

Best Practices for Committee and Task Force Chairs and Board Liaisons

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Committee and task force chairs play an important role in the Society for American Archaeology (SAA), and the SAA appreciates your service. This document provides guidance for chairs as they carry out the leadership responsibilities of a standing committee or a shorter-term task force. It also provides best practices for the liaisons from the SAA Board of Directors (Board) to these groups.

Charge of the Committee or Task Force

All committees and task forces (C/TFs) are given a specific charge by the Board that describes the function(s) to be carried out by each body in service to the Board and SAA. This charge can be found at

https://ecommerce.saa.org/SAA/SAAMember/Members_Only/Admin_Directory.aspx and in the Board meeting minutes. Sometimes charges also include a timeline, particularly for a TF. Every C&TF is assigned a Board liaison who can assist with any questions or concerns. As a C/TF chair, it is important that you know and understand the charge of your committee or task force, and that you maintain effective communication with your Board liaison. It is always best to ask for clarification of your charge if there is any uncertainty. It is imperative that there be no divergence between what the Board expects and the scope of work carried out by the C/TF.

Charges work differently for C/TFs. At times, the Board may offer additional charges to a standing committee, beyond those stated at the time of the committee's formation. Task forces are given a single charge and a deadline for completion of that charge. All TFs are sunsetted on the due date specified in their original motions, unless expressly given a new due date for a new specific purpose.

Activities Beyond the Board Charge

Many C/TFs wish to undertake activities related to their general charge that are not specifically requested by the Board. The most common example of this type of activity is sponsoring a topical paper/poster session, forum, or symposium at the SAA annual meeting. Each C/TF may sponsor one such event at the annual meeting, but it must go through the regular program review process. A C/TF chair should contact the Program Committee chair for more information about sponsoring a session, forum or symposium or other activity that needs to be scheduled at the SAA annual meeting. Other activities include authoring articles or special forums in *The SAA Archaeological Record* or other SAA publications. The publication of such articles is at the discretion of the magazine or journal editor. Such events and activities are encouraged as they help to elevate the profile of C/TFs with the membership and engage the members in their activities. These events may not, however, be designed to convey potential changes to or newly established SAA policies, procedures, principles, bylaws, or other formal governance/policy issues without prior consent of the Board. If you are considering other activities for your C/TF, consult with your Board liaison to ensure your activities don't first require Board approval or to find out how the Board can offer support.

Know the Committee/Task Forces Members and Rely on them

For Committee Chairs: When you begin as chair, get to know the members of your committee, learn about their backgrounds, and identify their strengths as they apply to the charges on which you'll be working. A face-to-face meeting at the SAA annual meeting is a prime opportunity to become acquainted. At this initial meeting, offer your ideas for leadership, and explain your leadership style and expectations for committee members.

While some responsibilities solely fall on the shoulders of the chair, the chair should rely on the expertise and experience of committee members.

- Know and understand that committee membership is cycled, that is, member terms end at different times to ensure that committee business continues smoothly. Be aware of when your committee members cycle off. Ideally only one-third or less of your members rotate off the committee in a given year;
- Consider gaps in expertise and how potential new members could best help fill them.
- Use your networks and collaborate with your Board liaison as needed to find appropriate committee members;
- In November of each year, new members can be selected either by application through the [SAA Open Call for committee service](#) or by a committee chair asking particular SAA members to serve on their committee;
- Check the charge of the committee for the requirements of the group composition. This may include specific requirements for certain committees, such as the inclusion of a student member and/or a minimum and maximum number of members; and,
- Chairs make recommendations on appointments to the Board liaison, who is responsible for approving appointments and conveying those names to the SAA for appointment. Chairs cannot officially appoint members to a committee.

For Task Force Chairs: One of the key responsibilities of being a TF Chair is recruiting its membership. Use your networks, but also consult with your Board liaison and the SAA President/Executive Director to help you identify potential members and other groups at SAA whose leadership might want to participate on the TF. The Board may include a list of suggested members for you to consider as well. Chairs may contact potential candidates about their interest in serving on the TF and then recommend those candidates to the Board liaison. If the individuals agree to serve, are approved by the Board liaison, and hold a current membership in the SAA, they may be appointed. Chairs cannot officially appoint members to a TF; Board liaisons make the final appointment.

When constituting a TF, chairs should consider the backgrounds and identify the strengths of potential members as they apply to the TF charge. Early in your contact with the TF, offer your ideas for leadership, and explain your leadership style and expectations for members. Task forces can go off track when chairs do not know the members well and/or do not communicate early and often with them.

Task Force recommendations are the most constructive and helpful to the Board when a TF:

- Avoids suggesting that the Board create a new standing committee and then detail activities that this non-existent group might do;
- Examines the existing structures at SAA and recommends how specifically these could be engaged in the service of the TF's charge; and,

- Seeks Board approval to undertake a specific activity to test the waters and provides data to the Board. For instance, instead of a TF recommending that the Board create a committee that could hold workshops, it would be more meaningful for the TF to seek Board approval to organize a workshop itself, validate the strength of membership interest, and help the Board address the concern(s) that led to the TF being authorized in the first instance.

For Committee and Task Force Chairs: When there are tasks for the C/TF, it is important that the chair identify strengths of different members and assign responsibilities to ensure that these tasks are completed. C/TFs can go off track when chairs do not know the members well and/or do not communicate early and often with them. At times, some C/TF members may not be as engaged as the chair would like; in those cases, reach out individually to that member and see what can be done to work collaboratively with the entire group. Be sure to communicate with your Board liaison if the working relationship between or among members is of concern. Moreover, lack of leadership and communication from a chair can cause confusion and cause members to be less involved.

Board Liaisons and their Responsibilities

Each committee (with the exception of specific awards committees, which report to the Committee on Awards and Scholarships) and task force is assigned a Board liaison by the SAA president. The assigned Board liaison will contact the C/TF chair to establish a line of communication. The tenure of this liaison will be one to three years, depending on other responsibilities of that Board member and their term of service. Ideally, the liaison will have several years with the C/TF to get to know the chair and membership. Good communication between the chair and the liaison is essential.

Board liaisons are at the service of the C/TF to facilitate good communication and advance each C/TF's work via the Board. Liaisons are not members of the C/TF and as such should not be tasked with committee business, but they are there to offer feedback and advice. If a C/TF would like to present a report or recommendation to the Board, please work directly with your liaison so she/he can effectively advocate on your behalf.

Liaisons assigned to C/TFs must maintain an open dialog with those chairs, particularly about the Board's actions with regard to those C/TFs. As part of this, liaisons must:

- attend assigned C/TF meetings at the annual meeting or any other meetings the C/TF has between annual meetings, if the liaison's schedule allows;
- get to know the C/TF, its members, and keep abreast of what occurs within the group;
- receive from the previous Board liaison any pertinent information that will aid in being a productive facilitator between the Board and C/TF;
- work with C/TF chairs on appointments to the C/TF as well as develop chair nominations for Board consideration as vacancies occur;
- review C/TF reports before they are submitted to the Board and ensure that C/TF reports and budget requests are submitted to the Board on the current year's schedule; and,
- provide the C/TF chair with any Board motions specific to a C/TF and a summary of any Board actions related to or of interest to the C/TF.

Committee and Task Force Meetings

Good, regular communication between members is essential for C/TF success. Generally, C/TFs meet face-to-face once a year at the SAA annual meeting. If the chair requested space the previous August or September (based on a prompt by the SAA; see calendar below), there will be meeting space provided by the SAA. At all meetings, the chair should prepare an agenda to distribute ahead of time and assign someone to take meeting minutes.

Throughout the year, the activities of the C/TF may require other meetings through email, telephonic conferences, Skype, virtual platforms such as Zoom, and so forth. Meeting virtually can also keep your committee on track and engaged. Some C/TFs use shared document spaces or create closed groups on social media to facilitate conversation among members. There are no restrictions or policies on such activities.

Scheduled Reports to the Board

C/TF chairs have a responsibility to provide a report to the Board once a year. These reports are normally due in January and familiarize Board members with the activities of the C/TF and any issues they need to consider at the spring Board meeting, which is held at the SAA annual meeting or virtually. In reports to the Board, it is important to highlight the general progress of the C/TF, but also identify and explain any items that require action by the Board (“Action Items”). For example, if a C/TF would like to undertake a study or prepare a document on behalf of the SAA, such activities would require Board approval before they could begin. If an Action Item requires a financial obligation by the SAA, the Board also needs to approve a budget (see below). Prior to submitting a report to the Board, please share a draft and any proposed Board actions with your Board liaison for feedback.

There are two other times information is requested from C/TF chairs. In the fall (normally September or late August), chairs are also required to submit a report if they are requesting funds for the following calendar year budget. These will be reviewed at the fall Board meeting, which usually takes place in October. In the fall (normally August or September), chairs are required to submit a meeting space request for the annual meeting the following spring. C/TF chairs will receive email notifications from the executive director with directions about these reports and requests.

Meeting with the Board

At the annual meeting, there is a Board-hosted breakfast for C/TF chairs, typically Saturday from 7 to 8 a.m., so as not to conflict with sessions. The gathering serves to thank C/TF chairs and to offer networking opportunities among chairs and Board members. The breakfast is an opportunity for the Board to communicate important information to chairs and get to know one another in a more casual setting. Feel free to bring questions and comments to the meeting. Also realize your Board liaison works with multiple C/TFs and, at the breakfast, they’ll want to spend some time with each chair, to the extent possible. If you need a longer conversation with your liaison, it’s best to schedule time outside this breakfast.

C/TF chairs can also request to meet with the entire Board to discuss a particular issue at a virtual Board meeting. This request should go through your Board liaison. Similarly, the Board may request a C/TF chair to join a Board meeting if there are issues requiring a conversation.

Guidance on Communication on Behalf of the SAA

Only the President and Executive Director of the SAA may officially speak on behalf of the SAA. The Executive Director generally speaks to administrative matters, while the President speaks to archaeological matters. C/TFs may help draft letters on behalf of the SAA, but draft statements must be sent through the Board liaison to the President and Executive Director for review prior to distribution under the signature of the President. C/TF chairs should not send letters to outside groups in their role as chair, as this may imply speaking for the SAA.

Communication includes “speaking” through social media. Below is some other guidance related to communication outside of your C/TF:

- If you are approached by the media, direct them to the main SAA office (see [Contact SAA Staff](#) page) and to contact the Manager, Communications and Fundraising, to describe the approach.
- Don’t share the details of C/TF work through your own personal email and social media accounts. The workings of C/TFs are not for public dissemination until approved by the Board.
- Send any social media post ideas to the SAA Manager, Communications and Fundraising, for posting on the Society’s Facebook page or Twitter account.
- Retweet and share SAA initiatives and activities through your own personal social media accounts. Sending messages promoting SAA events, initiatives, and activities by your C/TF and others to your friends and followers is a great way to promote the SAA.

Planning for Chair Succession--Committees Only

Standing and Advisory committees of the SAA are permanent (either based on bylaws requirements or the wishes of the Board), and chairs may serve one or two 3-year terms. A second term is not automatic and requires reappointment by the Board. If a chair is cycling off a committee, it is important that he or she work closely and communicate with the incoming chair so that there is a seamless transition in leadership. Normally new chairs are appointed at the fall Board meeting prior to a chair cycling off at the annual meeting in the spring.

The outgoing chair should share with the new chair any documents of the committee, offer a history of what the committee has done to date, and identify ongoing business. Many chairs now use file-sharing programs like Dropbox, Box, or Google Drive to pass relevant documents to the next chair. Some committees also have scanned older documents and placed them in these electronic file-sharing services. See the “SAA Archive” section below about the responsibilities of C/TFs for archiving SAA official records.

The outgoing chair and Board liaison should also ensure that the incoming chair is familiar with the charge of the committee and the current composition of the committee membership. Normally, during this transition, there will be some members cycling off and new members being appointed. It is preferable that outgoing and incoming chairs work together on making recommendations on new members to a committee.

Conflict of Interest and Leadership Considerations

All individuals involved in SAA leadership at the Board, Committee, and Task Force levels should be vigilant regarding possible conflicts of interest. To be sure, your professional and

personal networks in the archaeological community are an important part of who you are and are an essential resource in your ability to serve the SAA. We all reach out and tap our networks to research issues, seek advice or suggestions, and ask for help. The SAA encourages the development of networks and indeed is one of the contexts in which we build those networks. We also need to be careful how we use and engage in our networks, particularly because the archaeological community is a relatively small one. In your role as C/TF chair (or Board liaison) it is imperative that you guard not just against actual conflict of interest but also potential perceived conflict of interest by the broader SAA membership. Please remember that the optics and appearance of a situation can sometimes present problems as significant as an actual conflict. If you are concerned about a potential conflict of interest, please reach out to the SAA President and/or Executive Director for advice. Additionally, do not hesitate to disclose a potential conflict of interest and recuse yourself from deliberations, if appropriate. In this matter it is often best to be overly cautious than risk creating a difficult situation.

Committee and Task Force chairs are required to certify the following:

(a) I am not and have not ever been the subject of a discrimination or harassment lawsuit or related administrative complaint that resulted in an adverse finding; and

(b) I do not have and have not had a current or pending disciplinary action such as suspension or termination of registration, resulting from a Register of Professional Archaeologists' grievance investigation.

SAA Archive

The purpose of the SAA archive, curated at the National Anthropological Archives (NAA), is to retain official records that document the history of archaeology in the Americas; the organization's accomplishments and contributions to the major debates about practice, methods, and knowledge of the field; and to record the history of the SAA. Therefore, official records as identified in the [SAA Scope of Collection Statement](#) (Scope) and pertaining to C/TF activities must be preserved for future research and other uses.

There are various official records created by a C/TF as part of their mission or Board charge that are submitted to the Board for approval and are included in the Board books, which are archived as such. These include guidelines, policies, and best practices, as well as annual reports to the Board. It is expected that the C/TF chair knows what records they have submitted to the Board during their term as chair. There are other official records, such as C/TF meeting notes, significant correspondence on critical issues related to the C/TF, draft letters for signature by the SAA president, and white papers, which must be archived according to the Scope. Drafts of such products are not typically archived unless there have been substantial changes, such as between the first and final drafts.

The C/TF chair submits these additional records in digital format (PDF/A) to the SAA Archive Committee within six (6) months after the end of their term or on an annual basis, if that is preferred (a reminder will be sent by the Archive Committee chair with instructions). The C/TF chair must also provide the Archive Committee with an inventory of the records submitted

following the categories in the “Types of Records to be Archived” section of the Scope, along with the record format. The inventory should be an Excel file.

If a particular committee is supported by a SAA staff member¹, the chair should consult with that staff member about what records the committee chair should submit to the Archive Committee. This is critical to prevent duplication of records submitted, since the SAA staff member also is responsible for submitting official records related to his/her job and committee support. Once C/TF chairs submit records and an inventory, the SAA Archive Committee reviews, accepts or discards, and transfers the appropriate records to NAA.

The webpage about each C/TF is preserved when the SAA webmaster saves a copy of the overall SAA website on an annual basis and sends it to the NAA to be archived.

Important Deadlines and Dates during the Year (starts at the annual meeting in March/April)

March/April

Face-to-face committee meeting at annual meeting.

May

If an outgoing C/TF chair, the current Archive Committee chair will send a reminder requesting appropriate records to be sent within the next 6 months.

August

Request from SAA staff any physical meeting space at the next year’s annual meeting.

September

Submit report to the Board for its fall Board meeting (normally only required if you have action items, such as a budget request, for Board consideration). Send any budget requests for the upcoming year’s budget.

November

SAA staff starts “Open Call” for committee members.

December/January

Chair receives names of applicants for new committee member seats from "Open call" for committee service. Chair selects incoming members from list provided by SAA staff. If the "Open call" for committee members does not provide enough names, chair may use her/his personal network or consult with committee members and the Board liaison to identify possible new members for the committee. All names of new committee members go to the Board liaison for approval. Once approved, chair notifies those selected and those not selected. SAA staff sends appointment letters to those selected to serve.

January/February

Submit report to the Board for its spring Board meeting (required of all C&TF chairs).

¹ The Committees that are supported by SAA staff members are: Annual Meeting Program, Council of Allied Societies, Ethics, Fundraising, Government Affairs, International Government Affairs, Investment and Finance, Media Relations, Local Advisory, Publications, Public Education, and Repatriation.