Agenda Item IV.B.

Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
May 16–17, 2017
Chicago, Illinois

Create Task Force on Research (Data) and Evaluation

(Prepared by Dennis Meissner, Kris Kiesling, and Nancy Beaumont)

BACKGROUND

At its November 2016 meeting the Council discussed a proposal by Immediate Past President Dennis Meissner to create an SAA Committee on Research and Evaluation (1116-V-A-CORE). As noted there:

> The point of CORE would be to provide a standing entity that would be responsible for conducting or facilitating research that is practical, meaningful, and useful for SAA and the archival community. It would strive to gather, manage, and surface quantitative and qualitative information of strategic value for advocacy, awareness, relevance, audience service, and community engagement.

The concept of forming such a group also was proposed in Meissner's 2016 Presidential Address.

And included in SAA's Strategic Plan are two strategies that address the idea of expanding SAA's capacity to address research and evaluation:

- Strategy 1.2.4.A. Apply for IMLS National Leadership Grant to fund "Toward a More Data Informed Profession."

- Strategy 1.2.4.B. Publish a periodic compilation of data re the "state of America's archives" using metrics such as employment rates, salaries, funding for archives, media citations, etc.

DISCUSSION

Since conduct of the Archival Census and Education Needs Survey in the U.S. (A*CENSUS) in 2004, SAA has struggled with finding (or assigning) the resources necessary to support data gathering and evaluation. Two preliminary proposals to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (which funded A*CENSUS)—one for a reprise of A*CENSUS and the second for a $50,000 planning grant to fund "Becoming a More Data-Informed Profession"—were not successful. In light of the stumbling block associated with external funding, we have tended to put aside the larger issue of whether SAA should "champion, organize, prioritize, or resource the

sorts of research efforts that can materially benefit SAA. As a result, while we may have many projects going on in members' repositories or in professional collaborations that produce useful results, we lack a means to approach them strategically so as to achieve results that are cumulative or that provide models for members to adopt."[1]

Our intent in the proposed charge for a Task Force on Research (or Data) and Evaluation is to keep things simple, to give the group some leeway in how it reaches its recommendations, and to stimulate a relatively quick decision-making process.

In "Purpose" and "Duties and Responsibilities" we suggest that the Task Force might undertake one or two pilot projects as a means of testing initial assumptions and incrementally developing a potential operational model for a standing body. A promising initial project could be a revisiting of A*CENSUS that would refocus its data points and test more economical and agile survey methods. Other projects during the Task Force's tenure might be developing an institutional assessment toolkit for archival repositories or developing learning tools on data gathering and assessment for repositories.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT a Task Force on Research (Data) and Evaluation be charged per the following description, with a final report date of not later than November 2018.

SAA Task Force on Research (Data) and Evaluation

I. Purpose

The Task Force on Research (Data) and Evaluation is responsible for exploring the feasibility of creating a standing body within SAA to conduct, facilitate, and/or evaluate research that is practical, useful, and meaningful for SAA and the archival community. The Task Force may take on one or more pilot projects if it believes that this experience would aid in making recommendations about a standing body.

II. Selection, Size, and Length of Term

The Task Force is charged for an 18-month period that begins in May 2017 and continues through the Council's November 2018 meeting.

The Task Force will comprise six SAA members, one of whom will serve as chair. Task Force members will be appointed by the vice president/president-elect.

III. Reporting Procedures

The Task Force chair will prepare a written status report for each of the Council's spring and winter meetings, and will prepare for Council consideration at its fall/winter 2018 meeting a final

[1] From Meissner's discussion item at the November 2016 Council meeting: http://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/1116-V-A-CORE.pdf.

written report with recommendations. Should the Task Force recommend that a standing group be created, it should include in its final report a draft charge/description for that group.

IV. Duties and Responsibilities

To fulfill its purpose as described above, the Task Force is specifically charged to:

- Determine whether sufficient need exists to justify the effort and costs associated with establishing a standing body to conduct, facilitate, and/or evaluate research that is meaningful for SAA and the archival community.
- Determine how such a standing body should be structured, staffed, and governed.
- Determine how such a standing body might be financed and supported.
- Propose how such a standing body might interact with other SAA groups.
- Propose how such a standing body might interact with external groups.

In addition to the deliberative work assigned above, the Task Force should actively pursue one or two pilot projects as a means of 1) testing initial assumptions and 2) incrementally developing a potential operational model for a standing body.

Reference: See "Proposal for a Committee on Research and Evaluation"—and particularly "A Conceptual Framework" on pages 3-5 of that document—prepared by Immediate Past President Dennis Meissner for the November 2016 SAA Council meeting.

V. Meetings

The Task Force will carry out its charge primarily via electronic mail, conference calls, online meetings, and face-to-face meetings held in conjunction with the SAA Annual Meeting. Should the Task Force determine that an additional face-to-face meeting would be beneficial, it must apply to the Council (through the Executive Office) for funding.

Support Statement: Many organizations have created standing research arms within their operating structures to commission, gather, and evaluate information that is critical for their members in better serving their audiences, demonstrating their value to society, and expanding their professional knowledge base. The Council seeks advice and recommendations from a task force charged specifically to evaluate whether sufficient need exists to justify the effort and costs associated with establishing a standing body within SAA to conduct, facilitate, and/or evaluate research that is meaningful to SAA and the archival community and, if so, how such a group might be structured, financed, and supported.

Fiscal Impact: None unless funding for a face-to-face meeting is specifically requested.