

## Best Practices for Committee and Task Force Chairs and Board Liaisons

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Being a Society for American Archaeology (SAA) task force or committee chair is a big responsibility and the SAA appreciates your service. This brief document is designed to offer best practices guidance for chairs as they either carry on the leadership responsibilities of a standing committee or a shorter-term task force. It also provides guidance for Board liaisons to these groups.

### **Charge of the Committee or Task Force**

When the SAA Board of Directors (Board) establishes a committee or task force, they write an explicit charge that states what is to be the work of that body and the function(s) it will carry out in service to the Board of Directors and SAA. This charge can be found on [saa.org](http://saa.org) and in the Board meeting minutes. Sometimes charges also include a timeline. Committees and task forces (C&TFs) do the work of the Society through the implementation of the charge(s) of the Board. First and foremost, ensure that you know, understand, and refer back to the charge of the committee or task force. It is extremely important that there is good communication between the Board and C&TFs to ensure they work in sync together. It is always best to ask for clarification of your charge if there is any uncertainty. Reach out to your Board liaison. It is imperative that there be no divergence between what the Board expects and what the committee or task force is doing.

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 are dissolved once that charge is complete. If a task force identifies an area or issues needing ongoing work, the Board may give that work as a charge to a standing committee, or form a new task force with a new charge.

### **Activities Beyond the Board Charge**

Many Committees/Task Forces 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 the sponsoring of a topical paper/poster session, forum, or workshop at the SAA annual meeting. Each Committee/Task Force may sponsor one such event at the annual meeting, but it must go through the regular program review process. Other similar activities include authoring articles or special forums in *The SAA Archaeological Record* or other SAA Publication. 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 committees/task forces with the membership and engage the members in their activities. These events may not, however, be designed to convey potential changes 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 committee/task force, be sure to consult with your Board liaison, to insure your activities don't first require Board approval, or to find out if the Board can offer some kind of 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 do this. At this initial meeting, offer your ideas for leadership, and explain your leadership style and expectations for committee members. Committees can go off track when chairs do not know committee members well and/or do not communicate early and often with them. Moreover, lack of leadership and communication from a chair can cause confusion and disengagement in committee members.

While some responsibilities solely fall on the shoulders of the chair, the chair should rely on the expertise and experience of committee membership. Know and understand the cycle of committee membership and when members cycle off. Consider what gaps there are in expertise and what potential new members could best help fill them. Use your networks and work with your Board liaison as needed to find appropriate committee members. In November of each year, new members can be appointed either by application through the SAA Open Call system or by a committee chair asking particular SAA members to serve on their committee. Please check the charge of the committee/task force for the requirements of the group composition. Depending on the committee/task force this may include specific requirements, such as the inclusion of a student member, and/or a minimum and maximum number of members. 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 Task Force 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 Task Force. The Board may include a list of suggested members for you to consider as well. Chairs make recommendations on appointments to the Board liaison for potential candidates about their interest in serving the committee. If these individuals agree to serve, are approved by the Board liaison, and hold a current membership in the society, they may be appointed. Chairs cannot officially appoint members to a task force.

When constituting a task force, please consider the backgrounds and identify the strengths of potential members as they apply to the charges on which you'll be working. Early in your contact with the task force offer your ideas for leadership, and explain your leadership style and expectations for committee members. Task forces and committees can go off track when chairs do not know committee members well and/or do not communicate early and often with them. Moreover, lack of leadership and communication from a chair can cause confusion and disengagement in task force members.

For Task Force recommendations to be most constructive and helpful to the Board, it is advised that the task force members avoid suggesting that the Board create a new standing committee and then detail activities that this non-existent group might do. Task Forces can make more impact and larger contributions by examining the existing structures at SAA and recommending

how specifically these could be engaged in the service of the Task Force's charge. Alternatively, Task Forces could seek Board approval to undertake a specific activity to test the waters and provide data to the Board. For instance, instead of a Task Force recommending that the Board create a committee that could hold workshops, it would be more meaningful for the Task Force 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 Task Force being authorized in the first instance.

***For Committee and Task Force Chairs:*** When there are tasks for the task force or committee, it is important that the chair identify strengths of different members and assign responsibilities to ensure that these tasks are completed. At times, some committee or task force 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 together with the entire group. If a particular member of a task force or committee becomes a problem in some way, please reach out to your Board liaison.

### **Board Liaisons and their Responsibilities**

Each committee (with the exception of specific awards committees, which report to the Awards Committee) and task force has an assigned Board liaison. 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 committee or task force 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 committee to help facilitate good communication with the Board. Liaisons are not members of the committee or task force and as such should not be tasked with committee business; but they are there to help offer feedback and advice. If a task force or committee would like to present a report or recommendation to the Board, please work with the liaison to do that.

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

- attend assigned committee and task force meetings at the annual meeting
- get to know the committee or task force, its members, and keep abreast of what occurs within the group
- receive from the previous Board liaison any pertinent information which will aid in being a productive facilitator between the Board and task force or committee
- work with committee chairs on appointments to the committee as well as develop chair nominations for Board consideration as vacancies occur.
- ensure that committee reports and budget requests are submitted to the Board on a timely basis
- provide a summary of any Board actions related to or of interest to the committee or task force chair.

### **Task Force and Committee Meetings**

Generally, task forces and committees 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, and see calendar below), there will be meeting space provided by the Society. At all meetings,

the chair should prepare an agenda to distribute ahead of time and assign someone to take minutes or notes of the meeting.

Throughout the year, the activities of the committee/task force may require other meetings, through email, telephonic conferences, Skype, and so forth. Good, regular communication between members is essential for success. Some committees/task forces 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**

Chairs have a responsibility to provide reports to the Board once a year. These reports are normally due in January and allow Board members to familiarize themselves with the activities of the committee and any issues they need to consider at the spring Board meeting, which is held at the SAA annual meeting. In reports to the Board, it is important to highlight not only the general progress of the task force or committee, but also to identify and explain any items that required action by the Board (“Action Items”). For example, if a committee 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 would also need to approve a budget (see below). Prior to submitting a report to the Board, we suggest sharing it and any proposed Board actions with your Board liaison for feedback.

There are two other times information is requested, as appropriate, 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 September or late August), chairs are required to submit a meeting space request for the annual meeting the following spring.

### **Meeting with the Board**

At the annual meeting, there is a board-hosted breakfast (typically Saturday from 7am-8am, so as not to conflict with sessions) both 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 also 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 committees/task forces and at the breakfast they’ll want to connect with all of them if 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 at their spring meeting to discuss a particular issue. This request must come well in advance so time can be allotted in the Board agenda. This request can go through your Board liaison. Similarly, the Board may request a committee or task force chair to come to a Board meeting if there are issues requiring a face-to-face conversation. It may not be possible to request a specific day or time for a meeting with the Board. Board meetings take place all day Wednesday and Saturday at the annual meeting.

### **Guidance on Communication on Behalf of the SAA**

It is important to note that only the President and Executive Director of the SAA may speak for the society. 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 society, but that draft must be sent through the Board liaison to the President and Executive Director for review prior to it being distributed under the signature of the President. Committee and Task Force chairs should not send letters to outside groups in their role as chair, as this may convey speaking for the SAA. Communication includes “speaking” through social media. Below is some other guidance related to communication outside of your task force or committee:

- If you are approached by the media, we recommend directing them to the main SAA office and contacting the Manager, Communications and Fundraising to describe the approach.
- Don’t share the details of C&TF work through your own personal accounts. The workings of C&TFs is not for public dissemination until approved by the Board.
- Do send any social media post ideas to the SAA Manager, Communications and Fundraising Communication for posting on the Society’s Facebook page or Twitter account.
- Do retweet and share SAA initiatives and activities through your own personal media account. Messages promoting SAA events, initiatives, and activities by your committee/task force and others to your friends and followers is a great way to promote the SAA.

### **Planning for Chair Succession--Committees Only**

Task forces generally are short-lived, as they have been charged with a specific task by the Board. Standing and Advisory committees of the society, however, 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 does require reappointment. If a chair is cycling off a committee, it is important that he or she work closely 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 any documents of the committee, offer a history of what the committee has done to date, and identify on-going 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. This is ideal, as the SAA does not archive committee documents.

The out-going chair should also ensure that the in-coming 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.

### **Important Deadlines and Dates during the Year**

#### **January**

Submission of names of new committee members to committee liaison for appointment  
Finalization of committee membership from Open Call; chairs must send emails to those not selected to serve. Staff will send appointment letters to those selected to serve.

**January/February**

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

**March/April**

Face-to-face committee meeting at annual meeting

**September**

Deadline for submission of report to the Board for its fall Board meeting (normally only required if you have action items for Board consideration)

Deadline for submission of budget requests for the upcoming year's budget

Deadline for submission of space requests for meeting space at the annual meeting for your committee or task force

**November**

SAA Open Call for committee members

**December**

Chair receive names of applicants for new committee member seats

**Conflict of Interest 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 Society. We all reach out and tap our networks to research issues, seek advice or suggestions, and ask for help. The Society encourages the development of our 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 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 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.