MEETING DATE: Thursday, September 24, 2009

AGENDA ITEM #: 12 B

ITEM: COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE PRESENTATION

RECOMMENDED ACTION:
- None
Analysis & Background

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Based upon discussions performed by Collection Development Committee held in spring of 2009
Collection Development Approaches: Examining Possibilities

The 2009/2010 budget will limit both the amount of material to be purchased and the number of staff hours that can be expended to select materials. In response to this change, and as part of its ongoing analysis of collection development methods, the Collection Development Committee has chosen to closely examine four competing collection development strategies to consider enacting in 2009/2010. In doing so, the committee recognizes that the most important factors to consider are user benefits, organizational challenges, and costs of doing business. Additionally, the committee has discussed how expanding floating collections might cost-effectively add value for customers while presenting unique organizational and staffing challenges.

Considered Methods

- Current practices
- Planners perform selection
- Centralized selection by Collection Development staff
- Vendor selection

The committee compared and contrasted four integral elements of each strategy:

- User benefits
- Organizational strengths that would help make the strategy successful
- Organizational challenges the method might present
- Associated costs

Current Collection Development and Selection Process

Current practices combine strong community focus with methods that address countywide needs, and include a growing collection of floating materials and materials ordered by planners centrally for multiple libraries.

There are three very labor intensive elements to current collection development practices:

- Fund Management
- Planning
- Selection

The majority of collection development work is performed by community library staff who plan and select materials. About thirty Collection Planners spend five to fifteen hours each month creating selection lists. About fifty selectors receive these lists and use a myriad of fund codes that represent budget allocations to make book selections for individual library collections. An
average monthly order includes roughly 1,500 titles. Selection work can comprise dozens of hours each month per community library. Additionally, Collection Development, Acquisitions and Administrative staff spend many hours each month supporting this process.

Due to the current budget consideration, the library faces not only having fewer permanent staff-members to perform collection planning and selection, but also the loss of permanent intermittent positions that enable staff to spend many hours reading reviews, tracking funds, and selecting materials.

Collection development methods greatly affect patron experiences in such areas as:

- The opportunity to obtain new materials in a timely manner
- The opportunity to browse refreshed collections
- The appropriateness and breadth of materials available

The Collection Development Committee recognizes that any changes to collection development methods should begin with consideration of patron experiences, rather than the needs of the organization or attachment to familiar practices. These documents are intended to emphasize that fact.
Executive Summary: Comparing Costs to Benefits

There are benefits and challenges associated with each collection development method. This study examines each closely, and is designed to help ASM analyze possible consequences of changes in collection development methods and allow the Collection Development Committee to make practical recommendations to support the successful implementation of decisions.

Current practices that interweave community library selection with some centralized ordering are particularly inclusive, and therefore labor intensive. We have created a set of estimated labor costs for each of the examined practices. There are other costs and challenges associated with each practice. Likewise there are potential user benefits and current organizational strengths that would support any given set of practices.

Findings

Our findings present each strategy in terms of these categories:

- Positive impacts
- Challenges

See Document: “Four Collection Development Approaches.”

The committee also recognizes the need to consider each process in light of the possible expansion of floating collections.

See Document: “Expanding Floating Collections.”

Estimated cost are based upon test orders, discussions with vendors and other professional Collection Development Departments and observations of current monthly ordering practices.

See Document: Addendum 1 Methodology for Estimating Costs
Addendum 2 is the spreadsheet utilized to develop labor cost estimates.

Key Costs and Benefits

Current Practices

Estimated Annual Labor Costs: $318,240

Key Benefits: A key benefit of continuing these practices is the fact that they are quite inclusive and let library staff utilize their broad expertise on a regular basis to develop community-focused collections. Additionally, it is a familiar set of practices and no effort would be required to implement new procedures if we kept working in the way that we do.
Key Challenges: Continuing current practices may hinder the ability of community libraries to successfully accomplish the key strategic initiatives identified by the library’s Strategic Plan. Due to the County’s current and predicted ongoing financial problems, the library anticipates fewer permanent and intermittent employees to support everyday work. Our current collection development practices require an estimated 50% greater amount of time than other practices we have examined and it is doubtful that library users gain much immediate benefit from this investment of time. Furthermore, the length of time between when the library receives lists from the vendors and when patrons are able to check out books is much greater than what we would expect to see if we altered practices. Another large challenge is how to develop practices that best satisfy user demands for dynamic and broad audiovisual collections despite limited current funding sources for such collections.

Planners perform selection

Estimated Annual Labor Costs: $248,400

Key Benefits: If we implement this practice, we should expect materials to arrive up to 50% sooner than currently. Another user benefit expected would be probable improvement in topical and genre coverage for patrons with very specific interests.

We should expect a 33% reduction of community library staff-time spent on materials selection, but, conversely, planners would be required to spend more time on their work, as they would need to order for the entire library community. This practice offers a greater depth of participation for planners, who are able to focus on a particular collection area and develop a much higher level of expertise in this area than before. Because this practice relies on Community Library staff to perform materials selection, patrons, partnering cities, and community groups could be assured that local staff members participate in the selection process.

Key Challenges: Although this method requires less overall staff involvement in selection, it promises more planning possibilities that offer a deeper level of work. All librarians, to the greatest extent possible, will need to be integrated into collection planning. Planners will need to develop understanding of diverse community needs throughout the county, and will need to spend more time than they currently do on planning tasks.

Centralized Selection

Estimated Annual Labor Costs: $123,600

Key Benefits: If we order centrally, we should expect some similar benefits as in the above practice, particularly much quicker arrival of materials. Labor savings are even greater, and this practice greatly supports community library staff focus upon outreach, programming, and hands-on collection work such as weeding and community profile development. Furthermore, it leverages expertise developed by collection development staff
Key Challenges: This practice puts pressure on very few staff members to meet deadlines and make selections that match diverse community needs. It would require that community library staff regularly utilize communication tools to help determine such needs, a fact which is both a challenge and an opportunity. It would also necessitate the development of ways to sustain a strong message to staff, community groups and customers that our collection development practices are designed to support patron needs.

Vendor Selection

Estimated Annual Labor Costs: $108,600

Key Benefits: Vendor selection is a very cost-efficient means by which to quickly receive popular materials. Vendors depend upon local staff to develop community profiles, budgets, and other collection specifications. Patrons might see some kinds of materials that librarians do not currently order, and this might have some surprisingly positive results for our customers, as it is often challenging to recognize collection areas that the library does not regularly satisfy. Vendors serve many communities and, generally, have a good sense of cultural trends, fads, and are able to nimbly develop lists based upon their observations of the overall culture.

Key Challenges: It is unknown how well the vendor’s selections could meet specific community demand without creating cookie-cutter collections that have little community character. Implementation of vendor selection would require much effort on the part of the Collection Development Department and Committee to ensure that vendor supplied materials meet specific guidelines. In order to allay concerns, it would be imperative that the collection development committee develop methods that increase community involvement in shaping collections.
Four Collection Development Approaches

Current Approach

Two thirds of county materials, and virtually the entirety of gift and Friends funded materials, are ordered by Community Library staff on a monthly basis. Some areas of the collection are selected centrally by planners, by members of the Collection Development Committee, or by way of standing orders. Community library collections include a growing collection of floating materials that are ordered centrally.

Positive Impacts

- Staff develops awareness of local user needs and often orders specific items to satisfy recognized needs
- Community library staff plays a large role in developing community focused collections, including special collections designed to satisfy specific audiences.
- Staff is attuned to a specific, current community library collection. Selection can reflect experience working with the physical collection, including recent weeding.
- Process has been in place for many years and staff is comfortable with process.
- Easy integration of Friends and Foundation orders in ongoing selection process

Challenges

- From the time vendors supply us titles, patrons often must wait three to four months for materials
- Little consistency. Ordering practices vary community by community.
- Huge outlay of time at each site planning and selecting materials. For example, planners provide detailed notes, annotations, review summaries and holding information to titles to guide individual community library selection. The need to include such information can double the time it takes for planners to develop lists.
- Requires methods to ensure that collections and allocations reflect community needs based upon community profiles.
- Staff must read through hundreds of reviews to select few materials. Libraries with limited staffing and/or budgets require as many hours dedicated to this work as those with greater materials and staffing budgets.
- Due to limited time, community library selectors regularly skip lists that planners have spent hundreds of hours preparing.
- Replacement lists are bulky, time consuming, and often rote. Their inclusion in monthly order lists greatly multiplies time required to complete ordering.
• Would require complex coordination between vendors, planners and selection deadlines, with many staff-members involved. Much of Collection Development staff time is taken up with this coordination.

• Anticipated loss of planners and selectors will put a huge amount of work onto a very few librarians at some sites.

• Anticipated loss of P.I. hours will reduce ability of Community Library staff to expend time required to perform monthly selection tasks.

• Funds and fund reports are regularly misunderstood by staff. This causes uneven ordering over the course of the year. Some staff-members create their own spreadsheets to which they dedicate many hours of work. These often do not reflect accurate information.

• Limited countywide budget means we are greatly constrained in our ability to satisfy user demand for audiovisual materials.

Selection by Planners

Planners will be given the task of selecting materials for the entire county.

Positive Impacts

• Patrons see new books much faster (estimated time savings: 30 - 45 days).

• Frees up community library staff time to perform outreach and other programming.

• Planners develop more expertise and depth in assigned areas. We can thus offer a more diverse collection.

• Less of a dependence upon the inclusion of professionally reviewed materials allows for collections to broaden and thus better serve unique communities and consumers. See Sullivan’s “Beyond Cookie Cutter Selection” for a description of how Phoenix Public Library’s collections and circulation greatly grew when it departed from the practice of relying on professional reviews to guide virtually all selections.

• Reduces labor time on selection; planners can make selections as they review materials; one person instead of twenty-five reads each review.

• Remains an inclusive process, as Community Library staff would comprise the majority of selectors.

• Compels community library staff to use Suggestions for Purchase and other tried and true methods for communicating community needs (profiles, for example).

• Planners can use knowledge of more than one community to make selections.

• Gives community library staff more time to perform analysis and weeding of current collections.

• Can be performed using either community library or floating funds.
• Process is familiar; many planners already work in this manner.
• Provides opportunity for libraries to focus Friends and Gift money on special collections, if desired.

Challenges

• Presents a change in focus for community library staff.
• Recent loss of some planners requires others to be trained to do work.
• Planners may require additional time to complete the monthly task.
• Planner must develop methods to easily track dispersed fund codes.
• Some collection planning areas may need to be sub-divided due to breadth of content and length of lists.
• Use of fund codes to select presents a huge time requirement for Acquisitions staff.
• Planners must expend a large amount of time determining which branch needs each item.
• May require production of special lists for selection of materials with Friends and/or gift funds by community library staff.
• Planners must develop understanding of diverse community needs.