

Paper #3: Budgets and Organizational Models for Collections Work: Issues in Transition.

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The Problem: Rigid Acquisitions Budget Structures

For decades college libraries have been challenged by the very real problem of their acquisitions budgets not being able to keep up with the skyrocketing costs of books, journals, and other library content. Some assumed that electronic content would help solve that problem, but it has not.

Another white paper proposes that part of the solution lies in bolder activity in the sphere of collaborative collection development. This white paper proposes bolder activity in a second, complementary area: revisioning the acquisitions budget structure.

Acquisitions budget systems and models are still derived from the era of print purchases and capital investment. Many new forms of content are borrowed and/or licensed. College libraries are relying increasingly upon the acquisition of large packages of electronic content (“bundles”) purchased through consortia. Where do products, such as federated searching, link resolvers and bibliographic management tools fit into the acquisitions budget? What about the archiving of our electronic content, for example a subscription to PORTICO? These tools enhance, protect and complement our content, but should and can they be purchased with “library materials” funds? Another issue concerns the purchase of audio-visual content via streaming versus a physical object such as a DVD. Many colleges have policies, or philosophical beliefs, in place that prohibit using the acquisitions budget for such “content” as:

- Streaming video
- Cataloging records to accompany large sets of content (microforms, for example)
- Hardware and software necessary to use the content purchased
- Increased Interlibrary Loan. Often it is easier to buy a seldom-used title than to borrow it.
- Licensed products. (Some colleges require that acquisitions dollars be used only for materials actually owned by the institution.)
- Boxing or otherwise preparing content for use. (The content might arrive in a fragile binding, for example.)

In short, the traditional acquisitions budget should be reshaped for an “access” model of library services and collections. Librarians should have tools for deciding whether, for example, it is more cost-effective to borrow or buy a particular title.

As we continue to forge best practices for collaborative collection development, we need to look more aggressively at areas for sharing. How do libraries pay for memberships or other annual fees associated with consortia in which coordinated collection development activity might take place and should this be considered as part of the acquisitions budget? We also need to be cognizant of our role as a steward of our campus' resources, but additionally we need to be a "good citizen" in terms of doing our part in buying content to share with others. We can't borrow everything or the system would eventually break down. But at this juncture, we can do more in terms of collaborative borrowing.

One college in the CTW Consortium has already named its print collection the "legacy collection." This bold step shows the reality for most of us, yet the budget structure doesn't reflect it.

College libraries need statistical tools, templates, and models for this budgetary transformation. Many believe that the Oberlin Group can contribute a great deal in this underdeveloped area. We can also create best practices statements that endorse more flexible and creative uses of acquisitions budget dollars than are available at present.

The Problem: Organizational Models That Don't Support New Collections Patterns

Many college libraries maintain local staffing patterns based upon the acquisition of physical pieces. As we acquire material available "virtually", are those legacy staffing models as efficient as they were when we dealt exclusively with physical items? Do we have the appropriate distribution of staff if we move more towards an access-based model of collecting? For example, is there appropriate coordination between the work of Interlibrary Loan and Collection Development? Are our staffs trained appropriately to bring new and necessary expertise to their work in organizing, managing and acquiring this material? Some colleges have gained experience with redesigning workflows locally to best support new collections patterns and others have worked on collaborative collection development projects with shared staffing. We can learn from the experiences others have had in this area.

Some areas to be explored:

- The relationship between the ILL and Collection Development staff
- The relationship between local and consortial staff
- Useful statistical measures to demonstrate successful or unsuccessful strategies
- Methods for reorganizing staff to support new forms of content/acquisitions
- Flexible ways to reallocate staff back and forth between access and technical services
- Training models for staff
- The "digital library"—what does it mean, and how does it affect skills sets required?

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