Why do we have officers?

History
- Event steward → Seneschal (interface to the mundane world), Reeve
- Tourney/combat organisers → Marshals, Lists
- Colour and pageantry → Heralds, B&Bs, Crowns
- Crafts and research → Arts & Sciences
- Growing of groups, comms etc → Hospitaller, Chronicler, Webwright, ...

Yes, but why do we need them all now?
- WE DO A LOT OF DIVERSE THINGS! Far more than most social or sporting groups.
- This requires more investment of time and planning than “meet here on Thursday” - especially if you want to keep doing things for longer than a few years
- Effective officers add structure and documented process to a group’s activities, making key tasks easier and more reliably repeatable in the long term
- Officers can and do grow the reach and the range of a group, making it far more likely to survive and prosper in a changing world than a loose social group

Why do officer roles turn over every two years?
(after all, this means we’re constantly advertising to fill roles, moving officers on from roles they’re doing well in – this wastes effort and also looks bad, right?)
- Avoid burnout
- Lessen the likelihood of strong clique formation and persistence – though beware of the “one step to the left” approach
- Avoid the “cold dead hands” syndrome – allowing for fresh energy and ideas
- Helps to develop skills at the individual level and across the group
- Two years is a lower bar to consider taking on than longer terms, especially for the bigger roles

Barriers to taking on offices
- Lack of time
- Finances (membership, transport etc)
- Lack of immediately relevant skills
- Lack of knowledge/information (see https://seneschal.lochac.sca.org/resources)
- Criticism and negativity bias

Also see Appendix one – an excerpt from katherine kerr’s NZ Principality Discussion Document, Oct 2020
How to encourage and support applications from potential new officers?

- Find out what the key barriers are in your group
- Think about ways to lower barriers – improving your information, training, systems...
- Make an effort to share the positives of officer roles (to you, to the group), not just the “oh my god I’m tired/that thing!” type messaging that most of us share with our friends
- If taking on an officer role is not for you, help find others – think of people with special skills/interests, or who’d benefit from developing other areas
- If you’re already an officer, take on deputies to help them try your office on for size – even a few time-limited six-month spells can help several people get a taste
- If you’re not in a role yourself, try to actively and visibly support those who are – find ways to give them feedback – in public if it’s positive, privately if it isn’t
- $ sponsorship – if you can’t take on an officer role yourself, sponsor one or two memberships for officers!

To Do!

- If you’re new to holding an office, start small and easy – a deputy role, or any of Lists, Constable, Hospitaller, Webwright
- Work out where your interests and skills are, and where your gaps are – try a SWOT analysis for you and for the group (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)
- Promote and support the concept of holding offices – understand and explain the resilience-building and growth-promoting benefits of having a range of dynamic officers
- Read up! See https://seneschal.lochac.sca.org/resources – it has Officer Job Descriptions for all regular group roles, and a ton of other resources
- Help make your existing officers happier and more effective – chocolate is almost always welcome, kindness and consideration definitely is.
Appendix one – an excerpt from katherine kerr’s NZ Principality Discussion Document, October 2020

Perceived barriers to taking up offices, and responses

- financial: I can’t afford SCA membership:
  call for/offer membership sponsorships (offered already in some groups)
  offer as event raffle prize or other appropriate group funding

- transport: I can’t get to meetings or events
  have designated transport people willing to help; call for offers of assistance
  have a deputy assigned to go/take notes etc
  actively assess physical locations eg on public transport routes, accessibility
  (may be less of an issue post-COVID, with more online meeting capabilities)

- lack of information: I don’t know what is required
  make role descriptions publicly available, in ads and notices (now done)
  encourage managed handovers

- workload: I probably don’t have the time or the experience
  identify basic requirements and time generally needed to fulfil those
  (well underway at Kingdom level, being rolled out to groups)
  encourage focus and support structures
  strengthen support for deputy or mentoring roles
  encourage managed handovers to clearly identify responsibilities
  develop support systems for workload management
  support regular training sessions or role-based gatherings and develop
  support groups and networks especially at national level
  (LOTS 2 has just been undertaken, LOTS More is in early planning)
  encourage administrative-focused Collegia classes to help up-skill, or make
  use of relevant local body/NGO resources, education and support services

- recognition: What’s in it for me?
  encourage local/Coronet recognition from simple thankyous to formal awards
  develop CV-appropriate descriptions covering SCA service

- criticism: People are really mean and I’m just a volunteer
  active mentoring to provide support and awhi, discourage incivility
  develop coping strategies and promulgate them
  calling out discourteous behaviour and developing training/resources on how
  to give/deal with criticism or challenging behaviour, as well as how to listen
  and act positively to criticism (some resources already completed; see
  https://seneschal.lochac.sca.org/helping-make-behaviour-better)
  encouraging and modeling courteous interaction, particularly on social media
  encouraging active support and appreciation of volunteer service

- negativity bias: The whole officer thing is nothing but #@%@
  encourage Officers (and former Officers) to recognise and mention positive
  aspects of their role in ads and job descriptions and while undertaking their
  activities and reports (under way)
  remind Officers that they may be jaded or near burn-out coming to the end of their term
  and they need to be careful not to let that colour hand-over
  develop recognition strategies (see above)