

# Policy Manuals

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This article explores the need for a policy manual, how to begin writing one, how to keep it current, and a brief synopsis of what to include—juxtaposed with distinctions between policy and procedure manuals. Even a small, one-person library would find a policy manual useful because with infrequent acquisitions a hard-copy “memory” will ease the search for past decisions. Then too, if the result from the last decision was unsatisfactory, corrective changes can be recorded for future reference. In departments both large and small a policy manual provides for consistency in decisions through changes in personnel.

## Need For Recorded Policy

Policy manuals develop uniform answers for similar questions. Libraries thrive on the elusive quality of consistency. A policy manual provides the mental framework for consistency and communicates to everyone working in the library the guiding principles behind its procedures. In essence, the procedures should flow from the policies. The manual should not set the policy in epoxy, but should provide a place to record changes. In short, the ideal of consistency must not be abandoned simply because we often fail to achieve it.

Are there administrative problems? Yes, some administrators find policy making difficult, others make decisions quickly, or should one say hastily, and do not want to record this as policy.

These equally untenable problems will not be addressed in this article but it is well to acknowledge that they exist and can make manual production "manual labor." Matters of policy must be clearly formulated, but this need not relate to either a lengthy or hasty process. Formulating a policy requires a clear understanding of the problem each policy addresses and the effect of the decision. After a policy is established, it should be recorded in a way that can be easily applied. As administrators learn to use computer spread sheets, forecasts can be made based upon some, if not most, of the effects of their decisions, and this in turn may encourage better policies.

### Beginning a Policy Manual

To design a policy manual for an on-going institution, one must first discover the explicit and implicit policies in effect. This can be done by examining the procedures and edicts frequently found in a procedure manual already in existence.

### Policy Manual Layout

A Policy Manual needs a cover page telling what it is, for which department and/or library it applies, who wrote it and at what date. When it is revised, the new editor and date should be added to the current information—do not delete the past records. Following the title page there should be a topically organized Table of Contents. Most librarians find a very detailed Table of Contents helpful, because each user can see at a glance what section to use. Next, there should be a Preface containing general policies for this library. For example, a Policy Manual for the Cataloging Department will have the same approved policies in its Preface as will be found in manuals for the Reference or Circulation Departments. These might include a collection policy, a censorship policy, and a gift policy; policies governing special projects that affect many departments such as reclassification, reconversion, or massive weeding will be included in this widely distributed Preface. At the end of the Preface it is helpful to have an organizational chart of the library, showing positions and the reporting hierarchy within the library. Since this manual deals with "policies," it will be useful to designate those officers who

approve policy and the routes for effectively enhancing or changing previous policy decisions.

At the end of the Preface the published books or other material used by the department in carrying out its routines should be listed. For instance, the Cataloging Department's manual may list the latest edition of the unabridged Dewey Decimal Classification and the latest edition of the *Library of Congress Subject Headings*; the Reference Department may list the latest edition and updates of *Guide to Reference Books*; and the Circulation Department may list a printed guide produced by the vendor of their circulation system. Listing these books or other material at the beginning of the Policy Manual will help the user of the manual gain a policy overview. Following the Preface are the current policies for the department.

#### Materials To Be Considered In A Technical Services Policy Manual

The manual should describe which classification system is used and why, the type of catalog used and why, the philosophy behind the subject headings used to index the collection, and the descriptive cataloging used and why.

#### The Catalog

An overall policy statement is needed concerning what is to be accomplished with the catalog. This may be the point to state what is desired; for instance, a catalog accessible from many locations may be a necessity, and the policy manual can show this. But if this is not possible at present, include the policy governing the current catalog. With care, you may be able to show how the current activities fit into the broader plan of the optimum catalog. The more specific you can be with the goals and objectives for the catalog, the easier it will be to monitor the success of the catalog, or to analyze the costs needed for success. Also, if the goals and objectives are very specific, the library staff can examine them and trade-off some goals for some economy.

#### The Classification System

There should be a general policy regarding guidelines for classifi-

cation. For instance, do you want a classification system to store material compactly? Do you want the classification to encourage browsing? Do you want the classification to be useful with automatic retrieval and discharge devices? Do you want the classification system to be useful in maintaining the shelving order? For example, a small library might choose a system which would help the user reshelve material. After naming the specific classification used, information about modifications, shortcuts or abridgements to that classification are included. A policy of what to do when the classification system changes and relocates material should be considered.

The Procedure Manual will include information about how to use Cutter tables, whether or not to identify editions within the "call number," how multiple copies are handled, etc.

### Subject Headings

A policy statement should identify the goals of subject access. Do you want subject access to be "finely tuned" for specifics, so the patron has small groups of material to examine? Or should it focus on larger topics, thus providing the patron with a larger group of possible relevant material to sift through? Should the subject approach be a linear arrangement, such as the subject headings of the Library of Congress Subject Headings? Should there be provision for Boolean coordination of subject headings or descriptors? Are cross-references provided in the catalog? Are see-references provided in the catalog? Is there an "authority list" used for the subject and other entries? In providing answers to some of the questions, only the policy issues should be considered in this manual. What is actually done is part of the procedure manual.

Other questions should include what descriptors or subject headings are in use? What general modifications, short-cuts or abridgements are made in this library? What do you do if the descriptors or subject headings are changed by the issuing agency?

### Descriptive Cataloging

The catalog entry for a small library may only include the author, title, publisher and date for material. There is no reason to expect the detail of edition statements, place of publication, series

statements in every library, and this is stated in the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules*, 2d edition.<sup>1</sup> For libraries using a national cooperative cataloging database, the original cataloging added to the database must be detailed. This distinction should be recorded as policy in this manual as well as being stated in the Procedure Manual. If the library does much original cataloging, the statistics for cataloging output will be low, due to the inordinate amount of time needed in cataloging the original input items.

### Shelving

A shelving policy must consider whether it is the patron or the library worker who takes precedence. For example, do you want a browsing collection? In this case, the classification and the subject access must keep this strategy in mind. At the other extreme, you might want the collection to be accessed almost entirely from the catalog. If so, time-and-motion considerations might dictate a different layout for

- (1) location and arrangement of
  - reference material
  - periodical indexes and abstracts: current
  - periodical indexes and abstracts: retrospective
  - display of new material for patron interest
  - circulating books
  - circulating nonbook material
  - current serials
  - retrospective serials
  - microform serials
  - equipment for using nonbook material
  - government documents
  - equipment for using nonbook government documents
  - material of local interest
  - material of interest to special groups, i.e., librarians, teachers, etc.
  - stored material
- (2) inter-library loan requests and pickups
- (3) material requested by patrons and being held for them to pick up.

Each of the foregoing should be considered in relation to the

catalog (the index to the collection), the circulation desk, elevators, stairs, escalators, etc.

### Inventory and Collection Development

As with other policy statements, the inventory policy should start with what is to be accomplished by doing an inventory. This policy will interact with the collection development policy and may interact with the business office's insurance policy for the library. A collection development policy that relies upon the shelf list to establish whether there is or is not adequate material in predetermined areas of the classification will be sadly deceived by the evolving collection if some areas are missing or have large segments of the material missing from the shelves while listed in the shelf list. Inventory control may be needed for an accrediting agency and for budget purposes. The policy about inventory control should include information about frequency and thoroughness. One library may use the sampling technique to study its inventory and formulate conclusions. Another may inventory each item in the library.

The inventory policy statement should also cover how long the material is listed as missing, and the policies about withdrawal and reordering, which may be integrated with the collection development policy. As with many other policies, this one will be more effective when integrated with the Circulation Department policies, which may or may not be under Technical Services.

### Serials

Serials warrant a separate policy manual. However, the ordering, checking, binding and housing of serials are a part of Technical Services, and will receive brief mention. Serials must be included in the collection development policy and each title reviewed annually to see if it continues to fill a need in the collection worthy of its costs and space demands. Other policies needed for serials include checking in of serials, completion of back files, and a cataloging policy for serials. With the emergence of union lists of serials, a library's policies should address the reason for joining or not joining such a list. A policy statement that supports joining a union list of serials necessitates another policy statement regarding the main-

tenance of the listing for this library. For example if the library adds or deletes serials in its collection, these changes must be made immediately in that library's entries in the union list.

### Forecasting

Each policy section is enhanced by a 5-year forecast but this may be too much to expect when a policy manual is first written. Ultimately these forecasts can be added at the end of each article.

### Professional Duties

Some libraries may want to include policy on professional activities in each area covered in their policy manual. Other libraries may find, however, that this can be covered adequately in the procedure manual.

### Statistics

The concluding policy will deal with statistics. What statistics are kept and for what reasons will probably be incorporated into each of the sections already described, while a general statistics policy is summarized here. This policy can be used later in developing forecasting strategies. How statistics are kept should be detailed in a procedure manual, but what to keep and why, is a legitimate part of the policy manual.

### Index

Some may want to index the policy manual, while others may use the detailed Table of Contents and may not want to spend the time in developing an index. This will be a matter of personal preference.

### Keeping A Policy Manual Current

Many libraries will have only one copy of the Technical Services policy manual; large libraries may have several copies. For libraries with several copies, the copy with or near the head of Technical Services will be designated as the master copy, and changes, deletions,

notes, etc. will be recorded in this copy. Other copies may or may not be kept current until the time the manual is retyped. When first preparing a policy manual you should set guidelines for the layout and updating. Think of your policy manual as a highly structured outline, probably in sentence form. Allow for handwritten additions by including an inch of space between each segment of the outline. When the handwritten additions become too difficult to read, retype the manual (or at least that section). The easiest method for revision is the computer. When the early edition of your manual is in computer storage, the additions can be easily typed in, deletions made, title page updated, and a newly printed Policy Manual produced. The computer does not make the work simple, but it takes the onus out of a repeated typing of largely unchanged text. Without the computer, updated policy manuals can be produced easily by typists who know nothing about libraries, if a librarian will cut and paste an edited edition out of xerox copies of the master—of course clarifying illegible notes as the text evolves. If this route is taken, a yearly revision might be anticipated possibly during the drag days of August. As a personal preference, this author prefers policy manuals to be single spaced for easy scanning with large expansion blanks between sections.

### Changing Policy

This will depend largely upon the administrative style and organizational plan within the library but clearly it should be done in consultation with all involved. In the manual, an immediate deletion should be done in a way that preserves the old text until time for a reprinting. This old-juxtaposed-with-the-new policy will aid in maintaining continuity through the transformation the revision produces.

### Is Writing A Policy Manual A Big Undertaking?

Yes! But the real question is whether having a manual is worth the effort required by its preparation. You might ask yourself, "Can a Technical Service area function easily without a policy manual?" And your answer will hinge on the word "easily." If you and others in the Technical Service area can work "easily" without a defensible

framework for consistency, then the answer may be yes. That framework must answer the "why" questions. Knowing the answer to these questions makes new decisions flow easily within the system. Knowing the "why" for procedures distinguishes between an understanding and rote memory and this understanding helps new staff (and even some old staff) fit in as an integral part of the system. That in itself is justification for much of the effort. Policy manuals offer beautiful opportunities to formulate the reasons for the things we do, and this then encourages us to ask questions that lead to improvements. If you see a better method, "buy it."

#### Note

<sup>1</sup> "Base the choice of a level of description on the purpose of the catalogue or catalogues for which the entry is constructed." *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*, 2d ed. (Chicago: American Library Association, 1978), pp. 14-15.

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