The preceding chapters have dealt with the theory and practice of creating adult core collections. The discussion has centered on the definition and philosophy of core title selection, the importance of a written collection development statement as a buying plan, and the criteria and sources to use to unearth core titles. It deserves stressing again that there are many different routes that a library can take to develop core collections. Collections can be of varying size and cost. Of primary importance is that the core collection reflects the library’s community and is viable for its consumers.

The remaining components to be discussed are the actual ordering of titles, budget considerations, evaluation and maintenance of core collections, and the design of a core marketing plan. All these elements play a vital role in selection for the general collection; they are equally important for core collection development. As always, the ensuing discussion will center on the specifics of these topics as they relate directly to core collections.

**BUDGET ALLOCATION FOR CORE TITLES**

Once the materials budget has been determined, it can then be divided in numerous ways. The budget can be differentiated by age level (children, teen, adult), for-
mat (book, video, audio), language (English, Spanish, Chinese), or subject (fiction, history, religion), or by whether it is new, retrospective (new to the library but not newly published—useful for tracking collection upgrading), replacement, or core title, or, additionally, whether it is a circulating, reference, or electronic resource.

The finer the breakdown of the materials budget, the easier it is for selectors to track their expenditures to ensure they are following established collection development policies. The resulting list of budget fund levels can become extensive and result in a bookkeeping nightmare for technical services staff. Fortunately, there are many electronic acquisitions systems available today that can support a detailed budget breakdown. The Phoenix Public Library at one point had over 1,500 fund codes! If your library does not have access to an automated fund management system, I suggest that you limit your budget levels to those of the utmost importance. It is a good idea, however, to give each selector unique fund levels to ensure fiscal responsibility. Strong consideration should be given to creating separate fund levels for core materials. These core fund levels will allow selectors to see exactly how much money has been spent on core titles, along with the average discount and fill rates.

The percentage of a library’s total budget allocated to collection development is an excellent indication of its priorities. Budget allocations should reflect the policies outlined in the collection development statement with allotments matching the library’s needs as expressed therein. Matching funds to a library’s stated needs is complicated and can be quite time-consuming. However, it is the only way to monitor expenditures and have a clear picture of how a library is spending its monies. The simplest way to beef up a subject is to allocate funds to it. Allocations need to be reviewed yearly to make certain that the money has been spent as planned and the expected collection results obtained. If collection enhancement has taken place correctly, then funds can be reallocated in the coming fiscal year to another subject area in need of upgrading.

Determining how much money to put in a core budget fund is difficult, particularly if funds are limited. For general subject collections, budget allocations can be determined by reviewing circulation figures, community demands and interests, publication and inflation rates, and proportional subject makeup of bibliographies, such as the Public Library Catalog, Reader’s Adviser, or Subject Guide to Books in Print. Several of the collection development handbooks listed in chapter 6 have information on setting up a materials budget, including specific formulas for division of monies. None of these, however, is a uniformly accepted method, and all are of limited use in deciding core allocations. In Collection Development, William Katz claims that the problem of how to divide a library’s materials budget is essentially a “debate between a librarian and an economist.
The latter bemoans the lack of statistical data available from libraries; the former counters that libraries (including their budgets) fail to lend themselves to measurement because their books reflect the amazing diversity of human perception.”¹ This is certainly the case with core titles.

It is virtually impossible to predict how much money it will take to develop a core collection. Much will depend on what emphasis has been placed on collecting basic works and classics in the past, whether these titles have been replaced regularly, and if they are still available for circulation and are in decent condition. Chances are that older library systems will already own more core titles, but they might be shabby and worn. A library’s definition of core and how broadly or narrowly it has been defined in the core development collection statement will ultimately determine how many titles need to be purchased to establish this collection.

The easiest way to obtain core funds is to simply trim a percentage off the top of the materials budget for core purchases. This is guaranteed to make waves with the selectors, because it will reduce their discretionary selection dollars. If there is staff buy-in to core collection creation, the budget allocation process will be a lot less painful for everyone. Ideally, this would be done during a year when the library’s materials budget has increased, so the effect on individual branch budgets would be negligible.

Libraries should consider presenting the plans for core collection development to their city councils, library boards, or other official sanctioning bodies, explaining core’s importance to the community, and requesting funds be earmarked for this project. Library Friends groups might be interested in raising additional funds for core collections through their book sales, dinners, or author signings. Cooperative collection development might be undertaken with local community colleges or schools whose budgets have outpaced their facilities and so have additional funding that they cannot spend because of lack of collection space. Additionally, there might be opportunities to apply for grant funds to be used specifically to supplement the materials budget for core collection creation.

Remember, although core collection development will be ongoing, the major expenditure will come with the initial purchase of core titles. Once the entire collection has been reviewed and all required core titles purchased, the cost of adding newly published core titles or replacing lost or worn titles will be much lower. Once established, the monies for replacement or updating of the core collection need no longer be a separate line item. The funds can now come out of the yearly materials budget, as this reiteration of core should not be a major ongoing expense. If many additional core titles need to be added every year, then it might be necessary to reexamine the core criteria and selecting practices. Well-selected core titles should retain their significance well beyond two or three years.
Whether these funds are taken from the existing budget or secured elsewhere, they can be divided among agencies or spent centrally. Whichever method is adopted, records should be kept on how much is being spent on core—by subject, by each branch, and by the entire system. These figures will prove helpful when core collection use is evaluated later to determine if core purchases resulted in any significant changes in circulation. Knowing, for example, exactly how much money has been spent on core titles for a particular subject, staff can then review circulation statistics for that subject to determine if any change has occurred in that subject’s use. Consideration should be given to dividing core funds among the individual branch agencies and the central library. Although this complicates bookkeeping, it will result in stronger selector commitment to core list creation, because their funds are being spent on core titles, not some far-off centralized budget over which they have no control.

This occurred in the Phoenix Public Library when funds came from a central pot of money. Librarians attending review forums where core selections were being decided commented that they really didn’t care what titles were selected as long as the purchases weren’t coming out of their monies. On the other hand, it must be mentioned that having centralized core funds did reduce staff angst about their reduced budgets. It is a trade-off. Each library system will have to decide how best to proceed.

When dividing funds among agencies, keep in mind that it is the smallest branch with the most limited budget that will most likely need the most money for core titles. A central library or regional branch with larger collections and accompanying budgets should have many core titles already. It is the smaller collections that will need to add more core titles, as, most likely, their coverage of less-in-demand subjects will be limited by budget constraints and reduced shelf space. Large library systems with branches of varying sizes might consider undertaking a tiered core system. In this manner, varying amounts of titles could be required for agencies depending on the individual size, budget, or circulation. Although Phoenix Public Library did adopt a tiered acquisition system for core reference materials, we did not deem it suitable for circulating core titles. We felt that requiring every agency to have the same core titles, with no exceptions, would keep the number of core titles manageable and ensure staff accepting the core process. This way everyone would have an equal stake in what titles were selected. Most importantly, it would ultimately limit the core collection to only the very best titles; librarians in the smaller branches with budget and size constraints would just not condone designating a mediocre title as core. Allowing the core collection to grow beyond the most outstanding titles would ultimately dilute the collection’s value to the community.
The division of the library’s collection by subject and genre into an organized buying plan will assist you in determining how much money you will need to allocate to core collection creation each year. For example, if it is determined that the philosophy collection is weak and missing standard works, more money will need to be allocated when this area is reviewed for core titles. Subject areas, such as art and science, with books that are generally more expensive will also require more core dollars. Exactly how much money is needed for any given subject cannot be determined until the core titles are actually selected and a systemwide inventory undertaken to find out exactly how many copies of a particular core title are needed. At Phoenix Public Library, we were frequently surprised at the number of titles that were no longer in our collection. Selectors had assumed they still had them. Sometimes the condition or appearance of a core title was so poor that replacement was deemed necessary. New editions with jazzy covers made replacement desirable and resulted in increased circulation. If a branch had several copies of a core title, these were distributed throughout the system to save money. This also expanded access for the out-of-print titles.

If the inability to determine the exact budgetary needs for core selection is too uncomfortable for you, there are various ways to allocate core budgets. Core selection work can proceed during one fiscal year with the ordering delayed until the next fiscal year after the costs for core selections have been computed. Another possibility is to set aside a finite amount of money for core titles; selections must subsequently match that amount. In this scenario, priorities need to be assigned for each title, because once the core monies are expended, selection ceases. Additionally, libraries can decide not to designate any special funds for core. Core titles are selected from the regular materials budget with selectors determining core priorities and purchasing accordingly.

This last method will be most successful if core selection is deemed a high priority. If it is not, core purchases might be curtailed. This is not a problem if a library is interested in sustaining only a limited core collection. A small, tight selection of the very best books available can still enhance a library’s collection. The main thing to remember when beginning a core collection is there will be a direct correlation between the money allocated and spent on core titles and the ultimate size of your core collection.

The uncertainty of how much to allocate for core titles can result in too few or too many funds for core purchasing. Surprisingly, both of these can prove problematic. Obviously too little money will restrict the quantity of titles that can be purchased. This can result in core purchases being postponed until a time when additional funds become available. During this interim, titles can go out of print. Although too much core money hardly seems like a problem, excess funding can
dilute core collection decisions and result in titles that are not truly core being purchased. If you should find yourself in such an enviable position, consider buying duplicate copies of the more popular core titles.

Whatever is decided, it is a good idea to also set aside money to purchase the necessary selection tools needed for core work. Additional copies of certain bibliographies, such as Fiction Catalog or Public Library Catalog, might be needed, particularly if selectors throughout the library will be working on core list creation. If your library is fortunate enough to receive a grant or additional funding to pay for core purchases, make certain before you begin expending this money that adequate technical services staff are available to handle the increased ordering, cataloging, and processing needed for core materials. Make certain that you have sufficient processing supplies, such as book jackets, video cases, or CD jewel boxes on hand; budget for these increases as well. Check your shelf space to ascertain whether you have enough room to house the addition of core titles. If not, and if purchasing more shelves isn’t an option, consider doing a massive deselection project before receiving your first core shipment.

**ORDERING CORE TITLES SYSTEMWIDE**

In small libraries of only one or two agencies, once a title has been determined to be core, it can basically just be ordered. Although core ordering has an impact on any size library, in larger systems, core title ordering has greater ramifications. If not organized properly, it can cause havoc in the normal selection process and create substantial additional work for selectors. To keep this to a minimum, some central work needs to be done up front even in libraries without centralized selection.

It is a good idea to coordinate core subject ordering with general add and replacement work in the same subject. This allows selectors to know, for example, that they are required to buy a certain book on pandas. They might, therefore, elect to skip another non-core title on the same subject. To save selector time, searching systemwide for title availability can be done centrally if staffing allows, and holdings information can then be supplied directly on selection lists. This will save each agency having to check its holdings and circulation for every core title. Even if this initial checking is done centrally, it still is important that branch staff check their shelves for the core title’s condition. Knowing which titles they already have allows branch staff to check only those titles their branch is listed as owning. Preparing selection lists in call number order will assist this shelf check.

When doing ongoing core review work—after the initial purchasing of core titles—staff will continue to save time by following these same procedures. It is far
more effective to have all core selectors conform to the same core add and replacement schedule. A sample breakdown of the entire collection into three mostly equal parts can be found in chapter 5. This schedule allows for a core selection list to be released approximately ten times over the course of a year. Adhering to a core replacement schedule will ultimately save staff time because it eliminates checking individually for title availability and repeatedly writing or creating online the same order. Technical services staff will appreciate not having to purchase, catalog, and process the same titles over and over again. Schedule exceptions may need to be made for those titles that are lost almost immediately or are in such demand that staff members do not want to wait for the core ordering cycle to repeat itself. However, even in these cases, whenever a core title is ordered it should be offered for purchase systemwide on the off chance that another agency needs a replacement also.

**ACQUISITION OF CORE TITLES**

Locating and acquiring core titles should mirror the normal acquisition procedures used to purchase titles for the general collection. The closer core purchasing is to established library processes, the less impact it will have on the work flow of technical services and the less likely it is to cause a delay in receipt of library materials. Core orders need to be written or created electronically in a manner consistent with the rest of library purchasing. Communication between selectors and technical services staff is crucial to the success of any core collection project. Besides just normal courtesy between library units, talking to technical services staff about the forthcoming core collection can help ensure that these materials are received in a timely manner and can eliminate potential resentment on the part of either public services or technical services staffs. To this end, the buying plan schedule needs to be developed in conjunction with acquisitions, cataloging, and processing units. If you have decided to develop a special core work form that will ultimately be used to order core titles, this should also be approved by technical services staff before core selectors begin to use it.

Acquisitions staff, with their experience and expertise in purchasing materials, are an excellent resource for determining publisher reliability, discounts, and fill rates. This is useful information because classic titles can be available in numerous editions. Often acquisitions staff are also knowledgeable about special vendor purchasing plans or new publishing imprints. Most libraries use a vendor or a jobber (both words are used interchangeably today) to eliminate the need to order every title individually from its publisher. (Vendors allow libraries to place orders
for titles from many different publishers at the same time, often with a substantial prenegotiated discount.)

Once acquisitions staff are alerted to the advent of core collection development and the type of material that will be ordered, they might deem it worthwhile to talk to the library’s vendors or directly to publishers about the implementation of core purchasing. Acquisitions staff might be able to obtain an additional discount with certain publishers that are known to publish classics or core titles regularly. If there has been a significant increase in the book budget because of core allocations or a grant for core purchasing, acquisitions might decide an increase in vendor discounts is justified and negotiate accordingly. Vendor discounts are usually determined by the total amount of money to be spent with one particular vendor.

With selector input, acquisitions staff could set up an approval plan or standing order for ongoing receipt of potential core purchases. For example, the Library of America Series books are excellent, reasonably priced editions of outstanding American writings printed on acid-free paper. This series could be established as a standing order, so that each new title would be automatically sent to the library. If a library needs multiple copies, the standing order could be set up for this as well. Acquisitions could also arrange for samples of different editions, new publisher imprints, or binding alternatives to be sent to the library for selector review.

Processing and mending staff can assist core selection by recommending the most durable editions of a core title. This is an important consideration because longevity and retention rates can save money. Unlike the selection of best-sellers where there are usually no options, core selection frequently allows for binding, imprint, and publisher choices. Public services librarians need to remember to take advantage of the knowledge available in the library’s technical services department. Too often, selectors do not talk to their acquisitions and cataloging colleagues about their collection needs.

**OUT-OF-PRINT PURCHASING**

Sad as it is to relate, core and classic titles do go out of print. One would assume that core titles would remain in print indefinitely, as by their very nature they have lasting appeal and continued importance. This is true up to a point and does work in the favor of the core selector, but far too many excellent core books have gone out of print. Katz reports in *Collection Development* that “one study found ‘both in Britain and the United States, that after 10 years less than half the original publication is recorded as remaining in print.’” The Notable Books Committee of the American Library Association, which since 1944 has been selecting the outstanding books of the year, was pleased to discover that notable books did stay in print.
longer than the average title. In 1996, the committee found that “34 percent of the
titles selected in 1946 are still available, usually in a reprinted edition. Fifty per-
cent of the titles from 1956, 48 percent of the titles from 1966, 66 percent of the
titles from 1976, and 68 percent of the titles from 1986 are still in print.”3

The acquisition of an out-of-print book is labor intensive and can prove to be
expensive. The benefits of acquiring a desired out-of-print item are obvious, par-
ticularly a core book, because only the very best and most desirable titles would
have been deemed core—a book should not be deemed obsolete and expendable
merely because it has gone out of print. One of the most important functions that
libraries perform for their community is continuing to stock books that are no
longer available elsewhere. The popularity of book clubs with their loyalty to read-
ing good books and the classics has helped keep these titles in print longer. The
Library, a publishing imprint that focuses on tried-and-true classics, and whose
paperbacks all feature reading group guides, released one hundred classics as e-
books.4 Only time will tell whether e-books will help stem the tide of out-of-print
titles. Historically, libraries have been some of the best customers for classics and
important standard works. If core collections become the norm in libraries around
the country, perhaps even more classic titles will remain in print!

The ongoing advances in digital technology also have the potential of easing
the out-of-print problem. Random House has begun a “backlist extension pro-
gram” that is essentially a print-on-demand plan. Out-of-print books are scanned
onto a disc and, when requested, can be printed in a matter of minutes. If the title
is not in disc format already, the turnaround time would be six to eight weeks.
Currently, Random House is offering over six hundred titles through this Backlist
Extension Program, and all are listed on its website, randomhouse.com/
library. Books will be printed in a basic trade paperback format and only in black
and white, with a minimum print run of at least twenty-five copies. This is good
news for core selectors.

Before deciding to pursue an out-of-print title, it is logical to make sure the
book is truly out of print. This can prove difficult, because a library vendor might
report a title as out of print when it really is not. For example, on a particular day
a vendor might find that a title is not available in the warehouse and that there are
no plans to pursue getting the title from the publisher. Just because a title is no
longer listed in Books in Print does not mean it is o.p. or o.s.i. (out of stock indef-
initely) and no longer available. In these cases, bypassing the vendor and going
directly to the publisher can occasionally yield results.

The reverse may prove fruitful other times. A library vendor or a small-press
distributor can sometimes deliver the title even after the publisher turns in an o.p.
report. A selector might find the title on the shelves of a local bookstore or on its remainders table with the price slashed. After these avenues have been exhausted, a library must decide whether to delve into the out-of-print world for core purchases. Libraries must weigh this decision carefully. If a library does not normally acquire out-of-print materials, it is a good idea to establish a methodology to denote core titles at the time of ordering. This will enable acquisitions staff to know immediately that a core title order has been canceled and that purchasing the book will require more exhaustive procedures.

Unlike university libraries, most public libraries do not have much experience with out-of-print purchasing, and their electronic acquisition systems are frequently unable to accommodate this easily. The likelihood of finding multiple copies of an out-of-print title is small, and decisions need to be made concerning which branches should receive the o.p. books. There are numerous ways to locate an out-of-print title, all of which are time-consuming and none of which is guaranteed to be successful or even to ultimately meet a library’s needs once the book is found. Condition and an inflated price tag might render the search meaningless. In most instances, an o.p. title will be an older book that probably has been used. Hence, the condition may be poor. Its pages may be yellowed or marked up, or it may be falling apart. Very likely, it will have no dust jacket or, if it does, the jacket may be torn. Smaller libraries might consider the unilateral decision not to order any o.p. titles. Although this is the easiest route, it might create some important gaps in the library’s collection. The simplest way for a library to proceed when ordering o.p. titles is to send all o.p. orders directly to one designated dealer that specializes in out-of-print titles.

Once the book has been located, many o.p. dealers require advance payment. Libraries are not accustomed to doing this, so they may need to establish a separate out-of-print account. Often there is a no-return policy for out-of-print titles. Because this purchase is outside the normal acquisitions process, and not one with a designated library vendor, the general discount will not be available. The search can often take a number of months or even a year. Because the result of an out-of-print search is so uncertain, as a rule, funds for o.p. items are not encumbered at the point of ordering. The purchasing cycle can also extend over two fiscal years, so when the title is located and payment necessary, selectors may no longer have the funds to pay for it. The library might need to create a contingency fund to pay for out-of-print books.

The decision to purchase out-of-print materials has ramifications for acquisitions staff time, for selectors, and for the state of the collection as well as the library’s book budget. Therefore, it is a good idea to set up elementary guidelines for out-of-print selection and acquisition, and to include these in the collection
development policy. At Phoenix Public Library we ordered some highly desired out-of-print core titles with limited success. We were very selective in which o.p. titles we ordered. We set $50 as the maximum acquisitions staff could pay beyond the original list price without first consulting the collection development coordinator. Good to excellent condition was always requested by acquisitions; items deemed in poor or worn condition were not even considered for purchase. On occasion, books were received in worse shape than advertised, but we were unable to return them. We were stuck and just turned them over to the Friends of the Library to sell at the next library book sale. In the case of a partially filled order, which was likely, the coordinator decided which branches were to receive these copies and whether acquisitions should continue searching for the rest of the agencies’ copies.

I am not trying to discourage you from purchasing out-of-print titles for your public library; I just want selectors to be aware of all that is involved in selecting an o.p. core title and to be judicious whenever pursuing this option.

LABELING CORE TITLES

When establishing a core collection, librarians need to think about whether they wish to physically label these titles as “core” on the book or audiovisual item and in the catalog. If you are planning a marketing campaign with these titles, which will be discussed later in this chapter, you might consider adding “core” to the call number or perhaps using a separate core label on the spine or outside of the book. A core spine label will help the public locate these titles on the shelves and alert staff not to weed them but to notice if condition warrants ordering a replacement copy. Circulation staff would also be able to easily determine that a lost title is core and alert appropriate selection staff to reorder. Tagging core titles in your catalog or database will also assist the public in finding core titles. This helps selectors create core selection lists or book lists; most electronic catalogs can sort titles by several different fields, including call numbers. Missing and lost titles reports are often created in call number order, and core titles, identified as such, would sort together, allowing for ease in replacement work. In this manner, statistical reports on core title use can also be established to assist in core evaluation, to allow selectors to determine circulation of core titles compared to the general collection, or to keep track of the size of the core collection. If you decide to label core titles, be sure to discuss this with technical services, as it is the rare processing section that will welcome yet another spine label! Processing staff need to be alerted to the core collection before core books arrive, so that their procedures are in place and
adequate core labels are on hand. If retrospective labeling of core titles that are already in the library also needs to be done, technical services must determine the best methodology to ensure consistency throughout the library system.

Although core books could be shelved separately, I don’t advise this, because it creates an extra place to look for a particular title. However, if you do decide to separate core titles, it is crucial that the call number or location code in the library’s database say core. A core label will assist library shelvers and staff when creating special core title displays. At the Phoenix Public Library we discovered that library users picked up on the core designation and actually went looking for these titles knowing that they were of excellent quality. The public seemed to appreciate the assistance this labeling supplied. For the same reasons, it also helped public services staff assist library patrons in finding the best titles on any given subject. Unfortunately, labeling and tagging core titles create more work for technical services at the time of book or audiovisual receipt, and later, if a title ceases to be core, additional steps are involved in removing its core indicator and moving it to the general collection.

MAINTAINING THE CORE COLLECTION

Once a core collection has been established, its maintenance is quite straightforward. It requires a systematic reexamination to ascertain that core titles are still being used and of continuing interest to the community served. After the initial review of the entire adult collection has been completed and all needed core titles ordered, it is time to begin to reconsider the entire core collection. Ideally, core collection creation did not take an inordinate amount of time, and the next phase of review and maintenance of the core collection can begin within a reasonable time frame.

The establishment of core collections in fiction and all subject areas should not take longer than four years. Much like the rest of the library, core collection maintenance and evaluation need to be ongoing; allowing too much time between review cycles can result in collections that become depleted, run-down, or of limited appeal. The appearance of the core collection reflects the importance the library places on it. It should complement and enhance the rest of the collection. It is a good idea to keep a centralized list of core titles that is continuously updated as literary prizes are awarded or whenever new bibliographies and book lists are issued or revised. Although the core update committee might decide not to include a prize winner, having the information readily available for the next review cycle will simplify and greatly speed the process.
Phoenix Public Library had an elaborate system of yearly add and replacement committee work, and core collection maintenance was added to this already established process. The library had divided its entire nonfiction adult collection into three equal parts. Fiction was also divided into three equal sections by using Fiction Catalog as a guide to determine approximately how many titles were in each portion of the alphabet. In this way the complete adult collection, including the core collection, was reviewed every three years. Implementing core review in tandem with add and replacement work is logical. Because librarians will be examining subject bibliographies, checklists, publisher catalogs, reviews, and the existing collection to replace lost or outdated titles for the general collection, it makes sense to have these same selectors evaluate core titles at the same time.

Each adult services librarian in the Phoenix Public Library system was given committee subject assignments at the beginning of the fiscal year. In anticipation of this process, every core title was checked centrally by clerical staff to find out if it still was in print. Systemwide holdings and circulation were also checked. The collection development office distributed the previous core lists, now three years old, to the core committee members along with the updated circulation and publishing information. Additional bibliography and book list citings as well as prizes that had been awarded since the core list was first created were also distributed to committee members.

This is a fine time for the core review committee members to reread the core collection development buying plan to reexamine the original core criteria and make certain that they still are appropriate. Any proposed changes to core criteria need to be made at this time. Procedures for their approval and implementation should have been established before the review process. (Ideally, these policies would be outlined in the core collection selection policy statement.)

Next, core committee members need to evaluate every core title to make certain that it continues to be suitable for the library’s users. This is accomplished by reviewing standard bibliographies, often the revised editions of the ones used in the initial creation of the core collection. Does the title still appear in Public Library Catalog or Fiction Catalog? Is it now listed in any new book lists? Has it perhaps won a literary prize? Is it still talked about and used as a comparison when similar titles are discussed? On the other hand, has the title been discredited? Is it outdated? Is there a newer edition or a recently published title that is better? Is the title now out of print? Is the expense of an out-of-print search justified?

A decision to remove or add a title always needs to be made cautiously. It is an expensive proposition to mandate that every branch discard an existing core title or require that one core title be replaced with another. If the difference between the new title and the original core selection is slight, the newer or
updated core title can be recommended rather than required for purchase. In this way branches can decide on their own if they want to spend their money to update the core collection. In Phoenix, selectors often elected to buy these newer titles. If agencies no longer had the original title, then they were obligated to buy the newly recommended title. Proceeding with the same criteria used during the initial core list creation, new core titles can be unearthed and added to existing core collections. Certainly all the recent Pulitzer, Nobel, and National Book Award winners over the past three years should be considered for inclusion. The changes made to the existing core collection during this review process should affect no more than 5 to 10 percent of the initial core title list. A greater change warrants a review of the library’s original core criteria unless the library has revised its collection development statement significantly or it has decided to expand its core collection. (Admittedly, there might be a few more changes necessary after the first review, as selectors were just beginning to learn the rudiments of core selection when the initial core titles were chosen.)

It cannot be stressed enough that well-selected core titles circulate, though perhaps not as much as a current best-seller or an Oprah title. Committee members must review each core title’s circulation to make sure it still holds interest and importance for the library’s clientele. To assist in this review process, librarians can set a minimum circulation rate required for all core titles. This can be the same for all subjects and every agency or there can be variable rates. A busy branch might demand a higher circulation of its core titles than a smaller branch where turnover rates are generally lower. Core titles in high-demand subject areas, such as sports, crafts, or biography, might have an assigned circulation rate higher than titles in philosophy, history, or law, for example. At the Phoenix Public Library, we required that every core title circulate at least five times in every agency during any given year. We assumed that each core title was in good condition and attractive. It is not fair to expect shabby classic titles to compete with their newer, splashy general collection cousins. A number of new, attractive core books were purchased to replace old, shopworn copies. We wanted to give every core title a fair chance at snaring the library user’s interest.

During this review process, the Phoenix Public Library no longer held regular core forums for all librarians to discuss and vote on every recommended core title. Core decisions were made solely by the committees, though drafts of core selection lists with changes and updates were sent to all selectors for their review before the final list was issued. New core titles had brief information or an annotation explaining why the title had been added. During the following three years of the review cycle, a yearly meeting was held to solicit selector input and to discuss the entire core collection process. Once all the librarians’ suggestions were
discussed and agreed upon by the core committee, a core selection list was distributed to all agencies.

As I mentioned earlier, in Phoenix Public Library, this was done in conjunction with general add and replacement work. Core titles were interfiled in Dewey order with general add and replacement titles, but they were clearly marked as core. This simplified selection because librarians had to deal with only one list. Selectors could easily see whether a subject had a required core purchase and so could elect to pass on buying a non-core title on the same subject.

Upon receipt of this updated core selection list, selectors examined each core title’s condition. The list noted whether the branch already had a title, again making replacement work easier. If the committee had decided to withdraw a title from the core collection, a separate list was sent to every agency for ease in deselection. The individual agency then made the decision whether to retain the title in the regular collection, removing the spine core labels as warranted. Technical services was also given a copy of the withdrawn-from-core list, so that their staff could change the online catalog to reflect this global change. Librarians do not have the authority to remove or deselect any core title unless condition warrants it. In this case a replacement copy needs to be expeditiously ordered. Librarians can, however, petition the core committee and request that a title be deleted or added to core, ensuring the consistency and integrity of the core collection throughout the library system.

**CORE MARKETING PLAN**

After three long years of enormous staff time and energy devoted to developing a core collection of the very finest literature, it would be a shame if this marvelous new core collection was not highlighted and its merits not understood by the library’s clientele. The art of selection is a mystery to the general public, but most of them are somewhat intrigued by the process. Whether they read classics or not, members of the community—the city council, school boards, and other civic organizations—will be pleased to hear that the library has made a commitment to enhancing its collection along traditional lines. This can serve as an excellent public relations tool to answer groups that are concerned with the overall “quality of the collection.” A brand-new core collection is a perfect time to capitalize on this interest. No library should waste the opportunity to gain additional community support and positive publicity for its collection.

There are countless ways to promote core collections. In libraries where adult programming is up and running successfully, it will not be much of a stretch to develop programs that focus on core titles. A classic or great book discussion group
could be started using core titles. The series could begin with Italo Calvino’s thought-provoking essay, Why Read the Classics. In a lecture series on the classics, the local professors who helped in core selection and attended the library’s core forums could be invited to talk about their selections and why they are important. A library could sponsor a film series using movies made from classics or develop a series of film talks on whether classic books make classic films. Libraries might contact publishers of core title authors to see if any of these authors would be available to speak. Local celebrities might also be invited to share their favorite books. Poetry workshops, subject lecture series—the possibilities are truly endless. Any of these programming ideas could be packaged, a grant proposal written, and special funding sought.

Whether a library decides to implement special programming to tout core titles or not, there are numerous other ways to promote the collection. Every library should, at the very least, write a press release about its core collection that can additionally be used as a presentation to the library board, Friends groups, or the city council. Remember that your library’s news release will be competing with many other organizations’ press releases. Anything you can do to make your copy stand out from the others can result in your event being publicized. Make sure your release is accurate, honest, clear, and concise. Every press release should answer the five “w” questions: “(1) whom the announcement is about; (2) what the announcement is about; (3) where the event or service is taking place; (4) when the event or service is taking place; and (5) why the public may be interested in what is being announced.” The release should be sent to the local media—newspapers and magazines, television and radio stations, and particularly to the editors, reviewers, newscasters, or reporters who have written book-related pieces in the past. A follow-up phone call can help draw attention to your release. The press release announcing the new core collection can also be tied into a program series or special exhibit. At the Phoenix Public Library’s Central Library, we displayed unusual rare and first editions of core titles from our Art of the Book Room to publicize this new collection. The exhibit provided a photo opportunity that appealed to the newspaper and resulted in some excellent publicity for the core collection and the library.

Each core committee was asked to choose ten to fifteen titles from its assigned subject or fiction area. Lists of these core titles were printed and distributed. This was an expeditious way to develop book lists, because selectors were familiar with the titles—they had just evaluated them for core inclusion. The lists were issued as bookmarks celebrating good reading and were available about the same time as the core books arrived at the branches and the Central Library. Copies of several of the book lists were added to the press release sent to the newspaper and were printed.
Libraries can also add these lists of recommended core titles to their website. The public could be asked for their opinion of the core titles and for suggestions of titles that the librarians might have missed. Libraries can participate in county fairs and street festivals touting the core collection. A table or booth stocked with library handouts and core book lists is an excellent way to publicize the newly established core collection. The publicity possibilities are limited only by your imagination, so enjoy creating programs and book lists that support the finest literature and good reading.

Chapter 6 includes some general programming guides that provide suggestions for programs along with complete publicity plans, including how to write a press release with samples. An example of a core news release can be found in figure 1. The completion of a core collection is an excellent time to generate positive feedback for the library and for reading and to ensure that core titles are used. Don't let this opportunity slip away!

**FIGURE 1**

Sample Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact Mario Jerry, Public Information Officer
Southwest Public Library
53 West Saguaro Blvd.
Anytown, AZ 85062
(602) 321-4660

Southwest Library Getting Back to Basics

Anytown, Ariz. What do *Mein Kampf*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Casablanca*, *Star Wars*, and *Gone with the Wind* have in common? Although this is an unlikely combination of classic literature and films to be lumped together, each is part of the library’s new core collection. Core books are the titles that have altered the course of history, like Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* and *Quotations from Chairman Mao*. Others have illuminated our lives, like Sigmund Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* and Alex Comfort’s *Joy of Sex*. Still others are films that changed the way we view the world, such as *Schindler’s List* and *Dr. Strangelove*. All are very different, but all are of the first rank and of lasting importance. It is the library’s intention to go back to the very foundation of the library, to the basics of what makes a library a library. The creation of the core collection took over three years, and titles were selected by librarians throughout the Southwest Public Library with supporting grants from the Two Bank Foundation.
A complete collection of these landmark films and books is now available for check-out at every single branch library and the central library. Titles are clearly labeled “core” for ease of use. So if you are tired of sitting in front of a computer screen all day or have always wanted to read the classics and see the great films, now is the perfect time. Stop by your neighborhood branch and check out the core collection!

For additional information about the Southwest Public Library and for current library hours, call (602) 423-7890.

Notes

2. Ibid., 177.