

Competencies of Law Librarianship

The American Association of Law Libraries seeks to define the profession of law librarianship and its value to the legal field, today and in the future, by identifying, verifying, and actively promoting competencies of law librarianship. Competencies are the knowledge, skills, abilities and personal characteristics that help distinguish superior performance. (Kenneth H. Pritchard, CCP. Society for Human Resource Management White Paper, August 1997, reviewed April 1999). These competencies may be acquired through higher education, such as library and information science programs (see "AALL Guidelines for Graduate Programs," November 1988; AALL Professional Development Policy, July 1996), through continuing education and through experience.

The first section, "Core Competencies," includes those that apply to all law librarians, and will be acquired early in one's career. The subsequent sections are related to specific areas of practice. Some law librarians — for example, solo librarians or librarians in smaller institutions — may have multiple responsibilities and need to be proficient in more than one of the "Specialized Competencies." Other law librarians may specialize in just one area or in a subset of one area.

Individual librarians can use the AALL Competencies for coordinating their continuing education as they identify areas for professional growth. Employers can use the competencies to make hiring, evaluation and promotion decisions, and to make recommendations for professional development. The American Association of Law Libraries uses the competencies as a framework within which to structure professional development programs. This framework provides guidance to ensure that the programs offered will assist law librarians in attaining and maintaining the skills or knowledge necessary for their current and future work.

1 Core Competencies

Core Competencies apply to all law librarians and will be acquired early in one's career.

- 1.1 Demonstrates a strong commitment to excellent client service
- 1.2 Recognizes and addresses the diverse nature of the library's clients and community
- 1.3 Understands and supports the culture and context of the library and its parent institution
- 1.4 Demonstrates knowledge of the legal system and the legal profession
- 1.5 Understands the social, political, and economic context in which the legal system exists
- 1.6 Demonstrates knowledge of library and information science theory, information creation, organization, and delivery
- 1.7 Adheres to the Ethical Principles of the American Association of Law Libraries and supports the shared values of librarianship (American Association of Law Libraries Ethical Principles, 1999)
- 1.8 Exhibits leadership skills including critical thinking, risk taking, and creativity, regardless of position within the management structure
- 1.9 Demonstrates commitment to working with others to achieve common goals
- 1.10 Acts within the organization to implement the principles of knowledge management
- 1.11 Exhibits an understanding of the importance of a multidisciplinary and cross-functional approach to programs and projects within the organization
- 1.12 Shares knowledge and expertise with clients and colleagues
- 1.13 Displays excellent communication skills and is able to promote the library and advocate for its needs
- 1.14 Communicates effectively with publishers and other information providers to advance the interests of the library
- 1.15 Recognizes the value of professional networking and actively participates in professional associations
- 1.16 Actively pursues personal and professional growth through continuing education

Specialized Competencies

Specialized Competencies relate to specific areas of practice. Some law librarians may have multiple responsibilities and need to be proficient in more than one of the Specialized Competencies. Other law librarians may specialize in just one area or subset of one area.

2 Library Management

- 2.1 Engages in a continual process of long-range planning
- 2.2 Plans, prepares, and controls budgets and manages all financial resources
- 2.3 Selects, supervises, evaluates, and provides for the training and development of library personnel
- 2.4 Understands the principles of project management and organizes people to accomplish complex tasks
- 2.5 Measures, evaluates and articulates the quality of the library's services
- 2.6 Ensures the optimal use of library facilities to accommodate the evolving needs of clients and staff
- 2.7 Provides leadership within the parent organization to ensure that the library is vital to that organization
- 2.8 Maintains an understanding of trends and developments in publishing and the information industry
- 2.9 Tracks, anticipates, and influences changes in policy and legislation that impact the library and the profession

3 Reference, Research, and Client Services

- 3.1 Provides skilled and customized reference services on legal and relevant non-legal topics
- 3.2 Evaluates the quality, authenticity, accuracy, and cost of traditional and electronic sources, and conveys the importance of these to the client
- 3.3 Assists clients with legal research using both print and electronic resources
- 3.4 Assists non-lawyers in accessing the law, within the guidelines provided by the American Bar Association's Model Code of Professional Conduct and other applicable codes

- 3.5 Aggregates content from a variety of sources and synthesizes information to create customized products for clients
- 3.6 Creates research and bibliographic tools (handouts, aids, pathfinders, bibliographies) on legal and related topics
- 3.7 Monitors trends in specific areas of the law

4 Information Technology

- 4.1 Understands the practical application of creating, accessing, and managing information including databases, integrated library systems, client-server applications, hardware, software, networks, and electronic information resources
- 4.2 Evaluates the need for new and evolving technology and implements required changes
- 4.3 Conducts long-range planning and policy formulation for computer services and training needs
- 4.4 Evaluates, purchases, implements, and tests software and hardware necessary for accessing electronic information
- 4.5 Assists and educates clients and colleagues in the use of the library's information systems
- 4.6 Resolves library hardware, software, local area network, Web site and Internet connectivity problems
- 4.7 Develops, creates, and maintains the library Web site

5 Collection Care and Management

- 5.1 Creates collection development policies that are appropriate to the overall mission of the parent organization
- 5.2 Makes selection decisions, in consideration of all relevant factors, including the library's collection development policy, differences among formats, and costs of purchase and upkeep
- 5.3 Evaluates information resources in all formats, integrates them to meet the needs of library clients, and discards or archives them as appropriate
- 5.4 Understands the acquisition and management of a diverse collection of legal and non-legal resources in multiple formats
- 5.5 Ensures the optimal arrangement of and access to the library's traditional and electronic resources
- 5.6 Improves the power and scope of library services by ensuring accessibility to outside collections and databases through resource sharing
- 5.7 Selects and implements an appropriate level of descriptive cataloging, classification, and subject analysis to meet the needs of the institution and the nature of its legal materials
- 5.8 Creates and selects catalog records according to national standards and accepted practices
- 5.9 Selects, implements, and continually improves an integrated library

system appropriate to the needs of the institution

- 5.10 Applies appropriate preservation practices to the library's collection

6 Teaching

- 6.1 Determines the educational needs of clients through observation, discussion with clients and colleagues, and the use of needs assessment tools
- 6.2 Effectively teaches library clients with differing needs and technological skill levels
- 6.3 Knows and applies the principles of adult learning
- 6.4 Designs curricula and methods to meet the educational needs of clients and evaluates the educational process for effectiveness
- 6.5 Educates clients in the methodologies of legal research
- 6.6 Provides training and guidance on the organization and use of legal resources in various formats
- 6.7 Acts as liaison to outside providers of commercial research databases to coordinate instruction on the effective use of these tools
- 6.8 Promotes the effective use of new technologies for the retrieval of information
- 6.9 Prepares and packages materials such as bibliographies, pathfinders, training scripts and handouts, utilizing a variety of formats