

Unlocking the Seneschalate: Seneschal Role Overview (Barony of Namron)
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What is a Seneschal? Depending on time period and location, a Seneschal was typically the steward of a household during the middle ages, overseeing feasts and staff duties, but, at other times may have held judicial and military authority. In the SCA, a Seneschal is responsible for all of the business activities of a group. What that entails can vary depending on level and group culture. For example, the Seneschal of a Province oversees all aspects of the group, but in a Barony, the Seneschal frequently coordinates and consults with the Landed Nobility on various matters.

In the Kingdom of Ansteorra, the best source for information on the duties of the office is the [Seneschal's Handbook](#). Anyone who is interested in serving as a Seneschal, or who is just curious as to what one does, is encouraged to read the handbook. For my successors, additional documents, tracking sheets, and official resources are available on the Seneschal's Google Drive, and the Seneschal's Google Calendar is filled with reminders, deadlines, and event dates.

Your time as Seneschal can float smoothly by, or be filled with challenges. There isn't really a good way to predict which card you'll draw. And so, I think it's important to stress that you are not locked into the position if it becomes untenable for you. Like all local officer positions, warrants of appointment are for six months, renewable up to two years. It does take a few months to fill the position, so announcing your intent to step down well in advance is preferred. In the event that you must resign your position with little or no notice, your Emergency Replacement or other Interim Seneschal designated by the Regional Seneschal can fill the role. I think it's very important for officers to know that they can step down when they need to, rather than feeling obligated to a set time frame and possibly losing their efficacy.

So, with that said, what are some of the specific things that a Seneschal does?

Communication

Communication is paramount. The populace needs to know what is happening, and when, and how. This has been so important during The Time of Covid, as things could change quickly and often early on. Work hard to earn the trust and confidence of the populace. Open and responsive communication is a big part of that.

Legal

Acting as the legal representative of your group and dealing with modern authorities and the media are tasks that many potential Seneschals dread, but they occur infrequently, and we have some excellent resources for reference. Additionally, the Regional and Kingdom Seneschals are readily available to support you.

A few key points:

- You are the legal representative of the group, and responsible for signing contracts, etc., but you are not legal counsel. You are not responsible for interpreting civil or criminal law. Always seek guidance from the Regional and Kingdom Seneschal in any situation that is beyond your scope.
- It is the job of modern authorities to sort out whether a crime has been committed and what action to take. In the case of theft, consult the [Theft Procedures for Seneschals and Exchequers](#) document before taking any action.
- Only the Seneschal or individuals approved by the Seneschal are authorized to approach and deal with media outlets. Other officers, such as the Hospitaler, must work with the Seneschal and the Kingdom Media Liaison when planning to use the media. The Seneschal's Handbook has extensive information on working with the media, including sample press releases and advertising templates.

Group Status

As Seneschal, you are responsible for ensuring that your group meets all of the requirements to maintain its group status. This includes maintaining the minimum number of paid members, maintaining a roster of required officers, ensuring submission of officer reports and waivers, ensuring that deposits are made and financial reports submitted in a timely manner, ensuring that a newsletter is published monthly, and demonstrating a healthy and active group through hosting events, demos, practices, meetings, and other activities. The good news is that there is a team of officers to help get these things done; you are just responsible for following up to make sure they are completed.

Reports

Ah, paperwork! Many volunteers for officer positions do not realize that these are primarily administrative roles, and the office of Seneschal is no exception. Reports are critical to communication at the local, regional, kingdom, and society levels. Be honest in yours. If your group is struggling, seek support. If your group is thriving, express that. Ask your officers to copy you on their monthly and quarterly reports so you can include their perspectives when you submit your own.

Waivers

Seneschals should embrace them. Love them. Encourage everyone else to love them. Failure to submit waivers to the Waiver Secretary in a timely way may affect your group's ability to hold certain activities:

- Future events may be removed from the calendar.
- Fighter practices may be suspended.

Submission of waivers is a priority. I have written a brief document titled "[Tracking Waivers](#)" that is located on the Barony of Namron website for my successors who would like some recommendations for keeping this important piece of business organized. There is also an existing spreadsheet in the Seneschal Google Drive that can be used to track submissions on a weekly basis.

Events

One of the major responsibilities of the Seneschal is to help plan events. Check the Seneschal's Google Calendar or the Seneschal Timelines document for more information. There are several items that must be filed well in advance of an event. Bids must be posted in time for selection, budget approval by the Financial Committee, and planning. Allow your designated Deputy, the Event Steward, to plan the event, but the Seneschal should be available to answer policy questions and provide support in meeting deadlines.

Demos

All official demos must be approved by the Seneschal. You may select (in coordination with Landed Nobility, for baronies) a Demo Coordinator. Only the Seneschal and Hospitaler have a blanket authorization to represent the SCA to the public regarding group promotion and publicity, however. Any media contact must be approved by the Kingdom Media Liaison or Kingdom Seneschal.

Meetings

Seneschals conduct meetings. The type and frequency vary from group to group. In the Barony of Namron, we currently hold a Populace Meeting at the beginning of the month, that is led by our Landed Nobility. Primary discussion is about upcoming activities, officers share information with the populace, we talk about personal projects in progress, and recognize members of our barony for their contributions and successes. In the middle of the month is a Business Meeting, led by the Seneschal. We briefly recap upcoming activities, discuss policy changes, conduct training sessions for officers, and have subject specific discussion roundtables, sometimes with guest speakers. Those formats could change a little with the successors to either the Landed Nobility or Seneschal. In some groups, both meetings are led by the Seneschal, or are combined into one. It all depends on group culture and on who is currently filling specific roles.

Financial

The Seneschal has some financial responsibilities. They are a voting member of the Financial Committee and, in the Barony of Namron, a signatory on the baronial bank account. The Seneschal may co-sign checks, and according to Namron Financial Policy, is the only authorized signatory for contracts (in some groups, a deputized Event Steward may be permitted to sign contracts). They should also work with the Treasurer to ensure accurate accounting and timely submission of financial reports. By Namron policy, the Financial Committee reviews and votes on all bids and budgets; the Seneschal holds a vote on these matters.

Social Media

Social Media wasn't really THAT big of a deal until The Time of Covid, when everything is happening online. And I predict that social media will be a much bigger factor in SCA activities even after Covid-19 restrictions are lifted, so be sure to familiarize yourself with the various policies. If you have a Social Media Deputy, you will still be responsible for all social media activity, so be active on those platforms. I have combined the Society, Kingdom of Ansteorra,

and Barony of Namron policies into a [single document](#), which was approved by the Kingdom Social Media Officer prior to publication. The KSMO also reviewed and approved the Facebook group rules currently in use by the Barony.

Deputies

As Seneschal, you should have a minimum of one Deputy, your Emergency Replacement. Select someone who knows the role and can step in on short notice, such as in case of an illness. Many Seneschals train a potential replacement, but there is no guarantee that individual will be selected when you step down. My goal during my term as Seneschal is to provide extensive information on the position so that interested individuals have a clear idea of what to expect. My hope is that more people will become interested in serving as Seneschal, and will see that there is a multitude of support resources available.

You can choose to appoint additional deputies to help you with your duties, but ultimately, you are responsible for your office. At this time, I have four Deputies who assist with the duties of my office. An Emergency Replacement Deputy, who has served as Seneschal before and can step in to cover for me short-term, if needed; an Ad Hoc Deputy, who assists with special projects; a Calendar Events Deputy, who creates all of our group's Facebook Events, ensuring compliance with Social Media Policy, and also researches and maintains our database of potential physical event sites; and a Social Media Deputy, who moderates social media platforms, develops content, and tracks analytics. They have all been immensely helpful in keeping me abreast of things I may have missed, and in getting everything done!

Resources

Your reference library is the ultimate source of information on policies and procedures. As mentioned above, I have written several tutorials and information sheets to assist my successors with some of the rarely occurring tasks of the position, such as [requesting insurance certificates](#), procedures specific to the Medieval Fair in Norman annual demo (located in the Seneschal's Google Drive), and [officer email administration](#). Additionally, I have added comprehensive reference sheets for each officer position in the Barony of Namron that pulls all of the key information for each position into one document. None of these are intended to replace warranting classes, handbooks, or other official documents, but rather, to serve as supplements.

The key documents with which a Seneschal **must** be familiar are Corpora, the SCA Sanctions Guide, Ansteorran Law and Financial Policy, and the Seneschal's Handbook. Others include:

- Complete Participant's Handbook (the Ansteorran rules governing combat)
- Event Report form
- "Request for Date on Kingdom Calendar -or- Bid for Kingdom Event" form
- Black Star Event Ad Checklist
- End of Year Financial Report form
- SCA liability and Equestrian insurance procedures
- Roster Waivers
- Minor Waivers

I am working to include links to all of the necessary print resources for Seneschals on the Barony of Namron website and Google Drive, as well as supplemental resources, hopefully saving some time and frustration.

Pollings

Seneschals, primarily Regional Seneschals, are sometimes called upon to conduct pollings on behalf of the Crown. This is infrequent, and there is extensive information provided in the Seneschal's Handbook, including a sample form.

Conclusion

It is my hope that this document answers a few questions about the role of Seneschal. While it seems like a lot, most days are pretty quiet, and as long as you communicate with your populace and Landed Nobility, and stay current on paperwork, things will go smoothly.