

# *Care and Tending of the Garden*

## *The Collection Management Policy as Gardening Manual*

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**I**N 1931, S. R. RANGANATHAN DEVELOPED FIVE LAWS THAT DEFINE A LIBRARY'S functions and responsibilities. The fifth law, "the library is a growing organism" (Ranganathan 1931, 382) encourages the use of a garden as a metaphor for library collections. Gardens, like library collections, are in a perpetual state of change and adjustment. They are never finished and need constant and consistent tending in order to thrive and benefit their users. This chapter envisions the collection management policy as a gardening manual that guides the library director as they tend the library's collections.

Whether a garden or a library collection, the health of either is determined by its ability for growth and flexibility. As with gardens, if a collection is not well tended, it will die or become of limited use to the community it serves. Gardening manuals provide information for the gardener to help them make decisions that will ensure positive growth and development of the garden for its users. Likewise, in

order to have a library collection that is useful for the community that it serves, management of the library's collection should be guided by a well developed collection management policy.

To clarify, throughout this chapter, when the term *collection* is used in the singular form, it is referring to all the collections available in and through the library.

## *Purpose*

The collection management policy (CMP) is a document that guides the collection management decisions of the library staff to serve both the present and future needs of the library user. CMPs help the library director know where to focus attention and funds in order to steward the library's collection in a thoughtful and balanced way. It provides library staff the opportunity to codify collection development decisions in a systematic and thoughtful way. It states the mission of the library, the purpose the library serves, and provides continuity across time and personnel changes.

Because the CMP allows for transparency and communicates what the library is about, it should be published on the library's website. In essence, a CMP contains guidelines for making decisions that address the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the library's collection.

- Who?
  - Whom do the collections serve?
  - Who makes the final decisions for selection and deselection?
- What?
  - What types of resources are collected?
  - What is the goal for the level of coverage?
  - What criteria are used for selection and deselection?

- Where?
  - Where are resources that are sensitive or costly located?
  - Where is equipment stored?
  - Where are formats other than print materials located?
- When?
  - When is the CMP reviewed and revised?
  - When are collections inventoried and assessed?
- Why?
  - Why are resources selected?
  - Why are resources deselected?
- How?
  - How are the collections organized?
  - How are resources purchased?
  - How is access provided?
  - How are challenges handled?
  - How are the collections assessed?

The CMP is usually created by the library director collaboratively with staff, informed by the community they serve, and is approved and endorsed by either a person or committee that oversees the work of the library and library director. This endorsement is important as it conveys support by the larger governing body for the library director and serves as a means of protection should questions arise about decisions and actions they make.

## *Context*

Most gardens are not designed or built in a haphazard way with little consideration of the context in which they exist. Rather, the context determines the type of plants that are grown in the garden, whether the garden is ornamental or used for growing food, is in pots or

raised beds, and so forth. In the same way, the context in which a library exists determines the types of resources to which that library provides access and how the resources are organized and accessed. The context in which library collections function consists of three elements:

1. The community served
2. The curriculum supported
3. The collections developed

### *Community*

The degree to which the library's collection is responsive to the community it serves is correlative to how well the community's information needs are served by that library. As noted in Berryhill's (2020, 8) explanation of what theological libraries are, "theological libraries vary in their constituencies." Yet all academic libraries serve two distinct communities to one degree or another: internal communities and external communities.

Internal community members are the people served directly by the institution: congregants, clergy, students, faculty, staff, and administration. Members of the internal community are the primary users of the library collection. Therefore, it should reflect the diversity of those members.

Some elements that provide a cursory understanding of the complexity of the internal community include demographics such as age, ethnic background, socioeconomic level, education level, religious affiliation, and grade point average. Furthermore, knowing whether students reside on campus or commute, the length of commute, and the prevalence and reliability of internet access for internal community members, particularly those who commute, is helpful. Another element to consider is the percentage of the internal community members who are international and what their primary language may be.

An often-overlooked element of understanding the internal community is knowing who is not coming to the library or using the library's resources and why, so that collections can be built or resources added that target these community members to draw them in.

The makeup of the external community is informed by the mission of the institution. Some theological libraries are quite restrictive in the types of users they allow to access their resources beyond the internal community, and their external community may consist only of those users served through interlibrary loan and consortial agreements. Other theological libraries make their collections available to anyone who walks through the doors. These external community members may include physical neighbors to the institution, local clergy and theological scholars, volunteers, members of friends-of-the-library groups, alumni, and institutional governance members.

Interests, strengths, and challenges in each community also should be noted as well as annual, seasonal, and other special community events.

Community members can also serve as resources for support and assistance. Collaborative partnerships developed with constituents within both the internal and external communities can serve to advise, inform, mentor, and support the work of the library and its director. Volunteers are a well-known asset but are not the only community members who can partner with the library. Knowing the extent of resources available in both internal and external communities and building relationships with decision-makers and those who hold the purse strings can greatly benefit the library.

Finally, communities are in a constant state of change. They shrink and grow. People come and go. Local, regional, national, and even global events can impact a community. There is no community that stays constant forever. Even if the library director has a sense of what the communities the library serves are like today, they will likely be different in three, four, or five years. Regular assessment of both communities informs the mission, goals, and strategic plan.

A summary of the characteristics of both the internal and external communities will be included in the CMP. This summary should be updated when assessments are completed.

### *Curriculum*

Theological libraries exist to support and supplement the curriculum of the institutions with which they are associated. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the library director and other library personnel who make collection decisions to be aware of the curriculum provided by the institution by serving on curriculum committees. Attending de-

partment meetings also informs selectors of changes to curriculum and programs that are added or cut so decisions can be made that are responsive to these changes.

It is helpful to work in partnership with faculty on major research projects they assign their students to ensure sufficient resources are available to meet the demand. Likewise, meeting with the clergy on a regular basis to learn about upcoming sermon series or topics enables library directors of congregational libraries to proactively provide resources that supplement sermon themes.

Theological libraries situated within institutions that offer a curriculum that is broader than theology, religion, and ministry provide access to resources that support the entire curriculum. Libraries situated within institutions with curriculum limited to theology, religion, and ministry still need to provide access to resources that cover more generalized subject areas—just to a lesser degree—or ensure that their internal community has access to these resources through a local library.

Libraries should also consider providing resources that support extra-curricular activities available on campus such as film screenings, conferences, and locally produced podcasts. It is helpful to connect with the appropriate offices to find out about both institution- and student-initiated extra-curricular activities.

A library director should also be aware of the curriculum initiatives and trends impacting higher education, such as distance learning and pedagogical trends, in order to provide proactive acquisition of resources.

A brief summary of the topical foci of the curriculum, whether formal or informal, will be included in the CMP.

### *Collection*

In order to develop a collection that meets the information and interest needs of the community and curriculum, the library director needs to assess the current collection, determining what resources are available, where the gaps are, and how effective it is. Collection analysis looks at the strengths and weaknesses of the collection as it relates to the community and the curriculum and considers the criteria included in the CMP for selection and deselection.

The library director should also be aware of resources available through other libraries. For instance, consortial agreements often in-

clude the use of physical items from other libraries through interlibrary loan. Consortial agreements can also include shared purchasing of both physical and electronic resources. The director should also consider whether internal community members have access to other library's collections that are in close proximity to them.

Assessing the organization of the library is a crucial element to understanding the collection. Commonly, a theological library's resources are loosely sorted by format into collections such as reference, circulating, periodicals, audio-visual, electronic resources, and sometimes equipment. Some libraries also include separate collections for archives, maps, and rare materials.

Physical collections are organized by a system that is often determined based on the format of the resource. For instance, periodical collections are often organized by title, fiction collections are organized by either author last name or genre, and reference and circulating collections are usually organized by a classification system such as the Library of Congress Classification System or the Dewey Decimal Classification System. Electronic databases are usually organized on the library's web pages by topic or subject.

A brief description of each collection of the library, formats collected, and how the collections are organized should be included in the CMP.

## *Elements of a Collection Management Policy*

To grow a garden, some foundational elements are soil, sun, and water. Additional elements—such as seeds and compost—and actions—such as staking, pruning, and weeding—all contribute to a thriving garden that serves the gardener well. Similarly, the CMP contains elements that are fundamental to ensuring a library collection not only grows but thrives and serves the community and curriculum well.

### *Mission Statement*

Like soil, sun, and water to the garden, the library's mission statement is an essential element of the CMP. It should align with the mission of the institution and should reflect the purpose for the library

collection's existence. A theological library collection is a means to an end, not an end in itself, and the mission statement helps keep that end in mind. Goals and values are also included to clarify the library's purpose.

### *Community Profile*

The community profile is a brief summary of both the internal and external communities served by the library as well as a statement indicating that the community will be reassessed every three to five years.

### *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*

The library's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the description of, access to, and content of the collection should be clearly stated, as this impacts all facets of collection management. This section should also address support for users regardless of their location and ability.

### *Collection Management Decisions*

While purchase recommendations from faculty, students, and other community members are welcome and encouraged, ideally the library director and subject-specific librarians in larger libraries should have the final determination related to collection management decisions. They know and understand the community, curriculum, and collection, the principles and values of the profession of librarianship, and the criteria used for evaluating resources. The CMP clarifies the advisory role of a governmental body, such as a library committee, and indicates its makeup.

Additionally, information about how the communities served by the library can communicate with the library director, whether that be through suggestion boxes, links on websites, or email addresses or phone numbers, is helpful to include.



## *Collection Scope*

The collection scope is a brief description of the formal and informal curriculum supported by the library followed by a statement about the desired collection goals. This includes what collections the library will have and the types of materials and resources to which the library can provide access. Additionally, state the desired depth of collection in each topical area of the library.

A helpful scale of collection depth developed by the Research Libraries Group and available from the Library of Congress ([loc.gov/acq/devpol/cpc.html](https://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/cpc.html)) can be adapted by libraries of any size (Mayer 2018, 9).

Additionally, this section should specify information about the following criteria:

- Curriculum support
- Cost
- Authority
- Accuracy
- Bias/Perspective
- Format
- Age
- Number of copies
- Currency
- Language
- Reading level
- Condition (for physical resources)

Additional criteria related specifically to electronic resources should detail:

- Accessibility
- Usability

- Licensing
- Pricing model (Mangrum 2012, 110)

Finally, the role of open access resources, digitization, and shared repositories in collection development goals should be elucidated.

This information guides and supports both selection and deselection decisions, so it is crucial that it be as specific and thorough as possible. It is also helpful to include statements about collection balance and limiting factors. In the event of a challenge to a resource added to the collection or a concern about resources withdrawn from the collection, a clear statement about the criteria used for selection and deselection decisions can address those challenges and concerns.

Finally, the CMP indicates the scope, frequency, and responsibility of inventories as well as assessments of both physical and electronic resources.

### *Organization*

A brief description of the various collections as well as how they are organized should be included. This will indicate the classification system(s) used along with locally developed organization schemes and the rationale behind their use. The organization and access of electronic resources should also be addressed.

### *Preservation*

A discussion of how physical materials are processed, if they are mended, as well as the process and criteria for deselection should be covered.

### *Acquisition Responsibilities and Methods*

How the purchase of resources is funded, who is responsible for the acquisitions process, how gifts are handled, how recommendations and requests can be made, and how to deal with challenges should be explained in this section.

The library's consideration of acquisition models such as patron-driven acquisitions / demand-driven acquisitions (PDA/DDA),

approval plans, standing orders, and subscriptions should also be stated along with summaries of formal consortial agreements.

### *Intellectual Freedom Statement*

Another fundamental element of the CMP is a statement about the responsibility of theological libraries to support intellectual freedom through access to information. This is a professional ethic to which all library directors and librarians subscribe and uphold. It can be challenging within the context of a theological library to reflect the values of the institution and community as well as support access to a variety of viewpoints and perspectives, but it is essential to allow the library user to make their choice about what information they access. Furthermore, it is important to remember that the institution does not need to endorse, agree with, or approve every idea or presentation that the library makes available.

The American Library Association (ALA) has developed a number of statements and policies on access (ALA 2021) which can be referenced in this part of the CMP. If it is too controversial to include the ALA's Library Bill of Rights ([ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill](http://ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill)), provide a statement such as: "The Library will uphold its users' right to access and use a variety of information and materials, including controversial information and materials." This should suffice to both clarify the role of the library within the institution as well as support the decisions of the library director and their staff.

Lastly, there should be statements about the role the library director serves as protector of an individual's right to privacy and confidentiality in the use of library resources and services, as well as the user's right to freely express their opinions about library resources and services.

### *Policy Revision Cycle*

While the CMP should be a fairly stable document, regular updates will be informed by changes in the community, curriculum, and collection. Major changes within the institution may also indicate a need to revise the CMP. The CMP should include a timeline for reviewing the CMP on a regular basis as well as indicate who will be involved in the revision process. It is also helpful to indicate the methods used

for analyzing the community, curriculum, and collections to facilitate continuity and identify gaps in the analysis.

## *Conclusion*

If written thoughtfully, deliberately, and comprehensively, the CMP will serve the library and its staff as they seek to tend this growing organism for the benefit and use of its community.

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