

**American Historical Association
Council Meetings
January 11, 2026
Chicago Hilton, Joliet Room**

Meeting Minutes

Sunday, January 11, 2026 (Suzanne Marchand, presiding)

Council Members: Cemil Aydin; Jennifer Baniewicz; Lonnie G. Bunch; Edward Cohn; Van Gosse; Pragma Kaul Guido; Jana Lipman; Jennifer McNabb; Karen Miller; Kristin O’Brassill-Kulfan; Raisur Rahman; William Thomas; Ben Vinson III; Karin Wulf; and Serena Zabin. **Ex officio members (non-voting):** Alison Dreizen, general counsel; Kenneth Ledford, parliamentarian; Sarah Weicksel, executive director; and Will Wechsler, treasurer. **Staff:** Debbie Doyle; Brendan Gillis; Alex Levy; Ben Rosenbaum; and Dana Schaffer. **Guests:** Jessica Venable, Thorn Run Partners. **Absent:** Mark Bradley, *AHR* editor.

Marchand called the meeting to order at 8:09 a.m. She welcomed new Council members and reviewed expectations for conducting Council business and Council’s fiduciary responsibilities. She reminded Council that discussion is confidential and that the executive director is the spokesperson for the Association.

Advocacy and Governmental Affairs

Federal Governmental Affairs Update

Levy introduced Jessica Venable from Thorn Run Partners (TRP), the AHA’s government relations consulting firm, and Ben Rosenbaum, AHA public affairs associate.

Levy explained that the National Coalition for History had dissolved in 2024, at which time the AHA partnered with the Society for Military History, the National Council for Social Studies, and the Organization of American Historians to hire TRP to advise on government affairs and federal advocacy work. In the past year the AHA has issued statements, action alerts, amicus briefs, and a lawsuit against DOGE and the NEH for terminating grants to humanities organizations and scholars. Much of this advocacy work is done quietly and in collaboration with a variety of other organizations, and in many cases, AHA is the only history organization at the table.

Levy said that in the past year the AHA held six Congressional Briefings to provide non-partisan historical context to current political issues. This Mellon Foundation-funded initiative included briefings on the history of deportation, the federal civil service, tariffs, federal science funding, and the history of Congress. Future briefings are planned on the history of vaccines, artificial intelligence and privacy, and US intervention in Latin America, a topic that will also be the focus of a History Behind the Headlines webinar. Briefings usually see a bipartisan audience of between 30-50 Congressional staff.

Weicksel updated the Council on the NEH lawsuit, which is currently in the discovery phase. AHA lawyers are scheduling depositions with NEH officials and DOGE employees.

Federal Advocacy

Venable thanked Council for inviting her. She explained TRP's organizational structure, emphasizing that it is a bipartisan firm with extensive knowledge of federal efforts on both sides of the aisle, with specialized resources and knowledge of arts and humanities issues. Venable praised the AHA staff for their groundwork and Weicksel for her remarks in the press, which helps move AHA advocacy efforts to a position of strength.

Venable provided a summary of the TRP's federal relations work in the final quarter of 2025, which included a review of AHA public-facing documents, targeted outreach regarding the National Park Service, international foreign language programs, and the amicus brief in support of Harvard's case. TRP has also developed advocacy trainings—one held during the annual meeting—to give AHA members tools to move from being petitioners to partners. Council members asked TRP to develop advocacy trainings for Council and the membership.

Venable reviewed the federal policy landscape, emphasizing that the federal administration is actively litigious. She shared an assessment of potential advocacy-related risks, including drains on the operational bandwidth of AHA staff. She urged the AHA to protect its statutory mission and suggested mission-aligned areas where the AHA could make the greatest impact in the current political moment. Venable asked Council to develop a cohesive narrative that TRP can help push forward. Council said the goal for AHA strategy is to protect the organization but also to be attentive to a divergent moral center of our membership.

Council discussed TRP's risk assessment and advocacy strategy suggestions. They considered how to constructively inform the membership of the risks and limits of speaking collectively. Council members agreed that advocacy training sessions for members could be a helpful way to not only mobilize members but also communicate the risk landscape. Venable said that AHA should regularly communicate its advocacy "wins" to its members.

State-Level Advocacy

At its meeting in June Council had encouraged more direct engagement with AHA members on state-level advocacy. Gillis said that this strategy has produced several victories in recent months. In many cases, AHA has been the only organization calling attention to these issues. In Iowa the AHA helped to stop a bill in committee by effectively engaging 13 historians to speak against it. In Ohio, AHA's efforts helped to remove some of the most devastating provisions in the SB1 bill. The AHA has also been working to support and inform state history standards, most recently in Oklahoma and Texas. Gillis is seeing a pattern of state legislators shifting education reform in ways that remove historians and history educators from the conversation. Council members agreed that defending the importance of historical expertise is essential for this work.

Venable left the meeting. Marchand moved the meeting to executive session.

Executive Session

A motion to adopt the “Resolution in Solidarity with Gaza” failed.

A motion to non-concur with the “Resolution in Solidarity with Gaza” and send it to the full membership for a vote failed.

ACTION: A motion to veto the “Resolution in Solidarity with Gaza” passed.

ACTION: **A motion** to veto the “Resolution Opposing Attacks on Core Principles of Education” passed.

Marchand moved the meeting out of executive session.

Teaching Division

Zabin thanked fellow division members and AHA staff and highlighted several accomplishments led by the Teaching Division and AHA staff: publication of the *Guiding Principles for Artificial Intelligence in History Education*, a partnership with the Library of Congress on Teaching with Primary Sources, a revised edition of *Careers for History Majors*, and record participation by K–12 teachers and students. The Division also advanced regional teaching conferences and developed an advocacy toolkit to support members responding to state-level history standards. She emphasized a major challenge: the AHA’s Teaching and Learning department staff are funded almost entirely by grant money. Staff positions are at risk, making new funding sources an urgent priority.

Committees

Committee to Aid Palestinian Historians

Aydin said that AHA is in the process of forming the Ad Hoc Committee to Aid Palestinian Historians, which Council had established last fall. Although members have agreed to serve on the committee, Palestinian historians invited to serve on the committee had suspended their committee membership unless the AHA Council adopted the business meeting resolutions. Council recognized the imperative of including Palestinian historians on the committee, and Aydin and Weicksel said they would continue efforts to finalize the group and begin substantive work.

Committee to Support Academic Freedom

ACTION: Weicksel asked the Council to consider expanding the Ad Hoc Committee to Support Academic Freedom from 7 to up to 9 members, as needed. The expansion would allow for flexibility in ensuring relevant expertise. Thomas moved to expand the committee. McNabb seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

O’Brassil-Kulfan left the meeting.

Committee on International Historical Activities

ACTION: Weicksel said that in the past, the Committee on International Historical Activities’ work had primarily focused on promoting the conference of International Committee of Historical Sciences (CISH), which was reflected in the committee’s charge. She proposed

revisions to broaden the committee charge to better reflect and serve the Association's ongoing international activities and to increase membership to up to seven members. Zabin moved to accept the changes; Rahman seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

Weicksel asked for recommendations for members of the committee.

Committee on Racial and Ethnic Equity

Doyle joined the meeting and said that the Committee on Racial and Ethnic Equity expressed an interest in assisting with initiative of the newly established Ad Hoc Committee on Academic Freedom. She asked Council to consider how best COREE could assist with this work. Council members suggested that the committee might help with advocacy training for members.

Committee Reports

Marchand encouraged Council members to read the following committee reports available in the Council agenda book: Committees on Racial and Ethnic Equity, Committee on LGBTQ Status in the Profession, Committee on Gender Equity, Pacific Coast Branch, the Small Liberal Arts Colleges Committee, Graduate and Early Career Committee, the Committee on Affiliated Societies, and the Digital History Working Group.

Annual Meeting and Online Programs

2026 Annual Meeting Update

Doyle said that there were 2957 registrants at the annual meeting. These numbers are on par with meetings held in San Francisco and Philadelphia but lower than the 2019 Chicago meeting (3700 attendees). Registrants are attending more sessions than in previous years, and feedback indicates that attendees perceive the conference to be welcoming. The 2027 program committee is now accepting proposals through February.

Annual Meeting 2031 Location

Doyle said the AHA books meeting and hotel space about five years in advance, and she is currently exploring options in the Midwest region for the 2031 meeting. Doyle is considering Chicago and asked if Council wanted her to explore other cities. She reviewed the AHA's location selection priorities, including not meeting in places where members would be subject to discrimination, preference for union hotels, and other considerations. Council members also discussed the conference schedule and suggested holding fewer evening events.

AHA Online

Marchand said that an update on AHA Online was available in the agenda book for review.

Marchand adjourned the meeting at 12:23 p.m.