The SCA Needs You – Becoming an SCA Officer

Oct 2020, Jun 2023 bartholomew.baskin@gmail.com with suggestions from Steffan Glaube and others

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
- Ask people what their interests are and suggest a role that suits those skills best
- 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. Start moving people closer by delegating out smaller projects within the office. This removes some pressure and helps give others a win to celebrate and build from.
- 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.

Minimum Officers Required for Each Group Type

Kingdom (required by Corpora):
Seneschal, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Herald, Earl Marshal, Arts & Sciences Minister, Chronicler
plus under Lochac Kingdom Law:
Chirurgeon, Constable, Keeper of the Lists, Hospitaller, Provost of the College of Scribes, Archery Marshal, Rapier Marshal, Heavy Marshal, Equestrian Marshal, Keeper of Regalia, Historian, Web Minister

Principality (Corpora):
six principal officers as for Kingdom
plus as defined in Principality Law

Barony/Province (Society Seneschals Handbook):
Seneschal, Reeve, Herald, Knight Marshal, Arts and Sciences Minister, Chronicler.
A Barony requires a Baron and/or Baroness.

All Other Groups (Corpora):
Seneschal, Reeve; one of Knight Marshal, Arts and Sciences Minister or Herald

Notes:

1. Hamlets are a special case. They do not have required officers, simply a headperson who represents the Hamlet's interests to the parent group as necessary.

2. Colleges follow the appointment procedures required by their university.

Example officer job description: # Chirurgeon

Required in: Kingdom, otherwise appoint if required. Appointed by: parent group Chirurgeon in consultation with the outgoing officer, Kingdom Chirurgeon; if a Barony: ratified by B&B

Role: responsible for first aid assistance at events, reporting, rostering

Requires:

- current SCA membership and be aged at least 18
- current first aid certificate
- willingness to coordinate with additional qualified helpers if necessary to provide sufficient cover for longer events

Workload:

Rough time estimate: College/Canton/Shire: 2hrs/mth, Barony: 5+, Kingdom: 10+

Being responsible for first aid at events you wish to volunteer at, paperwork for each event, and quarterly reports to Kingdom.

Reporting Channel: Kingdom Chirurgeon

Resources:

- Chirurgeonate email list
- Lochac Chirurgeonate website : https://chirurgeon.lochac.sca.org
- Local helpers: check if the previous officer has a list of suitable assistants
- The Lochac Procedures Manual and other officer resources on the Seneschal website

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
    - 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
    - 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*
    - actively mentor to provide support and awhi, discourage incivility
    - develop coping strategies and promulgate them
    - call out discourteous behaviour and develop 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   )
    - encourage and model courteous interaction, particularly on social media
    - encourage 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
    - 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)