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THE IMPORTANCE OF MEMBER PARTICIPATION IN THE AALL SALARY SURVEY



AALL's Salary Survey provides salary, benefits, and staffing information that's essential to the legal information profession.

BY KATHLEEN (KATIE) BROWN, DEANNA BARMAKIAN & ARIEL NEWMAN

The American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) *Biennial Salary Survey & Organizational Characteristics* (hereinafter *AALL Salary Survey*) has a long history of providing helpful salary-related data to the AALL membership and beyond. Thirty years ago, in 1993, the *AALL Salary Survey* was published for the first time to “provide comprehensive compensation information to legal professionals” employed in all law library settings. The value of the *Salary Survey* lies in providing extensive compensation data for law librarians and legal information professionals.

Over the years, the survey questions have evolved to meet our members' changing information needs. Some questions have been updated at the request of a particular special interest section (SIS) or AALL

“Our HR department and I use the survey when offering jobs to librarians. I can usually get the median salary in these situations.”

subgroup. Other questions were modified based on societal changes and the current legal market. For example, the 2021 edition of the survey included several questions that were COVID-19 related. Every time we request your participation in the *AALL Salary Survey*, the information and questions are thoroughly vetted beforehand. Fundamentally, the purpose of the survey is to enable jobseekers and law library management to identify and understand trends in compensation and the evolution of the work law librarians perform.

Background

Every other year, AALL requests your participation in the *AALL Salary Survey* after the *AALL Economic Status of Law Librarians Committee (ESLLC)* has thoroughly vetted the questions. ESLLC members conduct the work of reviewing and revising the questions, job titles, and position descriptions for the survey's biennial publication. This group of dedicated AALL members directly impacts the creation of this unique and valuable resource that gathers in-depth information about salaries, titles, positions, and library organizational structure.

As previously mentioned, during the last 30 years, the survey questions have changed to provide data that better reflects what is happening financially within the legal information profession and our organizations. AALL members from various library settings are tasked with vetting, updating, and reporting out content for the *Salary Survey*. Additionally, the process for completing the *Salary Survey* has also changed in recent years to directly address members' concerns about validity. Two key concerns expressed by members were that (1) the survey is self-reporting

TESTIMONIALS

"In addition to the salary figures, the position descriptions are especially helpful when I'm trying to promote from within—I can say that 'they're already doing most of this.' I use some of the language to re-write job descriptions for both promotions and new hires. I know that my HR department uses the American Library Association (ALA) survey, and some of the job duties that they listed for a senior research librarian were clearly more clerical in nature because librarian means anyone who works in a library setting. [This may be due to the lower number of responses or could be that law firm legal administrators still don't realize what we do!] I have convinced them that the *AALL Salary Survey* more accurately reflects our firm."

"I have used the *AALL Salary Survey* in several different ways. Most notably when I was applying to Library School around 2006, I used it to determine how much in student loans I could/should take out based off future anticipated earnings. I have also used it to negotiate salaries for myself and for my new hires."

"After the firm laid off more than 50 percent of our team, my title remained the same and my job duties increased. I was able to utilize the *Salary Survey* as a tool to negotiate a new title change and a substantial 10 percent increase over a two-year period. I was shocked to discover that I had been paid well under market value, and my director was more than willing to speak to HR and make things right. I also use the *AALL Salary Survey* for annual salary increases and bonuses, and I appreciate that the survey has so many ways to slice and dice the information, including geographical region, years of experience, size of firm, and degrees. Again, this may be due to the larger number of responses. I have found that the *Special Library Association (SLA) Salary Survey* is much less useful in this regard, probably because the pool of participants is much lower."

"I used the *AALL Salary Survey* to figure out the number I should aim for in my starting salary. Knowing what other people make in that position in my geographic area gave me confidence to keep negotiating for a higher salary even when the HR department told me to be satisfied with the lowball offers they were making. I ended up with a salary about 10 percent higher than what was initially offered."

"I have been successful every time I use the *Salary Survey* to justify an increase. Once I successfully advocated for a raise for an employee. A few months later the new salary survey came out and I was able to justify another significant increase for the same person. The survey is the greatest gift to me as an advocate for the librarians in my shop."

"I attended an event for a local chapter where a year's membership in AALL was given away as a door prize. I was chatting with the winner after they received the good news, and they asked me, 'What can I do with it?' I immediately told them about the *Salary Survey*. Later they took a look and realized they were severely underpaid, and very quickly got a better paying job at another law firm."

"I was able to use the *AALL Salary Survey* for better pay for my paraprofessionals by looking at the rents in our town and cross-referencing rents in other parts of the country that were comparable. This way I could justify going outside of my region and argue for raises."

"Our HR department was gathering salary data across the entire law school for an equity analysis. Although IT is not under the library at my school, I was able to provide them with data points from the *AALL Salary Survey* that were incredibly beneficial to the IT department and HR."



“I have used the *AALL Salary Survey* to successfully negotiate a raise for myself when I was promoted into a supervisory role.”

“We are actually consulting the *AALL Salary Survey* right now along with the CPI Inflation Calculator to determine the raises we will be giving staff for 2023.”

and (2) that the member being asked to complete the survey may not have the current and accurate salary information due to an individual organization’s structure. To solve this problem, when a member receives an email to complete the *AALL Salary Survey*, they can now easily pass it on to the HR Department, Finance Office, or whomever is best suited within the organization to complete the survey.

A Valuable Resource

The ESLLC is always excited to receive feedback from the membership on how they are using the *AALL Salary Survey*. Some organizations reported using the survey results in a traditional way—to stay informed about pay rates nationwide and in their regional area. Others are using the data in new and unique ways that also benefit non-librarians and those employed outside the library. For instance, using the pay data to justify compensation for paraprofessionals and law library IT staff. As a committee, we believe the entire law library profession will benefit from learning how others across the country and across library types are using the *Salary Survey* results to help themselves and others in their organization.

Gearing Up for the Next Edition

The *AALL Salary Survey* is a valuable resource for organizations and individuals alike as they continue to assess, plan, and move forward. It is also a fantastic tool for negotiating current staff salaries as well as new recruit salaries. At a time when the profession is focused on planning for the future of the profession, it has never been more important to have accurate and reliable data about the current job market, including salaries and benefits.

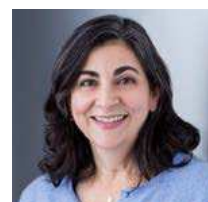
The 16th iteration of the *AALL Salary Survey* will be released in May 2023, and we encourage you to participate or pass the survey on to be completed by the appropriate individual in your organization. To ensure that we have enough data to compile a complete report for AALL members, it is essential that those in director-level roles complete the survey. ■

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