

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
January 25 – 27, 2012  
Chicago, Illinois**

**Action: Define “Working Group” in Governance Manual  
(Prepared by SAA Executive Director Nancy Beaumont)**

**BACKGROUND**

Within the context of a discussion among Council Liaison Donna McCrea and SAA staff about how to clarify the charge and description of the Cultural Property Working Group (see Agenda Item 0112-III-F-CPWG), McCrea pointed out that the Governance Manual currently does not define a “Working Group.”

**DISCUSSION**

Working Groups of the Council have been created by the Council as it has determined a need for a standing body of experts in a particular issue area. Working Groups differ from standing committees in that 1) they are populated with acknowledged experts in a given topic area and 2) their members may be reappointed indefinitely so that their expertise remains available to the Council. Working Groups differ from task forces in that their charge is ongoing and not (necessarily) time-limited. Working Groups are advisory to the Council and may be created and disbanded by the Council as appropriate. Currently the Council has four working groups:

- Communications Technology Working Group (CTWG, created in August 2007)
- Cultural Property Working Group (CPWG, created in August 2008)
- Government Affairs Working Group (GAWG, created in August 2008)
- Intellectual Property Working Group (IPWG, created in May 2001)

Although “Working Group” currently is not defined in the Governance Manual, the fairly consistent language in the descriptions of IPWG, GAWG, and CPWG points to the following needs:

- The need for a group of “experts” who can respond in a timely fashion to requests from or on behalf of the Council for background information and recommendations on matters relating to the group’s area of expertise.
- The need for a group to scan the environment and track issues that may be of interest or concern to archivists and to suggest whether SAA should respond to an issue.

- The need for a group to prepare drafts (for Executive Committee or Council approval) of position papers, statements, and/or other documents related to the issue area.
- The need for a group of experts to contribute to the education of SAA members and staff on the set of issues assigned to them.
- The need for a group of experts to bring to the Council’s attention areas in which collaboration with other organizations may advance SAA’s efforts related to the set of issues assigned to them.

The Intellectual Property Working Group was the first created and, as noted in the Council discussion item for creation of the Government Affairs Working Group (0808-III-B-GovtAffairsWG): “The model of a working group has been impressively successful as applied to intellectual property issues. Although public affairs issues are broader, having a group of experts dedicating time and attention to such matters would be a significant step forward over the current situation of relying primarily on the President (sometimes the Vice President) and the Executive Director to monitor items, draft statements or op-eds, determine recipients of communications, and find time to follow up.”

Among the Working Groups, the Communications Technology Working Group has been a bit of an outlier in that 1) its membership has changed based on tasks assigned via the Strategic Plan and 2) it has been chaired by a staff member (Brian Doyle). (See Agenda Item 0112-IV-I-CTWG.)

Because Council Working Groups specifically have been intended to be made up of acknowledged experts, they have not been included in the groups for which SAA members at large are encouraged to volunteer (i.e., via the annual Call for Volunteers issued by the SAA Vice President/President-Elect). On a number of occasions, however, Working Groups have been expanded or re-populated based on recommendations from the groups themselves.

There are also working groups that are advisory not to the SAA Council itself, but to SAA committees or boards, such as the Glossary Working Group (created by the Council in August 2011 as a subgroup of the Publications Board) and the *Native American Protocols* Forum Working Group (created by the Council in August 2008 as a joint working group of the Diversity Committee and the Native American Archives Roundtable for the purpose of planning and executing three public forums on the subject of the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*, with a final report due following the August 2011 forum).

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT the following definition of “Working Groups” be added to Section XIV of the Governance Manual:**

### **Working Groups**

## **Purpose**

**A Working Group may be created by the Council to monitor and address a set of issues that are important to the profession and/or to SAA. The Working Group's purpose is to provide timely expertise and advice to the Council. Working Groups:**

- **Respond in a timely fashion to requests from the Council for background information and recommendations on matters relating to the Group's area of expertise.**
- **Scan the environment and track issues that may be of interest or concern to archivists and suggest whether SAA should respond to an issue.**
- **Prepare drafts (for Executive Committee or Council approval) of position papers, statements, and/or other documents relating to the Group's issue(s) area.**
- **Contribute to the education of SAA members and staff on the set of issues assigned to them.**
- **Bring to the Council's attention areas in which collaboration with other organizations may advance SAA's efforts related to the set of issues assigned to them.**

## **Selection and Length of Term**

**Working Groups are composed of acknowledged experts in the issue areas assigned to them. In recognition that the type of expertise needed on a Working Group may be in short supply, there is no set term length for participation; members serve at the pleasure of the SAA Council.**

**Working Groups have no fixed size. The Council may adjust membership according to the availability of expertise and the group's anticipated workload. The Vice President/President-Elect, on behalf of the Council and with the recommendation of the Working Group, makes new appointments and terminates appointments as needed.**

**[Unlike other positions within SAA, there is no prohibition against a member of the Council serving on a Working Group because Working Groups are a creation of the Council and not of SAA as a whole.]** (Note: This language currently exists within the IPWG description.)

## **Reporting**

**Working Groups work closely with their Council liaisons and the Executive Director to ensure that they are responsive to the needs of the Council. In certain cases, when time is of the essence, Working Groups may communicate directly with the Executive Committee.**

**[Note: The Council may create working groups that are subgroups of standing committees or boards. These groups have specific assignments that are executed on**

**behalf of, and in conjunction with, the committee or board to which they report. Appointments are made per the policies and procedures that apply to standing committees and boards.]**

**Support Statement:** Providing a definition of “Working Groups” in SAA’s Governance Manual helps to distinguish this type of SAA body from other bodies (such as standing committees and task forces), ensure some measure of consistency across Working Group charges, and clarify their roles and responsibilities for existing groups. Defining a Working Group in SAA’s policy document will help Working Groups understand how to carry out work assigned to them and will distinguish this type of SAA body from other SAA bodies (such as committees or task forces). The description of each Working Group should be modified to be consistent with this definition.

**Impact on Strategic Priorities:** None.

**Fiscal Impact:** None.