SAA Council Seeks Comment on
Proposed Changes in Member Affinity Groups
(June 14, 2016)

BACKGROUND

Since at least 2005 the SAA Council periodically has discussed the value of affinity groups (i.e., sections and roundtables) to the organization as well as their structure, functioning, and support needs. Since 2013-2014 the Council has reviewed three sets of recommendations regarding affinity groups:

- In May 2013 the Council created a Task Force on Member Affinity Groups to "consider the most effective structures to encourage flexible, inclusive, and participatory opportunities for the membership. This should include an evaluation of the effectiveness of current affinity groups (sections and roundtables) and consideration of whether a different structure would better serve SAA's members. The group is also charged with identifying what kinds of support and resources are needed to allow current and potential affinity groups to work most effectively." The task force made final recommendations in November 2014, at which time the group was disbanded with thanks.

- In 2013 the Council provided funding for audiovisual support for some roundtables at the Annual Meeting. Since 2014 that support has been provided to all roundtables.

- In November 2014 the Council created a Council Working Group on Member Affinity Groups charged to "…explore options for simplifying component group structure while preserving the advantages and services provided by existing Sections and Roundtables. The internal working group will assess the impact of a flatter organizational structure, provisions for sun-setting component groups that become inactive, and support for virtual groups as an alternative way of organizing within SAA." In May 2015 the working group presented to the Council a proposal for changes in member affinity groups that the Council agreed to distribute for member comment before and during the 2015 Annual Meeting. In light of significant concerns expressed at the August 22, 2015, Annual Membership Meeting, the Council extended the member comment period and, at its November 2015 meeting, reviewed the more than 60 member comments received.

- The Council formed a small working group in November 2015 to develop a proposal for discussion at the May 2016 Council meeting.

Based on its May 2016 discussion, the Council now seeks member comments on the following proposed changes to the structure and requirements for SAA sections and roundtables. ***The deadline for comments is Wednesday, July 6.***

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In discussing how SAA might ensure access to flexible, inclusive, and participatory opportunities for members and other individuals by way of its affinity groups, the working group reviewed previous reports, read and analyzed the 60+ member comments received, and developed the following "guiding principles" to be considered in any decision to revise SAA's current group structures. SAA should:

- Be responsive to the many thoughtful comments of members.
- Foster an environment in which groups can—and are encouraged to—spend more time on their missions and less time on governance.
- Increase the opportunity for participation by nonmembers while not diminishing the value of SAA membership.
- Seek to implement simpler, more efficient systems and processes and to minimize "legislation" of groups.
- Provide opportunities for groups that wish to disband or that are burdened by governance requirements to disband or down-shift to a discussion group.
- Develop a better and more logical schedule for group processes.
- Allow for more flexibility and space at the Annual Meeting.

PROPOSED CHANGES

Based on member feedback, consultation with SAA staff, and the recommendations of the working group, the Council proposes the following modifications in the current component group structure:

1. **That the distinction between sections and roundtables be removed.** Although SAA has a long tradition of distinguishing between these groups, that distinction no longer seems useful or meaningful. Sections and roundtables have become more similar to each other in recent years, providing similar benefits to members. Both types of groups now have equal access to meeting space and audiovisual support at the Annual Meeting. Removing the distinction between the types of groups will reduce confusion and may provide more flexibility in scheduling meeting rooms and times at the Annual Meeting.

2. **That the language of "section" or "roundtable" be replaced with "group."** Following Recommendation #1, use of one term to refer to these groups will reduce confusion. The staff office would provide support for development of new logotypes for all groups.

3. **That SAA members may join as many groups as they wish.** Currently SAA members may join an unlimited number of roundtables but are asked to choose just two sections. This change would broaden their options.

4. **That nonmembers be permitted to be list participants on up to three group discussion lists.** Currently nonmembers may be "list participants" on roundtable lists. This privilege would be extended to all groups, but would be limited to a reasonable number of lists (i.e., three). As now, nonmembers would not be permitted to hold office, serve on a steering committee, or vote in group elections or referendums.

5. **That the following be required of all groups:**

   a. Standardized bylaws based on the SAA template. All current bylaws that are not in this format (primarily section bylaws) would be simplified based on the template. If some

groups require special processes not addressed in the standard bylaws, they can be handled via a group manual or similar document rather than by amending bylaws.

b. If they intend to hold one, submission of a proposal for the group's annual meeting (including agenda, description, preference for onsite or offsite location, AV needs, duration, and indication of whether it is a solo or joint meeting) by <u>March 1</u> each year. If a group does not submit a proposal by the deadline, SAA will not allocate support for that group at the Annual Meeting.

c. Conduct of an online election for group leader(s) using SAA's process, with submission of the slate by <u>June 1</u> each year. Inclusion in each election and/or referendum conducted at this time of a simple questionnaire asking for member feedback on the effectiveness of the group or posing a question such as, "If you have suggestions for improving the effectiveness of the group, note them here."

d. Submission of an annual report and a complete leader roster by <u>September 1</u> each year. The report would be prepared by the outgoing chair. SAA will create an online form to make it easier to provide the required information, including an indication of how the group addressed SAA's strategic priorities in the past year.

e. Responsiveness to SAA Council requests for assistance in conducting research, drafting expert comments, or undertaking other activity related to the group's area of special interest.

6. **That new groups may be formed much as they are now,** with submission to the Council of a petition, signed by 100 SAA members, that includes a statement of purpose and goals and a statement of why a separate group would be beneficial to SAA. Setting the number of signatures at 100 seeks to strike a balance between current requirements for forming a new section (300 signatures) or forming a new roundtable (50 signatures).

7. **That groups may be designated as "inactive" if they do not meet one or more of the requirements stated above (in Recommendation #5).** Inability to meet a requirement would lead to a conversation among the group chair and/or steering committee, the Council liaison, and the executive director to determine a) why the group is unable to complete an activity, b) what might be done to assist the group in moving forward (e.g., combine with another group, change leadership), and c) whether the group might function more effectively as a special-interest discussion list. (See Recommendation #8.) An inactive group may resume active status if activity resumes. A group may be discontinued by the Council if it requests discontinuation or remains inactive for several years. A disbanded group that wishes to be reinstated would simply have to submit a petition. (See Recommendation #6.)

8. **That the idea of creating "virtual community groups" be put on hold and that, instead, discussion lists be made available to members who request them.** SAA discussion lists, which historically have been available only to appointed groups, sections, and roundtables, have proven to be an important tool for most groups. With this change, discussion lists could be used also as a low-barrier platform for small groups of members to connect around special

interests when they do not need the level of support and governance offered by groups. In regard to discussion lists:

a. Nonmember participation would be welcome.

b. A discussion list could be an early step to gauge and build interest, and could eventually become a group.

c. An inactive group could function as a "list-only" group, maintaining connections between members without the extra work of the requirements in Recommendation #5.

d. A large group could conceivably have multiple discussion lists to help focus its work. This could benefit groups that already function with subcommittees, and possibly provide a means for existing groups with similar interests to merge.

e. Members and groups could use separate discussion lists for special projects or tasks and then discontinue the list at the end of the project.

f. Staff would develop a simple and logical method for requesting creation of a discussion list and would facilitate the approval process. Procedures for discontinuing lists after a prolonged period of inactivity also would be developed.

Staff currently is exploring solutions to improve the infrastructure of discussion lists. They expect these improvements to increase the effectiveness of lists as a tool for members and also allow for more efficient management of lists by staff.

The SAA Governance Manual will have to undergo significant review and revision to accommodate these changes, but should retain the notion that groups are organized to advance professional practice within areas of common archival interest and affiliation.

The Council seeks member comment on the proposed changes in SAA Member Affinity Groups. Share your comments on any aspect of the proposal at saahq@archivists.org or http://www2.archivists.org/news/2016/council-seeks-comment-on-proposed-changes-in-member-affinity-groups by Wednesday, July 6.

The Council will take action based on member feedback at its August 1 meeting in Atlanta.