Web Arch Roundtable Membership Poll: Proposed Affinity Group changes

Total respondents: 41

Question 1: Self-Identification (optional)
Select your SAA membership status

Question 2: Hypothetical ballot
If you were asked to vote on the proposed changes to SAA affinity groups today, how would you vote?
Question 3: Benefits
In your opinion, what is the greatest benefit offered by the proposed changes?

GREATEST PERCEIVED BENEFIT

- Simplified structure: 52%
- Lowering Administrative overhead: 15%
- Sunsetting inactive groups: 15%
- Membership Incentive: 8%
- Other: 5%

* See appendix for answers given in the “other” category

Question 4: Drawbacks
In your opinion, what is the greatest drawback of the proposed changes?

GREATEST PERCEIVED DRAWBACK

- Membership requirements for individual participation in affinity groups: 76%
- Percentage of membership requirements for affinity group status: 10%
- Removal of distinction between affinity group types: 10%
- Other: 2%
- No response: 2%

* See appendix for answers given in the “other” category
Appendix

Question 3: “Other”

Opportunities for official networking with others in virtual groups

Question 4: “Other”

Requiring membership % instead of activity requirements

possible overlap between affinity groups and virtual affinity groups

It doesn't really simplify, it just creates a new stratification and actually complicates life for the former "roundtables" that will need to manage two discussion lists: one for members of the "affinity" group and an partner one for a "virtual group"

Comments and Suggestions

I'm not sure I understand the implication of SAA non-members no longer being able to be "participants" in a new Web Archiving Affinity Group. Non-members already can't become officers, but they could theoretically still participate in all communications via a parallel Virtual Community Group. I generally like the idea of winnowing inactive groups, thereby focusing energy and resources on those that remain (presumably WebArchRT meets the membership threshold). That said, I think it's important for SAA non-members to be able to participate, since the WebArchRT is currently the most active forum for web archiving discussions outside of the IIPC.

The current structure of "groups" is, admittedly, not great and kind of a mess. The new proposal, however, doesn't seem like the answer.

Would it be possible to essentially split the Web Archiving Roundtable into two groups, an "open" Virtual Group and a "closed" Affinity Group? And if so, what sort of relationship could the two groups have with each other?

Not sure how the suggestion affects me being an associate member from abroad.

Web archiving, in particular, is an area with a lot of cross-disciplinary interaction -- librarians, computer scientists, web developers, digital humanists, historians, etc etc etc are all playing an important role in understanding how we can and should capture the web. I worry that limiting participation (esp things like listservs) to SAA members will shut out important and helpful voices. Not to mention the possibility of shutting out students or other professionals who can't afford an SAA membership (personally, I do value my SAA membership, but it's a struggle to maintain it along with my other library professional associations and dues). I agree that SAA needs to make a change in how its subgroups are structured, but I don't think this is quite the right way to do it. Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback!

Unclear to me how "participate" is defined and what exactly a non-member would no longer be able to do. Does it simply mean non-SAA members can't vote on affinity group business? Or that they can't attend affinity group meetings/webinars, join listservs, etc.?

I don't think there is a "greatest drawback" on the list. The only downside is that the proposal is too modest in moving away from the formalism of legacy structures and toward in-time collaborative networks. It's an incremental simplification.

I agree with many (most?) of the comments that have been posted at http://www2.archivists.org/news/2015/council-seeks-comment-on-proposed-changes-in-member-affinity-groups. The proposal hampers the ability to include people who could not reasonably be expected to join SAA (e.g. people from other countries or other professions) but whose perspective might be useful -- even critical -- to the conversation. Some of the benefits that SAA may be hoping to realize with this change (e.g. lowering administrative overhead, simplifying structure, and sunsetting inactive groups) could be achieved in other ways, per the many helpful suggestions already made on the page linked above. I agree with those who suggest that non-members could be asked to pay a nominal fee to be part of an SAA affinity group (or whatever it ends up being called).

As a non-member who is not able to afford the cost of joining SAA, I still find it quite valuable to participate in discussions with the Roundtable groups. I am discouraged that these proposed changes seek to discontinue presently open access to resources and information sharing. I participate in a SAA Roundtable listserv for discussions where I am able to answer questions for colleagues around the country and I also gain helpful insights from conversations that play out in that space. It seems counterproductive to limit access to information sharing that truly serves to benefit our colleagues in the field. Isn't that at the core of the work that we all do in striving to preserve valuable resources and promote access to them for wider audiences?
The membership requirement for participation is really the only complaint I have with this change. I understand from a financial perspective that perhaps SAA hopes to use this change to encourage more people to become members, but it hasn't been articulated clearly from what I have seen and I'm not sure that would be the effect.

I think it's one matter to require a certain percentage of members to be from SAA, but to completely exclude non-members from participation in Affinity Groups is a step that would restrict the interdisciplinary work that archivists engage in. I would suggest a hybrid approach, where Affinity Groups should meet reasonable criteria in order to be fully supported by our membership fees and other SAA funding, but still allow non-members to participate virtually.

SAA benefits from non-member participation. Requiring membership in these types of groups would be a loss to the overall knowledge base. There are many non-archival people who can assist us the archivists do our job by adding a new perspective just as we can assist in educating others about the importance of our work.

The SAA discussion group for web archiving is useful because there isn't much available in this space, but otherwise the association with SAA is mostly annoying.

It can be difficult enough to deal with all the emails emanating from the existing sections and roundtables. One of my concerns is that if we create affinity groups for members only and virtual affinity groups which can include non-members, will there be overlap between some of the groups? If so, will I be getting messages from two listservs devoted to the same affinity, if I want to enjoy the benefits of one group that has SAA privileges and the other group that allows me to hear the ideas of non-members?

Are we impoverishing the discourse of our affinity groups if we limit them to members only?

This proposal, if passed, would make several significant changes to SAA's structure and practice -- some, like exclusion of non-members from Affinity Groups, profoundly wrongheaded -- for little discernible benefit.

I do not consider the exclusion of nonmembers from affinity groups to be a benefit to me or other members. In fact, I value the participation of nonmembers and would not want to create barriers to that participation.

I would add that I see no need to change the name either. For certain groups, particularly those with international members (EAD, IAART, etc.) or those with specialized, non-archivist members who contribute to the profession (CPR, Recorded Sound, etc.) - it will be extremely detrimental to our profession to require membership for those who participate on the listserv!

SAA needs inside and outside participation to grow and address major concerns.