



Putting Your **Best** Foot Forward

Writing effective personal statements for
AALL Annual Meeting/workshop grants

By Michele Finerty

When you apply for a grant for the AALL Annual Meeting or Workshop, you'll need to submit a personal statement that describes "why you feel you should be awarded a grant; your financial need for a grant; how attending this particular Annual Meeting or workshop will help you professionally; your level of involvement in library activities; and anything else you would like the Grants Committee to know about you."

Your personal statement provides the Grants Committee an opportunity to learn not only your goals and experience, but also your attitudes and professional priorities as they relate to law librarianship. It supports your case for a grant by supplementing what is on your application, resume, and references. While every suggestion listed here may not be relevant to your individual situation, below are a few tips on writing a personal statement that will humanize you to the committee and detail the reasons you should be awarded a grant.

For both new and experienced grant applicants, there are a few general points to keep in mind:

- State specifically why you are requesting financial support. Are you a student who must cover your costs? Are you a law librarian working at an institution that will not cover the cost?
- Avoid general statements such as “attending the Annual Meeting is essential to my growth and professional development.” Instead, explain how it is essential. What is its educational value to you? What do you hope to accomplish by being there? Will you play a role as a program speaker or a committee member? Will you work with other members on chapter or special interest section business?
- Another common general statement is, “The Annual Meeting is an opportunity to network with other law librarians.” Explain in what way networking is valuable to you. Will it build cooperative partnerships with other professionals and to what benefit? Do you plan to seek solutions for common problems (e.g., staffing concerns, publisher issues, the ever-changing technologies) by speaking face to face with other AALL members?
- Avoid summarizing what is on your resume or application in the personal statement. Discuss items in greater detail only if doing so further develops information about you for the committee.
- Carefully proofread your personal statement.

New Law Librarians

Although you are in the beginning stages of your career, the personal statement is the opportunity to express your enthusiasm for and heartfelt commitment to law librarianship.

Elaborate on the experiences or influences that shaped your decision to enter law librarianship. Explain with concrete examples what attracted you to the profession. If your past positions motivated you to focus on law librarianship, explain how that came about.

Give examples of experiences that have developed or refined your goals throughout your career.

Identify your career goals. What do you want to accomplish in your new (or present) position? If you are not aiming for a specific title or rank at this point in your career, describe the type of law library

environment (private, academic, public, government) you think will give you a sense of accomplishment and allow you to fulfill your goals.

What do you want to accomplish in your new (or present) position?

Identify the values you hold in your choice of a career and how you anticipate using those values in your professional life. What have you learned from your academic and practical experiences?

This is your opportunity to highlight those abilities that can lead to success in your career. List any skills that will serve as an asset to your profession (e.g., fluency in another language, managerial and leadership skills). Cite volunteer or professional activities that make use of those skills and develop them further. Explain how you envision contributing to the profession of law librarianship by using those skills.

Experienced Law Librarians

Make your personal statement a showcase of the contributions you have made to the profession of law librarianship and to your institution.

As an experienced law librarian, be specific in describing the benefit for you in attending the Annual Meeting or workshop. For instance, are you a member of a committee that conducts its business at the Annual Meeting? Is your plan to share your expertise in technology, national law library standards, or how to market your library with a chapter or special interest section?

Highlight any innovations or enhancements you brought to your institution. Did you streamline procedures for efficient staff operations? Did you institute staff development opportunities? Has your role in library technology enhanced staff productivity and patron access to information? Describe the process through which you (or you and others) identified the need and made the changes.

Explain how your professional activities in AALL, chapters, and special interest sections, as well as in other associations, made use of your skills over the course of your career and what developed from those activities.

Give examples of experiences that have developed or refined your goals throughout your career. Has your vision and approach evolved as a result of those experiences? What have you learned from that process? If there are further career goals you are working toward, please elaborate.

One final point: Your personal statement is an important part of successfully applying for a grant. It makes you more than just a name and gives the Grants Committee a clear picture of you and your goals, your experiences, and the contributions you have made (or hope to make) to law librarianship. ■

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