

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
February 5-6, 2024  
Virtual Meeting**

**Business Archives Section: Colloquium at Annual Meeting  
(Prepared by Tesa Burns, Jennifer Henderson, Dave Moore, and Lydia Tang)**

**BACKGROUND**

The Business Archives Section (BAS) was notified that the SAA Council is considering eliminating the in-person option for our Business Archives Section Colloquium, held in conjunction with the SAA Annual Meeting, in favor of a virtual event. BAS Steering Committee members, representing the Section membership, are hereby advocating that the BAS Colloquium remain an in-person event as part of the SAA Annual Meeting.

The BAS Colloquium is typically a 3-hour long session that allows like-minded business archivists the opportunity to learn from each other. As opposed to other, more traditional, session formats, the Colloquium is heavy on group interactions. Business archivists can engage with one another, discuss complex issues, and share strategies and solutions, all within a semi-structured session. The Colloquium is unique in that it covers topics specific to business archives. This is particularly important because it is usually the only session at the Annual Meeting that focuses solely on the business archives perspective.

Since its inception, the BAS Colloquium has been held in-person at the SAA Annual Meeting. It emerged in 1992 at the joint ICA/SAA Annual Meeting, and was initially intended as a one-time event. However, attendees “loved the experience of being able to spend quality time talking about business archives issues.”<sup>1</sup> After that, the Colloquium became an annual program. From 2020 to 2022, due to the COVID pandemic, the Colloquium was held virtually. While Section members did participate during the virtual Colloquiums, engagement was markedly lower than in-person events. Many members felt more reluctant to participate in a virtual meeting. The 2023 Colloquium was the first to be held in-person since before COVID, and members expressed greater satisfaction. Members felt that being able to meet with colleagues in-person was an added benefit and allowed them to get more out of the event.

**DISCUSSION**

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<sup>1</sup> Quote from Elizabeth Adkins, the BAS Chair during the first Colloquium, written in an email to J. Henderson on 5 February 2024.

There are two ways to proceed with the Colloquium. One is to continue to hold the event in-person and the other is to change it to a virtual format. There are costs and benefits for each option. However, BAS is strongly advocating for continuing to hold the Business Archives Section Colloquium in-person, rather than switching to a virtual format.

The in-person Colloquium is a highlight of the SAA Annual Meeting for Business Archives Section members. In fact, many BAS members have expressed the sentiment that it is the most beneficial reason to attend the Annual Meeting, and may not attend the SAA conference entirely if there isn't an in-person Colloquium.

Additionally, changing the Colloquium to a virtual format would make it more difficult for participants to engage with each other on a deep and candid level. There are numerous benefits to getting together as a group in a common space, including casual discussion and networking before and after the program, breaking into small groups for more intimate/detailed discussion, and the ability to move around the room. Attendees at an in-person event are also more likely to participate in discussion.

While breaking out into small groups is possible in a virtual format, the technology creates an added layer of complexity and a physical barrier to participation. It also does not easily allow for session facilitators to move throughout the room and interact among the groups.

On the other hand, a virtual Colloquium would have a lower financial cost to SAA, which is an added benefit. It is possible that a virtual Colloquium would allow more archivists (i.e., those that are unable to travel to attend the Annual Meeting in person) to participate. However, it could mean that fewer business archivists would attend the SAA Annual Meeting. It may also lower engagement among BAS members at a virtual Colloquium.

In all, an in-person format simply allows for deeper connection and better flow of ideas among participants. While the financial cost to SAA is higher for an in-person event, these benefits outweigh the cost.

## **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

That the SAA Council permit the Business Archives Section Colloquium to be held in-person at the SAA Annual Meeting in 2024 and onwards.

### **Support Statement:**

An in-person Business Archives Section Colloquium in conjunction with the SAA Annual Meeting will provide SAA members that work in the business archives field with a quality educational, professional development, and networking opportunity. The event provides a venue for business archivists to engage with one another, discuss complex issues, and share strategies and solutions. Holding the event in-person rather than

virtually creates an environment more conducive to engagement and participation, providing greater benefits to members.

### **Impact on Strategic Priorities:**

In order for SAA to be the primary resource for the archives profession as a whole, it must facilitate programming that benefits archivists from a wide variety of sectors. Business archivists are a small but active sub-set of SAA's membership. The Colloquium is the only program at the SAA Annual Meeting that is particularly catered to this group.

Holding an in-person Business Archives Section Colloquium helps further SAA's strategic goals; particularly:

- Goal 2.4: Foster communities for professional interaction.
- Goal 4.2: Create opportunities for members to participate fully in the association.

While a virtual Colloquium would contribute towards these goals, an in-person event meets these goals more fully for business archivists, providing a venue for quality interaction, participation, learning, and professional development.

### **Fiscal Impact:**

Unfortunately, the full fiscal implications of in-person vs. virtual format for the Colloquium have not been shared with BAS. We are aware that an in-person event incurs more expenses than a virtual one; however, we feel that the benefits outweigh the cost.