

SHAFR Council Meeting Minutes
June 20, 2025
via Zoom, 12:00 noon-4:00pm (US Eastern)

Present: *Melani McAlister (chair), Megan Black, Brooke Blower, Brian Etheridge, Gretchen Heefner, Mary Ann Heiss, Chris Hulshof, Elisabeth Leake, Mitch Lerner, Christopher Nichols, Jay Sexton, and Alexandra Southgate*

Others Attending: *Richard Immerman (ex-officio), Amy Sayward (ex-officio), Kaete O’Connell (ex-officio), Faith Bagley, Elizabeth Ferguson, Anne Foster, Petra Goedde, Robert McMahon, and Silke Zoller*

Introductory matters

President Melani McAlister welcomed the Council members and affirmed the electronic votes taken since the last meeting. Council then voted unanimously in favor of a resolution of thanks for those who had completed their terms of service to SHAFR.

Conference Matters

Kaete O’Connell (Conference Coordinator and Deputy Director) presented an oral update on the upcoming SHAFR conference. She was particularly pleased with the response to the AV donation campaign, which allowed all those on the program who were unable to travel to the United States to participate in the conference via Zoom. This came about when O’Connell, in monitoring registration, reached out to several international members who notified her that they were unable to attend. Council thanked O’Connell for her quick thinking and action in pivoting to assist these SHAFR members; and Chris Hulshof also thanked her for her work in coordinating the graduate student social. O’Connell also highlighted that one session has been arranged for which a Zoom link will be distributed to all SHAFR membership on the first day of the conference. Preparations for the conference were complete.

Looking ahead to 2027, the Renaissance Arlington has agreed to release all the meeting spaces but allow SHAFR to retain the block of rooms. O’Connell and Richard Immerman (Executive Director Designate) are meeting with Laura Belmonte to discuss the use of Virginia Tech’s Innovation Campus as the preferred alternative to Arlington. A key issue is whether the facility has enough room space to accommodate ten concurrent sessions (the Arlington Renaissance model) or whether the program will need to be reduced to eight concurrent sessions, which has been the case in the past. Council also has another viable back-up with the George Mason campus.

Amy Sayward (Executive Director) also notified Council that a refund of the funds deposited for last year’s conference at the University of Toronto had finally been received, which helped with this fiscal year’s budget. She also mentioned that the Call for Proposals for hosting the 2028 conference had gone out. The goal was to generate several proposals.

Looking ahead to the 2026 conference, O’Connell reported that planning is going well. She has set up a meeting with staff from the Blackwell conference venue and student housing; the latter will supply a cheaper housing alternative. The Local Arrangements Committee has already developed ideas both for sponsorships and for organizing social events. Vice President/President-Elect Jay Sexton also announced

the Program Committee chairs for that conference—Mario Del Pero and Tamson Pietsch, who will continue to reinforce SHAFR's international character.

There was much discussion of the cost of the current conference, focusing on the projected deficit, which has been somewhat mitigated by last-minute registrations, the special appeal for donations to cover the AV costs, and an increase in sponsorships. O'Connell also reported that though the conference remains expensive, the food prices have not gone up as dramatically as they did between 2019 and 2023.

Financial matters

McAlister opened the discussion of financial issues by pointing to the mid-fiscal year's projected deficit, which was serious but had to be put into context. The budget surplus from the previous fiscal year meant that SHAFR would largely be able to offset this year's operating deficit; that surplus does not include the Lefflers' gift, which has been deposited in the endowment. Additionally, the final conference numbers would not be available until August and might not be as dire as projected. She also pointed out that SHAFR has historically subsidized its conferences, rather than seeing them as a source of revenue, which many other organizations do.

Another cause of the projected deficit was that only 80% of the projected income from *Diplomatic History*, under the new contract, is paid in the current fiscal year, with any additional funds being disbursed in April. The other main source of the deficit was that printing costs under the new contract were much higher than expected.

Immerman counseled that given the uncertainty of the final conference expenses that Council focus on these key trends, rather than specific numbers. He also highlighted the work that the editors of both *Diplomatic History* and *Passport* had been doing in order to determine how they might be able to appreciably lower printing/mailling costs. Sheridan Press (our printer) is working on estimates for these different scenarios, but Council will ultimately have to determine how to handle these costs, which might include some combination of charging per issue and organizational subsidy. Sayward stated that while Council had expected that a \$50 donation would cover both for a year, this had been about half of the actual cost. Currently the number of members requesting print copies was 250-300. She also explained that last year a couple of dozen members had expressed the desire to receive one of the two publications in print, with the other being provided electronically; so this was another possible variation for Council to consider offering to members. Brian Etheridge, editor of *Passport*, had sent out a survey to SHAFR members. Of the 162 respondents, 55 had expressed their willingness to pay annually for their publications, but what they were willing to pay for these publications averaged \$24.42. He feared that cutting print publications, which SHAFR members had come to expect as a benefit of membership, might lead to a drop in membership. These were complex questions that Council members should be thinking about ahead of the September meeting. Sayward emphasized that any surcharges to membership for print publications (one or both) would have to be settled ahead of the November 1st start to membership renewals.

McAlister also pointed out that the projected deficit could be addressed by augmenting income through donations, a development campaign, and/or increased endowment returns. She proposed establishing a task force to carefully go through the budget documents to propose to the Ways & Means Committee and then Council cuts and shifts for its September meeting. The task force might well look at budget

items beyond printing costs and fundraising, including possible adjustments to prizes and revisions to the membership fee structure. There are options besides printing costs, such as the dissertation completion fellowship. Also, the results of the AV appeal demonstrate the potential of fundraising. Revising the membership fee structure is another possibility. Reporting for the Ways & Means Committee, Mitch Lerner seconded McAlister's recommendation and stated that the committee had postponed any specific budget requests at its earlier meeting.

Immerman also pointed out to the reports on the endowment's performance, which Council had already discussed. Council previously removed some of its restrictions on the endowment's management, and SHAFR leadership may want to follow up on its previous discussion of exploring a change in investing consultants, which would also have to come through the Ways & Means Committee.

Publication matters

Anne Foster and Petra Goedde joined to discuss their editors' report on *Diplomatic History*. Conditions are much the same as last year. *DH* had received a healthy number of good submissions and a fair number of weaker submissions. Their main priority continues to be soliciting proposals and expanding efforts to solicit manuscripts from scholars who are doing work in foreign relations but may not identify within the field. The editors also discussed their plans for a special 1776 issue next June and for the 50th anniversary of *DH* in 2027. They also hope that the SHAFR in Asia initiative will provide content for one of the issues. Goedde and Foster pointed out that a smaller number of women submit manuscripts persistently, even though those submissions are accepted at higher rates. The editors are also encouraging international submissions by recommending that authors reach out to a mentor, however they are not sure if that initiative will ultimately be successful. They then turned to their recommendations for new members of the editorial board. Hulshof moved to accept those recommendations, Brooke Blower seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Elizabeth Ferguson then joined to review Oxford University Press's publisher's report. She provided information about production (which remained on schedule) and projected an increase in the number of articles that are likely to be published under an open access license, since OUP has signed some "read and publish" agreements with some U.S.-based university consortia. Collection subscriptions have also grown significantly, because Oxford has signed an agreement with India to provide top-tier journal access across the country. However, traditional institutional subscriptions have declined, which was expected. Usage (page views and downloads) has experienced a slight increase, so *DH* is looking healthy and promising overall. Ferguson also spoke to the new agreement for machine learning that Oxford has signed. SHAFR can expect to receive approximately \$12,000 across three years (with the first payment coming in May/June 2026). Ferguson ended her discussion by stating that OUP is definitely interested in entering a bid when the current contract expires; she then left the meeting.

This reminded Council about the need to make a decision by December 2028 about whether it intends to continue using OUP as the publisher of *DH*. Consequently, a task force should be established in 2026 to make recommendations to Council. The task force and ultimately the negotiation team should review past contracts.

Silke Zoller, editor of *Passport*, then joined the Council discussion. Immerman provided an overview of the current state of issues. An extensive search had revealed that Sheridan is the primary (and seemingly only) printer of academic journals currently; McAlister suggested exploring whether European

printers might make an offer. The costs of the initial issues of *DH* and *Passport* far exceeded estimates, which prompted the recent discussions with Sheridan about how to reduce costs. Etheridge and Zoller then summarized their report. The January issue was primarily prepared by past editor Andrew Johns, and the April issue also included some of the material he had collected; the September issue will consist entirely of materials they had solicited and will include new features highlighting research and archives. They also recognized that the modality of *Passport* is part of the larger budget conversations that Council is having, which prompted their survey in May. Of the 162 respondents, 101 read *Passport* in print, with 55 of those willing to make a payment for *Passport* (average amount of \$24.42). Discussions with Sheridan had resulted in a black-and-white publication but revealed that the size presented no cost issues; however, the number of pages was a cost issue. Etheridge emphasized the fine line between maintaining members and making wise financial decisions in terms of *Passport*. He mentioned that some parts of the publication might remain in print, while others shift on-line.

Sayward then summarized the current arrangement between SHAFR and Brill in publishing the *SHAFR Guide*. The editor has recruited section editors who will be paid when they submit their edits in fiscal year 2026-2027, as reflected in the long-range financial projections report provided to Council by the executive director. When entering into the current contract, Council had agreed to split the costs of the publication with Brill, defining the *Guide* as a service to members, who were using the Guide in large numbers when the decision was made. SHAFR is not contractually obligated to continue updating the Guide following the upcoming revision.

Council matters

Council discussed an amendment to the by-laws to provide for more nimble advocacy decisions. This grew out of the barrage of requests to sign on to different, time-sensitive statements that SHAFR had received since the new administration took office. The draft revision proposed that a super majority of Council be required rather than the current requirement for unanimity. Gretchen Heefner pointed out that according to this proposal, a vote of only 69% of the full Council could approve a statement. The resulting discussion led to a motion by Heefner to amend the proposal to approve an advocacy statement with just 80% of Council members voting but requiring a unanimous vote for approval (else the proposal would go out to a membership vote). Hulshof seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously. It will now go to the full membership for a vote in the upcoming fall election.

The second part of the amendment added to the section of the by-laws on the powers and responsibilities of the Executive Director, specifically providing that the executive director will represent SHAFR with other organizations and to the public when authorized by the president. Sexton moved to accept this proposal, which was seconded by Blower and which passed unanimously to also go to the membership for approval on the fall ballot.

Mary Ann Heiss then presented the draft Conflict of Interest Policy to Council, which she and Sexton had been charged to draft by McAlister and which was mandated by SHAFR's contract with OUP. It covers financial and other conflicts of interest. In sum, Council members, officers, and employees must sign every year to attest to their understanding of their responsibilities. The draft policy allows latitude for the Council's discretion and stipulates that those with conflicts will recuse themselves from deliberations on the specific matter. Hulshof moved to adopt the draft policy, Christopher Nichols seconded, and all voted in favor. The policy will be distributed to all affected parties and will be posted on the SHAFR website.

McAlister tabled discussion about membership in the American Council of Learned Societies until SHAFR's financial outlook was clearer but highlighted the important current work of the ACLS.

Committee matters

Council then turned to the various reports that it had received from its committees and task forces, starting with the Internationalization Task Force's recommendations regarding regional networking options. The recommendation regarding networks applying for SHAFR funds—the only recommendation with a fiscal impact—was tabled until the September meeting. The task force did recommend recognizing the Asian-Pacific group as an international network of SHAFR, which would function like other SHAFR committees (which would have a rotating chair and membership posted on the SHAFR website, which would be asked to make regular reports to Council, and which could request Council action, including funds). The task force also recommended prompting the current UK-Ireland network to establish itself into a similar international network of SHAFR, which could be formally recognized at the next Council meeting. There was also discussion about working toward creation of a similar European group through personal invitations and an e-blast announcement. Discussion also emphasized that these networks were meant to increase opportunities for international members, not replace or undermine the annual SHAFR conference. Megan Black moved to recognize Asian-Pacific Regional Network of SHAFR; the motion was seconded by Nichols and approved unanimously.

Council then turned to the report of the Membership Committee, which was responding to the Internationalization Task Force's recommendations about changes to the membership fee structure. Council expressed appreciation of the committee's work, which it believed would be very important to the budgetary task force and to Council in the fall. However, no action was taken at this time.

Council expressed general support for the idea, proposed by the Committee on Digital Resources and Archival Sharing, for creating a prize for outstanding digital history scholarship in our field. However, they believed that fundraising would be needed to establish a funded prize. Therefore, a final decision was postponed.

Hulshof then discussed the work of the Graduate Student Committee. Its recruitment drive had resulted in new memberships, and the committee was looking forward to further networking at the graduate student event at the Reagan Institute during the upcoming conference. Since the last Council meeting, the committee had organized a webinar about working at the National Archives with David Langbart, which went well and had prompted planning for another webinar about working in international archives. This follows on last year's successful webinars about applying for grants and attending the conference. The Graduate Committee had also organized a Reagan panel for the Conference. Hulshof also recognized the work over the past year that had provided graduate student representation on all SHAFR committees (other than the prize committees).

Robert McMahon, chair of the Historical Documentation Committee, then joined the Council meeting to provide his perspective, having only recently taken over as chair. He was concerned that this long-standing committee seemed currently to lack a clear mandate, despite the chaotic circumstances currently swirling around declassification and representation on the Historical Advisory Committee (HAC). The key question is what should the Historical Documentation Committee's mission should be formally, so that it can do more than just react to circumstances. Currently, its main responsibility seems to be to award the Anna Nelson prize. He highlighted some of the many issues that it could take on—

such as the transfer of documents from NARA to the Hoover Institution, NARA's budget, researchers' access to the archives, monitoring records schedules, and updating the membership on key developments in these areas. Council expressed enthusiasm and consensus about the Historical Documentation Committee serving as a clearinghouse to pass on information on developments related to NARA and other archival issues on all these fronts. Council envisioned distribution of the information through email blasts and perhaps a regular column in *Passport*.

Council adjourned at 4:17pm (U.S. Eastern).