

Alert Collector

Matthew Galloway, col. ed.

Building Collections

Matthew Galloway

I had no idea supplementing my archaeological grad school funding (or the lack thereof) with a part-time library job would completely change the trajectory of my life. I'd applied on a whim because libraries were always special to me. Certainly I submitted my application thinking, "I love to read! This will be perfect!" but it also had me remembering how safe and understood librarians made me feel throughout my childhood. As a new adult I was more of a used book store connoisseur because forking out the money ahead of time was easier to plan for than risking fines for a late book. In fact, I almost didn't apply at all because I knew I had some fine—probably massive—that had kept me away from the library for months because I never had cash on me. (Note: it ended up being 25 cents I paid on my first day of work.)

Now, 13 years later, I've bounced between public-facing and collection development jobs across states and public library systems—circulation to acquisitions, librarian to adult fiction selector. I had amazing mentors who never let me get too comfortable, assuring me there was more I could be doing. They pushed me toward state library associations, which opened up a world beyond my own library doors. In the years since, volunteering for committees—particularly for awards—has become an especially gratifying part of my work. Within ALA I've chaired the Reading List Council, the Louis Shores Award, and the Awards Coordinating Committee, and served on the Listen List and Dartmouth Medal committees.

As a side note, working with any of these committees expands your understanding of librarianship. More specifically related to collection development, book awards committees improve your skills in a multitude of ways, whether that's granting new evaluative tools and philosophy or introducing you to new authors, subgenres, and audiences. I'm equally grateful to my state book awards for introducing me to so much local talent and my cherished four years of Reading List for teaching me to appreciate even the genres I dislike—and how to find the hidden gems for people who do love them. I can, and will, go on about the ins and outs of books committees to anyone who asks.

Six years into my buyer position at Anythink Libraries—plus more recent work for *Library Journal*, *Novelist*, and other organizations—the most important thing I've learned about selection and collection development is that it's not something you learn. It's something you grow with. It's a discipline that's always in motion. Our communities change, publishing chases new trends, and who feels empowered to speak and write and seek knowledge expands every year.

From the public library viewpoint, I know about the clashes that can arise between budget constraints and ideals. We have finite resources and could easily justify collections of the already popular and highly marketed by pointing to circulations stats, holds lists, and requests. But are any

of us content to do that? Collections are a vital part of the library ecosystem that, when healthy, nurtures our communities, making them feel safe, understood, and powerful.

I'm hoping you'll share your experiences with your colleagues here in RUSA. Whichever type of library you hail from, what are the tools and philosophies that allow your collections to evolve with your communities? Have you overcome your challenges or do you need more eyes on the issue? What triumphs can you share to inspire us all?

Collection development is the foundation of nearly everything we can do with reference and user's services. I firmly believe we can all learn from each other no matter the size or composition of our communities. As a column editor, I'm so grateful I have the opportunity to share your insights with the rest of RUSA.