

Approved by Council, August 15, 2017

APRIL 21, 2017 COUNCIL REPORT OF BALLOT VOTE

The following message was sent to the Council and the Council was asked to vote no later than April 21, 2017:

As you will recall, at the March Council meeting we discussed the possibility of launching a “Sociology Action Network” (SAN)—optimally without great delay. While this concept held great appeal to Council, the idea had not yet been developed into a concrete proposal. For this reason, a subcommittee of Council was appointed, to be joined by two additional ASA members who had participated in the generation of this idea as well as relevant Executive Office staff. The group’s charge was to develop an articulated practical vision for the SAN and submit it to Council for consideration and electronic vote. Attached please find a memo to Council from the committee. Thanks to Tanya, Barbara, and Chris as well as Lester Kurtz, Akos Rona-Tas, and Carmen Russell for their hard work.

To: ASA Council

From: Tanya Golash-Boza, Nancy Kidd, Lester Kurtz, Barbara Risman, Akos Rona-Tas, Carmen Russell, and Chris Uggen

Date: April 14, 2017

Re: Proposal to launch the Sociology Action Network

Background and Context

Encouraging and facilitating public engagement with sociology is among ASA’s primary mission-related goals, and the import of that process has only increased in the current political climate. It is more important than ever for us to demonstrate the value of sociology to a wide range of public audiences in targeted and meaningful ways. When Council met in early March, we discussed this imperative at length.

In the interest of focusing our attention on this important goal, one of the key components of the recent Executive Office restructuring was the inception of a new Department of Communications in early March. This department is being led by Carmen Russell and will be fully staffed by the Annual Meeting. Carmen is in the process of developing a robust, integrated strategy for our public engagement work and its related infrastructure, and in August he will provide a report to Council.

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In this memo, we describe the proposed Sociology Action Network and some of the ways in which ASA resources can be developed and deployed to support its activities. If approved, SAN would be one key initiative in the broader ASA strategy to build engagement between various publics (e.g., media, public policy makers, community leaders, educators, general public) and sociology. The various initiatives in this larger strategy will be integrated such that supporting resources will be available for use in different ways across initiatives. For example, ASA is planning to produce podcast interviews with sociologists on timely policy issues and short informational videos featuring sociologists explaining key sociological concepts and findings in accessible language. Many of these resources can be used to support SAN activity and, in turn, SAN collaborations have the potential to become powerful public interest stories that will communicate the value of sociology to a wide range of audiences.

What is the Sociology Action Network?

The goal of the SAN is to leverage our sociological expertise to empower various sectors of civil society to intervene in current sociopolitical contexts in meaningful ways. SAN will do this by providing direct support to nonprofit organizations with advocacy missions related to issues that can be informed by sociology. The idea is to connect willing sociologists on a volunteer basis with relevant (principally, but not always, local) organizations. Sociologists will offer both substantive (e.g., sociological knowledge on recidivism) and methodological (e.g., survey design) expertise to the organizations. This is a nonpartisan effort to ensure that sociological expertise is used to support effective organizational activity.

Given the breadth of sociological scholarship, eligible organizations could range, for example, from the NAACP to an elementary school and from a shelter for victims of domestic violence to a consumer financial protection organization. Note that ASA's role in this is *facilitating* productive partnerships between sociologists and organizations that can benefit from the expertise of sociologists. The sociologists will be working as independent, pro bono consultants, not on behalf of ASA.

How do we get started?

There are many details that will need to be carefully considered to launch this successfully, and the subcommittee did just enough preliminary thinking about these issues to generate comfort among ourselves that this is indeed feasible and can responsibly be brought to Council for consideration.

We recommend that the President appoint a SAN Advisory Committee that will be tasked with partnering with relevant Executive Office staff in refining the initiative, getting it launched, and continuing to provide support and advice as needed over time. (Ultimately, Council will put in

place a process for the selection and rotation of members, but we will defer that until we have a better sense of the longer-term responsibilities of the Advisory Committee).

Among the initial steps the Advisory Committee would be charged with taking:

- ✓ Identify the social world we want to address. Who would be our audience? Map the organizations.
- ✓ Document the areas of expertise—topics and methods—that can be offered by sociologists to support those organizations, and overlay them onto the organizational map.
- ✓ Consider whether we want to develop specific consulting modules that can be deployed to similar organizations across the country (e.g., LGBTQ rights organizations). These might include packets of resources about a particular topic that could be used as appropriate. (Note: ASA is considering developing such packages for use in non-SAN contexts as well.)
- ✓ Communicate with other groups that have engaged in related efforts to ensure complementarity, e.g., Scholars Strategy Network (SSN), Council on Contemporary Families (Note: Most of these contacts will also extend to questions beyond SAN.)
- ✓ Communicate with the leadership of regional sociological associations to consider partnerships on place-based activity.
- ✓ Develop a session for the Montreal Annual Convention in August on SAN. Consider inviting some of the organizations with which we might partner. Or consider making it a broader session about public engagement of sociologist and invite people from The Society Pages, SSN, and other relevant groups.

As indicated above, during the coming period of time ASA will be developing an extensive communications infrastructure. Many of the components of that infrastructure will be useful for the SAN in addition to other public engagement initiatives. Among the components of the infrastructure that will be useful for SAN:

- ✓ Public engagement liaisons from each section. We will ask section chairs to make these appointments. For SAN, the liaisons will be asked to identify key areas of expertise members of their respective sections can bring to SAN organizations. This will be one of the various networks we will deploy to identify topics and people for outreach purposes.
- ✓ Experts database. We already have an “experts database,” but we are going to be enhancing and expanding it quite a bit in the coming period of time. Experts in the database can be tagged for different purposes, including willingness to serve as part of the SAN network and relevant expertise for SAN.
- ✓ Short explanatory videos and related materials. These would be Vox-style video stories which break down complex research in a way that applies to the socio-political questions of the day. These videos will be just one of many resources we will develop that could be deployed by SAN sociologists. We are planning to develop concise written materials geared to a public audience, podcast interviews with sociologists on timely policy issues, and more.

All members of Council voted unanimously to approve the development of this program and grant authority to the President to appoint a SAN Advisory Committee.