Reciprocal Membership / Registration
Agreements with Related Organizations
(Prepared by: Visual Materials Section Chair Stephen J. Fletcher
on behalf of the Visual Materials Section Steering Committee)

BACKGROUND

During the 2010 Visual Materials Section Midwinter Meeting, attendees examined the section’s three-year plan in light of SAA’s strategic plan, with the overall theme of the meeting being “Staying Relevant.” From our discussion of the section’s use of liaisons with other visual materials related organizations, an idea surfaced concerning the possibility of SAA working with other related professional organizations to create a reciprocal membership program.

For several years now, the Visual Materials Section has utilized a liaison system whereby SAA members who are also members of related professional organizations report news and information to the section at large, usually through the section newsletter, listservs, and/or announcements at the annual meeting. The success of the program varies, however, as it is highly dependent upon finding people who are members of SAA and a related organization who are also willing to serve in that capacity—which means it's hit or miss.

DISCUSSION

Archivists, librarians, and museum professionals cannot easily afford membership in more than one professional organization. Professionals such as these are most successful when they can share expertise, especially when we have overlapping efforts and interests. Financial limitations stifle the sharing of ideas through professionals’ memberships because many can afford to join only one or maybe two associations. Consequently, silos of expertise are perpetuated within each association or profession – research efforts and expertise are duplicated across our associations and professions. The recently formed visual materials group within RLG would be an example of such a silo.

As archivists, we have much in common with our non-archivist colleagues. Many of us even work in the same environment as librarians, visual resources specialists, and museum professionals. Currently we cannot participate in ALA, VRA, or AAM listservs,
receive their professional literature, or receive discounts on conferences for other than those of SAA without paying membership dues.

To encourage more collegiality among related professions, the Steering Committee of the Visual Materials Section proposes that SAA broker a reduced reciprocal membership agreement with ALA, VRA, and AAM, or other professional organizations that may be pertinent to SAA members, so that we can be in conversation with each other and understand each other’s viewpoints. We believe an arrangement like this could potentially bring in new members to SAA, new readers for the American Archivist and other SAA publications, and more attendees at SAA conferences. It would also further the goal of bolstering partnerships and the exchange of ideas among libraries, archives, museums, and visual resources departments across institutions, and with special regard to digital collections.

We believe reciprocal memberships directly or indirectly align with components of SAA’s Strategic Plan, particularly:

**Goal 1, Outcome 3:** SAA will make increasingly effective use of current and emerging technology in order to enhance communication with internal and external audiences and stimulate collaboration among its constituents.

**Goal 2, Outcome 2:** Identify and promote existing models and develop new methods for assisting archives and archivists to diversify the documentary record within their repositories.

**Goal 2, Outcome 3:** In cooperation with appropriate communities, develop SAA guidelines and resources on managing cultural property that will assist the broader archives community in dealing with cultural property issues.

**Goal 3, Outcome 3:** Develop a common statement that SAA members can use to describe “who we are,” “what we do,” and “the value of archives” and instruct SAA members in how to put this information to use with policy makers, donors, patrons, and others.

The Visual Resources Association has been a leader in developing metadata standards for digital surrogates and holding summer educational institutes that have benefited archivists and librarians. The American Library Association has a new group called the Image Resources Interest Group (IRIG) in ACRL. Members of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of the ALA often work with the same kinds of materials as archivists, particularly those in the Visual Materials Section of SAA. Yet we can’t really know what’s going on among our groups without memberships in the “home” organizations. It only seems fitting that SAA extend a similar membership level for the sharing of resources as it can only benefit the Association and its peer professional organizations.
RECOMMENDATION

THAT the SAA Council investigate with other related professional organizations the viability of establishing a reciprocal membership program.

Support Statement: In order to build strategic alliances for SAA as an organization and to provide opportunities for its members to advance their professional development, SAA will investigate with other related professional organizations the viability of establishing a reciprocal membership program.

Fiscal Impact: It is not possible for VM section members to determine the fiscal impact of this idea to SAA. Any fiscal impact would be dependent upon the number and cost of any mutual benefits that can be identified and agreed upon with associated organizations. For example, the ability to join listservs would be relatively low-cost, while sharing publications would be much more expensive. Discounted attendance fees at annual meeting would be another cost that could vary depending on the percentage or agreed-upon amount.