

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
January 25 – 27, 2012
Chicago, Illinois**

**SAA/Regional Summit at the SAA Annual Meeting
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BACKGROUND

Although SAA has served as the national archival organization since it was established, as time progressed there seemed to be a need for more regional, or even local, archival organizations to meet the needs of smaller, regional or municipal repositories. Starting in the early 1970s a number of regional archival organizations, such as the Midwest Archives Conference, the New England Archivists, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, the Society of Georgia Archivists, the Society of California Archivists, and the Society of Northwest Archivists, to name a few, have been formed and thrive to this day. As these regional organizations have matured, there has developed a rivalry of sorts between them and SAA for a variety of reasons. However, even as early as 1983, Patrick Quinn wrote in *The American Archivist* about the potential synergy that could exist between the regionals and SAA (“Regional Archival Organizations and the Society of American Archivists,” *The American Archivist* 46 [Fall 1983]).

At times, the regionals have felt threatened by SAA as the largest organization in the country. This has led to, at times, resistance on the part of regionals to work with SAA on various issues. However, the time has now come to put aside those differences and examine them and similarities to determine ways in which SAA and the regionals can cooperate and collaborate in ways that are beneficial to each and to the archival profession as a whole.

DISCUSSION

SAA, the regionals, and the state and local organizations all have specific roles that they do and can play within the archival community. With this in mind, I distributed a number of questions to the Council and to the presidents of a dozen or so regional organizations inquiring as to their reaction to the possibility of an SAA/Regional Summit at the SAA Annual Meeting in San Diego in 2012. I was pleased with the response on both counts. Below is a summary of the responses received as well as specific comments.

1. Would a half day or whole day be more appropriate?
 - a. A good number of people felt that a whole day would be better, but there was a serious concern about whether it would be feasible, given restraints on scheduling

- and finances. Included in these comments were ideas about dividing the day up into a discussion followed by productive work.
- b. People who felt that a half-day would be better were concerned about scheduling and the need for a detailed agenda.
2. Would Tuesday morning or afternoon (or all day) be feasible?
 - a. While a number of people felt that there would be fewer conflicts with a Tuesday meeting, the majority felt that it would need to be on Wednesday, even with the probability of conflicts, because of financial concerns (extra hotel nights for regional officers).
 3. Would Wednesday be better?
 - a. Again the comments were that there would definitely be conflicts but that it would be much more financially feasible for people to attend.
 4. What would it take to get Regional representatives to attend?
 - a. This was an area with some definite opinions. Without question, the key issue was that this would need to be collaboration-friendly/neutral, with no hidden agenda for SAA.
 - b. There was a strong feeling that there be the possibility of tangible benefits for the Regionals and that there be a clear understanding and trust that SAA is committed to helping the Regional associations attain their own goals and serve their members better.
 - c. An understanding that the Summit would look seriously at potential areas of collaboration and cooperation between the Regionals and SAA.
 5. Any suggestions for a moderator/facilitator?
 - a. There were a number of suggestions in response to this question. Several of the people mentioned were well-known SAA members who had been/were active in their respective regional organization. However, there was also a strong sentiment that it should be someone without strong ties to SAA, e.g., not a current Council member or current or recent past officer – maybe someone not affiliated with archives at all.
 6. What topics do you feel would be good starting points for discussion? (For this question, it seemed better to bring together the responses into categories rather than to attempt to summarize them on a larger scale.)
 - a. To learn about new initiatives and trends going on in other Regional associations, including workshops and programs as well as information on regional calendars.
 - b. Define areas where cooperation and collaboration could benefit both SAA and Regional associations, including coordination of advocacy on a national level and bringing SAA resources closer to home.
 - c. How can we benefit each other? How can we avoid duplication of effort? What are the strengths of each Regional? What are the strengths of SAA?
 - d. Educational, training, or service function(s) for members and for resource-poor entities. What are the best ways that activities and services can be apportioned to best meet archivists' needs?
 - e. What do Regional associations see as their biggest challenges, want to achieve for their members, want to do better? What benefits do Regional associations see from working more closely with their peers and SAA?

- f. Preparedness (could deal with disasters but also education, advocacy, graying of the profession/retirement, funding cuts, etc.).
7. Other issues that you feel should be addressed or worked out before?
 - a. What sort of format should the forum take?
 - b. Get regionals to discuss the topic at their spring meetings and submit ideas, etc.
 - c. What groups should be invited to attend? Who should represent SAA?
 - d. Where are the resources going to come from to support this new activity?
 - e. Potential benefits for the regionals, SAA, the profession?
 - f. We do not want to have another Committee on Regional Archival Activity.
 - g. SAA needs to be very clear about what it wants out of collaboration with the Regionals:
 - i. Serve strategic priorities?
 - ii. Fiscal impact?
 - h. How would working more closely with SAA benefit the profession?

Other Comments

- “SAA needs to go into it with a clear goal and a proposed action-based outcome anticipated. SAA needs a clear understanding of how activity in this area can benefit SAA, the Regionals, and the profession.”
- “Needs to be a clear agenda and the focus of the meeting should be for the Regional attendees to talk about what they want – what kinds of increased communication, collaboration and cooperation and on what issues, what problems or issues are most important to their members, what ideas do they have for what kind of formal structure, if any, is needed to achieve this?”
- “The notion of cooperation and collaboration between SAA and the Regionals is laudable and something worthwhile to pursue. We need to be clear about the benefit to the Regionals. Must be in their best interests. Not only about collaborating between Regionals and SAA but also about Regionals collaborating with other Regionals.”
- “Participants should ideally be in dialog virtually well in advance of the face-to-face meeting. I wonder if something extremely exploratory would make sense. Contact a small group of people and see if this idea seems to resonate. It might take more time to lay the foundation for a meaningful forum than we have before the San Diego meeting. We need to put some time into identifying a handful of preliminary ideas for the potential collaborators to react to – rather than placing the burden on them to come up with ideas themselves.”
- “Withhold any discussion of a potential structure and certainly avoid using words like ‘federation.’”

While this is just a judicious compilation of the comments received, it definitely represents all provided. The only editing that was done was to bring like comments

together into one. Overall, the discussion seemed to be hopeful that collaborative and cooperative activities could and should be investigated and discussed. There are a number of concerns, and there will be a real need to enter into this discussion with an open mind by all participants.

To make this a successful Summit, it will be necessary to develop a meaningful agenda, identify a facilitator, and identify the Regional organizations that can best represent the Regionals without leaving out important organizations (only to keep the Summit from becoming too unwieldy). Planning will need to begin almost immediately so that all the pieces can be in place by August.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT SAA convene a Summit of Regional Organizations and SAA at the 2012 SAA Annual Meeting in San Diego to investigate and discuss areas in which the Regional organizations and SAA can collaborate and cooperate for the benefit of all involved and for the benefit of the members of the archival profession at all levels;

THAT Council appoint a Task Force, to be disbanded at the 2012 Annual Meeting and representing SAA and the Regionals, to draft an agenda and appoint a facilitator for the meeting; and

THAT the SAA staff, in scheduling sessions for the Annual Meeting, set aside time on Wednesday afternoon, August 8, 2012, for such a Summit and that they work with the Council on determining an Agenda and facilitator.

Support Statement: Convening a Summit of Regional Organizations and SAA to begin a serious discussion of ways in which SAA and the Regionals can collaborate and cooperate in providing services to their respective members will benefit all involved, but most of all the members of the archival profession. This Summit will widen the lines of communication among these groups and will further the opportunities for collaborative activities in the future. No one group can do it all. By working collaboratively and cooperatively, more can be accomplished and more archivists will benefit in the end.

Fiscal Impact: The only potential fiscal impact would be the hiring of a facilitator, but among the suggested names (see question 5) there were a number of archivists who have the respect of their colleagues and who are active both in SAA and in their respective Regional organization. By approaching one of them, we should be able to minimize any potential cost.