

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

**Discussion of Increased Collaboration with South American,  
Central American, and Caribbean Archival Organizations  
(Prepared by Terry Baxter)**

**BACKGROUND**

Submitted at the request of Natalie Baur, archivist at the University of Miami's Cuban Heritage Collection, this discussion item has come out of several other discussions between Natalie and Terry about the usefulness of building more formal ties with our hemispheric neighbors.

SAA formally works with the western hemisphere's archives community through its participation in International Council on Archives groups: Committee on Best Practices and Standards (CPBS), Section on Professional Associations (ICA/SPA), and North American Archival Network (NAANICA). There are also ongoing *ad hoc* efforts through a variety of SAA's component groups (most notably the Latin American and Caribbean Cultural Heritage Archives Roundtable) and individual initiatives.

The publications arm of SAA has worked, with mixed success, on translation projects to translate SAA publications into other languages and on projects to translate works of other archival organizations in the region into English.

Current SAA membership is focused on United States archivists, with only a small percentage of archivists in the society from other countries. There are approximately 35 countries in this region with a national archives, and four countries have ICA/SPA representation.

**DISCUSSION**

SAA's new [strategic plan](#) calls for the organization to “[p]articipate actively in relevant partnerships and collaborations to enhance professional knowledge” (Goal 3: Advancing the Field). One of the key performance indicators for this goal is that “SAA participates in national and international collaborations in which representation of the American archival perspective is considered vital.”

SAA has also shown a long-standing commitment to increasing the diversity of its membership, the profession, and the American record. The context of this has usually been seen as the United States. But even if you accept this contextualization, as of 2010 21 million Americans were born in “Latin America,” which is more than half of the US immigrant population. Those ties of community, language, culture, and history require that a diverse American record at least consider the United States’ relationship to other countries’ documentary heritage.

We also have a responsibility, as the largest and best-funded archives organization in the region, to assist other archives organizations in building a solid base of practice and in advocating for the value of archives and archivists regionally. The archival endeavor is not circumscribed by national boundaries anymore than human heritage is.

ICA could lead this collaboration. The recent SAA representative, Trudy Peterson, discussed SAA’s role in ICA, especially in ICA/SPA. While there is potential for collaboration with “Latin American” archives via ICA, there are only four other SPA members from this region: Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Uruguay. Additionally, Peterson observed that most of the SAA work in SPA is not driven by SAA strategic interests, but is based more on the initiative and energy of the SPA representative.

That said, SAA should proceed cautiously. The organization is already at or near capacity in many areas. Proceeding with a few modest projects aimed at testing the feasibility of expanded collaboration would be in SAA’s (and probably in SAA’s potential collaborators’) best interests.

Translation efforts make good sense, primarily because there is an existing track record with Spanish language translations by SAA. There has been at least one abandoned effort by SAA to translate Brazilian archival works into English. One area of potential collaboration would be to work with archives organizations to determine the most important works in the region and determine methods to translate these works and to make translations widely available.

Another useful project would be to create practical resources for community archives in countries in the region. This would require both translation skills and knowledge of local cultures. There are a number of collaborative possibilities here, but it would make sense to partner with communities that have large population representations in the United States. This would allow the use of resources by both resident and immigrant communities.

A third area to investigate is the direct invitation of archives organizations in the region to an SAA meeting with at least some programming targeted towards regional cooperation. This could look something like the activities targeted towards Native American archivists at the 2004 Boston meeting of SAA.

While the focus of this discussion is on building collaborative relationships between SAA and other archives organizations within Central and South America and the Caribbean,

the results of these efforts have the potential to benefit communities within the United States as well as meet SAA goals to promote the diversification of the archival record and to collaborate to enhance professional knowledge.

### **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- **Is increased collaboration with archives organizations in other countries in the western hemisphere useful in meeting SAA's strategic initiatives?**
- **If so, are these proposed projects effective ways to begin building collaborative bonds?**
- **What groups or individuals would be best suited to investigate the feasibility of performing the work indicated above?**

**Note:** While the fiscal impact of investigating the feasibility of these proposals is limited primarily to staff and member time (not inconsequential in itself), implementing these ideas could have significant costs.