Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
May 26 – 28, 2010
Chicago, Illinois

Action Item: Appoint Task Force to Develop Policies for Vendor Participation in Society Activities
(Prepared by Margery Sly, Diane Vogt-O’Connor, and Rosalye Settles)

BACKGROUND

During the past several years, the Council has been asked to discuss several issues, policies, and procedures that include various degrees of vendor participation in SAA programs, activities, groups, and listservs. While open or implied endorsement of specific products is problematic to some SAA members whose sense of SAA culture is based in academic tradition, receiving product information from vendors is frequently worthwhile and their support for programs is an increasingly important part of the income stream.

At its February 2009 meeting, the Council agreed that it would be appropriate to develop an open and balanced policy addressing vendor interaction with the Society, thereby enabling us to be consistent and clear when we address future issues.

DISCUSSION

The issue of vendor involvement in SAA activities has come up with what appears to be increasing frequency over the last few years, including:

- On the A&A List, in fall 2007: Whether it is fair to allow Archivists’ Toolkit™ to advertise new releases and solicit input while not permitting ARCHON or Eloquent to do so.

- August 2007 Exhibit Hall vendor’s complaints about programs that promoted open-source software without giving equal time to proprietary systems. Running workshops (DACS for AT users, etc.) tied to specific products. (Resulted in a policy on use of specific products in workshops. See the Council-approved disclaimer, 5-6/08.)

- Including advertisements in workshop handouts. (Council voted in favor; 5-6/08.)

- The Archivists’ Toolkit™ Roundtable petition (approved in February 2008), and how to respond in future to requests for product-specific roundtables.
• Various mentions in website and logo policy documents (2/10).

In addition, Council members and staff have identified other areas to address, including:

• Use of the SAA Membership Directory: Currently vendors may network with members if they are a member, but they may not use the directory for telephone or email solicitations.

• Suggesting program sessions: How do we avoid sales pitches masquerading as speeches, yet allow substantive sessions that provide solid information from vendors? How is a vendor with a product different from an institution with a product?

• Becoming an exhibitor: Is there any type of exhibitor we will not accept? If so, what is it? Is the exhibit venue the one where products should be discussed as opposed to during sessions? How does an exhibitor address a group of archivists all at once, rather than one-by-one in an exhibit hall? Do we allow exhibitors to rent rooms and speak to groups and get it on the program, or must they pay extra to do this, or may they not do it?

As we reviewed all the various areas in which vendors intersected with SAA, it became clear that members of Council could not do the amount of research and deliberation necessary to address this issue. In addition and in the interest of fairness, a task force that includes representatives from all of the stake-holding communities should produce a more universally acceptable result.

We are, therefore, recommending that a task force be charged to review existing policies, research other organizations’ policies (How do ARMA, AMIA, SLA, and ALA handle this?), and promulgate a policy that would assist the SAA staff and Council members in responding to these issues in the future.

Task Force work could include:

1. Define what a vendor (plus contractor and consultant?) is and provide real-life examples by answering such questions as:

   • Are grant-funded projects (such as the Archivist’s Toolkit™) that develop a product considered a vendor or do they only become vendors when they have a product for sale?

   • Does a vendor who is or was an archivist in a previous life have a special status?

   • Is an institution with a product a vendor, or is it only a vendor when it sells the product?

   • Are nonprofits vendors if they sell products? Does the situation change if the product is free?
• What are the differences between and among vendors, contractors, and consultants? Do these differences matter? This seems to have been a question in the past on the listserv.

• How can we clearly spell out what a vendor is and whether or not it is appropriate for vendors to mention their products, ask for help with product testing, or list sales, give aways, etc.?

2. Define the role for vendors in SAA: SAA traditionally has welcomed vendors into exhibitions and has allowed vendors to become both individual and institutional members. Do we see any reason why this should change? If so, how?

3. Define whether vendors may propose SAA program sessions and workshops by answering such questions as:

• How do we avoid sales pitches masquerading as speeches, yet allow substantive sessions that provide solid information from vendors?

• How is a vendor with a product different from an institution with a product? For example, how is Hollinger Metal Edge talking about boxes in a preservation session different from the Getty talking about AAT or from the Library of Congress talking about EAD in a description session?

• How do we avoid giving institutions with products an "unfair advantage" over vendors? Vendors have told SAA that they feel that institutions get unfair advantages in sharing information on their products that result in a de facto SAA endorsement of the products.

• How should we balance fair competition with the need to avoid becoming shills of corporations?

4. Define the role of vendors in roundtables, sections, committees, and working groups by asking questions such as:

• Are roundtables (sections, committees, task forces) focused on a product acceptable? What do we do about the ones that already exist if they are unacceptable?

• What standards or criteria should be followed in making these determinations?

• Do we demand some form of disclosure from those with something to sell, such as a special badge, a special membership status, or some other special indication that they may have a financial motive in their participation?

5. Vendors, contractors, and consultants as exhibitors:
• Is there any type of exhibitor we will not accept? If so, what is it?

• Is the exhibit venue the only one where products should be discussed, or can product discussion take place during sessions (or workshops), too?

• If products or services are discussed during sessions, workshops, or on listservs, how might this be done acceptably?

• How does an exhibitor address a group of archivists all at once, rather than one-by-one in an exhibit hall?

• Are there any special suggestions (or limits) we have (or want to impose) on questions after sessions or on comments during workshops?

• Will SAA provide any exemptions to nonprofits with a free product (or a product for sale) who wish to exhibit, or do exemptions promote unfair advantages?

6. Vendor participation in SAA listservs and networking groups:

• How do we define appropriate participation?

7. Vendor proposals for SAA publications, articles in Archival Outlook, and American Archivist:

• Do we want to spell out that advertisements must be paid for and may not be hidden within articles, chapters, or other mentions within SAA publications?

• Are there any types of ads that we will not accept? Is this clearly stated in an SAA policy that is easy to locate?

8. Define vendor use of the SAA membership directory and membership terms:

• How do most vendors, contractors, and consultants join SAA? What rules should they receive?

• How is vendor, contractor, and consultant behavior, such as direct solicitations to SAA members via the listservs and mailing list, handled?

• How are member complaints handled about inappropriate solicitations?

9. Define vendor naming opportunities:

• Is it appropriate for SAA to name awards, fellowships, sponsorships, events, etc. after for-profit organizations?
• If so, do we want to avoid some groups such as alcohol, tobacco, firearms, war profiteers, etc.? (See NARA’s policy on this.)

• Do we need a more specific policy?

10. Holding office:

• Is it appropriate to allow vendors who are or are not archivists to be nominated and run for office within SAA?

11. Any other issues and categories that arise during the research phase of the Task Force’s work.

**RECOMMENDATION**

THAT the SAA Council charge a Task Force, consisting of representatives from relevant stakeholder groups (institutions, vendors, individual members), to review existing SAA policies, research other organizations’ policies, and promulgate a balanced policy for SAA that would assist the SAA staff, Council members, and members to respond to the host of issues surrounding vendor participation in SAA programs, activities, groups, and listservs; and

THAT the Task Force present its final report and recommendations to the August 2011 Council meeting.

**Support Statement:** The Society should enter into an open discussion that enables us to develop a fair and even-handed policy that would allow the Society to address vendor participation in ways that benefits our members, the Society, and the vendors.

**Fiscal Impact:** Task Force meetings would be held largely via conference calls. Under $1,000 should be available for accessing resources during the research phase. The Task Force may require some SAA staff support.