



Task Force on AAA Procedures for Producing Public Policy Position Statements Report

**Prepared for the
American Anthropological Association**

**Submitted by
Task Force Members**

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Summary

The following report presents the findings of the Task Force on AAA Procedures for Producing Public Policy Statements and offers recommendations to amend the AAA Public Policy Statement review process. The task force recommendations are based on the assessments from the Working Group for AAA Public Policy Statements final report, additional formal and informal interviews with AAA stakeholders—leadership, staff, section presidents, and members- and a review of statement procedures from sister professional associations.

The report covers recommendations for an effective and transparent public statement review process, a revised statement review and submission process, and a diagram that illustrates this process. One primary recommendation is for the Members' Programmatic Advisory, and Advocacy, Committee (MPAAC) to assume a central role in the statement review process to achieve a streamlined and effective review process. A central finding of the working group and the task force is that most AAA section presidents are unfamiliar with the guidelines for public statement procedures. To address this limitation in awareness of policy statement procedures, the task force recommends informational sessions on the revised statement process for AAA section presidents. A webpage to submit public policy statement proposals, house the statement review process, diagram, and related resources are also suggested.

The report is organized as follows:

- Background
- Methodology
- Recommendations
- Areas for Further Consideration
- Appendices

Background

The Working Group for AAA Public Statements was appointed to review the AAA public statement review process. The Working Group report shared findings and recommendations based on data drawn from surveys and interviews with stakeholders—AAA staff, Executive Board leadership, section presidents, and AAA members.

Some key findings were:

- Section leadership and AAA membership were unclear about the statement review process.
- The process was perceived as unclear and with hidden steps.

The working group identified areas needing improvement in the public statement guidelines, updated the statement submission process (approved and posted on the AAA website) researched, and reported on the existing statement review process and its limitations.

One of the recommendations was to establish a task force to devise a streamlined and transparent statement review process. The Task Force was commissioned to:

- Make recommendations to the Board concerning the current guidance on the nature and types of issues on which it is appropriate for the AAA to take public policy positions,



- [devise] A template or guide to AAA statement formats,
- [review and advise on] The organizational voice with which AAA addresses the membership and broader public, the roles and responsibilities of Sections, the structure and functions of a “Rapid Response Network” or equivalent group.

This Task Force is authorized to take its investigations into whatever areas it believes appropriate, but it will be generally guided by the following questions:

- If the President and Executive Director are the only positions authorized to speak on behalf of the Association, what are the implications for Sections wishing to issue their own statements without Association-wide endorsement?
- AAA’s current guidance is that for the Association to take a public position on an issue, the issue is expected to be one of public policy (a) for which there is a consensus in the anthropological literature, or (b) is related to matters concerning the well-being of the discipline and the profession. What modifications, if any, are needed to this guidance?
- What roles and responsibilities should be assigned to the Rapid Response Network (RRN), and what resources are required for the RRN to effectively carry out these recommended roles and responsibilities?
- What additional consultation is recommended with Sections and the membership at large before AAA issues public policy position statements?
- AAA often must formulate statements in response to rapidly unfolding events. What changes in our current vetting process are required to ensure a timely response on the Association’s behalf?

Methodology

Qualitative and quantitative assessments from the Report of the AAA Public Statements Procedures guided the Task Force.¹ The assessments included interviews with AAA staff, the Executive Board president, statement review groups, informal discussions with AAA members, and surveys of AAA section presidents. In response to additional questions about review structures, additional interviews were conducted with the communications director, AAA counsel, and a small group of section presidents. The Task Force, guided by the Public Statement Policy Working Group report, conducted interviews with AAA staff, informal discussions with section presidents, and a review of sister associations’ statement review processes.

¹ Working Group for AAA Public Statements, “Report of the AAA Public Statements Procedures,” American Anthropological Association, October 2021, p. 4 Both qualitative and quantitative assessments were carried out to understand the review process better. To understand how all the pieces operate together, the Working Group conducted assessments of the written guidelines: a survey assessing section leaders’ knowledge of AAA statement procedures; background reports on the RRN; interviews with leadership involved in the review; and the submission and drafting part of the public statements. The findings highlight challenges in the process. Challenges in the existing statement process highlight the urgency to reassess the procedural process and update it to address the changing nature of the statement.



Findings

The task force conducted interviews and reviewed professional associations' public statement policies to amend the statement review process, such as devising materials to revise the AAA public statement review procedures and suggesting an approach to educate AAA section presidents about the procedures. The revised review process is described in detail in Procedures for Advocacy and Policy Statements, and the outreach approach is discussed in the Memorandum to Section Presidents (see Appendix B).

The major findings are:

- The Rapid Response Network is no longer effective in the statement review process.
- The statement reviews and submission guidelines need to be revised and clearly communicated to section presidents.
- Sections are unfamiliar with the statement review process.
- One of the results of the unclear process is sections releasing statements without knowledge of the review process.

Recommendations

The task force created the following materials to build a transparent and clear public statement process. The Task Force on AAA Procedures for Producing Public Policy Position recommends the language below (see Position Statement Request and Review Procedures), the use of a Diagram of Procedures, and circulation of an informative memorandum (see Appendix B) to AAA membership and sections. In addition to the memorandum, it is recommended this policy be discussed annually with section chairs.

A Diagram of Procedures, or flowchart, is included to enhance transparency, streamline processes, and ensure a systematic approach. A flowchart visually represents the sequence of steps in a procedure, providing a clear and concise overview of the entire process. The inclusion of a flowchart graphic in advocacy and policy statement-making procedures is a strategic decision that enhances organizational efficiency, communication, and overall effectiveness. This visual aid ensures that the process is transparent, standardized, and accessible, contributing to the successful development and issuance of impactful policy and advocacy statements.

Proposed Policy for Advocacy and Policy Statements

As a matter of AAA policy, ordinarily only the Executive Director and the President are authorized to speak on AAA's behalf. However, members, committees, task forces, and Sections may recommend position statements that are consistent with AAA's mission and, in the view of the originator, ought to be amplified by the full weight of AAA's reputation. A set of procedural steps is necessary to ensure statements issued in AAA's name and directed to audiences outside the AAA represent as broad a consensus of AAA members as possible, reflect relevant anthropological scholarship, and are not inimical to the AAA's interests.



Procedures

The Executive Board has approved the following procedures for considering requests by AAA members and units to issue letters and advocacy and policy statements in AAA's name. In the cases where a Section, interest group, committee, commission, or task force is involved, a draft statement will need to be approved by that body before being submitted to the AAA Executive Director. The AAA Executive Director will review the statement according to the procedure described herein. The Executive Director will then consult with the AAA President, EB officers, and AAA's legal counsel as needed before statements are forwarded to the addressees or published on the AAA website. In most cases, advocacy and policy statements will be given expedited review and signed by the President (or their designee) or returned to the signatories by the AAA President within two weeks of their submission to the AAA Office.

AAA's long-standing guidance has been that for the Association to take a public position on an issue, the issue is expected to be one of public policy (a) for which there is a consensus in the anthropological literature, or (b) is related to matters concerning the well-being of the discipline and the profession. The general principles we follow in considering whether to publicly engage in an advocacy effort in the Association's name include:

- a) Public statements should address matters of clear common professional interest and concern to the Association's membership or matters about which the Association's members have special knowledge and or expertise.
- b) The statement itself should include language that demonstrates such special knowledge. Thus, to the extent possible, the statement should present anthropological findings, conclusions or recommendations on the matter being addressed.

1) **Submission Procedure.** Requests should be sent to the AAA Executive Director (aas@americananthro.org) and the Communications Department (jmartin@americananthro.org). They will notify the President, the Executive Board Officers, MPAAC, and Sections with knowledge on the issue. It is important to have this standard way of submitting proposals in order to assure that all proposals receive the same timely and appropriate review. Proposals sent in unexpected ways are more likely to be lost. The link for sending proposals is on the Public Statements webpage found on the AAA website. It can be accessed after logging in (for security).

- b) Those submitting requests should indicate whether they want the request to receive expedited review. Expedited review will be faster, but if it is not possible to reach agreement with minimal consultation the statement will be returned to the requesting individual or section.

2) **Contents.** The correspondence should contain as much of the following information as possible:

- a) Brief summary of the issue.
- b) Brief history, if any, of relevant AAA positions or advocacy, statements, or resolutions, as well as those of other social science / humanities associations or other relevant organizations, if known.
- c) List of other groups supporting the effort or cause (with phone and email contact information).



- d) If the position statement is originating from outside AAA, and AAA is being asked to add its name as a signatory or endorser, whether the originating source has any flexibility regarding the wording of a statement.
- e) Phone and email contact information for lead advocate/commission or committee working on the issue/concern and
- f) Contact information for qualified outside experts, if appropriate.
- g) Evidence that the proposed statement has the backing of the unit originating the request, where appropriate.
- h) Response deadline and reason why response is needed by this date.

- i) Follow-up plans or description of next steps, where appropriate.
- j) Brief appendices, where appropriate, including reference documents, bibliography of published articles, etc. demonstrating the supporting scholarship.

3) **Review.** The following processes are reflected in the Diagram of Procedures to assist in clarifying the workflow.

- a) Once a request is received, the President or Executive Director will seek advice from the MPAAC, Sections, and other AAA members as appropriate. The routing for most topics will be to MPAAC.
- b) The MPAAC will offer a prompt, informed assessment of the proposed position statement. If the issue is relevant, strategic, and the proposed responses are actionable, MPAAC may provide suggestions including phrasing and the overall direction of the statement. MPAAC does not decide whether to issue the statement. MPAAC may recommend additional reviewing bodies. For expedited reviews, if MPAAC cannot reach a conclusion at this point regarding what review is needed, the proposal will be returned to the Communication Department, who may end the process or return the proposal to the authors.
- c) For ordinary reviews, if MPACC does not have relevant expertise among their members, MPAAC will try to identify it elsewhere in the AAA and refer the Communication Department to them.
- d) In requests for expedited review where timeliness is extremely important, AAA may issue statements based on the discretion of the AAA President and Executive Director. The AAA President and Executive Director may request advice from either the AAA Officers or the overall Executive Board, depending on need. AAA staff will distribute the final statement to the appropriate audiences and notify the membership that such distribution has been completed.

4) **4) Appeal Process.** In the rare event the AAA President declines the request or requires a change in the original text that is not deemed acceptable to the request's originator, the request originator may appeal the President's decision through the following process:

- a) A cover letter that specifies why the President's decision is unsatisfactory and the desired result (i.e., approval of the original statement or of a modified



statement), along with the original request, original cover letter, the President's response, and other relevant correspondence, must be submitted to the AAA Manager of Organizational Governance.

b) AAA Manager of Organizational Governance will solicit from the President a statement regarding why they declined to approve the letter or statement or requested changes.

c) AAA Manager of Organizational Governance will circulate these materials to the AAA Executive Board (EB). The AAA Secretary (an EB member) will moderate discussion by the EB, which will consider both positions and then vote as to whether AAA support should be granted.

d) If a majority of an EB quorum deem it appropriate to grant AAA support for the letter or statement, the EB may delegate an EB member sign on behalf of the EB. The EB may suggest as an alternative that the request's originator issue a statement in its own name, provided that it is clear they are speaking as an individual in the unit and not on behalf of the AAA.

5) **Section Statements.** Statements by sections that are not statements of the AAA. Sections may issue their own statements in their own names that are not AAA position statements. Such statements should include a clear disclaimer identifying the section or sections making the statement and saying that the statement is not a statement of the AAA as a whole and has not gone through the AAA procedure for review and approval of such statements.

- a) The AAA suggests the following wording for section disclaimers: **This statement represents the view of the members of [name of section or sections]. It should not be construed as representing the American Anthropological Association as a whole. The American Anthropological Association is a voluntary, non-profit, scholarly association. Membership is worldwide. It has diverse sections representing specialized interests within the field.**
- b) The AAA requires that sections issuing their own statements notify the Executive Committee of their intended wording, for two main reasons. 1) To allow the AAA to offer legal advice if it seems to be needed. 2) To allow the Executive Committee to suggest other sections that might wish to communicate with the initiating section.
- c) Sections desiring legal advice can seek it through the Executive Committee.
- d) Sections with concerns about policy statements can propose these concerns for discussion in the monthly zoom meetings of section presidents.

Diagram of Procedures (Flowchart)

(To review each component of the diagram, click on the graphic for break-out explanations of the procedures for advocacy and policy statements)

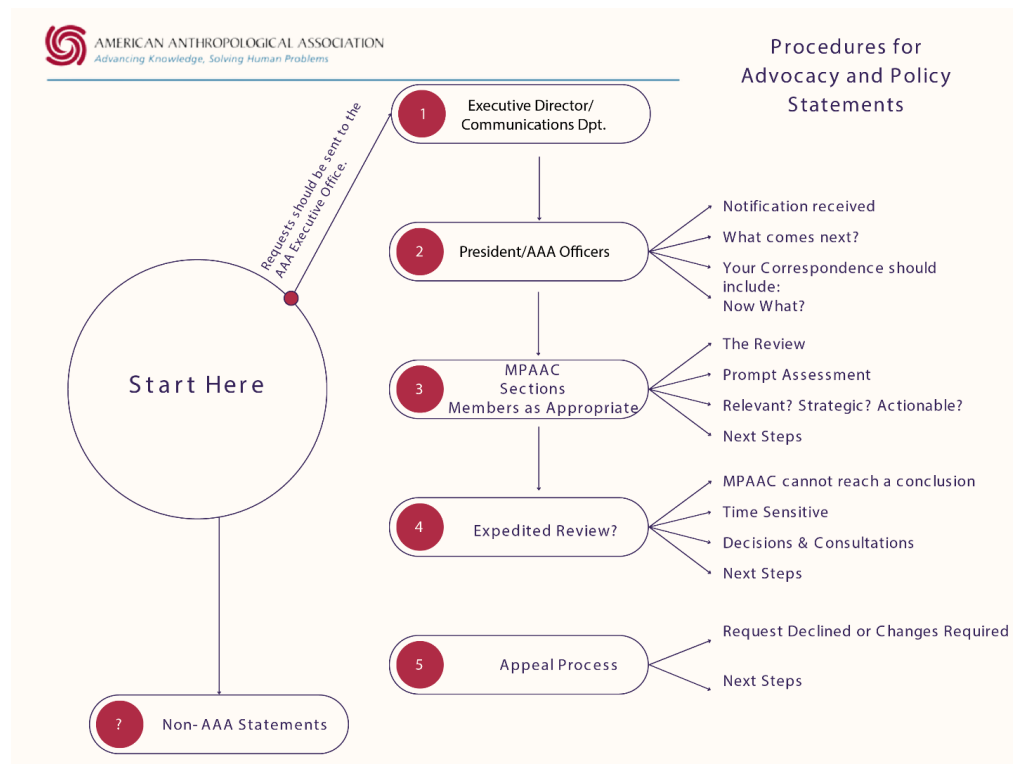
This interactive diagram is included to enhance transparency, streamline processes, and ensure a systematic approach. A flowchart visually represents the sequence of steps in a procedure, providing a clear and concise overview of the entire process. The inclusion of a flowchart graphic in advocacy and policy statement-making procedures is a strategic decision that enhances organizational efficiency, communication, and overall effectiveness. This visual aid ensures that the process is transparent, standardized, and accessible, contributing to the successful development and issuance of impactful policy and advocacy statements. The flowchart is essential for:

- **Visual Clarity:** A flowchart offers a visual representation of the policy and advocacy statement-making



procedures, presenting complex steps and decision points in a clear and easily understandable manner.

- **Process Standardization:** By encapsulating the procedure in a flowchart, organizations establish a standardized visual guide that helps maintain consistency in the execution of policy and advocacy activities. Standardization is key for ensuring that every statement undergoes a uniform process, minimizing the risk of errors or oversights and contributing to the overall quality and reliability of the statements issued.
- **Decision Path Representation:** A flowchart allows for the representation of decision points and branching paths within the procedure. This is particularly relevant in policy and advocacy, where multiple stakeholders may contribute to the drafting and approval processes. Decision paths can include internal reviews, expert consultations, and final approval stages, offering a comprehensive view of the various pathways the statement may follow.
- **Accountability and Roles:** Clearly defined roles and responsibilities are fundamental in policy and advocacy work. A flowchart enables the assignment of specific tasks to individuals or committees at each stage of the procedure. This visual representation fosters accountability, as it is easy to identify who is responsible for each step, promoting a collaborative environment where stakeholders understand their roles in the overall process.
- **Identifying Bottlenecks and Streamlining:** Through the visual depiction of the flowchart, organizations can identify potential bottlenecks or areas where the procedure may experience delays. This insight allows for proactive measures to streamline the process, ensuring that policy and advocacy statements are developed and issued in a timely manner.





AAA Public Statement Webpage

The public statement webpage (see Appendix A) was designed to feature a link to submit statement proposals, AAA guidelines for acceptable proposals, the revised statement procedures, procedures diagram, brief background on working group and task force research, and findings regarding the statement process, contact information for AAA staff handling statements, links to sample approved statements and other resources.

Information Session for Section Presidents about Updated Statement Process

The task force recommends informational sessions be initiated with the section presidents. Given the previously limited awareness of guidelines for proposing position statements, it will take some time for the new process to become part of institutional memory. Membership frustrations can ideally be minimized by providing education about this process via all sections and their respective governance. In addition to this, a memorandum (see Appendix B) can be circulated across sections and membership outlining basic information about the new process and how it came to be. This memorandum should also provide links to more detailed information, such as the AAA Public Statements webpage.

Areas for Further Consideration

Several areas that need further research/committee work were identified by the task force. Some of the areas went beyond the original charge of the two-year task force. Others emerged during the research.

Process/Rules for Statements not reviewed through AAA Statement Procedures - The task force understands that Executive Board leadership is interested in exploring the next steps for AAA sections and individuals who do not submit a statement proposal for review. It is suggested that the Executive Board or a committee consider guidelines.

Timeline for Review of Statement Procedures - With the working group discovering discrepancies between published statement procedures guidelines, the task force recommends a review of the procedures and related materials every four years.

Time for Section Presidents and Members to Share Feedback on Revised Statement Procedures - Research for this report surfaced some member concerns about transparency and accountability in how the policy to determine which statements are issued was developed as well as how it has been implemented. Instituting a comment period would allow members to suggest possible modifications the EB can take into consideration as it makes its final determination. Inviting comments would also signal a commitment to member input and dialogue.



Task Force Contributors

Kamela Heyward-Rotimi, PhD, is a AAA Executive Board Member who chaired both the Working Group for AAA Public Policy Statements and the Task Force on AAA Procedures for Producing Public Policy Position. Dr. Heyward-Rotimi devised the task force work plan and the drafting and compilation of the task force's final report.

Jaymelee Kim, PhD, D-ABFA, previously served on the Committee for Human Rights and was a human rights delegate for the AAA Members' Programmatic, Advisory, and Advocacy Committee. In the past, the former was responsible for assisting with public statement writing, and the latter was responsible for the AAA 2020 Statement on Anthropology and Human Rights. Dr. Kim brought her historical knowledge of these processes and membership concerns to the work of this task force. In addition to that, Dr. Kim assisted in drafting the Memorandum (Appendix B), reviewing the Diagram of Procedures, and developing the procedures and report.

Murray Leaf, PhD, has been president of Culture and Agriculture and Agriculture and the Society for Anthropological Sciences, member of the Section Assembly Executive Board, and the small section representative on the AAA Executive Board.

Karen Rignall, PhD, previously served as the labor seat for the AAA Members' Programmatic, Advisory, and Advocacy Committee (MPAAC) and as Treasurer of the Middle East Section (MES). Dr. Rignall had first-hand experience of the statement review process from her position in MES and participated in discussions about processes for issuing statements and representing member concerns as part of MPAAC. She assisted in conducting interviews, reviewing procedures and the role of the RRN in those procedures, and in drafting the final report.

Elisha Oliver, PhD is a former AAA Leadership Fellow and served as a member of the Working Group for AAA Public Policy Statements. As a member of the task force, Dr. Oliver assisted in the review of the procedures, creation of the Diagram of Procedures, and development of the final report.



APPENDIX A

Task Force Procedures for Producing Public Policy Position: Background

The Working Group for AAA Public Statements was appointed to review the AAA public statement review process. The Working Group report shared findings and recommendations based on data drawn from surveys and interviews with stakeholders—AAA staff, Executive Board leadership, section presidents, and AAA members.

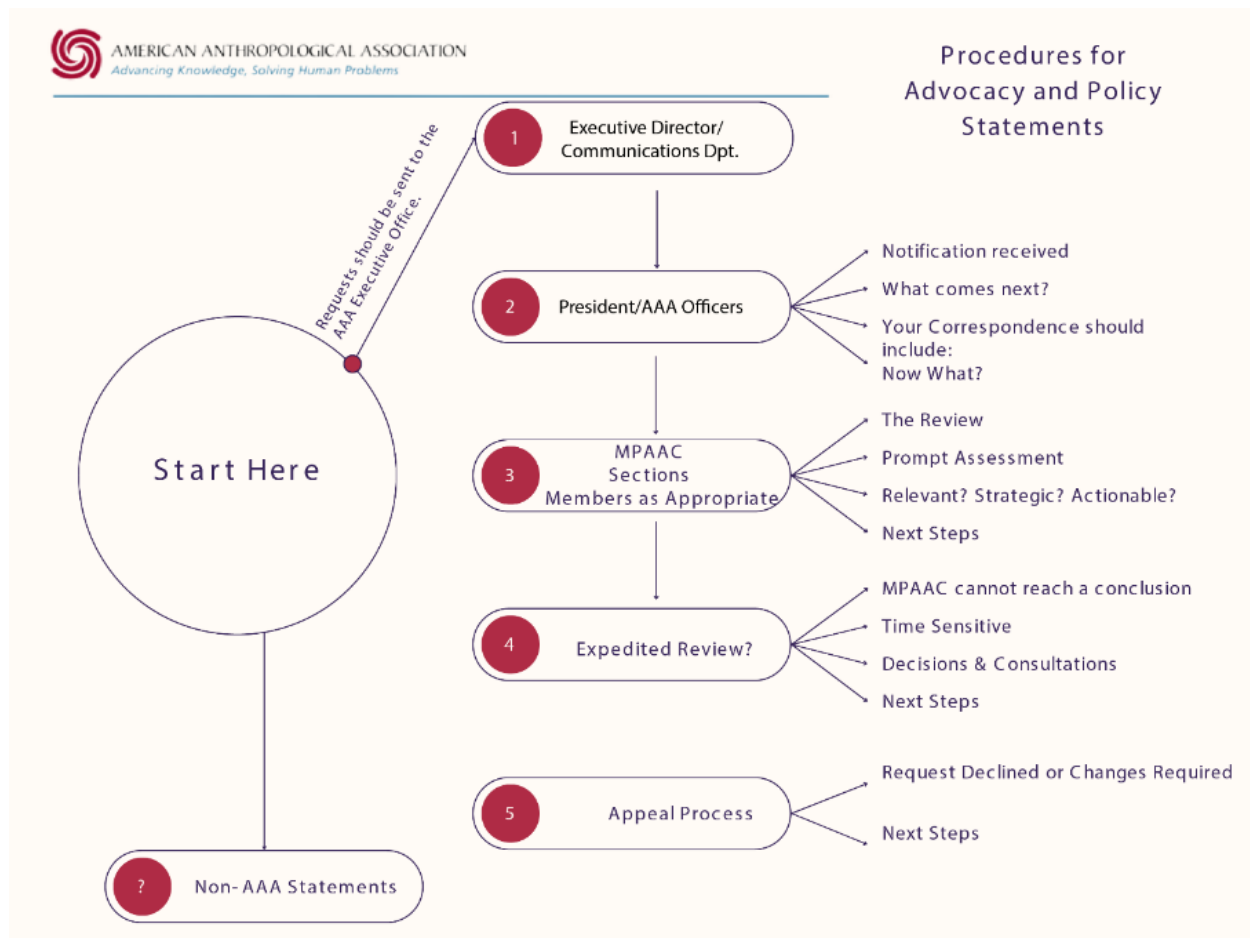
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One of the recommendations was to establish a task force to devise a streamlined and transparent statement review process. The Task Force was commissioned to:

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- [devise] A template or guide to AAA statement formats.
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Submit statement requests to: Ady Arguelles-Sabatier (aas@americananthro.org)
 Jeff Martin (jmartin@americananthro.org)



APPENDIX B

Memorandum

TO: AAA Membership

DATE:

SUBJECT: Policy for Issuing Position Statements

The Task Force on AAA Procedures for Producing Public Policy Position has been asked to develop an official set of procedures that allows membership to request that AAA issue a position statement to the public (e.g., AAA Stands with Tribal Nations Opposing Dakota Access Pipeline). Here, we are providing brief contextual information for the request and the work of the task force.

WHY DEVELOP A PROCESS FOR AAA TO ISSUE PUBLIC STATEMENTS?

In response to concerns from members and sections, the executive board commissioned a working group to assess the statement procedures process. The working group recommended a task force develop tools to streamline the statement review process. The executive board accepted the recommendation and determined that a task force was needed to establish an official pathway for membership to request that position statements be released to the public by AAA. Historically, requests were channeled through diverse routes, including, but not limited to:

- Committee for Human Rights which was absorbed by the current Members' Programmatic, Advisory, and Advocacy Committee (MPAAC)
- Direct requests to the AAA Executive Board
- Rapid Response Network

This process was unorganized, inconsistent, did not ensure consultation or review by appropriate AAA organizations, and there was confusion about who could release a public statement on behalf of AAA.

GOALS OF THE PUBLIC POLICY STATEMENT TASK FORCE?

The task force guided by the Report on the AAA Public Statements Procedure, discussions with various AAA stakeholders, crowdsourced information on past "processes," and with the assistance of AAA administration, aimed to meet the following objectives:

1. Develop an organized and consistent workflow for submitting requests for AAA to release public statements on pressing issues.
2. Create a process that is ideally timely and able to be initiated rapidly.
3. Codify the need for consultation of AAA sections, interest groups, committees, and general counsel prior to release of a public statement.



WHO CAN SUBMIT A STATEMENT?

Any member of AAA can submit a request following the formalized workflow. Draft statements or suggested language for statements can also be submitted with the request, along with additional information outlined in the procedure. Leadership within AAA organizations or interest groups may submit a request on behalf of a section/interest group (with that section's approval).

CAN AN AAA ORGANIZATION ISSUE A STATEMENT ON ITS OWN?

Any section/interest group can issue a statement, but if it does not go through the official AAA process, then it must include the following disclaimer:

“This statement represents the view of the members of [name of section or sections]. It should not be construed as representing the American Anthropological Association as a whole. The American Anthropological Association is a voluntary, non-profit, scholarly association. Membership is worldwide. It has diverse sections representing specialized interests within the field.”

WHERE CAN THE OFFICIAL PROCEDURES BE FOUND?

We encourage executive boards of AAA sections and interest groups to circulate the procedures and their flowchart to its membership, and we hope this simplifies and improves AAA's ability to respond to burgeoning issues in our global community. These procedures can be found at the [Public Statements webpage](#) on the AAA website.