

Guidelines for SAA
Sections on Merging,
Transitioning to a
Discussion Group, and
Sunsetting



**SOCIETY OF
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Archivists**

As communities of practice and information exchange, SAA sections are vital to supporting SAA members' needs. The SAA Council periodically revisits the list of active sections to ensure they effectively meet membership needs. If the scope of a section appears to no longer align with the needs and interests of the membership, or if the section fails to comply with minimum governance requirements for an extended period, the SAA Council liaison and the section's steering committee will have a conversation to consider merging with another section, transitioning to a discussion group, or sunseting.

It's important to note that merging, transitioning to a discussion group, or sunseting a section should not be viewed as a failure by the section or its leadership. Rather, this is often a strategic move toward charting a stronger and more focused path to meet members' needs in new and holistic ways.

This document details the steps for merging, transitioning to a discussion group, and sunseting sections.

Merging

Benefits of sections merging include:

- Maintaining a focused, relevant, and impactful scope of the section mission.
- Streamlining and focusing efforts to fill section election rosters.
- Reducing the tendency to cross-post related content across multiple section email listservs.
- Increasing the single section membership pool to foster the greater ability to network and collaborate among members.

Steps to consider merging:

- 1) Section leaders from interested SAA sections should communicate and align on merging. These conversations will inform the Recommendation to Council to Merge Sections document (Appendix A), so leaders will want to discuss that document together throughout their planning process. Topics for conversation should include:
 - a. Merging section charges and standing rules (see [SAA Governance Manual, Section IX E2 and E3](#)).
 - b. Merging current section leadership rosters and planning for leadership transitions (reducing the combined leadership roster to a chair, vice chair, and a manageable number of steering committee members is encouraged).
 - c. Managing section communication platforms and documentation, including making decisions about:
 - i. SAA Connect: Will there be a new SAA Connect community for the new iteration of the section, or is this rescoped section going to continue in one of the renamed existing SAA Connect communities?

- ii. SAA website: Will there need to be a new SAA microsite, or will one of the section's microsites be modified going forward? Who should have editing rights?
- 2) Section chairs of both sections are advised to inform section members and gain general consent for the merge. A suggested approach might be to have an informal poll of both section memberships to gauge support for the decision. The suggested procedure would be to share the draft Recommendation to the Council to Merge Sections (Appendix A) and issue a simple poll of support, abstain, and oppose, potentially with a free text question to gather feedback and questions.
- 3) To prepare the final Recommendation to the Council to Merge Sections, section leadership is encouraged to hold open working sessions while planning the transition to incorporate section member feedback.
- 4) Section leadership should alert the Council liaisons for both sections about the decision to merge and submit a Recommendation to the Council to Merge Sections.

After the Council's approval, the merged section leadership needs to:

1. Review their working documents to consider sending records of enduring value to the SAA Archives. Records of enduring value may include but are not limited to standing rules iterations, annual reports, and other records identified in partnership with their SAA Council liaison, SAA governance staff, the Records Retention Policy for the SAA and SAA Foundation, and SAA archives staff at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.
2. Work with SAA staff to ensure their new standing rules are created and posted to the SAA Governance Manual.

Within the fiscal year, SAA staff will deactivate any inactive steering committee or SAA Connect section communities.

Transitioning to a Discussion Group

A discussion group is an informal community of practice without the formality of elected leadership. Discussion groups have listservs on SAA Connect but are not bound by the SAA Governance Manual for holding section elections, having a steering committee, or holding annual business meetings and other programming. Discussion groups are encouraged to self-organize programming if they wish, and they will remain eligible for using the SAA Zoom and Webex electronic meeting platforms.

Sections may want to consider transitioning to a discussion group if they are having difficulty filling their election roster or organizing minimal programming for their annual meeting. If a section wishes to transition to a discussion group, they need to engage their section membership with a discussion and/or informal polling to gauge member support for this transition. If the section is overall supportive, the steering committee needs to submit the

Recommendation to Transition a Section to a Discussion Group (Appendix B) to their Council liaison, who will bring the request to the Council for approval.

After the Council's approval, the former steering committee needs to:

1. Review their working documents to consider sending any records of enduring value to the SAA Archives. Records of enduring value may include but are not limited to standing rules iterations, annual reports, and other records identified in partnership with their SAA council liaison, SAA governance staff, the Records Retention Policy for the SAA and SAA Foundation, and SAA archives staff at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.
2. Work with SAA staff to ensure their former standing rules are updated to note the transition to the discussion group. A discussion group is not required to have standing rules, but the intent of updating the former section's standing rules is to formally document the transition to a discussion group. Former steering committee members will work with their Council liaison to craft a vision and brief description for the discussion group for the SAA website and SAA Connect.

Within the fiscal year, SAA staff will deactivate any inactive Steering Committee or SAA Connect section communities.

Sunsetting

Deciding to sunset a section is a major decision that SAA section leadership can make in collaboration with their Council liaison. Sections may sunset for multiple reasons, including if the section scope no longer maintains professional relevancy or there is insufficient energy/capacity for sustaining the Section.

Sustaining sections requires significant ongoing commitment by the section membership for volunteer leadership and administrative support by SAA staff. Sections should evolve and change over time and may sometimes evolve to the point that the section is no longer needed. This frees up resources for SAA to support the creation of new sections addressing our members' current needs. Instead of maintaining structures and systems that may no longer resonate or support membership, sunseting a section is an opportunity to regroup energy toward new initiatives and opportunities.

Steps to explore sunseting a section are:

- 1) In collaboration with their Council liaison and the SAA governance manager, section leaders should brainstorm and troubleshoot issues to explore if the section can be revitalized or rescoped instead of sunseting it outright. The possibility of sunseting a group should never be a surprise for SAA section leadership – they may have noticed over a span of time some of the following symptoms of a flagging community, including:

- a) A lack of section engagement. Do people post questions or announcements on the list? Does the section's SAA Connect only consist of cross-posting or do members engage in dialogue and information-exchange?
- b) A lack of leadership capacity. Can the section fill an election roster? Are leaders struggling to find people willing to volunteer to serve? Are chair or steering committee seats going unfilled? Does the section need to hold special late elections to get a full roster for the election?
- c) A lack of participation in programming and projects. Do section members engage with and participate in programming and work on section projects? Is it difficult to get people to engage with and participate in shared work?

If any efforts to reinvigorate the section are not successful or if there is a strong understanding between section leaders and their Council liaison that the section is no longer serving member needs, then the following steps can be taken to sunset:

Note that groups already in the process of sunseting as of 2023-2024 are at step 4.

- 1) Section leadership should hold an informal poll of their membership to vote on whether the section should be dissolved. The results of this poll should be transparently shared with section membership.
- 2) To prepare a Recommendation to Council to Sunset a Section (Appendix C), the section leadership should host at least one open working session for section members to collaborate and provide feedback on drafting the recommendation.
- 3) Section leadership will submit the Recommendation to Council to Sunset a Section.
- 4) If the recommendation is accepted by Council, the SAA Council liaison will inform the section leadership of the SAA Council's decision to sunset the section at the end of the term, effective September 1. The liaison will communicate a timeline and transition plan, which will include:
 - i. The specific dates for the formal dissolution of the section.
 - ii. A plan for ensuring ongoing or pending projects or activities are appropriately concluded.
 - iii. A request to leadership to notify steering committee members and section members of the sunseting process and the timeline for their involvement. Steering committee's term dates will be set to end September 1.
 - iv. A request to review and close any financial accounts or budgets associated with the section, including ensuring that any remaining funds are appropriately allocated or returned to the organization's general budget.
 - v. A request to inform any external partners, vendors, or stakeholders of the section's discontinuation and any relevant changes in contact points or responsibilities.
- 5) Once the section is sunsetted, the SAA staff will initiate amending the SAA Governance Manual to reflect the section's discontinuation. SAA staff will update any internal documentation or records to reflect the section's status effective September 1.

After Council's approval, the former steering committee is requested to review their working documents to consider sending any records of enduring value to the SAA Archives. Records of enduring value may include but are not limited to standing rules iterations, annual reports, and other records identified in partnership with their SAA Council liaison, SAA governance staff, the Records Retention Policy for the SAA and SAA Foundation, and SAA archives staff at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Within the fiscal year, SAA staff will deactivate any inactive Steering Committee or SAA Connect section communities.

If a discontinued section wishes to be revived in the future, a proposal and petition are required in a workflow similar to starting a new section after a minimum span of one year.

Recommendation to Council to Merge Sections

Annual deadline: April 1

- Current Section Names:
- New Section Name:
- Transition Plan: [Will all or a few members of the original sections remain on the new steering committee? Will there be staggered terms for the new steering committee to ensure institutional knowledge carries forward while allowing new leadership to rotate in?]
- New Section Leadership Roster: [Names, roles (chair(s)/steering committee members), term lengths (1- to 2-year terms are encouraged to ensure staggered terms). This will need to be determined amongst the leaders—no traditional election will happen during the first year. The following year, they will follow the regular election cycle for sections.]
- Rationale Statement: [Include how this action would better support the SAA Strategic Plan; ideally include poll statistics to demonstrate the community approval for this plan.]
- Sustainability: [Add details about elections and other administrative tasks that will require maintenance. How will the change ensure the longer term sustained interest and leadership of this reconfigured section?]
- Updated Standing Rules:
- Potential Drawbacks or Questions:
- Council Decision: [To be added after a decision is made.]

Council will approve the request or provide feedback and ask for additional information. In most cases, Council will likely approve the recommendation.

Recommendation to Transition a Section to a Discussion Group

Annual deadline: April 1

- Current Section Name:
- New Discussion Group Name:
- Rationale Statement: [Include why the section is being recommended for discussion group transition; ideally include poll statistics to demonstrate the community approval for this plan.]
- Potential Drawbacks or Questions:
- Council Decision: [To be added after a decision is made.]

Council will approve the request or provide feedback and ask for additional information. In most cases, Council will likely approve the recommendation.

Recommendation to Council to Sunset a Section

Annual deadline: April 1

- Section Name:
- Section Leadership: [Names, roles (chair(s)/steering committee members).]
- Rationale Statement: [Include why the section is being recommended for sunseting; ideally include poll statistics to demonstrate the community approval for this plan.]
- Potential Drawbacks or Questions:
- Council Decision: [To be added after a decision is made.]

The Council will approve the request or provide feedback and ask for additional information. In most cases, Council will likely approve the recommendation.