

What Does it Mean to Be a Member of AALL?

by the AALL Involving All Our Members Special Committee

The American Association of Law Libraries is a group composed of individuals who become members because of a shared professional interest: law libraries. As many members know, AALL was initially begun as a split off from the larger American Library Association. The founders felt the need for a group to focus on issues peculiar to law libraries as distinct from libraries in general.

Note that the name is Association of Law Libraries, not Librarians. To a certain extent, this reflects the origin of the Association, which has always included law school, government, and bar association libraries, with the focus on the institution.

But what about individual librarians? While championing law libraries is the primary purpose of AALL, there is recognition that, of course, a law library is nothing without its librarians. AALL exists to promote law librarianship and support its members. This focus is reiterated in the Association's Strategic Directions:

AALL strengthens the profession of law librarianship and supports the individual efforts of our members.

Providing opportunities for individual members to learn skills that will raise their individual profiles within their institutions and communities is an important part of AALL's mission.

Why do people belong to AALL? A recent member survey reveals a wide range of motives, from the most mundane (a librarian is automatically signed up by his or her institution as part of the job, regardless of personal interest) to those who are passionately devoted to the profession to the extent that they pay dues and attend meetings out of their own pockets. The extent to which a member gets involved reflects back to his or her motives for belonging in the first place.

Do people see value in their membership?

Eighty-eight percent of respondents in the recent member survey indicated that AALL is the recognized voice of the law librarianship profession. And, 96.7 percent responded that they are satisfied with their AALL membership. The two highest-rated member services are the Annual Meeting and Conference and the continuing professional education opportunities.

Many members wonder if AALL can possibly represent the interests of its increasingly diverse membership, observing that AALL will never have the unquestioning support of all members on any particular issue. That is part of what an association is supposed to be: a forum where we can discuss issues and concerns. There are the shared interests, common across library types: cataloging, reference v. practicing law, preserving information, the cost of legal information, and recruitment. Additionally, we have individual interests: how to justify membership or meeting attendance to our bosses, acquiring practical skills to make our jobs easier, and specific cost cutting tips. The Association has to balance these interests.

Who does the work of the Association?

The December 2007 *Members' Briefing* in *AALL Spectrum* introduced members to the Headquarters staff. This group of hardworking individuals supports the membership. They are generally aware of the issues of law librarianship. But, the heavy lifting on our issues is up to us, the individual members. It is our shared voice that can make the difference for law libraries.

Do members have an obligation to be involved in AALL activities? No one can make individual members contribute (see "How to Volunteer for an AALL Committee" on page 3). But, membership is a two-way street. Members expect value from AALL membership. Yet the value of membership is primarily created by members.

Participation in Your Association

This month, the Involving All Our Members Special Committee looks at involvement—both why AALL members should do it and how. They provide resources you can use to help convince your employer of the value of professional networking and education, and they describe the committee appointment process and changes that are coming from committee restructuring. They even provide a quiz to test your knowledge of AALL!

I appointed this committee because I heard from many members, particularly those in private and government libraries, that their employers did not support their participation in AALL, that they saw little reason to participate, or both. Participation can encompass a very wide range of activities—from just reading *Spectrum* or occasionally attending an Annual Meeting to chairing a committee or running for office. The same level isn't right for everyone, and even the same person may find that different levels fit his or her career or lifestyle at different times.

My goal is to help members find the kinds of support they need to participate at the levels they choose, but perhaps at the same time to discover new reasons to get involved or opportunities to do so. In order for AALL to fulfill its vision as "the national professional organization for all law librarians," it needs for all law librarians—from every law library type, job specialty, and experience level—to feel that AALL belongs to them. Of course such a sense of ownership grows out of involvement.

Over the next few months, the special committee will try to develop some concrete proposals that the AALL Executive Board can use to help involve all our members. In the meantime, I hope you find that this *Briefing* opens the door for you to participate in your AALL in a new or deeper way.



Ann T. Fessenden
AALL President, 2007-2008

Many associations share this conundrum of encouraging member engagement. AALL's frequent exhortations to speak up or volunteer are echoed in other organizations. We recognize that individuals contribute in different ways and have a variety of other interests competing for their time. No one should ever feel that his or her involvement is

not valued. The amount of time is not what is important. It is the fact of engagement for whatever fits your circumstances that is important. The strength created by sharing our time and energy benefits all of us.

AALL is really not that big, so it is important to involve all members. Sharing the effort of active participation

potentially enriches each member while reducing the time required. Involvement through voting; following Association issues; expressing opinions; volunteering for activities on the chapter, caucus, and special interest section (SIS) level; writing articles; planning programs; and developing Web tools are all ways to make AALL work—for all our members! ■

What Do You Know about AALL?

True or False?

- ___ 1. AALL is mainly run by academic law librarians.
- ___ 2. It is really hard to get appointed to an AALL committee.
- ___ 3. I can't serve on a committee because I can't attend the Annual Meeting every year.
- ___ 4. AALL offers scholarships to encourage members of minority groups to become law librarians.
- ___ 5. AALL serves as an advocate for law librarians with publishers, the government, and decision makers in our institutions.
- ___ 6. The only educational programming AALL offers is at the Annual Meeting.
- ___ 7. AALL members value the Washington Affairs Office.
- ___ 8. AALL Headquarters directs the work of the Association.
- ___ 9. AALL's special interest sections don't offer anything but boring business meetings.
- ___ 10. Most members voted in the recent AALL election.

answers appear on page 4

AALL Member Benefits

Networking benefits included in your AALL membership

- Local networking through chapters
- National networking through special interest sections (SISs), committees, and caucuses
- Mentoring
- Member search on AALLNET and through the print *AALL Directory and Handbook*
- Conference of Newer Law Librarians (CONELL)
- AALL Annual Meeting

Using the law librarian underground to get information and amaze your boss? Priceless.

Current awareness benefits included in your AALL membership

- Chapter and SIS newsletters
- Continuing professional education audio and video broadcasts
- Publications, e.g., *AALL Spectrum* and *Law Library Journal*
- Monthly e-newsletters
- Washington Affairs Office
- AALL Annual Meeting
- Calendar of Events

Maintaining your status as the legal information guru in your neighborhood? Priceless.

Strengthening the profession with your AALL membership

- Scholarships
- Research grants
- Continuing professional education grants

- Recruitment to Law Librarianship and Membership Development Committees
- Speakers Directory

Attracting new law librarians to the profession? Priceless.

Informational tool benefits included in your AALL membership

- *Price Index for Legal Publications*
- *Biennial Salary Survey and Organizational Characteristics*
- Committee on Relations with Information Vendors (CRIV)
- Job Hotline

Being able to convince the powers that be that you are not just making up numbers? Priceless.

Professional development benefits of AALL membership

- Annual Meeting, regional, and chapter programming
- Web-based training, podcasts, and other electronic learning opportunities
- Articles in *Law Library Journal*, *AALL Spectrum*, and SIS publications
- Toolkits located on committee, SIS, and other Web sites
- Ability to learn across the spectrum of law library types

Education by law librarians for law librarians? Priceless. ■

How to Volunteer for an AALL Committee

"Just as a grain of sand does not make a beach, neither does a single individual make an organization. It is only by the work of tens of hundreds of individuals that this organization makes a contribution in the professional area."

—*Erwin Surrency, former AALL president, 1967*

In 2006, then-President Sally Holterhoff appointed the Special Committee on Committee Structure. That committee's report (www.aallnet.org/committee/reports/CmteStructure-FinalReport.pdf) was accepted by the Executive Board in November 2007. As a result, there are now 24 AALL committees of three types: process, policy, and special. Committee terms were reviewed, some were changed, and a vice chair/chair-elect was added to each committee. This should provide for better continuity, particularly for policy committees.

How are members selected for committees? There is a perception that it is difficult to be appointed to a committee, that you need to know someone, and that there is an in-group that keeps appointing its friends and excluding others. Hopefully, this explanation will dispel some of those ideas.

Each year, the AALL vice president/president-elect solicits committee volunteers in the fall by sending an e-mail to all members. The e-mail directs interested members to the page on AALLNET where they can sign up to volunteer for a committee. All of the submissions are gathered at Headquarters and are presented to the Appointments Committee, which meets in February.

While there are a total of approximately 300 standing committee slots, not all of them turn over each year. There are approximately 100 open spots each year. The Appointments Committee analyzes the membership of each committee and attempts to balance the membership so there are representatives from different library types, jobs, areas of the country, etc. It is very helpful for the committee when volunteers provide information about their interests and experience and are flexible by applying for more than one committee.

Ideally, some member of the Appointments Committee would know each volunteer. Unfortunately, that doesn't always happen. Some members feel frustrated—how can people get to know me if I'm not already on a committee? Actually, there are many opportunities for "face" time:

- Volunteer to staff the Annual Meeting registration desk
- If you have an idea or question about a committee's activities, contact the chair
- Offer your opinions on law-lib or your SIS online discussion list
- Show up at the smaller caucus or SIS social mixers
- Be active in your chapter or an SIS.

“**The average member is the future of the Association and the profession. The needs of the membership will guide where it goes in the future. Librarianship is not what it was 10 years ago and will probably change just as radically in the next 10, but it will be here to serve our clients. As long as we keep evolving individually and as a profession, the mission of service will be accomplished.**”

— *Alvin Podboy, Baker Hostetler (2001)*

As you become more active, you'll get on the radar screen of leaders looking for committee members.

One common misperception is that attendance at the Annual Meeting is required to be appointed to a committee. It's always helpful to attend the meeting to put faces to names and participate in the discussion. But, with the exception of the Conference of Newer Law Librarians and Placement Committees, attendance is not necessary. Most committee work is done by e-mail and the occasional conference call.

The Special Committee on Committee Structure reworked the committee charges. Reviewing the new charges will give potential committee members an idea of the time commitment required for the various committees. Some committees have a continuous flow throughout the year, and others have shorter bursts of activity.

There are committees that are more popular or requested more than others, including the Annual Meeting Program, Grants, Mentoring, and Recruitment Committees. When only two or three spots are available for those committees each year, it is unavoidable that some applicants will be disappointed. This is where flexibility in committee preference can make a difference and result in appointment.

Committees with fewer applicants in recent years include the AALLNET Advisory, Bylaws, Diversity, *Index to Foreign Legal Periodicals*, Indexing of Periodical Literature, and *Price Index for Legal Publications* Committees. If you're wondering what members of a particular committee do, ask someone who is on the committee. Or, read

the committee's report on AALLNET (www.aallnet.org/annualreports) or in *Law Library Journal* (reports prior to 2006-2007).

Members see that the committees are primarily composed of academic law librarians. The primary reason for this is that fewer state, court, county, or private law librarians volunteer for committees. Generally, most state, court, county, and private librarian applicants receive a committee assignment, unless their preferred committee placements need academic members.

The Appointments Committee attempts to assign as many volunteers as possible to their first or second choice committee. But you know what they say: you can't please everyone. During the phase-in of the new committee structure we should see an improvement in the appointment process. As always, the AALL Executive Board and Headquarters staff welcome comments and suggestions. ■



What Do You Know about AALL?

Answers from page 2

- False.* The Private Law Libraries Special Interest Section (SIS) has the largest membership of the three library type SISs, and a majority of the current AALL Executive Board (including the president) work in library types other than academic.
- False.* Be flexible when selecting committees to increase your chances of being appointed.
- False.* Only members of the Placement and Conference of Newer Law Librarians Committees are required to attend the Annual Meeting. Most committee work is done by e-mail.
- True.* The George A. Strait Minority Scholarship is awarded to college graduates with law library experience who are members of a minority group as defined by current U.S. government guidelines, who are degree candidates in accredited library or law schools, and who intend to have a career in law librarianship.
- True.* See "Resources to Convince Your Employer of the Value of Membership" on page 4 and AALLNET for the Washington Affairs Office site and the new Vendor Relations page.
- False.* Check out the Professional Education section of AALLNET to find information on upcoming events, links to archived programs, plus information on grant funding available to develop continuing professional education programs.
- True.* Two-thirds of respondents to the recent AALL Member Survey valued the Washington Affairs Office.
- False.* Headquarters staff supports member decisions and work, but doesn't direct the work of the Association.
- False.* The SISs offer opportunities to participate in smaller groups on specific areas of interest. Each SIS has information and newsletters available on AALLNET. Many SISs offer alternative programming at the Annual Meeting.
- False.* While 55 percent of eligible voters participated in the 2004 U.S. presidential election, fewer than 40 percent of AALL members voted in 2007. ■

Resources to Convince Your Employer of the Value of Membership

Competencies of Law Librarianship

www.aallnet.org/prodev/competencies.asp

Approved by the Executive Board March 2001

How to Hire a State or County Law Librarian

www.aallnet.org/sis/sccl/Pdfs/scclresguide1.pdf

A guide for government and court decision makers

Library Marketing into the 21st Century: A selected annotated bibliography

www.aallnet.org/sis/allsis/toolkit/marketing_bib.pdf

Marketing toolkit for academic law libraries, 2003

Statement on the Value Added to Organizations by Law Librarians

www.aallnet.org/committee/pr_statement.asp

AALL Public Relations Committee, 2003

The Value of a Public Law Library

www.aallnet.org/sis/sccl/pdfs/Scclguide2.pdf

A guide for government and court decision makers

The Value of the Corporate Law Librarian

www.aallnet.org/sis/pllsis/Groups/corpdoc1.asp

By the PLL-SIS Corporate Law Librarians' Group

Why I Need to Go to the AALL Annual Meeting this Year

www.aallnet.org/products/pub_sp0502/pub_sp0502_Why.pdf

How to write a request to attend the AALL Conference

By Lucy Curci-Gonzalez and Christine Graesser

Why We Need Academic Law Librarians: Adding Value to the Law School

www.aallnet.org/sis/allsis/toolkit/

[why_we_need_trained_librarians.pdf](#)

By Virginia J. Kelsh

Will You Be In New Orleans? How to Obtain Funding for the AALL Conference

www.aallnet.org/sis/pllsis/newslett/spring07.asp#Will_you_be_in_New_Orleans_How_to_Obtain_Funding_for_the_AALL_Conference

By Donna M. Fisher ■

The members of the AALL Involving All Our Members Special Committee are: Co-Chair Christine L. Graesser, Co-Chair Catherine Lemann, Evelyn M. Campbell, Susan Goldner, Claudia Jalowka, Jennifer S. Murray, Terry Psarras, and Roseanne Marie Shea.