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Daniel C. Mack, "The New Collection Development: Planning and Assessment to Promote Innovation" (2015). *Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference*.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284316262>

The New Collection Development: Planning and Assessment to Promote Innovation

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Abstract

Library collections are in the midst of a radical transformation. Rapidly evolving technology, innovations in distributing and accessing content, new models of pricing, repurposing of library spaces, and shrinking collections budgets create a new environment for collection development. This new environment requires that librarians participate in a variety of new collection development activities beyond just selecting content.

In the emerging library collection development landscape librarians must engage with the disciplinary content of collections as well as a range of other areas. New areas of responsibility might include: information technology, including issues of personal data curation; copyright, open access, and scholarly communication; new modes for delivery of content; budgeting, development, fundraising, and stewardship of resources; collections issues regarding space, preservation, curation, and storage of collections in all formats; and integrating collections issues into instruction, reference, readers' advisory, programming and other engagement with the library's users, and funders and other stakeholders.

These and other activities continue to take an increasing amount of time and effort on the part of collection development librarians. In many cases, however, librarians and library administrators are not adequately prepared to incorporate these activities into their portfolios. The audience will engage in a dialog about incorporating new and emerging collection development activities into training programs, strategic plans, work plans, and assessment activities. Attendees will leave with tools for incorporating innovation into their institutions' operations.

We all know that library collections are in the midst of a radical transformation. Rapidly evolving technology, innovations in distributing and accessing content, new models of pricing, repurposing of library spaces, and shrinking collections budgets create a new environment for collection development. This new environment requires that librarians participate in a variety of new collection development activities beyond just selecting content. This paper focuses on academic libraries, and the issues are broadly applicable to libraries of all types and sizes.

In the emerging library collection development landscape librarians must engage with the disciplinary content of collections as well as a range of other areas. Some of the traditional areas of concern for collection development include:

- Subject coverage
- Scope and depth
- Geographic coverage

- Chronological coverage
- Languages
- Formats

With changes in technology, user needs, funding, and library services, collection development personnel have adopted new duties. New areas of responsibility might include:

- Diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Information technology, including issues of personal data curation and bibliographic citation management
- Copyright, open access, digital rights management, and scholarly communication
- New modes for delivery of content, including demand-driven acquisition and other types of evidence-based collection development

- Budgeting, development, fundraising, and stewardship of resources
- Collections issues regarding space, preservation, curation, storage, and access to collections in all formats
- Integrating collections issues into instruction, reference, readers' advisory, programming and other engagement with the library's users, and funders and other stakeholders

These and other activities continue to take an increasing amount of time and effort on the part of collection development librarians. In many cases, however, librarians and library administrators are not adequately prepared to incorporate these activities into their portfolios. This paper addresses the process of incorporating these new collection development issues into the library's planning and assessment programs. It does not focus on the specifics of planning and assessment. A selected bibliography provides recent sources for information about planning and assessment for collection development.

Most libraries address at least some of these emerging issues. However, many libraries do not view these issues through the perspective of collection development activities.

A holistic approach to planning and assessment should not only involve collections issues, but also include collection development personnel. They can bring their unique perspectives to the conversation, as well as ensure that library-wide efforts address collection development priorities and policies. Unfortunately, many libraries focus on collections as objects while excluding the programmatic endeavors that are part of the art and science of collection development. For example, in your library, how is collection development involved in planning and assessment for decisions about matters such as planning for library spaces, acquisition of and training for new technologies, and issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion? All of these concerns affect not just library collections, but also the art and science of collection development. How can planning and assessment holistically incorporate collection

development to encourage innovative ideas and new projects?

In the 21st century we have incorporated new roles for collection development librarians. The transformation from bibliographer to subject specialist has already happened in most academic libraries. As part of this metamorphosis, librarians with collection development responsibilities may now also serve as liaisons to specific user communities; act as teachers for information literacy, media use, and lifelong learning; mentor users as research consultants and interpreters of content; and serve as coordinators of spaces and technologies that promote use of collections. These new roles are necessary to promote innovation and foster success among our users. Holistic collection development planning and assessment require:

- A library-wide commitment to a holistic view of not just collections, but also of collection development
- Engagement and outreach beyond the library and the academy
- Accountability at every level, including frontline personnel, supervisors, department heads, and senior administrators
- Ongoing planning and assessment to direct resources to strategic priorities
- Support for innovation, which by definition means doing new things, or doing old things differently

Individual personnel should incorporate innovation, assessment, and planning into their own work plans, which should likewise inform departmental tactical plans. The library's organization-wide strategic planning should both reflect and inform departmental and individual planning activities.

Administrators can incorporate innovation throughout every level of planning in several ways:

- Asking each subject specialist, curator, archivist, or other collection development

librarian to identify how their collection development activities can support innovation

- Incorporating at least one collection development goal that supports an innovative initiative into each librarian's work plan
- Always focusing on developing *user-focused* collections
- Being an advocate for both collections and users

For example, individual work plans could include activities such as:

- Supporting development of a library maker space by de-duplicating print serials runs for which the library has perpetual access to reliable digital surrogates
- Supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion by working with acquisitions to ensure that licenses for digital resources permit reformatting of content for users with special needs
- Supporting faculty grant applications by collaborating with technology personnel to advise on data curation requirements

One important issue to address is how to identify relevant data to collect and analyze, and how to employ this data in the creation of meaningful assessment measures relating to new collection development activities. Some specific examples from individual work plans might include the following questions:

- How many volumes can I withdraw? Translate this into how many square feet of library space can be repurposed to support the new innovative maker space.
- How many licenses will I review? How many users requested assistance with content reformatting?
- How many faculty did I assist with grants? What is the total dollar value of the grants?

There are two important considerations to keep in mind. First, who will coordinate data collection? Establishing specific personnel responsible for gathering, analyzing, and reporting data is vital. And second, everyone in the organization must recognize that not everything is quantifiable. When appropriate, any assessment plan including collection development should identify qualitative measures as well.

Of course, planning and assessment to support innovation requires not only action on the part of frontline personnel, but also commitment and effort from supervisors and administrators. Management can begin by taking some initial steps:

- Requiring innovation in individual work plans
- Rewarding success and permit failure. Note: success in this case means trying something new that supports strategic priorities. Exploration sometimes must permit failure.
- Engaging collection development librarians in decisions about spaces, programs, and technology in all aspects of library planning
- Providing tools, technology, and resources necessary for new initiatives
- Being an advocate for your collection development librarians within the library, throughout the institution, to the central administration, and to external partners
- Making middle managers central to successful planning and assessment in a large organization
- *Not calling something a priority if you are unwilling to allocate resources to it*

Assessing collection development should be an ongoing activity. Unfortunately, many libraries confuse analysis of *collections* with assessment of *collection development activities*. Assessment can include issues such as evaluation of *collection content* to redirect resources in support of changing mission and goals of the institution,

including curricular changes, redirection of the research enterprise, especially if the institution supports advanced research, and the needs of other stakeholders such as citizens for land-grant institutions. Assessment of *collection formats* can enable the library to make creative and informed decisions about leveraging budgets, supporting the needs of specific disciplines, and empowering users with special needs. Assessment of *collection spaces and facilities* can help in the development of technology-rich, collaborative spaces that promote innovation and creativity, as well as provide for excellent, state of the art support for print and other legacy formats (this is also a good opportunity to educate stakeholders that user spaces *are* collections spaces). Assessment of *collection-related technology* can facilitate discovery, access, and use of collections in all media and formats, and can also offer users new tools to explore the content of collections and to create new information.

Many libraries already do many of these activities, but may not be coordinating, budgeting, or evaluating these activities holistically. A holistic approach requires that the library be programmatic in its planning and assessment endeavors. A move from *random activities* to *demonstrable results* is as much a change of mind-set as it is a change of action. To make this happen, a library must:

- Incorporate support for innovation into collection development activities
- Include activities in individual work plans, departmental tactical plans, and library-wide strategic priorities
- Hold frontline personnel, managers, and administrators accountable
- Work with your institutional culture
- Keep it simple and start small

Many librarians and managers have found that checklists are one easy and effective way to keep track of new activities. A variety of widely available formats makes the creation of useful checklists easy. Libraries can use Word, PDFs, web forms, or whatever other format works best for their institution. Some content for a planning and assessment checklist for collection development librarians includes:

- Reviewing collection development policies: do they address spaces, technology, diversity, and other issues?
- Polling faculty and students for new initiatives in teaching and research and other innovation endeavors
- Asking the following questions: what priorities drive the rest of the library, and what are their synergies with your collection development activities?

As in every collection development activity, communication and collaboration are the keys to success.

Managers and senior administrators can also benefit from a checklist covering such issues as:

- Providing staff with the training, technology, tools, and other resources necessary for innovation
- Involving collection development librarians with planning and assessment at every level
- Viewing collection development librarians as experts and resources for user needs in all library programs and operations

It is worth repeating that, as in every new initiative, communication, and collaboration are the key to success.

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