# Libraries & Weeding

## The Facts

## Library Director's Edition – Talking Points in Red

**What is weeding?**
Weeding is the process of evaluating individual library materials based on established weeding criteria, deciding whether to retain or discard each item, and implementing that decision.

**Why do libraries weed?**
Weeding is as important to a library's functioning as adding new materials. The weeding process is necessary to:

- Make space for new materials
  - Libraries would have to continue to build new wings if nothing was ever weeded!

- Provide a more appealing, up-to-date collection
  - Use the example of a rack of clothing in a store. Which is more appealing, the rack crammed with the leftovers that no one has purchased, or the rack of new styles, arranged in a system you can immediately see?

- Make the library easier for patrons and staff to use
  - It is aggravating to try get books off a shelf that is jammed tight. It is hard to find books that are stuck on top of other books because there is no more space on the actual shelf.

- Maintain the library's reputation for providing reliable information
  - When someone comes into the library for a book on the moon and finds one that says "Someday man will walk on the moon," where will they go when they need information on medical conditions, or selling a house, or infertility? Not to the library.

- Eliminate false or dangerous information
  - Knowledge changes. Outdated knowledge perpetuates a view that can be false or even dangerous, such as out-of-date science fair manuals that may contain potentially harmful compounds or dangerous chemical experiments.

- Provide feedback on strengths and weaknesses of a collection
  - Weeding is one of the best ways for the staff to really get to know the library's collection. There's no substitute for looking at books and other items individually.

**Who does weeding?**

It is the function of the staff to select and discard materials, and to advise customers on their use.

- Weeding is an operational duty, and therefore it is the staff's job. The library staff works with the collection daily and has the knowledge to make the judgments necessary for weeding.

**How does the staff decide what to remove and what to keep?**

Librarians use guidelines developed by professional organizations and statistics on the collection and its use in making weeding decisions. The CREW Manual, a respected source for weeding guidelines, offers parameters for evaluating fiction and nonfiction by specific categories.

In addition, the System creates individualized reports that show various statistics useful in weeding, such as publication date and number of checkouts.

Primarily, materials are withdrawn form library collections because of misleading or obsolete information, insufficient use, physical damage or wear, altered collection emphases, or space availability.

- Weeding is a complex process. While there are guidelines, there are no prescriptions. A broad knowledge of collection management principles and use of guidelines and statistics go into each judgment.

**Yikes! Our shelves are half empty!**

When outdated, unused, and shabby items are removed from a collection that has not been thoroughly weeded in some time, the shelves may look bare. Rather than being a deterrent to library use, this can result in increased circulation. Shelves with fewer, newer items are more inviting than shelves jam-packed with tattered titles. Empty shelf space permits face out display of items, inviting patrons to investigate them. Many libraries find that their circulation actually goes up following a thorough weeding.

- This is why weeding should be done on a systematic basis. After a collection has been neglected for years, a true weeding will mean that many of the items should be removed. Since seeing bare shelves is alarming to some, library staff often do a light weeding and then come back and do another weeding some months later. This is extra work.
- When libraries merchandise by featuring our great books and materials in displays and face-out shelving, we create appeal. Many patrons do judge a book by its cover.

**What happens to our items after they are weeded?**

Following a discard process (disabling the barcode, removing labels, etc.), the item's electronic record is removed from the catalog. Now that the item is no longer part of the library collection, it may be given away, sold, or recycled. Some libraries have Friends group that sell discarded materials. Some libraries sell books on the Internet, or use companies that do the selling for them. Some libraries use companies that recycle the books. Some local community organizations welcome donations.

It's important to be aware that handling and finding homes for discarded materials can take a lot of time. Staff time spent on finding weeded books a new home takes away time from the current library programs and services that are more helpful and visible to the community.

- Have your plan in place (or at least in mind) to present here. Be straightforward. If you don't feel it's a good use of staff time to call around to other organizations to see if they want your old books, say that. Also, if the library will try to sell the old books, have a plan for getting rid of the books that don't sell (which should not be keeping them until the next book sale).
- Better World Books (http://www.betterworldbooks.com) is a great place for libraries to repurpose discarded books, and one that takes little staff time. Even if you don't use them, their guidelines on what they will take offer a useful indicator for which books should simply be recycled as paper (if allowed by your recycler) or thrown out.

**Do we need a weeding policy?**

Our library system advises every library to have a collection management policy that includes a section on weeding. This section should contain the basic information in this fact sheet to communicate to the public what weeding is and why it's done. In addition, it is wise to link a policy on gifts and donations to a weeding policy so that givers understand that donated materials are subject to the same guidelines as any other item in the collection.

- Your library system can provide sample policies and guidance.