



This Resource Guide has been created to address the particular needs of state, court, county and other government agencies that must manage and maximize legal information. It explains the tangible benefits gained by organizations that hire a professional law librarian and provides guidance in the hiring process. Prepared by members of the State, Court and County Law Libraries Special Interest Section of the American Association of Law Libraries, this guide incorporates experiences and knowledge from law library experts who serve all types of jurisdictions and regions in the United States.

Whether you're thinking of hiring your first law librarian or considering ways that the role can be expanded to accommodate the needs of a changing organization, we know you'll find helpful information here.

How to Hire a State, Court or County Law Librarian

A Guide for Government and Court Decision-Makers

Why and when does a court, agency or governmental entity need a professional law librarian?

Today's information-driven legal environment presents unprecedented challenges for courts and government agencies — from managing the vast array of necessary print and electronic legal resources to actually publishing their own reference materials. Whatever the agency's specific role, its effectiveness depends on finding, managing and using accurate legal information. A professional law librarian has the expertise to handle these diverse demands, putting the power of information to work for a court or government agency.

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Hiring a law librarian is one way a court or agency can manage its information needs, control its budget, and stay on top of new resources and recent legal precedent. But when is the right time to hire? What are the critical considerations? And how does an agency find the right person for the job?

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Understanding Today's World of Legal Information

Before exploring the roles and possible responsibilities of a law librarian, it's important to recognize how the legal information arena and the law library have changed in recent years.

Legal information is now available in more formats and can be used more quickly than ever before. Desktop access to databases such as LexisNexis™ and WESTLAW makes legal information easy to find and delivers it right

to your computer, saving photocopying and research time. The Internet offers numerous new information sources and improved access to existing ones. The most recent court rules, federal agency procedures and state court decisions are now available to researchers via the World Wide Web. E-mail, fax and even overnight delivery, along with the Internet, accelerate the practice of law and work in the courts.

"Our trained librarian is able to look outside of our usual sources. She brings a fresh and knowledgeable approach to our research and has contributed research information which is unique and valuable."

Kathleen Torres
Assistant U.S. Attorney
Department of Justice
Denver, Colorado

The traditional law library — with its impressive mahogany shelves lined with weighty tomes — has evolved to incorporate the many powerful information resources that can be delivered right to the user's computer desktop. Private law firms are using technology to meet ever-increasing demands from the fast-paced legal environment. Law libraries that serve government and municipal agencies need similar resources. As the arbiters of the law, the courts need to be able to find and use the same — if not better — information as what is being presented in the courtroom.

Even though the number and type of legal resources have multiplied significantly in the past five years, budget-conscious public-sector law libraries must focus even harder on making their collections cost effective. Yet with many diverse resources available, it is nearly impossible for the untrained person to know how to manage a library's budget and collection to secure the most valuable resources for the least expense.

Deciding to Hire Your First Law Librarian

As a rule, if most of your agency's information-related tasks are handled by attorneys, law clerks or people trained for other responsibilities, the organization would work more efficiently with a law librarian on the team. It may be time to consider hiring a law librarian after carefully examining your organization's operations, culture, clientele and long-term goals. Also consider the value that someone with professional research and management skills could bring to your organization. The following steps may help you decide whether you need your own law librarian:

- **Consult with attorneys, judges and court administrators** who have worked with law librarians to learn their perspectives and experience on the value law librarians can bring.
- **Quantify the hours now being spent** on information-related work to determine the possible savings from having a law librarian provide those services.
- **Find out how other organizations manage their law libraries** by talking with law librarians, publisher representatives or colleagues.
- **Contact the American Association of Law Libraries** to identify a local contact who can help explore the agency's options (e-mail aallhq@aall.org).

Embracing the Potential of a Law Librarian

When an agency hires a professional law librarian, it is important that everyone in the organization understands the significant opportunities that come with adding this expertise.

Judges, legislators and other members of the library's governing body must appreciate and support a new law librarian position and the positive changes it represents. Planning ahead for the new situation paves the way to success. For example:

- **Consider hiring a part-time professional law librarian** or consultant first, then budget for a full-time salary a year or more in advance.

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RESPONSIBILITIES: What a Law Librarian Can Do for You

Law librarians, who are trained to select and organize information in a variety of formats, can improve the efficiency of their state, court or government agencies by effectively managing legal information and making it useful to their customers. Some of the services a law librarian can provide are:

Research and Reference Services

Researcher on call – quickly reviews available sources, providing targeted summaries and bibliographies in response to research requests

Forward thinker – anticipates customers' needs and continually identifies the best resources and technology to deliver information within the library's budget

Policy-maker – develops and implements policy to extend information services to the library's public customers

Information evaluator and publisher – evaluates and creates legal information guides, such as indexes, catalogs, pathfinders and Web sites, for the library's users

Networker – ensures cost-effective access to resources beyond the library's collection through other institutions and free Web-based sites

Management Services

Liaison and contributor – maintains close working relationships with the library's governing board and others in the organization and recommends policy and procedure

Budget manager – plans, prepares, justifies and controls the library operating and personnel budget

Collection overseer – defines the scope, content and formats of the library's collection

Library advocate – maintains in-depth knowledge of the legal publishing industry to obtain the best pricing and collection for the library

Format balancer – analyzes customer needs and use of resources and provides the proper balance of electronic and print sources to meet those needs

Technology expert – monitors new and evolving information technologies and selects software and hardware necessary to access and produce electronic information

Cost-conscious negotiator – negotiates contracts and licensing agreements for a variety of print and Web-based resources



Personnel manager – interviews, recommends and hires personnel for library staff positions

Indexer and cataloger – creates, manages and maintains an automated online catalog (preferably Web-based) of the library's resources

Training and Instruction

Coordinator – creates and schedules educational programs and technical training to help customers use resources effectively

Training developer – develops and promotes ongoing educational programming in basic and specialized legal research skills for the library's users

Customer education manager – ensures that both on-site and remote users understand and can use legal print and electronic resources

Orientation director – provides information to all new legal staff throughout the organization about the collection and services available at the law library

Note: For more information and sample job descriptions for state, court, or government law librarian positions, please visit www.aallnet.org/sis/scell.

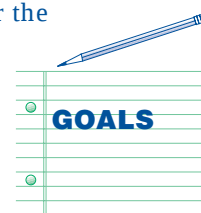
Embracing the Potential of a Law Librarian continued from pg. 2

- **Add a law librarian as part of the agency's or court's long-range strategic plan**, e.g., to help integrate electronic legal resources with the agency's or court's computer system.
- **Develop an appropriate job title**, position description and salary requirements for review by key constituents of the library and the governing body. (You'll find AALL's Competencies of Law Librarianship at www.aallnet.org/prodev/competencies.asp.)
- **Establish the librarian's reporting and approval authorities** for library activities, as well as expectations for the librarian and staff members working with him or her.
- **Clarify what changes will be required** in the agency's practices once a librarian is added.

"Today's law librarian will select appropriate resources, negotiate contracts for online services, manage the library budget and teach others to be intelligent users of information sources."

Anita Anderson
Law Librarian
Minnesota Office of the
Attorney General
St. Paul, Minnesota

- **Set realistic goals** for the librarian to achieve and provide support in meeting those goals.
- **Clearly communicate expectations and goals** and regularly evaluate progress.
- **Provide the librarian with the necessary tools** to attain the organization's goals, including support personnel and encouragement from senior leaders.
- **Discuss and communicate all of these issues** with governing body and agency leadership before, during, and after the law librarian starts in the new position.



Replacing a Law Librarian

When a law librarian leaves the organization, it's a perfect time to re-evaluate the role, look at the organization's needs and future plans, and revise the librarian position as appropriate. Some steps to take before replacing a law librarian:



- 1) **Survey library users** to gauge what support they need and what change, if any, should be made.
- 2) **Find out how** other local agencies or courts use their librarians and adopt their best practices.
- 3) **Consider customer expectations** of the law librarians — are they being met and, if not, why not? Are the expectations reasonable? Are there sufficient financial and personnel resources to support the demands on the library?
- 4) **Review and assess how the librarian's skills are being employed.** What information services can the organization use or afford, and does the librarian have the skills and resources to provide them? Could the librarian position be responsible for other information-related tasks? Does the agency's culture encourage the librarian's participation, or do staff members need to find ways to better use the librarian's expertise?

Who Qualifies and Why?

After familiarizing yourself with the organization's information needs, library users' expectations and the librarian's job description, the stage is set for hiring a law librarian. To find the right person, you must next identify the qualifications needed to do the job. The right person will have a combination of academic credentials and career experience that suits the organization's needs.

Academic Qualifications

M.L.S.: Masters of Library Science – A professional librarian will have a graduate degree in library or information science, which covers library procedures and all aspects of obtaining, organizing, storing and accessing information in various formats. Graduate coursework includes helping library users obtain desired information (reference), selecting and acquiring information (collection development, database negotiation, acquisitions), facilitating access by cataloging and classifying information (technical services), organizing information (indexing and, more recently, Web design), and management theory.

Note: Accreditation by the American Library Association indicates that a graduate program provides comprehensive, quality instruction that meets national standards. For a complete list of accredited library schools, visit www.ala.org/alaorg/oa/lisdir.html.

Law-specific training – A number of graduate library programs offer additional law librarianship courses, including joint M.L.S./J.D. degrees. These programs focus specifically on legal information, including basic and advanced legal reference, cataloging and classification of legal materials, and computer-assisted legal research.

Most experienced law librarians have sufficient legal knowledge to direct library users to the correct resources. Twenty-seven percent of all law librarians have J.D. degrees in addition to graduate library degrees. Having both law and library science degrees may be advantageous in larger state, court and county law libraries. In smaller law libraries, the importance of a law degree depends on the library's clientele and mission.

Technology – Because librarians are also “information navigators,” most graduate programs today focus on technology's role in storing and accessing information or offer extensive coursework in understanding and using the latest technology. If library candidates have not had expo-

sure to these latest technologies in their academic careers, it is very important that they have had such experience in their professional careers.

Professional Experience

Professional law librarians have experience in legal research and subject specialties that they have acquired on the job — whether at law libraries in government agencies, law firms, corporations, academic institutions, or other states, courts or counties. A candidate's experience should be appropriate to the library's needs and the requirements of the position.

A state, court or county law library's first librarian, or a solo librarian, should have at least three years professional-level law library experience, preferably in a similar type of law library. If the librarian has not had previous service within your state, he or she may still have a substantial learning curve just to become familiar with local law, legal procedures and the organizations with which the librarian will have to interact.

If legal research skills are important, hire someone who has specific experience or training in law librarianship, as opposed to someone with an M.L.S. degree but no experience.

Anyone in charge of a library, even if the person works alone, should have the budget-

management experience necessary to handle the significant fiscal responsibility involved. The head librarian should also have some skill in advocacy and oral presentation if the person will be making budget presentations or lobbying on behalf of the library.

When hiring a law librarian, as with any profession, candidates at various levels offer different benefits and require varying support:

- **New librarians** (0-2 years experience) will need time to learn the world of law and legal research and to build personnel, management and marketing skills.
- **Mid-level librarians** (3-10 years experience) have skills in various areas, especially research, and can quickly provide value-added service to the organization.
- **Advanced librarians** (10 or more years experience) typically supervise personnel, are conversant on technology and interact with fellow department managers. In addition to these administrative roles, they provide higher levels of research and training.

Most graduate library programs today focus on technology's role in storing and accessing information.

THE REAL WORLD: Harnessing Technology in Minnesota

Two Minnesota law libraries demonstrate how technology can be useful and effective in serving library customers at various levels.

Since purchasing its first computer in 1983, the **Minnesota State Law Library** has committed resources and personnel to effectively use technology in serving its judiciary, government staff and public users:

- **An electronic services librarian**, hired in 1997, advises on electronic format materials, consults on effective use of information technology, and maintains the library's Web site.
- **The library's Web site** includes a Case Archive Web page that had more than 1.6 million hits in 2001 and archives of appellate decisions that are searchable back to May 1996. The site, www.lawlibrary.state.mn.us, connects to various Minnesota legal resources, other state law library Web sites, a directory of county law libraries, the library's online catalog, the Minnesota appellate courts, and other legal sites.
- **E-mail reference services** at AskMarvin@courts.state.mn.us answer users' questions and provide appropriate referrals to attorneys, agencies or other libraries.

- **Internet access to the library's databases** and Index to Legal Periodicals offers customers powerful searching capabilities and up-to-date information, as well as an ease of use not imagined in the past.

The Minnesota Attorney General Library introduced Internet services in 1994 with a basic Internet navigational menu, the first step in its efforts to equip library users with high-quality electronic information. Today a full-service intranet, designed by the webmaster and library staff, delivers the following to the agency's attorneys and staff:

- **Access to many internal documents** that are searchable and hyperlinked, eliminating the need for expensive print copies.
- **Links to high-quality, free** and subscription-based Web sites and internal library information.
- **Links to office and Internet directories** that have replaced printed staff listings, city telephone books, and state employee and city/county directories.
- **Management tools**, including electronic library routing, a database that manages employees' Internet usernames and passwords, and a database that records employee training as well as handles registration for classes.

How to Make the Most of Your Law Librarian Investment

The decision is made to hire a law librarian and the qualifications for the position have been established. Now, how much is this going to cost your agency or court and how are you going to receive maximum benefit? Some suggested guidelines:

Salary – Any professional position requires salary commensurate with experience, and a law librarian's salary should suit the job description and expectations for the position. When setting the salary range, be sure to consider the cost of staff time now spent on library matters, and recognize that much of that time can now be put toward other important projects once a professional librarian is hired. A library consultant or member of the American Association of Law Libraries might be helpful in clarifying an appropriate salary range for the job.

Law librarians should receive a competitive compensation and benefits package, including financial support for association memberships and continuing education to advance their skills and keep up-to-date in their field.

Benefits – Like any other professional, the law librarian should receive a competitive compensation package with paid vacation, retirement benefits, health insurance and other employee benefits.



Continuing Education – Just as judges must stay abreast of changes in the law, law librarians provide the most value when they are up-to-date in their field. Staying current in the legal information profession, especially as it relates to information technology, is critical to a law librarian's effectiveness.

A law librarian should receive financial support to advance his or her skills through the following:

- Membership in the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL), a professional organization devoted exclusively to the needs and interests of law librarians
- Membership in the State, Court and County Law Libraries Special Interest Section of AALL, which focuses entirely on the needs and challenges of court and agency law librarians and libraries
- Attendance at the AALL Annual Meeting, the premier educational program for law librarians
- Membership and participation in regional and local law library associations and conferences



Conclusion

There are many benefits to be gained by having the expertise of a professional law librarian contributing to the court or government agency's mission. The law librarian not only adds value within a limited information budget but also can provide important research support and service to the library's customers. A court or county that invests in a professional law librarian can:

- **Efficiently find and manage** the vast array of available information
- **Seize the opportunities** presented by information technology

- **Serve the public** and internal customers with high-quality information and expertise
- **Operate more efficiently** by effectively using personnel resources

For more information on law libraries and professional law librarians, contact the American Association of Law Libraries and look for subsequent *AALL Law Library Insights*.

Specific job descriptions and sample interview questions for state, court and county law librarians can be found on www.aallnet.org/sis/scell.

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Where to Find Your Law Librarian

Finding the right law librarian means advertising in the right place. Depending upon the scope of the search, you might consider advertising through:

- The American Association of Law Libraries Job Placement Hotline, <http://aallhq.org/jobhotline/hotline.asp>
- Local AALL chapters, many of which also have placement services online at www.aallnet.org/chapter
- Local legal newspapers

To learn more about issues concerning state, court and county law libraries, join the SCCLL listserv by visiting www.aallnet.org/sis/sccll/listserv.htm.

Law Library Insights
is supported by



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American Association of Law Libraries
Maximizing the Power of the Law Library Community Since 1906

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