Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations

Council Meeting Minutes

Date: September 18, 2026
Time: 12:00–2:00 p.m. EDT
Location: Virtual

Present

Chris Hulshof, Brooke Blower, Mitchell Lerner, Christopher Nichols, Jay Sexton, Sheyda Jahanbani, Jason Parker, Kaeten Mistry, Brian Etheridge, Sarah Snyder, Melani McAlister, Andrew Johnstone, Elisabeth Leake

Ex-Officio

Richard Immerman, Kaete O'Connell

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1. Call to Order

President Jay Sexton called the meeting to order. He thanked Council members for joining, encouraged members to vote in the SHAFR election, and expressed his appreciation to Brooke Blower, Chris Hulshof, Mitchell Lerner, and Christopher Nichols for their years of service on Council.

Sexton expressed his pleasure over the willingness of SHAFR members to serve on committees and thanked Richard Immerman and Kaete O'Connell for their work on the budget. He encouraged Council members to engage with the budget process.

Immerman thanked Sexton and the departing Council members for their service to SHAFR.

Approval of Actions Taken Since the June Meeting

Immerman affirmed the following actions taken since the January Council meeting:

1. Approval of the minutes of the June Council meeting.
2. Approval of Kazushi Minami, Rebecca Herman, and Dario Fazio to serve three-year terms on the Editorial Board of *Diplomatic History*.
3. Approval of Emily Conroy-Krutz to serve a three-year term on the Editorial Board of *Passport*.

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2. Advocacy

Immerman reported on advocacy actions approved by Council since the June meeting:

1. SHAFR signed a letter calling on the U.S. House Appropriations Committee to preserve, archive, and, as appropriate, make available reports produced by the Surveys & Investigations staff of the House Appropriations Committee.
2. SHAFR signed a letter to the Department of Defense opposing its proposal to exempt controlled unclassified information (CUI) from the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).
3. SHAFR endorsed a letter written by the Organization of American Historians (OAH) to Acting Archivist of the United States Edward Forst, urging the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) to reconsider its decision to close the National Archives and Federal Records Center facilities in Chicago and San Bruno.

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3. Finances

Immerman presented the FY26 budget and projected FY27 budget. He explained that the budget process had been more rigorous and extensive than in previous years. Immerman and O'Connell led the process, with Sexton, Sarah Snyder, and the Ways & Means Committee, particularly Chair Melani McAlister, closely involved.

The process included collecting historical information on revenue and expenses. Immerman identified estimating income from Oxford University Press under the *Diplomatic History* contract as the greatest challenge. OUP income remains a significant component of the budget but is lower than in previous years. Because OUP will not provide the Guaranteed Minimum Income figure for several months, the amount remains an estimate.

Immerman reported that SHAFR received $12,000 in print subscription revenue the previous year, which will be eliminated beginning in 2027. SHAFR expects to save approximately $19,000, and potentially more, in printing costs.

The FY27 budget includes $4,500 for *Passport* production, reflecting the remaining payment for construction of the website and expected to be a one-time expense. The budget also includes $15,000 for contributors to the Guide, another one-time expense. SHAFR has not previously paid the $500 honorarium to contributors.

Membership dues were budgeted at $65,000, while actual revenue was approximately $85,000, including six lifetime memberships. Conference sponsorships totaled approximately $71,000. Immerman noted that comparable sponsorship revenue may not be guaranteed in the following year.

Travel awards included $10,000 from the University of Missouri's Kinder Institute and $4,000 in Leffler Grants, awarded for the first time. Council has also developed a more systematic process for drawing funds from the endowment. The FY26 draw was slightly less than $70,000.

Immerman reported that SHAFR came very close to balancing the budget, including anticipated cuts.

Diplomatic History

Council discussed whether there were opportunities to reduce the costs of *Diplomatic History*, which are currently approximately equal to the revenue generated by the journal. Members noted that other journals operate with smaller budgets and discussed whether reducing the journal's budget could affect its quality.

The Oxford University Press contract expires at the end of 2028, and the editors' terms end at the end of 2029. Council noted that this would be an appropriate time to revisit the terms of the relevant contracts.

Ways & Means Committee Recommendations

A. Passport **Production Costs**

McAlister reported that producing the PDF edition of *Passport* costs approximately $4,000 and requires significant effort. The Ways & Means Committee proposed eliminating the PDF edition.

Etheridge explained that the new website had been constructed, following Council's instructions, on the assumption that the PDF would remain part of *Passport*. The website is scheduled to launch the following month. Eliminating the PDF would undermine the current website architecture and require a redesign.

McAlister proposed postponing consideration of the matter because the committee had not fully understood that the PDF was integral to the new website's architecture.

Action: Consideration of the proposal to eliminate the *Passport* PDF edition was postponed.

B. Council Travel

McAlister noted that SHAFR has budgeted $7,000 for Council travel in FY27 and as well as $14,000 for travel scholarships. She noted that the 2028 conference in The Hague could substantially increase the need for Council travel support while emphasizing the importance of maintaining support for graduate students and international participants.

Immerman explained that Council had approved travel support for Council members who did not receive funding from their home institutions in the early 2000s. The policy was not widely known and implemented irregularly. The issue became moot when Council meetings moved online.

With one Council meeting now held in person each year, and with Council seats designated for Teaching and for a graduate student, as well as an increased emphasis on international membership, the issue has become more relevant. Immerman suggested establishing tiers for Council travel support and potentially combining Council travel funds with participant travel funds to create a larger pool.

Elisabeth Leake moved to reduce the Council travel budget from $7,000 to $5,000.

Action: The motion was defeated, with seven voting no and five voting yes. Funding for Council travel will remain at the level of $7000 with the understanding that Council members should apply for these funds as a last resort.

C. IT Director Position

McAlister reported that the Ways & Means Committee had voted to reduce the IT Director stipend to $5,000. Subsequently, the Executive Council proposed eliminating the IT position and increasing the budget for support services by $2,000.

Under the proposed arrangement, Richard, Kaete, Faith, and Jeffrey Gilbert would share the IT Director's responsibilities. Gilbert, initially Kaete's intern, is now working on the website as an independent contractor.

Council also discussed cybersecurity concerns. Fujii's recommendation in his latest report that the work be outsourced was noted.

McAlister moved to eliminate the IT Director position.

Action: The motion passed, with 10 voting in favor, two opposed, and one abstention.

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4. Conference Matters

O'Connell reported that the 2026 conference had gone extremely well and that SHAFR was on target in obtaining sponsorship commitments for the 2027 conference.

The 2027 conference will have a "fresher" format. It will begin on Wednesday evening, and the Bernath Lecture will be held off-site. The Council on Foreign Relations will sponsor the graduate student mixer.

O'Connell also reported that SHAFR will collaborate with the World History Association. Its conference will be held in Pittsburgh, allowing participants to attend both conferences. The organizations will offer reciprocal registration discounts.

Council noted that beginning the conference on Wednesday will require UK and other international travelers to arrive a day earlier. Members emphasized the importance of communicating this information as soon as possible.

Parker reported that all applications to the Summer Institute, hosted by the Texas A&M History Department and Bush School at the Bush School's campus in Washington, D.C., are international.

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5. Reports

Communications and Website

O'Connell reported significant progress in SHAFR's efforts to bolster communications program. The website has been substantially revamped, and Jeffrey Gilbert has made significant improvements to the MemberClicks platform.

A new Graduate Student Resource page will launch shortly. Plans are also underway to reimagine the Teaching Committee page, relaunch the dissertation page, and make the Ask an Expert page functional.

SHAFR's Instagram account, launched the previous month, has been receiving substantial traffic. O'Connell noted that Instagram provides a useful means of reaching graduate students and younger scholars. The account will showcase SHAFR members and inform visitors about SHAFR's activities and resources.

O'Connell praised Gilbert's contributions to the website and expressed interest in working with the Education Committee to revamp its webpage.

Organizational Status

Snyder reported on the possibility of SHAFR transitioning from a private foundation to a public charity. She noted that SHAFR's current status has created difficulties in receiving contributions and has resulted in higher taxes.

Snyder and Immerman have met with a tax attorney and plan to consult with another to determine which of the available options would best serve SHAFR's needs. The conversation may take 5 years.

Job Crisis Task Force

Snyder reported on the Job Crisis Task Force. A task force established several years ago had submitted recommendations that Council never acted upon. Snyder proposed revisiting those recommendations rather than beginning the process again.

Council considered:

- Amending the eligibility language for the Myrna Bernath Award.
- Sponsoring a survey on how SHAFR could better support contingent faculty in a post-COVID environment.
- Offering contingent faculty free membership in exchange for extensive committee service.

O'Connell noted that contingent faculty registration was $55 and membership was $25. A suggestion was also made to offer free lunches as a way to foster community.

Council expressed broad support for changing the eligibility language for the Myrna Bernath Award and offering free membership to contingent faculty who volunteered for committee service but limited support for conducting a survey.

Actions:

1. Council unanimously approved changing the language of the Myrna Bernath Award to explicitly establish the eligibility of contingent faculty.
2. Council unanimously rejected the proposal to initiate a survey.
3. Because it was an administrative action, a vote was not necessary to offer free membership to contingent faculty in exchange for committee service.

Bernath Lecture Prize

O'Connell proposed revising the eligibility requirements for the Bernath Lecture Prize. She explained that the current age requirements were ambiguous and did not sufficiently account for changes in the academy and SHAFR's demographics. She noted that Ph.D. recipients tend to be older and may take longer to complete their degrees because of the academic job market and related circumstances.

O'Connell proposed eliminating age restrictions entirely and giving the committee discretion to determine who qualifies as an up-and-coming or mid-career scholar.

Council members expressed concern about granting the committee this degree of discretion and suggested establishing guidelines or parameters. Council also discussed whether applicants should identify career breaks or otherwise explain circumstances affecting the amount of time since they received their degrees.

No vote was taken. Council agreed that the eligibility requirements should be revised but did not reach agreement on the specific language.

Action: Sexton will form a committee to revise the eligibility language. Council will subsequently vote by email before the holiday break.

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6. New Business

There was no new business.

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7. Summary of Actions

The following actions were taken or assigned during the meeting:

Approved

- Approved the June Council meeting minutes.
- Approved Kazushi Minami, Rebecca Herman, and Dario Fazio for three-year terms on the *Diplomatic History* Editorial Board.
- Approved Emily Conroy-Krutz for a three-year term on the *Passport* Editorial Board.
- Approved eliminating the IT Director position, with 10 in favor, two opposed, and one abstention.
- Approved changes to the Myrna Bernath Award language to make explicit the eligibility of contingent faculty.

Defeated

- Motion to reduce the Council travel budget from $7,000 to $5,000; seven opposed and five in favor.
- Proposal to initiate a survey on supporting contingent faculty; rejected unanimously.

Postponed

- Consideration of eliminating the PDF edition of *Passport*.

Referred/Follow-Up

- Sexton will form a committee to revise the eligibility requirements and language for the Bernath Lecture Prize.

- Council will vote by email on the revised Bernath Lecture Prize language before the holiday break.
- SHAFR will continue exploring the possibility of transitioning from a private foundation to a public charity.
- Council will revisit the terms of relevant contracts, including those associated with *Diplomatic History*, as the Oxford University Press contract approaches its expiration in 2028 and the editors' terms conclude in 2029.