Strategy for Funding Standards Development
(Prepared by Standards Committee and Council liaison Dr. Lydia Tang)

BACKGROUND

Standards development for SAA requires top-notch subject expertise, is time-intensive, and labor-intensive. Standards development initiatives often request funding from SAA and the SAA Foundation, and these requests have traditionally been denied, partially because of the budget deficit but also because there is an assumption that it would upset the precedence for volunteer labor.

Referencing successful recent IMLS grants for both SAA for funding the A*CENSUS II and Yale University in securing IMLS funding on behalf of the Accessioning Working Group for developing their new standard, these recent grant awards demonstrate that SAA has the capacity to receive IMLS grants and that IMLS can consider funding standards development activity.

Due to the importance of standards development, the required extensive subject expertise, and the requirement of a polished final standard which then become a commodity of SAA, the Standards Committee respectfully requests piloting a funding model to support modest honoraria for labor and expertise for standards-developing volunteers, funding for engaging with external stakeholders for validation of emergent standards, and funding for programming and outreach to encourage adoption of the standard within the profession. The tentative approach would be to pursue an IMLS grant or similar large type grant, with the intention of re-granting it to standards development work, and work with SAA Foundation to pursue intentional fundraising for continued financial support going forward.

DISCUSSION

The expectation of volunteer labor in itself is built upon a professional environment that is no longer (or arguably was ever) a reality. Simply put, compensation for labor, especially for producing professional standards, should be a typical expectation of supporting the work that supports and advances our profession. If standards development continues to be unfunded, it has and will continue to be difficult to recruit volunteers with the necessary expertise, time1, and

1 For many standards development initiatives, particularly for proposal-driven initiatives, the time-commitment is well beyond the “4+ hours per week, often in small batches scattered throughout the year” or “4+ hours/week, in 1 or 2 concentrated batches” time commitment options in the annual call for volunteers. The current Standards
altruistic spirit (since they could be compensated for their expertise and labor by getting royalties from publishing a book or leveraging their knowledge through consulting work).

Additionally, particularly when developing standards for accessibility for people with disabilities or engaging students, it is more likely to require engaging with populations who historically are underemployed and thus not subsidized for their time and labor by an employer, thus resulting in an extractive relationship with SAA. The expectation of uncompensated volunteer labor is an equity issue and is a barrier to the participation and engagement with people whose voices and perspectives are needed in informing our profession.

Conversely, if standards development is funded, it will:
1. Competitively encourage participation in those committees – thus increasing the quality of the standards being developed
2. Standards groups might be able to engage more meaningfully with reviewers and stakeholders to validate their recommendations – currently beyond having an open call for feedback in a form, there isn’t a standard workflow for engaging stakeholders in critical validation of standards.²
3. It may encourage the subcommittees to "think big" about not only the development of the standards but also programming and outreach to encourage faster and more enthusiastic adoption of the new standards

For greater context of the models of standards development work, they basically fall into three categories:
1. Proposal-driven: 2-3 year term limited intensive effort and time commitment
2. Council-driven: 2-3 year term limited intensive effort and time commitment
3. Continuous revision (on-going maintenance and major revisions): more in-line with standard volunteer time commitment expectations but transformative ambitious initiatives could also be undertaken in those standing committees if funding was available.

With terms on standards developing committees usually spanning 2-3 years, this is not sufficient time for individual committees to develop a grant proposal. If SAA pursued larger grants such as IMLS grants that they could re-grant in amounts akin to $10,000 or so per initiative (these are roughly estimated numbers), this could alleviate a tangible hardship for volunteers and enable more robust, impactful, and ambitious work by the experts in these roles.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

THAT the SAA Council approve the Standards Committee and Council Liaison Tang to explore pursuing applying for large grants (such as IMLS, Mellon, or other granting

Committee chair is currently on year 5 of a 3 three-year term because of the expertise and institutional/policy knowledge that is necessary to coordinate and lead the committee.

² This was noted as a pain point in a DACS recent revision. The TS was unable to gather feedback from enough small institutions to validate their recommendations. If funding was available to convene a focus group of stakeholders, it would have alleviated significant administrative uncertainty and debate among the TS and Council.
agencies), along with engaging with SAA Foundation to brainstorm approaches for continued funding secured for standards development initiatives.

**Support Statement:** Since volunteer service terms usually span only 2-3 years, it places standards developers at a disadvantage for trying to individually apply for grant funding. Indeed, since committee terms rollover in August, this gives less than a month before IMLS grants are due in September. If SAA intentionally pursued a larger grant that they can re-grant for the standards development, as a pilot for ongoing permanent funding going forward, it would allow the subject experts to focus on what they do best: compiling and creating their best knowledge for the profession, allow greater validation and inter-connectedness with the standards in dialogue with external stakeholders, and educate archivists to more quickly adopt emerging standards in their local repositories. Supporting standards development with these three objectives could be transformational within our profession.

**Impact on Strategic Priorities:** This initiative supports the SAA Strategic Plan in the following ways:

**GOAL 1: ADVOCATING FOR ARCHIVES AND ARCHIVISTS**
By acknowledging that archival expertise and archival labor are worthy of compensation, SAA will “walk the walk” of modeling to our profession what equity looks like in this challenging era of resource-scarcity. We should not perpetuate the “make do with nothing” approach that is pervasive in under-funded professions without making earnest inquiries into funding sources and models that might be possible.

**GOAL 2: ENHANCING PROFESSIONAL GROWTH**
By providing funding and the expectation that standards development also involves outreach and programming to support adoption of the new standards, this will benefit the broader profession. Not everyone learns the best only by reading. By factoring in interactive online sessions (for example) to help archivists learn the new standards and apply it to their local institutions, it will promote a more educated and more nimbly adapting profession.

**GOAL 3: ADVANCING THE FIELD**
By “investing” in standards development, it will attract the most knowledgeable professionals to contribute their expertise, allow for external engagement of stakeholders to validate the developing standards, and promote greater awareness and adoption of the new standards within the profession.

**GOAL 4: MEETING MEMBERS’ NEEDS**
By compensating standards development work, it will “Create opportunities for members to participate fully in the association.” For some people who are not employed or precariously employed, they are not subsidized or supported by their employer to participate. They may need to only volunteer off work hours and may pay out of pocket for all expenses associated with their SAA service. For some people, even if their expertise and perspectives are valuable for standards development, it is truly a barrier for participation if it is not compensated. Providing even a token honorarium is key to embodying “Foster[ing] an inclusive association and profession through educational and leadership opportunities.”
**Fiscal Impact:** Taking a stance of honorariums for standards development is a bold move that will require fiscal resources, but it is the right and equitable thing to do. There can be discussions and debate about how to provide this honoraria. For volunteers in the standards developing committees, assuming that they must be members of SAA, perhaps it is sufficient to grant them a free membership for each year of service, with a cap at 2 or 3 years that are directly related to their involvement on the committee? For external stakeholders for focus groups and/or extensive peer review, perhaps it could be as low as $100 individually? For programming, perhaps it could be just the time and labor of SAA Education staff promoting, hosting, and captioning the webinar? Archivists are persistent and adaptable but we also need to dream big to build great things. This is why pursuing a pilot grant and re-granting workflow would be necessary to pilot a model that balances sustainability and fiscal responsibility with social responsibility and equity in standards development.

If a large grant is procured by SAA, it would take SAA Foundation involvement for managing and distributing the grant, and arguably a term-limited project manager to oversee this pilot project and assess the effectiveness of it.

Here are some examples of the types of initiatives and projects that the Standards Committee oversees and would like to fund:

**TS-DACS:**
- **Members:** 15 community experts
- **Project(s):** Major updates to meet DACS Statement of principles, e.g., adding versioning/guidance on revision of fields over time, improving processing note and documentation of labor
- **Estimated support amount:** $3,750-$7,500 ($250-$500 per participant)

**Guidelines for Accessible Archives for People with Disabilities**
- **Members:** 8 members, 1 technical consultant, 6 external reviewers
- **Project(s):** Holistic revision and migration to GitHub repository (like DACS) for an accessible and discoverable format
- **Total request:** $3,500 - $7,500 (lowest figure based upon unfunded SAA Foundation proposal and upper limit figure estimating $500/participant)

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. Does the model of pursuing a large grant with the intent of re-granting it for smaller standards development initiatives seem feasible?
2. Would it be better to work with SAA Foundation to increase earmarked funding for standards development initiatives instead?
3. What other issues or topics need discussion here? What other considerations do we need to consider that might not have been listed here?