

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
January 23 – 26, 2013
Chicago, Illinois**

**Action: Providing AV Equipment to
Roundtables at the Annual Meeting
(Prepared by SAA Treasurer Mark Duffy)**

BACKGROUND

In August 2011, the Council decided that the Finance Committee should review all Roundtable AV requests for the 2012 annual meeting on a trial basis so that an appropriate amount would be included in the draft budget for Council review and adoption in June 2012. The following language was sent to all roundtables via *In The Loop*, the Leader List, and other media several times before the April 1 deadline:

In response to a growing demand for audiovisual support at roundtable meetings, the SAA Council has determined that, beginning in 2012, SAA roundtables must submit a formal request for audiovisual support. The Finance Committee will review all applications—along with roundtables’ histories of meeting attendance and fulfillment of basic reporting requirements—and will propose an amount for funding to be incorporated into the draft budget reviewed by the SAA Council in May. Once the Council approves a budget (that may or may not incorporate all funds requested), the Treasurer will notify roundtables regarding whether they will receive AV support at the 2012 Annual Meeting.

Sixteen roundtables completed the application form. Of that total, the Finance Committee approved ten requests and denied six. Subsequently the staff was able to accommodate three of the six requests because, based on attendance history and other requirements, the Roundtables could be placed in rooms that already were equipped with AV. In the end, six rooms included AV equipment (LCD projector, screen, podium microphone) at a cost of \$750 per room, for a total expense of \$4,500.

The requests were filled based on a combination of: 1) Finance Committee ranking, 2) anticipated roundtable attendance (based on history), 3) timeliness of the request, and 4) the already-existing availability of AV. Volunteer members of the Finance Committee ranked proposals by:

- Reviewing each written request independently.
- Weighing the request (e.g., How well did the RT make its case for the need for a projector?) by evaluating the importance of AV equipment to the program if other mechanisms could serve to convey the same information effectively.
- Reviewing the history of attendance at each roundtable meeting in recent years.

The Committee's decision to deny requests led to a request for a written evaluation and explanation from one Roundtable leader.

DISCUSSION

The Committee reviewed the trial process at two meetings, one during and one following the annual meeting. The Committee is of the opinion that sufficient objective criteria are in place to respond to Roundtable requests for AV equipment without its further involvement. Past practice indicates that the existing criteria, applied rigorously, are generally sufficient to match qualifying Roundtable requests with available AV installations. In most instances, staff should be able to review the strength of the written request and, with the assistance of Council liaisons, work with Roundtable leaders to ascertain the level of need.

SAA staff members are in the best position to negotiate meeting spaces and equipment, and to evaluate compliance with reporting practices, meeting numbers, joint gatherings, filing dates, and other requirements set by the Council. Working with Council liaisons, staff can be relied upon to work with the Roundtables to evaluate programmatic needs and priorities. The Executive Director should feel fully supported by the Council in following the existing objective criteria for making such decisions unless there is reason to doubt the fairness of a decision.

In any year, if the process does not produce a favorable outcome within budget expectations, the staff should lean on the side of supporting the work of the Roundtables. In the event that budget projections are exceeded for any annual meeting, but other financial means exist within the Society's overall budget, the Executive Director should consult with the Executive Committee for advice on how to redirect funding streams to meet unanticipated annual meeting expenses.

The Committee recognizes that utilizing current technology to support educational programming is not a luxury or special request. As the Society's members self-organize into more Roundtables, equitable decisions about using annual meeting resources to support their technology and meeting room requests will have to be considered in the budget process. Currently, AV equipment is assigned for conference rooms to support the educational program at about \$700-800 per meeting room. No new money is designated for Roundtable meetings in the budget.

The Committee discussed the need for the Council to consider adjusting cost expectations in the annual meeting budget in order to adequately address reasonable Roundtable AV (and meeting room) requests. Doing so would eliminate an unnecessary tension that has persisted in this area of member activity for too many years. The Council should explore other options for allocating funds in ways that do not penalize timely requests or create imprecise evaluative processes to judge the relative merits of a Roundtable's program.

Even with the addition of some funding, further elaboration may be needed to arrive at fair processes for allocating limited resources. A decision to decline a request on a first-come-first-served basis in one year, for example, could push a Roundtable's request to the top of the queue in the succeeding year. Another possibility might be to create a process to consider targeted grants from a small pool of money, which could be set aside each year for Roundtable projects or events (honoraria, online workshop, steering committee gathering) on condition that the pro-rated cost of supplying extra AV equipment also be expensed as part of the Society's financial support.

The Finance Committee believes that the 2012 trial process only served to cloud and complicate the decision to allocate AV equipment. Further involvement by the Finance Committee would be on the basis of supporting staff in applying the established criteria (X.IV.B.3 as follows) and any additional requirements adopted by the Council.

Roundtable requests for a dedicated meeting room and/or equipment at an SAA Annual Meeting will be evaluated and determined by the Executive Director, in consultation with the SAA President as appropriate, from among the following criteria:

- The convener submits a timely request before deadlines published by the SAA office,
- The Roundtable has organized a special presentation or program that advances the Society's strategic priorities,
- The Roundtable is engaged in a collaborative exercise with another Roundtable or Section,
- The historical and expected attendance are large enough to warrant dedicated space in order to accommodate members, and/or
- All annual reporting requirements for the previous year have been met, including the leader's acknowledgment of leadership responsibilities.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Council charge the SAA staff to carefully monitor the allocation process for AV equipment at the Annual Meeting as outlined in the Governance Manual (Section X. Roundtables, Membership and Meetings) and, working with the Council liaison and the Executive Committee, resolve any unexpected demand that cannot be met within existing budgetary appropriations; and

THAT the Council charge the Finance Committee to consider future budgetary appropriations that will adequately support the increased demand for AV support of Roundtables at the Annual Meeting.

Impact on Strategic Priorities: None.

Fiscal Impact: None in FY2013. Additional funding may be required in FY2014.