

Leadership Orientation and Forum
Wednesday, August 14, 2013, 10:30 am – Noon

Remarks of SAA Executive Director Nancy Beaumont

Good morning.

I'd like to begin with a quick scan of who's here:

- How many of you are here today representing a Council-appointed group, such as a Committee, Board, Working Group, or Task Force?

- And how many of you are representing a Section or Roundtable?

- How many of you are current leaders of a component group?

- How many are incoming leaders of your group?

My assigned topic – SAA's Governance Structure and How to Make It Work for You – is rather broad, so I'll try to focus on some practical tips for navigating SAA as efficiently and effectively as possible....

The primary purpose of governance of an organization like SAA is: To ensure that the organization complies with the legal and financial obligations of its charter documents.

Beyond that: Governance should provide a framework within which knowledge-based decision-making can take place effectively.

Increasingly governance is expected to be transparent. How are decisions being made? Who is accountable for those decisions? What processes, procedures, or "rules" are being followed?

That's it. That's governance in a nutshell.

In my view governance should be a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. It should – fundamentally – provide a framework for accountability and a structure for making good decisions.

SAA now has some 60 component groups, by which I mean boards, committees, task forces, working groups, sections, and roundtables.

The benefit of having so many and such varied groups is that there is the opportunity to tap into the grassroots – the broader knowledge base that can contribute to the best possible decisions. The downside of having so many and such varied groups is that chaos can ensue....

Having in place some governance processes and procedures can help mitigate the chaos. In my opinion, simpler is almost always better when it comes to governance.

My best advice for how to make SAA's governance structure work for you is to begin by reading some basic and practical resources that we've put together for you.

The first of these is the SAA Governance Manual. The Manual is probably not something that you're going to want to sit down and read from cover to cover. But I will say that, thanks to the efforts of Terry Baxter and Beth Kaplan and Bill Landis and Rene Mueller during the past year, the Governance Manual has been thoroughly reviewed and revised to ensure that it is up to date and consistent from section to section. The revised Manual will be available on the SAA website in mid-September, soon after this conference.

The second resource – and probably the better place to start – is the [2013-14 Guide for SAA Leaders](#). In it we have provided some very basic information that is sort of a “cheat sheet” for the larger SAA Governance Manual.

Rather than being an exhaustive policy guide, this document provides an introduction to common questions that you may encounter and tips on where to find additional information and resources. Sections of the 16-page guide address your responsibilities as a component leader, important dates and deadlines, working effectively with the SAA Council, how leader rosters are updated, group email lists, group websites and online communications, records management for component groups, and a contact list for assistance.

What are the different types of component groups? How do Council-appointed groups (like committees and working groups) differ? What’s the difference between Sections and Roundtables?

What are your responsibilities as a component leader? The requirements are pretty simple:

- You must provide an annual report to the governing body of the organization – i.e., the Council – at the end of each year.
- In the case of Sections and Roundtables, you must elect leaders and, new for Roundtables per Council action in June 2012, you must adopt bylaws. (I’ve worked with many of you over the past several months to get bylaws in place.)
- And you really, really *should* engage your members in discussion of the topics for which your group was created.

What are the important dates of which you should be aware during the year? This guide provides a calendar of key dates.

How can you work most effectively with the Council to bring forward your ideas for consideration? We provide a schedule for getting your ideas before the Council and a very simple template for preparing action items, discussion items, and reports that is available on the website and that is intended to help you focus the Council's attention on your issues.

What are the procedures for updating leader rosters on the SAA website?

How do group email lists work?

What's the purpose of the SAA Leader List?

What are the expectations regarding records management for component groups?

Two other items in the Guide may be of particular interest to you:

- We provide full language and explanation of a policy adopted by the Council in June 2012 that allows component groups to establish an auxiliary website or start a social media account as a means of accomplishing their communication objectives. However, all auxiliary sites must be cross-referenced with the group's official Drupal microsite to ensure the continuity of the record through leadership changes.
- And we provide an example of effective communication by the Business Archives Section as its leaders attempted to drum up nominations for BAS leader positions. The communication is lively and fun – and it worked!

Who can you contact for assistance on a variety of topics?

Whenever I'm given the opportunity before a group of component leaders, I can't resist making this plea:

Please try to do more than hold an annual meeting at which you decide on a topic for your next annual meeting or elect officers whose only job is to run the next annual meeting.

Please use your discussion list and your microsite to communicate knowledge and information and to stimulate discussion among your members. Allow your governance activities to take a backseat to your reason for being – which is to connect your members on topics of interest to them.

I worry when a Council meeting has more agenda items about governance matters than about how to make the world safer for archives and archivists.

If you have ideas for streamlining governance processes and requirements, please contact your Council liaison or me. Our goal – always – is to help you spend less time worrying about how to manage your group and more time focusing on your goals!