

Floating the Fairfax County Public Library Collection

Sept. 24, 2013

What is Floating?

Effective May 2013 the library's collection – with the exception of periodicals and non-circulating reference materials – is now a “Floating” collection. Floating materials are not owned by a specific branch and become part of the collection at the branch to which they are returned. Based on the experience of many other library jurisdictions that float, FCPL expects to improve return on investment of taxpayer funds through the increased usage of individual items and resulting collections responsive to local customer demands.

Benefits of a Floating Collection

- Floating collections spend less time in delivery, which reduces the physical wear and tear on materials and also reduces staff workload in processing delivery items.
- Materials are available sooner to customers since the materials are spending less time in delivery and are on the shelves faster.
- Browsing at individual branch collections is enhanced by increasing the availability and diversity of items on the shelves for customers.
- Customer driven collections are created. Retaining material returned by local customers enhances the local branch's core collection to reflect the interest of the community, and provides opportunities for other community members to see and use these items.
- Significant reduction in delivery is realized, enabling FCPL to implement a Central Transfer program of low demand items (library materials are transferred to another location and given additional life in the collection) and Central Distribution of withdrawn materials to Library Friends Groups.

Challenges of a Floating Collection

- Managing shortages and overflows of materials at individual locations.
- Space management at individual branch locations to accommodate changing collections.
- Staff concerns that collection knowledge is hindered by ever changing collections.
- Transition to system determined and centrally applied uniform spine labels and location codes, resulting in a consistent look from branch to branch.

How the Library Prepared for Floating

- Technical Operations Staff read widely about, discussed with and visited various public library systems floating their collections.
- Technical Operations Staff attended many system meetings from October 2012 through the present to explain Floating to all staff, and also created Focus Groups made up of front line branch staff and Technical Operations staff, in order to address staff concerns and create best practices.

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- A Floating Team site on our internal network was created for staff to communicate with Collection Services about new guidelines and practices.
- From October 2012-May 2013, Branches were asked to weed for condition and accuracy, to ensure that their materials were accurate, up-to date and useable. Taking the time to withdraw damaged and inaccurate materials would help to ensure shelf space when the collection started Floating. Low demand materials were not withdrawn from the collection at this time, as those would be good candidates for the new Central Transfer program starting in May. Since May 2013, over 4,000 items have been transferred to different branches in order to refresh collections and extend the use of the materials.
- FCPL also purchased the CollectionHQ software program. This program is a collection performance improvement tool. It carries out detailed analysis of the circulation figures at each branch to help monitor demand for different types of material and collections. This information will help to make better informed decisions regarding collection development and management. Expected implementation of CollectionHQ is Fall 2013 after customization is complete.

In Development

1. Collection Services will be forming a Transfer Focus Group with front line branch staff to review and improve the rebalancing mechanisms of branch collections.
2. A shelving space analysis will be performed for each branch to determine appropriate allocation of shelving space for various branch collections.
3. A Collection Evaluation Focus Group will be formed and members will include front line branch staff and Collection Services staff. This group will review current procedures and practices that assist all staff in collection management best practices and provide guidance and training for consistent weeding and collection development.
4. Collection Services will continue to provide site visits and assistance to branches that are dealing with shortages and overages, or need additional training and information.