

## Acquisitions: *Or, How Do I Stretch the Budget?*

Once you know what is in your collection, how do you know what to add to it? The first thing to do is to look at the library's **Collection Development and Management Policy**, if one exists. This may tell you very specifically about the materials that you are expected to buy. If no such policy exists, ask your board to give you some general guidelines until they can complete a full policy. Your ICfL Area Field Consultant can help you with policy formation and revision.

There are many ways to discover new materials that you can add to the collection. Publishers will gladly send you advertising about their books—whether you want it or not. Indeed, you will probably be overwhelmed with the amount of advertising mail that the library receives.

While advertisements will keep you informed about what new books are being published, remember the purpose of this advertising is to sell books. You can hardly expect them to give an objective view of what they are trying to sell.

It is better to purchase most books based on objective book reviews. While you can find some reviews in places like general newspapers and magazines, normally you will not find a wide enough variety to meet your library's needs. Because of this, there are several library-related magazines that you should consider purchasing:

- *Booklist*, a publication of the American Library Association, reviews both adult and youth materials, has a pre-publication section which reviews new books that are likely to be best-sellers before they are published, and includes a special section on reference books. *Booklist* includes reviews of audiovisual materials and is generally considered to be the best single source of reviews for smaller public libraries. <https://www.booklistonline.com/>.
- *Library Journal* is an American trade publication for librarians, founded in 1876 by Melvil Dewey, the inventor of the Dewey Decimal System. *LJ* reports news about the library world, emphasizing public libraries, and offers feature articles about aspects of professional practice. While the primary purpose of the magazine is to carry news about libraries, it has also has an extensive review section, concentrating on adult fiction and non-fiction books. It also reviews library-related materials and equipment, including audiovisual and magazine

reviews, making *LJ* a valuable resource for public library directors and staff.  
<https://www.libraryjournal.com/>.

- *Publishers Weekly* offers feature articles and news on all aspects of the book business, bestsellers lists in a number of categories, and industry statistics, but its best known service is pre-publication book reviews, publishing some 9,000 per year. It is targeted at publishers, booksellers, librarians, literary agents, authors, and the media. The *PW* Starred Review is awarded to indicate a book of exceptional merit. *PW*'s "Best Books" lists are published annually, usually in November ahead of "Best Books" lists from the *New York Times* and other prominent review venues. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/>.
- *School Library Journal (SLJ)*, originally part of *Library Journal*, is an American monthly magazine with articles and reviews for school librarians, media specialists, and public librarians who work with young people. Articles cover a wide variety of topics, with a focus on technology, multimedia, and other information resources that arouse the interest of young learners. Reviews are included for preschool to 4<sup>th</sup> grade, grades 5 and up, and teens. Both fiction and non-fiction titles are reviewed, as are graphic novels, multimedia, and digital resources. Also included are reviews of professional reading for librarians and reference books. *SLJ*'s website allows both subscribers and non-subscribers full access to every issue published from 1996 to the present, including the current issue. In addition to these resources, the website has a number of blogs and several e-newsletters including *Curriculum Connections*, *SLJ Teen*, and *SLJ Extra Helping*.

All of these magazines are expensive, so check out their websites for more information. Many of the book reviews and best books lists are available free online. If you would like to receive the print edition, but your book budget is small, try to find another library in your area to share the subscription. You can sometimes find book reviews from these publications on Amazon.com, below the publication information for the title you are considering.

When selecting a book from reviews, ask yourself the following questions:

- Does this book fit into the collection policy or guidelines that the board has given me?
- Is this book likely to be asked for by anyone in my community?

- Is the book by a popular author whose works are frequently requested?
- Does the review indicate that this is a high quality book?
- Do you already have current materials on this subject?
- Does the potential use of the book justify its cost?

By answering these questions, you can determine whether or not you should purchase a particular title.

Once the selection has been made, you enter the acquisitions phase of the process. If you order a large number of books and use more than one review source, it is a good idea to make sure you haven't already ordered the book. This can be done by keeping an "on-order" file on a computer database or spreadsheet—or on index cards if your library is not yet automated. Simply check the titles of the books being considered against the books already on order. If they are not on order, add them to the on-order list. If they are, you will need to determine whether or not you need additional copies.

Once the list of books to order has been created and you have checked them against the on-order file, you are ready to place the order. Generally, it is advisable for libraries to use "book jobbers" for their orders. Such jobbers make books and other materials available at substantial discounts—up to 45 in some cases. The size of the discount will depend on how much, if any, discount the jobber received from the publisher of a particular book. Using jobbers can save you time and money, as you can consolidate orders with one or two jobbers instead of sending orders to dozens of publishers. To get the names of appropriate jobbers for your library—if the library is not already using jobbers—you can ask for recommendations from other library directors or contact your ICfL Area Field Consultant.

While most of your books should probably be ordered through jobbers, books published locally are sometimes only available from the publisher or in local bookstores. Bookstores, including Amazon.com, can be used when you need a book in a hurry, as jobbers may take several weeks to fill an order. Bookstores sometimes offer discounts to libraries. Make sure to ask about a discount.

Some publishers, such as those that publish encyclopedias, do not sell to book jobbers nor to bookstores. If in doubt, contact the publisher or place the order with a jobber. If the jobber cannot supply the item, you will receive a reply suggesting you order directly

from the publisher. [Several encyclopedias](#) are included at no charge to Idahoans as part of the [LiLI Databases](#).

The next step in the acquisitions process is to receive the books you have ordered. When books are received, check the titles against the invoice, so you know the bill is correct. Then you should check the invoice against your on-order file to remove the record of those books which have been received. The books are now ready to be processed and placed on the shelf.

## **The Materials Budget**

Throughout the acquisitions process, you need to keep track of how much you are spending. How do you know how much to spend? Some librarians simply take the materials budget items, divide by twelve and spend that much each month. However, publishers tend to bring more books out in the spring and the fall, so you may want to plan on spending more money during those months and less in the winter and summer. It can help to track your expenditures from the previous year to see what percentage of your materials budget has been expended each month in the past.

Because you will always have some books in your on-order file, and you will never be certain about the amount of discount to be received on each item, expending money for materials can never be an exact procedure. By keeping tabs on where you are each month, you should be able to spend close to the budgeted amount each year without drastically underspending or overspending.

## **Additional Resources:**

The ABLE Acquisitions Sequence is a self-directed, online learning course comprising:

- Collection Development Basics (1 contact hour),
- Collection Development Policy (1.5 contact hours),
- Building a Collection (1.5 contact hours), and
- Collection Maintenance (2 contact hours)

ABLE courses are offered free of charge and a certificate of achievement is awarded upon completion of each sequence.