

## **RUSA Guidelines for Developing and Maintaining Genealogy and Local History Collections**

### **History:**

Prepared by the Genealogy Committee and the Local History Committee of the History Section (HS) of the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) of the American Library Association (ALA). Originally prepared as separate documents: Guidelines for Establishing Local History Collections, developed by the Local History Committee June 1979, revised 1993, 2006, and 2012, approved by the RUSA Board, May 2012; and Guidelines for Developing a Core Genealogy Collection, developed by the Genealogy Committee 1991, revised 1999 and 2007, approved by the RUSA Board June 2007.) Joint guidelines revised February 2022. Approved by the HS Executive Committee, March 2022. Approved by the RUSA Professional Resources Committee, [7/31/2023].

### **Purpose:**

These guidelines are intended to assist librarians in developing and maintaining a collection for genealogy/family history and/or local history (hereafter "Collection"). These guidelines address not only collection development and maintenance but also services, personnel, access, preservation, and fiscal considerations. These guidelines are designed to support the needs of librarians and other library staff (hereafter "the librarian") either in establishing a Collection that has not previously existed or in continuing to develop and maintain an existing Collection, including cases where a Collection may have been assigned to a new librarian.

### **Foundational Considerations:**

In all aspects of collection development, maintenance, and access and related services, the librarian should follow principles consistent with the American Library Association's [Library Bill of Rights](#) and the [RUSA statement on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion](#).

In undertaking the development of a Collection for genealogy and/or local history, the librarian should assess the relevant information needs of the community:

1. Research and identify how the community will benefit from having a Collection.
2. Research and understand the ethnic, geographic, and demographic backgrounds of the historic and current community population, including indigenous peoples, remaining aware of the community's changing demographics.
3. Research and understand the unique community and the local and regional history.
4. Communicate on an ongoing basis with other local and nearby institutions that also hold materials and/or provide services related to local history and/or genealogy.
  - a. This includes, but is not limited to, other libraries (both public and academic); archives; museums; local and state genealogical and historical societies; and government agencies at the city, county, regional, and state levels.
  - b. Efforts should be made to determine what materials have already been collected, what services are

already provided, what future development of collections is planned, and what collaborative agreements already exist or are possible.

5. Based on previous research and communication, determine the scope of the Collection and the range of its associated services (both onsite and remote), while considering additional factors like available space, personnel, budget, and future growth.

### **Collection Development and Maintenance**

The acquisition of print and digital genealogy and local history materials, as well as their cataloging/processing, should receive the same priority as other library materials. In preparation for the ongoing development and maintenance of the Collection, the librarian should develop appropriate policies to govern collection activities.

1. The Collection's acquisitions policy may be a section of a general acquisitions policy or an independent document.
2. The policy should be specific to the Collection, establishing geographic and demographic scopes, as well as the qualities and formats of materials being collected.
3. As part of the acquisitions policy, identify the types of materials that will not be collected, such as those that are outside the geographic scope of the collection, or material formats or conditions that are better preserved by other institutions.
4. As part of the acquisitions policy, identify the subject areas for materials that may be acquired as part of a cooperative agreement with other institutions.
5. Develop a policy regarding acceptance of gifts and bequests and their incorporation into the collection. This should include a "deed of gift"-style form that addresses physical and intellectual/usage rights.
6. A rights permission statement is needed for digital acquisitions.
7. Incorporate a policy under which materials may be de-accessioned from the collection.

### **Services**

The librarian should identify the range of services that will be provided to genealogy and local history patrons, both onsite and remotely:

1. User services should include, but not be limited to:
  - a. Assisting and instructing patrons to determine what research materials they need.
  - b. Evaluating the significance and validity of various types of information.
  - c. Providing interpretation or contextualization of materials in their collections.
  - d. Locating research materials through print and digital data sources/services.
  - e. Circulation through interlibrary loan, when possible and appropriate.
2. The librarian should refer patrons to other known libraries, institutions, agencies, and archives that may have materials applicable to their research.
3. If a specific genealogy and local history reference service cannot be provided, the library's general reference service should include assistance for genealogy and local history patrons.
4. The library should have clear, written policies that explain and offer services.
  - a. These policies should be publicized on the library's website and by any other appropriate means.
  - b. They should identify the scope of the services, define the maximum amount of staff time/effort allowed, and outline applicable fees or other costs.

### **Personnel**

The librarian should identify the number and type of personnel needed to support the collection:

1. Whenever possible genealogy and local history collections should be maintained by professional reference librarians, who may be assisted by paraprofessionals and by knowledgeable volunteers.
2. All reference librarians serving genealogy and local history patrons should be trained and periodically updated in genealogy and local research. This may include, but not be limited to, attendance at local, state, regional, and national genealogy, local history, or library conferences; seminars; workshops; webinars; or other types of meetings/courses where genealogy and local history research procedures are presented.
3. Reference librarians should be trained to assist patrons with evaluation, search techniques, and use of resources related to genealogy and local history research, including born-digital resources.
4. The collections and holdings of other genealogy and local history collections should be familiar to library staff, so they can provide appropriate referrals. These collections may include archives, government agencies, historical societies, other libraries, museums, etc.

## **Access**

The librarian should address issues relating to access to genealogy and local history materials:

1. The library should have a clear and visible access policy.
2. The physical Collection should be established in an identifiable, secure, and monitored place within the library.
  - a. Genealogy and local history collections held by the same library may be combined or separate from each other but should be distinct from main collections in most libraries.
  - b. Exceptions include special libraries and archives where the main collections are focused upon genealogy and/or local history.
3. The Collection should be fully cataloged, and additional tools for patrons--finding aids, research guides, bibliographies, etc.--should be created when appropriate. Metadata for digital collections should be created to meet or exceed established standards for providing access.
4. The Collection must include sufficient equipment and workspace.
5. Circulation policies for the Collection should be considered separately from general circulation policies and clearly stated to patrons. Genealogy and local history materials often are rare, fragile, or are in great demand locally as reference materials. When possible, however, they should circulate, including through interlibrary loan.
6. The Collections and related services should be represented on the library's website, as well as in other promotional, informational, or outreach materials/sites.
7. Digital records should be available publicly when possible and should include rights/use permission statements.

## **Preservation, Security, and Collections Management**

The librarian should address issues relating to the preservation of rare or fragile genealogy and local history materials:

1. The environment for Collection materials should be conducive to preservation of those materials, including light, temperature, humidity, and pest controls.
2. Genealogy and local history staff should be trained to recognize physical threats to the Collection's materials and how to address those threats. This may include training on basic book repair techniques, rehousing of fragile photographs and other materials, identifying outside conservators to assist, etc.
3. Whenever possible, fragile or unique items should be digitized and made available through the library website, within the limitations imposed by copyright, donor, and other restrictions. If digitization is not possible, fragile or unique items should be reproduced in another preservation format. In either case, access to the original fragile or unique items should be restricted.
4. The library should have a set of digital preservation procedures so that digital collections and their metadata can be properly maintained, migrated, updated, and stored over the long term.

## Fiscal Considerations

The library should ensure that the genealogy and local history collections are adequately and appropriately funded:

1. The library should provide a budget sufficient to acquire, process, maintain, and staff the Collection. This includes funding:
  - a. Ongoing physical and bibliographic access to the collection.
  - b. Reproduction, reformatting, and/or digitization of rare and fragile materials.
  - c. Access to genealogy and local history databases.
  - d. Marketing and outreach.
  - e. Evaluation of use, services, etc.
2. The library should identify and implement ways to increase funding for genealogy and local history collections and services, such as fund-raising, Friends of the Library, foundations, and grant writing.

## Further Readings:

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