

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
November 17-19, 2025
Hybrid Meeting**

Feedback and Recommendations Following the 2025 Diversity Forum

Prepared by: Diversity Committee

Executive Summary

On 25 August 2025, the Diversity Committee hosted its annual Diversity Forum in Anaheim and online during the 2025 Annual Meeting. The goal of this event was to provide a safe and anonymized space for attendees to A) engage in open dialog with each other to better understand how their work is being directly impacted by the current political climate and B) generate ideas for how SAA might better advocate for them and the profession at large. This report summarizes their feedback and suggests specific recommendations for SAA to take under consideration.

For the Committee, the number one takeaway is the number of members, including those who identify as being from historically marginalized groups and people as “high up” as former Council members, who are considering letting their membership lapse if they do not see changes in the organization’s response to attacks on diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA). Members must see proactive, robust advocacy efforts, including communications, publications, and updated toolkits that directly address active hostility to our professional values and purposeful misinformation about the diverse communities that we serve, to feel better prepared to meet the moment. Members are hearing from or looking to other allied organizations like the American Library Association, American Alliance of Museums, and the American Association of University Professors and seeing a faster, great response, and they are not making excuses for SAA because it is smaller. Given this dissatisfaction and current economic conditions, there is a very real risk that members have and will continue to make a value-based decision to spend their time and money elsewhere if SAA continues with business as usual. This is a death spiral that in the best case results in an organization in 2029 that is smaller, less diverse, and hopeless.

Contextual Information

On day one of his presidency, Donald J. Trump issued the executive order (EO) “[Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing](#),” which ordered an end to “all discriminatory programs, including illegal DEI and DEIA mandates, policies, programs, preferences, and activities in the Federal Government, under whatever name they appear.” This was followed by the EO “[Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History](#)” on 27 March,

which ordered the Smithsonian Institution, Independence Hall, and the Department of the Interior to stop “replacing objective facts with a distorted narrative driven by ideology rather than truth.” Each of these EOs has proven to be a first shot in this administration’s assault on diversity and history, which greatly concerns this diversity-focused committee of archivists.

Archivist of the United States Colleen Shogan (the first woman to serve) was fired on 7 February and replaced in an acting capacity by Secretary of State Marco Rubio. The White House issued the EO “[Continuing the Reduction of the Federal Bureaucracy](#)” on 14 March, which listed the Institute of Museum and Library Services along with six other agencies, and Acting Director Cyndee Landrum (a woman of color) was soon replaced by Deputy Secretary of Labor Keith G. Sonderling. Neither Rubio nor Sonderling have professional archival or library experience, and both have *additional* Executive Branch roles. It is also worth noting that Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden (the first woman and first woman of color to serve) was fired on 8 May and replaced in an acting capacity by her deputy Robert R. Newlen, although President Trump attempted to appoint Deputy Attorney General Todd Blance to the role.

National Endowment for the Arts Chair Maria Rosario Jackson (the first African American and the first Mexican American to serve) resigned on 17 January and was replaced by Mary Anne Carter, who previously held the position from 2019-2021 and has been nominated again. National Endowment for the Humanities Chair Shelley C. Lowe (the first Native American to serve) was fired on 12 March and replaced in an acting capacity by General Counsel Michael McDonald. Both positions were named to the [White House Task Force on Celebrating America’s 250th Birthday](#) on 29 January, along with the IMLS Director but not the AotUS.

More recently, the White House published its “[Letter to the Smithsonian: Internal Review of Smithsonian Exhibitions and Materials](#)” on 12 August, with a 120-day timeline signed off on by three officials including Russell Vought, Director of the Office of Management and Budget and one of the authors of Project 2025. The National Park Service has [flagged signage for review](#), while Independence Hall remains closed as we write this due to the ongoing government shutdown.

In response to this flurry of activity, Jennifer Johnson, a leader of the Women Archivists Section, proposed a “profession-wide town hall” on the SAA Leader List on 19 February. She and her fellow Steering Committee members had found that their membership “needs a space to ask questions and share concerns for the future of the section, SAA at large, and their personal careers.” They also expressed a desire for this to be “a broader conversation about advocacy given the current political climate, supporting colleagues who are losing their jobs, limitations on grant funding, protecting records, and creating safe space in which to act.”

This news was reportedly met with panic inside SAA, as Society-wide events are not allowed to take place without involvement from Council and staff, who were not planning to hold such an event. A portion of Council joined a virtual meeting with Jennifer, Diversity Committee leaders, and other leaders on 13 March, and the Diversity Committee met with its affiliate Sections on 9 April. To date, no town hall has been held except for “Raising Your Voice for Archives” on 21

April, which while commendable and of good quality, specifically focused only on advocacy and was apparently a one-time event.

This, combined with the lack of a statement similar to 2016's "[Reaffirming Our Commitment to the Importance of Diversity and Inclusion](#)" led the Diversity Committee to publish its [own statement](#) on 22 April and pivot its Diversity Forum at the 2025 Annual Meeting to be membership-led rather than speaker-led. After a welcome and instructions, attendees self-sorted into topic-based breakout groups based on impacts to budgets, collecting, reference and instruction, and state and federal workers. The following three themes emerged:

1. **Advocacy and Support:** Members want SAA to be more proactive and visibly engaged in advocacy. They are seeking more robust support, including legal aid, guidance on protecting at-risk collections, and updated advocacy resources, as well as clarity on and a renewed commitment to the Society's DEIA-related values (if they have not changed). There is strong interest in lobbying efforts and coalition-building, especially for those affected by cuts to funding.
2. **Mental Health and Safety:** There are widespread feelings of isolation, exhaustion, and anxiety among archivists, especially those working in hostile environments. Given the A*CENSUS II finding that burnout was already a primary driver forcing archivists out of the profession, this is particularly alarming. Safe spaces for conversation and community building are seen as vital for wellbeing.
3. **Funding and Resources:** Funding cuts and freezes—especially to federal funding—are impacting the ability of archivists to develop professionally and fill vacant positions (which may themselves have been frozen or eliminated). Members are interested in alternative or flexible funding models, quick grants, and coordinating with smaller archival organizations and allied national professional organizations.

Alignment with Strategic Priorities

Our recommendations meet all four of the goals delineated in the most recent strategic plan, especially:

- Goal 1: Advocating for Archives
 - 1.1. Provide leadership in promoting the value of archives and archivists to institutions, communities, and society.
 - 1.3. Provide leadership in ensuring the completeness, diversity, and accessibility of the historical record.
- Goal 4: Meeting Members' Needs
 - 4.1. Facilitate effective communication with and among members.
 - 4.3. Foster an inclusive association and profession through educational and leadership opportunities.

Fiscal Impact

This report offers multiple recommendations, some of which absolutely would cost money, like providing the services of an attorney. Some items could probably or will have to wait to be written into our next strategic plan (assuming that process only lasts this academic year), but if

this organization continues to be perceived by its members as doing nothing to very little (let alone proactively) and instead burying its head in the sand until hopefully 2029, that too will have a fiscal impact as members, especially those most vulnerable due to their own finances or identities, leave. We will end up with a less diverse organization in a number of ways that we claim to value, and this committee will be worse off.

Potential Benefits

The potential benefits include a healthier professional association where members feel heard and vigorously advocated for; where members feel a strong commitment to the stated ethics and values of the profession and have a better sense of how to advocate for each other during these uniquely challenging times, with varying levels of government actively hostile to our mission. Louder voices from the archival profession can enhance the public's understanding of our work, which in turn can result in advocacy for archives from outside the profession. America 250 presents a twice in a century opportunity to connect with the public and let them know how they can help.

Potential Drawbacks

Increased public scrutiny: This would appear to be the primary fear held by staff and maybe Council, given the lack of even a direct statement until October. While it remains unclear to members how the federal government could hurt SAA (Foundation's tax-exempt status?), it is easier to imagine individual state governments taking action against our public sector colleagues. At the same time, they feel under assault anyway.

Fiscal situation: Obviously, dues would not be rising if there was not a financial need for them to. We are aware that we must propose fiscally realistic recommendations, but more members would probably be willing to pay more (if they could afford to) if they felt that their money was A) going to support their unemployed or targeted colleagues or B) paying for training or services that they need or might need under this current administration.

Recommendation

By addressing key concerns such as mental health, advocacy, and resource allocation, these recommendations are designed to guide SAA in its commitment to fostering a safer, more inclusive, and better-resourced environment for all members. This Committee encourages SAA to use these strategies as a foundation for meaningful action, ensuring that the evolving needs of archivists are met with empathy and sustained support.

Advocacy and Support

1. Update advocacy-related online resources.
 - o SAA's advocacy-related resources have not been updated to reflect the current political climate and are especially inadequate for those under attack, dealing with bad-faith actors, etc.--modern concerns rather than simple ignorance or neglect. The [Advocacy Guide](#) has not been updated since October 2024, the [Public Policy Agenda](#) and [Legislative Agenda](#) have not been updated since May

2022(!), and the [Resources and Toolkits](#) page could be reviewed. This is work to be done by the Committee on Public Policy and Committee on Public Awareness, as well as the Issues and Advocacy Section.

2. Build and strengthen cross-regional ally networks.
 - Partner with RAAC to ensure that local, state, and regional archival organizations are exploring ways to provide practical support, share resources, and amplify advocacy efforts between archivists under more pressure and those under less pressure.
 - The Membership Committee's application forms for its Mentoring and Navigator programs could include a way for people to indicate that they would like to be matched cross-regionally or based on concern/threat.
3. Provide guidance on how to proactively safeguard records at risk.
 - Partner with Invisible Histories to offer webinars on topics like updating deeds of gift with language that would allow donors to reclaim their material if it becomes at risk of being censored or destroyed for political or ideological reasons.
 - Cross-regional ally networks could also be important for this reason, allowing at-risk collections to be transferred somewhere safer.
4. Provide some form of legal aid.
 - Considering the lack of a nationwide union for archivists and the amount of archivists working at institutions without a union, an attractive member benefit would be access to an attorney willing to provide at least legal information. If SAA already has counsel, maybe a certain amount of hours could be offered for members, or they could at least host a webinar.
 - A [Legal Defense Fund](#) representative at the last Annual Meeting offered to support any organization facing possible threats to collecting practices.
5. Learn from activist communities about effective communication, coalition-building, and resilience in the face of adversity.
 - The Diversity Committee cannot think of any particular organization to name here, but it does recall 2020-2021 events that featured or included activist organizations focused on Black people/life. In the current moment, activist organizations focused on immigrants and trans people could use our attention.
 - One member suggested partnering with the emerging [Community Archives Collaborative](#).

Mental Health and Safety

1. Provide mental health resources.
 - Partner with mental health organizations to offer webinars, like [Mental Health First Aid](#) from the National Council for Mental Health. The [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) is another known organization, and the Accessibility and Disability Section should be involved in planning.
2. Establish and maintain safe spaces for identity-based conversations.
 - The steering committees of SAA's identity-based sections should not only be holding regular meetings amongst themselves but among their sections at-large, with a focus on socialization and community-building rather than business.

- Besides Connect, which is more like a mailing list, they could also look into chat platforms like Discord, Slack, and Teams. Moderation could be a concern, but especially younger people have come to expect a platform to be available to them which allows for more instantaneous communication.
- A form option, possibly anonymous, could allow members to share possible discussion topics.
- The [Code of Conduct](#) is past due for review, and it would be good to also review the [Connect Terms and Conditions](#).
- 3. Launch peer-support initiatives.
 - There is a need for lower effort, less formal alternatives to one-on-one mentoring, with the Mentoring Program already struggling to find enough mentors for all the interested mentees. Cohorts or groups organized around a common concern would allow for one organizer (or a small group of organizers) to reach a bigger audience.
 - A buddy program is another possibility, with a focus on wellbeing rather than mentorship. This would be a more horizontal arrangement, with two buddies agreeing to occasionally check in on each other.
- 4. Celebrate success stories and acknowledge challenges.
 - SAA's communication strategy needs to acknowledge current realities in the field while also offering hope and solutions. This could look like a regular column in *Archival Outlook* in place of the Archivist of the US column and/or regular social media posts that celebrate success stories.
 - *Archival Outlook* and *American Archivist* could organize whole issues on DEIA or an aspect of DEIA, a historically marginalized community or communities, and/or how to navigate current challenges.
 - Similarly, the Publications Board and Editor could consider aligning their priorities with these, as SAA has a history of missing out on such works that were forced to go elsewhere, such as *Preserving Disability*.
 - Component groups should use their annual business meeting to include such programming, and they should be permitted to endorse one Annual Meeting proposal per year.
- 5. Provide cybersecurity resources for individuals.
 - Members are concerned about their privacy and safety, especially when it comes to their electronic data and including in the workplace. Not that the SAA website needs another page, but SAA should take note of allied organizations like AAUP and their [digital security resources](#).
 - Partner with cybersecurity companies to offer webinars, like the [CyberPeace Institute](#). Multiple sections might be interested in planning such an event(s), including Privacy and Confidentiality, Electronic Records, Metadata and Digital Objects, and Web Archiving.

Funding and Resources

1. Provide alternative and flexible funding options.
 - Offer a renewable waiver or lower-cost registration option for those who have become unemployed since January 2025 due to budget cuts.

- Establish a fund similar to ALA's [LeRoy C. Merritt Humanitarian Fund](#), which is devoted to librarians who have been denied employment rights because of a marginalized identity or defense of intellectual freedom.
 - Continue to provide virtual and hybrid options and keep the registration fee as low as possible so that it is a valid option for those unable to attend in person, such as those who remain employed but have had professional development funding frozen or eliminated.
2. Provide expanded access.
- Offer DEIA-related education courses for free or low cost for people who may be unable to use professional development funding or work time for such purposes.
 - Presenters of DEIA-related Annual Meeting sessions could also be asked if it would be okay to record and make available their sessions for this same reason. Broadly speaking, the Committee on Education and Program Committee must realize that there are archivists who would like access to this information but are experiencing additional barriers to access.
 - Similarly, events should be public when possible, especially those that are seeking to reach the archival profession at large. SAA's focus must first be its members, but archivists across the US look to SAA to advocate for the profession. The Diversity Committee acknowledges that the Diversity Forum was behind a significant paywall, and we are concerned who we may have not heard from because of that.
3. Finish redesigning the SAA website.
- Redesign the SAA website and reduce the number of pages through consolidation and deletion. Move the calendar out from behind the Connect login. It is far too difficult to navigate and find what you are looking for without googling to the specific page (if you know what page you are looking for). The danger is that we update or add resources that are no easier to discover.

Appendix

Questions asked in Diversity Forum breakout rooms:

- SAA's Role
 - What kind of support or resources would be most helpful to you that SAA could theoretically provide?
 - Who are the allies in your region that SAA could partner with?
 - Have you seen any model responses to DEI restrictions from professional organizations that SAA should take note of?
- Work Impacts
 - Have you been forced to change any aspect of your job? How has your employer communicated this?
- Effective Responses
 - Do you have an example of written, published advocacy, like testimony/testimonials, opinion editorials, or talking points, that you would like to share?
- Other Topics

- How has your health and wellbeing been impacted?
 - How can people outside of your state or institution support you?
- Specific Breakout Rooms
 - Have you changed which items you select or what you say during instruction? (Ref & Instruction)
 - Have your reference interactions changed at all? More or less traffic, different character/type, etc. (Ref & Instruction)
 - How has your collecting been impacted? How have donor relationships been impacted? (Collecting Efforts)
 - Have your collection development policies been revised? (Collecting Efforts)
 - External pressures, mixed messaging. (State Workers)