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Riding the whirlwind: the changing world of collection development

Robin Bradford * January 21, 2026



What's on Tap

- The Rules of Collection Development
- Policy vs. Procedure – and how to utilize both
- Surviving, and thriving, in the chaos.
- Q&A

The Ground Rules of Collection Development



Ground Rules 1 & 2

- **You will never be caught up**

- There is always another Tuesday
- It's not *just* Tuesday anymore
- More books are being published than ever before.
- Collection Development is being done with more care than ever before.
- Finding the things is half the battle.
- Everything wants a piece of your time.

- **It won't get done unless you do it.**

- Often only 1 person assigned to an "area"
- Selection is rarely your only job even if you work exclusively in collection development
- Study Long/Study Wrong.
- Decisions must be made.

Ground Rules 3 & 4

◦ **You must be curious**

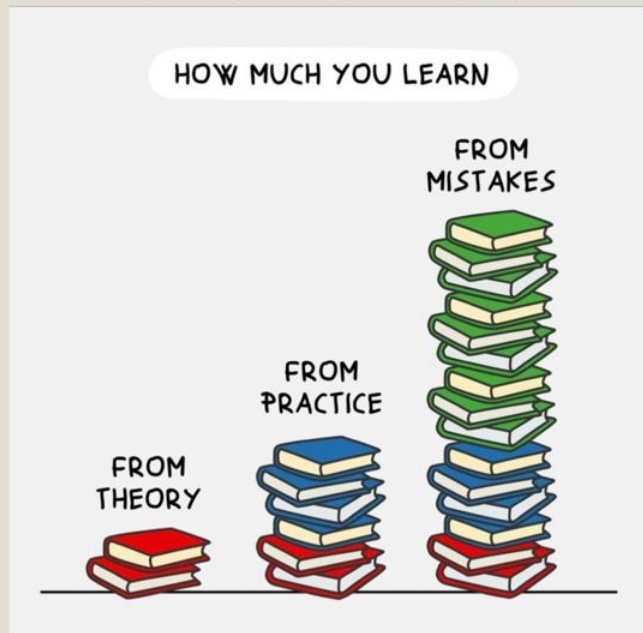
- Buying the obvious is important, but finding the gems is too.
- Discoverability is the name of the game
- Who are we missing in the collection?
- What is just over the horizon?
- Show horses vs. Work horses
- Absorb the "book atmosphere"

◦ **You must be adaptable**

- Libraries, and publishing, moving at a more rapid pace.
- "How we've always done it" can't always apply.
- WAY more than 50 shades of Grey
- The world is changing with or without your permission.

Ground Rules 5 & 6

- **You will make mistakes**



- **Your job is to open the floodgates, not be a gatekeeper.**

- Someone's winner is someone else's loser.
- Access to titles, not just access to titles the selector deems "good."
- Interest is enough. Collection maintenance will take care of the rest.
- Be the place of discovery.

Also remember...

Accessibility is the main goal. Sustainability must come next.

Read all your fine print.

Be cautiously optimistic — emphasis on cautiously.

Don't ignore the chatter, but DO remember to filter it for what's best for YOU.

No one is too big to fail. It just hurts more when they do.

KNOW YOUR REPS.

Be direct with them. Let them know you expect the same in return.

Make sure they know you, your library, your situation.

Policies and Procedures

Collection Development Policy

[East Moline Public Library Collections Development Policy](#)

[La Grange Public Library Collection Development Policy](#)

The “thousand level view” of your collection.

Usually (but not always!) relatively short.

Usually (but not always!) approved by the board.

Usually (but definitely not always!) KEPT UPDATED.

Hits the highlights for the collection in terms of what most patrons want to know.

Selection of books, Removal of books, how to make suggestions, what we do with donations, what you can expect to find, what we don't carry, anti-censorship language.

Collection Development Procedures/Plans

[La Grange Public Library Collection Management Plan](#)

A great reference with a lot of detail. If you're looking for a procedure manual, I would start here.

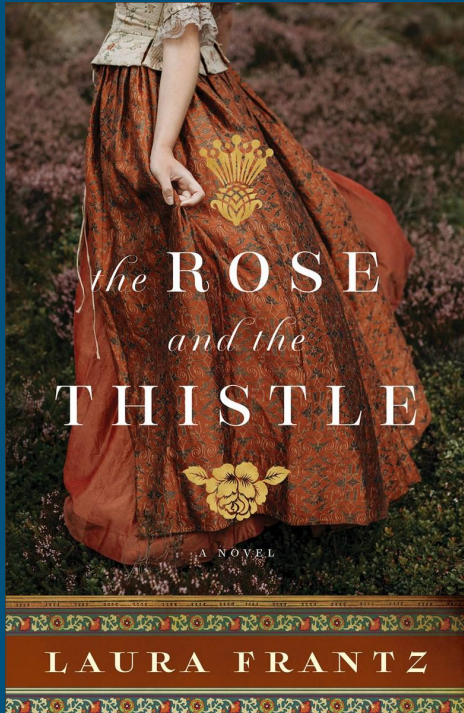
Out of date almost as soon as published.

Hard to keep updated.

Great for in house use, though, especially for training new staff.

Great for ALL staff use because the person who buys the mysteries isn't necessarily who will get the QUESTIONS about the mysteries.

The Rose and the Thistle



Not all requests for reconsideration/requests for censorship come in at 100.

Christian fiction, Christian fiction publisher, Christian fiction subject headings, Christy award winning in Historical Romance

Complaint alleged:

1. Drinking
2. Cursing
3. ????????

Surviving and Thriving!

Materials and Display Challenges

Book and display challenges aren't in the news everyday, but they remain.

Complaints about any number of collection related things, from acquisitions to weeding, still exist.

The complaints are the problem, we just need to be prepared for how to deal with them.

Get your reconsideration policy in writing if it isn't already, make sure it is updated, role play scenarios to get practice with your responses, include EVERYONE

Realize that you may not change anyone's mind.

And remember...

Digital landscape is still the Wild West. New models, Higher Prices, More Titles than ever. New vendors.

[More advocates.](#)

Libraries aren't going anywhere

Our demise is often predicted, never completed. We continue to adapt in terms of who we're serving, how we're serving, in what formats we're serving. We've heard that no one wants this format, we move to the next one. We've heard no one wants print books anymore, every genre in our fiction collection had higher circ in 2025 than 2024, including Westerns (which no one wants anymore!) We are going to be here for a long time to come and we're going to do that by making sure we have what we need, getting it in a way that doesn't make us frantic, and keeping it accessible to all.

Q&A

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