

AALL's Strategic Plan: Putting Vision into Action

by Sally Holterhoff

Strategic planning begins with vision. But for any plan to be effective and to really matter, it must lead to action. Both are essential aspects of the *AALL Strategic Plan 2000–2005*, which presents a vision for the future of the Association and its members and illustrates how AALL can realize that vision by undertaking specific activities. The underlying theme is to make a difference in the daily work lives of AALL members and to collectively represent the interests of law librarians to the rest of the world.

As we wind up the third year of the plan, it seems worthwhile to take another look at the document that's guiding the Association and to consider the process it has set into motion. As you'll see, members of the AALL Executive Board have been working behind the scenes to support the plan by generating activities and tracking progress. Results of their efforts, along with those of hundreds of other AALL members, are benefiting all of us.

Four Directions = 54 Initiatives

Major areas or directions of the four-pronged plan state that AALL will:

1. Ensure the future of law librarianship as a valued profession.
2. Maintain an ample supply of well-educated, skilled and adaptable law librarians.
3. Shape fair and equitable information policies.
4. Work for a diverse and competitive legal publishing industry and preserve legal information in all formats.

Each broad direction leads to a list of desired outcomes, each followed by specific initiatives intended to achieve it.

Preparing for Action

Turning the plan into a guide for action is the job of the Strategic Planning

Committee of the AALL Executive Board. When the Executive Board approved the plan in July 2000, members of the committee had already started working on an implementation plan to accompany it. They continued until each of the 54 initiatives was annotated with an explanation of "who, what, why, when and resources needed." Individual activities were matched with appropriate AALL committees. In some cases, it was apparent that a new task force or special committee would be needed to accomplish the particular task. Certain Special Interest Sections and other AALL entities that might play a role were also included. For some initiatives, the committee recognized that chapters were in the best position to undertake them at the local or state level. Sometimes two groups that might work together on a particular task were identified.

In all, more than 40 AALL entities were listed for "who." A general timetable was set for each initiative, keeping in mind that not everything in this multiyear plan could be tackled in the first year. Another important consideration was what monetary resources were needed and if funding was available.

Making Decisions and Staying on Track

The resulting implementation version of the Strategic Plan is a working document of the AALL Executive Board, rather than a finished product for wide distribution. Board members consult the implementation plan at every meeting to help determine priorities and make program and budget decisions. The Executive Board receives proposals for many worthy activities and projects, but it can select only a few to receive attention and resources. An important factor in such decisions is whether or not the activity or project addresses one of the objectives in the plan.

Strategic Planning: Making it Work for You

Nearly everyone has been involved with strategic or long-range planning at some point. Whether your plan was developed for your library, Special Interest Section or chapter, creating a plan is frequently a demanding and mind-numbing experience that may result in a report that is soon filed away and forgotten.

In contrast, AALL's Strategic Plan, found on AALLNET at http://www.aallnet.org/about/strategic_plan.asp, is a living document firmly based on AALL's Vision Statement. The Strategic Plan is supported continuously through the activities of AALL members and guided by the Executive Board through its Strategic Planning Committee. The AALL Vision Statement is the foundation for the goals to which the Strategic Plan aspires:

The American Association of Law Libraries is a thriving professional association whose members and libraries — whether physical or virtual legal information services — are recognized as critical to the success of their organizations and as central to society. AALL members possess the knowledge and skills to maintain effectiveness in a constantly changing legal environment. Since the ready availability of legal information is a necessary requirement for a just and democratic society, AALL and its members advocate and work toward fair and equitable access to authentic current and historic legal information, and educate and train library users to be knowledgeable and skilled legal information consumers.

The number of committees, entities and individuals working to fulfill the initiatives of AALL's Strategic Plan or for one of its entities is amazing, and the Executive Board thanks everyone who has participated in the implementation efforts of AALL's Strategic Plan to help members maximize today — every day. In this Members' Briefing, Strategic Planning Committee Chair Sally Holterhoff outlines the plan and its progress, while James E. Duggan and Sarah Andeen describe how SISs and chapters are benefiting from the strategic planning process.



Carol Avery Nicholson
AALL President

AALL Long-Range Strategic Planning: A Brief History

1930: AALL member William Roalfe sets in motion AALL's first long-range planning effort by writing a letter to AALL President Rosamond Parma, suggesting a number of changes to the Association and its work. The letter is later published at *24 Law Libr. J.* 60–63 (1931).

1934: AALL members unanimously adopt a resolution directing the officers to go forward with the Roalfe Plan, which becomes a guide for the work of the Association for the next 40 years. Proposals in the plan include establishing a full-time staff at a permanent headquarters, enlarging the *Law Library Journal* and publishing a bulletin with lists of current legal literature.

1990: The Executive Board approves a detailed Strategic Plan, prepared by the Long-Range Planning Committee chaired by Executive Board member Kay Todd and developed during the term of AALL President Dick Danner under his charge. The plan outlines the direction to be taken by the Association for the next four years. It is published at *22 AALL Newsl.* 201–211 (1990).

1994: "The Strategic Challenge 1994–1998" is unanimously adopted by the Executive Board as AALL's second long-range plan. The Long-Range Planning Committee responsible for its creation was chaired by board member Margie Axtmann.

2000: The Executive Board approves a new *AALL Strategic Plan 2000–2005*. Prepared under the leadership of Ruth Fraley, chair of the board's Strategic Planning Committee, and subtitled "Leadership for the 21st Century: New Realities, Changing Roles," the plan establishes four strategic directions for the Association to pursue during the next five years.

Compiled from "AALL History in Brief: A Chronology," by Frank G. Houdek, which appears in the AALL Directory and Handbook 2002–2003.

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Each incoming AALL president uses the plan to develop his or her presidential initiatives for the year ahead. He or she may appoint special committees or task forces to address particular initiatives and give specific charges to particular committees and SISs. Commitment to the goals of the plan provides continuity from year to year while allowing for creativity and new solutions.

Measuring Progress and Updating the Plan

With implementation activities underway, the Strategic Planning Committee and the Executive Board turned their attention to keeping the plan current and on the radar screens of leaders throughout the Association. Every year the Strategic Planning Committee sends letters to the current committee and SIS chairs and chapter presidents, asking them to review the plan and provide comments and suggestions.

To measure progress on plan initiatives, the Strategic Planning Committee opted for a personal approach rather than a cumbersome reporting scheme. Board members serve as liaisons to AALL committees, so they can monitor those committees that have Strategic Plan responsibilities. Other AALL entities mentioned in the plan are divided among board members, who contact the leaders of those groups each spring and fall. Board members have made more than 100 telephone calls in the past two years to check on the status of activities related to the plan. The information is reported back to the Strategic Planning Committee and becomes part of an annual updated version of the implementation plan, with significant activities listed for each initiative. These calls to AALL entities serve to generate enthusiasm for the plan and maintain continuity despite annual leadership changes in the groups.

Recognizing completed projects encourages future activity. In 2002, then President Barbara Bintliff presented AALL Presidential Certificates of Merit to acknowledge the success of two Strategic Plan initiatives. For developing the *AALL Competencies of Law Librarianship*, she awarded a certificate to the chairs and members who served on the Professional Development Committee during the three years of this project. Another certificate

went to members of the Academic Law Libraries SIS for creating a series of CD-based lessons on legal research for the Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction, a project which relates to Initiative 2D1.

Making a Difference: Success Stories

Many accomplishments, large and small, have already come about as a direct result of the AALL Strategic Plan and are having an impact on the lives of AALL members.

- Outcome 1A states, "Law libraries determine the evolution of virtual and physical law libraries." In order to address several initiatives under this outcome, the Special Committee on the Future of Law Libraries in the Digital Age was appointed. Their final report, *Beyond the Boundaries*, describes possible models of academic, private and government law libraries of the future, which will be shaped and supported by the skills of law librarians. Wide distribution of the report is already underway, with particular emphasis on attracting the attention of employers, such as lawyers, law school deans and judges. As **Elise Keller**, senior information specialist at Locke Liddell and Sapp LLP in Dallas puts it, "In the past, most of what we've seen really praising the virtual law library has been written by lawyers, space planners, paralegals or IT specialists. It is great to see something on this subject written by our colleagues that shows law librarians as forward-thinking professionals and as a valuable part of the future of legal information."
- Outcome 2A states that the *AALL Competencies of Law Librarianship* will be used to "guide professional development activities." To address that goal, the competencies were adopted in 2001 and have been used as the basis for education programming at the 2002 and 2003 AALL Annual Meetings. Program descriptions in the AALL Preliminary and Final Programs provide the corresponding competency that each program addresses, allowing members to choose programs that match their own educational needs. As **John Klaus**, reference librarian at the William J. Campbell Library of the U.S. Courts in Chicago, points out, "For the Seattle Annual Meeting, there are nearly 100 different programs to choose from — almost too many choices! Having each program description labeled with the corresponding competency is making it

much easier to decide which ones I'll attend."

- According to Initiative 3A1, AALL will "promote permanent public access to government information from the legislative, executive and judicial branches of federal and state government." The AALL Government Relations Committee and the Washington Affairs Office were awarded an AALL/Aspen Publishers research grant in 2002 to survey state laws regarding permanent public access to electronic government information. After AALL members in each state completed the survey, four regional editors compiled the results. Working with Mary Alice Baish, associate Washington Affairs representative, they analyzed the findings and made recommendations. Their report concludes that although most states have done very little to address the issue legislatively, a handful have implemented good models to achieve permanent public access. **Richard J. Matthews**, assistant professor at the University Libraries at Wichita State University in Kansas and former knowledge management director at Levenfeld Pearlstein in Chicago, was a regional editor on this project. He views the survey as "a good start for our advocacy work educating state legislators that government information now disseminated on the Web is in danger of quickly becoming lost or inaccessible unless laws are in place to ensure its continuing availability to citizens who

seek it. Digital government information demands new legal safeguards for permanent access and preservation." He says that the next step is "proposing legislative language on permanent public access in a few states, with the hope of spreading this concept to many others." Permanent public access to electronic government information will be a major topic of discussion at the Legislative Advocacy Leadership Training session on July 12 at the 2003 AALL Annual Meeting in Seattle.

- Initiative 4B1 says that AALL will "develop a model code of fair business practices for legal publishers that is an accepted standard in the industry." To carry out this part of the plan, the Special Committee on Fair Business Practices spent two years developing the new *AALL Guide to Fair Business Practices for Legal Publishers*. As **Anne Myers**, head of technical services at Boston University's Pappas Law Library, says, "When the Federal Trade Commission rescinded its *Guides for the Law Book Industry* in 2000, the playing field between librarians and publishers became much more uneven. It was very unclear how we would be able to resolve problematic issues in a fair manner. The new AALL guide goes a long way toward addressing those concerns." Myers hopes AALL will develop a similar guide on business practices of law librarians, an idea that may be considered by the newly appointed AALL Fair Business Practices Implementation Task Force.

Looking Ahead

That's the story of the *AALL Strategic Plan 2000–2005* at the end of the third year. Some significant tasks have been completed, but more work remains to be done. Even if you haven't been involved so far, there is still a role for you if you're willing to help.

- How about writing a short article about law librarianship for your library school alumni newsletter?
- Have you thought of volunteering to coordinate a program about legal research for a group of community residents or public librarians?
- Maybe you could respond to the next AALL advocacy alert by corresponding with members of your congressional delegation.

And here's just one more suggestion: Please start thinking about where you'd like your own career, AALL and the profession of law librarianship to be by 2007, 2010 or beyond. Before long, AALL will be asking for every member's help to look strategically at the future: two, five or more years down the road. Your ideas can help shape a new vision and a plan — which you can count on AALL to turn into action.

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Strategic Planning and Special Interest Sections: A Tale of Two SISs

by James E. Duggan

To paraphrase a current politician, strategic planning is a "vision/action thing." No entity under the AALL umbrella knows that better than the 13 Special Interest Sections, who, in addition to furthering AALL's Strategic Plan with various initiatives, also *visualize* and *actualize* their own section goals and activities. Many SISs have accomplished these endeavors by establishing their own highly successful individual strategic plans. To see how strategic planning works at the SIS level, consider the following examples.

SCCLL-SIS: Eating Your Peas Before Dessert

A few years ago, some members of the State, Court and County Law Libraries SIS noticed how the SIS's direction and goals were shifting with changes in leadership. In order to document SIS objectives and provide a game plan for the future, in 1998 then SCCLL-SIS Chair Jean M. Holcomb appointed a committee chaired by **Gail Warren**, state law librarian of Virginia, to draft a strategic plan for the SIS.

"Strategic planning is like eating your peas before you get to dessert," Warren says. A good strategic plan ensures that the fundamental objectives of the organization are carried out first, provides the structure and constancy that volunteers need, and keeps the organization moving forward.

The SCCLL-SIS took a very formal approach to strategic planning. To start the process, members of the strategic planning committee (who paid their own way) met for a half-day retreat prior to the 1998 AALL

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Annual Meeting. A facilitator helped the committee brainstorm about possible goals and strategic initiatives. Follow-up assignments included formulating an environmental scan and obtaining section member input through surveys. After several months of work, the committee finished drafting its first three-year strategic plan (1999–2001), which was approved unanimously by the SIS membership in July 1999. The committee went on to help the SCCLL-SIS leaders implement the plan and to keep track of progress.

Many of the initiatives in the 1999–2001 plan were accomplished, with notable achievements such as revitalizing the section newsletter, improving the listserv, creating a Web site for the section, and raising grant and scholarship funds. The SCCLL-SIS continues to use the strategic plan model to outline its direction for the future and is currently drafting its 2003–2005 plan.

CS-SIS: A Collaborative Process

The Computing Services SIS took a less structured but equally effective approach to strategic planning. Because the section had been led by both active and less active chairs over the years, the SIS wanted to create a strategic plan that could provide needed direction to subsequent leadership and the membership.

Sheri Lewis, associate law librarian for public services at the University of Chicago D'Angelo Law Library, chaired the committee charged with creating the strategic plan in 1998. Lewis prepared her committee members for the task by sending them strategic plans of other library-related groups. She urged members to consider a potential mission statement and specific goals appropriate for the CS-SIS plan.

Writing the strategic plan turned out to be more of a collaborative, small-group effort, however. Although all of the committee members contributed ideas, a smaller subset of the committee members actually ended up drafting the majority of the plan. "It was an odd process," Lewis says. "We

wanted to get the plan approved by the membership at the upcoming Annual Meeting but didn't have the opportunity to get all the committee members together in person in time to write the final plan." Despite this limitation, the resulting plan quickly won full committee approval and was adopted by the CS-SIS membership at its 1999 business meeting.

The resulting 1999–2001 CS-SIS strategic plan identified a number of important initiatives that eventually became a reality, such as sponsoring a CS-SIS Breakfast during the Annual Meeting, adding two member-at-large officer positions, and creating a job description-document database. The section continues to use its strategic plan to guide the future direction of the SIS. A committee is currently working on the 2003–2005 plan.

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Chapters Develop Strategic Plans and Make Them Work

by Sarah Andeen

Creating a strategic plan for an AALL chapter can take several years and a lot of work. Once the plan is completed, chapter members are often so exhausted and relieved to be done that they fail to take the next logical step: implementing the plan. But a strategic plan is virtually useless if it is simply filed away or placed on a Web site, never to be looked at again.

The best way to ensure that your strategic plan will be a living document is to create specific programs or projects to carry out the plan's goals. The *AALL Strategic Plan 2000–2005* can also be used in conjunction with an individual chapter's plan as a guideline for projects. Implementing your strategic plan need not require a huge commitment of time or resources. The following examples demonstrate how AALL chapters implement the initiatives in their strategic plans and often incorporate AALL's strategic plan initiatives as well.

- Improving compensation for law librarians is a goal for certain chapters. Several chapters conduct salary surveys in their local areas. Both the **Northern California Association of Law Libraries** and the **Virginia Association of Law**

Libraries have worked with local groups of the Association of Legal Administrators to include job descriptions for law firm librarians in the ALA salary surveys.

- In order to provide education while also promoting law librarians as premier legal information trainers, several chapters have developed legal research institutes. The **Arizona Association of Law Libraries** holds its Legal Information Institute annually for law librarians and paralegals. The **Minnesota Association of Law Libraries** was awarded a federal Library Services and Technology Act grant to conduct legal research workshops for public and county librarians in its area.
- Partnering with other legal organizations is another option. **VALL** has provided the content, consisting of practical legal advice, for three issues of the *Virginia Lawyer*, the official publication of the Virginia State Bar. **MALL** members are actively involved in updating the Web site LawMoose at <http://www.lawmoose.com>, which provides access to legal resources.

- Supporting charities is a commitment for some chapters. **AZALL** collects cellular phones for a project that aids domestic violence victims. Members of the **Law Librarians of New England** help promote reading by collecting cash and book donations for the "America Reads" program. Chapters also make generous contributions to support AALL projects, such as the George A. Strait Minority Scholarship Endowment.

Strategic planning can be beneficial not only for chapters and Special Interest Sections of AALL but for your own library as well. Key components of successful strategic planning and implementation are the same for any organization: coming up with clear initiatives, setting reasonable timeframes, obtaining group support and effectively communicating the progress made on the projects. By taking these steps, you and your organization can turn a planning document into a working tool that will bring results.

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