

Society of American Archivists

Membership Committee Annual Report for 2017

Prepared by Matt Gorzalski, Chair; Kate Dundon, Outgoing Chair

BACKGROUND

Per the Membership Committee's Council-approved guidelines, the Chair must submit an annual report to the Council by September 1.

REPORT

Section I. 2017 Membership Committee Annual Meeting Summary

1. Annual Meeting: Portland, OR

The Membership Committee met July 25, 2017 with four members in attendance. Also in attendance were both the outgoing and incoming Council Liaisons, SAA staff liaisons with the Membership Committee, two members of the Key Contacts subcommittee, and SAA President-elect. Three regular members of the committee were absent.

Council liaison Rachel Vagts reported on SAA Council matters and announced Jamillah Gabriel's appointment as Ex Officio Diversity Committee liaison.

Committee Chair Kate Dundon reviewed the committee charge and announced incoming appointed members Alison Clemens (2017-2020), Sherry Griffin Grundy (2017-2020), and Jeremy Floyd (2017-2018).¹ She also announced Michelle Sweetser's acceptance of appointment to the position of Vice-Chair/Chair elect.

Other appointments to the standing subcommittees were reviewed or made as follows:

- Karen Spicher accepted an appointment as co-chair of the Key Contact subcommittee. Karen is a member of Key Contacts, but not Membership.
- Laura Kopp Starr accepted an appointment as co-chair of the Career Development subcommittee to serve an additional one year term. Jennifer Motszko will serve as co-chair with Laura for one more year as well.
- Sherry Griffin Grundy was appointed as junior co-chair of the Career Development subcommittee to serve a two year term.
- Alison Clemens was appointed as co-chair of the Mentoring subcommittee for a two year term.

¹ Special 1-year appointment to fill spot left by Member Michelle Sweetser moving into Vice-Chair position.

- Gabrielle Spiers accepted an appointment as chair of the Navigator program for a one year term.

The Committee then reviewed the work in progress of each subcommittee, and discussed the annual meeting events and service programs sponsored by the Membership Committee, reminding everyone to attend and to encourage attendance by subcommittee members and volunteers.

2. Discussion Points

The Committee discussed the idea of offering virtual career development services such as Skype mock interviews or resources on interviews via the Career Center.

Also discussed were the results of the Committee's survey on barriers to participation in SAA. The survey report was well-received by council, who was enthusiastic about creating a "get involved" page on the SAA website. See Appendix for background on the survey and full report.

President-elect Tanya Zanish-Belcher discussed her ideas regarding solicitation of funds to support SAA activities and mitigate increasing costs of the annual meeting.

3. Activities 2016-2017

The Committee met three times via conference call on October 3, 2016; January 31, 2017; and May 5, 2017. The primary point of discussion was the survey on barriers to participation, which was conducted in response to a Council directive. See Appendix for background on the survey and full report.

Section II. Subcommittee Reports

Subcommittee Program Reports for 2017: 1. Key Contact Program, 2. Mentoring Program, 3. Career Development Subcommittee, 4. Navigator Program.

1. Key Contact Program Summary

Michelle Sweetser and Tommy Brown, Subcommittee Co-Chairs

Program Summary

The Key Contact Subcommittee is a unit of the Society of American Archivists Membership Committee. It is comprised of 2 co-chairs and 11 District Representatives overseeing geographic regions covering the United States and international countries.

The Representatives work with 68 appointed Key Contacts to reach out to SAA's membership in greeting and welcoming new members, promoting the value of SAA's services, and periodically offering information on various archival resources.

Activities in 2016-2017

Revamped Key Contacts section of the SAA website:

- Renamed files, and reorganized sections, headers, etc.,
- Made all files public (not behind login) for better discoverability
- Uploaded missing content

Drafted a new Co-Chairs manual to facilitate smooth transition from year to year and to reflect timelines and work that need to be done.

Reviewed membership on email distribution lists and worked with SAA to ensure that distribution lists were up-to-date and include current active volunteers.

Contacted 1,093 individuals (members with a join date of July 1, 2016-June 30, 2017).

Current Vacancies

A Key Contact is needed for each of the following states:

- Connecticut
- Kentucky

Business for 2017-2018

Now that educational resources are more discoverable online and are updated to reflect current practice, solicit feedback from KCs and DRs in the fall to determine whether the website and the resources available there are meeting their needs. If gaps are identified, work to fill the need with additional educational resources.

Regularly communicate with all KCs and DRs using standardized tools.

2. Mentoring Program Subcommittee Summary

Gabrielle Spiers and Devhra BennetJones, Subcommittee Co-Chairs

Administering the Mentorship Program

The following members are rotating off the Mentoring Program Subcommittee in 8/2017

- Gabrielle Spiers, Co-Chair
- Gabriela Redwine, member
- Kelly Spring, member

The following SAA members have agreed to join the Subcommittee starting 8/2017

As of July 18, 2017 there were 81 of Protégés and 77 Mentors active in the program. Of these 8 are Protégés waiting to be matched.

For the total from the SAA Mentoring Program Database 2011/09/04 to 2017/07/22, there have been 448 Mentors and 511 Protégés.

Subcommittee activities

Ongoing tasks that maintain the program:

- Reviewed and updated the database Protégés and Mentors to identify matches and manage information about participants
- Contact recently “expired” Mentors to see if they are interested in being matched with another Protégé.
- Communicated primarily via email and listserv but co-chairs had a conference call.
- Regularly submitted calls to the membership of various SAA sections for Mentors. This was especially successful with the Lone Arrangers and Business sections

Outreach activities

- Worked with Alexandra Orchard (former committee member) and Allison Stankrauff providing them data for the article that they wrote
- A blurb appeared in In the Loop during National Mentoring Month.
- The mentoring program Meet and Greet is scheduled for Thursday July 27, 2017 at 3:15pm and this year it is separate from the First Timer/New Members coffee.

Ongoing Issues

- Continue to foster meaningful mentoring relationships between SAA members by matching Mentors with Protégés and soliciting Mentor volunteers via group listservs and personal connections.
- Several Mentors contacted us because their protégés were not communicating. Perhaps a check-in email with the Mentors and Protégés during the year to see how things are going?
- Work with the Academy of Certified Archivists to see if CA credit is a possibility. Incoming Senior co-Chair Devhra BennetJones and committee member Michelle Ganz are both involved with ACA.
- On the whole committee members are very good at responding quickly to requests.
- Permissions need to be revoked for prior committee members
- Continue to promote the program through “In the Loop” and on the various listservs.
- Continue to be proactive about recruiting recently expired mentors. Many are interested in carrying on but are not sure how to do so.

3. Career Development Subcommittee Summary

Laura Starr and Jennifer Motszko, Co-Chairs

Career Center Subcommittee Membership

Jennifer Motszko, Co-Chair

Laura Starr, Co-Chair

Jennifer Johnson
Meredith Lowe
Sherry Griffin Grundy (incoming)

2017 Career Center Offerings

Based on past experience, the subcommittee decided to reduce the hours of the Career Center at the SAA 2017 conference. We were open on Wednesday through Friday from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM; we were not open on Saturday. These hours seemed to work well given the number of volunteers and those who signed up for services.

The Career Center again offered resume/career counseling and mock interviews by appointment or walk-in, job boards and a file box for employers to post positions, a board and file box for job seekers to post resumes, free handouts on resume and cover letter writing, and a private space for on-site interviews.

2017 Career Center by the Numbers

Counseling/Resume Advisers: 32 (down from 46 in 2016)

Scheduled Advisees: 40 (down from 41 in 2016)

Mock Interviews: 14 (down from 16 in 2016)

Mock Interviewees: 8 (same as 2016)

Private Room Appointments: 0 (down from 1 in 2016)

*Some people may have used this space for interviews on a walk-in basis, but they were not counted

2017 Career Center Lessons Learned

There may not always be a SAA or Career Development member in the Career Center to direct visitors to the services available. Consider more signage for next year. Specifically, the private interview space should have a sign indicating its purpose and that people can meet privately there if not in use. It seems no one used this private space this year.

Clarify the “live schedule” so that advisors can clearly see if they have booked appointments and so that walk-ins can see available advisors. We had a spreadsheet with that information this year, but a little more context around the data would be useful to viewers.

We need to be sure to capture statistics about the number of job announcements and resumes posted on the boards, general visitorship to the Career Center (via a sign-in sheet), and drop-ins

seeking specific services (via another sign-in sheet for drop-in resume review or mock interviews).

The Mentoring Program Meet and Greet was held in the Career Center during open hours. People participating in mock interviews during this time found it very difficult to talk and concentrate with the other event going on. For next year, we should consider either closing the Career Center during the time of the Mentoring Program Meet and Greet or have the Meet and Greet in another location.

We have distributed a participant survey (closing on August 25) to receive specific feedback on this year's Career Center to see if there are additional improvement opportunities for next year.

Looking Ahead

Jennifer Motszko and Laura Starr acted as co-chairs this year and have agreed to continue in this capacity next year (2017-2018). Sherry Griffin Grundy is the incoming chair for 2018-2019; Sherry will work with Jennifer and Laura during the course of the next year to ensure a smooth transition.

We will begin an initiative to consider expanding the Career Center offerings beyond in-person services at the SAA annual meeting. We received several inquiries during our calls for conference Career Center participants about remote services for members who cannot attend the conference. We will start this initiative by creating and distributing a 3 or 4 question survey to all SAA members asking for specific feedback on what types of remote career development services they might be interested in. We're thinking these remote services might include phone or Skype Mock interviews, as well as recording some "tips and tricks" webinars about how to prepare for an interview and general mentoring advice. It will be important to discuss these possible services with the Mentoring subcommittee to understand the overlap; for example, if a new Mentee completes their form and indicates they'd like career counseling, perhaps that person could be directly connected to the Career Development group. We will work on this initiative over the course of the next year; we may develop a working group to take on the specific tasks once fully planned.

4. Navigator Program Subcommittee Summary

Diane Pugh, Chair

2017 Navigator Program Subcommittee members:

- Diane Pugh, Chair
- Rachael Dreyer, Member
- Caitlin Wells, Member

Online sign-up form went live on April 6, officially closed on June 15. However, a request was made to the Chair to extend the deadline to allow members of ARL/SAA Mosaic to apply. They were given until June 23rd to respond.

46 initial responses for those wishing to be matched with a Navigator, and 22 initial responses for Navigators (up from 62 responses total in 2016)

Made 24 additional matches after a later call to the SAA Leaders list for more volunteers to serve as Navigators.

Total 46 matches; 92 participants total (2016: 62 participants; 2015: 114; 2014: 126; 2013: 70)

Gabrielle Spiers appointed Chair for 2018.

Section III. Conclusion

2017 has been a productive year for the Membership Committee and its Subcommittees. The Committee continues to work towards building strong connections between the organization and its members and to introduce valuable resources to SAA members. As initiatives such as the Navigator Program and Career Center become more formalized, we are able to better assess their impact and improve our offerings. We hope to continue to be included by Council in conversations related to the needs of the membership, especially in light of questions related to member benefits and participation. We look forward to continuing to work as a Committee to develop programming of import to the membership as a whole.

Appendix

SAA Membership Committee Survey on Barriers to Participation

Report submitted to SAA Council by the Membership Committee, June 2017

2016-2017 Membership Committee:

Kate Dundon, Chair

Matthew Gorzalski, Vice Chair

Tommy Brown, Committee Member

Claire Jenkins, Committee Member

Jennifer Motszko, Committee Member

Diane Pugh, Committee Member

Gabrielle Spears, Committee Member

Laura Starr, Committee Member

Michelle Sweetser, Committee Member

Racheile Ricklefs, Intern

Holly Smith, Ex Officio (Diversity Committee Chair)

Rachel Vagts, Council Liaison

Nancy Beaumont, SAA Staff Liaison

Carlos Salgado, SAA Staff Liaison

Background

At the 2016 SAA Annual Meeting, the Membership Committee received a directive from SAA Council to gather information about barriers to participating in SAA from the general membership, and discuss and recommend ways to break down these barriers. The Committee first addressed this task by informally surveying members through casual conversation at the annual meeting and within our individual professional networks, and identified the following common barriers:

- Insufficient funding to attend annual meeting
- Insufficient time to commit to active involvement
- Assumption that leadership positions are only available to those who attend annual meeting
- Lack of professional connections
- Desire to get to know SAA before becoming actively involved

The Committee used this feedback to create multiple choice questions for a survey distributed to the general membership for more comprehensive data on barriers to participation. The Committee and SAA staff disseminated the survey via In the Loop, the SAA website, the Archives & Archivists List, and the SAA Leaders list. The survey was open for approximately 1 month, from late February to late March 2017. 1,279 people responded.

In the survey, the Committee defined "participation" as active involvement in an SAA group, contributing to an email list or social media, volunteering as a mentor, attending the Annual Meeting or a workshop, or partaking in other activities or initiatives. The survey consisted of the following three questions, which provided a free text response option in addition to choices that could be selected concurrently. Responses are attached as appendices I and II.

1. Are you satisfied with your current level of participation in SAA?
2. If you do not participate, or are unsatisfied with your level of participation, what are the barriers you face?
3. Additional feedback about participation in SAA

Key Findings and Observations

Response to question 1 tells us that roughly half of the respondents (about 665) have a desire to be more involved in SAA. We see this as a good problem because it demonstrates a desire to engage with the organization. It also reveals that a number of members aren't satisfied with their involvement, which should be unpacked. We hope that by assessing the most common barriers faced by our members, we will gain a more nuanced understanding of complex professional lives of SAA members, and will be able to suggest realistic methods of breaking down these barriers.

Response to question 2 tells a bigger picture:

The top two barriers to participation are expense and time. Members do not receive adequate funding from their institutions to travel to the annual meeting and stay at a hotel, and they struggle to cover costs out of pocket. Many temporary and contract archivists are not paid when taking time off for professional development activities. Members are stretched in their jobs, coursework, and family lives. These issues are longstanding, widespread, and difficult to address.

The third most common barrier is that members new to the profession do not feel experienced enough to get involved in SAA. It is understandable that a student or new professional should want to take a year or two after joining SAA to get oriented to the organization and become familiar with the opportunities for involvement, and this should be respected. However, we also believe it is important to engage new members with the organization so they feel valued and included in the profession. Furthermore, SAA benefits from the skills and perspectives of new members.

The fourth most common barrier is the lack of clarity on how to participate. We interpret this as is a communication issue. SAA leadership forms a large and complex organization of groups and subgroups that intimidates new members. We need to acknowledge the learning curve members face in participating in SAA, and consider how our organizational structure and systems of communication can obstruct engagement.

The fifth most common barrier is simply not being appointed to a position after volunteering. Some members described unsuccessful attempts at participating (rejected conference session proposals, submitting volunteer the form but not being selected) and have become discouraged from repeated failures and/or never hearing follow-up. This is a frustrating experience. While we want all members to feel welcome to participate at the level they feel most comfortable, we also think it is important for leadership positions to remain competitive. SAA leadership is most effective when individuals are committed to serving in their positions, and the application process helps to ensure the value of holding a leadership position or presenting in the annual meeting program.

Response to question 3 and feedback in free-text “other” options in questions 1 and 2 were analyzed together. Feedback was diverse and revealing. The most common themes include the following, roughly in order of predominance:

- It is difficult to participate while unemployed, in a temporary position, or when one lacks a professional network. This speaks to economic and professional privilege enjoyed by members with permanent jobs.
- Leadership and general membership feels cliquish. Respondents expressed that one seems to have to know people in SAA in order to get involved.
- Annual meeting programming and communication from SAA seems to predominantly focus on issues relating to archives at large established universities, which does not necessarily serve members at small institutions, corporate agencies, or government archives. Thus, opportunities to participate do not necessarily align with professional interests.
- Channels for participation are not clear.
- Some members face a lack of support from their employers, managers, and colleagues in participating in SAA. This goes beyond a lack of funding. Institutional culture does not always support using work hours for service in professional associations, making time devoted to SAA a larger burden for some members.
- Several respondents, both young and old, experience ageism in SAA. This is alienating, and prevents some members from seeing themselves reflected in the organization.
- Some respondents indicated that they felt alienated by the seemingly predominant liberal politics of SAA leadership and general membership. Additionally, the A&A listserv is perceived as politically combative from both sides of the political spectrum, and is intimidating.
- Some members who have previously served in leadership positions did not find the experience fulfilling and therefore have not sought new opportunities for participation.

Additional observations on free-text responses:

It is clear that many members experience feelings of intimidation and unwelcomeness that contribute to their hesitation to participate in SAA. These include: perception of cliquish leadership and membership; first-time annual meeting attendees intimidated by the size of the meeting; lack of people of color in SAA; and the perception that SAA is dominated by the interests of academic archives.

SAA has become significantly more engaging over time, particularly to younger members. One respondent stated, “SAA has long had a reputation as being an insular organization where a small group dominates. This was not true 30 years ago and is not true now. New members have never had such opportunities for service.”

The current White House administration is seeking to ban travel from a wide array of countries. Traveling to the annual meeting may no longer be feasible for some international members. One respondent stated, “I do not live in the United States, and as of this year I am no longer able to travel safely to the United States. I have travelled to participate in SAA events in the past and taken part in training. This seems no longer possible. It is likely I will not continue my membership. Not your fault.”

Addressing Barriers

We believe we have a better understanding of the complex barriers faced by members in participating in the organization. The Committee has compiled the following suggestions for addressing these obstacles, many of which were presented to us by survey respondents.

Expense

Continue to create more opportunities to participate virtually in order to mitigate geographic and financial barriers to participation. This was the most common suggestion from survey respondents.

- Live stream annual meeting sessions, keynote speeches and presidential addresses.
- Encourage committees, sections, and session speakers to livestream their meetings at annual conference. Some sections do this but it is not universal. There are free services such as Hangouts On Air.
- When feasible, provide recorded professional development workshops online for a fee. Recorded webinars in the Digital Archives Specialist courses provide precedent, and SAA already provides MP3 recordings of annual meeting sessions for purchase.

Continue to seek ways to control costs of the annual meeting:

- Shorten the annual meeting.
- Hold multiple short meetings throughout year rather than a single long meeting.
- Consider joint conferences with allied fields of public history, museums, and libraries to increase attendance and potentially lower costs.
- Continue holding meetings in “second tier” cities using the convention center model.

Encourage committees, sections, working groups, etc. to identify and promote opportunities for involvement that do not require attendance at annual meeting.

Consider a sliding scale fee for workshops, courses, etc. in the spirit of tiered membership dues.

Time

Sections and Committees can provide more specific descriptions of leadership positions with estimated time requirements, perhaps in a centralized place on the SAA website.

Experience

In addition to the First Timers and New Members reception at the annual meeting, SAA leaders could host a session for new members on SAA organizational structure and how to make the most of one's membership. This could also be achieved in a video available on SAA's website.

Clarity

Create a "Get Involved" section in the SAA website that clearly articulates the various paths toward involvement in committees, sections, etc., and centralizes information about all leadership positions, both elected and volunteer. Open elected positions and committee appointments could be posted in this centralized location.

Provide more transparent reporting and documentation on participation, including how leadership positions are filled, how many people apply each year, how many people participate in section and committee leadership, how many participate in the mentorship program, etc.

Produce regular profiles of current SAA leaders or volunteers with a description of their path of service that led them to their current positions, perhaps on In the Loop. A respondent commented, "I think I'd have a clearer picture of how to start my own service with SAA if I saw examples of how others have done it."

Set up an automated 'thank you' email sent after a member submits the annual volunteer form. Follow-up emails should encourage members to continue pursuing service opportunities and ways to participate in the annual meeting. These emails would provide an opportunity to more clearly articulate how one can participate in SAA if one isn't assigned a position, such as participating in the mentoring or navigator programs, or volunteering in the career center.

Other

Attempt to increase visibility of archivists at small institutions, corporate agencies, and government archives in the annual meeting programming, Archival Outlook, and In the Loop.

Initiate a follow-up survey asking members to identify topics and areas that they feel are underrepresented in SAA's current offerings (section specializations, professional development opportunities, conference session topics) to broaden SAA's relevance to non-academic archival work environments.

Promote the annual "call for volunteers" sign up form as a way to overcome the perceived cliquish nature of SAA leadership.

Members seeking to draft a statement for SAA endorsement should be reminded of the Criteria for Advocacy Statements adopted in August 2015. Stronger moderation of the Archives and Archivists email list may be necessary when communication becomes too combative.

Where appropriate, SAA leadership should attempt to fill their sections, committees, working groups, task forces, etc. with members from diverse institutions and geographies.