

**Society of American Archivists  
Leadership Orientation and Forum  
Wednesday, August 14, 2014, 10:30 am – Noon  
Marriott Wardman Park, Washington, D.C.**

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

- How many of you represent a Council-appointed group, i.e., a committee, board, working group or task force?
- How many of you represent a section?
- And how many represent a roundtable?
- And are you an incoming leader?

Good – it looks like we have representation from our various types of groups and varying levels of experience.

My assigned topic – SAA's governance structure and how to make it work for you – is rather broad, so I plan to dabble a bit in philosophy and then offer some practical tips for navigating SAA efficiently and effectively. Mostly I'm going to teach you to fish....

First just a couple of broad strokes about governance in a professional association.

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 – its constitution and bylaws.

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

Think about that for a minute: A framework within which knowledge-based decision-making can take place effectively. That's a pretty tall order, actually....

Increasingly we all expect governance to be transparent. How are decisions being made? Who's making them? What processes, procedures, or rules are being followed? And how can we pose ideas or recommendations that can be considered and acted on by the decision makers?

The natural evolution of most professional associations, however, is that governance gets a bit more complicated over time. It can become over-engineered, less transparent. It can become an end in itself.

In my view governance should be a means to an end, rather than an end in itself.

SAA now has some 60 component groups, by which I mean boards, committees, working groups, task forces, 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 (and occasionally does) ensue....

Having in place some governance processes and procedures can help mitigate the chaos. I think simpler is nearly always better when it comes to governance – and that applies to both the Council and component groups.

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And so how can you best navigate SAA's governance structure so that it works for your group?

I have five tips:

1. **To get started**, read the 2014-2015 Leadership Manual. We have about a hundred copies here in the room, but it's easy to find on the SAA website – go to About Us, click on Policies and Procedures, and then click on Leadership Resources. This 16- or 17-page guide provides an introduction to common questions that you may have and tips on where to find additional information and resources. It addresses your responsibilities as a component leader, important dates and deadlines, the schedule for getting an item on a Council meeting agenda, how to work with group email lists, online communications, and other very practical matters.
2. **Connect with your Council liaison.** Council members take very seriously their role as liaisons to component groups, and they are happy to answer any questions you have, help you craft an item for Council consideration, or talk over an issue with you. Virtually all of them have served in a leadership position with one or more component groups. They understand what it's like to be in your shoes.
3. **Connect with your colleagues via the Leader List.** All section and roundtable steering committee members and all members of Council-appointed groups are subscribed to the Leader List. Within the past 6 months or so we've converted it from an announcement list to a discussion list, and we encourage you to use it as a tool for sharing ideas and information and seeking advice.

4. **Call me. Or email me.** I'm always happy to suggest a way forward for you and your group – or put you in touch with someone who can advise you.
5. If you'd like to dig a little deeper into SAA's governance, take a spin with the **Governance Manual**, which is also available online at About Us, Policies and Procedures. Last year the Council adopted a revision of the Manual put forward by Council members Terry Baxter, Beth Kaplan, and Bill Landis and staff member Rene Craig that clarified, standardized, and in some instances simplified the Manual. It's not light reading, nor is it for the faint of heart, but it is informative.....

Finally, my annual plea:

There are just three things that the Council requires you to do as a component group leader – and these really apply to sections and roundtables:

1. Within 14 days of the annual meeting, you must submit your leader roster to the staff office,
2. Within 90 days of the annual meeting, you must submit an annual report to the Council, and
3. Sections and roundtables are required to elect leaders and adopt bylaws. I worked with many roundtables last year to get bylaws in place, and we'll be wrapping up that process—I hope!—this fall.

Those are the requirements. But then there are also the wonderful opportunities that your position affords you:

- Use your position as a group leader to lead.
- Engage your members in discussion of the topics for which your group was created.
- Be transparent about how your members can participate in your group – so that they will participate.

I worry when a Council meeting includes more agenda items related to governance than about how to make the world safer for archives and archivists. And I worry when our roundtables, for example, meet once a year at the annual meeting and don't communicate with their members at other times. You undoubtedly have many members who have never attended an annual meeting. What about them? What opportunities do they have to learn, engage, and participate?

SAA is growing – in fact, we just achieved a new high in membership of 6,224 at the end of July! – and that's in part because of the good work of our Council-appointed groups and the affinity that members feel for their special interest groups. Use your microsites to communicate knowledge and information beyond your appointed

group. Use your section and roundtable discussion lists—and your energy—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.

If you have ideas for streamlining governance processes and requirements, please talk to your Council liaison or to 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!