Chapter 1
Five Steps to Efficient, Economical Collection Development

Ann Hallyburton
Western Carolina University, USA

ABSTRACT

Libraries' collection development funding seems limited in the best financial times. In worse economic situations, those resources prove even scarcer. To ensure that the constituents served by libraries receive the best possible materials to meet their needs, developers must set purchasing priorities before spending the first dollar. A five-step process can aid developers in wisely spending funds. First, developers should devote the largest portion of collection building funds to meeting direct patron needs. The next largest fund portion goes toward "core" materials singled out by respected recommendation resources specific to relevant disciplines or genres. Holdings data from libraries with notable collections offer an additional avenue for identifying necessary items. Freely available, quality materials offer another opportunity to plug holes or accentuate collection areas. Finally, resources craved by the developer but not critical to the collection, should be judiciously considered.

INTRODUCTION

Even when the economy does well, library funding often does not reflect the bounty. In times of want, library funds prove vulnerable to the budgetary machinations of the academic institutions, businesses, hospitals, states, and cities those libraries serve. This most recent economic downturn has helped spur record enrollment in postsecondary institutions (Douglass, 2010) and greatly increased usage of public libraries (Rooney-Browne, 2009). Meanwhile, materials library users covet do not stop coming, despite the evaporation of funds. Librarians in all areas must serve more individuals with fewer resources, all the while working to equip their clients with the materials those clients need and want.

Even with substantial financial resources, collectors can never acquire all items of benefit to their patrons and must exercise judicious restraint. In times of extremely restricted resources, this judicious restraint transforms into a mandatory dis-

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cipline where even clear necessities must compete. In both instances (and countless points in between) collectors must set priorities, meeting the greatest needs of the populations they serve, but how do collectors set priorities and buy the "right" materials when faced with a profusion of publishers, vendors, platforms, time and staffing constraints, and constituencies in need of service? Approval plans may seem an easy answer, but collectors must still know how to finesse plan profiles and make selections. A five-tiered approach offers one paradigm for making wise selections in times of both parsimony and plenty. This approach, though based on a non-recurring expense model (e.g., the purchase of monographs, individual audiovisual materials, etc.), can likely be adapted to work in the selection and maintenance of recurring fund purchases (serials, databases, etc.) as well.

BACKGROUND

Priority setting is not a new concept to individuals who build and maintain collections, no matter the type or funding level of the library in question. Chan (2008) and Kusik and Vargas (2009) state emphatically that program needs must function as the primary driver behind collection development and advocate for reexamination of current funding models to insure expenditures still align with foremost needs and goals. Austenfeld (2009) outlines priority setting steps used by librarians at a small academic library to add materials supporting a new university program. Those steps recommend that, when collecting for a new subject area, librarians:

- Meet with faculty members of the new program;
- Use reviews, bibliographies, and searches of journal indices to create an "ideal collection" list;
- Evaluate current library holdings;
- Compare holdings to those of top collections in the field;
- And estimate the cost of adding needed materials to the library collection.

The sheer quantity of materials in various formats now available complicates this priority setting, though. In his wide-reaching piece "Rethinking Research Library Collections: A Policy Framework for Straitened Times, and Beyond," Hazen (2010) states the situation brought about by a profusion of Internet resources and online communications and proliferating journal titles has caused librarians and libraries to experience "a dual crisis of purpose and identity" (p. 116). Hazen (2010) goes on to describe the difficulties the library profession faces in defining, categorizing, and making accessible electronic and sometimes ephemeral resources such as blogs, raw datasets, and even genome sequences. These resources often serve multiple disciplines. As information types and resources become even more numerous and widely spread, librarians may find that adapting or cross-mapping existing classification methods makes resources more accessible to the individuals they serve and saves money by lessening duplication of resources across affiliated libraries (Hiebert, 2009).

Priorities must then guide allocation of collection development funds. Budget allocation schemes in many libraries have focused on materials usage and cost formulae, but those methods must be revised in light of the quickly changing patron needs and restrictive budgets libraries face (Kalyan, 2003). Kusik and Vargas (2009) advocate for a materials budget allocation formula using what they term "holistic collection development" guidelines. These guidelines stem from current patron needs (electronic resources over print, new academic disciplines being served, etc.) rather than traditional funding models with set amounts to be spent on specific formats, genres, and disciplines (Kusik & Vargas, 2009). Many other methods are