

## AALL Professional Development Program

*Professional Perspectives—Tools and Techniques of the Trade. The Professional Development Committee encourages members to continue to explore topics after presentations at the local, regional, and national levels. We welcome your comments and article suggestions. Please contact Susan Siebers at 312/902-5675 or susan.siebers@knz.com.*

According to a famous quote (widely attributed to Otto von Bismarck but unverified), “if you like laws and sausages, you should never watch either one being made.” As law librarians, we do have some interest in law-making and legislative bodies. But for a much more entertaining behind-the-scenes view, most people would prefer watching how Hollywood makes movies. In recent years, this has been possible through documentaries on “the making of” popular films. A “making of” documentary may include such things as interviews with directors, cast, and crew, explanations of special effects, and outtakes from the actual filming. These try to capture the process of creating a movie, which typically begins with an idea, goes through many stages of development, and culminates with the final result that is screened in our local theaters.

While we don’t have the genius or box office clout of George Lucas and his latest *Star Wars* movie, we do have a “making of” story to share with you. AALL and the Professional Development Committee (PDC) have spent the past several years producing educational programs and getting procedures in place to meet AALL members’ needs year-round. We invite you to join us for a peek behind the curtains at how our PDC programs evolve from an idea to a scheduled event. As with most things, there is more to the process than you might imagine. The PDC doesn’t need to worry about signing Julia Roberts and Brad Pitt, or creating new special effects technology, but there are issues of selecting the “talent,” approving the “script,” and going “on location.”

### Creating the Concept: An RFP Is Born

Knowing your audience is a key element of successful ventures. From its start in 1996, the PDC has focused on studying and meeting the needs of AALL members and non-members alike for continuing education in the fields of law librarianship and legal information. A major goal is to provide educational opportunities that didn’t exist before, such as live regional

programs, satellite teleconferences, and even “desktop” learning through *AALL Spectrum* articles and listserv discussions.

To find the right people to develop specific programs, the PDC has devised a Request for Proposal (RFP) process, which works as follows. A topic is selected based on member needs, as determined by surveys, evaluation forms from Annual Meeting programs, and focus groups. Topics covered so far by professional development programs have included basic legal research, copyright, Internet training, managing the multi-location library, and legal reference services. With the topic in mind, PDC members write a document outlining what is expected in terms of the length of the program, the target audience and level of expertise, the general content, and the number of faculty/speakers. Sometimes an RFP is written in consultation with an AALL Special Interest Section. When completed, the RFP is posted on AALLNET and publicized widely, in order to give anyone who wishes the chance to respond. Individual AALL members or groups of members or other interested parties may respond to an RFP. The deadline for submitting a proposal in response to an RFP falls about six weeks from the posting date.

### Script and Casting: Proposal Submission and Faculty Selection

The words of a film script provide an early glimpse of the movie to come. Cast members are selected and, guided by the director, they determine how the lines of the script will be read and how the characters will look and sound to the audience. Like a movie script, program proposals written for submission to the PDC are meant to provide a clear and detailed description of what the author/proposer has in mind—the program he/she would like to present. Inclusion of a sample syllabus along with the resumes of proposed faculty/speakers gives the PDC an idea of the educational experience in store for attendees at this proposed program.

Factors for Selection of Program Faculty/Speakers:

- Knowledge of topic: Has this person spoken before on the topic? How extensively?
- Level of experience: What job experience, credentials, and degree(s) does this person have?
- Reputation: Would this person’s reputation draw participants to the program?
- Variety of focus: Has this person worked in different environments?
- Delivery method: Will there be participant interaction in this person’s presentation or will it be primarily in lecture format?

Proposers are asked to pay special attention to desired learning outcomes and suggestions that interactive participation be included.

To assist individuals who might want to write and submit proposals, the PDC section of AALLNET includes a “Guide for Developing a Proposal” and a “Program Proposal Checklist.” The first describes the steps in the proposal-submission process and the second outlines the basic information to be included in a complete proposal.

### Closing the Deal: Selection, Contract, Final Syllabus

Film industry contract agreements with writers, cast, and crew may be interesting legal exercises, but these negotiations are not usually portrayed in “the making of” projects. The PDC’s review of submitted program proposals also takes place behind-the-scenes. While the consideration of submitted program proposals is a confidential process, it has been designed to be fair and understandable to all. All proposals received for a given RFP are rated by a selection team of PDC members who are familiar with the proposal topic.

Selection Criteria include:

- Program content and format
- Learning outcomes

# A Desktop Learning Opportunity

- Speaker credentials, experience, and references (if available)
- Suggested program materials.

The review process takes place during the two months following the proposal submission deadline. During this time, proposers may be asked to change, refine, or enhance proposals as part of the selection process. The person whose proposal is selected is contacted by the AALL Director of Programs to negotiate a contract with AALL and work out details regarding the number of presentations, fees, and expenses. This person, now known as the Program Developer, has the next several weeks to prepare the final curriculum and schedule. Specific deadlines are set when the contract is signed. Those people whose proposals are not accepted are also notified promptly.

## On Location: Siting the PDC program

Decisions on the time to release a film and how widely to distribute it are important ones. Should the film be targeted for the summer or holiday crowds or positioned

for Oscar nominations? Timing and location are also important factors for scheduling AALL professional development programs. Often one-day and multi-day programs are held first in connection with an AALL Annual Meeting. Site selection for subsequent presentations is based on committee recommendations regarding location/dates. Requests from Chapters/members in a particular region are also considered. When a location is being considered, contact is made with local or regional AALL Chapters to explain the plans, location, and registration fee, to check on conflicting dates, and to seek advice/cooperation. AALL does the work and assumes the risk, but Chapter support and help with publicity are important for a successful program.

## Premiere: Presentation and Evaluation

A film premiere is an exciting event, the culmination of months, even years, of work. It is time for film critics and the public to decide if the new film is a box office hit. Presentation of a new AALL professional development program is also

the result of careful planning and hard work. When the "curtain goes up," attendees can expect a high-quality educational experience, with well-prepared speakers and useful handout materials. Evaluation forms from PDC programs to date have consistently affirmed the value of the learning experiences being offered. Comments made by participants are considered carefully, especially suggestions for future program topics. As with a movie production, when all the details come together for an AALL professional development educational program, the end result is favorable audience reaction, building of customer demand for future projects, and another ☆☆☆☆ professional development program for AALL!

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## Spotlight on a PDC Program Developer

In the film industry, successful actors through the years have found that they can add a new element to their careers by turning from acting to directing. Sometimes this means moving completely behind the camera for a project; other times the performer doubles as his or her own director. Recent examples of the actor-turned-director phenomenon include Robert Redford, Tim Robbins, Tom Hanks, Diane Keaton, and Shirley MacLaine.

In our own profession, AALL offers people with expertise on selected topics the chance to write, cast, act in, and direct their own educational productions. (Production details are worked out by AALL staff.) In the process of developing and starring in a PDC program, the Program Developer accepts the challenge to learn and grow professionally in order to share knowledge with colleagues.

Joan Shear of Boston College Law Library is one AALL member who responded to the chance to put together a PDC program.

In 1998 an RFP was issued by the PDC for a multi-day program on the topic of "basic legal reference." Joan was encouraged to put together a proposal by the chair of the Research Instruction and Patron Services (RIPS) SIS. Using her own materials and experience from 16 years as a reference librarian in academic law libraries, Joan submitted a proposal that included a syllabus, sample handout materials, and the names of several possible faculty members who might participate with her.

Joan describes the creation of a proposal as "time consuming and challenging." In her job at Boston College, she does a lot of teaching, mostly with law students. But in the program she developed for AALL, "the emphasis is on teaching other people to do my job," she says. For this program she was able to recycle some materials she had used previously for legal research classes for her Chapter (LLNE). In her proposal, she described interactive learning activities she would use, such as a skit, games, and hands-on experience with print sources.

One challenge was deciding who the audience would be and how much could be covered in the two and-a-half day time frame. Getting the right focus on legal

reference as distinguished from legal research (which is covered by a different program) was also an issue.

Once her proposal was accepted by the PDC, Joan worked on finalizing her choices for faculty, on updating her materials and creating new ones, and on finding creative ways to promote active learning within the physical constraints of the time and place. When the time came for the program to debut, Joan found that "putting on the actual thing was the most rewarding part. It was cool to be in charge!" The program was presented in Washington, D.C., prior to the AALL Annual Meeting in July 1999. It has since been re-named "Legal Reference Services" and is now available for scheduling around the country, with Joan and John Nann as instructors (for description, see [www.aallnet.org/prodev/event\\_am\\_basic.asp](http://www.aallnet.org/prodev/event_am_basic.asp)).

Presenting this program gave Joan an opportunity to meet many newer members of the profession who participated in it. Based on her own experience, she encourages others to take her lead and join the ranks of PDC program developers.