹ Should similar situations arise in the future, the Board would like to ensure that guidelines are in place to provide guidance, especially to clarify procedures and

¹ *Staff Note:* SAA appointed groups are guided by their Council-approved descriptions in the Governance Manual which are not, strictly speaking, "bylaws."

communication between the Council and the Board. In addition, the Board believes it would be beneficial to have clear policies delineated in the Bylaws that address procedures for addressing conflict among Board members, and between the Editor and the Board. For example, the Editorial Board Bylaws do not include any provisions about decision-making processes in case of disagreements between members of the Editorial Board.

We also believe that an evaluation of the current [Code of Ethics](#) and [Code of Conduct](#), and how they can be better attuned to foster inclusivity in online spaces such as the journal, will help strengthen the journal as a space for civil discussion and debate. These efforts would also be in concert with the Editorial Board's current work to review its own internal procedures and processes that promote the publication of scholarship in an ethically-centered and inclusive framework. This initiative, which can only be implemented in close collaboration with the Diversity Committee and the Committee on Ethics and Professional Conduct, also aims to explicitly address the criticism that the *American Archivist* has not sufficiently addressed bias in publishing the journal, and not done enough to increase representation of authors from historically marginalized communities.

DISCUSSION

We recommend that the SAA Council implement a review of the current Code of Conduct to evaluate ways in which it can be clarified to address content in SAA's publications, as well as engagement between members in online and physical spaces and events. For example, while the Code of Conduct refers to online spaces,² it does not explicitly mention SAA publications, or in what ways the Code of Conduct would apply. We suggest that the Council consider appointing a task force on professional mediation, facilitation, and conflict management to undertake this review.

Likewise, we believe it would be important for the Council to establish a process to review the Code of Ethics. The current Code of Ethics is largely positioned toward archivists' role as stewards of the cultural record and does not address how that role extends to published scholarship. We suggest that the Council also consider forming a task force on publication ethics composed of members of the *American Archivist* Editorial Board and the Publications Board to evaluate the current Code of Ethics. This task force could be formed to review how the Code of Ethics can and should be aligned with respective editorial policies. We believe it would be important for the task force that evaluates the Bylaws and Code of Conduct to cooperate with the task force on publication ethics to clarify how it should apply to the publication process. We strongly believe it is important to emphasize that the *American Archivist* Editorial Board needs to maintain its autonomy and oversight over its own editorial policies and procedures. However, we believe that the review of these external policies could be done in concert with our own internal review of the Editorial Board's procedures and editorial policies to lead to a more inclusive journal and Society.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

² See "In SAA Online Spaces," <https://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-code-of-conduct>.

That the SAA Council form two independent task forces in close collaboration with existing committees, especially the Diversity Committee and the Committee on Ethics and Professional Conduct, each group should be given autonomy to define their own charge:

- That a task force on professional mediation, facilitation, and conflict management be formed to review the SAA Bylaws and the Code of Conduct is necessary.
- That a task force on publication ethics be formed. This task force shall be composed of members from *American Archivist* and Publications editorial boards. The task force will be charged with reviewing and making recommendations to the Code of Ethics that fosters an ethical framework for the publication of content in the Society, and within which the boards might operate.³

Specific tasks that could be undertaken by the task forces include:

- Compile a list of resources on professional mediation, facilitation and conflict management, seek input from members based on their experiences with different strategies.
- Review and revise as appropriate the SAA Bylaws and Governance Manual, identifying structural deficiencies in the governance of component groups that need to be addressed in order to provide guidance for conflict mediation, management, and facilitation.
- Help with identifying facilitators (or a process) for controversial online and on-site discussions.
- Consider developing a racial equity training program for archivists in cooperation with the Racial Equity Institute, the Center for Creative Leadership, and other organizations.⁴
- Consider developing a training program on non-violent communication for SAA members.
- Develop a process for reviewing and developing guidelines for publication ethics that promote productive and inclusive discussions and debates in published scholarship. These recommendations might take into consideration the [COPE guidelines](#) and best practices on publication ethics, in addition to other frameworks for media ethics.

Support Statement: The establishment of a task force on professional mediation, facilitation, and conflict management, and a task force on publication ethics will support the *American Archivist* Editorial Board in promoting the journal as a respectful and inclusive space for discussion and debate, and the publication of scholarship in an ethically-centered and inclusive framework.

Impact on Strategic Priorities: The work of the proposed task forces would align with Goal #4 of SAA's Strategic Priorities, "Meeting Members' Needs." They would specifically support 4.1 (facilitate effective communication with and among members) and

³ For example, these recommendations might take into consideration COPE guidelines and best practices, <https://publicationethics.org/>.

⁴ We thank Editorial Board member Sumayya Ahmed for this suggestion.

4.3 (foster an inclusive association and profession through educational and leadership opportunities) by providing a mechanism for mediation and conflict resolution and promoting an ethical and inclusive publication framework.

The work of the proposed task forces would contribute to Goal #2 of SAA's Strategic Priorities, "Enhancing Professional Growth." In particular, these task forces would support 2.2 (provide content, via education and publications, that reflects the latest thinking and best practices in the field) by developing an ethical framework for publication in which to provide content.

Fiscal Impact: N/A.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- If you agree that these initiatives would be beneficial, how will the task force members be selected?
- What is a reasonable timeframe for these task forces?
- How will the new Editor for *American Archivist* be involved?