Annual Report:

Program Committee

(Prepared by Erik Bauer & John Bence, Co-Chairs)

Committee Membership:

Co-chairs for this year were Erik Bauer and John Bence. Other members were Mott Linn, Celeste Brewer, Sara DeCaro, Mallory Furnier, Eric Hung, Stephanie Mackin, Savannah Moss, Angelique Richardson, Victoria Sockwell, and Julia Teran.

Everyone's term was from September 1, 2024, to August 31, 2025.

The Program Committee extends its gratitude to all of the SAA staff who supported us in creating a successful 2025 annual meeting. Thank you, Carlos Salgado, and Michael Santiago.

Conference Theme and Call for Proposals:

In September 2024, Program Committee co-chairs John Bence and Erik Bauer met with SAA staff to discuss responsibilities, roles, and timelines for the Committee. They drafted a call for proposals. The full Committee met on September 28 to discuss the draft and solicit feedback. On October 9, the call for proposals was distributed to the SAA membership.

Our call for proposals asked participants to respond to the following:

> *As archivists, records managers, information professionals, and cultural heritage workers, we are charged with making an impact through our work. We are compelled to acknowledge a world where professional concerns are amplified by political, social, and environmental forces that shape how we work and will work in the future. The challenge, then, is to adjust practices, question our assumptions, and seek partnerships to ensure what we do counts in the future.*

> *The Program Committee seeks perspectives from across our profession that emphasize the results and impacts of our work and our workers. The conference theme—Making it Count—encourages proposals that demonstrate the impacts of our work and even expand our understanding of what counts in our profession. The Committee recognizes that part of making our work count for others means making sure it counts for us as well, and we invite proposals that challenge what counts as success in our work. Overall, we seek proposals that explore how our profession can expand our ideas about impact, results, and what counts in a rapidly changing world. Among other topics, proposals might consider:*

> - *Impactful innovations in collection development, management, arrangement, and description.*
>
> - *Making access and outreach count for users and communities.*
>
> - *Applications of AI in our work and the ethical implications of its use.*

- *Partnerships and collaborations, including post-custodial or community-led initiatives—making the way we engage count for others.*

- *Accessibility of archives, both as repositories and workplaces—broadening the way collections and institutions can be counted on to work for everyone.*

- *Labor and making our profession responsive to workers' needs and growth—making it count for us.*

- *Assessing the outcomes of our work—making our impacts count.*

- *Data gathering and use of data in our profession—how we analyze our work*

We welcome proposals on other topics related to archives and archival work.

For the 2025 Annual Meeting, the Program Committee also elected to continue the Mix and Match program and bring back the Pop-Up Session. The Mix and Match option allowed individuals to propose a single talk, rather than a full session. Pop-Up sessions enrich the conference program by addressing topics and concerns that may have "popped up" since November 2024 (when initial proposals were due).

Education Sessions and Posters:

All of the Program Committee members read all proposals, and the co-chairs made notes on every proposal. The Committee met for three days in January 2025 to review and discuss the proposals we received. In total, we received 227 proposals (including 62 Mix & Match) and 41 poster proposals. John and Erik met after the Committee meetings to finalize Mix and Match selections, based on discussions from the full Committee.

The Program Committee collaborated with SAA staff to ensure the program was balanced, representing various facets of the archives field in terms of both presenters and topics, and to minimize scheduling conflicts between sessions with similar topics or intended audiences. We believe that we had prepared a well-balanced program.

Each session block offered five potential sessions: 1 hybrid session, 1 in-person only sessions, and at least 1 virtual only session.

1,513 attendees registered for the full-access pass (in-person and virtual) while 371 attendees registered for a virtual-only pass.

Conference Experience:

The 2025 Annual Meeting was held at the Hilton Anaheim in Anaheim, CA, from August 24-27. In keeping with SAA's commitment to accessibility, the conference with hybrid with the possibility to attend several, though not all, sessions remotely.

Co-chairs John Bence and Erik Bauer wrote an article in the May/June issues of Archival Outlook to encourage participation in and attendance at the 2024 annual meeting.

Although the Program Committee has not yet had the opportunity to review the conference feedback form results, we have received positive feedback anecdotally. Multiple attendees expressed appreciation for sessions relating to AI and its uses within archives.

Observations and Feedback:

There were some positives and areas for improvement with the annual meeting we put together. The Mix and Match sessions went really well, and we recommend continuing this format. We received presentations that would not have otherwise been submitted for proposals, and were able to create some really unique and well-attended sessions.

The co-chairs responded to several emails regarding why a session was rejected. The chairs looked at our notes and were able to provide answers and feedback on why a session was not selected. A go-to explanation in each case was that the number of quality proposals outstrips our available space, which has been reduced in recent years due to our commitment to providing a streamed experience for a minority of attendees.

The committee decided to revive the Pop-Up session because this year's meeting was held on the West Coast, and hosting the Bring Your Own Breakfast (BYOB) would require an early start. While we, the committee, do like the BYOB option, we were unable to continue it for the 2025 meeting; however, we encourage future committees to consider this option in the future. The one downside is that it does mean more work for SAA staff, but with the development of AI and other new technologies, they should be considered for future meetings.

The committee made an effort to address concerns from mid-career and long-time attendees about the relevance of the conference, but there were still some mid-career attendees and long-time attendees remarked about the relevance of some of the sessions. Sessions felt stale and repetitive. There were also concerns from those who do not work for academic institutions that some sessions were not relevant outside of an academic setting. We, as a committee, do not have the answer, but there should be a push for new topics and presenters. We recommend that the next Program Committee consider this when reviewing proposals.

In response to the above feedback, we suggest revisiting the current evaluation rubric. During the review, there was an emphasis on selecting sessions that would appeal to the broadest range of attendees (eg, "there's already one session on business archives" or "institutional archives don't have to worry about repatriation"). The emphasis on professional and geographic diversity amongst panel members also means that many single-institution sessions, presenting on a specific project, were rejected for this reason. The next program committee should reflect on ways to incorporate and encourage presentations from bleeding-edge and in-flight projects, whether by adjusting the call for proposals or weighing proposals differently during evaluation.

The Program Committee experienced a significant shift in how AI is perceived between the proposal reviews and the conference itself. We recommend continuing the pop-up session for future

conferences. AI is evolving at a rapid pace, and we should encourage archivists to share new ideas and applications that have developed over the 6-month interim.

If section meetings do not return to the annual meeting schedule, some space should be allocated for sections to publicly report on their projects, surveys, and other work to the larger membership.

Respectfully Submitted,

Erik R. Bauer & John Bence

2025 Program Committee Co-Chairs