



What advice do you have for first-time AALL Conference attendees?

*The following responses are available on AALLNET only. For the responses published in the June 2008 issue of *AALL Spectrum*, please see the issue in its entirety.

“Treasure friendly people you meet; be sure to get their e-mail addresses and other contact information. Wear comfortable shoes. Be sure to schedule time for the Exhibit Hall—and lunch (I have forgotten to allow time for lunch, believe it or not). Make notes of follow-up tasks for when you return home, but basically enjoy the riches of a fine conference.”

- *Sally H. Wambold, technical services librarian at the University of Richmond School of Law Library*

“There are a lot of things about the Annual Meeting that first-time attendees should check out: the Exhibit Hall, the swank parties, and the local information booth to find where the good restaurants are. However, the one thing I’d recommend most to get the full effect of how AALL works—volunteer. I speak from experience when I say that the first time out, the Annual Meeting thing can be pretty intimidating. It’s big. It’s crowded. Everybody seems to know each other. My first time out I worked at the registration booth and collected tickets at the Closing Banquet. I found out that by volunteering you get to see the picture on a smaller scale. You get to meet people and network without having to yell over the band. You get to see how the organization works from the inside out. You get to help make the whole thing work.”

- *Robb Farmer, instructional/research librarian at Faulkner University Jones School of Law Library in Montgomery, Alabama*

“Some of the best things I’ve learned from attending the AALL Annual Meeting haven’t come from a lecture hall. Accordingly, I suggest first-time attendees make it a point to do all the ‘fun’ stuff. By this I mean attending receptions; hopping to various group get-togethers, such as school reunions (Go Dawgs!); doing the Hein Fun Run; shaking a leg with the Dancing Special Interest Section; playing ping pong in the Exhibit Hall; signing up for some of the tours offered; and volunteering somewhere. These are great opportunities for networking, and you meet the really cool law librarians who will turn out to be friends and mentors for life. Plus, you make some great AALL memories. If it’s ‘unusual,’ I suggest you do it. I know you’ll be delighted at all the benefits you receive.”

- *Lisa A. Mecklenberg Jackson, legislative staff attorney at the Montana Legislative Services Division in Helena*

“Start planning early. Apply for an AALL grant for new librarians to attend the conference. Not only will you get your trip paid for, you will also show your superiors how resourceful you are if you get it.

“Make friends. You will be surprised how helpful these contacts may be during your career path, both professionally and personally. Take pictures, and make a point to send copies to everyone in the pictures. People will be more willing to help you if they remember who you are.

“Go to as many sessions as possible, keep handouts, and take notes. You might want to write an article for a newsletter or give a presentation to your colleagues, and having these notes will make it easier for you to put your thoughts together.

Member to Member

“Meetings are hectic and tiring. Take a nice walk around the city at the end of the day to unwind and get a glimpse of the city you may not be able to come back to for many years.

“Remember: This is going to be the best experience of your professional life ever. Enjoy!”

- *Anna Djirdjirian, deputy director of the U.S. Court of International Trade in New York City*

“If you’re nervous about your first meeting, relax—you’re among friends. Lots of them. Meet as many folks as you can. Talk to everyone. If you’re waiting for an elevator, introduce yourself to the folks waiting with you. Make connections, ask folks to lunch, or ask if you can join folks for dinner. Ask lots of questions. Attend your own special interest section meeting and roundtable where you can meet folks who do what you do. Attend a program in something that sounds fascinating to you, even if it’s not in your subject area. If you’re a tech services person, attend a public services program and vice versa. Spend some time in the Exhibit Hall and get to know the vendors and new products. Don’t forget to register for the contests—you may win a prize. Bring some freebies back for the folks who weren’t lucky enough to go to the conference. If you have suggestions for product improvements or new products, suggest them to the vendors. They want our feedback. Before you go, look through the program and meeting schedule, and make yourself a schedule with all the programs, meetings, and parties you want to attend. Volunteer. Suggest a program for next year’s conference. Better yet, agree to coordinate or help coordinate a program. Go to the parties and have fun. And you don’t need a partner to dance. Just join a circle of other singles and dance! If you can, give yourself an extra day at the beginning or end of the conference to reward yourself with a tour or a visit to a winery. Most of all, have fun.”

- *Lisa J. Arm, collection development librarian at Boston University Pappas Law Library*

“Make connections.

“One of the great benefits of the conference is networking, but if this is your first time attending AALL’s Annual Meeting, chances are you’ll feel a little overwhelmed. You’ll see lots of folks who obviously know each other well and have that feeling of being on the outside looking in. But keep in mind that most of these ‘insiders’ started on the outside. Here are some tips for getting in the door.

“(1) If you belong to a chapter, find out who’s going to the conference and make plans to get together. Many chapter members end up rooming together to save money. Check to see if your chapter is having some sort of social event at the conference. They will be listed at the Annual Meeting home page and in the program booklet.

“(2) If you’re a branch librarian and some of your co-workers from other offices are going, plan to meet them. If you’ve struck up an e-mail friendship with a librarian via an online discussion list, arrange to meet him or her as well.

“(3) There will be a number of events that could give you an opportunity to meet new friends—sign up for CONELL (the Saturday program for newer law librarians), a public service project, a library tour, or an excursion. All of these involve more manageable numbers of people. AALL usually organizes ‘dine-arounds’ (pre-arranged restaurant dates with six to eight people) on the Saturday night before the Opening Event, which is another way meet people.

“(4) When you attend programs, introduce yourself to the people around you. We’re all interested in meeting new people because you can never know too many librarians!”

- *Christine L. Graesser, legal information specialist at Brown, Rudnick, Berlack, Israels LLP in Hartford, Connecticut*

“Don’t just stick to your job focus. If you’re a reference librarian, don’t just attend reference- or research-related sessions. Instead, try something totally outside of your professional responsibilities, something that just looks like fun. Also, get to know your colleagues—even if you barely know another person outside of your workplace, eventually you’ll turn to

your network of library colleagues for help, support, and advice. Finally, take advantage of the locale and go on one of the planned excursions, go out shopping or to dinner, or go exploring on your own. I always think of the AALL Conference as part work and part fun.”

- *Amy Burchfield, access and faculty services librarian at Cleveland State University
Cleveland Marshall College of Law Library*

“Be open to all types of Annual Meeting experiences. Attend a business meeting, an ‘other special interest section (SIS) educational opportunity,’ and a reception for at least one SIS and/or committee. Go to a breakfast meeting, a luncheon, and a vendor presentation. See an educational program on a topic completely different from your library area of practice. Spend some time in the Exhibit Hall. Introduce yourself to at least one person at all of these types of events. If you get a chance, meet one of the big names in law librarianship. All of these experiences will teach you something very interesting, and even practical, about law librarianship. Better yet, the people you meet will be the friendly faces you see at many meetings for years to come and a solid base for your law librarian network.”

- *Raquel M. Ortiz, head of reference services at Boston University Pappas Law Library*

“Don’t just go to programs that are in your current field or level of expertise, but think of where you might be in five years and go to some programs that will inspire you. Ask questions to older librarians; be prepared for a longer, more involved answer than you expected; and ask follow-up questions. The intensity is much higher than an ordinary week at the office, so be sure to eat well and take a break now and then. Don’t let exhibitors suck you into long sessions by offering goodies. Your time in the Exhibit Hall is too valuable, so choose what actually interests you.”

- *Charles R. Dyer, consultant and retired public law library director living in Bellingham, Washington*

“Attend CONELL (Conference of Newer Law Librarians)!! Although CONELL is usually held prior to the AALL Conference, it is well worth it to schedule this day-long preconference into your plans. Last year was my first AALL Conference, and the sheer size of the conference and amount of activities, educational programs, meetings, parties, and the Exhibit Hall could have at times been overwhelming. However, the CONELL speakers explained the many facets of the conference and offered tips to get the most from the conference. Because of CONELL I was prepared for the conference and all the wonderful programs and activities offered. CONELL is also a terrific opportunity to meet other new librarians who you will hopefully be able to connect with at future conferences.”

- *Christine E. Morton, reference librarian at Touros College Gould Law Library in Central Islip, New York*

“Don’t eat dinner the night of the opening dessert event!”

- *Michael J. Saporito, access services librarian at the Social Law Library in Boston*

“My advice to first-time AALL Conference attendees? Pace yourself and have fun! At my first Annual Meeting I thought I’d be proactive and take the Preliminary Program and create a spreadsheet (color-coordinated, no less) on which I blocked off time for sessions I wanted to attend. Once completed, what I had was a multi-colored monster staring back at me—it was rather intimidating. And although I did a pretty good job of following this schedule, I was mentally and physically exhausted by the end of the conference. Don’t do this to yourself! Plan ahead, of course, and make sure to attend those sessions that really interest you. Spend some time in the Exhibit Hall. Meet new colleagues. Go for a run. But most important of all, relax and have some fun. Don’t become a prisoner of your own multi-colored monster!”

- *Jason R. Sowards, reference librarian at Wake Forest University Professional Center Library in Winston-Salem, North Carolina*

Member to Member

“Here’s my advice to new and previous attendees. The number one thing that I never did in the past but will do in the future: Write a short synopsis of the workshops you attend and share your newly discovered gems of wisdom with others in your department. Your department benefits, and the importance of continuing education is demonstrated to the firm, which pays for your attendance and travel. I recently did this after attending the AALL-PLL Webinar on cost recovery (which was extremely beneficial and informative). The response was very positive, and I plan to follow this suggestion the next time I attend the AALL Annual Meeting.”

- *Deborah Maglione, senior reference librarian at Howrey LLP in San Francisco*

“First, get to know as many people as you can. Participate in the Conference of Newer Law Librarians (CONNELL) and other informal events, dinners, dances, tours, etc., as much as you can.

“Second, try to obtain a mentor (preferably in advance of the conference). AALL’s mentorship program is terrific, and it may be underutilized. There are experienced librarians, or ‘old hands,’ who are more than happy to share their experience, knowledge, and expertise. Mentors can become long-term contacts, acquaintances, and maybe even friends who can help you find better employment or handle other problems you encounter.

“Third, consider joining a committee or special interest section focusing on an area of interest to you. You meet lots of great people and have wonderful experiences in the smaller committee and group situations.

“Fourth, sample the wide variety of excellent presentations available.

“Fifth, don’t forget to try to get some sleep. Fatigue can become a real problem by the end of a convention.

“Sixth, enjoy the freebies from our major vendors, go to the West party, the LexisNexis events, etc. Just remember we still have to keep them somewhat at arm’s length in our day-to-day work. There are many really nice people working at these events and very good contacts inside the vendors’ organizations.

“Seventh, budget some time to be in the Exhibit Hall. Many good business contacts are started there, and you get to learn of many important products and services. Just remember to take a skeptical pill each evening so your appreciation will remain reality based (similar to point six above).

“Eighth, a propos of item point one, bring lots of business cards, if you have them; you can’t have too many. Cards make it easier to share your contact information with other folks you meet. They are great for putting into glass jars for prizes and drawings, too.

“Finally, after the event, take some time to contact all the people you met (e-mail is okay) to reinforce the connections you have made.”

- *Gregory M. Fite, technical services librarian at Bernard E. Witkin Alameda County Law Library in Oakland, California*

“Here are my two cents for first-time attendees: Sign up for a mentor and ask what he or she recommends doing at the Annual Meeting (a great mentor will invite you to events with him or her). Go to the Conference of Newer Law Librarians (CONNELL)—if you’re interviewing, you may not get out much after this. Attend your chapter’s reception and all the other big receptions—get free food and meet new people. If you know people from your local chapter, ask what they are doing and plan something with one of them. Tour the Exhibit Hall to see what the vendors offer and meet the folks at the chapter and special interest section tables (and get free stuff). If you are shy, try to introduce yourself to someone at each event.”

- *Ellen J. Platt, senior reference librarian at Santa Clara University*

“Make friends. The people you meet on new committees and in special interest sections can become friends for life. They may provide valuable career mentoring, help you network with other librarians, provide you with inspiration, and be a source of support in difficult times. Get involved and make friends.

“That’s my advice for your first AALL Conference and for every conference thereafter. Welcome to the club!”

- James G. Durham, head of public services at Touro College Gould Law Library in Central Islip, New York

“For my entire life, I have struggled with remembering people’s names. This might be your problem, too. A good method for remembering people’s names is to associate them with a particular activity. Getting involved with a special interest section (SIS) in an area of your interest would both introduce you to new people and provide a link to a topic of interest to you. There are many SISs. By participation in a section, you will meet very knowledgeable people and you will build your network of friends. Before you know it, you will start contributing to the group and have great pleasure in doing so. And through contact with members, you will be forced to remember their names. This definitely helps me.”

- Katrina M. Piechnik, head of technical services at Jenkins Law Library in Philadelphia

“Print a blank daily calendar from your e-mail program (Outlook, GroupWise). Fill in activities and carry this around. Use pencil—your schedule may change when you converse with others before and during the conference.

“Attend at least one program that has nothing to do with your current job. The object is to learn something new and be able to relate to what challenges other librarians.

“Check roundtable sessions carefully. While they can be filled with information, they might be dominated by one type of library. For example, cataloging roundtables are interesting, but tend to have many large academic technical services librarians in attendance. If you’re from a small specialized library with a small amount of cataloging, it would be better to attend another program in that time slot.

“Don’t be shy. Introduce yourself to others, and inquire about them (they might be shy—you go first). Start with, ‘What’s your name? Where are you from? What type of library are you with?’ Prepare a little bit by thinking about different types of libraries and what you’ve always wanted to know about those libraries—then ask those questions. In return, be prepared to answer questions about your library: How many people are on your library staff? How many attorneys are in your office? What’s your most frequent reference task? What do you specifically do in your job? It may be helpful to know the population of your city and state. I’ve been asked this question and was momentarily stumped (I guessed). Thinking of topics in advance makes conversation much easier and surely beats talking about the weather.”

- Karla Gedell, research librarian at the Minnesota Office of Attorney General in St. Paul