Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
August 12 – 13, 2013
New Orleans, Louisiana

Council Priorities for Changes to the SAA Annual Meeting
(Prepared by Annual Meeting Task Force Liaison Jackie Dooley)

BACKGROUND

The Council charged the Annual Meeting Task Force in August 2011 to do a thorough study of SAA's Annual Meeting and recommend possible changes. Under the leadership of Kathy Marquis and Fynnette Eaton, the group did extensive research, engaged actively with members, polled members repeatedly for their input, and submitted an excellent final report for the May 2013 Council meeting. At that time, a Council subgroup accepted responsibility for preparing an analysis of the AMTF report and recommending ways in which we might carry their work forward; this was delivered to the Council in June.

The Principles and Priorities articulated in the Recommendation (below) were taken from those two documents. They are meant to serve two purposes: 1) articulate our priorities and 2) present a concise overview of progress already made. We acknowledge the critical importance of active, ongoing communication with the membership about outcomes as we continue to move forward with a flexible attitude about the content and structure of the Annual Meeting.

DISCUSSION

We recognize that the Annual Meeting (AM) is one of SAA's most important activities in terms of both its benefit to members and its role in maintaining the Society's fiscal health. The AM has changed little in recent years, however, in terms of structure, schedule, and approach to session types. We have minimally implemented new technologies to enable virtual access to content. As both technology and means of communication have evolved, we have not been nimble about considering ways in which the AM might usefully change in order to meet the needs of members, nearly half of whom are students or have been in the profession five years or less.

It is important that SAA embrace a culture of experimentation and testing to ensure that the AM evolves over time to continue to serve the changing needs of our members, taking into account new modes of learning and communication. We must facilitate continuous improvement, including via feedback loops from attendees. All those closely involved in planning and executing the AM (Program Committee, staff, and others)

would benefit greatly from a set of guiding principles and priorities that can be put into play and referred to on a regular basis.

The Council may wish to consider questions and issues such as the following when discussion about the Annual Meeting model continues at the winter 2014 Council meeting.

- Is it important to find ways to **_shorten the meeting_**, and if so, how?
    - Allot less time to some sessions?
    - Cut back on the number of education sessions?
    - Schedule component groups to meet in the same time blocks as education sessions?
    - Schedule time blocks (other than coffee breaks) when no sessions of any kind will take place?
    - Schedule sessions and events for more hours per day?

- What kinds of **_networking opportunities_** would members like to have available?
    - "Structured" networking?
    - New types of unstructured networking?
    - Unconferences?

- Which types of **_meeting content_** would be the most valuable to make accessible **_online_**?
    - Particular types of sessions (e.g., traditional, lightning)?
    - High-value sessions selected in advance by the Program Committee?
    - Plenaries?
    - Business meeting?

- What **_technological approaches_** to making online content available would be the most valuable to members?
    - Assign "official" tweeters or bloggers to sessions to ensure a stream of content via social media?
    - Synchronous ("live") or asynchronous (post-meeting)?
    - A virtual conference that occurs on different dates than the annual meeting?
    - Would the potentially lower quality of "DIY" (do-it-yourself) recordings be acceptable where expenses would otherwise be too high?

- Would members like to be able to **_vote on submitted proposals_** as a way of identifying the potentially most popular/important sessions?

THAT the following Principles and Priorities for Continuously Improving the SAA Annual Meeting be adopted:

Principles and Priorities for Continuously Improving the SAA Annual Meeting

Guiding Principles

- We will explore new locations, structure, and content for the Annual Meeting on an ongoing basis.
- We will embrace a culture of experimentation and will be willing to take calculated risks with respect to the Annual Meeting. No aspect of the meeting will be off limits based on "tradition."
- We will strive to make every meeting as useful, affordable, accessible, and enjoyable as possible for all attendees,
- We will find ways to enable a highly diverse population of registrants.
- We will actively pursue ways of making meeting content available online.
- We will integrate a commitment to social responsibility into all aspects of meeting planning and execution.
- We will continuously seek feedback from both attendees and non-attendees on various aspects of the meeting, including site selection, content, options for online access, and affordability.

Site Selection and Contract Requirements

- We will experiment with meeting in second-tier cities using a combination of a convention center and room blocks in several hotels at varying price points.
    - *Progress: Staff has begun investigating such sites for 2015-2017. It should be noted that investigations are already revealing, however, that this approach will not always result in reduced costs for attendees.*
- We will offer inexpensive alternative housing (such as dormitories) whenever feasible.
    - *Progress: Staff will actively pursue this beginning with the 2014 meeting in Washington, D.C.*
- We will stipulate in all Requests for Proposals (RFP) that free wireless access in meeting spaces is a key component of our needs.
    - *Progress: This stipulation is in all RFPs currently out for bid.*
- We will stipulate in all RFPs the importance of fair labor practices, sustainable ("green") practices, and donation of excess food and beverage to worthy causes.
    - *Progress: This stipulation is in all RFPs currently out for bid.*
- Staff will actively monitor information about labor contracts and potential labor actions affecting the hotel sector.
    - *Progress: This is being done on an ongoing basis.*

Delivery of Meeting Content

- We will deploy a mobile conference app for access to program information via smart phones and tablets.
  - *Progress: We will have an app in 2013 and going forward.*
- We will ensure that each year's conference website includes effective functionality and navigation.
  - *Progress: We have retooled the conference website for 2013 (although it was not available too much in advance of the meeting); remaining work will be done as quickly as possible in the context of redesigning SAA's overall website.*
- We will seek to provide free access to recordings made of important sessions from past conferences.
  - *Progress: Staff has begun discussing this with the company that produces and distributes our conference recordings.*
- We will investigate and gradually implement online access to meeting content by various means as technology and resources permit.
  - *Progress: Staff has been discussing approaches and costs with several companies that offer these services.*
- We will implement sustainable practices in our production of conference materials.
  - *Progress: As of 2013, registrants may opt out from receiving the onsite program in paper. We are using recycled materials for name badges and badge holders.*

New Approaches to Meeting Content and Structure

- We will experiment with new approaches to plenary sessions.
  - *Progress: The 2013 opening plenary will feature a panel of three speakers moderated by the SAA president. The Vice-President/President-Elect will present her inaugural address at the Business Meeting on Saturday.*
- We will identify and implement new approaches to structured and unstructured networking.
  - *Progress: As in 2012, a room will be set aside with ten or more round tables that small groups may reserve for informal meetings on an ad hoc basis.*
- We will experiment with new formats and content for education sessions.
  - *Progress: The Call for Proposals for 2014 invites members to propose new session formats of any kind. Sessions will be 60 or 75 minutes long rather than the "traditional" 90-minute time blocks; this will open up time for other possible conference activities.*
- The Program Committee charge will be revised to encourage Program Committees to innovate in additional ways.
  - *Progress: The Council will vote on a revised charge at its August 2013 meeting. (See 0813-1-III-A-2-ProgComm.)*
- We will actively publicize to members all efforts to consider, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of new approaches.
  - *Progress: This document is our first step in what will be an ongoing process.*

Support Statement: This document presents a summary of the Council's principles and priorities for ensuring the continued development of the Annual Meeting, based on the excellent work of the 2011-2013 Annual Meeting Task Force. Going forward, the Council expects that there will be ongoing reporting on the extent to which these principles and priorities are put into play for the Annual Meeting.

Relation to Strategic Plan Goals and Strategies: The Annual Meeting touches on many of the Society's Goals in that it serves to provide professional content and networking and governance opportunities. Perhaps most relevant are the following: Strategy 2.1 (Provide content, via education and publications, that reflects the latest thinking and best practices in the field), Strategy 2.2 (Deliver information and education via methods that are accessible, affordable, and keep pace with technological change), and Strategy 4.2 (Create opportunities for members to participate fully in the association).

Fiscal Impact: Many of the priorities will involve a financial impact on the Society. The Council will evaluate each of those in the context of the annual budget.