

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
November 8 – 10, 2015  
Chicago, Illinois**

**Discussion Item: Vendor Involvement with  
SAA Education Programs  
(Prepared by Education Director Solveig De Sutter)**

**BACKGROUND**

Every few years the Council is asked to discuss issues, policies, and procedures that include various degrees of vendor participation in SAA programs, activities, groups, and listservs. In 2007, for example, the Committee on Education (CoE) proposed inclusion of vendors in workshops where appropriate, including a fee structure that would allow SAA to decrease registration fees (as vendors would be responsible for their expenses). The proposal was rejected at that time.

**DISCUSSION**

Although open or implied endorsement of specific program activities is problematic for some SAA members, whose sense of SAA culture is based in academic tradition, vendors often are very knowledgeable content experts, receiving their product information is often worthwhile, and their support for programs can become an important part of a professional association's income stream.

The issue of vendor involvement in SAA education programs has once again come to the attention of the Committee on Education:

- Course/workshop evaluations consistently show that students are asking for more hands-on work and requesting training for/on specific proprietary products.
- The Council of State Archivists (CoSA), which has partnered with SAA to sponsor workshops (especially DAS courses), recently announced a partnership with Preservica to develop new Practical Digital Preservation training: "Preservica, a world leader in digital preservation technology, research and consulting, and the Council of State Archivists, the professional association serving the 56 state and territorial archives in the United States, are pleased to announce dates and registration

details for a brand new joint program of Practical Digital Preservation training for 2015/16.”<sup>1</sup>

Most of the CoSA/Preservica courses are in competition with and/or overlap with the DAS program. They are being offered at no cost to CoSA members/staff and for a fee of \$25 to nonmembers. Because cost is a recurring theme in every survey that we conduct regarding our programming, it stands to reason that this kind of training is going to have an impact on SAA registrations.

The Committee on Education (CoE) is trying to manage its resources and is asking for the Council’s “barometer” on this issue. If the Council has philosophical objections to pursuing the possibility of including vendors in appropriate courses/workshops, the issue will be put to rest. If, on the other hand, the Council is interested in exploring possibilities, CoE would proceed with that project. We estimate that 15 hours of staff time would be required to research and prepare a written report for consideration.

**Issues to be explored might include:**

- How do we avoid vendors’ “sales pitches” yet allow substantive training that provides solid information?
- How do we avoid giving institutions with products an "unfair advantage" over vendors? (Vendors have told SAA that they feel that institutions get unfair advantages in sharing information on their products that result in a *de facto* SAA endorsement of the products.)

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- Is the Council open to considering developing a policy that would allow vendors to participate as presenters in SAA’s professional development workshops/courses?
- If so, do Council members have certain guiding principles that should be taken into account if we pursue this possibility?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://rc.statearchivists.org/Content/Electronic-Records/Education-Training/CoSA-Preservica-Practical-Digital-Preservation.aspx>