

Every Library is Special and So Is Its Collection Development Policy

by Karen Silber

Professional Perspectives—Tools and Techniques of the Trade. The Professional Development Committee encourages members to continue to explore topics after presentations at the local, regional, and national levels. We welcome your comments and article suggestions. Please contact Carol Avery Nicholson at 919/962-1199 or carol_nicholson@unc.edu.

Have you ever been asked by one of your attorneys to purchase the book *100 Best Lawyers in America* because his/her name is in it? Have you ever been asked to buy materials that don't fit into the scope of your collection? What is the scope of your collection? Do you know the needs of your users? The answers to all these questions are in a collection development policy. The collection development policy is a written document with a multitude of uses: it describes how the library's collection serves its users; it's the library's plan for building a collection; it dictates what the goals for the collection are; it manages the growth and maintenance of the collection, etc. Below is a discussion of collection development policy components followed by a list of why this policy is a vital and useful tool for every library.

Policy Components Introduction

Begin with an introduction containing the purpose or goals of the policy. For example, "This policy is designed to create a collection that will meet our research needs" or "This policy details an array of policies designed to bring our library up to needed research levels."

Include the library's mission statement in the introduction. The mission statement proclaims the library's purpose or reason for existence, and its role within the parent organization. The statement helps to focus library activities in order to achieve the organization's goals. The parent organization's mission statement may also be included. Key components of a mission statement include identifying the customer, products and services offered, and values and aspirations. For example, the mission statement of a law firm library might read:

To assist the attorneys and paralegals in utilization of library resources; and, assist in legal research by not only providing primary and secondary legal materials, but also providing the formulation of online research

and location of off-site materials thus providing excellence in product and service in an accurate, timely manner.

Community Profile

The community profile describes the library users and includes information such as their education, interests, background, etc. In the sample mission statement above, attorneys and paralegals are mentioned. However, it does not explain that many attorneys might hold advanced degrees in fields other than law, such as engineering or economics, therefore bringing with them a certain area of expertise. An address or location (e.g., D.C. branch) may also be included to further identify the users. A community profile might also encompass information about others that use the collection, such as clients or branch offices.

Collection Description: Scope and Coverage

You will need an overview or description of the current collection. This section will list the range of subjects and the extent to which each will be collected, so be as specific as possible. The conspectus approach, often used in academic institutions and public libraries, uses codes to determine collection level. The codes range from 0 (out of scope) to 5 (comprehensive). The conspectus approach can be adapted in the special library to describe collection levels. This list will also include strengths and weaknesses, chronological coverage, collection size, formats collected, satellite libraries, languages collected, etc. For example, "the collection accommodates legislative histories from 1974" and "the library does not collect in the area of..." etc.

Needs Assessment

A needs assessment is a collection of data from the users on what they need and also gives the user a chance to have input into the development of the collection. This information can be used to determine who does and does not use the library and why; how the library is used; what the users find helpful; what new services

should be offered, etc. There are several ways to do this including questionnaires, surveys, informal samplings, etc. A survey may contain questions such as: "How satisfied are you with the material (books, looseleaves, periodicals, etc.) in your practice area? Are there other materials, services, etc., you would like the library to offer?" The better you know the needs of those who will use the collection, the better the collection for their needs.

Collection Management

Information regarding selection responsibility and procedures, and methods for selection must also be included. Although collection development may be the responsibility of one person (often the head librarian), input for selection can come from several places—reference librarians, users of the collection, and (dare I say?) vendors. In addition, there are several selection tools available: reviews in trade periodicals, acquisition lists from other libraries, catalogs, user recommendations, and advertisements from publishers forwarded by the users (warning—this could get expensive). Bibliographies, *Legal Looseleaves in Print*, *Legal Newsletters in Print*, *R.R. Bowker's Law Books & Serials in Print*, etc., can also be consulted. Librarians should meet with users—e.g., attorney practice groups—to ascertain their needs. A practice I found effective was to hold working lunch meetings with each practice group. A list of the group's holdings was distributed a week prior to the lunch to each member of the group. Discussion during lunch consisted of titles to weed and/or collect. This meeting also gave me a chance to learn the direction of the practice group.

Unless you are the Library of Congress, you cannot collect everything, so a description of the selection criteria used is essential. A statement such as "we will collect all state statutes and regulations" is appropriate, whereas "the library selects items that reflect the needs of the users" is vague and does not convey what items

A Desktop Learning Opportunity

Resources

More information on collection development policies, including sample policies, can be found in the following sources:

<http://www.colorado.edu/Law/lawlib/ts/aall/policies.htm>
<http://www.dlapr.lib.az.us/cdt/colldev.htm>
<http://msl.state.mt.us/slr/cmpola.html>
<http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/units/cts/acq/cd/>
<http://www.nla.gov.au/aclis/ddack3.html>
<http://www.library.vanderbilt.edu/law/acqs/acqs.html>

Anderson, Joanne S., ed. *Guide for Written Collection Policy Statements*. 2nd ed. Collection Management and Development Guides, No. 7. Chicago: American Library Association, 1996.

Evans, G. Edward. *Developing Library and Information Center Collections*. Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1987.

Wood, Richard J. and Frank Hoffman. *Library Collection Development Policies: A Reference and Writers' Handbook*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1996.

Also, the following journals contain information regarding collection development:

Advances in Collection Development and Resource Management. Irregular. Stamford, CT: J A I Press Inc., 1995–.

Acquisitions Librarian. Semiannually. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, Inc., 1989–.

Against the Grain. 6 times per year. Charleston, SC: Katina & Bruce Strauch, 1989–.

Collection Building. Quarterly. Bradford, W. Yorks (England): M C B University Press Ltd., 1978.

Collection Management. Quarterly. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, Inc., 1975–.

Library Collections, Acquisitions, and Technical Services (formerly Library Acquisitions: Practice and Theory). Quarterly. Kidlington, Oxford: Elsevier Science Ltd., 1977–.

to collect. Selection criteria should also address issues of multiple copies, cost, space, currentness, availability, ease of use, updating, quality of items, and reputation of publisher, etc.

Formats to be collected are also an important consideration. As more and more publishers are making their products available on the Web, the need for CD-ROMs may decrease as will the need for equipment such as CD-ROM towers and servers. Case law, statutes and regulations, periodicals, etc., can be obtained from online sources and should be considered as a means of supplementing the collection when space is a problem. In most cases, retrieving information online is much faster and cheaper than purchasing print materials or waiting for a messenger to return with an interlibrary loan. Furthermore, online is sometimes the only way to retrieve information as more and more publication sources are available via the Web only.

Maintaining the collection in the form of updating and weeding is very important, especially in a law library. Updating looseleaves, removing superseded statutes and regulations (or moving them to storage because of their historical value), and inserting pocket part replacements must be executed in a timely manner.

A written guideline on how and when to weed is essential. A section on replacement of misplaced, lost, or stolen items is appropriate here as well.

Next, the acquisitions policy needs to be described. A statement on who approves all purchases—head librarian, committee, partner, department head, et al.—is warranted. A brief description of ordering, processing, and cataloging may also be included. A phrase such as “all publications that are paid for by the organization/firm, must be ordered through the library” may be appropriate as is a description of the relationship between collection development and the library budget. Lastly, gifts and donations should go through the same acquisition criteria as material to be purchased. Otherwise, the library may end with up out-of-date materials foisted on it every time an attorney vacates an office.

Policy Review/Revision

The policy should not be filed and forgotten after its completion. It should be reviewed and updated periodically to reflect changes in the library's goals, users, and perhaps the organization's practice areas. Hence, a section on specifically who, when, and how the policy will be

reviewed and updated needs to be included. For example, “every March by the library staff with input from various practice groups and departments.”

Approval and Implementation

The collection development policy must have the backing of senior management in order to be implemented and effective. Without this backing, you may experience challenges and controversy. A simple statement at the end of the policy that reads “this policy has been reviewed and accepted by the library committee and the firm's administration” is all that is needed. The policy should be widely distributed to the community of users. Also, the policy should be on the organization's intranet and handed out during orientations so new employees have a chance to become familiar with the library procedures.

Five-Year Strategic Plan

Develop a five-year strategic plan that will outline future changes as part of your collection development policy. This plan does not need to contain specific details—for example: “re-design the library computer room to incorporate future computer expansion, develop a disaster plan, build litigation section.”

Why Have One?

The importance of the collection development policy can be summed up in the following ten statements:

- Describes a systematic way of acquiring and maintaining the collection to reflect the users needs;
- Describes the nature and scope of the collection, including the library's collecting priorities;
- Identifies the collection in terms of subjects and formats collected;
- Acts as a set of guidelines for staff to consult when deciding on whether to purchase, eliminate, or reject an item;
- In times of staff turnover, helps ensure consistency and provide for continuity;

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- Serves as a source of reinforcement when an item selection and purchase is challenged;
- Provides the library staff with the means to meet organizational goals and to shape a more responsive collection to meet those goals;
- Acts as a device by which to measure progress in meeting organizational goals;
- Is useful during library orientation to familiarize staff and users with library policies;
- Acts as your best friend when you have to justify budget allocations.

Karen Silber (ksilber@bna.com) is Reference Librarian at the Bureau of National Affairs, Inc. in Washington, D.C.