

SHAFR Council Meeting Minutes
January 16, 2026, noon-2pm (Eastern)

Present: Sarah Snyder, Brain Etheridge, Kaeten Mistry, Jay Sexton, Jason Parker, Mitchell Lerner, Chris Hulshof, Sheyda Jahanbani, Brooke Blower, Andrew Johnstone, Elisabeth Leake, Chirstopher Nichols, Alexandra Southgate, Melani McAlister

Absent:

In Attendance: Richard Immerman (ex officio), Kaete O'Connell (ex officio), Faith Bagley, Silke Zoller

Jay Sexton opened the meeting by introducing all the Council members and welcoming the new ones: Sarah Snyder, Sheyda Jahanbani, Andrew Johnstone, and Jason Parker.

Richard Immerman affirmed the votes that had been taken since the fall Council meeting. These included approval of the minutes from the September Council meeting, approval of an expression of appreciation for members rotating off the board of *Diplomatic History* and *Passport*, and approval of the establishment of the William Burr Dissertation Prize in Nuclear History. The members expressed their appreciation for Konstantin Dierks, Penny Von Eschen, and Brandon Byrd for their service to *Diplomatic History*, and Nate Citino for his service to *Passport*.

The Council discussed upcoming conferences. The 2026 conference will be held in Columbus, Ohio. The conference social event will take place at an award-winning distillery, and the welcome reception will be hosted at the Cartoon Museum, which is also preparing an exhibit specifically for SHAFR. More than \$53,000 in sponsorships have been secured. Kaete O'Connell and the conference co-chairs warrant special thanks for their work. The plenary event will focus on the U.S. semi-quincentennial from a global perspective. The Council will meet in person during the conference.

The 2027 conference is planned for Washington, DC. The tentative venue is the Virginia Tech Innovation Center, although the space cannot be booked more than one year in advance. Work is underway to secure the space. The backup option at George Mason University's Arlington campus.

The Council then turned to the proposals for the 2028 conference. It was noted that this is a difficult period in higher education due to limited resources, and the Council wanted to be mindful of what host institutions are being asked to provide. A local arrangements committee is required for any proposal. The original deadline for proposals was September but was extended to December 15. Two sample proposals from previous years were circulated to provide guidance on what SHAFR was seeking. Budget projections were

difficult to provide so far in advance. Kaete did mention that she reviewed some preliminary cost estimates from Vanderbilt. In her judgment, they were in line with past conferences.

After some active recruiting by Kaete and Richard, three proposals were received. One proposal was from the Roosevelt Institute in Amsterdam for a meeting at The Hague. The Council discussed both the advantages and disadvantages of holding an international conference. A second proposal came from Vanderbilt University in Nashville. The location offers many advantages, and Vanderbilt has a conference center capable of hosting the meeting. However, unlike Ohio State, the conference would require the use of a campus-affiliated hotel. A third proposal came from Southern Methodist University's Center for Presidential History (CPH) in Dallas, Texas, which has a long history with SHAFR. Because the CPH could not guarantee the use of a campus conference space due to changes in campus structure, the proposal included the alternative of holding the conference at a hotel, with the many proximate universities helping to offset costs and enhance the overall experience.

The Council discussed whether any of the proposals might be better suited for 2030 rather than 2028. It was noted that the SHAFR president and program co-chairs decide the theme of the conference, rather than the hosting institution, allowing flexibility in working with potential hosts. Dallas and Nashville were aware of this guideline, while authors of The Hague proposal did not seem to be. Questions were raised about known costs for Dallas and Nashville. It was noted that the 2028 Summer Institute will be held at Ohio State, and hosting institutions could be asked if they wished to take on that responsibility or collaborate with Ohio State because it is currently set to serve as host.

President Sexton requested that that Council consider selecting hosts for both 2028 and 2030, but several members expressed reservations.

Several members observed that the cost of traveling to a major international hub is not necessarily higher than traveling domestically. In addition, an international conference could enforce and encourage broader international participation, and The Hague proposal offered a strong conference infrastructure.

Shortcomings to holding an international conference were identified. The DC conference received 154 submissions while the current year received 116. The Hague might well receive fewer. The conference in Toronto, moreover, demonstrated pitfalls, including challenges with exhibitors, customs delays, and limited outreach response. While the Hague could potentially attract publishers from Germany and the UK, university presses in the United States might be less likely to attend. Currency exchange rates would affect

individual members more than the organization, and graduate students might face affordability challenges.

Despite the risks, the Council acknowledged that the benefits of an international conference could be significant and would demonstrate SHAFR's commitment to internationalization. Success could open the door to more international conferences in the future. There were risks. That conceded, SHAFR would not know whether an international could succeed unless it attempted one. And there may never be a proposal for an international conference stronger than this one.

A motion was made to hold the 2028 conference in The Hague, and the motion passed unanimously. A second motion addressed where to hold the conference in 2030. One vote was cast in favor of Nashville, three votes were cast in favor of Dallas, and ten votes were cast in favor of not selecting a site at this time. The motion to defer the decision carried. Council directed Immerman to encourage Vanderbilt and the CPH to resubmit their proposals for 2030.

Immerman then provided an overview of financial matters. At the June meeting, SHAFR's financial outlook appeared concerning, prompting several major decisions. These included moving *Diplomatic History* and *Passport* primarily to digital formats and reducing the Marilyn Young Dissertation Award. While the current financial situation is less dire, the organization must continue to operate cautiously.

The Ways and Means Committee presented several recommendations. The first was a revision of the Endowment Investment Policy. The revised policy it recommended maintains a moderately conservative approach while allowing for longer-term investment and growth. The current investment manager has underperformed, and performance will be revisited in one to two years if it does not improve. Richard will be required to sign a new policy reflecting these changes. The Council voted unanimously to approve the revised policy.

The second recommendation concerned the construction of a *Passport* webpage. Silke Zoller joined the meeting for this discussion. A survey was conducted to assess the impact of digitization, though it was acknowledged that the survey was not fully inclusive. The decision was made to move toward a digital format over several years while retaining a PDF option for members who prefer a printed version. Two quotes were received. Barking Creative, which previously oversaw SHAFR's transition from the old website to the MemberClicks platform, submitted a detailed proposal with three options. A second quote came from Yoko Co, a larger company with higher costs and less specificity, which would require a discovery session.

After significant discussion, a motion was made to approve the Ways and Means recommendation that SHAFR accept Barking Creative's Option #2 at a cost of \$9000, but that to the extent practical Brian and Silke explore proposals for other web designers not to exceed \$9000. The motion passed unanimously.

While Silke Zoller was present, the Council continued discussion of *Passport*. The *Passport* website is expected to be operational in 2026, with a stronger transition to digital publication beginning in early 2027. The coming year will be used to gauge member preferences. A PDF option will remain available, though it will continue to incur costs.

The Council then returned to the remaining recommendations from the Ways and Means Committee. Richard presented the preliminary budget for FY2026. He explained that budgets have typically been based on the previous year's spending, and that he attempted to formulate the budget at the beginning of the fiscal year. The initial projection showed a \$40,000 deficit, roughly half of the previous year's shortfall. However, sponsorships and donations have already altered the outlook, and much of the shortfall has been addressed. Richard requested Council approval of the current budget framework, with a more detailed discussion to follow at the June meeting regarding improved budgeting models. The Ways and Means Committee expressed a desire to see a revised budget first. Budgeting is complicated by the fiscal year beginning on November 1 while budget approval have occurred midyear. The Council agreed that outside expertise may be necessary and that if possible SHAFR consider revising its fiscal year. Further discussion was deferred to the June meeting.

The Council then discussed the establishment of a SHAFR prize in Digital Humanities. Immerman reminded Council that it had considered the proposed prize twice previously and that the Digital Resources and Archival Sharing had revised it based on Council's feedback. The proposal now calls for the prize to be awarded every other year, reflecting the committee's capacity and estimates of the expected volume of submissions. At this time the award will not be accompanied by a cash reward. A motion to create the digital history prize was made and approved unanimously.

It was noted that the SHAFR Guide is currently in production for 2027, but a decision must be made about whether to continue the project. A group chaired by Sarah Snyder and composed of Elisabeth Leake and David Engerman has been formed to review the costs and organizational impact, with findings to be discussed at the June meeting.

Kaete provided an update on social media and communications. Bluesky has gained more traction, and LinkedIn continues to be useful, especially for publicity. *The Dispatch* has

been well received and serves as an effective communication tool. SHAFR-branded swag is forthcoming.

There were no oral presentations from committees and no votes required. Nevertheless, Council expressed its appreciation to Chris and Alex for their outstanding and very valuable work on the Graduate Committee. In the future Council will continue to rely more on written committee reports in order to shorten meetings unless oral discussion is necessary. No comments were raised regarding the written reports.

The Council discussed agenda items for the June meeting. These include investigating the status of the Link-Kuehl Prize for editing, which appears to have lapsed. Richard will look into the matter. The Council will also discuss cybersecurity and risk management considerations, including potential implications for the *Passport* website. Richard will invite George Fuji to the next meeting to address these issues. Richard will ask George in addition to offer his thoughts on strategies for improving the current website. Council uniformly agrees that the website does not serve SHAFR's interests adequately but recognizes the constraint imposed by the MemberClicks platform.

Also proposed for inclusion on the agenda for the June meeting is a discussion of fundraising efforts and related matters regarding The Hague Conference. The goal is to generate the highest attendance possible. Another item should be a review of membership trends, including the effects of the revised renewal and print subscription fees.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:56 p.m. Eastern Time.