

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
August 10, 2009
Austin, Texas**

**Action Item: Section and Roundtable Governance
(Prepared by Bruce Ambacher and Brian Doyle)**

BACKGROUND

As sections and roundtables increasingly use online balloting to elect group officers, a number of questions arise concerning best practices and uniformity of group governance across the Society. In recent months, Ambacher and Doyle became aware of several cases in which there appeared to be confusion about and/or discrepancies in the policies and procedures.

1. Roundtable Officers

A number of roundtables follow the practice of electing a vice chair/chair-elect, which is official policy for SAA Sections,¹ while others elect co-chairs. However, the policy governing roundtables² makes no reference to these practices, establishing only that “roundtables will annually elect an SAA member as the convener, who may also be known as the chair.”

2. Section and Roundtable Elections

Historically, sections and roundtables have conducted elections in person at their annual group meetings. The advent of online balloting enables participation by more members but also presents a variety of procedural questions for which there are no clear guidelines:

A. Ballot access and security: Online ballot systems, including VoteNet and SAA’s in-house system, require that eligible voters be identified and that a *static* selection be made based on member status. However, group membership rosters change daily as new members join and non-renewing members lapse. As a result, the selection of eligible voters at any given time is based on an arbitrary date value depending on when the final ballot is ready and when this selection is made. The practical challenge is determining whether and/or how to support ballot access for new or renewing members who are not included on these static lists at the time of selection.

B. Hybrid elections: In the past, some sections and roundtables have conducted in-person voting at the annual meeting in addition to using an online ballot. Other group

¹ Council Handbook, Section IX: Sections (VIII.A.4) <http://archivists.org/governance/handbook/section9.asp>

² Council Handbook, Section X: Roundtables, <http://www.archivists.org/governance/handbook/section10.asp>

bylaws allow for the request of a mail-in ballot. Combined with the limitations described above, SAA's information systems provide no mechanism to manage ballot security in these contexts.

3. Governance Manual and Section/Roundtable Bylaws

Several sections and roundtables conducted referendums with their online ballots to approve revisions to their group bylaws. Staff received a number of inquiries about the protocols for making these changes and whether Council and/or staff approval is required to propose changes to bylaws. In addition, consideration by the Council of adopting uniform procedures for section/roundtable elections may increase the chances for policy/procedural discrepancies.

Note: According to the Council Handbook:

- “Section bylaws are subject to review and comment by the Council.”
- “Roundtables may operate as formally or informally as suits their needs; they are not required to draw up bylaws.”

RECOMMENDATION 1

THAT Section X.V.A. of the Council Handbook be amended as follows:

Roundtables will annually elect one or two ~~an~~ SAA members as the chair/ co-chairs ~~convener~~, who may also be known as the convener/co-conveners ~~chair~~. ~~This person must be a member of SAA.~~ If a Roundtable chooses to elect a Vice Chair, the Vice Chair shall not be considered Chair-Elect. Only SAA members may serve as chairs or conveners. No person may serve as chair, co-chair, or convener of a Roundtable for more than three successive years. Only SAA members are eligible to vote for Roundtable conveners or other officers.

Support Statement: Section X.V.D. of the Council Handbook establishes that “it was never the desire in creating Roundtables to establish bodies that spend more time on the structure of doing business than on the discussion of archival issues within their fields of activity.” Due to the relatively small size of some Roundtables and the challenge of recruiting leaders, the current policy does not impose hierarchical governance structures and permits longer terms of service for conveners—up to 3 years. The Vice Chair/Chair-Elect model does not accommodate longer terms of service and, in at least one case, has created conflict over the nominations process. The recommendation supports the governance structures used by the majority of SAA Roundtables and clarifies procedures for conducting nominations and elections.

Fiscal Impact: None

RECOMMENDATION 2

THAT a new section be added to Section IX. (Sections) of the Council Handbook, following VIII.A.7., and that subsequent sections be renumbered accordingly:

B. Section Elections

- 1. Sections shall conduct annual elections via an online ballot system provided by the SAA staff. Members must vote via the online ballot.**
- 2. Formal calls for nominations shall be issued by the Section leadership and collected no later than May 31.**
- 3. Basic ballot information (e.g., introductory message to voters, listing of offices, number of vacancies for each, names of candidates, and links to candidate statements) shall be submitted to the SAA staff no later than June 15.**
- 4. Supplementary ballot information (e.g., candidate photos, biographies, and statements), if desired, shall be posted by the Section leaders to the Section website no later than June 30.**
- 5. Online ballots containing basic ballot information shall be prepared by staff and made accessible during the first week of July and shall remain open for at least two weeks.**
- 6. Section members who are in good standing on June 30 shall be eligible to vote. Members who join after this date shall be eligible to vote during the following year.**
- 7. Ballot results shall be reported by staff to the Section leaders in order to be announced at the Annual Meeting.**

AND

THAT [similar language, replacing “Section(s)” with “Roundtable(s)”] be added to Section X. (Roundtables) of the Council Handbook, following Section V., and that subsequent sections be renumbered accordingly.

Support Statement: Voting for and serving on section/roundtable steering committees are benefits of membership. Uniformity of governance procedures ensures that these benefits are delivered in a fair and consistent manner. In addition, clear guidelines assist leaders in focusing their energy on their group missions rather than administration tasks. Conducting online elections requires attention to certain technical details but also enables wider participation in sections and roundtables. The very low number of requests for mail ballots (i.e., 10) during SAA’s 2009 general election suggests that the barriers to online participation are far less than those related to holding in-person elections at the Annual Meeting.

Fiscal Impact: As of July 22, 2009, six sections and roundtables have requested support from SAA staff to conduct online elections. Configuration of ballots that include candidate photos, biographies, and statements can be time consuming, taking up to an hour or more per ballot. The impact on staff resources can be effectively mitigated by limiting the ballot to so-called “basic” information and utilizing links to (optional) supplementary information that is edited, formatted, and posted online by the section leaders themselves.