

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE *of* AMERICA

SOCIETY RESOURCE GUIDES



STARTING A NEW SOCIETY

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Revised August 2018

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A. What is an AIA Society?

An AIA Society is a collection of geographically proximate AIA members who form a formally recognized local group affiliated with the AIA to promote and advance the Institute's mission in their local community. Societies support the outreach and educational goals of the AIA, and maintain national programs, like lectures and International Archaeology Day. The first Local Society was established in Boston in 1884. Today, the AIA has 108 chartered Local Societies and several more in formation. Societies' membership includes both professional archaeologists and non-archaeologists and reflects the Institute's unique character as an organization that welcomes both professionals and interested avocational members..

Society organization, activities, and programs vary considerably depending on size, location, and available resources. The AIA website, www.archaeological.org/societies, lists all of the Local Societies and provides contact information for each one. Many societies maintain their own website and/or Facebook page and links to these are also provided on the AIA website. Checking a Local Society's website is an easy way to keep abreast of what societies are doing and how they are organized.

Membership in a society is assigned when a person joins the AIA at the supporting member level and is based on geographical proximity. Local Societies enable AIA members to participate directly in the programs of the Institute and to communicate with the national organization and other like-minded people in their communities.

Each Local Society is managed by a board of elected officers who are responsible for various aspects of its operations. The organization of these boards and their overall composition, however, may vary. In some societies, the majority of the members are avocational, while others are largely comprised of professional members. While each society is different, the information herein should be useful to all and we encourage you to contact the AIA office in Boston with any questions. It may also be helpful to view the annual [Society Assessment](#) to learn more about society structures and best practices.

B. The Operation of Societies

1. Start-up

To be chartered as an AIA Local Society your local group must have at least 50 AIA members who agree to be a part of the new Society.

Steps to forming a society:

1. Contact the AIA office in Boston and inform the Director of Programs of your intention to form a society and provide a location for your proposed society—usually a city, for example: AIA-Cleveland Society, or region, for example: North Carolina-Triangle Area.

2. Request membership brochures that you can distribute or mail to potential members.
3. If you have not done so already, make a point of contacting the departments of Classics, Art History, History, and Anthropology at universities within a 1-hour radius of your regular event venue. Archaeology is regularly taught in several different academic departments, with each academic institution organizing this slightly differently; some institutions also have separate Archaeology programs or even departments. Contact local high school teachers; make sure that they understand the many resources AIA has to offer. Cast as wide a net as possible.
4. Look to see if there already are state-level or community-level avocational archaeology groups in your area. Check with the State Archaeologist's office or local Historical Society. Teaming up with extant groups on at least some events helps to build useful community ties, and need not dilute potential AIA membership; indeed, a cheerfully inclusive attitude may help build membership. Competitiveness with extant groups is counterproductive.
5. You can request the following from the AIA office:
 - a. Mailing addresses for all ARCHAEOLOGY magazine subscribers within your desired geographical boundaries. Over 200,000 people subscribe to ARCHAEOLOGY, and the list of subscribers in your geographical area is an excellent way to find members. Please provide the AIA office in Boston with the postal codes for the areas in which you are interested. Note: The AIA cannot legally provide email addresses for subscribers.
 - b. Mailing addresses for all "at-large" AIA members (i.e. those who belong to the organization but are not already affiliated with a society) in your locale.
6. Use the mailing addresses to send out letters announcing the formation of a new local AIA society and invite the addressees to join (NB: mailings will probably be at your own expense, since you have no treasury yet). You should send out two different versions of the letter, as follows:
 - a. One version to all ARCHAEOLOGY magazine Subscribing Members who are not yet members of an AIA Local Society; a membership brochure or at least a printout of the AIA Membership Form should be included with each letter. An electronic version of the brochure is available from the membership section of the AIA website.
 - b. One version to all the "at-large" AIA members in your locale, asking if they will agree to affiliate with your new society rather than remain at-large; a tear-

off form or separate sheet which they can fill out and send to Boston on their own will be extremely helpful.

5. As you receive positive responses to the above letters, or as you receive notice of new members from the AIA office in Boston (which are sent once a month), send each new member an individual letter of welcome and thanks! As you hear from potential members, collect email addresses if possible and make sure that these people are willing to receive emails from you. This will make future communication easier (and cheaper).

Despite these efforts, you may still need to recruit a few more people to reach the threshold of 50 members. There are several things that could help with this:

- a. Organize an event and invite your new members and others from the general public to attend. Encourage non-members to join the AIA and your society.
- b. Try to provide regular events (ideally once per month) in a consistent location and at a consistent time so that people get used to attending and plan for it. Try to diversify events in order to appeal to the broadest possible range of membership; alternate hands-on events, lectures, and discussion forums, for example. Whatever the event, make sure the venue has adequate parking or that adequate instruction about parking is disseminated in advance.
- c. Make sure that events begin on time as advertised, and end on time as advertised. (Be sure to communicate the end time clearly to speakers!) Do build in time for refreshments and conversation, but be clear about the start and end time of that as well. Local businesses or other partners may be willing to assist with the costs of refreshments.
- d. Ask current members to spread the word and recruit new members. Frequent reminders to those attending lectures and other events to please sign up as AIA members are helpful. Inject a sense of drama! This can be particularly effective if you are close to having the required number, i.e. if the society only needs ten more members to qualify for formation.
- e. Provide reminders about discounted memberships. Students will often sign up when they know about great offers. Student memberships are important; students are the future!
- f. Be persistent in advertising talks, events, and activities. Every event (whether a talk, a hands-on workshop, a field trip, etc.) potentially appeals to different constituencies beyond the core group, and those constituencies have to be reached. Example of

- success: a talk on Greek music which attracted a lot of musicians, some of whom returned for other talks and signed up to be members.
- g. Create a website for your society and use it as a way to publicize your efforts and activities.
 - h. Consider the use of social media to help with the recruitment process. Create a Facebook page for your society.
 - i. Be proactive in disseminating reminders about AIA events in the larger community: travel opportunities, field opportunities, conference opportunities, etc. These will definitely appeal to some would-be members.
 - j. Find ways to involve as many members as possible in leadership roles. Students can be valuable additions to a refreshments or hospitality committee, for example, and even small responsibilities are an incentive to students to stay involved. Students are also good publicity committee members; they are often more than willing to help post fliers, for example.
 - k. Other possible enhancements: work with local museums to build interesting activity options; request donations of materials (such as books) for raffles or prizes; work with other AIA Societies in your region to share resources (such as “local talent” for lectures) and to collaborate on large-scale events such as archaeology fairs.
 - l. Raise funds to provide gift memberships to potential members. See the finance guide for guidelines about soliciting and acknowledging gifts. It is possible that gifts to your society may be tax deductible.
 - m. Contact the AIA office in Boston for advice and assistance.

One of the keys to successfully starting and maintain a Society is having a consistent meeting/lecture place—at a university or college, museum, church or synagogue, or other large hall—which can hold at least 100 people and to which people will become accustomed. The venue should be ADA accessible and have audio-visual equipment. Be sure to provide information about parking options—if the parking will not be free, it is important to be upfront about that and provide alternative suggestions. At the meetings, have plenty of membership brochures on hand and have someone ready to explain membership benefits, etc. As noted above, brochures can be obtained from the AIA office in Boston.

Write yet one more version of the “invitation letter,” to be sent out to any interested parties who may hear about the new society after the initial formation is already in progress.

2. Founding a New Society

The following policies were adopted by the Executive Committee at its April 26, 1980 meeting and approved by the Council at its December 28, 1980 meeting (Bulletin, vol. 72).

a. The prospective society will:

1. Submit to the AIA office in Boston 25 or more society level memberships; also include any Lifetime memberships. Members transferring to the prospective society from another affiliated society may be listed in the rolls of the prospective society but cannot be counted at this stage. Members transferring from the At-Large category will be counted.
2. Select a name for the new society according to the formula: Archaeological Institute of America—XYZ (local area) Society. The AIA office in Boston must approve the selected name.

b. When the above requirements are met, the AIA office in Boston will:

1. Send the prospective society a \$100 starter fund and a single lecturer; it will also provide help and advice for attracting more members to the society and for raising funds locally. Headquarters will also request a specific accounting of the expenditure of the starter fund.
2. Enter all submitted memberships into the system as affiliates of the prospective society and begin sending the prospective society all membership printouts and other materials regularly produced for the societies.

c. The prospective society is now considered to be in formation. To receive a charter, the prospective society will need to:

1. Show an active membership of 50 or more members.
2. Formulate and present to the AIA office in Boston local regulations or bylaws which include provisions for election of local officers and the conditions for holding those posts. [See document on bylaws for more information and guidance.](#)

d. If a prospective society meets all the requirements, the AIA Executive Director will petition the Executive Committee on behalf of the society for its recommendation that the AIA Council charter the society. Upon approval of the Council, the society will be granted its charter and become an affiliated society of the AIA in good standing.

3. Maintaining Active Status

A chartered AIA society should try to maintain at least 50 members to ensure continued viability. We realize that membership numbers fluctuate over time, and therefore accept 35 as the minimum necessary to maintain active status, with the idea that the society is working on rebuilding membership levels back to 50. Societies will be urged to maintain an active membership of no less than 35 in order to remain in good standing. Societies below 35 can work with the AIA office in Boston to find ways to increase their membership.

An active membership shall have the following rights, privileges, and obligations:

1. An active society is subject to all terms and conditions prescribed by the Regulations, the Council, the Governing Board, the Officers, and AIA office in Boston.
2. An active society is entitled to fully participate in all programs established for the affiliated societies, including the Lecture Program and any programs that shall in the future be created for the benefit of the societies.
3. An active society shall be able to name representatives to the Council.
4. An active society shall receive an annual rebate based on its membership count at June 30th each year as determined by the Institute's membership records.

Society officers will be notified if the society's membership level drops below 25 and will be encouraged to work with the AIA office and/or the Societies Committee to increase membership.

If a society's membership falls to 10 or below and remains at that level for 12 consecutive months, the society will be considered INACTIVE.

Finally...

AIA Local Societies are the lifeblood of the Institute. They provide AIA members with a local community and network of individuals with a passion for archaeology. They carry on the mission of the AIA to inform people about archaeology. They maintain national AIA programs and support the outreach efforts of the AIA. Many Societies have their own local programs that support local archaeology and archaeologists. They communicate local concerns to the national office and represent local communities at the AIA Council meeting. They provide candidates for AIA leadership and governance roles. They enhance the visibility of the AIA and help the Institute fulfill its goals of creating a more archaeologically informed public.