

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
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**2009 Program Committee Report: Diversity
(Submitted by Co-Chairs Mark J. Duffy and Aimee M. Felker)**

The following report on diversity is submitted as an addendum to earlier reports of the Program Committee and summarizes its activities in this area only.

Committee Selection

In selecting members to serve on the 2009 Program Committee, the co-chairs, in conjunction with SAA Vice President Frank Boles and the Appointments Committee, strove to achieve diverse representation in the following areas: repository type, regional affiliation, subject matter expertise, professional experience, and gender. In addition, selection aimed to expand SAA member involvement. Achieving the highest level of diversity desired was difficult as many prospective members were already serving on other committees, had previously served on a Program Committee, or were unable to accept an appointment at the time. Attempts to increase international representation, especially from the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central America, were particularly unsuccessful.

Sustainable Archives: AUSTIN 2009 was a joint meeting with the Council of State Archivists (CoSA). To ensure that CoSA's interests were met, state government archivists and records managers comprised nearly one-fourth of the Program Committee.¹ Institutional repository types represented on the Committee included: state government (3; 23%), local government (1; 8%), federal government (2; 15%), college and university archives/special collections (3; 23%), business archives (1; 8%), religious archives (2; 15%), and museum archives (1; 8%). However, several members of the Committee had prior professional experience working in other types of institutional organizations, thus increasing the depth of topical expertise.

The 2009 Program Committee consisted of SAA members from the following geographic regions: Midwest (1; 8%), West (2; 15%), Southwest (4; 31%), Southeast (2; 15%), Mid-Atlantic

¹ SAA and CoSA appointees to the 2009 Program Committee members were: co-chairs Mark Duffy and Aimee Felker, William Caughlin, Jacquelyn Ferry, Dorothy Hazelrigg, Geof Huth, Theresa Mora, Chris Paton, Arian Ravanbakhsh, Teresa Reilly, Cindy Smolovik, Melanie Sturgeon, and Susan von Salis. SAA members Jelain Chubb and Ben Primer, co-chairs of the 2010 Program Committee, and Mary Jo Pugh, *American Archivist* editor, were *ex officio* members.

(2; 15%), New England (1; 8%), and Canada (1; 8%). The Southwest had a higher representation in part due to the CoSA appointment which occurred fairly late in the selection process. Members hailed from nine (9) states/provinces, including: Arizona, California, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, South Carolina, Texas, Wisconsin, and Calgary (Canada).

Achieving regional, repository, and subject matter expertise diversity was deemed a higher priority than achieving gender balance. The 2009 Program Committee was 31% male (4) and 69% female (9).

Program Sessions

The 2009 Program Committee made a deliberate, painstaking effort to honor the Society's strategic goal of diversity in both the call to meeting and the design of the Annual Meeting offerings. The organizing theme of sustainability gave proposers a direction for framing their approach to new and continuing professional challenges, but several additional criteria were explicitly named to emphasize the Society's priorities and to explore the diversity of our work experience, constituent users, and wider profession. The 2009 Call for Proposals, submission form, and liaison presentations at the 2008 section and roundtable meetings pointedly referred to the Committee's interest in a diversity of speakers, international voices, the variety of experience levels, and the input of all sections and roundtables.

These organizing themes were emphasized with the Committee in its evaluative process and informed some of the toughest decisions made during selection. Diversity of program was especially important to the co-chairs, as we were aware that co-sponsorship with CoSA would necessarily make governmental archives a dominant thread in the program and a factor to be kept in balance with other interests of SAA members.

The co-chairs used the submission form to strengthen program diversity in ways that were attentive to the proposers' viewpoints as well as to the need for an overall program coherence. An effort was made to draw clearer distinctions among the several types of presentations (traditional, panel, innovation, etc.) to meet the variety of members' educational preferences.

- The submission form asked proposers to categorize their session within two topics, a primary and a secondary. This approach proved very effective in not only identifying the general "aboutness" of a session, but also in signaling a proposal's specific thrust and target audience.
- Co-chairs assigned institutional categories (including the welcome "mixed" variety of speakers) to guide the process so that no one enterprise area of archival practice would emerge as overly-represented at the expense of representation in another area.

These grouping tools were incorporated into the Committee workbook that members used to make comparative evaluations as they went through the 135 proposals received. Ranking scores and other counts were used to alert the Committee to trends early in the evaluative process.

The first tier of the selection process (about 55-60%) focused on submissions of outstanding quality and thoughtful integration of the standard thematic criteria (sustainability, diversity, international voices, government, and levels of experience).

- As competition for the remaining slots became more intense, the Committee turned to the added elements of topic representation, speaker redundancy, and section and roundtable endorsements to filter, group, and balance their decisions.
- The use of simple technologies (e.g., spreadsheets, overhead projectors, flip boards) aided the Committee to reach an optimal diversity in the final program.
- The co-chairs used the discussion method of evaluating competing proposals in small groups where each member of the Program Committee would be more comfortable expressing their interests than in the large group setting. Feedback from several program members suggested that this approach enriched their contributions to the large group discussion, and thus, enriched the diversity of views that we had hoped to achieve in the Committee selection process.

Faced with such a large number of solid proposals, the Committee decided on a full program of 77 program offerings and set aside five additional and worthy proposals for late consideration, should space allow. While a full program offers something in every time slot for almost everyone, it may also disappoint many who have multiple interests. Proposers named or selected more than 30 topics (including 5 sessions directly related to diversity). The great majority of these topics were represented, even as the largest pool of proposals came to the Committee from a few topical areas: access, appraisal, education, management, and electronic records.²

Measuring the diversity of the presenters eluded the Committee's ability to capture good data except in a very general way. An examination of institutional affiliation and job titles for presenters who were scheduled at the time the sessions were finally selected in early 2009 gives the following profile (including chairs designated as speakers and panelists, but excluding poster sessions):

² Per the proposers' two self-identified topic selections, *Sustainable Archives: AUSTIN 2009* offered the following number of sessions per topic:

Access/Privacy	9
Advocacy	6
Appraisal	8
Audio Visual	1
Description	3
Diversity	5
Education	8
Electronic Records	11
Facilities/Security	1
International	5
Management	12
Methodology	5
Other*	16
Preservation	8
Professionalism	10
Records Management	3
Reference	3
Social Memory	5
Web Access	9

*Other covered such topics as legal issues, oral history, and disaster preparedness.

- 39% college and university archivists (5% were university affiliated medical archives)
- 26% government archivists (10% local and 16% federal or national)
- 16% nonprofit organizations (including religious, museum, charitable organizations, educational/professional associations, and non-university medical)
- 9% educational other (including educators, graduate students, and research consortia)
- 7% business archives (including self-employed archives consultants/firms)
- 3% independent historical societies

Just less than 7% of the presenters originally scheduled represented an international presence on the program, which was one of the goals for the Austin meeting. However, due to the economy and various personal reasons, several of the international speakers were unable to attend.

While diversity was a constant theme of the Committee's discussions in terms of how to bring new and representative voices to the table, the tools to measure the outcome efficiently have not been available. Until the technology and support are in place for creating cumulative data reports throughout the program's development, decisions will fall back on incomplete, impressionistic perspectives of what constitutes a diverse representation. Our future ability to measure inputs and outcomes is important if the Society aspires to a more accurate understanding of its inclusiveness in its premier educational program beyond the aspirations and best intentions of the Program Committee.