

Attachment 1
SfAA Public Policy Committee
Statement of Goals (1/98)

The committee considered three questions in its brainstorming efforts. (A) What goals do we envision for SfAA in the domain of public policy? (B) What are the major obstacles to achieving them? (C) What steps should the organization undertake to get there?

(A) Goals

Broadly, we need to increase the ability of SfAA to bring the results of anthropological research to bear on policy issues. SfAA as an organization should speak on policy issues of particular importance. Primarily, however, increased effectiveness in public policy must come through the actions of the membership. Ideally, each of us should develop a better understanding of how to translate his or her own expertise into recommendations that are relevant and cogent in a policy domain. Equally important, each of us should seek a better grasp of the policy process relevant to his or her expertise, to recognize the key players, the relevant interest groups, and the critical decision points, with the aim of becoming an effective actor within a given policy network.

Specific goals include the following. (1) SfAA should increase its capacity to deliver relevant training to its membership on effective intervention within the policy process. (2) SfAA should encourage policy-relevant research to improve our ability to demonstrate expertise that is valid, reliable, and credible in a variety of policy areas. (3) SfAA should be able to react quickly and effectively on time-dependent issues to present anthropologically sound information and recommendations.

(B) Obstacles

We see several interrelated factors that reduce the effectiveness of anthropology in the world of public policy. Many of these are reflections of the organization and values of academic communities, which continue to dominate our institutional landscape.

(1) There is a tendency to over-specialization, relative to the rather broad, synthetic approaches required for much policy analysis. (2) Organizational rewards reinforce the trend established in graduate training to focus inward, communicating primarily with one's peers, rather than outward, to relevant publics. (3) There is a lack of adequate (or too often, any) policy training in most anthropology curricula. (4) We have failed to identify clearly a set of analytic skills and a coherent knowledge base that both establish the relevance of our discipline for policy debates and distinguish us from other social sciences. The time has long passed when we could rely on the

claim of "doing ethnography" to explain our supposed distinctiveness.

(C) Solutions

Our suggested solutions, at least in the short term, fall under two headings: training and organizational development. The policy committee will involve itself in both areas, but we can be at best a catalyst. Increased effectiveness of SfAA in the policy arena will depend primarily on the willingness of our many colleagues who already have extensive experience in public policy to share what they have learned.

(1) The SfAA should work to improve training in policy-oriented analysis and intervention. (a) The policy committee plans to sponsor sessions at both the SfAA and, if possible, the AAA annual meetings to highlight particular policy issues and to showcase examples of effective anthropological analysis and intervention. (b) We need to encourage the publication of articles, discussions, and monographs that document anthropological "best practices" in the policy domain. (c) We need to develop model curricula for teaching skills relevant to public policy debate within both "pure" and applied anthropological training.

(2) The SfAA needs to become more effective and more visible as a resource for anthropological insight in matters of public policy. (a) SfAA needs to develop clearer standards for reviewing policy statements proposed for endorsement, and better procedures to allow responses on time-critical issues to be disseminated promptly and effectively. (b) SfAA needs to make greater efforts to have its members with appropriate expertise appointed to panels and commissions at all levels of government. (c) SfAA should participate more extensively in issue-oriented policy networks. (d) SfAA needs to facilitate the sharing of skills and experience among the organization's policy-oriented committees.

[Note. This statement summarizes the strategy discussion at the committee's November 1997 meeting, as subsequently revised in email discussion.]

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