

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
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**Dictionary Working Group: Annual Report**

**(Prepared by: Rosemary Pleva Flynn, outgoing chair; Katy Sternberger, incoming chair)**

The SAA Dictionary Working Group, established by the SAA Council in 2011, maintains the *Dictionary of Archives Terminology*. The group’s charge is “to establish and maintain mechanisms and procedures for allowing periodic updates and contributions of new content to the *Dictionary* and to ensure that this important resource adheres to the highest quality professional standards.”

**BACKGROUND**

During the August 2023 to August 2024 year, the twelve working group members were Rosemary Pleva Flynn (chair), Kate Bowers, Tamar Chute, Helena Egbert, Cliff Hight, Geof Huth, Daria Labinsky, Cheryl Oestreicher, Liz Phillips (data entry specialist), Margery Sly, Katy Sternberger, and Shannon Walker. The group’s SAA Council liaison was Joyce Gabiola. SAA staff representatives were Abigail Christian (before her departure), Rana Hutchinson Salzman, Julia Pillard, and Savannah Tiffany.

In fulfilling its charge this year, the Dictionary Working Group continued to develop the *Dictionary of Archives Terminology* by introducing new terms, revising existing terms, and performing data cleanup. The group also continued to publish the popular *Word of the Week* e-newsletter, introducing a term from the archival lexicon each week.

The group’s major priority this year was undertaking the migration of our production system. The *Dictionary*’s back end is hosted by our vendor, Elements Forge. Due to updates to online security settings, our previous system (DPS) became deprecated. Elements Forge and the DWG quickly pivoted to a new system (Xmlref). The build-out was completed in January 2024, and we made the final transition in April 2024, with additional required modifications into June 2024.

**DISCUSSION**

The Dictionary Working Group is a hardworking team whose members apply their specialized skillsets and invest substantial time to gain the required expertise in dictionary production. In calendar year 2023, the working group added thirty-one new terms to the *Dictionary* and revised 155 terms. Through August 2024, the group has revised fifty-six terms in addition to managing the migration to our new production system and conducting data cleanup on five hundred terms.

The working group drafted an update to its standing rules in 2022 to increase the number of members and make other adjustments. This process was delayed after several SAA staff departures in 2023. In 2024, the working group collaborated with the new SAA staff members to

establish next steps for updating the standing rules. The working group will present revisions to the standing rules for SAA Council approval at their fall 2024 meeting.

**Impact on Strategic Priorities:** Over the course of the last year, the Dictionary Working Group has fulfilled each of SAA’s 2023–2025 strategic priorities in the following ways:

- Goal 1: Advocating for Archives and Archivist—For archivists and nonarchivists alike, the *Dictionary* is the authoritative source to learn about our professional lexicon. The SAA publications program relies on the *Dictionary* in order to advocate for a shared understanding of archival terminology.
- Goal 2: Enhancing Professional Growth—The DWG consistently produces content to enhance archivists’ knowledge of the field. Every week, we publish the *Word of the Week* e-newsletter to expose archivists to professional terminology. Since launching in April 2020, the online *Dictionary* is a heavily used resource that drives ten percent of SAA’s website traffic.
- Goal 3: Advancing the Field—The *Dictionary* is based on citations from the professional literature, so the group continually educates archivists at all stages of their careers by exposing them to both historical and current archival theory and practice. In turn, we encourage archivists to add their voices to the professional literature so that we can continue building the archival lexicon.
- Goal 4: Meeting Members’ Needs—Via the SAA website, the DWG regularly receives and responds to user feedback regarding archival terms for potential inclusion or revision in the *Dictionary*.

**Fiscal Impact:** The Dictionary Working Group has proactively taken steps to keep costs at a minimum, plus our members’ volunteer labor adds substantial financial value.

SAA signed our current contract with Elements Forge in December 2023 at a cost of \$9,160, which includes monthly licensing fees per user and monthly server storage fees (these two costs are ongoing). It is worth noting that IDM, the developer of the dictionary software, did not deliver the improvements to the DPS as promised so Elements Forge did not charge SAA the software fees for many years. Also, under our current contract, Elements Forge has provided many additional services at no charge, saving SAA thousands of dollars in software solutioning costs.

In addition to the dictionary production system, the DWG requires additional tools. Members utilize the free versions of Asana for project tracking and Google for email and storage of image backups and documentation.

In addition, DWG meets on a weekly basis, meaning that each member commits at least four hours per month year-round. Members generally also devote a number of extra hours per week to the *Dictionary*, depending on our upcoming deadlines, training needs, data entry requirements, and other special projects. Across our twelve current members, this adds up to hundreds of hours of unpaid labor per year, besides members’ work and personal obligations.