3

Collection Development Policies

Collection development policies, selection policies, acquisition policies — are they all one and the same? Given the definitions in chapter 1, it is obvious they are not. However, many librarians use the terms interchangeably. Some of the same information in policies is variously identified as a collection development, a selection, or an acquisition policy, assuming that the library has a written policy. One library school professor who teaches collection development tells her classes, "On the first day you go to work in collection development ask to see the written policy so you can study it. When they tell you they don't have one, faint. By the way, you need to practice fainting and falling so you don't hurt your-selves — not many libraries have written collection development policies." In the mid-1980s this may be somewhat less true than it was 10 years ago; however, a great many libraries still do not have any written guidelines, much less a formal policy.

What Are Collection Development Policies?

Although selection and acquisition policy statements may contain most of the information to be found in a good collection development policy, they tend not to include some important items. As stated previously, the definition of collection development is the process of making certain that the information needs of the people are met in a timely and economical manner, using information resources produced both inside and outside of the organization. Effective collection development requires creating a plan to correct any weaknesses in and

maintain the strengths of the collection. A collection development policy is the written statement of that plan, providing details for the guidance of the library staff. Thus a policy statement is a document representing a plan of action and information that is used to guide the staff's thinking and decision making; specifically, the policy is consulted when considering in which subject areas to acquire material and deciding how much emphasis each area should receive.

Why is it that libraries frequently do not update their collection development policy or do not have one at all? One of the major reasons is that a good policy statement must be based on a great deal of data. It is necessary to know (1) the strengths and weaknesses of the collection; (2) the community being served and where that community is going; and (3) other resources available locally (to patrons) and those accessible through interlibrary loan. Only when all of this knowledge is in hand is it possible to start developing a policy.

People can and do point out that there are thousands of libraries and information centers with excellent, even outstanding, collections, that have no written policy. Some element of good fortune is required to have developed an excellent collection without one—good fortune in the sense that the individuals charged with the responsibility of building the collection are highly intelligent and motivated by a deep commitment to both the library and its collections. As a result, they stay at that library for most if not all of their careers and have an extensive knowledge of what is in the collection and of the needs of their service community. In talking to these people one finds that they *do* have a plan and a policy, even though it is not on paper.

While it is still possible for the situation above to occur today, it is not very probable. In the United States, career development in librarianship generally involves moving from one library to another, and occasionally changing the type of library. Another factor is the growth in the number of libraries, even of "instant libraries," as a 1986 advertisement in an American library publication illustrates—a 15,000-title "opening day collection" was sought. Rapid development without a policy and a plan is not likely to lead to an excellent collection. The problem is often a lack of continuity in both staff and funding. A written policy helps assure some continuity and consistency in the collecting program even though there are changes in staff and funding.

Another reason policies are lacking is that they require a great deal of thought. A policy needs to change to reflect a changing community and, therefore, the librarian's thinking and data collecting are never finished. Some librarians say it is not worth the trouble: as soon as the plan is on paper, the situation has changed so much that the plan is out-of-date—so why bother?

Why bother? A policy statement can provide a framework within which individuals can exercise their own judgment. Unless the library has a dictatorial style of management, its collection development work will involve a number of persons at any one time and a great many throughout the history of the library. Whenever a number of persons set policy without written guidelines, slightly different views of the library's purpose will probably emerge. *Without* written statements the divergence of opinion can be confusing; *with* a policy statement everyone has a central reference point. Differences in opinion can be discussed with some hope that a basic understanding, if not agreement, can be reached. In a school media center setting, differences of opinion about what should or should not be in the collection can and do lead to the courtroom rather than the classroom.

In an academic situation with faculty in charge of selection, numerous points of view come into play. For example, four different anthropology professors might be selectors over four successive years. Lacking a policy statement, each professor would be free to, and sometimes would, buy heavily in a particular area of personal interest. The result might be one year of almost exclusive purchasing of North American ethnology, one of Bantu studies, one of physical anthropology, and one of Oceanic material. In this way the entire field is covered, given enough changes in selectors. The problem is that many fields are completely ignored and are likely to remain so for many years. A professor may not stay long enough to fully develop an area, with the result that the library cannot claim strength in any area. If the professors have full authorization for the selection process, the library can do little to keep a bad situation under control.

Admittedly, a written policy statement will not completely solve this problem, because selectors normally have the authority to make the final decisions. However, if the library has a document outlining the fields in which coverage is required, the policy can serve as a reminder that areas other than the selector's favorites must also be considered. Even the small public library will find that having a written policy is useful, especially if there is community involvement in its approval, if not in its preparation.

A policy statement thus performs the following functions:

1. It informs everyone about the nature and scope of the collection.

2. It informs everyone of collecting priorities.

3. It forces thinking about organizational goals to be met by the collection.

4. It generates some degree of commitment to meeting organizational goals.

5. It sets standards for inclusion and exclusion.

6. It reduces the influence of a single selector and personal biases.

7. It provides a training/orientation tool for new staff.

8. It helps ensure a degree of consistency over time and despite staff turnover.

9. It guides staff in handling complaints.

10. It aids in weeding and evaluating the collection.

11. It aids in rationalizing budget allocations.

12. It provides a public relations document.

13. It provides a means of assessing overall performance of the collection development program.

14. It provides outsiders with information about the purpose of collection development (an accountability tool).

A final point is that a policy statement can be a useful means of communication with the patron. While a complete policy statement runs to many pages, something that few patrons would care to read, a summary of its major points can be a valuable information tool. This is especially true if the patrons have had some say in the formation of the policy.

Elements of a Collection Development Policy

What are the elements that ought to go into a good collection development statement? The following list of elements illustrates why policy formulation is so time consuming, but also why it is so critical to success. (Once the basic work has been done and the policy has been written, keeping the policy up-to-date is not a monumental problem; updating does take time, but if it is done annually, it is almost painless.) The elements can be divided into three parts: overview, details, and miscellaneous. Certainly all American libraries should consult *Guidelines for Collection Development* (American Library Association, 1979). Anyone reading that document will see a strong parallel with what follows; however, some additional considerations are identified.

Element One — Overview

The first element should be a very clear statement of overall institutional objectives in regard to the library. Statements such as "geared to serve the information needs of the community" have little value or concrete meaning. In order to ensure that the statement is of help to the selectors and has specific meaning, all of the following factors should be present in the first section of the statement:

1. A brief general description of the community to be served (town, country, school, business, etc.). What is the general make-up of the community and where is it going? If a thorough community analysis has been made (see chapter 2), this part of the policy and many of the following sections will be very easy to prepare.

2. Specific identification of the clientele to be served. Anyone who walks in the door? Probably not, or at least they probably will not be served at the same level as the primary clientele. Who are the primary clientele? Is it all citizens of the local area, all staff and students of the educational institution, all employees of the business? Will the library serve others? If so, to what degree? Will the service to others be free or will there be a fee? Are there to be differences in service for different groups, for example adults, children, faculty, or students? Must the patron come to the library? Will there be service for the handicapped, the institutionalized, users with less-than-average reading ability or other communication problems? There are no universal answers for these questions and many others that might be listed regarding the clientele to be served. There is only a right answer for a particular library at a particular time, and this "right" answer will change over time.

3. A general statement regarding the parameters of the collection. What subject fields will be represented? Are there any limitations set on the types of format that the library will acquire — just printed materials, such as books, periodicals, and newspapers? What are the limits in audiovisual areas? This section should provide an overview of the details that are specified in the second major element of the policy.

4. A detailed description of the types of programs or patron needs that are to be met by the collection. In a public library, to what degree is the total collection to be oriented toward educational purposes — that is, toward the support of formal educational programs and self-education? Will recreational needs be met and to what degree? Is the collection to be a circulation (loan) collection, or is it for reference purposes only? Academic libraries also need to be concerned with the degree of emphasis to be placed on research material. In the special library, all of these questions may have to be considered.

5. A section on the general limitations and priorities that will determine how the collection will be developed. To what degree will the library collect retrospective materials? One very important issue to cover in this section of the policy is whether the library will buy duplicate copies of an item; if so, what factors will be used to determine the number of copies and how long will the duplicates be retained? The question of duplicates is complicated and difficult. One excellent book that can be of great value in deciding the duplicate question is Michael Buckland's *Book Availability and the Library Users* (Pergamon Press, 1975). This is one of the essential books for members and potential members of a collection development staff to read.

6. A detailed discussion of the library's role in cooperative collection development programs. To be effective, this section must leave no doubt in a reader's mind as to whether the basic philosophy is one of self-sufficiency or cooperation. If the reader is in doubt, it means either that the writer(s) did not want to make a decision on this very critical issue or that they wanted to avoid taking a public stand. Furthermore, if the library is involved in cooperative programs, this section should identify those programs in which participation is to be active and those areas for which the library has a major responsibility. For subject areas not of major concern, the reader should be told where to find those who do have responsibility for their collection.

Element Two — Details of Subject Areas and Formats Collected

It is necessary to break down the collection into its constituent subject areas, identify each type of material to be collected, and specify the class of patron for which this area is primarily intended. This may sound like a lot of work — it is. The information specialist must spend hours talking to patrons about the problem and then spend many more hours thinking about the information.

Priorities must then be assigned to each area (perhaps even by format within each area) — all of this with an eye toward achieving a proper balance of subjects, and taking into account the particular community of users and their needs. The following is a reasonably comprehensive listing of patrons and formats to consider; there is no point in trying to list subjects.

Patrons

Adults
Young adults
School-aged children
Preschool children
Physically handicapped (blind, partially sighted, wheelchair patients, etc.)
Shut-ins and institutionalized persons (in hospitals, homes, prisons, etc.)
Teaching faculty
Researchers
Staff
Undergraduate students
Postgraduate students
Alumni

Formats

Books (hard- or paperbound, monographs, textbooks)
Newspapers
Periodicals
Microforms
Slides
Films and filmstrips
Pictures
Audio recordings (tapes and records)
Video recordings (tapes and discs)
Printed music
Pamphlets
Manuscripts and archival material
Maps
Government documents
Laser formats
Realia
Games
Specimens
Databases

Although these lists are fairly extensive, they are by no means complete; formats constantly change. The lists do provide, though, a rather clear picture of the magnitude of the project, especially when each subject consideration is further subdivided. Although this may indeed seem too time consuming, not all of the categories, formats, or subjects will be considered for any one library.

The setting of priorities, or levels of collecting intensity, can be handled in a number of ways. The ALA guidelines suggest a five-level system — comprehensive, research, study, basic, and minimal. The Research Library Group (RLG), made up of a number of large research libraries in the United States, developed a "conspectus" which is intended to serve several purposes. The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) has adopted the conspectus as well. It helps in formulating a collection policy because it forces a detailed subject analysis (through the use of the Library of Congress Classification System) and is the "subject" guide which indicates both current collecting levels and existing collection strength. RLG uses a numeric coding system for identifying collection strength: 0 (out of scope, not collected), 1 (minimal), 2 (basic information), 3 (instructional support), 4 (research), and 5 (comprehensive). (Chapters 15 and 16 contain additional information about the conspectus.) At the Library of Congress a four-level system is employed: minimal, reference, research, and comprehensive.

One complaint about these systems has been that they seem designed for academic libraries. That was certainly not the intent of the ALA committee that prepared the guidelines, but it is true that most of the systems are geared to the

needs of the large collection, which in turn tends to mean academic libraries. In Colorado, an effort was made to tie together all the libraries in the state through the State Library, the Colorado Academic Library Committee, and the Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries. A subcommittee designed a standardized set of collection intensity codes. One version, reproduced in figure 3.1, attempted to define levels for both educational and public libraries. Although no longer used, it does provide an example of how libraries of differing types might use the same levels and definitions.

Once the detailed subject information is available (a complete conspectus), a selector can focus attention on the items appropriate for the collection. Policy statements are only guidelines, with ample room for individual interpretation, but they do narrow the scope of a person's work. Combine the subject intensity section with the patron list and format listing—the result is a solid framework on which to build a sound collection.

Most subject areas will fall into the middle intensity ranges. Most libraries will have only one or two topics in the upper levels; such categories will be highly restricted in most instances to one person (e.g., Goethe) or narrow topic (e.g., pre-Colombian writing systems).

The second part of this element will probably be short but it is very important: it identifies where responsibility for collection development lies. Ultimate responsibility, of course, lies with the head of the library, as it does for all library activities; however, no one expects the head librarian actually to do all of the tasks for which he or she is responsible. Since the collections are important to the success of the library's programs, the question of who will actually develop them is a vital one. This must be decided upon after careful examination of the needs of the library. This section of the policy, then, should contain a clear statement of who will be responsible for selection, what guidelines are to be used, and how the selector's performance is to be evaluated. Media center selection responsibility must be clearly identified because of possible conflicts over control of the collection. The most recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling regarding the content of media center collections (the *Island Trees* case, which is discussed in chapter 19) limited the power of school boards to add, remove, or limit access to materials.

Level	Description		Collecting Scope
	Academic	Public	
0 Out of Scope			
1 Basic Information	General "community" support; no courses, except basic introductory study.	Basic introductory level limited in depth; material provides general overview.	a. Dictionaries, encyclopedias, general reference materials, basic bibliographies. b. Selected editions of important works. c. Selected major periodicals.
2 General Support	Undergraduate curriculum through first degree; some honors work, no sustained independent study.	Working collection—moderately advanced. Prior familiarity with subject—beyond introductory level. Meets general community needs.	a.-c. d. Wide range of basic monographs, complete collections of more important authors, selections from secondary writers. e. Selection of representative journals. f. Fundamental bibliographic apparatus in subject fields, broad reference collections, including major abstracts and indexing tools.
3 Introductory Research	Through Master's level, including senior seminars and independent study.	Comprehensive in-depth treatment of a subject. Analytical or technical, theoretical or scholarly orientated. Support special user group in community, but covers wide spectrum of users.	a.-f. g. Extensive monographic collections, including published primary source material, reprints, complete critical works of important authors, broad collections of secondary writers. h. Wide range of professional journals, congresses and proceedings. i. Specialized bibliographies, indexes, and abstracts.

Level	Description		Collecting Scope
	Academic	**Public**	
4 Advanced Research	Through Ph.D. level.	Extensive coverage of subject. Meet needs of highly specific and specialized portion of community. Highly specialized collections.	a.-i. j. Major retrospective collections, research reporting, experimental results, comprehensive current monograph collecting. k. Extensive collections of specialized serials and technical reports. l. Representative foreign language holdings. m. Selective manuscript collections, complete bibliographic support tools.
5. Comprehensive	Programs of national recognition.	Programs of national recognition.	a.-m. n. Large foreign language collections. o. Complete retrospective serial holdings. p. Recognized special collections and manuscript collections of important authors.
6. Exhaustive	Programs of international recognition.	Programs of international recognition.	a.-p. q. Collects as far as possible, all significant works of recorded knowledge.

Fig. 3.1. Colorado collecting intensities codes.

(Language Coverage Codes for figure 3.1 appear on page 74.)

Fig. 3.1. — *Continued*

Language Coverage Codes

E - English language material predominates; little or no foreign language material in the collection.

F - Selected foreign language material included, primarily Western European, in addition to the English language material.

W- Wide selection of foreign language material in addition to the English language material.

Y - Material is primarily in one foreign language.

Intensity Codes:

Are descriptive values assigned to a collection to determine its relationship to other collections in the state and nation. They are used to identify both the extent of existing codes in a subject field (collection density) and extent of current collecting activity in the field (collecting intensity).

Assumptions:

Definitions of collecting levels are not to be applied in a relative or ad hoc manner (that is, relative to a given library or group of libraries), but in a very objective manner. Consequently, it is quite likely that a large number of libraries will not hold comprehensive collections in any area. Similarly, academic libraries that do not support doctoral programs, or other types of libraries that are not oriented toward special research, may not have any collections that would fall within the research level as defined herein. The definitions are proposed to describe a range and diversity of titles and forms of materials; they do not address the question of availability of multiple copies of the same title.

Who Shall Select?

1. Patrons/users

2. Librarians from public service areas, with no special background or training beyond basic library education

3. Librarians from technical service areas — no special background or training beyond basic library education

4. Subject or service specialists, with special advance training in subject or service areas

5. Department heads

6. Head librarian

How Shall They Select?

1. Independent selectors, with or without a systematic alerting program from the library

2. Committees

3. Centrally prepared list from which selections are made

A few generalizations may be made about differences between types of libraries. Many exceptions to these generalizations exist, but a pattern is apparent in most areas. Educational institution libraries tend to have a higher patron (teachers and students) involvement and greater use of subject specialists than is found in public libraries. Special or technical libraries are often staffed with librarians who have advanced training in the field in which the library specializes, and they, with the frequent assistance of patrons, are responsible for selection. Public libraries normally use librarians (often department heads) from public service areas as selectors, working through selection committees or from lists prepared by a central agency.

When nonlibrarians have an active voice in selection matters, it is usually limited to the working or circulating collection. The library staff normally has the sole responsibility for the reference collection. Patrons tend to be more concerned with current items, books, and monographs, while librarians will also be heavily involved in retrospective buying and in serial and "other media" selection. Allocation of selection responsibility in any given library will depend upon the type of library and the local conditions. Whatever is decided, it should be put in writing so that there will be no question where the responsibility and accountability lie.

Finally, this section should provide some general guidelines concerning what, or what not, to select. Normally, such written guidelines are more important in public library and school media center situations, because usually a wider range of interests is involved, and there is a great deal of concern about the impact of the collection upon the children and young adults using it. Some examples of guideline criteria statements follow:

1. Select and replace items found in standard lists and catalogs.

2. Select only those items that have been favorably reviewed in at least two review sources.

3. Do not select anything that has received a negative review.

4. Try to provide both, or all, points of view on a controversial subject.

5. Do not select textbooks.

6. Do not select items of a sensational, violent, or inflammatory nature.

7. Select only items of lasting literary or social value.

The list could go on and on; however, most of the statements are in fact only variations of the selection criteria discussed in chapters 6, 7, and 8, and do not need to be repeated here. Whatever criteria are used, they should be clearly delineated in this section of the statement.

Element Three — Miscellaneous Issues

The term miscellaneous may cause this section to appear to be of less importance; this is not the case. Each of the subtopics in this section is important, but none of them needs to be very long; nor are they interrelated in the same manner as are the first two elements. Five topics are encompassed by this element: gifts, weeding and discards (deselection), replacements, evaluation and complaints, and censorship.

Gifts

Gifts should not be added to the collection on any other basis than that which is used for items that are purchased. The librarian should resist the temptation to add an item because it is free. No donated item is free — processing costs are the same whether the item is donated or purchased. Expending library resources to add something to the collection just because it is free, when it is not essential to the library's purpose, is a very poor practice. Applying the same standards to gifts as to purchased items will greatly reduce weeding problems.

The policy on handling gifts should be put in writing. The statement must make it clear whether only those items that should be added to the collection will be accepted or if anything will be taken with the proviso that unwanted items may be disposed of in any manner the library sees fit. Equally important is a statement regarding gifts with "strings." Will the library accept a private collection and house it separately if the donor provides the funds? Will it accept funds earmarked for certain classes of materials and use them to acquire new materials? If the collection is to be expanded through gifts and endowment monies, who will be responsible for this activity? Will it be coordinated? These are some of the major questions that should be addressed in a section on gifts.

Gifts and endowment monies are excellent means of developing a collection when and if the library has maximum freedom in their use. A very important

public relations question must be answered: Is it better to accept all gifts, regardless of the conditions attached to them, or should the library avoid conditional gifts? If there is a clearly reasoned statement as to why gifts with conditions are not accepted, there should be no public relations problem.

Weeding and Discards

Weeding and discarding materials need to be discussed separately. The level and type of weeding program will vary from library to library, but all libraries will have to face this issue eventually. (Even the largest libraries must decide on what materials will be stored in less accessible facilities.) Chapter 14 provides a fairly detailed discussion of this issue. Once such issues as the criteria, scope, frequency, and purpose of weeding have been decided upon, these decisions should be incorporated into the policy statement. At the present time the question seldom arises for anything but books, except in media centers and public libraries where other media are in high demand (for example, audio and video recordings). Multiple copies of bestseller and high-demand books are an issue in most public and educational libraries. To some extent the McNaughton Plan (short-term rental) can alleviate some of the problem for popular (mass market) titles. Such plans help reduce the cost of popular titles and long-term storage problems of books in high demand for only a short period of time; however, they do not resolve the question of how many extra copies to acquire. There are no easy solutions to the problem of extra textbooks unless a library has a low-cost rental system. Some possible guideline statements would be: "Buy one copy for every ten potential readers during a six-month period"; "Buy one copy for the general collection and acquire one copy for every five readers during x months for the high use or rental collection." Of course, the length of time, number of readers, etc., will be determined by local conditions.

Evaluation

Evaluation is an essential element in collection development. Chapter 15 outlines the major issues and needs to be mentioned in the policy. Indication should be made of whether evaluation will be only for internal purposes (i.e., identifying collection strengths and weaknesses) or for comparative purposes — or perhaps as a review of how well the selectors have been doing their job. Each purpose is different and requires different evaluation techniques or emphases. Making decisions about the how and who of evaluation ahead of time, putting them in writing, and getting them approved will save time and trouble for staff, patrons, funding agencies, and governing bodies.

Complaints and Censorship

The final section of the collection development policy statement can save time and trouble by outlining the steps to be taken in handling complaints about the collection. Eventually, every library will receive complaints about what is or is not in the collection. Naturally it is easier to handle questions about what is not there. (A library can always try to buy a missing item.) The major problem will be complaints about what is in the collection or questions as to why the policy says what it does.

An irate patron on the other side of the desk, who is livid because this "terrible" item has been purchased, can cause many problems. How does one reduce the person's anger? One solution is a "cop-out" — pass the buck to the supervisor. Such buck-passing does nothing to calm an upset patron; if anything it tends to increase that person's level of frustration. Lacking guidelines, however, it is dangerous to try to solve the problem alone. Normally the patron wants the offending item taken out of the collection, which is patron censorship.

A librarian should not promise to remove the item. He or she can and should agree to review it if the library has an established review procedure. It is necessary to identify who, how, and when the review will be handled. One method of doing this is to have a form for the patron to fill out concerning the offending item. While this tends to be a "bureaucratic" approach, it does help everyone to identify the specific problem. Such forms normally consist of two parts, one explaining the library's review procedure, the other asking the patron to identify specifically the offending sections or qualities of the questioned item (see chapter 19 for further discussion). At times this approach only increases anger; but since the librarian is offering to do something, more often than not the patron becomes less angry.

There are other alternatives, but whatever the library is going to do about complaints should be decided upon before the first complaint. Ad hoc decisions in this area can cause a library to have a great deal of trouble with its community. Consistency is not always a good thing, but in this area the merits far outweigh the drawbacks. As with weeding, whatever decisions are reached after due consideration of the basic issues should be incorporated into the written collection development policy.

Getting the Policy Approved

It should now be clear why the process of preparing a comprehensive collection development policy statement is thought to be very time consuming. If the staff — and it should be the library staff — has spent the time preparing a comprehensive policy, it is important that it be approved by the library's governing board. With board approval everyone has a set of agreed-upon ground rules for building a collection serving the local community.

An ideal policy development process would consist of the following:

1. The head librarian appoints a staff committee to draft a basic policy statement, which is to be submitted to the head librarian.

2. The head librarian reviews and comments on the draft and distributes it to the library staff for their comments and suggestions.

3. The original committee then incorporates the comments and suggestions into a revised, final statement. Perhaps a general meeting will be needed to discuss the interim draft before the final version is prepared.

4. The final draft statement is presented to the governing board for review, possible revision, and eventually, approval.

5. Another valuable step can be taken between board review and final approval. That step is to hold an open meeting for patrons to hear about and comment upon the proposed policy. Members of the drafting committee, the head librarian, and representatives of the governing board should be present to explain, describe, and if necessary, defend and modify the statement.

6. The final step is to prepare multiple copies of the final statement for the library staff and those patrons desiring a copy. A good public relations device is to prepare a brief condensed version for distribution to each new user of the library.

These steps can ensure community, staff, and administrative consensus about issues before a problem arises. It is much easier to agree theoretically on evaluation procedures, review procedures, levels and areas of collecting, and so on, in advance than to try to handle them in the heat of a specific disagreement. It also means that later disagreements can be more easily resolved as there is a body of previously established and agreed-upon rules.

Summary

Is all the work that must go into a policy statement really worth it? It is! Collection development is a complex process, highly subjective, and filled with problems and traps for the unwary. A comprehensive written policy, developed with the advice and involvement of all parties concerned, helps to make the process much less ad hoc and, therefore, less problem filled.

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