Materials Selection Policy

I. Introduction

The purpose of the Burke County Public Library System is to select, organize, and make freely and easily available to the people of Burke County printed and non-printed materials, within the limitations of space and budget, which will aid them in education, information, research, recreation, culture, and effective use of leisure time. The words "library materials," as they occur in this policy, have the widest possible meaning. Every form of permanent record is to be included whether printed or audio; bound or unbound; photographed or otherwise reproduced on tapes, discs, and pictures in the form of photographs, paintings, drawings, etc. "Selection" refers to the decision that must be made either to add a given title to the collection or withdraw one already in the collection. The BCPLS recognizes that many books, magazines, and newspapers are controversial and that any given item may offend someone. Selections will not be made on the basis of any assumed approval or disapproval, but solely on the merit of the work as it relates to the Public Library System's purpose as reflected in its five year plan and mission statement. The merit of any work will also be analyzed to the degree that it serves the needs and interests of Burke County as a whole. Library materials will not be marked or identified to show approval or disapproval of the contents, and nothing will be sequestered except for the express purpose of protecting it from mutilation or theft. Responsibility for the reading and/or viewing habits of minors rests with their parents or caregiver(s). Selection of materials for adults will not be limited by the possibility that they may come into the possession of minors. Customers not finding desired material in the Library system's collections may request that it be borrowed on interlibrary loan following set requirements, or that it be purchased by using the "Request for Purchase" form. Customers finding certain BCPLS material objectionable to the community may request that it be reconsidered by using the "Request for Reconsideration" form. Both forms will be available at all Burke County Public Library System sites. The Materials Selection Policy for the BCPLS will be reviewed on a yearly basis by the Library Director and Board of Trustees to ensure that it meets community needs. The "Library Bill of Rights," the "Freedom to Read Statement," and the "Freedom to View Statement," as adopted by the American Library Association, are a part of this Materials Selection Policy.

A. Responsibility for Selection of Materials

The final responsibility for selection of BCPLS materials, as for all Public Library activities, rests with the Library System Director, who administers under the authority of the Burke County Public Library System Board of Trustees. The responsibility for materials selection is shared by the Director with various professional librarians of the Burke County Public Library System.

B. Selection of Materials

The Burke County Public Library System recognizes its responsibility to have available a representative selection of materials on subjects of interest to its users. The selection of Library System materials is a prime activity within the Library System and is based on the needs and requests of customers of all ages, races, and creeds, and of organizations with a wide range of interests. The Burke County Public Library System takes no sides on public issues, and does not attempt to promote any beliefs or points of view, nor does it endorse the opinions
expressed in the materials held. The Burke County Public Library System recognizes its responsibility to provide materials presenting various points of view, within the limitations of space, budget, and availability, to enable citizens to make their own decisions.

C. Access to Materials

The BCPLS recognizes that some materials are controversial and that any given item may offend some customers. Processing and shelving of materials shall in no way reflect a value judgment of the materials in the Library System's collections. There will be no labeling of any item or of its electronic catalog entry to indicate its point of view or bias. All materials will be shelved in their proper order on open shelves, freely and easily accessible to the public. A person's right to use the BCPLS will not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views. The BCPLS assures free access to its holdings for all customers who are free to select or reject for themselves any item in the collections. Individual or group prejudice about a particular item or type of material in the collections may not preclude its use by others. Children are not limited to the juvenile collections, although juvenile collections are kept together to facilitate use.

II. Criteria of Evaluation

Materials will be judged on the basis of content and style of the work as a whole, not by selected or random passages or scenes. A policy, however high its standards, cannot replace the judgment of professional Library staff, but provides guidelines which will assist them in choosing from the vast array of available materials. BCPLS librarians utilize professional judgement and expertise, based on understanding of community needs and the knowledge of authors and publishers, in the process of selecting materials. The professional librarian is also aided by reviews found in professional, literary, specialized and general periodicals in addition to standard lists of basic works. At times, the BCPLS staff may consult subject area specialists to obtain advice on building certain technical fields. Factors which may influence selection of an item include:

- Contemporary or permanent value.
- Local interest.
- Price.
- Authority, skill, competence, reputation, and significance of the author.
- Reputation and standards of the publisher.
- Clarity, accuracy, logic, objectivity, and readability
- Social significance.
- Comprehensiveness and depth of treatment.
- Appropriateness and effectiveness of the medium to the content.
- Quality and suitability of the physical format to the BCPLS.
- Attention of critics and reviewers.
- Importance of the subject matter to the collection.
- Scarcity of material on the subject.
- Accessibility to the title through indexes and bibliographies.
- Availability of materials elsewhere in the area.
- Potential use.
- Budgetary limitations.
- Need for duplicate materials in the collection.
- Space limitations.
- Originality.
- Literary quality.
- Strength of characterization and plot
- Sustained interest.
- Authentic reflection of human experience.

Demand is a valid factor in book selection. Material selected for this service will be of popular interest and in high demand or of significant current interest, not always of enduring value. Best sellers are evaluated on their individual merits following selection policies.

III. Item Types

A. Books for Adults

The fiction collection provides books for the wide range of interests of the general reading public, including classics in the field, titles representing periods of writing, and those meeting the popular demand for light reading. No book will be eliminated solely because of coarse language, or violence, or frank discussion of sexual episodes, any of which may be objectionable to some people, if the author is justified in what he/she portrays, or when such episodes are pertinent to the plot or character delineation in the book. The nonfiction collection provides as its first priority popular nonfiction of use to the general adult library user. More specialized materials are purchased as the budget allows. Patrons are encouraged to use the interlibrary loan service to secure materials not available in the BCPLS.

B. Extension Materials

The entire BCPLS collection of items is available for use at the Morganton Main Library, the Valdese Public Library, the C.B. Hildebrand Public Library, the BCPLS bookmobile, and any other deposit stations (if applicable). Materials specifically donated to a particular BCPLS site are freely available to all customers of the BCPLS and are also available to other libraries via interlibrary loan.

C. Non-book Materials

The BCPLS staff considers that non-book materials represent an alternative format that may be selected when this format meets the needs of Burke County customers. In general, the same selection policies that apply to books will apply to non-book materials. Because the BCPLS' budget for non-book materials is limited and non-book materials may be susceptible to damage, some special restrictions may be placed on circulation of non-book materials for the BCPLS.

D. Juvenile Materials

BCPLS has traditionally assumed a high level of responsibility for programming for preschoolers, since no other agency provides this kind of service. The BCPLS will continue to target this age group in the interest of encouraging in the formative years the development of an appreciation of the Library System and a lifelong love of reading. To assist in this goal, the BCPLS will continue to purchase quantities of Easy books, which will meet the same standards as all other
collections. For school age children (1st grade through 6th grade), BCPLS cannot duplicate the materials ordinarily supplied by the Burke County Public School System. However, within budgetary constraints, the BCPLS will attempt to serve as a supplementary educational resource for thousands of Public School students in Burke County. The BCPLS will also serve as an educational center for an increasingly large number of home schoolers in Burke County.

E. Young Adult Materials

It is essential that BCPLS recognize the importance of providing services to meet the needs of the young adult community, that group of citizens who are at the stage between youth and maturity, in which they no longer see themselves as children, but who society does not recognize as adults. The young adult (known hereafter as YA) collection should bridge the gap between children's literature and adult literature with emphasis on materials centering on YA interests and informational needs. Due to the wide variation in sophistication and maturity levels in this group, varied reading and interest levels must be provided. There will inevitably be considerable overlap with existing adult and children's collections, as well as the literature that is specifically geared to teenagers. Since this is a period of rapid mental growth, widening interests, and changing ideas and attitudes, the professional staff responsible for selection of YA materials must keep these factors in mind when selecting material.

F. Large Print Materials

Large print materials are purchased to meet the recreational and informational needs of the community. They are all judged by the same standards of content and format that apply to other material purchased by the BCPLS. Talking books, tapes, and Braille material are available from the North Carolina Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, and are therefore not collected by the BCPLS.

G. Newspapers

BCPLS subscribes to Unifour area newspapers, major State newspapers, and to other newspapers of interest to our customers from the area and the nation.

H. Pamphlets

Inexpensive, ephemeral, and timely pamphlets are collected to supplement the regular collections of materials. They are periodically reevaluated and weeded.

I. Periodicals

BCPLS subscribes to nearly 200 magazines on a wide variety of subjects of interest to the average customer. For the most part, selection criteria for periodicals are the same as those for books and other materials. In addition to periodicals purchased for general interest, magazines are also obtained which are important for reference work and general research work. There is no attempt to purchase specialized periodicals for professionals, undergraduate or graduate students, or researchers. J. Gifts The BCPLS will encourage and accept gift material(s) with the understanding that gifts of materials will be added to the collections of BCPLS only if they meet the same standards required of purchased materials. Gift materials not meeting those
standards, those that are out of date, unneeded duplicates of items already owned, or those in a format unsuitable for the BCPLS, may be given to other organizations, sold, exchanged, or otherwise disposed of as the BCPLS desires. The BCPLS cannot make a commitment to keep any collection or group of donated items on a special shelf from other items in BCPLS’ collections. Gift items will be integrated into BCPLS collections in normal sequence, available to all Library patrons, and otherwise handled as any other material belonging to the BCPLS. Gift items may be marked with an appropriate bookplate. A receipt for tax purposes (indicating the # of units received only) may be given to the donor if requested at the time of the donation. Whenever a gift is no longer needed, it will be disposed of in the same manner as material purchased.

IV. Complaints about Materials

A customer who questions any material in the BCPLS may register his/her opinion in writing on the form "Request for Reconsideration" (download here) and the matter will be referred to the Library Director. A disputed item will not be removed from the shelves because of a complaint until such recommendation is agreed upon by the Library Director and approved by the Burke County Public Library Board of Trustees.

V. Weeding of Materials

Weeding is the continuous evaluation of the BCPLS collections by the professional staff. This annual process is an integral part of collection development and maintenance. BCPLS uses American Library Association approved guidelines for weeding of materials. Basically, there are six criteria for weeding. Used with judgement and a knowledge of our customers, they are as follows:

1. Materials which contain misleading and/or factually inaccurate information.
2. Materials which are worn and beyond mending or rebinding.
3. Materials which have been superseded by a new edition or by much better material on the subject.
4. Materials which are irrelevant to the needs and interests of area customers.
5. Materials which have no discernible literacy or scientific merit.
6. Materials that are not included in the standard bibliographies, and have not been charged out in the last three years.

Materials will not be remove solely as a result of pressure or demand from area customers.