

COLLECTION MAPPING PRESENTATION
FOR
DIRECTORS OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN FINLAND
AUGUST 2007
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WHAT IS COLLECTION MAPPING:

It is a systematic, usually subject or format organized, survey of the information & literary resources of a library in order to provide a baseline for future management decisions about all library resources (space, personnel, books, electronic resources, serials, audiovisual items, physical plant, and priorities of all types). Collection mapping or collection assessment as it has often been called, is a management tool that helps libraries make the most effective use of resources in response to the needs of clients. Without understanding exactly what the characteristics are of our existing resources it is impossible to know where we are going and whether continuing down the same path or making strategic changes will affect our ability to serve our primary user communities. It is also difficult to gain support for the library to be able to exercise authority to direct the resources in the best interests of the institution without being able to provide administrators and funding agencies with data and descriptions of both the strengths and weaknesses inherent in doing "collection development" based upon the interests of subject specialists rather than upon the professional judgment and experience of trained information professionals.

WHY DO IT:

The primary reason for doing some level of collection mapping is to make the best possible use of limited resources—locally, nationally, and globally—so as to best serve our end users. That is the charge for all library directors. We recognize that all of us trying to be all things to all people is no longer an economic model that makes sense or has the potential for success. We need to each target our use of resources to best meet the needs of those individuals who are our local primary end users. We can focus our collections because we can rely on others to provide collections of strength in those areas that might be weak ones for us. Together we are stronger than anyone of us alone.

RESULTS FOR THE INDIVIDUAL LIBRARY:

Although there is an investment in resources necessary to accomplish this work, the library gains the following:

1. The library director and the staff members will have data sets that can be presented in meaningful ways and can also be used to measure progress towards goals.
2. Once written, narrative descriptions of the information resources in individual disciplines can be used to assist librarians in making library resources more closely match the information needs of both current and future users.
3. Both the data and the verbal descriptions of collection characteristics can be used in communicating with members of the faculties, students, other researchers, library employees and other libraries about the nature of the collections and the priorities for each.
4. The results can be used in justifying budgets and in other political arenas.
5. The results will enable a library to write clear policy statements to guide collection management decisions for gifts, purchases, retention, storage, access, and preservation. This results in more strategically developed resources targeted to the missions of the institution and the library.
6. The library staff will gain invaluable, hands-on knowledge about the information resources—their strengths, weaknesses, depth and breadth—and this knowledge is essential for providing the best possible customer service and meeting the specific information needs of users.
7. This work offers numerous opportunities for the professional development of librarians and other staff members as they consider the character of their collections and the way in which the resources are used. Insights about the collections and their very direct relationships to the work of a specific institution and its programs enable staff members to better understand their own work and their role in the institution.

FINNISH NATIONAL COLLECTION MAPPING PROJECT:

The Finnish National Collection Mapping project is intended to improve the information and literary resources available to all of the citizens of Finland by making it possible for librarians collectively to better manage the limited resources available to them while allowing them to help the end user find appropriate collections of depth and/or breadth on topics or disciplines of particular interest. In addition, this project will eventually make it possible for the end user regardless of their location in the world, to identify collections of importance, depth and/or breadth at the macro level rather than the micro level (the individual bibliographic item). It is assumed that the initial contributions to this national effort will be the identification of some of the "best" collections on both narrow and broad subjects with an additional emphasis on the primary language or languages represented in such collections.

DOING COLLECTION MAPPING:

Once a staff member or two has been trained to do collection mapping by gathering data, by examining the collections, by working with others to describe or characterize the individual collections, a local project can be planned and implemented. The following are the key elements for a collection-mapping project:

1. Support from the director in the form of giving the project "director" or "manager" or "team leader" the clear authority to get the work done and to direct others as needed.
2. A plan with timelines and intermediate goals for the project.
3. Communication throughout the project both up and down the organizational ladder about progress, about "surprises" and about difficulties encountered.
4. Training for those to be involved (remembering that some comfort with ambiguity for at least the leader of the project is essential).
5. Do a couple of test areas to see how the plan works. Then adjust your process as needed and proceed.
6. Doing a "quick and dirty" sort of project is better than doing nothing at all. Remember that "good enough for now" can be a very enabling phase.
7. Use the knowledge gained to improve the management of resources locally and contribute to the national project as appropriate.
8. Re-do it or refine it when and if needed and to measure success towards goals and in fulfilling strategic plans.

DECISIONS TO BE MADE REGARDING A LOCAL PROJECT:

Before the local project can be undertaken, the library must decide upon a number of issues. These are outlined here for your consideration and to assist you in recognizing that the approach will be somewhat different in each library.

1. Will there be one person with the full-time responsibility for the over-all project? Will this project be a part-time "project" assignment for a staff member? Will this work be presented as a part of the routine work of collection management?
2. Decide how extensive the mapping project is to be. Will you do all disciplines? Will you do only those that you believe have potential as collections of importance regionally and/or nationally? Will you do those disciplines of importance to your institution or library?
3. Decide what formats you will consider. Monographs alone are not sufficient for most purposes. Serials (long extensive runs of now closed titles, current subscriptions and electronic access to the articles of journal titles) are all important for most disciplines, especially for post-secondary education and research. Electronic resources are an integral part of any modern library's collections and must be considered. In many disciplines the audiovisual resources are essential as well but perhaps not in all. The performing arts (drama, music, dance, etc.) all require appropriate audiovisual resources in addition to traditional monographic and serial collections. One must ask what other resources in what formats contribute to the strength of any collection to be mapped.
4. How will you determine the average age of the monographic collection? Will your ILS provide the reports in a discipline range? If not, will you do sampling?
5. What types of words of description do you want to use to characterize the collection? (The National Project has a meta-data format that assists with this issue.)

REPORTING COLLECTION MAPPING RESULTS:

The national project leadership will make more information available regarding the format and inputting specifics for participation in the project at the national level. In the meantime, there is no reason for a library to wait to begin planning and gathering information based upon the subjects/disciplines identified for this project.

MY ADVICE:

1. Remember, "do not let the *perfect* become the enemy of the *good*" (or good enough for now) by delaying doing something until all the resources are available or the process is perfect. This is a tool that is not perfect but can be adjusted to fit individual circumstances. It is a tool that provides insight and management information that is invaluable.
2. Begin by doing a test area or two with some minor topics for your library. Then when you have your process clarified, do those subjects that you think are your strongest or the most important ones for you and for others.
3. Do it. Listen to the advice and examine the results of those who have already done some mapping work. Learn from their experiences and their insights.
4. Do something rather than nothing. As a former boss of mine was fond of saying, "Santa Claus is not coming to town." In other words, we are not going to get substantially more resources. It is our job to manage what we have more wisely and to use more evidential data to make strategic and day-to-day decisions.

RESOURCES:

Lavoie, B., Connaway, L. S., & Dempsey, L. (2005). "Anatomy of Aggregate Collections: The Example of Google Print for Libraries." *D-Lib Magazine*, Sept. 2005.

Shenton, H. (2003). "Life Cycle Collection Management." *Liber Quarterly* 13: 254-272.

Signum 3:2006.