Strengthen Your Core (Collection)

How to Select and Promote Essential Titles at Your Library

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Denver Public Library
September 2019
Learning Objectives

- Define a core collection and understand its benefits
- Decide if a core collection is right for your library and be able to start creating and implementing a plan
- Brainstorm a core collection process that will work for your specific environment
Agenda

1. Intro to Core Collections at Denver Public Library
2. Process
3. Looking Ahead
4. Activity
5. Questions
What is a “Core Collection”?

Developing an Outstanding Core Collection: a Guide for Libraries by Carol Alabaster, 2nd ed:

“Certain books and films are standard classic titles that are at the very heart of a library’s collection and form the foundation upon which a library’s collection is built.” (vii)

“Core titles are the books people assume they will find at their library.” (13)

“[A]ll core titles must circulate, not necessarily like Oprah selections or the latest bestseller, but they must be of current interest...So although all core titles are great books, not all Great Books are core titles. Core collections...must also reflect the community’s uniqueness[...].” (18)
Denver Public Library Collections Context

- DPL has 26 branches that share “one dynamic collection”
- DPL’s circulating collection floats and re-distributes through an ILS function called “load-balancing”
- A centralized Collection Development Office purchases items and welcomes staff input
Three Tenets of a Core Collection

- Culturally important/foundational works/“classic titles”
- Reflect diversity and uniqueness of community
- Enduringly popular/continue to circulate
Why have Core Collections?

- Give customers (and staff!) a solid foundation for a particular genre or subject
- Aid staff in performing readers’ advisory
- Promote cultural literacy
- Allow for easy reordering of these books
- Decrease wait time for a book
- Committee and Subcommittees are ways for staff to explore leadership opportunities
Core Collections: The Story So Far

Completed
- Horror Fiction (Pilot)
- Adult American Poetry
- Western Genre Fiction
- Short Stories
- Alternate Classics
- True Crime
- Children’s Poetry
- Beginning Readers

Currently In Progress
- Standalone Mysteries
- Children’s Chapter Books
- WWII Historical Fiction
Funding/Budget

• Collection Development Office (CDO) has a budget line for buying added copies
• Core Collection added copies are a priority
  ○ Core titles are being promoted
  ○ An increase in promotion leads to an increase in demand
  ○ Committed to having a minimum number of copies per title
    ■ Minimum number depends on collection
Team Structure

- The Core Collection Steering Committee (CCSC):
  - 10 staff members from around DPL serve terms
  - Led by 2 Collection Development (CDO) Librarians
  - Create applications and promote subcommittee opportunities to all staff

- Pairs of CCSC members co-lead subcommittees
  - Look at one collection segment for a limited amount of time
  - Work together to develop their Core Collection segment through research and discussion
  - CCSC co-leaders have discretion about what process works for the group’s particular needs
Macro Process: A Core Collection Cycle

All CCSC: Pick segment

CDO: Use list for refreshes

CCSC: Compile & promote list

CCSC Leads: Pick team

Teams: Create list
Micro Process: Selecting a Core Collection

It’s flexible! Including:

- Defining genre
- Reading titles
- Conducting surveys (staff or patrons)
- Researching (Wikipedia!)
- Making spreadsheets for days
- Conducting diversity audits
- Running statistics
- Having so many discussions
- Feeling endless feelings
Team Criteria - Children’s Chapter Books

The final list will include books in the broadest possible range of reading levels, genres, and ages of reader. The books will demonstrate all or most of the following qualities:

- Current and enduring popularity and relevance to Denver’s children
- Literary merit
- Kid appeal
- A pleasurable read
- High quality presentation
- Reflective of Denver’s diversity
- Own voices
- Lasting appeal
Team Criteria - Adult Alternate Classics

The final list will include books that are classics in the sense that they are important, relevant, and foundational works. The books on this list will be guided by the following criteria:

- Representation of mental health, disability, LGBTQIA+, religion, and more
- Representation of author attributes
- Fiction and narrative non-fiction
- Balanced dates of publication
- Own voices
- Relevant topics
- Lasting appeal
To Read or Not to Read

Depends on

● Collection
● Audience
● Time
Prioritizing

- Reviews
- Awards
- Book lists
- Blogs
Staff Surveys

- Your organization has a lot of knowledge -- use it to build your core lists!
- Request input from coworkers using Google Forms or other survey tools
- Be creative with questions
  - Think: What purpose do I want the books on my list to have?

Sample Questions:

- ★ What is a book that helped you understand a life experience that is different from your own?
- ★ What is a book that reflected your own experience in a way that was important to you?
Diversity Audits - the Why?

- Determine the characteristics that each title and/or author will contribute to your list
- Ensure that your core list is diverse, inclusive, and represents your service area
- Find holes in representation
- We want authentic representation!
  - Quality matters
  - OwnVoices
  - Reading to better understand details of the representation may be important here, especially with children’s literature
Diversity Audits - the How?

- Google Form method
  - Gets data into a manageable, digestible format
  - Form allows for controlled vocabulary
  - Easy to create graphs to visually see data
- This is where the criteria you set up can come in handy - use it to guide your audit!
- No way to audit for everything - pick and choose what’s most important
Staff Development

- Recruitment
- Team work
- Reading
- Discussion
- Evaluation
- Reader’s Advisory
- Collection advocates
Collection Clean Up

- Inconsistencies
- Collection gaps
- Necessary rebuys
- Weeding
Marketing Core Collections

- Internally
  - Blogs, emails, usual channels
  - Staff trainings
  - Subject headings

- Public-Facing
  - Adults: denverlibrary.org/recommendations
  - Embedded lists on kids.denverlibrary.org
  - Bookmarks/print collateral
  - Public blog posts
  - Displays, programming, etc.
  - The sky’s the limit!
Evaluation

Staff feedback survey

● Are staff aware of the core collections?
● How are they accessing them?
● Are they using them and how?
Lessons Learned

- Clarify goals and expectations early and communicate them with your team
- Perform a diversity audit before completing your list
- Talk to supervisors about blocking out project time
- Develop a communication strategy to reach all staff and customers
Looking Ahead

- Goal is to have a Core Collection created for most genres and sub-topics
- 5-8 collections completed per year
- Reevaluate lists every 5-10 years
  - How do you know a title has longevity?
2020 Projects

Children’s Collections
- Gardening & Cookbooks
- Biographies
- Series

Adult Collections
- Graphic Novels
- Essays
- Biographies
Activity

Find a partner or small group. Together, answer the questions on the handout around creating core collections for an imaginary or real library.

- Goal
- Target audience & benefits
- Starting collection
- Promotion
Questions?


Contact Us

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