

MANAGEMENT REPORT



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Meeting date: March 26, 2015
To: Library Board
From: Corinne McConchie – Manager, Collections

Subject: **TOWARDS A COLLECTIONS STRATEGY FOR NVDPL – THE DIGITAL/PHYSICAL BALANCE**

SUMMARY

Our library collection, meaning the content NVDPL provides in a wide variety of formats, aims to meet the information and recreation needs of our community. Beyond printed books, for the past decade digital collections have been a part of the overall public library collection story. The library strives to balance and manage the collection in a holistic way.

At NVDPL, digital collections, due to accounting practices and principles, are not capital assets because they are licensed and not purchased outright. Thus, collection budgets at NVDPL are allocated between Capital (for the regular physical collection of items like printed books) and Operating (for the licensed digital collection of databases and e-resources).

We find that our community's interests, together with the evolution in digital publishing, is resulting in increased funding pressure on the digital side. At the same time we need to ensure that our legacy physical collections of printed books are maintained, funded and available to provide the best access and service according to use and patron preference. We want to keep up and look forward to the new and emerging formats and ways people prefer to consume the content they are seeking. With these things in mind, in 2015 we will be developing a Collections Strategy to chart the way, and updating the Collections Development Policy to guide library decisions.

PURPOSE

This report is for information.

DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS

A library's collection is a core library service. On behalf of the community, the Library Board's support of the collection is foundational to NVDPL's services, and highly valued by staff.

POLICY

[Collection development policy 4.1](#) (rev. May 2013), and the [Strategic Framework](#) adopted Sept. 2014

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

Collections have been a foundational strength and point of pride for our library and our community. The Strategic Framework identifies our guiding principles to be lifelong learning and the love of reading, and equitable access. And it points out that “a diverse collection,” as one of our strengths, is one that is responsive to community needs.

BACKGROUND

- Over many decades, library collections have incorporated new formats as they emerged on the marketplace. When LP albums and VHS were the media formats of choice, libraries acquired those. When CDs arrived as the preferred music medium, libraries moved their purchasing patterns in that direction to meet patron demand.
- When such shifts occur, libraries tend to keep the superseded formats for some time, acknowledging that not every library user is ready to move at the same pace, and there is merit and value retained in those older formats.
- Our library has offered digital content to our community for a number of years. Witness ebooks and downloadable audiobooks via Overdrive, EBSCO fulltext databases, PressDisplay for newspapers and more. People expect public libraries to have these digital formats now. In 2014, we counted nearly 130,000 uses of our digital collections representing 8% of overall collection use.
- A standardized ‘suite’ of digital collection offerings, and a recommended mix between physical and digital, has not yet been entrenched for public libraries. What we can say so far is that libraries are experimenting with the mix between digital books, e-audio, fulltext magazines and newspapers, educational games for children, a range of formats for people with visual challenges, serious research products and recreational content—that is, creating digital collections that mirror the regular physical collections that libraries have been building for decades.
- And now, streaming media has arrived. The strength of commercial streaming services like Netflix has shown that the public can and will consume streaming media via electronic devices, whether mobile phones or tablets, smart TV or personal computers.
- Our patrons still have strong interest in our physical media collections (DVDs, audiobooks on CD, music CDs). Use of physical media remains high, making it inadvisable to divert funds in any wholesale way from physical to digital at this time. In 2014, physical media formats (DVDs, CDs etc) were borrowed nearly 600,000 times, representing 37% of total library collection use.

- We are in what has been termed a “physical/digital hybrid era,” where both are still serving a need in our library. However, there is a significant shift coming on the near horizon, because the retail giants like Walmart are not investing in DVD and Blu-Ray anymore and the rental stores like Blockbuster are gone.
- Libraries have historically loaned formats that have stopped being produced in the market. Those collections still get used by the public for some time after the format goes obsolete. We experienced this with videocassettes and audicassettes. People hold on to their players and look to the library to continue to supply their needs for backlist viewing and listening.

DISCUSSION

What’s happening with Physical Media to date?

Use of our current audiovisual in physical media formats like DVD, Blu-Ray and CD, which represents a considerable proportion of our annual circulation, while still strong, shows signs of declining. As indicated above, use of our physical media represents 37% of overall use of collections. Still, over the past two years the adult physical media circulation has dropped by 15%. (Children’s media has also dropped, by a smaller amount--7%). We know that people have been and are consuming media via channels like Netflix, iTunes, YouTube, CraveTV or Shomi, and people have many choices.

Despite this, we know there is great demand for our physical media, and this has been especially in the areas of popular movies such as the *Theory of Everything* and the hot TV series like *Downton Abbey* and *Homeland*. The line-ups for new season DVD and Blu-Ray releases are fierce, with many having holds queues of over 150 per title.

Netflix, iTunes, Amazon Prime Instant Video, and the other commercial services for streaming are not available in platforms that libraries can offer to serve their communities. Those are, rather, platforms that are targeted and designed for private individual subscribers. The library market, as seen with ebooks, has not been a high priority, and in some cases, it has been viewed as a somewhat disagreeable part of the context, viewed as possibly hindering profits of these monolithic services.

Nevertheless, libraries have a role and mandate to bridge the digital divide, and to bring content, whether in print or via media, regardless of format, to their communities. Knowledge and stories come in many forms. Libraries have always folded in the new formats, as they arose, whether that meant long-play records, VHS, DVD, MP3 or BluRay.

Is there a Future for the Printed Book?

Concerning printed publications, current forecasts in publishing tell us that “print is not dead.” In the Fall of 2014, the British trade paper *The Bookseller* surveyed young adults (16-24 yrs), finding that nearly 75% preferred print to ebooks or audiobooks. And HarperCollins publisher Scott Pack projects, “I believe the reader of 2020 or 2030 will have two libraries, print and digital, with different types of books and publications in each”. There is every indication that the library as we know it now, with a mix of formats *including digital*, is on the right track.

The challenge to Maintain Diverse Collections

Proliferating formats squeeze library budgets and reduce the ability to offer collections of breadth as we are in some ways ‘buying the same titles again and again’ as we aim to meet demand and the differing styles of use and user. For example: *Gone with the Wind* might be in the library in some or all of these various iterations:

The novel—hardcover	Blu-ray
The paperback	Audiobook on CD
The Large Print edition	Hoopla access to the movie
The graphic novel version	Ebook on Overdrive
A CD soundtrack for the movie	Downloadable via Overdrive or Hoopla
DVD	

Furthermore, depending on a title’s popularity, multiple copies of any of these formats might be needed to address demand. This situation puts serious pressure on library collection dollars and speaks to the need for flexibility for staff to manage budgets creatively to enable prudent and emergent decision making.

The work of collections librarianship in managing digital collections is somewhat different from managing a physical collection of printed books. There are various tools we use in this new style collection management: use thresholds, price caps, removing or ‘de-selecting’ types of formats that are over- or under-used or unsustainable. This management is ongoing, starting before the decision to acquire, during implementation, through the pilot period where we learn how the collection is performing, and after, as we watch its ongoing use and costs.

This brings us back to consider to the role of the public library. Our library intends to serve the information, education and recreation interests of the community in a responsive fashion, and to reduce barriers to equitable access (which may be time barriers, format barriers and costs). Doing so in a shared resource model on behalf of the community is the foundation of public libraries. We still have a role in this.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

In 2014, the collections budget was \$572,070, of which 15% was allocated to digital collections. In 2015 we are aiming to spend 21% on digital collections. The expenditure of 21% of total library collection funds is what peer libraries have been spending, according to recent figures available. We anticipate we will need to transfer a modest amount from our Capital Library Materials to Operating Library Materials budget to help address the growing pressure on our digital allocation.

Ten years earlier, in 2004, the library spent \$590,803 on its collections (Source: *NVDPL Financial Statements December 31, 2014*). Since that time, the population has also remained fairly steady—

increasing only marginally. However, since 2004 with the advent of ebooks, downloadable books and streaming, to incorporate these within the same budget is a challenge.

Upon finalizing our Collections Strategy, we anticipate a recommendation for a longer-term approach to our digital/physical collection balance. It will include financial recommendations for the 2016 Budget. And finally, with respect to all of our digital collections, and indeed all collections we purchase, we are monitoring use and costs, and continuing our cost containment approach.

FINAL REMARKS

Library staff tell us, and use patterns confirm, that our physical collections (printed books, hard-copy media formats) still serve a strong need. People are continuing to enjoy and use our collections and they continue to demand new fresh materials. At the same time, use of our digital collections is significant and growing. Digital collections will continue to require collection dollars, but not, I recommend, at the expense or integrity of the physical collection.

Within five years according to industry information, new DVDs and CDs will most likely no longer be available to purchase and libraries will have only legacy media collections. Therefore, libraries should position themselves to a) continue to support and maintain the physical collections, especially print, and b) offer viable, interesting and competitive digital collections, to keep contributing value to the community.

The new Collections Strategy, which will be brought to the Board later this year, shall explore these issues and shall recommend specific directions and initiatives to maintain a strong service for the community, supported by solid budget management and decision-making.