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# What is the AALJ?

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It is a federal employee's union to represent federal administrative law judges primarily in the Social Security Administration, but it is more than that. The AALJ is an *opportunity* for those judges who participate and it is a *community* in which to grow, to learn, to meet new lifelong friends.

It has a constitution providing for a president, executive vice president, secretary and treasurer, elected by a national vote of all the members. For each region there is a regional vice president elected by the members of that region. Officers are elected in the spring of each even-numbered year. There is also an appointed National Grievance Chair.

The four national officers and the ten regional vice-presidents meet frequently as the National Executive Board (NEB) to make policy for the AALJ. The four national officers meet as the National Executive Committee (NEC) to execute the decisions of the National Executive Board.

The NEB operates with a committee system. There are currently eleven standing committees: Labor Management Committee, National Bargaining Committee, Legislative Committee, Health and Safety Committee, Constitution Committee, Membership Committee, Rules Committee, Joint Technical Advisory Committee, Judicial Education Committee, AALJ Education Committee and Public Relations Committee. Members of the committees are drawn from the NEB and from the membership at large. Members with certain skills or interests are encouraged to participate. The committees operate under the guidance of the NEB, working on their designated tasks, usually culminating in recommendations for the approval of the NEB. Most committees meet physically at least twice a year in the Washington D.C. area and meet more frequently through conference calls. Some of the committees are joint committees comprised of members from the AALJ and from Agency management. Long term friendships often develop from these working relationships.

Other members act as Transfer Coordinator, Retirement Awards Coordinator, Continuing Legal Education Coordinator and AALJ Educational Conference Chair.

In each hearing office there is an elected Local AALJ Representative (LAR) who keeps the judges in the office informed on matters of interest and acts as counsel for any judge who might be accused of misfeasance or malfeasance.

The AALJ has produced an educational conference for 18 years, held in the fall in interesting cities all over the country in which judges and spouses/significant others participate in educational and social events. For several years the AALJ has hosted a Roundtable Discussion in Washington D.C. with nationally known speakers and panelists addressing subjects of interest to judges, the Congress and the news media. The AALJ is regularly called upon to testify in hearings of congressional committees and to prepare statements for those committees on subjects involving Social Security and administrative law judges.

As you have seen, the AALJ is not just a union. It is that with its attendant protections, but it also offers education, professional associations, representation before Congress, opportunities to work with Agency management, to work with and for your colleagues and more.

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### **Why is the Association of Administrative Law Judges organized as a union?**

The AALJ was formed as a professional association in 1971 to enhance professional knowledge and provide collegiality among the judges. The association represented the interests of the judges. The AALJ and Agency management consulted with one another in planning strategies for the Agency.

Over the years the judges perceived a change in the attitude of management toward judges. What had once been a professional relationship between management and judges grew less civil. The emphasis shifted from quality in preparing cases and crafting decisions to quantity. New restrictions and new requirements were imposed. The most seismic shift came in the late 1990's with a reorganization imposed upon all offices, without any discussion or input from the judges, which changed the management of each office from a collegial management by the judges to one controlled by non-judge, non-attorney managers. The AALJ leadership realized the judges needed the legal protection which could only be achieved by forming a collective bargaining unit, a union.

There was of course a good deal of resistance to the notion of judges, skilled professionals, forming a union. There was much debate, an election was held and the majority of judges voted for the protection of a union. The AALJ kept its name and affiliated with the IFPTE, the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers. It was a good choice. The IFPTE has been supportive and helpful in providing legal and political advice and particularly in providing lobbying support.

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For further information visit [www.aalj.org](http://www.aalj.org)

For membership information and forms click <http://www.aalj.org/07a.html>  
or email the Membership Chair, Judge Cheri Filion, at [cheri.l.filion@ssa.gov](mailto:cheri.l.filion@ssa.gov)