

Final Report of the Special Committee on the AALL Archives Policy Review
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Committee Members:

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Introduction

The Special Committee on the AALL Archives Policy Review was charged with a review of the existing archival policy (www.aallnet.org/about/policy_archives). Specifically, the committee was asked to consider:

1. what categories of Association information need to be retained;
2. what categories of Association information need to be retained that are now not retained; and
3. what categories of archived Association information would be suitable for electronic storage

During preliminary discussions a number of issues were identified as being crucial in carrying out the review. Although solving the technicalities of implementing an electronic archive was not within the scope of this review, technical issues could not be ignored. Indeed they comprised a large part of the conversation when the committee chair met with the Association archivist and other University of Illinois staff on February 15, 2005. The committee determined, following this conversation, that an electronic archive certainly is feasible and that targeted software is available and continues to improve. However, the Board should be aware that long-term solutions for an electronic depository would require the integration of planning for technical implications into policy decisions. This will be particularly true if the Board decides to create an independent electronic archive.

The committee met at the AALL Annual Meeting in Boston and by email and conference call. The committee chair also met with the Association staff on February 14, 2005 and had telephone conversations with the editors of Law Library Journal and Spectrum.

An interim report was submitted to the Board in April 2005. Following the Board's feedback, the committee met again by conference call and email. It subsequently revised the existing Archives Policy to reflect an electronic archive, and developed guidelines for submission of documents to the Archives.

Recommendations:

The committee recommends a simple straightforward approach to the question. Many categories of Association information are suitable for electronic storage and are already produced electronically. There is a perceived tension between doing what we have always done and moving forward to an electronic archives. It is based on a fear of relying only on electronic sources which are not tangible. Additionally, there is a concern that print and other archives will be lost. These fears must be balanced against the continuing cost and space issues of maintaining a traditional print archive. Additionally,

an electronic archive is much more accessible to members. There are examples of successful electronic archives.

The Committee recommends that AALL develop an electronic archive and that it base the electronic archive at the University of Illinois electronic archive site – <http://web.library.uiuc.edu/ahx/>. This is a stable site with developed finding aids and subject guides. As the Association's current archive is based at the University, there will be continuity. Although it would be possible to create its own site with available archiving software this would be a massive undertaking and is not recommended at this time. An electronic archive should be started as soon as possible given the growth in born digital documents and files. All entities should be required to submit documents in electronic format whenever possible.

The current archive located at the University of Illinois should not be closed and the Association should continue to send those items not suitable for digital conversion to that archive.

Initially, the electronic archive should be built with currently produced documents which are either born digital or converted to digital format. Following that, a schedule for converting older print documents should be developed. For example, as older documents are retrieved from the print archive they could be digitized and added to the electronic archive. Additionally, there should be a schedule for moving designated parts of AALLNET to the electronic archive.

The categories of information listed in the current policy are still valid and have not been changed. The revised policy recognizes that it is the production format which has changed over time. However, the revised policy has been broadened to include the transfer of new digital formats such as discussion lists and blogs and makes provision for other digital formats. It also provides for the archiving of the Washington Affairs Office letters, testimony and briefs. Finally, it mandates snapshots of AALLNET on a consistent basis. The policy recognizes that much correspondence, committee files and other records are never produced in paper and that it is important to ensure these items are transferred to the electronic archive when appropriate.

AALL staff support the development of an electronic archive and the committee recommends that staff be involved at the technical level and in the management level.

The committee recommends that Annual Reports and Annual Meeting proceedings be created in a born digital format that is archived on an annual basis. The most recent year should be available on AALLNET.

The committee recommends a committee be established for the initial creation of the archive and implementing of the policy. Members of the committee might include representatives from the Publications Committee, from the SIS Council, and from other committees such as Computing Services and Technical Services. This committee should also have staff representation and there should be a liaison with the Archive at the University of Illinois.