

SHAFR Council meeting
September 6, 2023, via Zoom, 8:00-11:00 a.m. (U.S. Eastern)

Council members in attendance: Mary Ann Heiss (chair), Laura Belmonte, Megan Black, Emily Conroy-Krutz, Jessica Gienow-Hecht, Gretchen Heefner, Daniel Immerwahr, Mitchell Lerner, Sarah Miller-Davenport, Andrew Preston, Vanessa Walker, Molly Wood, Kelsey Zavelo

Others in attendance: Clelly Johnson, Amy Sayward (ex officio)

Introduction to meeting

SHAFR President Ann Heiss opened the meeting by pointing to the set of financial decisions that Council needed to tackle to ensure SHAFR's long-term financial stability. She pointed out that she had developed a proposal for Council's consideration but was happy to have members offer their best ideas for how to accomplish cuts before delving into it. Laura Belmonte talked about some cuts that could be made to the snacks offered at the conference, and Andrew Preston suggested a reduction of AV costs, which Daniel Immerwahr agreed should happen. Heiss also talked about the possibility of offsetting some of these conference costs with higher lunch tickets and possibly less of a discount for lunch tickets for graduate students.

***Diplomatic History* editorial team renewal discussion**

Council then discussed the *Diplomatic History* (DH) editorship renewal proposal. Belmonte suggested that Council approve the renewal, despite the costs, especially given the diversity and quality that the editorial team featured. Gretchen Heefner also stated that she would not want to see the journal move to an institution that did not support its graduate students. Mitchell Lerner pointed out that Temple's contribution to the journal might not be as generous as it appeared, with the cost of course releases being determined by the institution. He also stated his concern about the cost of print-on-demand for the journal moving forward. Preston said that he thought SHAFR should be cautious about changing editors. He asked if the proposal from Temple was negotiable, to which Heiss responded that after several conversations with the editorial team she believed this was effectively their final offer. Molly Wood asked about a letter from the editors, which stated that the graduate-student position at Indiana State University (ISU) could be eliminated, but it seemed to her that such a change would increase the workload for the editors and other graduate students.

Oxford University Press renewal proposal

Conversation then shifted to the provision in the Oxford University Press (OUP) proposal for print-on-demand for *Diplomatic History* and *Passport*, with SHAFR collectively or individual members paying these costs, which OUP estimated would be \$30/person/year. Sayward stated that she had estimated (for the long-term projections spreadsheet) that about half of the 600

members currently receiving the journal in print might shift to on-line only. Preston stated that he would opt to maintain a print subscription but thought that the cost should be borne by members rather than the society. Lerner pointed out that the OUP proposal needed clarification on whether the cost was per year or per volume, and Sayward stated that she would seek this clarification.

Immerwahr moved that Council approve the recommendations from the report by Melvyn Leffler and Nick Cullather that SHAFR seek better terms and a three-year renewal of the contract rather than the proposed five; Emily Conroy-Krutz seconded the motion. Megan Black stated that she favored maintaining the relationship with OUP, but she had to leave the meeting to teach. Lerner asked whether it might make sense to consider the end of the print edition that is part of OUP's proposal. Sarah Miller-Davenport stated that she did not support SHAFR subsidizing the cost of members' print copies. Heiss suggested that the cost of the print edition should perhaps be considered separately. Jessica Gienow-Hecht stated the value she attached to the physical journal as the primary way of promoting the organization; she also stated that it provided a tangible symbol of the value of membership in SHAFR, especially outside of the United States. At this point, Council voted in favor of the Immerwahr proposal (seconded by Conroy-Krutz) to negotiate better terms and a shorter contract term with OUP by a vote of 11-0-0. Council will consider OUP's response at its next meeting (before the end of this year).

Continuation of *Diplomatic History* editorial team renewal discussion

Conroy-Krutz then moved to accept the proposal from the *Diplomatic History* editorial team, including retention of the ISU graduate student; Immerwahr seconded the motion. Lerner pointed out that the projected loss of some \$20,000 or more from the new Oxford contract in addition to the higher cost of renewing the editorial team would mean a net loss of almost \$50,000 for the SHAFR budget. Wood stated that she was not comfortable voting on this issue without first identifying where in the budget cuts could be made to offset this significant deficit.

Discussion of potential budget cuts

At this point, Heiss returned to her proposed set of cuts to offset the OUP and Temple proposals, and Lerner suggested discussing them one at a time. In regard to the electronic communications line-item, Wood said that cuts in this area would reduce promotion of SHAFR and that the current Electronic Communication Co-editors (ECCs) did not seem to have had an adequate opportunity to deliver dividends. Heiss pointed out that the term had been set by Council when the position was originally established.

Awards

Gienow-Hecht expressed concern that cutting fellowships and prizes might hurt junior scholars. Heiss stated that she was specifically proposing to eliminate the Link-Kuehl Prize for Documentary Editing, as there have been only a small number of nominations in recent years.

Sayward pointed out that the cycle of every-other-year awards had had to be adjusted because there were no submissions one year. Belmonte, who had previously chaired this committee, agreed that this prize might no longer reflect the most recent scholarship in the field. Heefner pointed out that prizes or fellowships could be made every other year rather than every year if changes were needed.

Electronic communications

Discussion then turned to the podcasts created by the ECCs, which Heiss thought was a lower priority in these difficult budgetary times, a sentiment that Heefner agreed with. Preston pointed out that when the editor was appointed, it was done as a trial run, and there were no firm targets suggested regarding the podcasts; however, he thought that the current number of downloads was not impressive. Conroy-Krutz was also disappointed that the ECCs were not taking greater initiative with the webinar suggestion that Council had made. Immerwahr thought that the electronic communication initiative had not paid off and that he preferred funding fellowships if it came to a choice between the two. Miller-Davenport agreed and also thought that the prizes to senior members could be cut.

National Coalition for History

Lerner then called for elimination of SHAFR's contribution to and membership in the National Coalition for History (NCH), which currently costs just over \$6,500. Preston agreed with this suggestion. Sayward provided an update on SHAFR's relationship with the NCH, stating that our representative, Amy Offner, had been pleased with the work of the declassification subcommittee; Sayward also explained that Tom Zeiler had succeeded Offner and that SHAFR's dues were paid through September 2024.

Electronic communications

Gienow-Hecht pointed out that podcasts have been used to good effect in instruction, and Sayward pointed out that the ECCs also managed SHAFR's Twitter account. Vanessa Walker explained that she had been a guest on the podcast and had truly enjoyed it but opined that SHAFR probably needed to invest in communication about fund-raising more specifically rather than electronic communications generally. Conroy-Krutz added that the Development Committee was meeting shortly to work on making progress on fund-raising initiatives.

Council discussion shifted to what would happen if the ECCs were not renewed. Sayward explained that she would take up the Twitter responsibilities she had performed before the ECCs had taken up that role. She also explained that responsibility for the website—with the update the ECCs had spearheaded now almost complete—would remain with SHAFR's IT Director.

Continuation of Diplomatic History editorial team renewal discussion

Heiss said that she sensed an emerging consensus that cuts could be made to the general budget and asked Council if it was ready to return to the Temple renewal process, which needed to be settled at this meeting. Sayward reiterated the motion made earlier by Conroy-Krutz and

seconded by Immerwahr to accept the editorial team renewal terms. Council's vote on this motion was 9-2-0.

Continuation of discussion of potential budget cuts

Heiss then asked about other budget cuts that Council wished to discuss, for example, her proposal that the *Passport* editorial staff should manage their own copy-editing rather than outsourcing that task.

Electronic communications

Heiss also stated that Council could circle back to make a decision about electronic communications. Immerwahr moved to strike the electronic communication budget, which was seconded by Heefner. Preston asked for arguments to maintain electronic communications. Lerner said that he had spoken strongly in favor of it in the Ways & Means Committee discussion, but it was unclear that the budget could be balanced with this line item. Wood was similarly conflicted and wondered if the podcast could be cut but the ECCs kept to continue their work in promoting the work of SHAFR. Belmonte expressed some frustration that fifteen years of outreach had not reaped any demonstrable results. Council then voted on the motion to strike the electronic communications budget line item, which passed 10-0-1. Heiss expressed her regret that such cuts had become necessary.

National Coalition for History

Lerner then moved to cut SHAFR's funding for/membership in NCH, which was seconded by Belmonte. Preston agreed that this cut should be made. Belmonte asked about the status of what had been relatively regular meetings between the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and historical organizations, including SHAFR. Heiss and Sayward stated that they had not seen any effort to schedule a meeting lately, which Belmonte pointed out was after the confirmation of the new Archivist of the United States. Preston suggested Offner and Zeiler be consulted before the January meeting to assess this decision. Council supported the motion to end SHAFR's membership in NCH by a vote of 11-0-0.

2026 conference proposal

Sayward asked for Council's reaction to the proposal from the Blackwell Inn for the Columbus conference, with room rentals and service charges that make the costs equivalent to a conference at the Arlington Renaissance. Heiss wondered if it might be possible to utilize classroom space for breakouts and/or seek a reduced price for the room rentals. Sayward pointed out that being in separate buildings can be confusing for conference participants and might accrue additional transportation costs. Lerner indicated that he thought it might be possible to identify alternative spaces.

Awards

Lerner moved to take any cuts to graduate student fellowships off the table, and Kelsey Zavelo expressed the view that these should be expanded rather than reduced. Heiss indicated her interest in reducing some of the awards, and Walker and Immerwahr expressed support for eliminating the Link-Kuehl Prize. Heiss explained the “clickable” citations for award winners on the webpage of the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic (SHEAR), which may be an additional way to lend prestige to SHAFR awards.

Conference social events

Lerner then shifted the discussion to social events at the annual conference, pointing out that Sayward had cut those in the long-term projections for the 2025, 2026, and 2027 conferences. He thought that merited further discussion. Gienow-Hecht stated that she believed the social event was also a measure that reassured members that their membership was worth the cost. Belmonte suggested soliciting additional sponsors who could help with the cost, and Sayward pointed out that Conference Coordinator Kaete O’Connell’s report had pointed out that a less expensive social event could well be possible. Heiss thought that the conference would lose a lot if it lacked a social event, and Immerwahr agreed that it has real value, even if it is not an extravagant event. Miller-Davenport agreed and suggested the possibility of even something as modest as a picnic and with a budget of \$8-10,000 that would be “nice but not opulent.” She asked how much over budget the hotel bill was for this year’s conference, to which Sayward responded more than \$20,000. Preston agreed about the value of the social event and suggested that the money needed for it might be made up by eliminating the cost of alcoholic beverages at the welcome reception. Heiss agreed that the hotel’s food and beverage minimum could easily be met with the cost of the welcome reception (without alcohol) and the two luncheon events. Zavelo added that she thought that the social event and welcome reception were especially valuable to graduate students.

Executive director stipend

Lerner then shifted to a conversation about the cost of the executive director position and proposed a reduction of \$5,000-\$6,000. Sayward said that she supported this proposal and had already proposed (per the agenda) to donate the \$5,000 raise that she had earlier received to fund the transition in the coming fiscal year that was called for in the job ad for the position. Heiss agreed that the base rate for the new executive director, who will—by definition—have less experience, should be less than the current rate. Lerner also stated that he thought additional savings can be found in the current budget that can bring the budget into balance that he would work with Sayward on following the meeting.

2027 conference

Belmonte discussed a recommendation she had made previously to the Ways & Means Committee of SHAFR hosting a biannual meeting rather than having a conference every year. Preston noted that having the conference in DC was especially valuable for international scholars, as they could combine the conference with research. Gienow-Hecht thought that visiting DC was less important for research now than it had been in the past. Lerner suggested canceling SHAFR’s contract for the Arlington Renaissance for the 2027 conference, and

Sayward pointed out the contractual ramifications of doing this. Belmonte talked about Virginia Tech's Innovation Campus, which she had recently toured. It has its own Metro stop and would have all of the conference facilities (but not housing) that SHAFR would need for the annual conference. It was agreed that this might be something to consider for the 2027 conference, but a decision to cancel the 2025 conference would have to be made by December, which would be before the Innovation Campus opens. Lerner agreed that the Innovation Campus might be a good alternative for the 2027 conference, but SHAFR would need to understand the costs of a conference there before making a decision.

Non-budgetary business items

As the time for the meeting was nearing expiration, Sayward asked Council to look at the additional non-budgetary business items (renewal of the conference coordinator, updating of Myrna Bernath award language, acknowledgment of the approval of the June 2023 Council minutes, and *Passport* editorial board replacements), to see if there was any substantive discussion about these issues. Lerner stated he was in favor of each of the non-budgetary business items and moved that not only the Myrna Bernath prize information but all of the gendered (he/she) language in the by-laws be changed. Sayward welcomed the suggestion and said she could provide a set of revisions that Council could approve before June that would go onto next year's ballot for approval by the membership. Immerwahr seconded Lerner's motion, which was passed 10-0-0.

Sayward then requested a motion from Council to vote on the Ways & Means Committee proposal that the organization increase the endowment draw from "up to 3% annually" to "up to 4% annually" of the three-year rolling average of the endowment. The motion passed 9-0-1.

Discussion moved to the agenda of the next meeting, which will include the response of OUP to Council's counter-proposal (and either acceptance of OUP's response or opening the bidding process to all presses) as well as a final budget for the 2023-2024 fiscal year, which will begin on November 1st. Sayward said she would also provide revised estimates of the conference expenses based on reducing/cutting snacks and at least projectors and screens from the AV costs as well as other suggestions that surfaced during the Council discussion. Preston asked when the rotation of council members would take place; Sayward reminded Council that their terms end on December 31st, but the presidency changes hands on November 1st.

The meeting adjourned at 11 a.m. Eastern.