

## **MLAG Policy Sub-Group – Policy Guidelines Series**

### **Policy Guideline 1: Library Disposals**

#### **1.1 Purpose**

The purpose of these guideline documents is to provide support, aid and guidance to MLAG librarians and archivists who need to write new or revise existing operational policy documents for their libraries and archives.

Each of these guideline documents has been compiled following a review of active policy documents that are currently being used across MLAG libraries as well as policy documents from libraries and archives across other relevant library and archive sectors. The views and opinions of MLAG members have also been sought to ensure that all the relevant topics and issues for each policy area is included in each of the guidelines.

Each set of guidelines outlines the issues and themes that the MLAG Policy Sub-Group has identified as being the key elements to consider in a prospective policy document. The Policy Sub-Group has endeavoured to be as comprehensive as possible in ensuring that all relevant information is included in the guidelines. However colleagues are still strongly advised when writing a library or archive policy to supplement the content of these guidelines with their own research and investigations.

#### **1.2 Drafting your policy**

The guideline documents should be used on a selective basis by librarians and archivists to ensure that only the information that is relevant to the requirements of their own library and archive policy is included. Librarians and archivists are therefore advised to read through the guideline document first and highlight whatever topics are relevant to them before they commence writing their policy document.

It should also be stressed that the guidelines only contain basic guidance and pointers for each of the themes that are being recommended for inclusion in a policy document. As such each topic or theme listed in the guideline will probably need to be substantially expanded, contextualised and tailored so that it matches the specifications of the library or archive that the policy relates to.

In addition some of the topics or themes listed in the guidelines, particularly those mentioning standards, legislation, government directives, etc. will need to be double checked to ensure that the most current information is included.

We hope you find these series of guidelines useful and we wish you luck with your policy writing. If you require further support, please post your queries on the MLAG blog or list serve.

## **2. LIBRARY DISPOSALS POLICY**

#### **2.1 Overview**

When writing a library disposals policy, it is worth starting the exercise by considering each of the following external issues in turn and ascertaining if, where and how these relate to the policy document that you are about to write.

Particular attention should be paid to any statutory, legal or organisational implications that may derive from library disposals activity. If necessary, professional advice should be sought from your museum legal advisor (or equivalent) before proceeding.

## **2.2 Scope and Parameters**

The scope and parameters of the library disposal policy should be clearly understood at the outset. For example, does it cover just library materials or does it also cover archival materials, corporate records and/or museum objects?

If the disposal policy to be written is also intended to cover archival materials, corporate records, or museum objects, then the policy will need to refer to the appropriate professional standards and guidelines for these areas of activity. Refer to the accredited websites for archivists, records managers and museum curators for the latest guidance. The policy will also need to clearly state where and how the processes and procedures for the disposal of these types of items differ from those of library items.

Note that this guideline document has been written from the perspective of library disposals and as such all guidance contained from here only refers to the disposal of library materials, i.e. books, journals, maps, ephemeral materials, and other published / secondary source materials, including electronic resources. CILIP as the professional association for librarians provides a disposal policy for rare books and manuscripts on its website.

## **2.3 Library Collecting Policy**

The library disposals policy should be explicitly linked to the library collecting policy and must be congruent with the aims and objectives of the collecting policy. When writing the disposals policy it is therefore advisable to start by referring to the guiding principles and selection criteria specified in the library collecting policy and ensure that the points raised in these sections are checked and cross referenced against the corresponding sections in the disposals policy. This will ensure consistency of approach and avoid accidental disposal of items that should be retained.

## **2.4 Policies of Parent Institution**

The policies of the wider museum or gallery should also be referred to when writing a library disposals policy, particularly any that relate to acquisitions, collecting or disposals of objects. However, other policies that may impact on the library's approach to the disposal of materials should also be considered, for example the research policy, digitisation policy, intellectual property policy.

In addition to examining the policies of the museum or gallery, the museum / gallery strategic plan, cultural programme, learning programme, etc. should also be mentioned to ensure any activities that fall out of these plans or programmes which may directly impact on the library's collections are acknowledged in the library disposals policy.

## **2.5 Permissions and Ownership**

It is crucially important to ensure that the library has clarified the right to dispose of an item before removing it from the collection and as such the library disposals policy must make clear that permission and ownership rights are checked and verified before any library item is disposed of.

It may be useful to include a list of stakeholders in the disposals policy (as an appendix), who might need to be consulted prior to the disposal of any items, e.g. the museum / gallery registrar, records manager, legal advisor and original donor where relevant.

## **2.6 Legal Requirements and Statutory Acts**

The library disposals policy must make clear what legal requirements and/or statutory acts impact upon the library. For example, the libraries of national museums and galleries will need to abide by the terms of The National Heritage Act and the Public Records Act, and as such will need to ensure that library disposals are processed in a manner that fulfils the criteria set out in these acts. Similarly, local authority museums may be subject to local government legislation, which might impact on the library's ability to dispose of items.

In addition to government legislation, the library disposals policy should also seek to make clear where any local contractual requirements impact on library disposals. For example if the library

has a contractual agreement to enable access to collections by a local university, then this will need to be factored into the assessment process prior to disposal.

## **2.7 Collection Types and Formats**

The library disposals policy should clearly define what collection types and formats are in and out of scope for disposal.

For example, the policy will need to state whether all collection types, e.g. books, journals, maps, ephemeral materials, etc. will be treated in the same way during the disposal process and if not the policy will need to state what the key procedural differences are.

Similarly, the disposals policy needs to state whether any non-paper formats will be included in the disposal process, for example photographic or slide collections, microfiche, CD-ROMs, videos / DVDs. If these are included then an appropriate disposal process will need to be specified.

## **2.8 Staff Consultation**

A statement regarding prior consultation with museum or gallery staff, e.g. curators, educators, conservators, should be included in the library disposal policy. Similarly, a statement about consultation with library users and other external stakeholders may also be worth considering.

Consultation of this kind helps ensure that all decisions to dispose of library items are informed, documented and evidence based, which reduces the risk of the library disposing of items that still have value.

## **2.9 Reputational Risk of Disposal**

The library disposals policy should clearly define the reputational risk to the library and the wider museum / gallery of the disposal of library items. This is especially important if the items to be disposed of may be perceived as having some special significance amongst the wider public or if a member of the public subsequently questions why items have been disposed of. These issues are of particular concern when library items that have been withdrawn through the proper processes are later found in settings such as a charity shop, jumble sale or a rubbish skip.

The disposal policy may also want to indicate how these risks may be accurately measured and mitigated. Similarly, it may also be worth mentioning under what circumstances the museum / gallery press and PR team may need to be involved, e.g. to handle any enquiries or complaints that may arise from disposal of a significant item or collection.

# **3. RATIONALE FOR DISPOSAL**

Many of the Library Collections within MLAG institutions are historic and unique, which can make disposal of material more complicated, though not impossible. To assist with disposal, it is recommended that all MLAG libraries should have an up-to-date collecting policy, which is reviewed on an annual basis, along with any disposals policy. Listed below are the top ten key reasons for disposal as defined by MLAG members, which should be considered for inclusion when writing a library disposals policy.

Where possible, explore all available options for promoting your collection, through shared catalogues such as COPAC and WorldCat. Moving material off-site or permanent disposal should be seen as a last resort.

## **3.1 Duplication**

Duplication should not be encouraged, particularly where the library collection is reference only, but do consider retaining loan copies of key texts for supporting exhibition development. Donations should be checked against stock and then disposed of where a copy already exists. Material that meets the collection criteria should be retained and added to stock.

### **3.2 Out of date works**

Check to see if the material is still being used by staff and if copies can be accessed through another library – for example it may make sense to keep only the current copy of a year book, if your institution does not require a back file.

### **3.3 Uneconomic to repair**

It may be possible to fundraise for repair, but if this is not an option, then the item could be sent to another institution on the grounds that it is rare or irreplaceable.

### **3.4 Changes in collection policy**

Reviews of collecting policies and disposals policies should be done together. It is also important to keep up to date with the rationale behind your institution's collection development policy, as this may change over time.

### **3.5 Lack of use**

Determine why the material is not being used – are users getting it somewhere else or is it not relevant? If so, then refer back to your collecting policy. Is the material in the right format? If not, then it may have been superseded by digital versions.

### **3.6 Degradation of collections**

Can this material be sent to another institution better placed to maintain it? If material is not original, then consider weeding as it may affect the health of your collection.

### **3.7 More relevant to other collections**

If the item does not meet the criteria set by your collecting policy, then it should be sent to an institution where it does. This raises the issue of collaborative policies between MLAG and other libraries which have similar subject areas. The need for individual libraries to get their records onto shared catalogues e.g. COPAC and WorldCat can be seen as not only useful for promotion but to assist in collection development.

### **3.8 Lack of space**

Off-site storage should be considered but only if it is economically viable and there is a regular delivery service, so that material can still be retrieved and user expectations are met.

### **3.9 Superseded by digital versions**

How historical is the collection? Does your library hold the only run in the UK or internationally? If so, then keep. If not, then dispose of and replace with electronic version, but do check agreements with suppliers as sometimes when you unsubscribe, access to back issues is no longer supplied.

### **3.10 Foreign language materials**

Dependent on your collection policy – in general material should be collected in all languages if this is the only version of an item, otherwise the preference should be for English editions.