



Collecting for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Best Practices for Virginia Libraries

BEST PRACTICE

NAN CARMACK 

**VIRGINIA TECH.**
PUBLISHING

ABSTRACT

Collecting for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Best Practices for Virginia Libraries presents an overview for auditing library collections, from selection and cataloging to policy and community engagement statements. Developed in concert with public, school, and academic libraries, appendices support all library types.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:
Nan Carmack, Ed.D., M.L.I.S., M.Ed.
Library of Virginia, US
nan.carmack@lva.virginia.gov

KEYWORDS:
collection management; DEI;
cataloging; EDI; diversity audit

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:
Carmack, Nan. "Collecting for
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:
Best Practices for Virginia
Libraries." *Virginia Libraries* 65,
no. 1 (2021): 5, pp. 1–5. DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.21061/valib.v65i1.622>

HISTORY AND PROCESS

During the summer of 2020, a multi-type library working group came together to define a structure for Virginia libraries to audit their collections for representation of diverse authors. This group was comprised of school librarians, academic librarians, and public librarians, as well as faculty members from Longwood University and Old Dominion University. The group enjoyed representation from the Virginia Library Association's Librarians of Color Forum and the LGBTQ+ Forum. The entire working group and their credentials are found in Appendix 1.

The working group collaborated on researching national existing practices and resources as well as defining the steps described in this document. Appendix 2 defines many of the resources.

Certainly, as the year passed, differing practices and views came to light nationally and altered the trajectory of this project, resulting in the recommendations presented here. Many thanks to all who contributed to the knowledge, conversation, and direction of the project.

EDUCATION AND SELF-AWARENESS

Before engaging in any diversity audit planning, librarians should not only educate themselves about libraries, literature, and representation, but also reflect upon their own biases and attitudes. Without self-awareness and industry knowledge, the practices below will fall flat in effect and fail in shifting attitudes towards respect and valuation for all. Appendix 3 offers a small sampling of existing opportunities. It would be impossible to provide a comprehensive, up-to-date listing with new educational and reflective offerings arising daily. Many opportunities exist on the local level, such as within local municipal government and school administration, and on the state level, including Virginia universities, the Library of Virginia, and the Virginia Library Association. Please note that self-awareness and equity education is not a "one and done" activity and should be a regular part of professional development for every librarian.

COLLECTING FOR EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

Prior to auditing the current collection, libraries should establish best practice for collection development and cataloging for acquisition processes. Engaging in these practices will, hopefully, stem the tide of problematic or over-represented titles from being added to the collection.

In short, libraries should establish a collection development policy and practice as quickly and thoughtfully as possible in order to 1) enrich the collections with breadth and depth of current representative authors; 2) better serve the public with such collection additions; and 3) select a start date in order to note the beginning of representative collection practices for future evaluation. The order of these activities is intended to support immediate correction, action, and discoverability but can be viewed as circular in nature. Does one address policy first? Cataloging? Ordering? Certainly, several of these steps can (and should) happen simultaneously when possible. The working group chose the order that follows in the interest of addressing newly acquired and soon-to-be acquired items for immediate action while policy issues, which can be substantially slower in application, are addressed.

A. CATALOGING

Establish and use appropriate subject keywords for MARC Records of newly purchased materials. This is a challenging topic, as the field has not yet landed on accepted keywords, subject headings, etc.

Keyword selection: Best practice indicates that thoughtful and collaborative selection of an institution's keywords be created and then systematically applied. Keyword selection should be conducted with representation from all member libraries of a catalog (for example, public libraries and academic libraries that share an integrated library system (ILS); school systems whose ILS serves elementary, middle, and high schools). If possible, include individuals of historically excluded populations in this collaboration. Appendix 4 suggests resources to develop possible keywords. Again, this topic is evolving so it is imperative that librarians conduct their own research.

Education and application: In order for keyword revisions to be effective tools for discovery as well as future data collection/evaluation, every cataloger must be educated and committed to the keyword set adopted. Library leaders should engage their catalogers in education and self-awareness practices described above as well as require commitment to the application of the new sets of keywords. Further, every ILS differs in how keywords are applied and thus education regarding this technical aspect is necessary. Vendors should provide education, tutorials, and/or written instructions for tagging records.

Example: While the Library of Congress still uses "illegal alien" as a subject heading, keyword tags could be added for "undocumented resident."

B. COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

To best embody Rudine Simms Bishop's (1990) ideas of books as "windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors," the

following steps guide collection development. Appendix 5 presents a wealth of resources for identifying and evaluating resources.

Purchase Order Audits: Establish and utilize purchase order audits in order to ensure that collection additions are inclusive. The following questions are suggested:

1. Are titles from diverse authors represented—from skin color to neurological and physical ability and gender identity?
2. Are there any questionable items that poorly portray a minority group? Conduct an internet search with the book title and “controversy” and evaluate the returns.
3. What percentage of the order is being spent on historically excluded topics, populations, authors? Does this percentage reflect library goals and service population?

The working group acknowledges that an audit process could/should be formalized for an institution, but again, in the interest of stemming the tide, this informal process can be applied immediately.

Collection Practices: Assuming that those selecting books for a collection are librarians, the practices below are no different than those already employed. However, the lens through which librarians deploy these practices should be informed by the education and self-awareness practices described in the first section.

1. Review award lists (see Appendix 5)
2. Use vendor subject lists
3. Consult Library Journal/School Library Journal
4. Use [NovelList](#) to find similar titles to award winners
5. Search [Diversebooks.org](#)

C. POLICY REVIEW

If staff capacity allows, policy review should be conducted simultaneously with all of the prior activities. Certainly, policy additions and changes drive the values of the library and will require action by library leadership and boards. Policies establish priorities and command practice so it is imperative that libraries take on the development of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in their collection development policies. Policy review begins with the simple question: Does the policy reflect equality, diversity, and inclusion? If not,

1. Ascertain why the collection is unbalanced, reviewing collection practices above.
2. Research and draft a policy, in collaboration with library leadership; ask others for input, particularly those from historically excluded populations.

Submit policy to the board for review and action. Policy examples can be found in Appendix 6. Librarians should conduct additional research for sample policies in light of the evolving nature of this topic.

ADDRESSING THE BIAS

Addressing the bias can be controversial but, if grounded in solid library best practice, is always defensible. In the spirit of addressing all perspectives and avoiding censorship, adherence to MUSTIE and CREW weeding practices (see Appendix 8 for definitions) are endorsed. Just because a book has been challenged or includes problematic language and/or illustrations, does not mean it should be weeded on that basis alone. Strategies for addressing these items will be presented later in this guidance.

A. POLICY

If the policy review reveals that an update is required, follow institutional practices for adoption. Often, policy change practices are specified in an organization’s bylaws and should be led by the appropriate unit of leadership—director, dean, principal, etc. Such a change may require stakeholder communication and education in diversity, equity, and inclusion and may need to be preceded by educational opportunities and discussion by those stakeholders. Ideally, such education and exposure would happen prior to any policy presentation, noting that there is a possibility for resistance, negative attitudes, and conflict.

B. STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION

Public institutions are often led by majority population representatives and leaders must be prepared to discuss the necessity and value of a diverse and representative collection. Leaders must also be prepared to address any resulting conflict and resistance from its service population. A topic beyond the scope of this document, conflict communication strategies should be explored prior to introduction of policy discussions. However, libraries strive to present all perspectives and should consider adopting a statement that addresses “problematic” titles, programs, and exhibits that encourages civil discourse and exploration by the reader/attendee/viewer. Sample language is provided below:

{Library Name} values the freedom of expression and strives to represent all perspectives. If you find a book, program, or exhibit troubling, consider these questions:

1. *Why does this make me uncomfortable?*

2. What values are represented?
3. Whose perspective is presented?
4. Does their perspective inform me in any way?
5. Should their perspective/values be censored when my perspective/values are not?

{Library Name}'s director/dean/principal/librarian would be happy to discuss this with you. Please contact {Name} at {phone/email}.

Again, this statement should be collaboratively crafted and staff should be educated in the application of this statement.

C. AUDITING THE EXISTING COLLECTION

There are a variety of strategies that can be adopted, based on the size, budget, and staff capacity of the institution.

Vendor Provided Audits: The prevalence of audits by vendors is growing. The information provided below is based on knowledge as of this publication date. Vendor audits algorithmically evaluate the collection based on metadata, providing a (hopefully) less biased view than audits conducted by hand.

- Booksellers: Macken, Bound to Stay Bound, Ingram, and Baker and Taylor have automated audit tools that evaluate collections based on existing holdings and metadata. These audits are fee based.
- ILS Vendors: Follett ILS customers currently have access to a free audit tool. Consult account representatives for instructions. Consider requesting such a service from ILS vendors, such as Ex Libris, TLC, SIRSIDynix, etc. At the time of this writing, it appears that such services are in development in this sector, although it is unclear the timeline or fee for such a service.

Staff-Conducted Audits: Certainly, staff conducted audits require capacity and planning but are possible. A sample worksheet is included in Appendix 7.

1. Planning

- a. Determine the order in which collections will be audited (YA, Children's, Non-Fiction, Fiction, etc.). If enough staff is available, collections could be audited simultaneously.
- b. Determine staff responsible for each collection. Staff might include collection development and cataloging staff, as well as library assistants, to pull lists and examine MARC records.
- c. Auditing staff should meet to decide:
 - i. Timeline, including targets for each collection, audit staff meetings, etc. Examples: A timeline for

each collection. For example, Fiction: A through C by this date; Non-Fiction: Dewey range 000-200 by this date.

- ii. Resources needed (staff, inventory lists, spreadsheets or worksheets, time off of service desks, space to work through titles if they need hands-on examination)
 - iii. Weeding or deaccessioning protocols
 - iv. Education for all involved on expectations and processes
 - v. Seek support/approval of library administration for these decisions
- #### 2. Execution
- a. Run inventory lists for target collections.
 - b. Compare lists to award winners and other sources outlined in Appendix 5.
 - c. Document list of gaps and provide list to acquisitions staff.
 - d. Examine subject headings and keywords.
 - i. Tag items that need to be edited for subject headings and keywords
 - ii. Edit these items as dictated by protocols developed in the Collection Development section of this document
- #### 3. Outcomes:
- Numerous outcomes can be anticipated by an audit. Consider these and establish additional outcomes as desired by the institution.
- a. Informs acquisitions
 - b. Informs potential in-library and virtual displays (Does the library website and social media feature diverse titles, topics on a regular basis?)
 - c. Informs potential programming, i.e., book groups, author talks, etc.
 - d. Demonstrates commitment to diversity and inclusivity to the community
- #### 4. Evaluation:
- The initial audit will serve as the benchmark for evaluation. Evaluation of the collection should occur on a predetermined schedule for evidence of progress towards a balanced, inclusive collection. Items to compare may include
- a. Percent representation of diverse and inclusive topics and authors
 - b. Percent budget spent on diverse and inclusive topics and authors
 - c. Consistent usage of selected keywords and subject headings (achieved by searches by the same in the catalog).
 - d. Circulation of diverse and inclusive materials
 - e. Numbers of displays, programs, representation of diverse and inclusive materials/topics.

CONCLUSION

As an institution that embraces democratization of information, it is critical that libraries engage in diverse, equitable, and inclusive practices. Librarians are called upon to provide trusted resources for both informational and personal consumption—resources that may be different for every member of their service population. Embracing Ranganathan’s *Laws of Library Science* (1931), particularly 2: Every reader, their book; 3. Every book, its reader, and 5. The library is a growing organism, the practices described here position the library as a trusted resource for all.

ADDITIONAL FILE

The additional file for this article can be found as follows:

- **Appendices.** Appendix 1 to 8. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21061/valib.v65i1.622.s1>

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Nan Carmack, Ed.D., M.L.I.S., M.Ed.  orcid.org/0000-0002-5897-2756
Library of Virginia, US

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Carmack, Nan. “Collecting for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Best Practices for Virginia Libraries.” *Virginia Libraries* 65, no. 1 (2021): 5, pp. 1–5. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21061/valib.v65i1.622>

Submitted: 26 July 2021 Accepted: 05 October 2021 Published: 25 October 2021

COPYRIGHT:

© 2021 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Virginia Libraries is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by VT Publishing.