

Society of American Archivists

Briefing Paper: Council-Proposed Motion to Implement a Member Dues Increase, Effective July 1, 2016

This briefing paper was developed to inform the November 2015 online member referendum on a Council-proposed motion to implement a member dues increase, effective July 1, 2016.

SUMMARY

Having considered at length SAA's strategic goals and financial resources, the SAA Council voted at its May 2015 meeting to propose to the membership a dues increase to take effect beginning July 1, 2016. A proposed dues schedule was issued for member comment during and after the Annual Business (Membership) Meeting conducted in Cleveland, Ohio, on August 22, and was modified based on member comments. The increase would apply to most member categories and would be implemented over a three-year period. The proposal is based on the Council's unanimous support for maintaining a growth strategy for SAA as measured by the quality of its member services and the Society's leadership role on behalf of archivists and the archives profession. The Council proposes to the membership the following motion for approval.

MOTION: THAT an increase in SAA member dues be implemented over a three-year period, beginning July 1, 2016, according to the following schedule:

Membership Category	Current Dues (FY2016)	Proposed Dues (FY2017)	Proposed Dues (FY2018)	Proposed Dues (FY2019)
Retired	\$70	\$73	\$75	\$77
Bridge	\$50	\$52	\$53	\$55
Student	\$50	\$52	\$53	\$55
ID1 (part-time)	\$80	\$80	\$80	\$80
ID2 (\$20-\$29k/yr)	\$105	\$105	\$105	\$105
ID3 (\$30-\$39k/yr)	\$130	\$133	\$136	\$140
ID4 (\$40-\$49k/yr)	\$160	\$164	\$169	\$174
ID5 (\$50-\$59k/yr)	\$200	\$206	\$212	\$218
ID6 (\$60-\$74k/yr)	\$225	\$233	\$241	\$250
ID7 (\$75-\$89,999/yr)	\$250	\$265	\$275	\$285
ID8 (>\$90k/yr)*	\$250*	\$292	\$310	\$325
Regular	\$300	\$320	\$330	\$340
Sustaining	\$550	\$565	\$580	\$595
Associate Domestic	\$100	\$105	\$110	\$115
Associate International	\$125	\$130	\$135	\$145

** Currently there is no ID8 category. Presumably individuals who would be in this category are currently in the ID7 category.*

PROPOSED BY: The SAA Council.

SUPPORT STATEMENT: SAA has set itself on a growth-oriented path with an ambitious five-year Strategic Plan, healthy but leveling membership numbers, a high-demand education program, a publications program that is working toward a successful e-publishing business model, and nascent advocacy and public awareness efforts. This growth strategy can be sustained only if SAA maintains an appropriate balance of revenues from both member dues and non-dues sources (i.e., product and service sales). The table lays out the proposed dues schedule, which would be implemented over a three-year period. In response to member comments, the schedule includes a new ID8 category for members earning \$90,000 or more per year and moves toward a more progressive dues schedule (based on the percentage of her/his income a member would pay in dues) by freezing dues in the ID1 and ID2 categories for the implementation period and adjusting the dues rates for other categories. The Council believes that the proposal is consistent with SAA's core organizational values and is necessary to achieve SAA's mission.

FISCAL IMPACT: Assuming no decline in membership, the proposed three-year increase would yield an additional \$42,870 in dues revenue by the end of FY 2017, an additional \$69,184 by the end of FY 2018, and an additional \$97,525 by the end of FY 2019. This proposal not only provides support for the Society's routine operations but also will generate a modest yearly contribution to reserves (in the range of 3% to 6%) to support continued advances in technology and communication and future member services. It is not possible to estimate at this time how many members may drop their memberships as a result of a dues increase.

BACKGROUND

The scheduled conclusion of approved dues increases in FY 2014 caused the SAA Finance Committee to examine the Society's capacity to provide a solid financial plan to support SAA's ambitious strategic direction. The Committee has been especially aware of the importance of member dues in SAA's finances and of its charge to "...annually review SAA dues and dues revenue to assure SAA's long-term financial stability." The Committee considered the appropriateness, scope, timing, and financial details of a dues revision at each of its in-person meetings in 2012, 2013, and 2014 and via several conference calls during which the group discussed the financial resources needed to ensure SAA's future stability.

The Committee [recommended](#) to the Council in November 2014 that a three-year stepped dues adjustment be implemented, effective July 1, 2016. At that time the Council affirmed the need to move forward with a dues increase proposal, pending some revisions of the dues schedule. At its May 2015 meeting, the Council discussed a [proposed dues schedule](#) and voted unanimously to bring the proposal forward to an all-member referendum in 2015. SAA's [Bylaws](#) state that member dues changes must be discussed at the Annual Business Meeting prior to conducting a referendum. At its November 8-10, 2015, meeting the Council approved a dues schedule that was revised based on member comments received during and after the 2015 Annual Business Meeting. See the Council's discussion document [here](#), and note in particular (on pages 4-6) the various scenarios that were explored.

The motion is presented to eligible voting members via an online referendum to be initiated between 60 and 90 days after the Annual Business Meeting (e.g., on or before November 20, 2015).

DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS

The SAA Council, which bears fiduciary responsibility for the organization, believes that implementation of a modest dues increase in July 2016 is critical to SAA's ongoing financial stability. The proposed schedule addresses cost-of-business increases since the last dues change ending in FY 2014 and accommodates forecasted changes in non-dues revenue streams, including publications and annual meetings. Implementing the increase over a three-year period enables SAA to budget accordingly and to develop programs and implement technology enhancements with some measure of predictable income. A planned increase also minimizes the risk of financial crisis and reactionary budgeting.

The Council's original proposal was modified in response to member feedback that 1) an ID8 category be created to acknowledge that some archivists' salaries are well above the \$75,000 that previously was the maximum salary reflected in the dues schedule (in the ID7 category) and 2) SAA should move to a more fully "progressive" dues structure based on an equivalent percentage of salary applied across all categories. The Finance Committee and Council acknowledge that the proposed schedule moves toward a more progressive structure, but does not (yet) fully achieve that goal based on the critical need to maintain the dues income forecasted in years 1 to 3 to support SAA's strategic plans and operational needs and to minimize the risk of attrition among the member categories that comprise approximately 51% of dues revenue.

As a result, in part, of the resources derived from the 2011-2014 dues increase, SAA has been able to 1) invest in development of a robust professional education program; 2) experiment with e-publishing and annual meeting models in response to member feedback; 3) launch new advocacy and public awareness initiatives; 4) take steps to make the SAA website more functional, accessible, and content-rich; and 5) create a reserve that will enable purchase of a more nimble and functional association management software system. Technology is expensive, and we must maintain a steady (predictable) investment in it or risk spending money on temporary, patchwork responses to members' needs.

To sustain its overall growth, SAA must have a baseline measure of predictable income (i.e., dues) so that the organization is not overly reliant on the increasing success of such revenue-producing products and services as publications, workshops, and annual meetings and so that it can continue to invest in its infrastructure and technology to support the programs that address member needs and interests.

- Members are turning to SAA for continuing education in record numbers as career opportunities widen. SAA must continue to enhance its education offerings and upgrade methods of delivery. Capacity is stretched thin currently; the human talent is in place and technology/infrastructure solutions to expand capacity are within our grasp. Building on the DAS model, for example, SAA is poised to launch additional certificate programs, beginning with Arrangement and Description in early 2016.
- Based on member feedback, SAA is experimenting with new locations and models for the annual meeting. Although we all agree this is the right thing to do, experimentation will require some compromises in achieving the best financial results from this critically important source of non-dues revenue. Notwithstanding the potential impact of experimenting with new models, the costs of travel, room rental, AV, and food and beverage will continue to increase.

- The early 2000s marked years of progressive growth in publication revenue that halted with the 2008 recession. Since then, publication sales have declined steadily despite SAA's move to electronic publications. This "loss leader" program awaits a successful e-publishing business model. In the meantime healthy revenues from member dues will allow SAA to maintain high-quality professional publications and implement new platforms that are the foundation of this emergent business model.
- To remain the preeminent professional organization representing the interests of archives and archivists, SAA must ensure the sustainability of its investments in advocacy and public awareness efforts through outreach and coalition building. Modest funding of our early efforts has produced modest results in view of our ambitious goals. Bolder initiatives and the possibilities that come from experimental risk will require a greater investment and continuous funding.
- Although SAA's membership remains healthy at 6,200+, growth has leveled off. The FY16 budget projects no growth in number of members.

SAA member feedback has shown the importance of developing and maintaining best-in-class information technology, e-publishing and subscription services, and professional education programs and initiating advocacy and public awareness efforts. During the past three years the organization has been able to address each of these areas, but continuing this work is expensive and must be sustained over time to be effective. A modest dues increase, phased in gradually, allows for SAA to plan and implement complex systems and programming enhancements with confidence that revenues are suitable to the task. Without such confidence, we run the risk of scaled-back ambitions and short-term budget planning.

CONTACTS FOR MORE INFORMATION:

SAA President Dennis Meissner (2015-2016): president@archivists.org.

SAA Treasurer Cheryl Stadel-Bevans (2015-2018): treasurer@archivists.org.

SAA Executive Director Nancy Beaumont: nbeaumont@archivists.org.

SAA Director of Finance/Administration Peter Carlson: pcarlson@archivists.org.