

The case for a written collection development policy: The Community Legal Centre library

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In 2005, the Caxton Legal Centre contacted the ALLG—Queensland to seek assistance in reviewing and managing their collection. The ALLG offered to provide an advisory role and to serve as a point of contact to Kirsten Harte, Master of Information Management (Library Studies) student of the Queensland University of Technology, who volunteered to do the project.

It has been a highly successful project where the ALLG—Queensland and the Caxton Legal Centre worked collaboratively towards achieving a goal of benefit to the Queensland community. It has also created an alignment between ALLG—Queensland and the Queensland University of Technology whereby a student was able to experience first hand the value of librarianship and our role in managing information resources.

Leanne Cummings, President, Australian Law Librarians' Group (Qld Division).

Introduction

This article makes the case for a written collection development policy (CDP) in the context of a case study, the Caxton Legal Centre (CLC) Library. The CLC is a community legal service provider and has a small library collection. The article discusses what a CDP is and presents the key arguments 'for and against' having a written CDP in the law library context. It goes on to explain why a written CDP was created in this

case and the process employed. It then critically considers the significance of this case study for law libraries generally. The conclusion of the paper makes a number of recommendations to hopefully provide law librarians and students with some guidance in the development of a written CDP for similar organisations and environments. This paper may also be of use to community legal centres, which do not have professional library support. A further aim of the paper is to demonstrate how committees of the Australian Law Librarians' Group and individual law librarians can contribute to the community legal centre through the voluntary provision of professional services.

A. Collection Development Policies

1 Definition of a collection development policy
There is no agreed definition for a CDP in the literature.¹ Kennedy defines a written CDP as 'a written statement of the policies intended to govern the activities of a library in regard to its collections.'² Johnson states that:

[c]ollection policies provide guidelines within which the library selects and manages its collection of information resources. These guidelines are a contract between the library and its community, supplying a framework within which complex decisions are made with consistency and reason.³

¹ Snow, R, 'Wasted Words: The Written Collection Development Policy and the Academic Library' (1996) *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 191, 191.

² Kennedy, J, *Collection Management: A concise introduction*, (2002) 13-4.

³ Johnson, P, 'Collection Development Policies and Electronic Information Resources' in Gorman, GE and Miller, RH (eds), *Collection Management for the 21st Century: A Handbook for Librarians* (1997) 83, 86.

Vickery cites the American Library Association's definition, as a formal document defining the:

scope and nature of a library's existing collections and the policies and plans for continuing development of resources, with precise designation of present collection strengths and current collecting intensity in relevant subject fields and a statement of selection philosophy as related to institutional goals, general selection criteria and intellectual freedom.⁴

Van Zijil considers this definition and a number of others and concludes that it is:

a document drawn up by a specific library to provide guidelines whereby the collection is developed and managed to meet the needs of that particular user group. This policy should explain the past, present and future acquisition and collection management practices of the library for the edification of bibliographers, other library staff, users, sponsors and anyone else who has an interest in the library in question.⁵

Therefore the key elements of a CDP appear to be that:

- it is a formal document
- it articulates the history, current practices and future goals of the collection
- it states principles governing a wide range of collection management activities.

2 Purpose of written Collection Development Policies

Given the lack of an agreed definition, it is informative to also consider the purpose of a written CDP. The precise purpose will vary according to the characteristics of the library in question. Long, Martin and Buckwalter⁶ consider that the written CDP serves two functions as a:

- communication device to internal and external stakeholder
- process of analysing the collection and issues associated with its management.⁷

⁴ Vickery, J, 'Making a statement: reviewing the case for written collection development policies' (2004) 25 *Library Management* 337.

<<http://www.emeraldinsight.com.ezp02.library.qut.edu.au/Insight/ViewContentServlet?Filename=Published/EmeraldFullTextArticle/Articles/0150250801.html>> at 19 February 2006.

⁵ Van Zijil, C, 'The Why, What, and How of Collection Development Policies' (1998) 66 *South African Journal of Library & Information Science* 99.

<<http://gateway.library.qut.edu.au/login?url=http://search.epnet.com.ezp02.library.qut.edu.au/login.aspx?direct=true&db=afh&can=1361230&site=ehost>> at 19 February 2006.

⁶ Long, RM, Martin, HS III and Buckwalter, RL, 'Acquisitions' in Mueller, HP and Kehoe, PE (eds), *Law Librarianship: A Handbook Volume 1* (1983) 237, 240.

⁷ Ibid.

As a communication device a written CDP can:

- act as a means of communicating the library's collection management philosophy and activities to the parent organisation, clients and library staff⁸
- demonstrate accountability to the parent organisation
- be used to make a case for funding⁹
- introduce clients to the collection (although the literature more often cites its role with respect to handling client complaints)¹⁰
- introduce new staff to the collection and set library-wide standards for selection, exclusion and de-selection decisions over time¹¹
- assist in rationalising budget allocations¹²
- act as an agreed standard to evaluate the collection¹³

The process of developing the policy is invaluable in itself as it can assist in developing a better understanding of the collection's strengths and weaknesses, analysing goals, evaluating resources and prioritising efforts.¹⁴ It is therefore a useful planning and learning exercise for library staff involved in its formulation and revisions.

3 Written collection development policies and law libraries in practice

While the law library and library literature recommend having CDPs,¹⁵ this is not reflective of practice. In 1984 a survey of Australian Law Libraries found that of the eighty law libraries surveyed, only five had written acquisitions policies.¹⁶ In the eighties CDPs were new to law libraries, however there was a growing interest in them. The lack of written policies at that time was attributed to law libraries having only recently come under strict budget constraints and accountability measures along with the lack of a perceived need as it was mostly head librarians who selected books.¹⁷

⁸ Edward Evans, G and Zaronsky Saponaro, M, S *Developing Library and Information Center Collections* (5th ed, 2005) 53; Kennedy, above n 2, 16; White, GW and Crawford, GA, 'Developing an electronic information resources collection development policy' (1997) 16 *Collection Building* 53, 54; Johnson, above n 3, 84; G E Gorman and J Kennedy, *Collection Development for Australian Libraries* (2nd ed, 1992) 4.

⁹ Evans, et al., above n 8; Gorman, et al., above n 8.

¹⁰ Kennedy, above n 2, 16.

¹¹ Evans, et al., above n 8; Gorman, et al., above n 8; Kennedy, above n 2, 15-6; Jacqueline Elliott, 'Collection Building: Selection for Law Libraries' (2004) 12 *Australian Law Librarian* 27, 27; White, Gary W and Crawford, Gregory A, 'Developing an electronic information resources collection development policy' (1997) 16 *Collection Building* 53, 54.

¹² Evans, et al., above n 8; Gorman, et al., above n 8; Kennedy, above n 2, 16.

¹³ Evans, et al., above n 8; Gorman, et al., above n 8

¹⁴ Long, RM, et al. above n 6, 240.

¹⁵ Long, RM, et al., above n 6, 239; Lovisa Lynman and Bonnie Geldmacher in Mueller and Kehoe, *Law Librarianship: A Handbook Volume 1*, (1983), 97, 104; Kennedy, above n 2, 14.

¹⁶ Genoni, Paul, 'Information Management in the Legal Environment: The Case for Collection Development' (Paper presented at the Second Asian-Pacific Special and Law Librarians' Conference, Brisbane, September 28-October 2 1987) 94.

¹⁷ Long, RM, et al., above n 6, 238-9.

Contemporary issues such as the consolidation of legal publishers,¹⁸ increasing costs, the growing scope and coverage of the law¹⁹ and the challenges associated with electronic resources²⁰ do not appear to have had a great effect on the number of law libraries with written policies. A survey conducted by the author revealed that of the seven respondents, only one had a formal, written CDP.²¹ While this is by no means a comprehensive survey, it does seem to correlate with current opinion and past studies that written CDPs are not often developed in practice.²² Indeed the value of the CDP for law libraries is deemed limited.²³ This is perhaps due to the close relationship between law librarians, collections and stakeholders.

4 Arguments against the written Collection Development Policy

This discussion may shed light on why CDPs are not developed in practice. An often cited reason for not having a policy is that they are considered to be static, reactive and of little use in practice,

describing an ideal rather than a reality.²⁴ Vickery also cites concern that a written policy may often be a reproduction of other libraries' policies and therefore may be of limited use to the library in question.²⁵

Arguments have also been made against the assertion that the written statement is a useful communication tool. For example, a written policy may be interpreted differently from person to person, which may lead to problems and inconsistencies.²⁶ Moreover, the experienced selector is unlikely to refer to the document and requiring anyone to do so routinely, is unrealistic.²⁷ As a communication device to clients the written CDP is of little value as it may be a very detailed document intended for the use of librarians.²⁸

The creation of a CDP requires time and effort and the argument has been made that scarce time could be better spent.²⁹ As policies do need to be reviewed to keep them up to date, it is often the

¹⁸ Milunovich, K, 'Issues in Law Library Acquisitions: An Analysis' (2000) 92 *Law Library Journal* 203, 206

¹⁹ Panella, D, *Basics of Law Librarianship* (1991) 16-17.

²⁰ Johnson, P, 'Collection Development Policies and Electronic Information Resources' in Gorman, GE and Miller, RH (eds), *Collection Management for the 21st Century: A Handbook for Librarians* (1997) 86-87.

²¹ Email from Glenda Ligtermoet to Kirsten Harte, 22 February 2006; Email from Lana Czarniecki to Kirsten Harte, 22 February 2006; Email from Cecily Adams to Kirsten Harte, 21 February 2006; Email from Gail Smith to Kirsten Harte, 20 February 2006; Email from Michelle Sammut to Kirsten Harte, 20 February 2006; Email from Jude Clarkin to Kirsten Harte, 20 February 2006; Interview with Leanne Cummings, Caxton Legal Centre, 18 February 2006.

²² Vickery, above n 4.

²³ Hallam, G, *ITN320 Law Library Management Day 3, Part 1: Collection Access and Management in Law Libraries* (2006) Queensland University of Technology, Online Learning and Teaching <<https://olt.qut.edu.au/it/ITN320/sec/index.cfm?fa=displayPage&trNum=2516498>> at 4 February 2006.

²⁴ Kennedy, above n 2, 17; Gorman, *et al.*, above n 8, 9.

²⁵ Vickery, above n 4.

²⁶ Kennedy, above n 2, 17-8; Gorman, *et al.*, above n 8, 9.

²⁷ Vickery, above n 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Kennedy, above n 2, 18; Evans, *et al.*, above n 8, 51.

case that those responsible for their development do not have the time to review them as regularly as required.³⁰ Moreover, the point has been validly made that in libraries where the focus is on responding to immediate needs of a well-defined clientele, as is often the case in law libraries, a CDP may be of little value.³¹ Rather, in this situation, it has been suggested that a methodology statement may be of more use.³²

5 Arguments in favour of the written Collection Development Policy

While the value of the CDP is not supported by evidence in practice the literature makes many arguments in favour of its existence. Many of these arguments reiterate the purpose of the written policy.

Traditional arguments include the fact that it provides a plan for the library's collection activities.³³ A CDP will articulate the scope and depth of the collection, identify its strengths and weaknesses, provide guidance in terms of acquisitions, weeding, donations, access issues and a guide for budget allocations.³⁴ Moreover, the CDP can communicate this to the parent organisation, clients, library staff and other interested parties³⁵ and is a useful tool in negotiating for funding by

demonstrating how library activities support the parent organisation's goals.³⁶ It can also assist in responding to client complaints,³⁷ introducing new library staff to the collection,³⁸ and is a helpful start to the development of a procedures manual.³⁹ Moreover, the process of developing the policy itself and its revision is an opportunity to review and evaluate the library's current performance and adapt to changes in clients needs.⁴⁰

Perhaps the strongest arguments, given the current challenges faced by law libraries, is that it provides a means of making consistent decisions, despite budget fluctuations and rising costs and can address the challenges associated with electronic resources.⁴¹

The Caxton Legal Centre

A Background to the Caxton Legal Centre

The CLC is a non-profit community legal centre that has been providing free legal services, social work assistance and community legal education for thirty years. The CLC is also actively involved in law reform activities and publishes a number of plain English guides to the law.

In addition to receiving income from publication sales, the CLC receives funding from a number of

³⁰ Vickery, above n 4.

³¹ Lynman, et al., above n 15, 107.

³² Gruben, K, 'Response: Law Firm Collection Development and Acquisitions' in Kehoe, Patrick, Lyman, Lovisa and McCann, Gary Lee, *Law Librarianship: A Handbook for the Electronic Age* (1995) 167,174.

³³ Kennedy, above n 2, 14.

³⁴ Ibid; Genoni, above n 19, 100.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Lynman, et al., above n 18, 105; Genoni, above n 19, 101.

³⁷ Kennedy, above n 2, 14.

³⁸ Evans et al, 51; Genoni, above n 19, 101.

³⁹ Evans 51.

⁴⁰ Long, RM, et al. above n 6, 240.

⁴¹ White, et al., above n 11, 54; Johnson, above n 3,86-7; Panella, above n 22, 16-7.

government agencies, membership fees and donations. The Grants Committee of the Queensland Law Society supplies its business premises. The CLC also applies for funding grants from other government agencies for special projects and needs as they arise or are anticipated.

The Centre has a small library collection of approximately four hundred items. All material is in print form, aside from freely available electronic resources. The primary focus of the collection is on legal material, but it also features other subjects relevant to its operations and features some, but not all of the CLC's publications. Comprehensive holdings of the CLC's own publications are held in its archival storage facility, although not in an organised manner. While the library has a budget for its ongoing subscriptions and legislation, funding for other material such as textbooks is dependent on grants and donations.

The library's clients comprise the employed solicitors, social workers and administration workers that run the Centre throughout the week and two hundred volunteers who donate their time outside regular working hours.

In 2005 the Centre received a grant from the Queensland Gambling Community Benefit Fund to make improvements to its collection. The contents of the collection were out of date and so funds were used to acquire current material. The CLC also saw a need for an organised system for retrieval and storage of the collection to be developed and for a record of its holdings to be established. The CLC sought the professional assistance of the Australian Law Librarians' Queensland Branch, who sourced and mentored

a library student throughout the project. During the project staff requested that a CDP be drafted and were particularly interested in selection and acquisition guidelines for the library's future purchases.

B The case for a Collection Development Policy
The earlier discussion provides a framework for considering the case for such a policy for the CLC.

There were many factors favouring the development of a written CDP at the CLC. Firstly, the library has no ongoing professional staffing. Therefore, a written policy would serve as a useful communication tool between the Centre and the volunteer librarians. It would communicate professional advice with respect to the allocation of its budget when making non-routine purchases and the evaluation of these resources and assist in facilitating the sharing of the library budget between different teams. It would also be useful in making decisions about the selection and rejection of donated library material. Also, given that in the past, the collection has not been organised in a systematic manner and material was often out of date, the policy could communicate the need to evaluate and perform collection management activities, such as weeding and stock taking. Secondly, a written policy would also act as a means to evaluate how well the budget is actually supporting the collection. Thirdly, the policy would be a useful tool when creating grants submissions to highlight the weaknesses of the collection and make the case for funds to be granted to improve aspects of the collection.

As mentioned earlier, external factors such as the rising costs of legal publications, favour the

development of a CDP, especially in times of budget fluctuations, or in the case of the CLC, limited funds in general. The CLC also needs to be seen as being accountable and providing a professional service to its clients, therefore, it needs to ensure that it sets standards for best practice, in the case of the collection this means making sure it keeps material current.

C Developing a Collection Development Policy
As the author had not previously written a CDP a literature review was conducted. Having developed an understanding of CDPs the author then compiled a draft written policy for the CLC. At this point the input of selected CLC staff was sought on the policy. The policy was updated and the author consulted with a mentor who provided input and advice and was able to share similar policies.⁴² Having updated the policy again, it was presented during the CLC's Annual Planning and Action Week. The policy was then further revisited and is currently awaiting management approval.

D Critique

While a written CDP was deemed useful in this case study, it does not support the application of written CDPs for all law libraries. The CLC was able to overcome many of the arguments against the written CDP because:

- it has no ongoing professional staffing of the library
- the nature of the centre's work (provision of initial advice) and its funding are conducive to a stable environment, and therefore the

policy is not likely to change substantially and become out of date.

The fact that the library has no ongoing professional staffing and is managed by administrative staff negates any argument that an implicit policy would suffice.

The argument that the policy may not be used still stands.⁴³ However, while this may be the case, there is no guarantee that any policy will be used. It is hoped that the CDP will be useful to the CLC staff, complementing a library procedure manual that is relied on by staff, so that the use of this policy might be encouraged. In this situation, the omission of the policy simply because it may not be used, is not warranted.

Most law libraries operate in different circumstances to the CLC and other community legal centres. For example, they tend to have greater funding levels and are more susceptible to political, technological (for example, electronic resources) and economic changes that may affect their collecting activities (for example, law firm mergers). In these situations, law libraries may wish to consider developing a brief methodology statement that serves to communicate to stakeholders specific matters such as the selection and access of library resources. That said, a written CDP could certainly assist law libraries in a climate of change in that it provides a means of making consistent decisions, despite budget issues and the challenges associated with electronic resources.⁴⁴ Therefore, it is ultimately up to each individual library to consider the benefits and disadvantages of developing a CDP.

⁴² Interview with Leanne Cummings, Caxton Legal Centre, 18 February 2006.

⁴³ Vickery, above n 4.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the definition, purpose and value of a written CDP remain unclear and at times controversial. While there is substantial support for the written policy in the law library and library literature, this is not reflected in its adoption in practice. As all libraries are different, the library in question needs to determine whether creating a written CDP is a viable option for them and if so to what extent. In the context of the CLC it was concluded that a written CDP would be useful because:

- there was no ongoing staffing of the library and it received professional advice on an ad hoc basis
- staff wanted guidance on the acquisition of material
- the Centre had no budget for the acquisition of new material and as it relied on funding grants, a policy would assist in making purchasing decisions and in the funding grant application process
- the Centre often received donations of material and a policy would provide a framework for their selection or rejection
- it highlighted the collection maintenance tasks to be performed

- it assisted in addressing contemporary issues facing law libraries and the need for the CLC to provide quality advice to its clients.

It was deemed that, in this situation, these positive potential outcomes outweighed any negatives.

This article demonstrates that the value of CDPs will depend on the library and parent organisation in question. In the case of this community legal centre library, it was deemed valuable. It is recommended that other community legal centre libraries and small law libraries consider whether such a policy may be of benefit to them, in their individual circumstances. It is hoped that this article and policy may be a useful guide in making such a decision and should the decision be affirmative, in its development also. It is also hoped that this article demonstrates the contribution that Australian Law Librarians' Group committees and individual Law Librarians can make to the community legal sector.

Outline of the Caxton Legal Centre Library's Collection Development Policy

Caxton Legal Centre Library: Collection Development Policy

Purpose:

The Caxton Legal Centre seeks to achieve best practice in providing access to quality information and services to its Library users.

⁴⁴ White, above n 11, 54; Johnson, above n 3, 86-7; Panella, above n 22, 16-7.

1.0 Introduction

Introduces the library, the features of the collection and a brief history of the library.

2.0 Collections

Describes collections.

3.0 Clientele Served

Describes clients.

4.0 Access

Describes how the library can be accessed in terms of physical access and access to the library catalogue.

5.0 Budget Issues

5.1 Budget

Describes library funding arrangements.

5.2 Gifts and donations

Provides outline of issues relating to receipt of donated material and criteria for their selection.

6.0 Acquisition/Selection Principles

6.1 Responsibility

Allocates responsibility for acquisition decisions and tasks.

6.2 Criteria for Selection

Provides criteria for the selection of library material.

7.0 Maintenance of the Library

Allocates responsibility for library maintenance tasks.

7.1 Deselection (Weeding)

Explains why the library should be weeded, when it is to be done and the criteria for deselection.

7.2 Stocktaking

Provides for when the stocktaking of the collection should occur and to whom the results are to be reported to.

7.3 Evaluation of the collection

Provides for when and how the collection should be evaluated and to whom the results are to be reported to.

8.0 Risk Management

Provides an assessment of current risks associated with the collection.

9.0 Copyright

Acknowledges that the CLC seeks to comply with Copyright laws.

10.0 Legal Deposit

Provides an outline of legal deposit issues and responsibilities.

11.0 Associations and networking

11.1 Australian Law Librarians' Group:

Queensland Branch

Articulates the role of this organisation in supporting the CLC.

12.0 Review of Policy

Stipulates when policy is to be reviewed and by whom.

Related Policies

Refers to related policies.

For a full copy of the content of the policy, please contact the author.