

Society of American Archivists
Leadership Orientation and Forum
Wednesday, August 8, 2012, 10:30 am – 11:30 am
San Diego, California

Remarks of 2011-2012 SAA Preservation Section
Chair Jennifer Waxman

Challenges and successes of running a section involve, simultaneously, communication. Whether it's working with your steering committee, the membership, or SAA, part of the successes and challenges include knowing what channels to use for communication and who to reach out to. As chair, it's important to establishing a good framework for routine communication. Here's some main points about what I experienced as Preservation Section Chair:

- Monthly conference calls allowed our motivated steering committee to engage in lively discussions and keep up with everyone's projects and needs. However, when both the Vice Chair and I got new jobs, we lost access to the conference call service. We couldn't use other tools like Google Hangout or Skype because of folks working on .gov jobs where they can't download them. Either way, we managed, but be aware of changes that could affect how to maintain communication lines.
- All-volunteer steering committee is busy with their real jobs and life, so sometimes you cannot get consensus or wait for everyone to respond to an email. Just take action. Forge ahead. You may feel like a despot, but it's probably more of a benefit to the section and its membership if you have time to handle something on your own than waiting for everyone to agree or to delegate.
- It's hard to gauge whether or not the membership is benefiting from what the steering committee does, or the goals it sets out to achieve. It takes baby steps for a Section to gain visibility for its membership, as I learned with the Preservation Section. After surveying the membership and beefing-up the resources and infrastructure on the Section website, *and* sending out a few emails via the listserv, you still wonder, is anyone listening? Is what we are doing useful for the members? It's hard to gauge efficacy, but in the end if your goal is to make the Section a resource and place for professional engagement for its membership, you are heading in the right direction.
- It's sometimes hard to understand the SAA infrastructure, its protocols, and how to communicate with SAA headquarters. Fortunately, everyone at SAA HQ is extremely easy to communicate with and they will help sort it out. Also, your Council Liaison is a line into to that organization and can help you sort out the "who, what and where" type questions.
- Finally, it can be unclear about how much of a conduit to your section that you, as Section leader, are supposed to be for information coming out of SAA headquarters. Do you forward every email from the leadership listserv? Do you forward announcements going to the A&A listserv as well? That's a good conversation to have with people that may have more experience in these roles, as well as your Council Liaison.