

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
January 23 – 26, 2014  
Chicago, Illinois**

**Action: Annual Meeting Site Selection Policy  
(Prepared by Nancy Beaumont)**

**BACKGROUND**

Currently “on the books” is the following 1991 Council policy regarding Annual Meeting site selection ([http://www2.archivists.org/governance/handbook/appendices/app\\_a/AM-Sites](http://www2.archivists.org/governance/handbook/appendices/app_a/AM-Sites)):

**Policy on Choosing Annual Meeting Sites**

Planning SAA Annual Meetings is a year-round process. At any one time, five or six annual meetings are in various stages of development.

Recognizing the importance of a successful Annual Meeting to the Society, Council has established the following guidelines to assist the staff in identifying potential host cities and hotels:

Geography is a principle factor in choosing potential cities. With a national membership, it is important for SAA to move systematically around the country, from region to region.

A city needs to have these characteristics in order to host an SAA Annual Meeting:

1. at least one major hotel with sufficient meeting space and sleeping rooms to accommodate member expectations for an Annual Meeting, preferably in a downtown location;
2. a variety of cultural, educational, and recreational opportunities for archivists; and
3. a sufficient number of SAA members to serve on the Host Committee.

To maintain consistency on scheduling, the Annual Meeting will take place during the month of September, avoiding Jewish holidays, but setting the exact dates in order to secure the most favorable hotel rates and airfares.

The Society will attempt to schedule its Annual Meetings at least five years ahead for its own planning and to avoid conflicts with other associations that meet in the fall.

Within general guidelines, the staff is allowed great flexibility in negotiating with hotels. Council will be kept informed about the process and will, generally by accepting staff

recommendations, approve the selection of the city and a hotel for a particular Annual Meeting.

Once discussions with hotels have begun, even before a contract is signed, verbal commitments have been made by both parties and understandings arrived at. Such discussions will be terminated only for good reason, and in full consideration of the Society's ability to secure an acceptable alternate site and the future effects upon its reputation within the hotel and convention industry.

*Adopted by Council: June 1991*

At its August 2013 meeting, in the context of adopting [“Principles and Priorities for Continuously Improving the SAA Annual Meeting”](#) based on recommendations of the Annual Meeting Task Force, the Council asked that the current policy be revisited at its January 2014 meeting.

## **DISCUSSION**

Among the Council’s principles and priorities for continuously improving the SAA Annual Meeting are the following related to site selection:

### **Guiding Principles:**

- We will make every meeting as useful, affordable, accessible, and enjoyable as possible for all attendees.
- We will explore new locations, structure, and content for the Annual Meeting on an ongoing basis.
- We will embrace a culture of experimentation and will be willing to take calculated risks with respect to the Annual Meeting. No aspect of the meeting will be off limits based on “tradition.”
- We will continuously seek feedback from both attendees and non-attendees on all aspects of the meeting.

### **Priorities for Site Selection and Contract Requirements:**

- We will experiment with meeting in cities of varying sizes using a combination of a convention center and room blocks in several hotels at varying price points.
- We will reevaluate site selection criteria based on member input.
- We will facilitate inexpensive alternative housing (such as dormitories) whenever feasible.
- We will stipulate in all Requests for Proposals (RFPs) that free wireless access in meeting spaces is a key component of our needs.
- We will stipulate in all RFPs the importance of fair labor practices, sustainable (“green”) practices, and donation of excess food and beverage to worthy causes.
- Staff will actively monitor and report to the Council information about labor contracts and potential labor actions affecting the hotel sector.

To ensure that SAA’s principles, policies, and procedures regarding Annual Meeting site selection are consistent, the Council might choose to pursue one of the following options:

**1. Rescind the 1991 policy and rely on the August 2013 “Principles and Priorities” document to address Annual Meeting site selection.**

*Pro:* The “Principles” document stresses the importance of flexibility and experimentation when selecting Annual Meeting sites. If SAA intends to be nimble, the document may give sufficient guidance going forward. Procedural matters, such as the respective roles of the Council and the executive director in site selection, could be addressed within Section IV. Council and Section V. Executive Director of the Governance Manual.

*Con:* The 1991 policy includes several practical considerations and “teaching moments” that may be lost with substitution of the “Principles” document for the policy. For example:

- “Planning SAA Annual Meetings is a year-round process. At any one time, five or six annual meetings are in various stages of development.”
- “Recognizing the importance of a successful Annual Meeting to the Society....”
- “With a national membership, it is important for SAA to move systematically around the country, from region to region.”
- “To maintain consistency on [sic] scheduling, the Annual Meeting will take place....”
- “The Society will attempt to schedule its Annual Meetings at least five years ahead for its own planning and to avoid conflicts with other associations....”
- “Within general guidelines, the staff is allowed great flexibility in negotiating with hotels. Council will be kept informed about the process and will, generally by accepting staff recommendations, approve the selection of the city and a hotel for a particular Annual Meeting.”
- “Once discussions with hotels have begun, even before a contract is signed, verbal commitments have been made by both parties and understandings arrived at. Such discussions will be terminated only for good reason....”

**2. Revise the 1991 policy to reflect changes in SAA’s thinking and procedures, and provide reference within the revised policy to the 2013 “Principles and Priorities” document.**

*Pro:* Captures many aspects of “how we do the SAA Annual Meeting” in one place, thus potentially making this information more discoverable.

*Con:* Combines policies, principles, and procedures in a way that may be confusing for some. The “policy” may limit the extent to which the organization can be flexible and experimental with the Annual Meeting.

Should the Council choose Option 2, a proposed revision to the existing policy is provided here (strikethrough = deletion, underline = addition):

## Policy on ~~Choosing Annual Meeting Sites~~ Annual Meeting Site Selection

~~Planning for SAA Annual Meetings~~ is a year-round process. At any one time, up to five or six annual meetings are ~~are~~ may be in various stages of development (e.g., issuing of RFPs, contract negotiations, implementation).

~~Recognizing the importance of a successful Annual Meeting to the Society,~~ Because SAA relies heavily on the success of its annual meeting for both programmatic and financial reasons, the Council has established the following guidelines to assist the staff in identifying potential host cities and ~~hotels;~~ conference venues. These guidelines should be viewed in conjunction with “Principles and Priorities for Continuously Improving the SAA Annual Meeting,” originally adopted by the Council in August 2013 and as modified thereafter.

~~Geography is a principle factor in choosing potential cities. With~~ Because SAA has a national membership and is committed to providing an affordable and accessible meeting, it is important ~~for SAA to~~ that the annual meeting moves systematically around the country, from region to region.

~~A city needs to have these characteristics in order to host an SAA Annual Meeting;~~ Following are desirable characteristics of a host city and conference venue(s):

- ~~1. at least one major hotel with sufficient meeting space and sleeping rooms to accommodate member expectations for an Annual Meeting, preferably in a downtown location;~~
1. The city should offer a variety of cultural, educational, and recreational opportunities for archivists, preferably in a downtown location; ~~and~~
2. The city should provide affordable and accessible options for either 1) convention center meeting space plus an adequate number of hotel sleeping rooms at varying price points or 2) hotel meeting space plus an adequate number of sleeping rooms at varying price points.
3. There should be, within a reasonable commuting distance, a sufficient number of SAA members to serve on the Host Committee.

~~To maintain consistency on scheduling, the Annual Meeting will take place during the month of September, avoiding Jewish holidays, but setting the exact dates in order to secure the most favorable hotel rates and airfares.~~

~~The Society~~ When possible, SAA will attempt to schedule its Annual Meetings at least five years ahead in advance, both for its own planning purposes and to avoid scheduling conflicts with other associations. that meet in the fall.

~~To maintain consistency on~~ in scheduling, the ~~Annual Meeting~~ will take place during the month of between mid-July and early September, avoiding Jewish holidays, ~~but setting the exact d~~ Dates in order to should be determined based on securing the most favorable venue and hotel rates and airfares.

Within general guidelines, the staff is ~~allowed~~ permitted great flexibility in negotiating with venues and hotels. The Council will be kept informed about the process and will, generally by accepting staff recommendations, approve the selection of the city and a hotel conference venue(s) for a particular each Annual Meeting.

Once discussions with conference venues and hotels have begun, even before a contract is signed, verbal commitments may have been made by one or both parties. ~~and understandings arrived at.~~ Such discussions will be terminated only for good reason, and in full consideration of ~~the Society's~~ SAA's ability to secure an acceptable alternative site and the ~~future effects~~ potential for a measurable negative impact ~~upon~~ its reputation within the hotel and convention industry.

*Adopted by the SAA Council: June 1991; revised January 2014*

## RECOMMENDATION

### OPTION 1

**THAT Policy on Choosing Annual Meeting Sites, adopted by the Council in 1991, be rescinded.**

**Support Statement:** The policy is superseded by “Principles and Priorities for Continuously Improving the SAA Annual Meeting” (adopted by the Council in August 2013).

**Relation to Strategic Plan:** None.

**Fiscal Impact:** None.

### OPTION 2

**THAT Policy on Choosing Annual Meeting Sites, adopted by the Council in 1991, be revised as follows:**

[Insert revised text.]

**Support Statement:** The revision corrects out-of-date information and incorporates changes in the organization’s thinking about the Annual Meeting, including those reflected in “Principles and Priorities for Continuously Improving the SAA Annual Meeting” (adopted by the Council in August 2013).

**Relation to Strategic Plan:** Addresses Goal 4 (Meeting Members’ Needs) by increasing transparency about SAA policies and procedures.

**Fiscal Impact:** None.