



Article from

In The Public Interest

July 2018

Issue 17

Chairperson's Corner

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NEW MISSION STATEMENT

The SIPF section council's first project for 2018 was developing a new mission statement. The old statement dated back to the section's formation a decade ago and needed some tweaking. After several months of discussion, the council agreed on a new statement, which had to be approved by the SOA's Board of Directors. That happened at the Board's March meeting. The new mission statement says:

The purpose of the section is to develop consistent, high quality continuing education opportunities and sponsor fundamental research into evaluating and managing (1) social insurance programs and (2) benefit plans for government employees and the role of such benefit plans in public finance. Programs within the section's purview include social security, government-administered health plans such as Medicare and Medicaid, and other government-sponsored pension and health benefit plans. The section's purview is not limited to programs in the United States.

A few aspects of the new statement are worth noting. First and unsurprisingly, it does not represent a fundamental change of direction for the section. The first sentence of the new mission statement is substantively unchanged from the old one. The next two sentences define the section's purview with some precision that was previously lacking. Our interest in Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid was always obvious, but the boundaries of our interest in other government-sponsored benefit plans is now much clearer. Finally, because the SOA is an **international** organization with members all around the world, we need to emphasize that the section's area of interest is not limited to programs within the United States.

The next step for the section council is ensuring that the section's activities are consistent with and well matched to our mission, as newly stated. Most of our activities involve continuing education, though research is not neglected. Continuing education is provided in basically three ways: (1) articles in this semiannual newsletter, *In the Public Interest*; (2) webinars, which we produce four to six times a year; and (3) sessions at SOA meetings, especially the annual meeting, which will be in Nashville, Tenn.,

this year (October 14–17, 2018). Deciding which format is best suited to delivering a particular topic is an interesting process.

Newsletter articles have some advantages over the other two possibilities. First, they are easily accessed, on paper or on-line, for a long period of time, making them well suited to material that has lasting value, as opposed to issues with short shelf lives. Examples of those might include status reports on developing legislation or even reports on the financial status of Social Security, which gets updated frequently enough that looking back at old reports may have limited value to most people. Newsletter articles are also peer-reviewed.

Webinars are also accessible for a while, through recordings that section members can access for free and non-members can buy. But listening to a recording is not as easy or convenient as reading an article. Still, webinars have their own advantages. They can be developed rather quickly, without the long lags associated with a semiannual newsletter. And, best of all, participants can ask questions real-time! That's impossible with a newsletter article.

Meeting sessions are the third option. Meetings are scheduled far in advance, so they share the issue of long time lags with newsletter articles. It's not easy (though not impossible, either) to present breaking news at an annual meeting session. Meeting sessions do have the great advantage, even better than webinars, in that they allow considerable face-to-face interaction between presenters and the audience. Some of the most valuable information comes out during question-and-answer periods.

Any suggested topic that the council agrees is of interest to our members goes through the process of determining which presentation format would be best, considering the somewhat contradictory considerations of timeliness and permanence. As we set our agenda throughout the year, we always think about how material should be delivered. The parent SOA does the same thing on a much larger scale.

I urge you to help us in these efforts by reading and contributing to this newsletter, subscribing to and presenting webinars, and attending and presenting at our meeting sessions. Together, we can fulfill our mission of delivering high quality continuing education material and sponsoring fundamental research of interest to our members. I look forward to working with all of you.



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