

Dear colleagues,

Last month, I circulated a plan for revisions to the SAfA bylaws to modernize our operations and accommodate circumstances that arose during the pandemic. “Step 1” (circulated on June 15), proposed to incorporate online tools for governance. This will be voted upon in the General Business Meeting (GBM) on August 15.

Today, I am circulating the “Step 2” proposed revisions. These mostly consist of recommendations by the Leadership Structure Committee (LSC), plus a few additional suggestions from the Executive Committee (EC). Step 2 changes are in some ways more substantive than those in Step 1, and the EC is allocating time at the GBM to discuss them, answer questions, and take feedback from the membership. Assuming the 15 August vote results in the adoption of Step 1, then the Society can vote on Step 2 revisions (with any changes suggested by the membership) in a two-week ballot period beginning on October 1, sixty days from today.

I encourage all members to take a close look at the proposed Step 2 revisions in the attached document, “SAfA Bylaws Proposed Changes Step2 1Aug2021.PDF”. Within the document, **red text** indicates Step 1 proposed revisions (already circulated). **Blue text** indicates revisions proposed in Step 2. (For comparison, a copy of the current bylaws may be found on the SAfA website at <https://safarchaeology.org/SAfA-Objectives> .)

Below is a summary of the proposed Step 2 revisions, and their rationale as set forth by the LSC and EC.

### **TURNOVER AND KNOWLEDGE RETENTION**

One of the biggest challenges for the EC has been frequent and fast turnover. Knowledge gets lost and there is little continuity of agenda from one EC to the next. Even basic structures like evaluation criteria for the student paper award may get lost and then reinvented from term to term, creating inconsistencies and needless extra work. The LSC recommended several actions; the EC incorporated some (but not all) of these into the proposed Bylaw revisions. In doing so, we have tried to strike a balance between (a) having enough continuity so the EC has smooth transitions with good working memory, and (b) having enough turnover that fresh points of view will be incorporated, and many members will have a chance to contribute to SAfA governance. Proposed changes include:

**1. New officer-elect positions** on the EC for the President, Treasurer, and Recording Secretary. Elections can take place electronically in a non-conference year. This creates time for a year of interaction and learning between officers and officers-elect before the formal handover at the end of the GBM. *See Article VI Section 2, Article 7 Section 3b and Section 6.*

**2. Multiple terms in a few key roles.** Treasurers have been asked to serve for multiple terms, because of the complexity of financial tasks. The LSC recommended that the Recording Secretary also be asked to consider serving for multiple terms to help retain continuity of knowledge. The LSC also recommended that when the Treasurer and Recording Secretary intend to step down, they must give the EC sufficient notice so that a successor can be found in time for a full-year transition period. *See Article VI Section 3c,d.* In cases where the Treasurer and Recording Secretary roles are transitioning, it might be helpful to have a Member-at-Large stay on for a second term, but the LSC recommended no more than two terms for a Member-at-Large. *See Article VI, Section 3b.*

**3. Nominations & Elections Committee.** In recent years, some nominations have come from the membership; however, many have come from within the EC, rather late in the game, as slates were not

full as the conference/election approached. The ultimate cause of this may be members' reticence to seek a public role, but haste in trying to fill slates for the next EC is not healthy. Furthermore, if many nominations are coming from EC members, this can lead to the perception of a "club" or "clique" of people in leadership roles. A society of SAfA's size deserves to have a Nominations Committee that is separate from the EC to solicit full slates of candidates and draw upon the broader membership. The LSC recommended formation of a 3-5 person Nominations Committee. The EC has endorsed this idea, and specified a 5-person committee that would include a mix people of various degrees of seniority and leadership experience. Two of the five Nominations Committee members would have prior EC experience (>2 years past, to create some distance from the current EC), one Nominations Committee seat would be assigned to a senior scholar without EC experience, and two Nominations Committee seats would be reserved for early-career scholars. The EC would create the nominations committee under these guidelines, but then step away from the elections process thereafter. The Nominations Committee would circulate a Call for Nominations to the membership and, if this did not lead to full slates of candidates, also take responsibility for directly soliciting nominations. One could not sit on the Nominations Committee and be a candidate for an elected position in that cycle. *See Article X Section 2a.*

**4. Executive Handbook.** In addition to proposing these Bylaws changes, the LSC prepared an Executive Handbook, to be read, used, and updated by all Executive Committee members term after term.

Balanced together, we hope that the outcome from these combined actions will

- preserve working knowledge from term to term,
- provide clear "on-ramps" for officers-elect to transition into their new roles,
- lighten the working load of the EC by removing nominations/elections from its portfolio of responsibility,
- engage more members in governance through the actions of the Nominations Committee, and
- ensure the elections are run by people for whom this is their sole exclusive task.

All of this should make Society service positions less overwhelming and more broadly distributed across the membership.

#### **OTHER COMMITTEES**

Conditions of the past three years made the EC realize that different types of committees are essential to Society business. The EC recommends that the Bylaws specify three categories so that committee operations and oversight procedures are clear. Most of the Standing Committees (each with a single task but changing composition of committee members) have operated for many years; the EC finds it useful to name these committees so that their efforts (and the breadth of members who have been involved in SAfA service) can be recognized. Ad Hoc Committees are created by the EC to meet specific challenges or opportunities that are expected to be limited in duration. Service Committees represent a new category whereby members might find a service area they wish to assist with (e.g., fundraising for 14C dates by African scholars). The EC recognizes that some excellent ideas for helping Africanist researchers may emerge from the membership, particularly younger members; the Service Committee category creates a pathway for the membership to develop an initiative and propose it to the EC for recognition within SAfA. *See Article X.*

#### **DUES STRUCTURE**

At the 2018 GBM, new dues structures were established for members residing outside of Africa: \$35 for regular members, \$25 for postdoctoral members, and \$15 for retired and student members. At the time, no one realized that this was not in fact consistent with the 2016 Bylaws, which specified that

Student and Retired members would have dues 50% of the Regular dues; the 2016 Bylaws also made no provision for postdocs or recent graduates. The LSC and EC concur that we want to make it possible to offer a bigger discount for Global North Student and Retired members; the new language (“reduced dues”) allows for this. It also creates a new category – Recent Degree Member – for people who have finished their degree less than 5 years ago, and have not yet obtained a permanent or tenure-stream position. Membership is, of course, free for all members based in Africa. *See Article IV Sections 2-6.*

## **CONDUCT**

The LSC recommended strengthening this section by making explicit the potential for termination of membership in cases where a member has been found to be in violation of SAfA’s Code of Ethics, or Sexual Harassment Policy. The EC concurs with this suggestion. *See Article IV Section 13a.*

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Having summarized the proposed changes, I now wish to speak briefly about scheduling. Although transitioning from the old to the new governance system is a bit complicated, there is a workable plan. Here are tentative dates for the various ballot and discussion events over the coming months:

## **2021**

August 1 (today): Step 2 proposed Bylaws changes are circulated to the membership.

August 15: General Business Meeting. Vote on Step 1 proposed changes to the Bylaws (online). Discuss Step 2 proposed changes to the Bylaws.

October 1: Voting begins on Step 2 proposed Bylaws changes (including any fine-tuning that was agreed upon at the GBM). Voting is online and occurs over a 2-week period.

October 15: Voting closes for Step 2 proposed Bylaws changes. If the new Bylaws are adopted, the current EC appoints a 2021 Nominations Committee as soon as possible. The 2021 Nominations Committee issues a Call for Nominations to the membership.

November: The 2021 Nominations Committee finalizes the election slate and the next Election takes place, online, over a two-week period, as soon as possible within the framework of the new Bylaws.

December: The 2021-2023 Executive Committee takes office directly after the election. Outgoing officers and Members-at-Large will provide every assistance to their successors.

## **2022**

January-March: The 2021-2023 EC appoints the 2022 Nominations committee to prepare for off-year election under the new Bylaws; the 2022 Nominations committee is responsible for soliciting candidates for Officers-Elect and Member-at-Large-elect positions under the new Bylaws, and running that election.

May: Election results are announced for the 2023-2025 EC. All Officers-elect and Members-at-Large-elect have a full year to liaise with their counterparts.

## **2023**

Summer: At the end of the GBM at the next (2023) SAfA meeting, the 2021-2023 EC hands over to the 2023-2025 EC. The new system/cycle is fully in place: Assuming no massive global disruptions, SAfA Nominations Committees will run elections in the early parts of even years (2024, 2026, etc.) for officers-elect. SAfA conferences will take place during odd years (2023, 2025, etc.), and each new EC will take full office at the conclusion of the biennial conference’s GBM.

I wish to thank the members of the Leadership Structure Committee – Elena Garcea, Diane Gifford-Gonzalez, Chris DeCorse, Gabriele Franke, Munyaradzi Manyanga, and Susan McIntosh – for their hard

work and insights. Many thanks also to the members of the current Executive Committee for helping prepare the final document.

I encourage members with any specific comments on the proposed changes to contact me directly. And we look forward to discussing this with SAfA members at the upcoming General Business Meeting!

Sincerely,

Elisabeth Hildebrand  
President