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*Library Resources & Technical Services*, the quarterly official publication of the Resources and Technical Services Division of the American Library Association, is published at 1201-05 Bluff St., Fulton, MO 65251. *Editorial Office:* American Library Association, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611. *Advertising Traffic Coordinator:* Leona Swiech, Advertising Office, ALA Headquarters, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611. *Circulation and Business Office:* Central Production Unit/Journals, ALA Headquarters, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611. *Subscription price:* to members of the ALA Resources and Technical Services Division, \$7.50 per year, included in the membership dues; to non-members, \$15.00 per year; single copies \$4.00.

Second-class postage paid at Chicago, Illinois, and at additional mailing offices.

*Library Resources & Technical Services* is indexed in *Library Literature*, *Library & Information Science Abstracts*, *Current Index to Journals in Education*, *Science Citation Index*, and *Hospital Literature Index*. Contents are listed in *CALL (Current Awareness—Library Literature)*. Its reviews are included in *Book Review Digest*, *Book Review Index*, and *Review of Reviews*.

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Publication in *LRTS* does not imply official endorsement by the Resources and Technical Services Division nor by ALA, and the assumption of editorial responsibility is not to be construed necessarily as endorsement of the opinions expressed by individual contributors.

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## Some Practical Observations on the Writing, Implementation, and Revision of Collection Development Policy\*

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*This paper was conceived in the context of the "RTSD Guidelines for the Formulation of Collection Development Policies." It describes fundamental qualities of policy applicable to all kinds of libraries and recommends a step-by-step process leading to the successful realization of policy planning. Placing an emphasis on the values of the process itself, the paper also suggests implications for collection development personnel and for the library as an organization, when a working policy is adopted.*

THE RTSD "Guidelines for the Formulation of Collection Development Policies" imply that a written policy serves several essential management functions. It serves as a planning guideline and working tool for selectors; it serves as a communications medium between the library and external administrative bodies; and it serves as the codified rationale for decisions in budgetary matters. These are weighty demands to place upon a document of paper, but projections for educational service agencies, including libraries, over the next two decades are dismal at best and suggest strongly that the design of some new mechanism will, indeed, be required in order to give coherent direction to an energy which—far too frequently—appears to be unharnessed. At the same time, both logic and experience indicate that a document of paper has no more value than a puff of smoke, if it is merely an administrative gadget to be displayed on appropriate occasions. The substance and format of library policy on collection development are critical, and the RTSD "Guidelines" offer a sure course to the establishment of a practical and rationally founded

\*Edited version of a paper presented at the Preconference Institute on Collection Development sponsored by Collection Development Committee, Resources Section, RTSD, Detroit, June 1977.

document. However, while considering the nature of the policy that is recommended and the use to which it might be put, it is equally important to take into account the benefits accompanying the experience of planning, creating, and first testing a policy of pervasive and long-lasting influence. For, in the long run, it is the quality of these process values that will determine the quality of the policy's relationship to the collection development function.

There are three very important process values to be gained from the drafting of policy on collection development: (1) the gaining of knowledge about existing collections and related collection development activity; (2) the gaining of control over budget and over the influx of materials; and (3) the securing of enhanced participation and interaction of a substantial portion of the professionals in the library. Those who are engaged in the planning, drafting, and implementation of collection development policy will have to be especially mindful of these abstract values throughout the process of policy formulation, lest they be forgotten in the wake of the more practical complexities that are certain to be encountered in this undertaking.

A key element both in the efficient use of time devoted to the establishment of a comprehensive policy on library collection development and in determining the quality of the finished product is adequate planning. Fortunately, this stage of policy making has now been facilitated, because the RTSD "Guidelines" constitute the basic planning document. Since the responsibilities of almost every professional in the library are affected in one way or another by collection development activity, an essential part of planning is to be found in making widely known the intention to formulate a comprehensive policy. Moreover, certain concerns felt by library staff and even the clientele may advantageously be anticipated. Among them are: what a collection development policy can and cannot be expected to do, how it will be used, who will write it, why it is needed, and what it will look like.

Surprisingly little is commonly understood about collection development policy in the profession. Preconceptions and misconceptions are abundant. Policy on collection development often has been viewed through a cloud of mystery, which in part has arisen from the formulation of policy by only one person or by very few persons, whose rationale could not be made clear to others. Indeed, one apparent reason for the necessity of the RTSD "Guidelines" at this time is precisely that relatively few libraries have bothered to formulate written policies and because, in many cases, those policies that do exist have proved to be ineffectual. The planning stage is the time when fundamental questions should be raised and answered in a broad forum, so that full advantage can be taken of the wide range of experience, knowledge, and insights that is to be found in almost any large library staff. This is done in an effort to identify potential problem areas, as well as to engender a widespread sense of commitment to the project and an understanding of its goals.

Also during the planning stage, it is useful to apprise administrators of neighboring or consortium-affiliated libraries of the plan to be followed in formulating a policy. The incorporation of existing or potential arrangements among institutions is especially important at this stage, in view of the likelihood that appropriate librarians at those institutions will be approached repeatedly throughout the writing stage in order to confirm and refine cooperative agreements. If interlibrary consultation at this stage arouses an interest in the formulation of policy at those other institutions, then so much the better, for cooperative arrangements will be more comprehensible and more assured of continued success if they are defined in the policy of both libraries and formulated on comparable plans. Similarly, it can be useful in the planning stage to alert certain local administrators outside the library—such as budget and program officers—of the intention to formulate policy, since this information can provide the opportunity for the library to incorporate in a formal way some of their requirements. This exchange will also emphasize that the capability to plan is understood within the library to be a primary ingredient in the successful development of its resources.

To summarize the approach to this whole undertaking that is recommended here, the completed document should be the result of an intellectual effort that incorporates the experience, knowledge, and judgment of a wide range of professionals beyond those who are engaged in the act of drafting policy. Therefore, the plan for policy writing must give adequate attention to the role of systematic consultation and coordination.

The RTSD "Guidelines" obviously serve as the basic planning document in this project, but they do require a supplemental plan of action for local use before writing begins. Specifically, these are determinations as to: chief editorship, assignment of authorship, format and order of the document, scheduled work plan, process for review of the finished product, and the mechanism for carrying the work of policy formulation forward. Consistent with the principles that have already been suggested, it is useful for the editorship or coordinating role to be assumed by the chief collection development officer, with the authorship, however, assigned to those who are engaged in collection development on a regular basis. If the number of librarians thus identified to be involved in writing policy is small (a half dozen), then the operation should be quite manageable. If, however, a considerably larger number is involved, then a coordinating committee should be formed of those who would have responsibility over a broad span of subjects, with responsibility for subsections to be delegated further. In either case, the vehicle for moving the project forward most effectively is a committee of subject librarians, numbering about a half dozen, chaired by the chief collection development officer of the library.

The many parts of a collection development policy and the principles behind its structure are most comprehensible when considered as

an organic whole rather than as individual parts or principles. Therefore, the RTSD "Guidelines" constitute a system, and it is crucial that everyone involved in the project be mindful of this concept. However, the heart of the policy clearly is to be found in the application of codes for levels of collection density and of collecting intensity to the classification scheme used in describing the collections. The significance of this complex combination depends, in turn, on the definitions assigned to collection levels, since they must be based on common interpretation among the authors of policy. This is an essential part of achieving whatever balance may be desirable in the collection. A logical extension of this "principle of common interpretation" lies in the area of interlibrary cooperation, where meaningful coordination of acquisitions is very difficult at best, but impossible without this specific commonality of understanding. Briefly, this is what is implied in the word *comparability*, which is one of the key words in the RTSD "Guidelines." Some librarians may find fault with the definitions of levels recommended in the RTSD "Guidelines," but their primary strength lies in their endorsement by a national organization for adoption throughout the United States. Indeed, these definitions are so critical to the future of the development of library resources nationwide, that the RTSD Collection Development Committee should be urged to consider definitions of a quantitative nature in order to make these qualitative definitions more precise. This would be of great assistance in interpreting the definitions and in furthering their comparability.

Of equal importance in designing a collection development policy is the scheme to be followed in describing the collection and its development. Just as the most advantageous context for the selection of materials in a large, comprehensive collection is the entire universe of selection possibilities, the most effective approach to the description of collections and their development is from a universal perspective. The primary function of a collection development policy is to guide the systematic selection of the world's recorded knowledge, and it should do so according to a rationale founded upon priorities that have been identified to serve the community most effectively. Consequently, the format for the central part of the collection development policy can best match these needs if it is structured by a classification of world knowledge. There are various such schemes in vogue, but the one that is by far the most influential in the United States—and increasingly abroad—is the Library of Congress (LC) classification. Whatever doubts may be expressed from a scholarly point of view about the validity of subject segmentation in the LC classification, one must bear in mind that the essential principles behind the planned collection development policy are comparability, a system perspective, and flexibility. The last is a criterion generally neglected but can be accommodated with progressive facility as the detail of the scheme increases. The specific modification of the LC classification recommended in the

"Guidelines" is a valid choice, because it is already in use as the basis of comparison among a growing number of large libraries.

Policy on the breadth and depth of collection development related to segments of the classification may be labeled "subject statements" for the purpose of discussion here. They are best drafted by the librarians who are responsible for selection in each respective area. Once the classification scheme is superimposed on the current configuration of selection assignments, some new assignments based on a rethinking of subject coverage relative to community needs may already be in order. This new perspective on collection development is likely to reveal areas that either are not monitored adequately or are monitored unnecessarily by more than one selector.

Although a policy on collection development will almost invariably reflect, in large measure, the status quo in collection development activity, it should also provide an unequalled opportunity for a new beginning. This new beginning for the provision and management of library resources—which both statistics and informed opinion indicate is quite in order—should be conducive to change in three areas: (1) a perspective for selection that incorporates all areas of human knowledge; (2) the identification of new patterns of research or of new knowledge interests that must be accommodated by the library, relative to other research needs and knowledge interests; (3) the identification and adjustment of traditional biases in selection.

Both the concerns of society and the needs of academic research have changed immensely in the United States during the past three decades, yet traditional goals for collection development—some of which may now be anachronistic—often hold sway. Perhaps this is largely the result of the persuasive powers of the oral transmission of policy. The vast majority of librarians have been trained formally in the humanities and history. It is not too much to assume that this conditioning, in conjunction with the oral transmission of a selection policy lacking in tested rationality, has directed collection development during the past three decades, and that the development of collections is now out of phase with community priorities. In any case, the codification of collection development policy along the lines recommended in the RTSD "Guidelines" offers a fresh approach with a new perspective. That approach ensures not only that duplication of effort in selection will be avoided, but also that all areas of knowledge will be given appropriate attention.

The subject statements may be drafted effectively according to the following four-stage plan: (1) the coordinating committee divides responsibilities for various segments of the classification scheme; (2) each coordinator assigns subsections of that responsibility to other appropriate selectors in the library (again, depending upon the size of the selection staff in the library); (3) each subject statement is written to reflect current practice as closely as possible; (4) each subject statement is modified as required.

It is especially with the beginning of writing that consultation and coordination become critical, for the long-standing problems of overlap and of gaps in selection finally have to be resolved. Before any of the subject statements are discussed within the coordinating committee, each committee member should separately review these statements carefully with their authors in order to identify possible overlap and gaps in coverage, and in order to test the validity and the uniformity of each statement, as each is prepared. The broader segments should then be submitted to the same kind of review procedure in the forum of the coordinating committee. It is a safe assumption that several drafts will be required before all criteria are satisfied. The subject statements then represent current selection activity so that they can be modified—through a similar process—according to whatever changes in policy are considered to be required. In an effort to assign relative priorities among sections of the classification scheme, consultation at all stages of writing is necessary. It should involve other librarians and members of the community wherever additional information or opinions can productively be found.

As a practical measure, it would be highly useful to precede the drafting of subject statements with a comprehensive evaluation of the collections, according to a uniform plan. If this cannot be accomplished, ad hoc evaluations almost certainly will be carried out in areas where the librarian responsible for authorship is not fully familiar with the collection. Without a well-founded understanding of the collections in place, and of their relevance to the community to be served, it is difficult to devise a sound plan for their future development.

Drafting the subject statements will be the most complex part of the project, but the effort can be rewarded by the knowledge about collection development that can be gained by all participants, particularly in terms of broadened perspective. The subject statements constitute the foundation of collection development policy, to which all other parts of the document will refer in one way or another. However, the selection of some materials, such as maps, newspapers, and others that tend to be treated by format, is not prescribed through the subject statements and will have to be dealt with separately. Similarly, every library has certain technical policies on such matters as gifts, duplication, and materials for reserve that also belong in the general collection development policy appended to the subject statements. Both of these kinds of policies, however, will be better informed by the effort spent on the subject statements and therefore should follow them in the project schedule.

While the advantages of using a scheme like the LC classification for the formatting of policy are to be found in its comparability, its flexibility for revision, and its combination of comprehensiveness with detail, its most evident disadvantage is its poor readability. Readability may not be a necessary quality for a document that is to be used in-

house or for the purpose of communicating with other librarians elsewhere, but it is a desirable quality in communicating with the layperson, whether administrator or clientele. For this reason, it also may be useful to synthesize the subject statements by larger classes or by departmental units in the library system. From a management point of view, this synthesis of policy may have the value of providing the kind of perspective that will facilitate review of the total collection development program as well as its parts.

The finished policy on collection development is not in itself the solution to selection problems, for the degree of its utility is commensurate with the knowledge that is possessed and continuously upgraded by those who implement it. Errors in selection caused by loose organization, a careless approach, or by uninformed decisions will no longer be obscured quite so quickly as they were before policy became the tangible standard against which collection development performance could be measured. The selector will have to be a student of the current publishing industry in order to be aware of trends in publishing and in scholarship, and to be informed about related developments that will stimulate library interest in the community. In this connection, the selector must be especially attentive to activity in the fields of collection development assignment. The selector will have to be apprised regularly about collection development in other libraries: locally, regionally, and nationally. The selector will have to have a rather good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the collection—as it stands and as it develops—and of the areas where theft and mutilation cause a special kind of problem. Above all, the selector must have an understanding of why and in what ways the community might need the library, both currently and in the future. And more than ever before, the selector whose work is to follow the guidelines of explicit policy on collection development must be able to select in the context of an assigned budget with a good idea of how much material that budget may be expected to acquire during the fiscal period.

Selection according to a precise guide to collection development has implications, too, for the library as an organization; the organization must be able to adapt to the capabilities that have been built into the policy if the goals of that policy are to be realized to their fullest. For example, the capacity to control acquisitions by priorities is paramount. Moreover, the flexibility that is incorporated into the policy must be adaptable throughout the library wherever workflow is dependent upon selection decisions. Flexibility may be required by changing conditions of the budget, or of the publishing industry, or of community priorities. Implementation of an exacting policy also has implications for personnel, since the responsibilities of collection development assignments will tend to be more rigorous. It will be important to reconsider the qualifications for those positions in order to be certain that long-standing collection development assignments are

allocated to those librarians who have both the ability and the inclination to fulfill the responsibilities successfully. Finally, because budget and policy are closely interdependent, the library will have to design a system that will permit the regular monitoring of expenditures analyzed in some way that reflects reasonably well the essential segmentation of the policy and related collection development assignments.

By way of summarizing the functional implications of a detailed policy, it may be observed that just as the collection development policy should be formulated both to reflect and to guide a system of organized activity, that activity must be accommodated into the overall operations of the library as part of the larger system. Logically, then, all procedures that flow from the policy and conclude at the time the selected material is made available to the public should be geared to the efficient implementation of that policy. Therefore, the priority for the implementation of collection development policy relative to the goals of other library operations should be established within the system before policy is finalized.

The allocation of the entire acquisitions budget may best be determined by one or a few relatively disinterested administrators whose judgment is not biased by daily subject selection responsibilities; however, the process for arriving at that decision should involve all selectors, since it is they who are most familiar with the policy and its fiscal implications. Upon the allocation of funds, each selector then is responsible for implementing policy within the framework of a known budget. Both the policy and the budget will be utilized to greatest advantage if selection is paced regularly throughout the fiscal period in conjunction with the regular monitoring of budget encumbrances and expenditures.

However valid the collection development policy may be at the time of its formulation, it is not a definitive statement; it constitutes just one step in an ongoing systematic activity that falls into a natural cycle. (No matter how administratively "neat" the policy and related procedures may be, the quality of collections developed still will be most profoundly dependent upon the application of sound, well-informed professional judgment.) The natural cycle linking collection development policy to other collection development activities is as follows: first, assessment of community needs, which leads to evaluation of the collection, which, in turn, leads to the formulation of policy, from which follows selection; and then back to the beginning of the cycle—reassessment of community needs and reevaluation of the collection, and so on. So while the policy is intended to guide selection, the whole collection development cycle should be directed so that it will be conducive to an alertness to the need to revise that document and not simply to bring selection into conformity with written policy.

One aspect of collection development that is only recently receiving its due attention is that of weeding the collection, or of deselection.

This exercise can be most helpful in indicating aspects of the collection development policy that may require revision, for it provides a fresh perspective on the quality of the collection at a given time, and it begs a healthy questioning of current selection practice. Beyond the obvious benefits of freeing space and of intellectually tidying the collection, a systematic weeding operation also offers the benefit of the identification of misjudgment in selection and the opportunity to take corrective measures; and all this with the definite advantages of hindsight.

Collection evaluation and the assessment of community needs are both integral parts of selection and, consequently, are continuous processes that may point the way to desirable revision of policy. In this connection, the importance of unbroken and substantive consultation between collection development librarians and the community cannot be overemphasized, particularly in an academic setting. It is always useful, however, to balance expressed and observed local needs with an understanding of publishing and subject trends on a broader national scale. Collection use studies have their value in informing library management, but they give evidence only about which materials *on hand* are used and not about the materials which might have been used even more gratefully by the community had they been available.

Revision of each section of collection development policy can be recommended by the appropriate selector in the form of an annual report on collection development activity related to the criteria of that policy. Depending upon the extent of revisions to be made in various sections of the policy, there is no reason why they cannot be adopted as they are recommended and reviewed. However, it will still be advisable to plan on a comprehensive review of the policy on a regular basis—perhaps every five years or so—in order for the library to benefit from some of the same process values that were gained in the original policy formulation.

In conclusion, the essential message intended in these paragraphs is that the adoption of a comprehensive and detailed policy on collection development has far-reaching implications both for the routine of collection development and for the atmosphere in which it will function. As a management tool endowed with something more than a hint of precision, the policy serves as a new measure of performance, stimulating at the same time a heightened sense of accountability in decision making. Accordingly, selection will be influenced more than ever before by a keen sense of community-derived priorities. It is true that this implies less freedom for individual self-expression and creativity on the part of those who select the material than has been the case in the past; but it is equally true that the full implementation of the kind of document recommended in the RTSD "Guidelines" presents a new kind of challenge for collection development and calls for a new kind of creativity. In fact, these are also the general requirements of the new era of librarianship we have already entered.