

Society of American Archivists Council Meeting Chicago, IL

Dictionary Working Group: Annual Report (Prepared by: Katy Sternberger and Rosemary Pleva Flynn, co-chairs)

The SAA Dictionary Working Group, established by the SAA Council in 2011 and formed in 2012, maintains the *Dictionary of Archives Terminology*. The group's charge is "to establish and maintain mechanisms and procedures for ongoing updates and contributions of new content to the *Dictionary* and to ensure that this important resource adheres to the highest quality professional standards."

Annual Report Year: 2024–2025

Current Roster (include full name, position title, and term end date for each):

1. Katy Sternberger (co-chair), 2028-09-01
2. Rosemary Pleva Flynn (co-chair), 2027-09-01
3. Kate Bowers, 2028-09-01
4. Alexandra Budding (early-career member), 2029-09-01
5. Tamar Chute, 2029-09-01
6. Helena Egbert, 2029-09-01
7. Cliff Hight, 2026-09-01
8. Daria Labinsky, 2026-09-01
9. Cheryl Oestreicher, 2026-09-01
10. Shannon Walker, 2026-09-01
11. Derek Webb, 2028-09-01

Additional notes on the roster:

- Geof Huth retired 2025-02 – allowed Alexandra Budding to transition from early-career member with term ending 2025-09-01 to full member with term ending 2029-09-01
- Margery Sly passed away 2025-07 – seeking a mid-term appointment to complete term ending 2026-09-01

Staff Liaison: Savanah Tiffany
Council Liaison: Joyce Gabiola

PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

(Please indicate all projects and activities that your component group has completed this year, continues to work on, or plans to implement in the following fiscal year.)

Ongoing: In fulfilment of its charge, the Dictionary Working Group continually develops the *Dictionary of Archives Terminology* by defining new terms, revising existing terms, and

performing data cleanup. The group also publishes the popular *Word of the Week* e-newsletter, introducing a term from the archival lexicon each week.

Completed: In addition to the working group's weekly output, members completed the following projects—

- Revised the working group's standing rules (September–October 2024), approved by SAA Council (November 2024).
- Continued working with our vendor Elements Forge to improve both the backend and frontend user experience of the *DAT* website (December 2024 – March 2025).
- Participated in the annual SAA Write Away Forum (January 2025).
- Reviewed and revised the dictionary's list of categories in collaboration with *American Archivist* editor Amy Cooper Cary (January–February 2025).
- Updated, tested, and approved the working group's Xmlref data entry procedures (February–May 2025).
- Worked with Derek Mosley, Mario Ramirez, and SAA Governance to confirm the DWG appointments for 2025–2026 (March–July 2025).
- Added alt text to images on the *DAT* website to improve accessibility (April–June 2025).
- Hosted the DWG annual meeting, which was one of our most well-attended annual meetings with twenty-five participants. It featured an overview of the process behind the dictionary as well as a discussion of three terms we prepared for review (July 2025).

New:

- Seek workarounds or alternatives to our project management tool Asana, which is moving to a paid model for groups with more than ten members (urgent need).
- Plan and establish workflows for enabling additional contributors to provide subject matter expertise on dictionary entries.
- Update and approve the working group's style guide and production manual.

SAA STRATEGIC PLAN

(Please review the current [Strategic Plan](#) and indicate below how the component group has or plans to contribute to one or more of the four main goals.)

Goal 1: Advocating for Archives and Archivists

For archivists and nonarchivists alike, the *Dictionary* is the authoritative source to learn about our professional lexicon. The SAA publications program relies on the *Dictionary* in order to advocate for a shared understanding of archival terminology.

Goal 2: Enhancing Professional Growth

The DWG consistently produces content to enhance archivists' knowledge of the field. Every week, the group publishes the *Word of the Week* e-newsletter to expose archivists to professional terminology. Since launching in April 2020, the online *Dictionary* is a heavily used resource that drives ten percent of SAA's website traffic.

Goal 3: Advancing the Field

The *Dictionary* is based on citations from the professional literature, so the group continually educates archivists at all stages of their careers by exposing them to both historical and current

archival theory and practice. In turn, we encourage archivists to add their voices to the professional literature so that we can continue building the archival lexicon.

Goal 4: Meeting Members' Needs

Via the SAA website, the DWG regularly receives and responds to user feedback regarding archival terms for potential inclusion or revision in the *Dictionary*.

SAA ANNUAL MEETING

Number of attendees: 25

Link to meeting minutes: Meeting recorded, to be made available in SAA annual meeting catalog

Summary of meeting activities and highlights: Meeting featured an overview of the process behind the dictionary as well as a discussion of three terms we prepared for review. Participants engaged in a vibrant discussion both verbally and in the chat.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

How would you describe the health or energy of the group, and how engaged are the members?

The Dictionary Working Group is a hardworking team whose members apply their specialized skillsets and invest substantial time to gain the required expertise in dictionary production. The *Dictionary of Archives Terminology* currently covers nearly 3,000 defined terms from the archival lexicon of the United States and Canada, along with nearly 3,000 sources. From September 2024 through August 2025, the working group added 32 new terms to the *Dictionary* and revised 195 terms. The group continually adds new sources from the professional literature and other outlets (presentations, blogs, newsletters, etc.). According to Google Analytics data, the *Dictionary* consistently brings a substantial amount of traffic to the SAA website. Also, data from the first six months of 2025 for our *Word of the Week* e-newsletter indicates that we're hovering near 2,500 subscribers with an average open rate of over 44 percent, which is well above average.

The DWG meets on a weekly basis, meaning that each member commits at least four hours per month year-round. Members generally also devote a number of extra hours per week to the *Dictionary*, depending on our upcoming deadlines, training needs, data entry requirements, and other special projects. Across our current members, this adds up to hundreds of hours of unpaid labor per year outside of members' work and personal obligations. The DWG is a passionate group that makes a large impact on the archival professional.

Did the component group's leadership encounter any challenges in achieving its goals for the year?

The DWG is grateful that this year we were able to resolve many of our previous challenges with the annual appointments process. In particular, we successfully revised the [working group's standing rules](#) to clarify appointments and responsibilities. We also appreciate that we were asked whether we would be able to participate in the early-career member program for the

upcoming year (compared to past years, when we were not consulted first). While we did not have the capacity to place an early-career member with us for 2025–2026 and ensure that they have a fulfilling experience, we will be working in the coming year on planning that better supports our group’s infrastructure.

What suggestions do you have for the SAA Council and staff that might help address these challenges in the coming term?

Looking ahead to the 2025–2026 appointments process, the working group’s standing rules state, “no more than one-fourth of the members are appointed each year.” However, four members’ terms are currently set to end in 2026. Not only that, the DWG unexpectedly lost two of its members over the course of this year. In the coming year, we need to address:

1. Staggering of members’ terms so that term end dates are better distributed.
2. Clarification on the process for filling midterm vacancies within working groups.

What questions or concerns do you have for the SAA Council and staff?

The Dictionary Working Group has proactively taken steps to keep costs at a minimum, plus our members’ volunteer labor adds substantial financial value. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the *Dictionary* as an essential program of SAA without more financial support and recordkeeping infrastructure.

SAA signed our current contract for a dictionary production system with Elements Forge in December 2023, which includes monthly licensing fees per user and monthly server storage fees (these two costs are ongoing). Elements Forge has provided many additional services at no charge, saving SAA thousands of dollars in software solutioning costs.

Besides the dictionary production system, the DWG requires additional tools. Members utilize the free version of Google for recordkeeping, including storage of documentation and image backups. For many years we were able to use the free version of Asana for project management for up to fifteen users. However, as of September 7, 2025, Asana forced us to purchase a two-user minimum plan at \$10.99 each per month billed annually in order to maintain our current number of users. We were only given four weeks’ notice of this change to Asana’s pricing model, and personal funds are currently being used to cover the cost. We are concerned that the *Dictionary*, as such an important resource for SAA members and the broader archival profession, is not more integrated into SAA systems.

1. The DWG has been eagerly awaiting the SAA website upgrade, which we understand has been delayed a number of times. How would file storage in the updated Drupal website compare to that in SAA Connect? Could there be different permission levels for public versus working group members only?
2. What funding sources and computing resources might SAA be able to provide to ensure that the DWG has access to appropriate tools for managing our complex tasks?