

Collection Management Policy (CMP): A Framework to Achieve Library Goals

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Introduction

There exists plenty of literature discussing the rationale, uses and roles of a CMP in a library. Yet, a significant number of libraries in the developed world and a vast majority in Pakistan do not have such a document. It is a seriously neglected area in local librarianship. Both a review of the literature and practice of libraries in the developed world demonstrate that the formulation of CMP has become a need rather than a norm. In light of the literature reviewed, this paper discusses both the status of CMP as framework to achieve library goals and developments in the theory and practice of CMP.

CMP as Framework

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (2000) states policy is “a plan or course of action, as of a government, political party, or business, intended to influence and determine decisions, actions, and other matters”. The same dictionary defines framework as: “i) A set of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that constitutes a way of viewing reality, ii) A fundamental structure, as for a written work.

These definitions portray the similarities between the purposes of two terms: *policy* and *framework* and justify that a documented policy may work as a framework to materialize the

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philosophy of a library and achieve its goals of managing collections. Evans & Saponaro (2005) also endorse this by stating that, “A policy is a plan....when properly prepared, is in fact the library’s master plan for building and maintaining its collections” (p. 49); [it] provides a framework within which individuals can exercise judgment (p. 52)

The following statement by Clayton and Gorman (2001) too illustrates in a comprehensive manner that it works for “the systematic management of the planning, composition, funding, evaluation and use of library collections over extended periods of time, in order to meet specific institutional objectives” (p. 17). Curley and Broderick (1985) profoundly describe the relationship among philosophy, framework and written policy of developing collection as follows:

The purpose for which libraries exist, the nature of the community and its needs, and the social philosophy, which underlies prevailing principles of selection are interactive elements which contribute to the framework of collection development in any particular library. Whether this framework has taken on the form of a written collection development policy, or not, it exists. To ensure that the balance of elements in the framework reflects and supports the institutions mission is a major reason for codification of collection development policy. (p. 24)

Since 1950 the literature has been mentioning the functions, rationale, and ways in which a policy may help libraries and librarians. Public libraries have a longer tradition of articulating the principles behind their collection development efforts than other types of libraries in USA. They did not only devise library standards but provide models also for other institutions by publishing their policies. For example, Enoch Pratt Free Library (1963), in Baltimore, Maryland, issued its first Books Selection Policy in 1950 which is a good example of the earliest

works done towards this direction. Editors state in the introduction the purpose of writing it as follows:

Much of what it says is and has been for years common place practice in libraries; Perhaps none of it is wholly new, yet the editors have found the attempting to state in precise terms and to carry to logical conclusions these very 'commonplaces' is a process not without value, leading as it often does to new insights into old problems. They hope that others will find in this statement something of the same value, as well as practical guidance in everyday book selection problems...As they are tested in practice, modifications and revisions may well suggest themselves.

Actually, the very definitions of a policy tell about its functions. The literature is full of arguments in favour of a policy. Most of the literature on collection development policy(CDP) and CMP predates electronic era. However, Clayton and Gorman (2001), Friend (2000), Evans (2000); (Evans & Saponaro, 2005), and van, Ziji (1998) writings are creditable to get a view of relatively current situation in the developed world.

Carpenter (1984), Evans (1995, 2000); (Evans & Saponaro 2005); Feng (1979); Friend (2000); Gardner (1981); Gaver (Ed., 1969) Gorman and Howes (1989); Futas (1977, 1995); Magrill and Corbin (1989); Spiller (1991); van Ziji (1998); Ward (1979) and many others repeatedly identify a number of advantages of CDP. For instance, Gardner states that it *forces library staff and governing body to think about library's goal* which is very fundamental for the attainment of library goals [italic added]. The frequently mentioned advantages described by professional experts and academicians are summed up as follows:

- It serves as a planning document
- A means for internal and external communication
- A selection guidance document and keep away personal biases
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of the collections

- Protects against pressures groups
- Decision-making tool for setting the access vs. ownership issues
- Assists in budgetary planning and funds allocations
- Collection evaluation tool
- Keeps consistency over time and regardless of staff turnover
- Deselection and preservation guidance
- Tool for cooperative plans and consortiums.

Above discussion illustrates that a well conceived, planned and precisely written policy should serve as framework to turn the philosophy of a library behind developing and maintaining collections into achievable goals and objectives.

Brief Overview of the Evolution of a Written Policy Statement

The available printed literature on the subject is mostly American and relatively few references from British literature are available. However, policies of different British libraries are available on their websites. There appears use of varying titles to describe this kind of document: from *selection policy* to *acquisition policy* to *collection development or/and collection management policy* (CDP, CMP, CD&MP, and CM&DP). Clayton and Gorman (2001) identify the insufficiency of British literature on CM as a whole. They state that the literature on CMP is even lesser. Books, articles and policies on the web mostly used CDP or both CD&MP or CM&DP; a few used only CMP and treated CDP as part of it. It appears that the literature and libraries by the end of 2010 would prefer to use CMP as a comprehensive term instead of CDP. In this paper the terms selection policy, acquisition policy, CDP and CMP have been used according to their emerged pattern in the literature cited.

The review of available literature identifies not mere benefits but some real problems associated with formulating a

written policy also. Experts like Cargill (1984) and Snow (1996) stress that such a work is not worth doing; yet, a majority of libraries in the developed world have now written policies providing practical guidance to all aspects of CM. They contain goals and purposes of collecting, ways of community analysis, selection principles and practices, priorities among subjects and formats, budget, acquisition methods, special collections, cooperation, evaluation, deselection preservation and conservation. The emergence and proliferation of electronic resources has further forced libraries to formulate comprehensive policies to meet the challenges and needs of the present age.

The literature also demonstrates that the writings on selection principles started appearing during the late nineteenth century, but until 1950 the need for a documented selection policy was not felt. Gaver (ed., 1969) compiled a large number of writings on the policy under the title of “Development of Selection Policy” (pp. 146-359). It is a commendable source to see the important literature till late 1960s on all relevant areas. Then, standards for various types of libraries made firm statements about the need for written CDP in North America. It gained importance after the censorship appeared as a serious issue in North America and selection statements started appearing during 1950s and early 1960s.

They reflected the concerns of library professionals on the concept of intellectual freedom, freedom to read and censorship. ALA adopted first *Library Bill of Rights* in 1939 and 1948 which was amended in 1961, 1967 and 1980 to assure the implementation of *The First Amendment* to the United States Constitution that guaranteed all individuals the right to express their ideas without governmental interference, and to read and listen to the ideas of others. However, librarians were really convinced against censorship and kept acting as censors by not purchasing controversial material or keeping it away from general display.

Asheim (1953, 1983) wrote a classical article on “Not Censorship but Selection”. He advised librarians in a subtle

manner how and why librarians should avoid being a censor while identifying the differences between censor and selector. It seems that Asheim's advice did not affect much upon librarians' mindset, as Katz (1980) also endorsed this practice by giving a good account of some classic studies about librarians acting as censors. Curley and Broderick (1985) write, "For all of the nineteenth century and the first third of the twentieth, librarians viewed themselves as moral arbiters for what the public should read. The theme of the 1895 ALA conference was *Improper Books: Methods Employed to Discover and Exclude them*" (p. 144).

Gardner (1981) gives a fine account of the three phases in the evolution of CDP in the following manner:

- In 1950s and early 1960s they were written as a part of *defense against censorship* and in support of intellectual freedom.
- In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the libraries developed policies *for social concerns*: to make sure that library was serving the entire community.
- During the second half of the 1970s rationale shifted again: with the cuts in library grants there rose the need *to show that the funds were being spent wisely*.

The next phases may be described as follows:

- From the 1980s to address the issues aroused with the inception of multimedia databases on CD-ROM in library collections.
- From 1990s to present, to meet the challenges posed by remotely accessible online full-text information sources; for example a big issue of access vs. assets

It is important to mention here that in this writer's opinion, it is not a matter of *shifting* rational behind the policies from 1950s to 1970s, but a phenomenon of *expanding* rational basis for having a policy during all these years, because, all the issues discussed by Gardner as justifications to prepare a written policy are still alive and dated. For example, USA PATRIOT Act, P.L. 107-56 and

Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), 50 U.S.C. 1801-1862. (Library of Congress, CRS, 2003, Feb.), affect the right of privacy of library readers after 11 September 2002. This act allows that FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) may check the reading records of any users. ALA is striving hard to protect the Freedom to Read, and to help libraries in handling the issue through proper policy. ALA (2003) Council adopted a number of resolutions regarding this act and maintaining the intellectual freedom of library patrons. The recent reservation by ALA President 'Michael Gorman responds to House passage of PATRIOT Act reauthorization bill' shows the constant disapproval of ALA (2006).

The Library Association (1998) in Britain also issued the Intellectual Freedom and Censorship statement in 1963 and revised it in 1978, 1989 and 1997. Curley and Broderick (1985) rightly mentioned that "Basically, the issues involved in censorship cases do not change. All that changes is what society considers acceptable and unacceptable. (p. 147).

In the middle of 1970s articles about the value of documented policy as a management tool began to appear. Preliminary edition of ALA guidelines for the formulation of the policy appeared in 1976. The Standards for University Libraries prepared by Joint Committee of the ARL & ACRL (1979) stated, "A university library's collection shall be developed systematically and consistently within the terms of explicit and detailed policies" (p. 103). According to Magrill and Corbin (1989):

University librarians were slower to accept written collection development policies as an appropriate tool for planning, but yet they made great progress over the past decade in producing such documents.... by the early 1970s, more evidence of interest in policy statements began to appear.... A collection development survey, conducted in 1974 by ARL, found that 65 percent of the large university libraries responding had a formal, written collection development policy. (pp. 30-31)

Elizabeth Futas (1977) produced a different kind of work on the subject. The first edition of *Library Acquisition Policies and Procedures* demonstrates the scenario regarding CDP in libraries around 1970s. The author wrote a letter, in 1976, concerning the status of the policy to 3600 academic and public libraries in USA and Canada and received over 500 replies and 300 selection policy statements. Majority of the responding libraries had no formal written selection policy. Futas concluded after reviewing the received policies that:

There is no one definition of selection or one type of selection policy which is appropriate for all types of libraries. In some libraries it is a theoretical document which stresses the intellectual reasoning used to select material for inclusion in the collection. For others it is a practical explanation of fiscal, community and space limitations which controls the purchasing of items. Most of the 300 policies received fall somewhere in between. (p. ix)

For the third edition, Futas (1995) sent 5000 letters to academic and public libraries in USA and Canada in 1992 asking the recipients to fill out a survey questionnaire and to share with the author a copy of their latest collection policy statement. The return rate was only 7% with 357 responses. According to the author the survey was not scientific, however, it represented the trends regarding collection development policies in different types and sizes of libraries He pointed out:

An examination of these documents reveals that many policies were copied from existing collections of policies and published policy documents...the idea of developing policy is to start a process of self discovery and self awareness and not to copy words that seem appropriate from some one else's policy...the process of developing these policies is at least as important as the policies we develop. (p. 4-5)

Batt (1984) too pointed out that detailed policies of various libraries, some extending to hundreds of pages were very similar and librarians could save hours of unnecessary work simply by filling up the information about their local collections and procedures. Though, these observations about were valid, yet, more and more librarians took initiative to *have* a CDP in a better form. The improvements were made gradually with experience, help of different expert and guidelines published by ALA.

Importance of CM Policy is Enhanced in Electronic Environment

Search of literature as well as libraries' websites reveal that electronic environment has forced the libraries and librarians to have, "longer, more explicit, less general, more procedural and better written policies" (Futas, p. 8). According to Evans (2000), "One of the factors leading to increased emphasis on collection policies is the complexity arising from electronic resources" (p. 69). Therefore, the number of libraries having written policies is rising in the developed countries and they are serving as framework and not mere fine pieces of theoretical writings.

Zijl (1998) discussed extensively various related aspects and despite mentioning various doubts about the worth of a CDP the author defended its need in a hybrid library. He cited a survey conducted by Casserly and Hegg in 1993 which reported that 71.6% of the respondents from academic libraries in the United States had written CDPs.

The review of the website *Electronic Collections Development*, authored by Okerson [n.d.] also testified the need for a written policy in the new century. The site collects links to a number of policy documents from big research libraries regarding the development of collections in an environment increasingly marked by the challenge of electronic resources. It is helpful for collection managers interested in learning the ins and outs of the matter. The world's largest Social Sciences Library of London School of Economics (2005), founded in 1896, has a detailed

thorough web-based CDP created in 1998 and lately revised in 07/05. The reasons to have a CDP or CMP and the aim of publishing it on the web are stated in *The General Policy Statement* as follows:

The policy, strategy, and criteria for acquiring items for the Library are described here. The aim is to provide information for use within the Library so that consistency and continuity are achieved in the management of the collections; and also publicity for the users of the Library so that the strengths and weaknesses of the collections are known and users know how to influence future collecting developments. The document builds upon and expands the Library's Acquisitions Policy of 1990.

The advanced search at www.google.com retrieved 15700 hits with the phrase "collection development policy" on February 1, 2003 and 107,000,000 entries on October 30, 2005. It shows that the practice of formulating CMP has been flourished in the electronic environment and libraries have been using ICT to make their policy a public and communication document in the real sense. American Library Association, Government Documents Round Table Education Committee (GODORT) provides URLs to collection development policies of hundreds of libraries of various types (<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/GODORT/>)

Collection Development Policies Committee, formulated by ALA, Reference and Adult Services Division, Collection Development and Evaluation Section (CODES) has solicited from interested donors those sample CDP statements for information in electronic format. Based on these policies, the core elements were derived. A draft *Core Elements of Electronic Collection Policy Statements* has also been made available online at their website (ALA. CODES, 1994). The homepage of CODES is a valuable source which "addresses the collection development interests of reference and user services librarians in libraries of all types. Issues of collection development, evaluation, and readers' advisory

are more complex and exciting than ever as Web and print publishers offer more resources and as new modes for serving our users become available” (ALA. CODES, 2002). Also, IFLA, Section on Acquisition and Collection Development (2001) provides Guidelines for a Collection Development Policy Using the Conspectus Model. Separate guidelines to deal with electronic resources are also available on its website.

Obstacles and Problems of Formulating a CMP

Literature revealed that despite very strong voices in favor of CMP it has been considered by librarians as a time taking and lengthy *process* to accomplish. Moreover, a CMP has been criticized for being an inflexible and theoretical document to put in a drawer and not to use for. Moreover, afterward it needs to be revised periodically. Such questions have been raised: Is the time, effort and money worth spending on that? And, why can not library build collection, and manage it without one? After all, the great libraries of the world were built without a policy; and still in America, hundreds of libraries and information centers have no written policy and yet have sound collections (Evans, 2000, p. 70).

The obstacles or problems in this regard can be classified broadly in two ways: (a) The process of formulation, and (b) The utility of the policy.

The process of formulation

The difficulties begin with the first stage of the process of policy formulation. As cited above, in USA most policies were copied from existing policies. One might think that the similar kind of the libraries would have encouraged the copying. But this should not be the case.

The process of formulation demands staff to think about ‘*its own*’ library; rediscover in precise manner its goals, mission and community. Evans (1985) stated that the creation of the document requires two kinds of commitment: the commitment to

intellectual effort towards a certain end, and the commitment of the library's most valuable resource, the time of its staff, to that same end. According to Futas (1995) this process is as important as the policy itself. He gives a fine description of how a document will turn into a real policy and stresses that the document must be prepared effectively for its end use (p. 13). He gives a worth reading list of actions under the four stages of the development process as follows:

- (i) Setting down exactly what is to be accomplished in a "planning to plan group".
- (ii) Collecting the type and amount of information to make correct decisions.
- (iii) Formulating and writing the final document.
- (iv) Determine what use to be made of the final product. (p. 5)

Consequently, the process appears extensive and prolonged which requires sound staff commitment for accomplishment. Gorman and Howes (1989) wrote that "more than most types of applied research, CDP formulation involves so many variables and incorporates so many possible ramifications that a detailed map is necessary to keep the policy staff from wandering down interesting byways or simply becoming lost" (p. 85). They give six stages of the procedure of policy formulation starting from 'policy committee staffing' and ending at 'ongoing evaluation process'.

Evans (2005) specified some fundamental reasons for the failure to formulate or revise a policy. One of them is that a good policy requires large quantities of data regarding the strength and weakness of a collection, the community, and other resources available to patrons. Furthermore, staff requires a great deal of thought to cope with the changing needs of the community, they never finishes collecting data and thinking about the change. Snow (1996) also confirmed "one difficulty is that writing the policy involves one of the librarian's most challenging and confusing tasks: collection evaluation" (p. 3). Many writers are of the opinion that evaluation is essential foundation for writing a policy, because

it is essential to have the awareness of where the library is, not simply where it wants to go.

In light of the above mentioned references from the developed library world, one can easily assume the additional apprehensions prevailed in the developing countries like Pakistan regarding the formulation and construction of such a document.

The utility of the policy

Katz while mentioning the problems related to the formulation of a policy wrote, “Nevertheless, the biggest single problem is that many librarians can’t see any reason for a policy” (1980, p. 23). Jannifer Cargill raised a significant voice in 1984 questioning the utility or need of such a document in academic libraries. According to Cargill it is very difficult to develop a document that can be applied to the selection process, and if libraries can work---and majority of them are working without it---then why should time be spent on formulating mere an ideal document. Moreover, a policy leads to inflexibility where as libraries need to respond to changes instantly, “...in the final analysis are they worth all the time, effort and politics that go into their creation? I think not.” (p. 25).

It appears that Cargill was not the only one with such doubts. He only gave voice to a large number of librarians who were of the same opinion, and thus not formulating CDPs in their libraries. Snow (1996) also demonstrated same concerns regarding a written policy in academic libraries and called it a “library orthodoxy” that goes unchallenged. Besides agreeing with the above mentioned objections by Cargill, he added that where selection is done by experienced selectors or by professors or libraries have approval plans, the policy is not needed. Snow concluded that to turn a policy into practical document, continuous updating is needed. Otherwise it is only an archival document to be kept in the “last folder in the bottom drawer of a filing cabinet”. Thus, it is better to use selectors’ time on the evaluation of how

and why material is used than formulating a document that carries a little value in practice.

These are a few comments that depict the problems in formulating and using a CMP. The tiresome nature of the activity, lack of time and doubts about its usefulness discourage librarians to take initiative towards this direction. It becomes clear that the formulation of a written CMP is easier said than done.

However, as already discussed, the electronic era has given a new impetus to its importance in all kinds of libraries. Instead of the debating on have it or not, the debate is on should a library have one integrated policy for all kinds of format or have separate policies for conventional and electronic resources. Evans (2000) is in the favor of separate policy for electronic resources in large libraries for convenience whereas Clayton and Gorman (2001) are in the favor of integrated one policy for all kind of materials.

Conclusion

CMP is not a miraculous document that carries solutions to all kinds of collection related problems. But, it is far better to have one than not to have. It makes a complex and subjective process of CM less problematic by devising and documenting the philosophy behind a library's collecting practice. It may serve as a detailed framework to execute *the* philosophy of a library. Thus, a written CMP has much more to offer to libraries in the digital and hybrid age-- an age which has mesmerized users with explicit and implicit perceptions regarding electronic resources.

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