

Collection Management

Weeding Collections

Do you have a garden or do you admire a beautifully landscaped yard? It didn't get that way by allowing nature to take its course—it had to be designed and managed. Managing means pulling weeds, removing diseased plants, removing plants that do not grow or bloom as they should, and pulling up annuals and perennials at the end of their season. It means discarding plants that are causing others not to grow. The garden or yard only has just so much space and cannot be allowed to just grow wild—obscuring the house and flowing over onto the neighbor's property. If it reaches that point, it will take a lot of time and expense to tame it again, whereas if it is managed in a timely manner it will flourish.

The collections of a library (books, media, etc.) also need to be managed like a garden. The American Library Association makes recommendations on collection management. It is a thankless job and many citizens have an opinion on the subject—especially on their favorite genre. Public funding was spent to purchase most of those materials, so there does need to be accountability. This is what library directors are paid to do—make those decisions.

There are many considerations when managing collections. First and foremost, the library is only just so big. If the library facility is overflowing with material, are you just going to go to the county commissioners and say we need a new library to house books? It is doubtful you will get very far with that argument. If there is only just so much square footage, how will additional books be accommodated? Set up book shelves in the restrooms? The entrance? Make the shelves even taller? Make the aisles even smaller? Fill up the community meeting space and reading areas with shelving?

Then there is the issue of being able to shelve new books. The reading public is constantly hounding the library staff for the latest and greatest title and they want them in sufficient quantities so THEY don't have to wait for it. Reference material outdates quickly and needs to be refreshed.

The children and young adults won't even pick up a book with an old looking cover or one that has old pictures. If there are two books by the same title (e.g., *Anne of Green Gables*), the one with the newer cover will be chosen. You might say—but they are the same book, however children have been brought up in a visual world—they are attracted to what's colorful and new. You can't judge a book by its cover, but kids do.

Culling books makes those left stand out. According to "The Art of Weeding Collection Management" by Ian Chant, "Circulation frequently rises after a weeding project, however counterintuitive that may seem: when people can browse the shelves (or the online catalog) without having to sift through older material they're not interested in, they're more likely to find something they are looking for—or something they didn't know they were looking for." [Click here](#) to read the article and we recommend that you do read it.

The article goes on to say, "When a lot of titles need to be weeded at once, communication is key. Being transparent about the decisions being made and the thought process behind them—and getting ahead of the story—can help prevent a library's otherwise supportive public from becoming upset when a number of books need to go." And that is what we hope to achieve in this issue—an open discussion regarding the collection management policies.

Legality of Discarding Books

The UNC School of Government are the experts on all things governmental in NC. [Click here](#) to see the UNC SG "Property Disposal Options for North Carolina Local Governments." Books weeded from library collections have no value and as such can legally be discarded or donated to nonprofits. Library can donate their discarded books to Friends of the Library.

Carteret County Public Library Collection Development Policy

It is the policy of the Carteret County Public Library to maintain an up-to-date collection of standard works in all fields of knowledge and a selection of items in current demand. Due to limited resources the library cannot purchase everything that might be desirable; however, the library strives to allocate resources in a way that is responsive and fiducially sound.

Patrons are also encouraged to use the statewide NC Cardinal consortium for specialized materials not available in the local collection.

The library purchases materials to meet the recreational, educational, and informational needs of the community in whatever format is most appropriate, whether in print or digital format. Efforts are made to provide materials and information that is accurate and authoritative on both current and historical issues.

Reviews in professionally recognized periodicals, standard bibliographies, publisher catalogs, booklists by recognized authorities, and the advice of subject area experts will be used in selecting materials for purchase. The Carteret County Public Library seeks to serve all the citizens of Carteret County and reflect its diverse interests through library materials. The library will not attempt to furnish course textbooks. While some materials related to academic are of use to the wider community, the provision of curriculum related materials is the major responsibility of the school and college libraries. Requests from patrons for specific titles or in subject areas are welcome and will be considered for purchase, within the library's resources.

The library keeps its collection vital and useful by retaining or replacing essential material, and removing on a systematic and continuous basis those works which are worn, outdated, no longer accepted as fact, of little historical significance, or no longer in demand. Ultimate responsibility for the selection of materials lies with the Library Director.

In exercising this responsibility, the Library Director has been instructed by the County Manager and the Board of Commissioners to follow the policies and guidelines expressed in the Library Bill of Rights and the Freedom to Read Statement issued by the American Library Association.

All library staff are involved in the selection process, giving suggestions and pointing out weaknesses in the collection as they become aware of needs. Most selection of materials for the Carteret County Public Library system is done by the Library's management staff but the selection of some materials may be delegated to other staff members as is necessary and appropriate.

The library recognizes that some materials are controversial and that any given item may offend some patrons. Processing and shelving of materials shall in no way reflect a value judgment of the materials in the library's collection. No item will be sequestered. All materials will be shelved in their proper order on open shelves, freely and easily accessible to the public.

A person's right to use the library will not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views. The library assures free access to its holdings for all patrons who are free to select or reject for themselves any item in the collection. Individual or group prejudice about a particular item or type of material in the collection may not preclude its use by others.

Children are not limited to the juvenile collection, although juvenile collections are kept together to facilitate use. Responsibility for the reading of children must rest with the parent or guardian not with the library. Selection of any materials will not be inhibited by the possibility that books may inadvertently come into the possession of children.

Carteret County Public Library Collection Development Policy

Collection Maintenance

A Library's collection is constantly changing to keep up with the needs of the community it serves. Staff are involved in this process in a number of ways on a daily basis. Guidelines help to lay out parameters and the process for removing materials from the collection. The Library's collection is maintained through constant evaluation by library staff to ensure its usefulness and relevance to the community. This evaluation relies on the staff's professional expertise to assess the content of the collection and the everchanging needs of the community. Library materials may be removed from a location or the overall collection for any of the following reasons:

- obsolescence: the material is no longer timely, accurate, or relevant
- damage or poor condition • space limitations
- number of copies in the collection
- insufficient use or lack of customer demand
- availability at other library locations or in other formats

Request for reconsideration of material

When a patron objects to the presence or absence of any library material the complaint will be referred to the Library Director or appropriate management staff who will discuss the matter with the complainant. If not satisfied, the complainant may fill out a "Request for Reconsideration of Library materials" form. The Library Director will examine the item in question if it is a request for withdrawal, the Library Director will determine whether it conforms to the standards of the materials selection policy. If it is a request for addition of an item that has been rejected by the library, the Library Director will reconsider its addition. The Library Director will decide and will provide written explanation of the decision to the complainant. If dissatisfied with the Director's decision, the complainant may appeal to the Library Board of Trustees and present a complaint at a regular meeting of the Board. Materials subject to complaint shall not be removed from use pending final action. The Library Board of Trustees is the final Board of appeal in reference to library materials.

Craven-Pamlico Regional Library Weeding Guidelines

Per Library Director Kat Clowers: CPRL is in the process of rewriting its Collection and Weeding policies and will be addressed by the CPRL Board of Trustees in November. This is the current policy.

CPRL staff removes worn, dated, and damaged items from the collection through procedures known as weeding. This process helps maintain the quality of the library collections and is not intended to sanction removal of items due to controversy of any kind.

In general, the entire CPRL collection should be weeded through systematic, ongoing procedures rather than by scheduling weeding for set periods every X number of years. However, the size of the collection and the availability of staff for weeding may prohibit a fully integrated procedure. It is thereby recommend-

CPRL Weeding Guidelines (continued)

ed that, in a rotating fashion, each listed area above be thoroughly weeded every 2-3 years. Only through a rigorous schedule can the CPRL collection be kept fresh and vibrant.

It is important to recognize that the weeding of any individual title will rely on the use of judgment. Although the criteria in the following points serve as guidelines, there are likely to be exceptions in specific circumstances. However, in general, materials will be selected for weeding when they are in poor condition, factually inaccurate, outdated, superseded by newer or better volumes, have no literary or scientific merit, or irrelevant to the needs of the community. Items that are little used or unused by patrons shall be weeded rapidly in light of the library's already limited shelving space. Additionally, materials that are duplicates will be candidates for weeding once a single volume is able to meet the demand of users. The Library Director will consider the availability of works through Interlibrary Loan, as well as appropriate volumes on collection development for small libraries when making final decisions about a specific volume.

When weeding, staff considers the following:

There are many methods and tools used to maintain and weed library resources. The CPRL staff refer to the [CREW Method](#). Crew offers six general guidelines for judging library material under the acronym MUSTIE.

M = misleading: factually inaccurate

U = ugly: beyond mending or rebinding

S = superseded by a new edition or by a much better book on the subject

T = trivial: of no discernible literary or scientific merit

I = irrelevant to the needs and interests of the library's community

E = elsewhere: the material is easily obtainable from another library

Disposal of Weeding Material

It is vital that the library take great care in its treatment of weeded materials so as to reflect CPRL's commitment to stewardship of the library collection. Materials will thereby be disposed of via the following methods, listed in order of preference:

- Selling: most materials no longer fit for inclusion in the collection will be sold during the library's Annual Book Sale, or as part of the book sale cart kept in the library year-round. Monies from these sales will benefit the library.
- Donation: Items unsold through the book sale will be donated whenever possible. Groups will be chosen to receive donations based on the organization's reflection of CPRL goals and their ability to retrieve materials.
- Recycling: In rare instances, a book may be weeded for reasons that do not permit the item to be sold or donated. In these instances, items will be recycled.

Library Collection Development Policy—Another Perspective

Submitted by Joanne Straight former head librarian of the New Bern-Craven County Public Library.

I think all the CPC Libraries have been reviewing/weeding their collections the past few months. Some of the libraries may not have been regularly devoting time to this. The pandemic shutdown did provide staff the opportunity to catch up. Libraries with shortage of staff or a budget that doesn't allow for replacements may place a lower priority on weeding.

Libraries typically have collection development guidelines which should include both selection and deselection (weeding) policies. The primary reasons for discarding materials: outdated-newer edition available; condition- damaged, moldy, mildew, etc.; no longer need multiple copies.

Collection Development also means planning and evaluating potential additions to the collection. There are numerous resources that can be used to assist with this including magazines such as: Publisher's Weekly, NY Times Book Review,

School Library Journal (for childrens and Teens).

H. W. Wilson publishes a series of reference materials on Core Collections such as Public Library Core Collection: Non-Fiction. These guides can be used for establishing a basic or core collection, identifying areas of where new or updated materials are needed with recommendations. This particular title is arranged by Dewey Decimal number and includes general non-fiction and reference titles.

Additional resources include Children's Core Collection, Fiction Core Collection, Young Adult Fiction Core Collection. Some of these resources are now available online.

Librarians must decide how they are going to allocate their resources - how much for Ebooks vs. hardcover, any special collections, childrens vs. adults, etc.

A simple resource, especially appropriate for small and medium size libraries was created by the Texas State Library. It is called the CREW method. The manual explains why weeding is important, covers the process and offers weeding assistance on specific categories. It is very readable and is something you may want to look at: [Click here](#) to view.

Collection Management: Art or Science by Mark West

On my first day of library school, I was introduced to the definition of a library: An organized collection of bibliographic materials. For the purpose of this article, let's concentrate on the word collection. My *American Heritage Dictionary* defines collection as "that which is collected; a set of objects, specimens, writings, etc., gathered together." Collect, in turn, is defined as "to gather together; assemble."

The first job of a librarian, then, is to gather together or assemble bibliographic materials. In practice, however, we need to ask for whom and for what purpose are we gathering these materials?

For those working in public libraries, the apparent answer to this question would seem to be that we are gathering materials for the general public, but that may be too broad a constituency. The need for books and the information they contain will be different in different places. A public library serving the residents of an immigrant community will likely have different demands placed on it than one serving an affluent suburb, which in turn may have different demands than one serving a rural community. Not only that, but the very term bibliographic materials has been extended to include all sorts of information in a variety of formats. When considering the whole question of collection management, we need to start by looking at the needs of the community we serve.

Collection Management: Art or Science (Continued)

Looking at the needs of the community seems like a simple concept, but in reality is not. For decades there has been a debate among librarians as to what should be collected for a community. This debate has ranged along a continuum running from "give them what they want" to "give them what they ought to have." The give them what they want end of the continuum uses expressed patron demand in determining what materials to collect. The give them what they ought to have end of the continuum makes judgments as to what is appropriate to collect. A public library concentrating on give them what they want might exclusively collect items such as best selling books and popular videos. A public library concentrating on give them what they ought to have might emphasize materials supporting the curriculum of local schools and classic literature. In reality, every public library creates a collection that falls somewhere along this continuum. Most public libraries, for example, will collect basic reference works even if they emphasize the collection of current popular materials just as libraries with a give them what they ought to have approach will likely have a collection of children's picture books even if serving a primarily older demographic.

Collection management goes beyond just the selection of materials. Equally important are the decisions made over the retention of materials. Some retention decisions are fairly easy to make. Most of the books a public library will collect are manufactured using what is sometimes called a perfect binding, rather than a sewn binding. Unfortunately, perfect bindings aren't perfect. These bindings often fail after a book as been read just a few times. Unless there is a justification for rebinding such books, they really need to be discarded. Similarly, a scratched DVD that no longer functions properly needs to

be withdrawn from the collection. Other retention decisions may be more difficult. Take an almanac, for example. The information in an almanac is usually obsolete once the year for which it was produced has passed. What, however, about its historic value? Perhaps someone in the future would like to know how *The Farmers' Almanac* extended weather prediction matched reality over a period of years. If the old editions of the almanac have been discarded, that information is lost. Then there are the classics. There is an old Star Trek episode where a character in the twenty-fourth century reels off the names of the great authors of the twentieth century, most of whom we would currently recognize as the writers of somewhat "trashy" literature. Who knows what will be considered a classic in the future?

There are two factors beyond simple selection and retention that most librarians need to face when dealing with collection management: budget and space. It is the rare public library that has a materials budget so generous as to allow it to purchase all of the materials its public wants or ought to have. That said, it is also true that most public libraries soon fill their shelves to overflowing with limited prospects for adding shelving space. Once a library reaches this "no growth" point, it will be impossible to add new material without discarding existing items.

Given these considerations, what is a library, and the people who work in it, to do when it comes to questions of collection management? The best answer is for the library, through its governing board in consultation with its library director, to have developed a thoughtful collection development policy. A good collection development policy will contain a number of elements.

Community: Describe the community you are serving. Pay particular attention to those characteristics that make your community different from others, including socioeconomic factors, demographics, and workforce composition.

Collection Management: Art or Science (Continued)

If the community is not homogeneous, note identifiable subgroups.

User needs: Identify user needs. For example, a community with schools blessed with strong media centers might not need to emphasize curriculum support as much as one where schools lack such resources. A retirement community will have different needs than one filled with young families.

Collections and formats: Specify the various collections and formats the library will support. These might include picture books, easy readers, juvenile materials, young adult materials, adult fiction and nonfiction, large type materials, pamphlets, e-books, books on CD, magazines, newspapers, electronic databases, music CDs, DVDs, and more. If appropriate to identified user needs, consider specialized collections such as a separate business and investing collection or local history materials. Do you also plan to collect anything from puzzles to realia? Specify these items in your policy.

Budget allocation: What portion of the materials budget will be devoted to which collections? The distribution of budgeted funds is perhaps the most powerful tool the board and library director have in influencing collection development decisions.

Gifts and donations: Describe the types of materials you will accept as donations and what you will do with donated materials that do not fall within the scope of our collection development policy.

Selection and acquisition: Who on the staff selects materials and what resources do they use to identify materials for acquisition? Are there any specific criteria for selection, such as a positive review in a recog-

nized journal? How are patron suggestions for purchase handled? Under what circumstances are multiple copies of a title purchased? Put another way, how many reserve requests must a title have before additional copies are purchased? Once items are selected, who is responsible for ordering materials and are there specific acquisition procedures?

Weeding: State the criteria for removing items from the collection. These might include the physical condition of the item, the currency and accuracy of its contents, or its popularity. If an item is worn, should it be rebound or replaced? If so, under what conditions? Identify staff positions responsible for making these decisions. If use as measured by circulation is to be a determining factor in retention, provide guidelines specifying minimum use requirements as well as criteria for retaining an item that does not meet the minimum use requirement. Is the library part of a consortium that has a "last copy" policy? If so, do any of these items meet the last copy criteria for retention?

Status of withdrawn materials: How are withdrawn materials disposed of? If they are still in serviceable condition, are there organizations that will accept them as donations?

As a former library director, I was ultimately responsible for the acquisition of literally tens of thousands of books during my career and for the withdrawal of thousands more. As a result, I have what some people might feel is a somewhat cavalier attitude toward books: Books are commodities. Some commodities, like gold and silver, are valuable and should always be preserved. Others, like used newspaper, are not as valuable and should be recycled or otherwise disposed of. Not all books are created equal and not all are of enduring value. As library professionals, one of the skills we should acquire is to note the difference between those books and other materials that should be

Collection Management: Art or Science (Continued)

preserved and those whose useful life has ended.

So, having taken this brief look at the topic, is collection management an art or a science? The science in "library science" includes developing policies and procedures, such as creating a useful collection development policy. The art is in implementing those policies. As such, collection management is both a science and an art.

* Mark West is a retired librarian whose career spanned more than thirty years. He holds a Master of Arts in Library Science from Rosary College, now Dominican University. During his career he was the director of several public libraries in the Chicago suburbs and retired as deputy director of the Naperville Public Libraries, at the time the second largest public library system in Illinois. He and his wife, Barbara, also a retired public library director, now live in New Bern, NC.



DISCARDING RESPONSIBLY

Call it what you will: culling, discarding, deaccessioning, weeding, or deselecting, but a dumpster full of books outside your library has the potential to be a PR nightmare—as we have seen recently. It is far better to weed the collection judiciously—frequent, small disposals—rather than one gigantic off-load. But if a big weed is necessary, it should be planned. The plan should include:

1. Make sure your collection management policy is up-to-date and followed.
2. Staff should all be on the same page philosophically to ensure the library is fulfilling its mission.
3. How often and how much will you weed.
4. A very detailed work plan to minimize handling.
5. Alert the public and invite them to help.
6. Carefully select and train those who volunteer to assist.

Here is one downstream cycle for discards:

Libraries could:

1. Offer them to the Friends of the Library associated with your library or another nearby Friends of the Library group. Friends sell used books and use the proceeds for library and community literacy needs. This is a preferable action.
2. Contact [Better World Books](#) — they will ship, process, and sell your discards and donations, then donate or recycle what's left for free.
3. Another option for discards is [Discover Books](#).

Friends Phase 1 (library & community donations):

1. Cull and dispose of the worst of the donations—the ones they know that won't sell. Sort and store what's left.
2. Sell them at a book sale. Sell bundled books (e.g., romance, mystery). \$5 bag sale at very end.
3. Sell better books online.
4. Use to stock Little Free Libraries coordinated by Friends.
5. Use to refresh libraries at Assisted Living Facilities and Nursing Homes.

Friends Phase 2 (for material that doesn't sell):

1. Offer them to the nearest NC correctional institution.
2. Offer them to those in the community that maintain Little Free Libraries.



The above is probably a picture of a book hoarder, but it could be how your local library might look if it never tended its collection.

3. Offer religious books and bibles to churches.
4. Offer basic and special diet cookbooks to food banks.
5. Offer books to homeless shelters.
6. Offer material to nonprofit thrift stores and other nonprofits.

Friends Phase 3 (left overs):

1. Identify material that might still sell, box up and store until the next sale.
2. Recycle paperbacks.
3. Discard the remainder.

Library staff and Friends absolutely hate to discard books! Don't ever question that. But books, like everything else, have their time and season. Libraries run out of room and Friends run out of storage space. There comes a time when we have to say, "Enough!" and discard.