

# Notes from the Stacks

by Lauren Lee

## A CLASSIC RERUN: BUDGET WOES

Although this column is called “Notes from the Stacks,” I usually begin my library visits in back rooms and offices. Unfortunately, I have heard a common theme in those offices in my recent travels—severe budget woes. Some states have been struck harder than others (California and Florida come to mind), but these sad songs are not isolated. As the bubble bursts in the housing market, tax revenues are quickly affected. Governmental bodies respond accordingly with library budgets as frequent targets in both staffing and materials. Sometimes these cuts happen in mid-year; other libraries get advance warning to make plans for the upcoming fiscal year. In this case, I’m not sure that a warning in advance makes it any less painful.

Here are some of the stories I’ve been hearing:

- Overall staff cut of 94 positions
- Technical services staff cut 27 percent
- Selection staff cut from 5 FTE to 3 FTE
- 40 percent cut in materials budget from one fiscal year to the next
- \$1 million decrease in current fiscal year materials budget
- Anticipation of a 20-45% decrease for next fiscal year

Luckily, librarians are resourceful and committed to providing collections to their communities. Folks from these libraries aren’t happy about the state of affairs, but they are being creative in their response to these new pressures. Here are some of their coping strategies:

- No further purchasing of entertainment DVDs
- Purchasing of all materials on hold for several months while the dust settles
- A focus on nonfiction purchasing this year, so that fiction for all age levels can take priority in next year’s smaller budget
- Slashing of the serials budget by 60 percent
- Preparing three contingency plans for the upcoming year based on three levels of anticipated cuts

These are very tough choices. In order to make these changes, you have to prioritize the services and collections you provide. Of all the materials coming in your door right now, which are the most important? Which ones could your clientele most easily do without?

Likewise, you have to think about the most important functions for your local staff to perform. Public service usually wins this one hands down. Therefore it is not surprising that libraries strapped for staff often consider outsourcing for selection and/or cataloging and processing. Even though these value added services come with price tags, they can be smart choices during lean times.

If you’re struggling with these dramatic budget changes, talk to your vendors and explore their options. Even if you decide not to exercise those options for your library, you’ll find a sympathetic ear.

I hope that your library weathers these financial storms and has more plentiful times ahead!

*Lauren*



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