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August 2, 2021

Mr. Crosby Kemper
Director
Institute of Museum and Library Services
955 L'Enfant Plaza North, SW, Suite 4000
Washington, DC 20024

RE: Request for Information to Assist in the Development of the Institute of Museum and Library Services' 2022–2026 Strategic Plan

Dear Mr. Kemper:

The American Association of Law Libraries (AALL), a national organization representing 4,000 law librarians and legal information professionals, appreciates the opportunity to provide comments to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) on the development of its 2022–2026 Strategic Plan.

The mission of AALL is to advance the profession of law librarianship and legal information and support the professional growth of its members through leadership and advocacy in the field of legal information and information policy. The Association's core values include advocating for equitable and permanent public access to trustworthy legal information and continuous improvement in access to justice. AALL members work in many library settings, including law schools and law firms; federal, state, and county governments; and federal and state courts and many of those law libraries are eligible to receive grant funding through IMLS.

As the agency develops its new Strategic Plan, we are excited to share our ideas on ensuring that future IMLS services impact a broader community.

Regarding how libraries can broaden participation in learning opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds, and needs:

Law libraries provide access to official, authentic, and up-to-date legal materials to assist attorneys, students, and members of the public with their legal research needs. With IMLS support, public law libraries can expand their services to help more self-represented litigants and members of the public, including by providing access to legal research materials, court forms, public computers, and referrals to legal aid organizations. Public law libraries can also expand partnerships with legal aid organizations and attorneys to provide more “lawyer in the library” programs, self-help centers, and other services to help members of the public who visit law libraries with



legal problems. Law librarians do not provide legal advice, but they do refer people to organizations that provide free legal services. IMLS support would also help law libraries provide enhanced virtual and in-person programming and build on partnerships with public libraries, universities, bar associations, law firms, government agencies, and other organizations.

Regarding what essential skills library professionals will need over the next five years to address changes to their work:

The *2021 AALL State of the Profession (State of the Profession)* report presents information about how law librarians and legal information professionals have evolved into technology leaders and innovators, finding the right products and solutions for their organizations, training lawyers, teaching law students, and providing their users with essential legal research.

In the next five years, law libraries will become less about the books on the shelves and more about community gathering spaces to participate in educational programs, receive expert assistance from trained law librarians, connect with legal aid and other organizations, and gain free access to official, authentic legal materials. In addition, some law librarians and legal information professionals will contribute to other areas of their organizations, such as strategic planning, artificial intelligence, and innovation initiatives.

The *State of the Profession* report found that academic law libraries are increasingly responsible for managing technology platforms and services internally as well as throughout their law schools. In the next five years, academic law libraries will continue to take increasing responsibility for supporting classroom technology, virtual learning, course management systems, websites, and databases. Academic law librarians will continue to enhance their technology and leadership skills to lead innovative projects that meet the needs of faculty and students and the public, in some cases.

Public law libraries support courts, judges, agencies, legislative bodies, and the public, and in the next five years public law libraries will continue to position themselves as essential partners in access to justice. Many public law libraries will continue to expand their services and partnerships to help self-represented litigants, including by providing in-person and virtual educational programs and supporting legal clinics. This will require enhanced communications and marketing skills, as well as stakeholder management skills. In addition, public law librarians will continue to enhance their contract negotiation skills, as most are involved with negotiating library contracts and recommending research and technology products for purchase.



Library professionals play key roles in their communities and in the next five years, a focus on DEI with respect to legal research materials and also with respect to making sure libraries continue to build on being inclusive will be key. Library professionals will need more trainings on DEI, emotional intelligence, emerging technologies, and data management and analysis.

Regarding how libraries can better use outreach and partnerships to serve their communities:

Currently, law libraries participate in many different types of outreach and partnerships to serve their communities. Many academic law libraries provide services and space to undergraduates, non-law faculty, and graduate students. Many government law libraries have established collaborative relationships with bar associations, legal aid organizations, and other government law libraries. Some public law libraries partner with public libraries to provide training on legal research and to provide legal research assistance. Public law libraries may also have connections to networks of organizations that provide legal services and social services.

Approximately 200 law libraries participate in partnerships with the U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO) through the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP). Many law libraries also participate in state depository library programs. Recently, GPO has updated policies governing the FDLP to allow participation by libraries in different ways, including as preservation partners, all-digital libraries, and more. Increased participation in the FDLP and state depository library programs, whether through traditional channels or new partnerships, benefits local communities by providing greater access to federal and state government information along with expert assistance from trained librarians.

As law libraries continue to evolve and innovate, they will explore new partnerships, remodel their physical spaces to accommodate new uses, and embed themselves into their organizations to reach users in new ways. New partnerships with different types of organizations such as social services agencies and nonprofits will help to increase awareness of law libraries and expand access to legal information. Creative partnerships with universities, anti-racism organizations, and other groups will help support DEI initiatives.

Regarding what practices and tools in library collections management, care, and access need to be updated or reinvented, and how:

Law libraries continually update and reinvent their policies and procedures to provide greater access to quality legal information, lead innovation efforts, and strengthen and empower their institutions. As a result of changing user needs, because of the COVID-19



pandemic or for other reasons, some law libraries have updated their collection development policies to emphasize selecting electronic resources over print materials when available and cost effective. Other law libraries are expanding efforts to digitize their collections to make these materials more accessible to the public.

Going forward, law libraries will need to be adept at data-driven collection evaluation to meet the changing needs of their users and their organizations. Law librarians will continue to be innovative and collaborative, breaking down silos between library type and between library departments—including the access services and technical services departments—to provide excellent service to in-person and remote users. In many organizations, placing a greater emphasis on DEI issues when developing and analyzing collections will also be important.

Regarding what research and data are needed to help libraries work more effectively for the benefit of the communities they serve:

Law libraries would benefit from additional data and information about the communities they serve in order to most effectively meet their legal information needs. Additional research and data about demographic information; information about legal aid organizations and the populations served by those organizations; and information on broadband assistance programs and government support programs benefiting libraries would be helpful. In addition, research and data about library DEI initiatives and the impact of COVID-19 on libraries would be useful. AALL would be happy to work with you to identify other data that would be helpful for law librarians and legal information professionals.

CONCLUSION

Law libraries are an integral part of the legal system and grants from IMLS can assist those law libraries in expanding their services to their communities. We hope you will take these ideas into consideration as you work towards the 2022-2026 IMLS Strategic Plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Diane M. Rodriguez'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'R' at the end.

Diane M. Rodriguez
President, 2021-2022
American Association of Law Libraries