

REVISE. REFOCUS. RESHAPE.



A Candid Conversation on Collection Development

By Heather Booth, associate editor, *Booklist*

What if the next big thing in inclusivity, access, equity, and serving more of our community members in a better way didn't require new training, tech, or budget lines?

In a library climate in which we are often pushed toward expanding our collections with newer, tech-forward, innovative options, sometimes the best option is one we've always had—one that libraries have ample experience acquiring and housing, and one that our users across demographics can appreciate and enjoy. From format-agnostic millennials to screen-weary remote workers, large print books are finding younger, more diverse audiences in libraries. As librarians reposition these collections, moving them out of their corners and into the spotlight, they're displaying the new reality that large print collections are current, in high demand, and available for everyone.

Equity in Content and Format

While much conversation about equity in libraries today has its root in diversifying collection content, format is another element that needs to be balanced in order to meet the needs of our broad spectrum of patrons. When it stands next to traditional print, audio, or eBooks, the presence of a curated, thoughtfully diversified large print collection signals to patrons that we're cognizant of their needs in both content and format.

At one of the country's largest library systems in Jacksonville, Florida, Jill Haile, collection development manager, sees the benefits of focusing on large print. They are evident not only in her high circulation numbers but also in the spirit of equity and inclusion that underpins her 21-library system's full collection. "You may not think it's revolutionary, but we treat large print as another very important format for our customers." Within their large print collection, all genre and interest categories, like romance, mystery, Black voices, or nonfiction, are considered at each location in a way that mirrors circulation patterns for those genres in other formats, from traditional print to digital media. "It's about curating collections that cross formats. And large print is an important component of this strategy." In their purchasing and cataloging, Jacksonville's large print collection is considered with the same scrutiny and balance as traditional print. Crafting and maintaining a collection that is balanced in terms of genre, popularity, format, and age means a well-rounded selection that appeals broadly across a readership with a wide span of ages and interests.

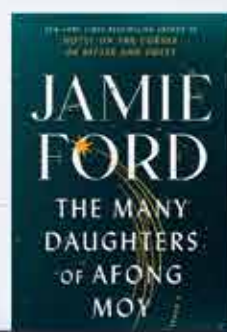
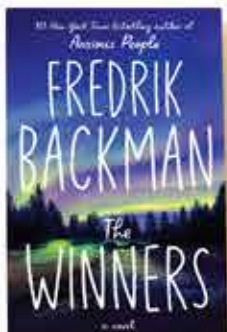
Haile emphasizes that choice in format should be patron driven and is critical from a service standpoint.



I'm not telling someone that they have to modify their reading habits to a particular format. They still get to enjoy the handheld book, but with a larger font, rather than telling them, 'I'm sorry, we don't have that. You could use a digital item with a larger font.' We don't do that! We try to meet our customers where they are. We're very responsive in that regard.



Jill Haile, Collection Development Manager, Jacksonville Public Library



Up Front and In Demand

Once the books are on the shelf, thoughtfully merchandising the collection will get the books into the hands of eager large print readers. Haile's collection approach ensures that browsable and holdable large print content is available even at the system's midsize to small locations, but she understands browsing isn't enough. "Staff promotion helps find new readers every day." Catalog-linked thematic lists that are shared on social media—from Women's History Month titles to romantic Bridgerton read-alikes—display large print editions, making it easy to place holds and reducing the stigma about readership of large print. "Large print takes its own place of pride in our branches and in our new book displays, and our collections stand alone, making them easily browsable."

That ease of discovery—both guided by librarian-created lists and displays or by traditional browsing in easy-to-access shelves in prominent locations—has kept large print a vibrantly circulating collection even as some readers turn toward digital content. **All thanks to shifts in perspective, marketing, and collection-development strategy.**

At the Schaumburg Township District Library, librarians see the demand for large print every time they go to fill their most in-demand display. Librarian Emily Vinci explains, "Hot Picks are our version of the lucky-day kind of books: high demand, long holds

lists on the new copies, but Hot Picks check out for a shorter period of time and are not hold-able. Adding a large print Hot Picks collection was a welcome addition to our patrons! And given this display's location at the front of our department, it attracts all readers to the format." Schaumburg also integrates large print into their regular display cycles with seasonal themes, topical collections, and genre-



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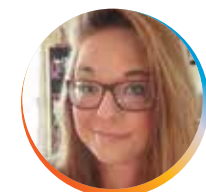
focused displays. Vinci suspects that the inclusion of large print in traditional print displays may do more to draw traditional print readers into the format, but the biggest circulation payoff comes with thematic large print displays, like Holiday Reads or Beach Reads. "I'm confident that all readers gravitate to those displays, regardless of format preference."

Focusing on balance has paid off at Schaumburg, especially in two important large print collections. As their selectors take a closer eye at diversity and inclusion, they are seeking out, selecting, and finding a ready audience for large print editions of titles by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) authors. Additionally, within the last five years, they have added a "small but mighty" selection of science fiction and fantasy in large print—a genre that's outside of the perception of what typical large print readership would be. "This portion of the collection has proven very popular!"

In-person displays aren't the only way to successfully market large print collections. Adult Collection Development Coordinator Monique Franklin of the Fort Bend County Libraries in Texas noticed a simple change in online merchandising that made a big difference in physical circulation. Large print titles began earning much more attention after the decision was made to place cover images and links to these items alongside those for traditional print and audio editions in the library's online catalog. Franklin describes the patron response to discovering large print on the digital image carousel, "When we started putting [them] on our website the minute we knew they were coming out, patrons immediately started placing holds on them . . . and then it just kept going! I realized we need to make sure that we always have new large print content to fill that need."



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Emily Vinci, Fiction Manager, Schaumburg Township District Library



Four Steps to Diversifying Your Large Print Collection

Tips from Tiffany Duck, peer reviewer for the Thorndike Press Black Voices Standing Order Plan



We know now that relying solely on patron requests for large print hasn't been good enough. It reflects the preferences of those whose voices are the loudest, but the unfortunate reality is that sometimes not everyone in a community feels like they have a voice at the library.

1

Set small, quantifiable goals.

For example, content by or about underrepresented communities will make up half of all titles in large print displays.

2

Open up your selection process to more people.

Include input from more frontline staff who work with readers.

3

Seek out influencers across your community.

Look outside the library walls to local leaders in school, religious, book club, or recreational communities; let them be library ambassadors.

4

Evaluate your efforts and revisit your goals.

Try new approaches, continue what works, and set new goals based on what you learned.

TO FLOAT OR NOT TO FLOAT

Deciding whether your large print collection floats among locations or stays at the building it was selected for? Both models offer benefits.

FLOATING COLLECTION

Books stay at the location where they were returned.

Patron holds directly impact the on-shelf collection.

Collection development staff oversee in order to maintain balance.

Emphasizes local favorites and popular genres.

STATIC COLLECTION

Books return to their home location after checkout.

Patron holds indicate trends for the direction of the collection.

Collection development staff curate collections specific to each building.

Offers opportunities to highlight “under the radar” or up-and-coming trends.

IT'S ALL ABOUT BALANCE

Fort Bend’s patrons are adept at using the catalog system to place holds. So much so that Franklin has used this patron behavior pattern to help shape the collection at each branch. The collection floats, so it’s significantly driven by patterns in patron holds but also gets infusions of fresh titles on a regular basis to pinpoint high-interest titles across fiction and nonfiction genres. They’ve found that the Black Voices selections, titles popular with book groups, and those with social media buzz circulate particularly well.

Franklin finds, through monitoring the patterns of holds, that large print seems to be a preferred format for many of her patrons across neighborhood demographics. “The branches with high circulation [of large print] have commercial areas, apartments, schools, and subdivisions near them. The communities surrounding them have grown a lot in the last 20 years.” Floating the collection based on holds has led to patrons essentially drawing items of community interest into their own branches. “More than half of the large print titles circulating at these branches are from another location.” This patron-driven curation approach naturally creates a neighborhood-library feel. “One of our branches with high circulation is very much a community library. The area has a lot of families, is near high schools, in a shopping area . . . there is a very diverse community there. So all ages, all cultures [in that community] have created a really high demand for large print.” Keeping up with popular nonfiction and ample genre fiction is quite a task. “We try to balance out the number of copies at each branch, but really the demand is so high. We can’t manage the collection based on what hasn’t circulated because you won’t find anything that hasn’t circulated in the last few years.”



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Haile agrees that the wide array of large print availability through Thorndike Press has been a boon to her patrons. “We make very good use of the depth and breadth of their catalog. We look for things that are going to be popular to any reader, and what’s so remarkable now is that I can get large print books simultaneously published with regular print, and I can get them in the quantities that I need to disperse throughout our system.” Though her large print readers also place holds with frequency and regularity, in contrast to the floating, patron-holds-driven collection composition in Fort Bend, Jacksonville’s libraries have chosen the opposite approach. “I made a determined effort not to float the collections because I wanted each location to have a consistent curated collection.” Haile believes she is better able to balance the collection through direct curation. She monitors and adjusts standing order plans and individual selection to meet patron interest and ensure a good balance at each building across the system. “It has worked out. Each year, we review and adjust what plans branches have, and sometimes we are just trying something new,” Haile explains. Every building gets broadly appealing titles, but these are supplemented with titles of specific interest to each community location. She tests various genres out and moves them within the system based on interest. “We mix it up depending on demand; we’ll reallocate that genre to another location. More titles are placed at larger regional branches that have higher foot traffic and circulation. Population density tends to be higher surrounding these locations, but is not necessarily



Monique Franklin, Adult Collection Development Coordinator, Fort Bend County Libraries



specific to any one demographic. We intentionally place large print in the system’s midsize to small locations to ensure browsable/holdable content is available. It satisfies the community who knows it exists, but also captures the users who may not know this format. Staff promotion helps find new readers every day.” She finds that this system simplifies the process of tracking demand and adjusting the variety of options as she crafts the ideal balance of large print titles in each location. Both Haile and Franklin rely on these curation tools to keep the newest and most-buzzworthy items coming in for their patrons on a regular schedule. In Fort Bend, Franklin has even seen lesser-known titles from the large print selection become very popular with her patrons!

Whether their patrons are reading for pleasure or to support their educational goals; whether they choose large print all the time or just on occasion; whether they first picked up a large print title for its accessibility, reading comfort, or simply because it had the first attractive cover they noticed when they walked into the library; Haile, Franklin, and Vinci’s patrons are committed to the format—just like these librarians are committed to keeping their collection vibrant, fresh, and diverse. Franklin summarizes:



Large print is for anybody. We don’t put ages on it. We don’t tell anybody, ‘Oh, you might like this collection better’ because of how we view them. It’s an important collection, and it’s growing.





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