

Consulting in Collection Development

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IT IS UNFORTUNATE THAT the outside consultant is seldom called upon except when crises arise or when changes are required in a local situation. This is because consultation is seldom thought of as a part of the continuing process of management, although it should be considered as such in all planning operations.

This article is limited to the areas of consultation with which I am familiar, collection development and the weeding process. The basic considerations that determine successful consultation, however, are applicable to most fields of library management, and there are specialists, as we all know, to consult about library buildings, equipment and furnishing, personnel management, technical and public services, public relations, budgetary controls, outreach programs, etc.

Consultants should never be thought of as having knowledge superior to that of the staffs of the organizations they are asked to serve. What a good consultant brings to any project is wide experience with a number of similar problems in other institutions, realization of what has worked in some situations and not in others, and—presumably—a totally unhampered and objective point of view. A consultant cannot undertake an assignment with any prejudgetment of what is right or wrong. Consultation must always involve a two-way exchange of ideas between the library's administration and staff and the consultant. Obviously, the temporary consultant cannot initiate complete changes in organization or control of collections. He is limited to suggesting new or different approaches, reorganization, or the extension or retrac-

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tion of particular programs or procedures. These latter objectives can only be evaluated by studying the history, development and present state of the activities that affect the problem, suggesting alternatives that will answer the problems, talking with everyone concerned and discussing their recommendations, and afterward modifying proposals in the light of information gathered.

Is a Consultant Needed?

All kinds of libraries might benefit at one time or another from an objective study of their problems by an outside consultant with special expertise. My own sense of authority is acquired from a background of graduate study, and experience which has come from years of work with rare books, manuscripts and special collections in libraries, in the antiquarian market, and in publishing. There is a common denominator to several basic problems that arise in all kinds of libraries or in their separate departments, problems suitable for analysis by an outside consultant. Generally, self-examination reduces these to the questions: "Where do we go from here?" or, "Is this the best and most effective way to do this?"—and sometimes, of course, "How did we ever get into this condition?" Such questions often arise as a result of opinionated expressions or stalemated actions by contentious personalities, and the consultant may need to serve only as an arbiter. Following are some typical examples of situations I have found and which can, by extension, be related to various library problems.

Dealing with collection development, particularly in academic and research libraries, questions arise from examination of the purpose and collecting intentions of the institution's founders as expressed in a charter or terms of a gift. In such a case there may be a legal problem in trying to change from the original purpose, as in the recent transfer of the American Geographical Society collection from New York to Wisconsin. Frequently, because of contending forces, the only objective review of such questions must be made by an outside observer. Through use of a consultant, the difficulties can be reduced to an evaluation of the present importance of original intent, of special interests inside the library, or outside among faculty, administration and students, all in the light of the legal alternatives.

The consultant must know the past and recent history of the library, study the personalities involved, examine the quality of the collections, and consider other factors that are known to have an effect, for example, budget, endowments, grants, or any restrictions that are incurred in funding.

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Similarly, in public libraries both large and smaller there is currently an evaluation of the overall community responsibilities of the library, its various departments, and all of its activities. Special libraries, too, have more and more pressure put upon them to justify their existence to their funding agencies, while at the same time specialist readers make increasing demands upon all of their services. The objective advice of the outside consultant can help in collection development situations and many others, particularly in the organization and composition of policy statements that can give substantive expression to the establishment, purposes, and objectives of a library, its departments, and its collections.

In discussions with the library staff and users of the collections (whether faculty, students, or general public) the consultant for collection development should be able to learn what is required of the library in terms of degree of collecting intensity, both in balance and depth, in all parts of the subject content. This is the point at which the specialized training of the consultant is brought to bear upon the problems of the intellectual worth of the collection. Then, when a clear picture becomes visible, the consultant and the staff together should write a policy statement.

Policy statements give guidance to administrators and to the directors of the organization the library serves. They are written as guidelines and should be stated in broad terms that are neither too restrictive nor too permissive. Their purpose is not exact delineation but to provide signposts toward the accomplishment of a miscellany of stated goals, whether these be for such variables as in-service training of staff or building on the strengths of the collection.

Other factors that may determine the need for a consultant can arise from dissatisfactions expressed by administrators, staff, faculty, or the library's users—students or the public. Most often these groups urge some kind of demand for the improvement of inadequacies of resources or service; others may complain of or question financial deficiencies or budgetary inequities. In collection development there is also always the problem of acquisition of serials versus monographs; and there may also be occasions when weeding programs inspire charges of dissolution of the collections. These are a few typical examples of situations when a consultant may be useful.

The consultant can help establish sound policy in handling gift collections for collection development. While the library staff should be free to solicit gifts pertinent to the collection, no gift should ever be accepted with any strings attached (such as keeping the collection

together, not circulating the books, etc.) unless the restrictions can be modified as the library's needs shift in the future. Donors are generally pleased with the suggestion of gift or memorial bookplates, and the library should try to attain these as the limit of special conditions of handling.

Appraisals of gift collections are often needed, particularly for tax deductions of gifts to tax-exempt institutions. Appraisals should be made by qualified experts who are aware of current values in the antiquarian book market. Consultants with qualifications for development of collections can supply such appraisals. Librarians' evaluations of gifts to the value of \$300 are generally acceptable, although acceptability varies with the Internal Revenue Service from \$100 to \$500 from time to time. The donor is generally expected to pay for an appraisal, the cost of which is a tax deduction for him in addition to that for the value of the gift, but most institutions do not hesitate to pay for the appraisal of an important gift if the donor resists an additional expense.

Returning to the main subject, consultants can be useful when problems arise in any factional disagreements affecting the library. They can also be helpful when the library wishes to embark upon a new project, program, or building, the details of which are not easily learned or the problems of which may not be immediately recognizable because of the staff's lack of experience. The consultant, in any of these situations, can serve as a dispassionate arbiter or an expert tutor when he is fully informed and has gained the confidence of the library he is called upon to help.

How to Obtain a Consultant

Perhaps the best way to find a consultant for any particular service is to inquire among colleagues. Those who spend a large part of their time in consultative and appraisal work find that most jobs come through the recommendations of persons for whom they have worked previously or from the reading of something they have written. Advertisements that some consultants use from time to time only serve to keep their names in mind, and they are pleased, of course, to send references to inquirers.

Librarians will be aware that there are now easily available directories of consultants, some more detailed than others, and a number of these are updated more or less frequently.¹ In the library and museum fields, some professional associations and, indeed, federal, state or city offices keep lists of consultants and their specialties. A few professional

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library associations are making greater effort these days to develop lists of qualified consultants.

Directories do not indicate fees charged by consultants, but my most recent inquiries (in winter 1979) show that one should not consider searching for the best-qualified experts for less than an average rate of \$80 an hour for up to three hours; or, beyond three hours, \$300 a day. Charges include site visits and time spent in writing reports. Such fees will undoubtedly increase, as inflationary trends already indicate. Clients are expected to pay for usual expenses such as transportation, lodging, food, and miscellaneous charges (tips, baggage checks, local taxis, etc.). It is a practice for consultants who must travel great distances (thereby killing a day's work time) to charge the travel day as a regular full work day, in both directions. Some adjustment of fees may be possible, especially if a long-term project is involved. I am aware, for example, of one very expert, long-experienced, thoroughly successful library consultant who charges over \$500 a day but who is perfectly satisfied with special 4-day workweek projects at \$1500 plus expenses. In any case, expect to pay fees similar to those noted or higher, and be glad you are not looking for financial, engineering, or business management consultants.

What to Do When the Consultant Comes

When negotiations for a consultant have been concluded, a letter of contract confirming the terms should be sent to the consultant. The institution should also send whatever the consultant may think is relevant before appearing on the scene. This will probably include a history of the library, annual reports for the past five years, and additional documentation to study regarding the problems for which consultation is needed.

I have commented on the importance of looking at the consulting experience as a two-way exchange of ideas and opinions. *Above all, it is necessary that staff, administration, and faculty who may be concerned in any way in the problem under review know in advance that a consultant will be arriving.* The consultant's assignment should be made clear, and everybody should know that they will have access to him to discuss relevant issues. Very nasty situations arise when careless library boards and librarians call in a consultant without advising the staff or faculty. This mistake is unnecessary and only hampers an advisor's access to facts, while it antagonizes staff toward the administration and the consultant.

The director of the library and the chairman of the library committee should be the immediate correspondents of the consultant, and it should be made clear to the consultant to whom the final report is to be addressed.² It should be arranged that staff and other interested persons may have direct access to the consultant during the site visit without the approval of supervisors, except for time to be taken from assigned work, and the consultant's availability should be made clear to staff members. This is particularly important when there are elements of gripe or personal controversy.

The librarian should provide a quiet base where the visitor may work and interviews may be held comfortably. Depending upon the nature of the consultation, telephone, typewriter, or part-time clerical and secretarial service should be offered. For major, long-term studies it is advisable for the consultant to describe his purposes and procedures at a staff meeting soon after he has settled in, where he can answer questions that are troubling staff and at the same time invite staff participation.

A practice that I find effective in discussing projects with staff or faculty is to assure them that in matters with which they are concerned, I will review my recommendations with them, and they will have the opportunity to correct errors or misunderstandings on my part. Although I will not plan to alter my recommendations, I sometimes incorporate opposing statements in the report for equal consideration by the authorities if they seem sufficiently important expressions of opinion. In a study of the Toronto Public Library, for instance, the music librarian and I saw things entirely differently, so the report included her counterargument in its entirety.

In early talks with the librarian, the consultant clarifies his understanding of the purpose of his visit, attempts to learn of any anticipated problems with boards, staff, faculty, or students, and tries to discover exactly what the administration hopes will come from the study. The answers to these questions help the consultant to direct his inquiries and to evaluate the level at which his report should be written.

As soon as possible, the consultant should direct his attention to the problems he has been asked to examine. When his preliminary conclusions are in suitable form he should review the report with everyone concerned, so far as is practicable, explaining (as mentioned above) his plan to incorporate ideas at variance with his own. The profession of consultancy is based upon subjective capabilities, experience, and trust or acceptance on the part of the client, which the good consultant can inspire. There are only commonplace rules: the

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consultant must be knowledgeable in the fields in which he chooses to operate. He must be practical and realistic, and these elements of his training should be based on an underlying moral sense of objectivity and impartiality guided by the best theoretical concepts of his professional and personal ideals.

Some practical applications of the consulting process may be shown in a few examples drawn from my activities over the past quarter-century in collection development.

The question arises about "new libraries from scratch." Today these are most likely to be special libraries, since public and academic libraries across the nation are handicapped by financial strictures.

If an organization plans to establish a subject collection, a professional librarian with subject-related experience should be at hand to plan space, staffing, equipment, and materials. Setting up any special library is a waste of money if a budget is not guaranteed to support it for at least a three-year trial period, with a program set forth for five to ten years of growth (depending, of course, upon the anticipated growth of the parent organization). A written policy statement for the library should be agreed upon and followed for as long as it is useful, and always be subject to thoughtful change. If the consultant is a subject specialist in the area covered by the library, he should estimate the cost of materials—book stock, serial subscriptions, etc.—based upon the latest general market analyses, and projecting inflationary increases. He should prepare lists for acquisitions, probably similar to the holdings of other comparable libraries, and with the aid of specialized bibliographies. The specialist consultant should establish personnel guidelines for the selection of the staff and, according to the best qualifications of professional standards, make recommendations for likely candidates. Basic to the entire library development is an agreed-upon policy statement and the support that management gives it.

The core collection of any special library is likely to be similar to others in its field. Developing a collection's special subject emphases beyond this point is what will give a library its individuality and its particular service capabilities. The success of collection development from this time on will depend upon the imagination and capacities of the librarian or consultants, the support given to the library by both the administration and users, and sensitive interpretation of the policy statement and its evolutionary change over a period of time.

In facing problems of collection development, it is important to recognize the objectives of the program. Most collection development is meant to extend or redirect acquisition of current material, or to fill

gaps in an existing collection. Sometimes both current and retrospective literatures must be considered. Consultation with the librarian and his staff determines what is needed.

It is an expensive waste of time for the consultant to provide itemized lists of recommended additions. Usually, basic selection can be done from specialized bibliographies that the consultant will define for the library to check against holdings. This exercise is valuable for the staff as well as the collection. The consultant, as a subject specialist, will review the selected lists that have been checked in order to calculate the staff's judgment and to make additional suggestions. In libraries overwhelmed with day-to-day staff assignments, the administration must provide for schedule adjustments that allow time for checking and compiling book lists.

A useful way to handle the compilation of desiderata lists is to divide the library's classification scheme (Dewey groups or LC alphabetical divisions) among the relevant departments of the library (or in smaller libraries, among a few staff) to cover a part of the classification for review by the consultant on each successive visit. For each division of the classification, I counsel librarians to find no fewer than five bibliographies for each subject field. If more finely divided specialized bibliographies are found within the subject field, they should be considered in addition to the basic five, and not as alternates.

The bibliographies should be studied and their limitations known. They should be checked against holdings, and titles not in the collection should be discussed with the subject staff and divided into primary and secondary desiderata. It is important for everyone to review the lists as though cost is of no consideration and money will come from a bottomless well, since at this point only the quality of the desiderata is being measured.

The two desiderata lists should be reviewed by the consultant who will suggest additions and adjustments. The primary desiderata will be objects of first purchase, and here the factor of cost will determine whether or not purchase is possible, although they will remain targets for gifts. Desiderata lists should be kept current by continual additions and revisions if quality is to remain the factor for collection additions.

Building a viable collection of quality is one aspect of collection development, but it is equally important for useless or irrelevant books to be weeded from collections of any size. Every library's ideas about weeding policies, storage programs, or sale of materials no longer pertinent vary. Here, indeed, is the place for an experienced consultant. Every library's statement of purposes and intentions with regard to these

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subjects is fraught with the likelihood of internal dissension, external criticism, and public antagonism. Only personal battles between the librarian and department heads concerning weeding ever seem to create animosities of such bitter intensity. And yet amicable and practical solutions are possible.³ It is seldom difficult to persuade opponents of the benefits of weeding—whether for storage or sale—when they can be assured of the accessibility of the same materials, the value of space saved, the ease of use of shelf collections relieved of never- or seldom-used books, and even of the gold that can be transmuted from books that for *this* library are but dross.

The consultant who is asked to weed any collection, large or small, must be what is called a “bookman.” Such a person applies to the task a test of the usefulness of each book in a particular library. For example, during the past nine years (with at least three more to go), I have spent about ten weeks a year—one week a month—weeding the collections of the American Museum of Natural History. The objective is to sort out from the general collection a History of Natural History Rare Book & Manuscript Collection, which is by now an outstanding resource, and at the same time to rid the general collections of duplicate and out-of-scope books. My knowledge of the literature of some areas is scant, so for each science—ichthyology, for example—before I begin weeding, I study four or five histories of the subject, and examine many specialist bookdealers’ catalogs (both old and current) and bibliographies. I talk with the departmental curatorial staff, and learn considerably more about the subject than I will long retain. After weeding, I arrange for the museum’s scientific staff—all of them, because of overlapping departmental interests—to review my candidates for removal from the collection. There are seldom any disputes about my selection. This kind of review process protects the weeder and, as he becomes more expert, encourages staff confidence and respect. Similar procedures can be applied to the needs of any library and its clientele.

Quicker but less intellectual weeding can be done on the practical basis of cutoff dates or circulation records.⁴ It has been said that a book that has not circulated in the past ten years will not circulate in the next ten either, and the recent Pittsburgh studies prove this view.⁵ One can also attempt to apply complex algebraic weeding formulas that have infested the literature in the past decade. Less intelligent methods have been used in weeding.⁶ But I am persuaded that the unreasoned reasoning of the prepared and experienced bookman who studies the books at the shelf can weed a collection most effectively. Most libraries cannot afford the staff time for this procedure to be done in-house, so it is an

economy to call upon the outside expert.

Too often, librarians or library boards take a simple way to dispose of books by sale to a local bookdealer, without considering the fact that such books may have unusual monetary value. And frequently, neither the librarian nor even a reputable general bookdealer has sufficient idea of the special worth of a collection of discarded items. Elsewhere I have presented in full my opinion and reasons why it is most often more profitable to dispose of special collection or miscellaneous duplicates and out-of-scope books at public auction, although there are occasions, if a collection is not too large, when specialist dealers might be invited to offer bids.⁷ Usually auction houses charge about 25 percent of the gross, which is reasonable considering the cataloging, in-house insurance, clerical work, and publicity that goes into every sale. For example, collections of one of my clients netted over \$300,000 and two other collections about \$120,000 at auction. It is my custom to work on a daily fee basis in examining a collection and advising how to dispose of it, rather than for a percentage of the sale price (although some advisors prefer the latter terms).

Storage programs are of questionable worth unless considerable space will be saved and book or periodical stock will be kept easily accessible. In the latter case, 24-hour delivery is generally considered desirable. The availability of cost-free space on campus, for example, often turns out to be temporary, and rented storage plus transport costs have risen at unbelievable rates recently. In any case, temperature, humidity, fire, and security controls are as essential in storage collections as in the library, and the cost of construction, installation, or adaptation today usually makes the necessary investment prohibitive. Even regional cooperative storage programs of several institutions must be questioned; witness the closing after many years of the Hampshire Interlibrary Center. It should be noted that relatively successful storage operations are very costly to their members (for example, the Medical Library Center in New York).

Although it is useful to study the possibility of a storage plan, the most likely beneficial solution is diminution of the collections by judicious weeding. But such weeding must be extensive if it is to provide better collections by removing books no longer of interest. For example, weeding at the American Museum of Natural History has provided no increase in book space because books are added to the collection at the rate of fifteen linear feet each week. Here, the library is having to claim additional stack space in a remodeled exhibition hall about equal to half its present area, which houses more than 350,000 volumes.

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By employing an outside specialist, a library adds to the effective knowledge of the staff through the application of the consultant's experience, based on years of observation through assimilation and understanding of varying conditions in many different situations. In a sense, employing a consultant is a turning to objective reasoning when the forest is obscured by the trees. Use of consultants can save hours of staff time that are spent discussing details, exceptions, and limitations that are too often unnecessary barriers to creative thought. A worthy consultant can eliminate problems and offer alternatives that will be adaptable within a systematic operation. He occasionally even provides wholly new ideas that will give new impetus and better direction to the library.

References

1. See, for example, Berry, John N., ed. *Directory of Library Consultants*. New York, Bowker, 1969; and Wasserman, Paul, and McLean, Janice, eds. *Consultants and Consulting Organizations Directory: A Reference Guide to Concerns and Individuals Engaged in Consultation for Business and Industry*. 4th ed. Detroit, Mich., Gale Research, 1979.
2. Although, on one occasion when I submitted six copies of an extensive public library survey that had cost nearly \$8000 and taken three months' time, the librarian's associate asked whether I had kept a copy for myself. On assuring him that of course I had, he said: "That's good, because this is the last we'll see of these. He's got three other surveys in his bottom drawer." It turned out to be so. No one on the library board which had commissioned my survey ever inquired about it, and the librarian died a year or so later. I believe he must have been buried with his unused surveys. They have never surfaced!
3. See Ash, Lee. *Yale's Selective Book Retirement Program*. Hamden, Conn., Archon Books, 1963.
4. See Trueswell, Richard W. "A Quantitative Measure of User Circulation Requirements and Its Possible Effect on Stack Thinning and Multiple Copy Determination," *American Documentation* 16:20-25, Jan. 1965, and other articles by Trueswell. For a simplified summary of his findings, see _____ "Growing Libraries: Who Needs Them? A Statistical Basis for the No-Growth Collection." In Daniel Gore, ed. *Farewell to Alexandria: Solutions to Space, Growth, and Performance Problems of Libraries*. Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1976, pp. 72-104.
5. Kent, Allen, et al. *A Cost-Benefit Model of Some Critical Library Operations in Terms of Use of Materials*. Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Office of Communications Programs, April 1978. (PB 282 059/5GA) See also discussion of this report: Schad, Jasper G., et al. "Pittsburgh University Studies of Collection Usage: A Symposium," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 5:60-70, May 1979.
6. One large library, when it moved to a new building about thirty years ago, actually junked over 10,000 volumes because they were represented in its catalog by old-fashioned half-cards. The decision was made by a head cataloger without any opposition from a lethargic administration. Who can imagine the loss!
7. Ash, Lee. "Hidden Treasures: Protect, Insure, or Sell?" *The De-acquisitions Librarian* 1:1, 4, Summer 1976. Reprinted, with comment, as "Increasing Sources of Books, Manuscripts," *AB Bookman's Weekly* 59:587-88, Jan. 31, 1977; see also "Mail Box" (reply), *AB Bookman's Weekly* 59:1384, March 7, 1977.

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