

A Great Conference Starts with

YOU



BY **ARLENE LAVERDE, JENNIFER STURGE, AND CAROLYN VIBBERT**

Have you heard the news?
The American Association
of School Librarians (AASL)
Conference is being held in
St. Louis in 2025.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, even with the conference a year away, your national conference committee is already hard at work planning the event. We'll do all the arranging, but it's YOU who we really need! We can't have a successful conference without great sessions!

Are You Ready for It?

No, we're not channeling our inner Taylor Swift, but rather asking are you ready to tackle the challenge, carry the ball, hustle, and make it to the end zone by sharing with a wide audience of school librarians from across the country what you have been working on or your area of expertise?

We are all at different places in our journey. AASL is filled with school librarians, aspiring school librarians and retired school librarians. We are there mostly for the same things—to learn, to share, to network. The field of librarianship is ever changing, and something a first-year librarian thinks everyone knows may be brand-new to a 30-year vet. Arlene will admit to remembering when databases were on CDs! Here's the really cool thing about AASL: You, me, we are the real experts. Every great lesson you've taught, strategy you've honed, and program you've implemented is worthy of an AASL session. You can take a small idea and run with it. You can tell a story of your journey in the library with a task, a tool, a standard. If you want to

present a session, but aren't sure where to start, consider these reflection questions: What do I wish I had known before walking into my first library position?

- What program, lesson, or professional development program am I really proud of?
- What have I learned that has helped me and may help someone else?
- What challenges have I overcome?
- What am I good at?

While we were working on this article, Carolyn chuckled about her first AASL proposal and shared this story, "I had an idea, but knew the topic would be better with two more experts. I basically cold-called two librarians from different states, introduced myself, and said that they probably didn't know it but we were all working on the same project. Would they like to present a session together? I felt so brave! Because our topic had helped me, I knew we could help others."

Are you ready to be brave?

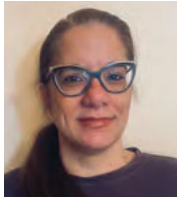
Developing Your Session

As co-chairs we have all served on the programming committee and presented at AASL and wanted to share some tips and tricks for your proposal.

A great session proposal does take time. It also takes a little bit of courage. Remember, everyone presenting at the conference was once a first-timer too. If this is your first time working through the application process, we recommend these steps:

Here's the really cool thing about AASL: You, me, we are the real experts. Every great lesson you've taught, strategy you've honed, and program you've implemented is worthy of an AASL session. You can take a small idea and run with it. You can tell a story of your journey in the library with a task, a tool, a standard.

Your proposal will be blind reviewed by our program reviewers and scored based on a rubric that has been developed specifically for the conference.



ARLENE LAVERDE

Conference Committee
Co-Chair
Queens College, NY

Setting Up Preview the application. For each of your ideas, create a document with the application questions included. This way as you brainstorm, you can see what is being asked of you on the application.

BRAINSTORM

Ask yourself the following questions: What did I wish I knew before walking into my first job? What helped me? What am I good at? What program, lesson, or professional development program am I really proud of? What have I learned that has helped me and may help someone else? What challenges have I overcome? There are so many more you can explore.

DEVELOPING

AASL sessions require a brief outline of the session. Think of this a bit like a lesson plan. It's not what the students see in the session, but it's evidence of the content, strategies, and pacing behind the scenes. Great proposals include transitions, interactive portions, and are not just a sit and get type session. They also relate to the National School Library Standards and that relationship is clear in the outline and outcomes. Sometimes, the committee will receive numerous proposals about one topic and will have to make a decision about which ones to accept—so keep that in mind as you decide what topic you would like to share.

GATHER FEEDBACK

Ask a few people to read your proposal. If you don't have anyone to talk about it with, reach out on social media. School librarians are generous and I bet the person you ask will be delighted to read.

MAKE REVISIONS

Once you've gathered feedback from a few school librarians, make revisions to your proposal as needed. Check that your outcomes match what you are proposing to do and your proposal reads easily and clearly.

PROOFREAD

Session titles and descriptions go into the program for school librarians to read. While small edits can be made later, it's easiest to just get it correct the first time. You'll also make a good impression on the program reviewers.

I Hit Submit, What Happens Next?

Congratulations! We're proud of you for taking the leap and submitting a proposal. Here's what happens next and what you should know about the behind-the-scenes selection process. Typically, AASL receives around 300 session proposals. Given the length of the conference, we can accept about 100.

Your proposal will be blind reviewed by our program reviewers and scored based on a rubric that has been developed specifically for the conference. The rubric is a starting point for the conference committee. They will consider the rubric scores, innovative content of proposals, and areas of school librarianship that are new or less represented in the submissions when making final decisions. Once it's gone through the review process, the program co-chairs start the process of working through the scores and placing sessions in the schedule.

If at First You Don't Succeed, Try, Try Again!

In May, potential presenters will find out if their proposal was accepted for a concurrent session. Since the conference can only accept about 100 proposals, you may not be accepted. But don't fret. You can submit an Idea Lab or Poster Presentation—many of the concurrent session submissions translate well into an Idea Lab or Poster Presentation, offering you a chance to present your ideas in a less formal setting.

Still on the Fence?

Attending the AASL National Conference and seeing firsthand presentations is sure to spark ideas for next time. We hope to see you in St. Louis in 2025. Registration will open in December 2024 with discounts offered each month until it's time to see you under the arches.

We can't have a great conference without the energy that comes from the presenters and more importantly, all the attendees!



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