

Collection Management Strategies for Archivists

JUTTA REED-SCOTT

Abstract: How can librarians and archivists effectively carry out the traditional responsibility of collecting, organizing, preserving, and providing information in the turbulent environment of the next decade? It is clear that the traditional ways of operating are being transformed. The continuing excellence of libraries and archives will depend on the ability to direct this transformation. Collection management—the systematic, planned, documented process of building, maintaining, and preserving collections—provides effective tools to shape archival collections in the future. Specifically, it encompasses four components. Planning is the most essential function in collection management, and the development of a written collection development policy is a crucial step in this planning process. A second important aspect of collection management is efficient selection or acquisition of needed materials. The third component of collection management is the ongoing evaluation and analysis of collections. Finally, fundamental to collection management is the concept of cooperative collection development and resource sharing. In summary, collection management aims to apply the basic components of the planning process to building and maintaining collections.

About the author: Jutta Reed-Scott is collections development specialist, Association of Research Libraries, Office of Management Studies. She previously served as director of collection development and bibliographic control at Dartmouth College Library from 1980 to 1983. Between 1975 and 1980 she worked as collections development librarian at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Other previous positions held include associate humanities librarian at M.I.T.; head, Reference Department, George Washington University; and cataloger, Harvard University and the University of Michigan.

She has been an active participant in professional associations and organizations. She chaired the ALA Collection Management and Development Committee from 1979 to 1982. Most recently she has played an active role in planning a series of regional collection management and development institutes and she currently serves as chair of the Planning Subcommittee on Regional Collection Management and Development Institutes. She is a frequent lecturer and has presented papers at ALA, ACRL, and regional conferences.

Her publications include: "R. K. Gardner, Library Collections, their Origin, Selection, and Development." Forthcoming review in *Journal of Academic Librarianship*; "Collection Analysis Project in the M.I.T. Libraries," in *New Horizons for Academic Libraries: Papers presented at the First National Conference of the Association of College and Research Libraries*, Boston, 8–11 November 1978 (New York, Saur, 1979): 490–495; and (with John G. Crane and John L. McDill), "The Dartmouth College Storage Library," *Dartmouth College Library Bulletin* 22 (April 1982): 40–46.

This article is a revised version of the core session paper presented at the 46th annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists, 20 October 1982, in Boston, Massachusetts.

Libraries and archives today share the feeling of standing at a historic divide and facing an uncertain future. The problems of the 1980s are all too familiar. They are characterized by a troubled national economy, declining resources for public and private institutions, expanding information, and rapid technological changes.

How can librarians and archivists effectively carry out the traditional responsibility of collecting, organizing, preserving, and providing information in the turbulent environment of the coming decade? It is clear that our traditional ways of operating are being transformed. The continuing excellence of libraries and archives will depend on our ability to control the flood of publications and records and to cope with the demands of the emerging information society. To meet this challenge, libraries are using collection management as a more systematic approach to shaping library collections in the future.

Archives and manuscripts, because of their qualities of uniqueness, present problems that differ from those relating to printed materials. Despite substantial differences in institutional organization, function, and purpose, libraries and archives have similar responsibilities. While our respective problems may differ, both libraries and archives can reap benefits from collection management strategies.

Only in the past few years has collection development evolved into collection management. Collection development focuses on the building of collections and implies a process of continuing growth. It relates more to our earlier periods of affluence, such as those of the 1960s. Collection management in libraries gained momentum in the late

1970s and was fueled by the economic retrenchment and decline of the 1970s and 1980s. It is the systematic, planned, documented process of building, maintaining, and preserving collections. Specifically, collection management encompasses the following four components: (1) collection planning; (2) effective selection; (3) evaluation or analysis of the collections; and (4) resource sharing and coordinated collection development.

The overall goal of collection management is to make "the process of acquiring materials, developing collections, [and] managing the growth and maintenance of collections"¹ cost-effective and user-beneficial. Collection management is thus a tool that enables libraries and archives to demonstrate to their parent institutions how funds are allocated and spent. Most importantly, it provides the means for coping more effectively with limited funds, staff, and space.

Planning is an essential function in collection management. The drafting of a written collection development policy is an important first step in this planning process. Such a policy is a statement of long- and short-range needs, of acquisition priorities, and of collecting boundaries. Some archives have a primary obligation to support their institution's educational, research, and administrative use; and the scope of their collections is easily defined. Others will find the process of establishing collecting goals difficult and time-consuming. Nevertheless, written collection policies are needed for all archives. They have many benefits. By defining the inclusion or exclusion of materials, they sharpen the focus of the collecting strategy and concentrate accessions in a clearly defined area. To that end, they are vital

¹American Library Association. Collection Management and Development Committee. "Guidelines for Coordinated and Cooperative Collection Development in Consortia and Networks" (unpublished fourth revised working draft, prepared by Paul Mosher and Marcia Pankake, June 1982), p. 5.

tools in dealing with donors. Collection policies can be a great help in showing a donor how the sought-after gift will fit into the overall collection. Equally important, policies will assist in dealing with unwanted materials. They forestall ad hoc decisions and minimize what F. Gerald Ham has called the acquisition of "random bits and pieces," as well as provide a documented rationale for rejecting gifts that are outside of the overall collecting scope. Most importantly, collection policies will facilitate coordination and cooperation among local and regional archives. During the last three decades we have witnessed the expansion and proliferation of archives and the concomitant dispersal of unpublished primary sources. While collection development policies alone will not halt this fragmentation or end the competition for collections, the shared understanding of collection strategies will engender cooperative collection development.

Strong support for developing collection guidelines exists in abundance in current archival literature. Unfortunately there is no generally agreed-upon structure or content for such guidelines. Such prior agreement on the format of the documentation is essential.

The history of library efforts to develop collection development policies suggests that such a framework plays a critical role. In the early 1970s there was much discussion of the need for collection development policies and very little action. This impasse was finally broken in the mid-seventies, when the American Library Association Development Committee set the guidelines for formulating collection development policies. In these guidelines the essential shared elements are identified, a format is suggested, and a standard terminology is established.²

Soon after publication of these guidelines in 1979, a number of libraries made a concerted effort to write policies. Among these were the General Library at the University of California-Berkeley, Stanford University Library, and Princeton University Library. The effectiveness of the ALA guidelines was demonstrated in these statements. Exemplary policies that were influential in the preparation of similar documents in other libraries were provided.

Although some of the elements of library collection development policies will not be applicable to archives, the essential elements are similar. These would include the users to be served and the kinds of programs supported. The policy statement should also include documentation of the legal, regulatory, or policy requirements of the institution. In addition, subject boundaries should be defined; the general priorities and limitations governing selection should be provided; and inclusions or exclusions of specific languages, geographical areas, or chronological periods should be noted. Most importantly, collecting activity or intensity in various subjects should be indicated. This brief list of essential elements suggests the kinds of data libraries include in policy statements; it is quite likely that additional data elements are needed for archives.

It is certainly true that the great archives of the world have not been shaped in accordance with clearly documented acquisition guidelines, but it is equally evident that the days of the great builders have passed. In today's environment of limited resources, policies become increasingly urgent. Problems of coping with the massive postwar information demand a systematic, planned, and defined collection strategy. Development of an agreed-upon frame-

²American Library Association. Collection Development Committee, *Guidelines for Collection Development* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1979).

work for acquisition policies is an essential first step. This would prepare the foundation upon which to build a set of national collection guidelines for archives.

While the collection development policy contains definitions of the parameters and an underlying rationale, only effective selection of materials translates the policy into practice. The process of selection to meet user needs will always call for special skills, judgment, informed knowledge of the existing collections, and a large dose of serendipity.

Collection management focuses on the need to build coherent collections and to make the process as consistent, cost-effective, and user-beneficial as possible. To meet these goals, selection should be pro-active; that is, acquisitions should be actively chosen and not merely passively accepted. Selection should recognize the need for increased specialization. Few archives or libraries can afford to sustain comprehensive collections in a number of subjects. Instead, emphasis should be given to the establishment of solid islands of institutional commitment and strength. Most importantly, effective selection should be carried out on two levels. The first is local and the second is interactive on a regional or national scale with other institutions. In addition to meeting local user needs, effective selection should operate within the context of resource sharing. Archives, like libraries, will have to make their local selections "within a much different environment, one in which each archive and library is not a self-contained entity, but a compo-

nent of an undefined whole."³ This need to prepare for planned interdependence is a critical concern for libraries and archives.

It is, of course, evident that collection management does not offer a new theory of selection. Rather, it underscores the pivotal role of planning, consistency, and coordination in selection. In addition, it offers an effective strategy to utilize limited resources in archives and libraries.

The third component of collection management is the ongoing evaluation and analysis of the collections. In recent years there has been a renewed emphasis on assessment. Library literature reflects a wide range of approaches to assessment of collections. An excellent survey of various methodologies was published by George S. Bonn⁴ in 1974. A more recent summary of available techniques was prepared by Paul H. Mosher.⁵

The primary purpose of collection evaluation is to determine how well the library's collection meets the institution's present and future information goals. Another purpose is the identification of materials that can be discarded or moved to auxiliary storage or that require preservation. In the 1980s, however, a further pressing need for collection evaluation is emerging. The increasing emphasis on coordination and cooperation requires adequate information on the holdings of other libraries and an assessment of the strengths, quality, size, and richness of existing collections.

One model for a nationwide collection evaluation effort is the Research Libraries Group effort. For the past two

³Patricia Battin quoted in American Library Association. Collection Management and Development Committee. "Guidelines," p. 1.

⁴George S. Bonn, "Evaluation of the Collection," *Library Trends* 22 (January 1974): 265-304.

⁵Paul H. Mosher, "Collection Evaluation or Analysis: Matching Library Acquisitions to Library Needs," in Robert D. Stuart and George B. Miller, eds., *Collection Development in Libraries: A Treatise* (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1980), pp. 527-545.

years, the members of RLG have undertaken a comprehensive, coordinated collection evaluation project. Information about collection strength is gathered in a series of worksheets for about 4,000 separate subject descriptors. At present, subject descriptors for each discipline are derived from Library of Congress subject classifications and modified and expanded as necessary. Member libraries analyze their collections and supply coded values. The first value represents existing collection strength and the second indicates current collecting intensity. The coded values are single-digit numbers from zero to five, which define collecting intensity levels from minimal to exhaustive. After each library has completed the worksheets, the information is merged; and revised worksheets are distributed to all participants. Among the fields evaluated by RLG libraries are languages, literatures and linguistics, fine arts, history, physical sciences, religion, and various social sciences. The information on collection strengths is also maintained in a machine-readable file and is available for on-line searching. At present, a researcher can determine with a few key strokes from a RLIN terminal which RLG library holds a strong collection in a particular subject field. Beyond the RLG effort, a number of members of the Association of Research Libraries have tested the RLG methodology; and indications are that ARL libraries will also undertake this in-depth coordinated collection evaluation.

Implementation of a nationwide plan to assess collection strengths is important for the future of archives. I believe that there is a unique opportunity to build on this RLG effort. To that end, I recommend that a study of the RLG coordinated collection evaluation effort be made to determine what could be useful for archives. Although there are differences between library and archival

collections, I nevertheless believe that a nationwide analysis of archival collections would undoubtedly be as revealing and worthwhile as has been the evaluation of library collections.

Finally, fundamental to collection management is the concept of cooperative collection development and resource sharing. We often use these terms interchangeably, but there are some significant differences. Resource sharing programs are intended to link users with needed material and information regardless of where that material is located. Resource sharing activities may range from informal understandings among two or more institutions to formal multi-institutional consortia networks. The traditional means of sharing resources is through inter-library loan. On the other hand, the concept of cooperative collection management calls for a commitment to coordinate acquisition policies and decisions among participating institutions.

While there are today more than 800 formal library consortia, only limited advances have been made in coordinated collection development. Libraries have paid lip service to coordinated collection development, but translating broad theoretical goals into practice has been a slow process. There are a few successful models. One effective program has been developed in California. The University of California system and Stanford University commit 3 percent of their acquisition budgets to a shared acquisition program. Decisions on what to purchase are administered by the bibliographers from the participating institutions. Other statewide coordinated collection development programs are being planned in Colorado and in Missouri. Finally, the libraries in the North Carolina Research Triangle have actively pursued collection coordination; and these efforts have been strengthened through outside funding.

Aside from these few successful examples, the history of library cooperation amply demonstrates that it takes much longer than anticipated to develop working programs. Effective coordinated collection development programs require top-level administrative commitment, active involvement of staff, strong financial support, and extensive communication. They also entail an effective document delivery mechanism and automated bibliographic control of the holdings of all participating institutions.

For libraries, the traditional approach to delivery of materials has been liberal lending policies and expedited service to get materials from one institution to another. This approach is not feasible for archives. Instead, photocopying or microfilming of source documents are a necessary and often costly intermediate step. Future improvements in telecommunications, however, may achieve cost savings in providing physical access to unique source materials.

While the nature of archival collections creates problems in sharing materials, the greatest challenge is the improvement of intellectual access to the vast mass of papers and records. Development of automated bibliographic systems is proceeding at an accelerated pace. The technological development of on-line catalogs, which can be accessed from a researcher's office, is already a reality in some institutions. So far the development and growth of the bibliographic utilities have essentially excluded archival materials. At present, out of a total of well over fifteen million bibliographic records in OCLC and RLIN, fewer than 1/4 percent describe manuscripts. David Bearman identified "substantial barriers to the emergence

of a national information system for archives and manuscript depositories." Among these are "inadequate financial incentives for the exchange of data; limited information processing, transmission, or conversion facilities in most institutions; lack of agreement on mechanisms to control vocabulary; and insufficient data on user need."⁶

In the past year enormous progress has been made toward implementing a national archival system. The National Information Systems Task Force has played a pivotal role in developing a national standard for an automated manuscript format. Although the essential steps have been taken, a great educational effort, as well as large financial resources, will be required to support a nationwide bibliographic system for archival materials. At the same time, archives cannot postpone the exploration of coordinated collection development. Despite the current obstacles, many archives have identified ways in which cooperative efforts can reduce duplicating activities; limit fragmented collections; and lessen budget, staff, and space constraints. Coordination on a small scale may achieve important immediate results and lay the groundwork for future expanded resource-sharing activities.

A case in point is the emerging coordination of congressional documents in New Hampshire. A number of New Hampshire libraries hold congressional collections, but there was no systematic plan to assist members of the state's congressional delegation in the disposition of their official papers. To coordinate the congressional collections in New Hampshire, a series of meetings have been held between the New Hampshire State Archivist and representatives from

⁶David Bearman, "Toward National Information Systems for Archives and Manuscript Repositories," *American Archivist* 45 (Winter 1982): 55.

the New Hampshire Historical Society, the University of New Hampshire, and Dartmouth College; and these have resulted in a statewide plan for congressional documents.

While there are only a few successful models of coordinated collection development in libraries and archives, the economic and administrative incentives are becoming increasingly important. The accelerating demands for information are challenging archival practice in many areas. Collection manage-

ment can be an effective tool to shift archives from custodial collection development to planned collection coordination, from emphasis on making collections physically available to providing intellectual and bibliographic access. Most importantly, it underscores the idea that archival management should be carried out in coordination with other institutions. To borrow Michael Gorman's words: "This may be the most serious challenge to your profession—to come together in pursuit of progress."

⁷Michael Gorman, "Thinking the Unthinkable: A Synergetic Profession," *American Libraries* 13 (July/August 1982): 474.