

Increased Involvement = Increased Enjoyment

by Joyce Manna Janto

Why should you volunteer for a committee? Usually you are told things like, "it's good for the profession" or "it will help you to develop new skills." Both are correct. Volunteering will allow you to do things you have never had the chance to do before. Volunteers allow the Association to offer services and programs it could not otherwise afford.

But this omits one happy fact. Volunteering can be a lot of fun. You get to meet lots of really neat and interesting people. It's a great way to get out of a rut. By volunteering, you meet people not only from other libraries, but from all over the country. I have met and worked with librarians from New York to Los Angeles, from firms, corporations, governments, and courts. It's an easy way to learn how other libraries operate, to gain a fresh perspective.

Volunteering allows you to stretch your wings, to do things you might not do in your normal life. In my years of volunteering, I have been a "Founding Mother" (organizational committee), wrestled with statutory construction (bylaws committee), acted as a literary agent (publications and publicity committee), organized a two-day conference (program committee), and run a business office (placement committee). I even got to play "Lady Bountiful" (scholarship committee) and edit a newsletter. I learned a tremendous amount in all of my committee assignments. I learned I had skills I had never tapped before, skills I did not realize I would enjoy using. I learned a lot about the people with whom I worked—who could be trusted to perform by deadline, and, alas, who could not. And how to cope when the inevitable disaster occurred.

I not only learned about myself and my colleagues. I also gained valuable insight into how the organization was run. I was much more sympathetic to the AALL dues increase request after seeing how expensive it was for SEAALL to put on its Annual Meeting. I learned what was appropriate to demand from my professional organization and what we really should be doing for ourselves. I learned that it is much more effective to lobby for change after you know how and why something is done, rather than to complain in a vacuum. The most common reason given for not volunteering is time. "I just don't have enough. I'm too busy with my own job, I can't spare the time." You are right. You don't have the time. None of us

does. Between work in my library, volunteer work at my daughter's school (ask me about Bingo sometime), and family commitments, there are days when I feel stretched pretty thin. There is, however, one maxim in which I firmly believe: "Work expands to fit the time allotted to it." If you plan on adding volunteer work to your schedule, you can fit it in. The time commitment need not be daunting. My stints on various AALL committees bear this out. Articles & Bylaws wasn't too time consuming. Every once in a while, I would read over some Chapter's changes for conformity to AALL language ... twice a year, maybe draft some language for a Board-requested bylaw revision. Placement

was easy—until the month before the Annual Meeting. Then, as chair, I was in constant contact with Headquarters about who had been advertising what job. The Annual Meeting itself? My most vivid memories from Baltimore involve the third floor of the Hyatt. (That's where the Placement Office was, in case you're wondering.) This year, I landed the plum

assignment, the one everyone lusts for, AMPSC—otherwise known as the Annual Meeting Program Selection Committee. For AMPSC, there has been a lot of work, but it comes in bursts. We will be busy for a month, and then have nothing to do for two months. My point is that the time commitment necessary for AALL volunteer work is manageable ... even for someone in a one-person library.

That brings us to the final reason why people are reluctant to volunteer for committees. Cronyism, the feeling that unless you are in the right clique, you won't get appointed. This is absolute nonsense. I have been appointed to committees (even named a chair) by people that I didn't know. There is one thing you do need though: persistence. Many people apply for a committee slot ONCE, don't get appointed and never try again. I have been a member of AALL for over 15 years. Every year that I am eligible (i.e., not already on a committee), I have volunteered. Do I always get appointed? No I don't. Do I still apply the next year? You bet I do! Should you volunteer at every opportunity? Sure, you could be letting yourself in for one heck of a good time.

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