



Best Practices for Scarce Copies

To ensure the depth and longevity of collective scholarly print resources, a shared understanding of collection management practices is needed. Identifying and communicating about scarce print resources within shared print archiving networks, and within state or regional collecting programs, is key to managing print collections at scale. For this reason, the following recommendations for scarce copy practices are proposed to guide libraries and programs when encountering last or scarce copies in collective collections.

With the growth and success of shared print programs, libraries tend to withdraw titles in conjunction with these programs and in accordance with their local collection development policies and practices. The best practices stated here aim to emphasize the importance of evaluating the number of libraries holding a title prior to withdrawal of the items due to membership in a shared print program.

Case studies on collaborative collection management may help programs develop scarce copy policies (see OCLC, 2021). An appendix of established last copy policies from various programs appears at the end of this document.

I. Elements of Best Practice

- A. **Defining Scarce Copies:** A shared print program should not only delineate a number value to identify what is meant by a scarce copy, but also explicitly state the range of comparison: for example, one copy held within a shared print program, or two copies held within the state, or three holdings shown in WorldCat within their MOU. There is no ideal or universally applicable number of copies. Scarcity should be determined within each program, because scarcity varies depending on the format, type of work, and relative value of the item to researchers within the realm of scholarship in a particular discipline. Identifiers and match points should be carefully considered to avoid over-estimating the total number of libraries holding a title.
- B. **Scope:** Shared print programs should define the scope of their scarce copy policies. In addition to the type of material to be considered for retention, a best practice will also address editions and manifestations of works.

- C. Metadata: Best practice is to add a local retention note to the bibliographic record so that a scarce copy is not withdrawn and may be recorded within a shared print program. Shared Print Programs should follow the [OCLC Detailed Metadata Guidelines](#) which outline the MARC tags that should be used for shared print disclosures (see [Best Practices for Discovery and Delivery](#)). An aspirational practice is to share the record more broadly so that it may inform other shared print programs.
- D. Access: Access should be prioritized and every reasonable effort should be made to provide access to a copy of the requested title. Providing access to scarcely held copies should carefully balance the following factors: number of copies available in the shared print community (local, regional, partnership), condition of the scarce copies, availability of an electronic copy, and need of the requestor to use a physical copy when an electronic copy is also available. Consideration of in-house use restrictions should also be included.
- E. Digital Surrogates: A shared print program should indicate in their MOU whether digital surrogates will be created for scarce or last copies if they are not already available through a trusted digital repository such as HathiTrust. In general, libraries should strive to ensure digital surrogates exist for scarce copies. Existing digital surrogates should be verified at least at the title level; edition verification is better; page-level validation is best. If possible, digital surrogates should be recorded in accordance with the [Partnership's Digital Surrogates Best Practices](#). Shared print programs may authorize members to cease retention of print materials for reasons that preclude lending due to physical condition, if validated digital surrogates are available (see table below).
- F. Withdrawal and Retention: Withdrawal and retention decisions are likely already governed by local, state and/or regional shared print program guidelines and practices. Considering the status of a scarcely held title in the context of the Partnership at large is best practice¹.

When multiple copies are known to be held across North America, it is also best practice to consider geographical distribution with regard to potential use:

- 1) distribution of copies such that physical proximity to the widest number of Partnership members is ideal;

¹ Note that Partnership-wide analysis regarding total holdings of any one title is an aspirational goal at the time of the first drafting of these practices.

- 2) consideration of stability (in terms of weather, natural disasters) of location sites and facilities is an aspirational practice (see France & Bogus, n.d.; [Preservation Best Practices](#); [Storage Environment Best Practices](#)).

Scarce copy considerations should also examine the circumstances under which transfer to a special collection is preferable to retaining the volume within a shared print program (see ACRL, 2016). Policy applications should be made in dialogue with special collections staff at member libraries.

II. Tiered elements of scarce copy policy:

Policy Elements	Good	Better	Best	Aspirational
Definitions				
Number of copies (what qualifies as scarce?)	X	X	X	
Range (e.g. across state/program/alliance)	X	X	X	
Scope				
Material type/format	X	X	X	
Address editions, manifestations of works	X	X	X	
Metadata				
Local retention note (for disclosure within program)	X	X	X	
Share retention data across multiple programs				X
Access considerations				
Number of shared print copies available	X	X	X	
Condition	X	X	X	
Electronic/digital copy presence	X	X	X	
Need for use of print copy	X	X	X	
Digital Surrogates				
Create surrogate when one is not available	X	X	X	
Verification of surrogate at title level	X			
Verification of edition	X	X		
Verification at page level	X	X	X	
Withdrawal/Retention				

Consider status in context of Partnership collection	X	X	X	
Geographical distribution (proximity to members)	X	X	X	
Stability/risk of physical location				X
Consider retaining in special collection	X	X	X	

III. References/Further Reading

ACRL. (2016). *Guidelines on the selection and transfer of materials from general collections to special collections. Guidelines, Standards, and Frameworks*. Association of College & Research Libraries. <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/selctransfer>

France, F. and Bogus, I. (n.d.). *Assessing the physical condition of the national book collection*. <https://nationalbookcollection.org/overview>

OCLC. (2021). *Weeding and deselection bibliography*. SCS and GreenGlass. https://help.oclc.org/Library_Management/SCS_and_GreenGlass/Weeding_and_deselection_bibliography?sl=en#CollaborativeCollectionManagement

IV. Appendix: Last Copy Policies

- A. Rosemont last copy agreement:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1z4g9n6vmiLIQA2HBCEr-ArzOLapXGrpkXPMKI9tDr4w/edit>
- B. Rosemont last copy donations and transfer guidelines:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dxquRTRt99wdL_2loYEpow8gn8kcyAip6M67_scp4RQ/edit
- C. CARLI Last Copy Program:
<https://www.carli.illinois.edu/products-services/collections-management/last-copy-project>
- D. ALI Last Copy Policy:
<https://academiclibrariesofindiana.org/shared-collections/reports>
- E. Keep@Downsview Memo of Agreement :
<https://content.library.utoronto.ca/common/pdf/201801081636.pdf>
- F. Appendix A of COPPUL/SPAN Monographs Project:
<https://coppul.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/SPAN%20Monographs%20Project%20%231%20MOU.pdf>

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