

Curating Collective Collections — What's Your Plan? Writing Collection Management Plans

by **Sam Demas** and **Mary Miller** (Preservation Strategist, University of Minnesota Libraries)

Column Editor: **Sam Demas** (Freelance Librarian, College Librarian Emeritus, Carleton College & Principal, Sam Demas Collaborative Consulting) <sdemas03@gmail.com>

Scenario

Your Provost has received expressions of concern from faculty about what is happening with the print collections. Specifically, the pace and extent of the library moving from “p” to e-journals, patron-driven eBook packages, transferring materials to remote storage, and weeding materials locally that are available through a shared print archiving program the library recently joined. She is aware of these projects because she has declined to push for funding for expansion of the library, but is anxious to support you in making room to develop a learning commons. She wants you to make a presentation to the faculty senate in two weeks to provide the big picture. “Help the faculty understand what the library collection will look like in five to ten years, and how it will be better for them. Where are we headed? How do these various projects fit into an overall strategy? What’s your plan?” she asks with some anxiety.

Fortunately, your staff just completed a thoughtful process of writing a collection management plan. You convene your management and collections teams to review the

document and prepare your presentation. Happy ending.

What is a Collection Management Plan?

We believe every library should have a written collection management plan.

We use the term collection management to refer to the set of decisions and activities made after items are already part of library collections, including: collection consolidation, transfer to storage, weeding, preservation, format migration, de-duplication and a range of other activities designed to maintain the overall usefulness and integrity of a collection, or a set of print collections. **Peggy Johnson’s** apt statement about collection development policies applies equally to collection management plans. “Libraries without collection development policies are like businesses without business plans. Without a plan, an owner and his employees lack a clear understanding of what the business is doing now and what it will do in the future, and potential investors have little information about the business’s prospects.”¹

A collection management plan articulates the overarching collection management strategy and the principles and guidelines used in implementing the strategy. It identifies the specific collection management projects anticipated over the next few years, and describes the methods for engaging the community served in thinking about and participating in stewardship of its collections. In essence, the plan provides a rational framework for decision-making about our legacy collections in a time of transition. As **Ross Atkinson** stated about collection development policies, it also has a rhetorical function:

“...should show faculty and students that the reasons the library contains certain materials and not others are part of a rational, consistent, publicly announced plan...administrators should be led by the policy to recognize that optimum use is being made of materials funding, and...consortial partners should also be moved by the policy to view the collection development operation as stable and reliable.”²

Why Having a Plan Matters

As we re-select our collections in a collective context, we will be making irreversible decisions to discard large numbers of books and journals. The stakes are high if we end up discarding things we should have kept. The systems we rely on are intricate and fallible, and currently we are under-resourced in collection management to accomplish the work necessary to get this right. In moving towards shared collections, what is at stake is long-term survival of the record of scholarship in its original print form, the credibility of our profession as stewards of this record, relationships we have cultivated with our local faculties, and the notion of collection integrity.

While the value of focusing on collective efforts in meeting the challenges of collection management is indisputable, it is essential to acknowledge the risks and difficulties. If we brush off the risks and later incur irretrievable losses on behalf of our community, our standing in the competition for local resources will be diminished. Locally, transfer to storage, increasing dependence on each other, and weeding and disposition of collections are potential minefields. Consortially, issues of ownership, enforcement of retention commitments, and funding of long-term stewardship will be difficult, but not impossible to navigate, particularly if we have the support of our institutions. Rather than masking these issues, transparency in acknowledging these factors and highlighting the areas in which choices are

News From the Field

❖ **Center for Research Libraries** is working with the **California Digital Library** to develop a Print Archives Preservation Registry (PAPR) system. The system will feature a searchable database of information about print serial archiving programs, including titles held, program characteristics (such as retention period, facilities, level of validation, conditions, accessibility), and availability of titles in digital repositories. <http://www.crl.edu/archiving-preservation/print-archives/papr>

❖ **OCLC** announced a strategic partnership with **Sustainable Collections Services (SCS)**, LLC, an organization founded by **Rick Lugg** and **Ruth Fischer** of **R2 Consulting**. SCS makes use of the WorldCat Search API to provide decision-support for collection assessment, de-selection, and shared print projects that leverages WorldCat Data to help libraries intelligently manage their print monograph collections. <http://sustainablecollections.com/>

❖ **John Berger**, Executive Director of the **Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL)**, announced that ASERL and the four members of TRLN — **Duke**, **NC Central University**, **NC State**, and **UNC Chapel Hill** — have joined forces to launch an expanded collaborative print journal archive.

❖ At their Constitutional Convention **HathiTrust** members approved a proposal “to establish a distributed print archive of monographic holdings corresponding to volumes represented within **HathiTrust** that is collectively supported by the **HathiTrust** membership.” http://www.hathitrust.org/constitutional_convention2011_ballot_proposals

❖ **California Digital Library** shared print manager **Emily Stambaugh** has posted a rich series of UC shared print policies. These include both prospective and retrospective shared print agreements and MOU’s, and shared print models, policy and processes. <http://www.cdlib.org/services/collections/sharedprint/>

❖ A special issue of *Collection Management* on shared print repositories will be published in July 2012. It will include a much longer version of this month’s “**Curating Collective Collections**” column by **Demas** and **Miller**. 

continued on page 00

being made is our professional obligation.

Writing a Collection Management Plan

We suggest a small team be appointed to develop a draft plan. Invite all library staff to participate by commenting on drafts. An iterative process of drafting and discussion should be paced to ensure that disagreements and complexities do not paralyze the effort. Discussion in appropriate campus forums and formal approval is the final step.

The benefits of writing a plan are the process of thinking through the collection management strategy in all its complex detail, having an agreed plan to guide collection management decision-making, and communicating collection priorities and strategies to internal and external audiences. The plan may take a dual form, comprising a detailed version for internal library audiences and an overview for external audiences.

The plan needs to be written at a level that is useful, but not with so much detail that it will bog down the writer or the reader. Start with more macro-level guidelines for the collection as a whole, and then drill down to more detail over time. Brevity and simplicity, hard as they are to achieve in treating a complex set of inter-dependent decision-making strategies, are virtues. Strive for a five to ten page plan, with a shorter version for external audiences.

We have all experienced investing considerable effort in writing collection policies that then sit on people's bookshelves gathering dust. How do we make the collection management plan a dynamic document that is used and updated? Taking the time to systematically update the plan will be the biggest challenge for many libraries. A wiki format might be useful in supporting continual updating and sharing.

Elements of a Collection Management Plan

What follows is an overview of issues inherent in responsible collection management, along with questions meant to initiate conversations. These will in turn generate further topics for discussion, research, and decisions. Collection management work is intricate and the elements are highly inter-dependent and overlapping. You needn't address all these issues in a written plan, but they are well worth thinking through with colleagues.

1. Collection Values, Situation and Outlook — Begin with a statement of values and goals informing collection management activities. Then try to articulate an overarching strategy for management of the collections that provides a framework within which the following specific elements of the plan are clearly tactical implementations of the strategy.

What are your key collection goals and priorities for the long term? What mix of print and digital materials do you currently have in books, monographs and other key

genres, and what are you aiming for in future? What unique or little-held materials do you have in the collection? Have you digitized these? What role will the library play, if any, in regional and national archiving and resource sharing efforts?

What parts of the collection will receive priority for retention in print form? How risk tolerant is your institution? To what extent do you already rely on other libraries for collection access? What are your operating assumptions about how other libraries will be taking care of collection segments your local library is not prioritizing? What are the key collection needs and priorities over the next three to five years? How do you plan to address these? What benefits will accrue to library users from this collection management plan?

2. Print and Digital: Format Preferences and Strategies — **HathiTrust**, **Portico**, **LOCKSS** and other trusted digital archives create an opportunity to align shared collection management strategies with preservation and access to the growing corpus of digital surrogates. What digital repositories meet your criteria as trusted repositories? What is your policy on withdrawing local print copies and relying on digital surrogates and a shared print copy stored remotely? What is your policy on retention of print originals that you scan locally?

3. Collective Collections Context — Managing local collections in the context of collaborative programs provides economies of scale, potential expansion of the scope of resources available to a library, and a strong rationale for local action. It also provides political cover for the inevitable pushback from some patrons. A successful collective collections program will provide the essential cooperative service layer, including friction-free, instantaneous delivery of digital texts, print on demand, and speedy delivery of print originals when needed.

What are your goals in joining a shared print archiving program? What is the archiving model (e.g., central storage vs. "archiving in place"), and the collection profile of the consortium: i.e., journals only, unique materials, last copy repository, publisher-based collections of journals? discipline? area studies, etc.?

Does your shared print program include a policy-making role for faculty of member institutions, e.g., serving on an advisory board? What are the policies on optimal or minimum number of copies retained, retention commitment, validation of copies, use of "best copies," etc.?

4. Decision Support Software — The emergence of decision support software (e.g., **OCLC's** Collection Analysis, **SUNY Geneseo's** GIST, and **Sustainable Collections Services**) can significantly reduce the labor and cost of decision-making for retention, weeding, transfer to storage, preservation, and transfer to special collections. They dramatically improve support for collaborative collection management and shared print archiving by helping to situate local decision-making in a regional and national context.

Librarians set the criteria or rules (e.g.,

usage level, dates of publication, languages, how widely held) and comparison groups (e.g., different libraries, **Choice**, and **HathiTrust**) governing the analysis, and then review the resulting "pick lists." Through an iterative process of review of results and adjustment of criteria, librarians can fine-tune the result set to address both local needs and collaborative collection management objectives.

How can you use the iterative nature of this process to inform ongoing development of the criteria, policies and principles of the plan? What rules and comparison groups will you use? Is your circulation system optimally configured to provide data on the number of times an item has circulated and the last time it circulated?

5. Bibliographic Records, Discovery and Access — The results of decision support analysis are as good as the data being analyzed. It is essential that member libraries use standards, and develop policies and workflows that ensure an acceptable standard of bibliographic records, local holdings statements, and item records.

No library's bibliographic data is perfect. You can sample records to determine the nature and degree of variability and the data problems that exist. This will inform your approach to normalizing data. **OCLC** reclamation projects and collection inventory will identify problems with records, provide a reliable control number to match with other institutions, and ensure that there is a high degree of fidelity between records and what is actually on the shelf. Consider using the new **OCLC MARC 583** field protocol for disclosure of retention commitments, condition, and completeness of archived materials.

How accurate and complete are your records, and what limitations will affect collection management decisions? How accurate are the holdings statements for journals and other materials in series? Can you rely on the books that you commit to retain actually being on the shelf and findable? What kind of copy-level usage data do you have access to?

6. Retention: On Campus, In Storage, and Transfer To Special Collections — Each library needs to establish a framework for life-cycle management: what will be retained on central campus in open stacks, what will be transferred to special collections, what will be transferred to storage, what will be reformatted, and what will be withdrawn?

General criteria for retention are essential. More detailed, discipline or subject classification criteria may be added over time as they are developed. Key issues in formulating retention policies include: space considerations and availability of off site storage; last copy guidelines; when and if digital surrogates are a preferred or acceptable format; and retention guidelines for specific genres and/or formats, such as: newspapers, films, sound, atlases, and reference materials.

Retention on campus in open stacks: Have you done collection analysis to identify collection strengths and weaknesses? What usage

continued on page 58

criteria will you use and what usage data do you have? How will your retention guidelines reflect disciplinary differences in the use of literature and the different ways in which disciplines value their literature?

Retention in storage: Are there indexed collection segments (e.g., newspaper or journal runs) that are particularly suitable for storage? Are these materials already included in another shared print archive? Are there collection segments (e.g., poetry and literature) that are not particularly suitable? How can you mitigate the loss of direct physical access by improving intellectual access to stored materials (e.g., added subject headings, scan or purchase tables of contents and indexes, etc.)? How do you differentiate between materials to be stored in an on campus ASRS facility and those stored more remotely? Will last print copies be accessible in the open stacks or held in storage? Are the service guarantees (e.g., delivery time, provision for on site consultation, provisions for digital reproduction, etc.) adequate to meet user needs?

Transfer to special collections: What criteria will be used to identify general collections materials for transfer to special collections or to a “medium rare” location? How can transfer to special collections be designed to piggy-back on retention, weeding and inventory projects?

7. Weeding — Often politically fraught, weeding is very much a function of local collection values and priorities, local circumstances (space, funding, programs), and local clientele. It is important to clarify the issues around weeding, establish a set of criteria and goals tailored to your collection and community, and assess the costs and benefits of weeding.

Criteria commonly used include: use, relevance to the collection, condition, accessibility in digital form and/or within a consortium, and number of archived copies held regionally or nationally. Linking weeding to availability of digital surrogates and print archives is a key strategy for journals and newspapers, and

will become more prevalent for monographs with the advent of eBooks at scale and with the growth of print archives. Some key considerations in weeding are: how widely to consult with users to ensure mistakes are not made, criteria and methodology, the impact on technical services, and timing.

Involvement of faculty in developing goals and criteria for weeding projects is a safeguard against making regrettable errors and undermining faculty trust in the library. A two-stage process is advisable: first identify candidates for weeding, and then invite faculty to review them.

What are your goals in weeding? What criteria will you use? Are you weeding in a collaborative context and taking into account the holdings of other libraries, or going it alone? Given “bibliographic indeterminacy,” how do you identify true duplicates? Does technical services have the staff capacity to process the materials withdrawn and do librarians have the time for de-selection? Have you budgeted and planned for careful records maintenance?

8. Disposition of Withdrawn Materials — It is essential to have a written policy statement, approved by the institution, covering this fraught topic. How much and what kind of effort will you invest in trying to find a good home for withdrawn materials? Among the options are: an ongoing book sale within the library, donate to a book sale to benefit a local non-profit, sell to local book dealers or on the Web, donate to a program like **Books for Africa**, sell through vendors such as **Better World Books**, and/or offer to faculty and/or students.

Will you recycle materials for which you cannot find a good home? How transparent will this process be? To avoid eruptions of misguided concern, how will you make the community aware of what you are doing and why it is a responsible course of action?

9. Education, Outreach, and Communication — While transparency is advised, many libraries seem to fear the consequences of communication and discussion around these issues more than the potential consequences of not informing the community. As stewards of community resources, we have an obligation to

inform, educate and engage the larger community in major collection management decisions and programs. It is advisable to start with the library staff. Next you need the support of the administration and an appropriate faculty governance group, e.g., library committee.

Once you have a collection management plan, develop a public relations plan specific to particular projects that will ensure effective communication. Even with a careful communication plan there will be at least occasional questions, complaints and criticisms. It is important to know how to manage these so they don't flare into crises.

Conclusion

How likely is this scenario to have a happy ending on your campus? We have not been able to find very many written collection management plans that come close to what we believe is necessary to convince a library staff and its community that we know what we are doing.³ What's your plan?

The authors will be putting their ideas about writing collection management plans to the test in our own work over the next few years. We invite you, dear reader, to do the same and let us know about your results. Collectively we can build a body of experience and develop templates to guide the writing of coherent and convincing plans for managing our legacy collections as system-wide resources. 🌱

Endnotes

1. **Johnson, Peggy**, “*Fundamentals of Collection Development and Management*,” ALA, 2009, p. 72.
2. **Atkinson, Ross**, 1986. The language of the levels: Reflections on the communication of collection development policy. *College & Research Libraries* 47, no. 2: 140–49.
3. The best examples we could find were: University College London-Bloomsbury “Collection Management Policy,” “WEST: Collections Model,” and an internal report “Retention Committee Final Report” at the University of British Columbia.