

## Core Competencies for Acquisitions Professionals

Approved by the ALCTS Board of Directors on May 10, 2018

### Introduction

Acquisitions professionals have a broad range of fiscal, managerial, and professional responsibilities, which vary from organization to organization, lack formal standards, and are often included across a variety of positions and departments within a library. Acquisitions, as defined by the Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science, is "the process of selecting, ordering, and receiving materials for library or archival collections by purchase, exchange, or gift, which may include budgeting and negotiating with outside agencies, such as publishers, dealers, and vendors, to obtain resources to meet the needs of the institution's clientele in the most economical and expeditious manner."<sup>1</sup>

Over the last decade, acquisitions practices have dramatically evolved along with the changing scope of library collections, evolving economies of scale for purchasing, and requirements for increasing expedience. Lack of training opportunities is a significant challenge in the field, with many acquisitions professionals learning locally developed practices on the job and through continuing education offerings by professional associations. These circumstances reveal the difficulties libraries face to establish best practices for acquisitions. Within the context of this changing landscape, the Core Competencies for Acquisitions Professionals document outlines competencies that are needed across the span of an individual's professional career to perform acquisitions functions. The intended audience for these competencies include students and new practitioners as well as managers and administrators who specialize or manage acquisitions functions in any library setting.

These competencies were identified through a systematic review of job ads posted for acquisitions-related positions over an 18-month period of contemporary recruitment. Job responsibilities from these position descriptions were analyzed to identify an initial list of skills and competencies and revised according to feedback from acquisitions professionals in the field.

These competencies focus on the broad skills required to perform acquisitions functions as well as the soft skills required to manage these functions. This document outlines competencies for knowledge, skills and abilities, and behavioral attributes that contribute to successful acquisitions practices for any kind of library material, regardless of format. These competencies are not tied to specific position titles but relate instead to any kind of position that performs acquisitions functions, including supervision and management of acquisitions employees.

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<sup>1</sup>Reitz, J.M. (2014). ODLIS: Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO. Retrieved from [https://www.abc-clio.com/ODLIS/odlis\\_c.aspx](https://www.abc-clio.com/ODLIS/odlis_c.aspx).

The document is not procedural in nature, but these competencies can be used for training and creating position descriptions. This document complements other related competencies in other documents including ALA's Core Competencies for Librarianship and NASIG's Core Competencies for Electronic Resources Librarians. Professionals who demonstrate these competencies should be better able to adjust to changing practices over time.

## **Knowledge Competencies**

Knowledge Competencies encompass background and context for acquisitions. These competencies include understanding the industry in which libraries do business, the tools and standards used, and management practices.

Knowledge competencies fall under four main categories: (1) Library and Publishing Industry Knowledge, (2) Business, Legal, and Financial Knowledge, (3) Management Knowledge, and (4) Systems, Technology, and Standards Knowledge. Industry Knowledge is comprised of the methods by which acquisitions is practiced in relation to the environment in which libraries acquire and manage resources. Business, Legal and Financial Knowledge comprises the standards involved in budgeting and accounting, knowledge of business contracts, and the organizational guidelines governing them. Management Knowledge includes an understanding of management principles, employment practices, leadership theory, and planning and assessment. Systems Technology and Standards Knowledge includes familiarity with systems commonly used to manage library resources, their interoperability, and the standards used within them to manage resource data and information.

### **Library and Publishing Industry Knowledge**

- Understands overall technical services operations and the intersection between resource management systems
- Understands standard acquisitions practices for all print and electronic formats including books/monographs, serials, electronic resources, streaming media, audiovisual materials, scores, manuscripts/archival materials, data sets, and data management programs
- Understands standard acquisition models including approval plans, firm orders, subscriptions, standing orders, blanket orders, consortial buying, gifts, demand-driven and evidence-based models, buying trips, auctions, and electronic resource management
- Understands the e-resources lifecycle and issues in acquiring, licensing, and managing access
- Understands the mechanics and climate of scholarly communications and publishing, including open access initiatives and financial implications
- Understands current issues and trends in collection development strategies and management, including perpetual access and preservation
- Understands the fundamentals of copyright, intellectual property rights, and compliance
- Understands the difference between private sellers, dealers, vendors, aggregators, and publishers and how to ethically evaluate services and products using evidence, performance, comparisons, and needs of institution

## **Business, Legal, and Financial Knowledge**

- Understands institutional resources, policies, and practices related to acquisitions
- Has a clear knowledge of budgeting principles
  - Examples: allocations, encumbrances, expenditures
- Has a working knowledge of budgeting and fiscal budget cycles
  - Examples: zero-base, static, flexible, incremental, rolling budget and rolling forecast budget, operating vs. materials budgeting
- Has a clear knowledge of generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) and auditing standards
  - Examples: separation of responsibilities, defined financial permissions, ledger compliance, inventory control, audit trails, tax exemptions applicable to non-profits and higher education
- Has a working knowledge of procurement processes, including requests for information, requests for proposal, formal bid processes, and contract negotiations, including e-resource license negotiation
- Maintains familiarity with state and organizational guidelines governing acquisitions practices and procedures
- Understands the options for organizing fund structures for materials budgets
  - Examples: format, departmental, subject-based
- Understands ledger and fund code design and usability
  - Examples: numeric, alphabetic, parent/child hierarchy
- Understands forecasting expenditures, including industry tools available to aid in forecasting (e.g. vendor price projections), and the role inflation plays in rising costs between different formats of materials
- Understands different types of funding
  - Examples: one time, recurring, deposit, contracts, grants, gift and endowed funds
- Conducts ethical business interactions with vendors, sales representatives, and publishers

## **Management Knowledge**

- Understands organizational design methods and approaches, including operational management, project management, and organizational structure
- Understands institutional resources, policies, and practices
  - Employment practices
    - Examples: hiring, performance evaluation, separation
  - Employee relations
    - Examples: professional development opportunities, career services
  - Benefits
    - Examples: employee assistance programs, Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodation
  - Compensation practices
    - Examples: leave policies, position leveling
  - University policies
    - Examples: diversity and inclusion, conflict of interest, harassment,

discrimination

- Understands the role that leadership plays in decision-making, influencing and coalition-building, and change management
- Understands the importance of effective time management, including delegation and feedback
- Understands the role that emotional intelligence plays in the workplace, including interpersonal relationships, communication, and conflict management
- Understands the importance of diversity, inclusion, team-building and collaboration
- Familiar with planning and assessment techniques, including strategic planning, goal setting, mission and vision planning
- Familiar with operational and project planning methods, including outlining tasks, resources, timeframe, budget, and establishing objective measures of assessment

### **Systems, Technology, and Standards Knowledge**

- Understands the importance of maintaining timely, accurate metadata for resources in all formats, and understands that different levels of metadata may be required for different resources
- Familiar with the management of acquisitions and serials modules within an Integrated Library System (ILS) and/or Library Services Platform (LSP)
- Knowledge of other systems for managing acquisitions and access
  - Examples: Electronic Resource Management system (ERMS), Knowledge base (KB), circulation system holds and alerts
- Knowledge of online vendor ordering systems
  - Examples: GOBI, OttoEditions, Fokus, EBSCOnet, Oasis
- Understands interoperability between common systems/tools in acquisitions and access management
  - Examples: ILS, Discovery layers/tools, ERMS, A-Z lists, link resolvers, LSPs, organizational payment systems, vendor systems, state accounting systems, loaders for ordering, Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) invoicing, Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems
- Understands industry standards related to serials and electronic resources
  - Examples: International Standard Serial Number (ISSN), Open URL, Knowledge Base and Related Tools (KBART), Electronic Resource Management Initiative (ERMI), Shared Electronic Resource Understanding (SERU), Counting Online Usage of Networked Electronic Resources (COUNTER), Standardized Usage Statistics Harvesting Initiative (SUSHI)
- Understands metadata standards and services that are important to the library environment
  - Examples: Machine Readable Cataloging (MARC), Dublin Core (DC), Enhanced Archival Description (EAD), ArcID, OCLC services, Resource Description and Access (RDA), Cooperative Online Serials Program (CONSER)
- Understands technical processes such as record loading and associated metadata specifications
- Understands the difference between holdings, order, and item records and their functions

## **Skill and Ability Competencies**

The basis for competent acquisitions work is not only the ability to master individual principles and skills but to synthesize these principles and skills in combination to create an organizational structure conducive to the work to be done, practicing managerial and leadership skills to plan for the unit's needs and encourage employee development, compliant with all legal and financial requirements, consistent in managing a variety of resources, and efficiently connected with the wider library marketplace and the systems used to connect the user with library materials.

### **Applies managerial principles in the organization and supervision of acquisitions operations and personnel**

#### Management and Supervision

- Designs and implements an effective organizational model to meet unit goals and fit changing operational needs
  - Examples: Ensures unit positions are structured efficiently in relation to the work to be done, reviewing job descriptions every so often to ensure they are still appropriate for the skills needed, and hiring or training personnel for those skills
- Manages projects to ensure focus on and completion of priority initiatives, and the optimization of resources and organizational capacity
  - Examples: Acts as a project manager or organizational champion for vital projects, requesting the resources necessary to ensure the project's success
- Manages operations to ensure optimization of services to the community
  - Examples: Implements automation or outsourcing services that decrease the time it takes to acquire and make materials available to users (Shelf Ready, Demand-Driven Acquisitions (DDA), Patron-Driven Acquisitions (PDA), Evidence-based acquisitions (EBA)
- Routinely evaluates employee job performance, coaching employees where necessary to improve performance
- Serves as resource or referral point regarding organization policy or procedure

#### Leadership

- Practices advocacy for unit initiatives and employee needs in management and administrative discussions
- Identifies areas of interest, concerns, needed skills and other areas of personal or professional development for both self and employees
- Secures the resources necessary to ensure opportunities for professional growth and development
- Practices time management techniques that result in work/life balance for self and employees
- Through delegation and empowerment, aligns task completion and decision-making with employee work assignments
- Establishes a vision and mission that resonates with employees as a source of motivation

## Planning/Assessment

- Identifies emerging and/or priority areas of focus for strategic planning
- Sets, communicates, and assesses unit and individual employee goals aligned with unit or organizational goals and strategic areas of focus
- Monitors, assesses and reports on operations, projects, and areas of responsibility
  - Examples: Creates reports capturing collections and budget data needed for budget management, external reporting, or collection analysis
- Practices continuous improvement
  - Examples: Applies metrics to assess operational efficiencies, building assessment into project plans and new services
- Practices effective project management techniques
  - Examples: Assesses risks, calculates resource needs, communicates plans, involves stakeholders, clearly identifies tasks and responsibilities
- Formulates and disseminates documentation of policies, procedures, guidelines, and operational workflows

## **Applies legal and financial principles in compliance with all parent organization, state, and federal requirements**

### Budget and Audit

- Proposes a budget and justifies it based on facts
- Designs and reads a ledger
- Conducts basic accounting and budget management tasks
- Interacts regularly with key staff in the organization's purchasing and accounts payable office; stays up to date on rules coming from those departments
- Translates budgetary information to those who may not be financially savvy
- Provides a variety of budget reports to all interested parties
- Ensures oversight and management of collection fund expenditures and reports budget trends
- Ensures budget operations meet auditing standards

### Contract Negotiation and Management

- Conducts a Request for Information (RFI) or Request for Proposal (RFP) process
- Reviews and negotiates license agreements with publishers and vendors, working with the organization's legal advisors and procurement office when needed
- Reviews and negotiates consortial and regional agreements, if applicable
- Designs basic licensing and approval plan agreements
- Serves as an expert resource on organizational financial regulations and guidelines and ensures compliance with regulations and accessibility standards
- Brings matters of public concern regarding waste, inefficiency, corruption, discrimination, and safety to the attention of organizational leadership

## **Applies industry and professional knowledge to acquire materials in all formats, maintain and assess vendor relations, and keep abreast of best practices in systems technology and use**

## Formats

- Manages all aspects of purchasing print and electronic monographs, including firm orders, approval plans, and DDA plans
- Manages serial and electronic resource lifecycle processes for continuing orders, demand-driven plans, journals packages, and database resources
  - Examples: requests quotes, organizes trials, acquisition, ordering, receiving, claiming, processing, access, assessment, renewals, and cancellations
- Manages the purchasing of other formats
  - Example: DVDs, Musical Scores, Games, CDs, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and research data sets
- Ensures that interfaces are compliant with accessibility standards
- Works with the library's collection managers or selectors to purchase appropriate materials with gift and endowment funds

## Vendor Relations

- Evaluates and selects vendors
- Builds and maintains relationships with vendors to acquire, establish, and ensure consistent access to library holdings across multiple platforms including the catalog and discovery services
- Resolves discrepancies between vendors and internal records
- Acquires materials from vendors worldwide
- Manages invoicing and payments, including EDI
- Works with material and records vendors to ensure smooth transfer of Embedded Order Data (EOD) in MARC records, application programming interfaces (APIs), or other transfer mechanisms

## Systems, Technology, and Standards

- Maintains acquisitions and e-resource data in any system used to manage library collections
  - Examples: Integrated Library System (ILS), Library Services Platform (LSP), discovery system, Electronic Resource Management System (ERMS), MARC record provider, link resolver, knowledge base (KB)
- Manages holdings and inventory in conjunction with collections management unit
- Uses third-party and vendor systems to gather usage statistics
- Maintains vendor technical specifications for ordering and invoicing loaders
- Reports and/or resolves loader problems between vendor systems, library systems, and campus payment systems
- Ensures seamless access to electronic resources
- Serves as an administrator for vendor platforms, ordering services, and content provider systems used to manage, order, or evaluate library materials
  - Example: GOBI, EBSCOnet, SpringerLink, ProQuest Ebook Central
- Troubleshoots issues related to access and accessibility standards
  - Examples: Issues related to IP addresses, proxies, VPNs, networking, vendor/platform activation, link resolvers

## **Behavioral competencies**

Appropriate knowledge and skills form a basis for acquisitions competency. A grasp of the key concepts and skills, however, do not add up to successfully practicing acquisitions. Behavioral competencies describe personal attributes that contribute to success in the profession and ways of thinking that can be developed through professional experience.

### **Communication and Cooperation**

- Works independently as well as collaboratively in a team environment
- Establishes and manages professional relationships with colleagues, vendors, publishers, subject librarians, and library partners/consortia
- Works across organizational boundaries in service of user needs
- Tailors the message for the audience, ensuring effective communication at all levels
- Engages in active listening, ensuring understanding

### **Accuracy and Efficiency**

- Works with a close attention to detail and high degree of accuracy
- Applies strategies to identify and prioritize initiatives that can improve productivity and success
  - Examples: the 80/20 rule

### **Creativity and Innovation**

- Devises innovative and creative solutions to problems
- Takes well-informed risks
- Uses data to make analysis-driven decisions
- Is flexible and adaptable in a changing, fast-paced environment

### **Professional Integrity, Diversity, and Inclusion**

- Actively seeks information on best practices and shares expertise with others
- Engages in and promotes ethical practices in purchasing and complies with terms of licensing and access agreements
- Mentors new librarians or library professionals
- Pursues diversity and inclusion for the equitable acquisition of materials, which allow for accessibility to patrons of varying physical abilities

This document was prepared by the members of the Education Committee of the Acquisitions Section, ALCTS – Maria Collins, Jo Crawford, Kay Granskog, Dracine Hodges, Stacey Marien, L. Angie Ohler, Christee Pascale, Susan Rathbun-Grubb, Trey Shelton, and Laura Sill. The Committee is grateful for the editorial suggestions made by the professional acquisitions community to improve this document.