



# Best Practices for Handling Discards and Donations

Faced with the challenge of ongoing book sales at 17 branch locations, the Baltimore County Public Library (BCPL) wanted a better way to manage discards and donations and to free up valuable space for self-service reserves. By partnering with Better World Books, BCPL created an ongoing revenue stream for the library and its Foundation, saved more than 40% in staff time, improved the visual appearance of branch libraries, and reinforced the library's role in being good stewards of taxpayer's money.

## BCPL by the Numbers

Circulation:	>10 million in FY2010
# of locations:	17 locations (2 additional locations opening by 2012)
Collection size:	1.7 million
Population served:	787,384
# of library cardholders:	492,729

## BCPL Challenge | *Limited Space and Staffing to Support Book Sales*

The Baltimore County Public Library managed ongoing book sales at every branch location. Organizing sale books created a constant storage problem, whether books were in the public areas waiting to be sold or in the back room waiting to be moved out to the floor, and it was difficult to keep the shelves tidy and professional looking.

A detailed analysis of the branch book sales showed that the cost of maintaining the sales was about 5,460 staff hours annually or \$107,172 in staff time. Especially in tight budget times, the library needed to deploy staff more effectively to focus on its core mission.

## The Better World Books Solution | *Reduce Costs and Time Spent by More Than 40%*

To address these challenges, in May 2009 BCPL opted to partner with Better World Books (BWB) on its Donations and Discards Program for libraries. The Donations and Discards program helps libraries manage their surplus books by selling them on over 24

online marketplaces and sharing the proceeds with the library and a nonprofit literacy program of their choice. There is no charge to the library to participate in the program.

Jo Ann Pinder, Assistant Director of Support Services, points to the following benefits of partnering with BWB:

- More efficient use of staff time. With BWB, staff do not have to price books or organize them for sale, resulting in a dramatic savings in time and money.
- Better space utilization. What was previously an unsightly, poor use of highly visible shelving is now an example of improved customer service—self-service reserves that let customers quickly pick up items on hold for them.
- Generates revenue and supports literacy. In the first year of partnering with BWB, BCPL raised about \$155,000 for the general operating fund and \$30,000 to support the My First Library Card program, the literacy program they designate to receive a percentage of every sale.
- Provides a wider audience for non-productive titles. BWB multiple online sales channels – in the U.S. and abroad – gives BCPL discards and donations much wider visibility than they could possibly get through branch foot traffic, increasing the likelihood that books will be sold rather than recycled.

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Comparative Costs (Circ Staff Hours and \$)	In-House Book Sale (May 2008)	BWB (March 2010)	% Reduction With BWB
System cost in Circ staff hours per week	105	60	42.8%
System cost in Circ staff hours annually	5460	3120	42.8%
System \$ Cost in Circ Staff Time per week	\$2,061	\$1,201	41.7%
System \$ Cost in Circ Staff Time annually	\$107,172	\$62,462	41.7%

Anticipating Staff and Community Questions

Ending branch book sales was not without controversy among some staff and a few vocal community members. But, Pinder says, “There will always be staff and members of the community for whom change is hard. The important thing is to clearly document the benefits of the change and be confident you’ve made the right decision.”

BCPL management compiled detailed facts and figures to demonstrate that the move to BWB was data-driven. This information was made available on the staff’s wide area network, ensuring that staff could respond to comments and concerns expressed by customers.

*To help other libraries know what to expect, Pinder categorized the concerns and the library’s responses as follows:*

**The books were bought with taxpayer money and we should have first crack at them. I bought books at the sale to use for day care, or home school or for my classroom.**

BWB maintains an online sidewalk sale for BCPL at BetterWorldBooks.com. With one click from the library’s home page you can shop the library book sale 365 days a year. Selling through BWB delivers the most value for our public property.

**I made money selling the books I bought at the library sales. You’ve taken away my livelihood!**

The library is in the business of circulating books, not selling used books. You can still buy our books through our BWB online sidewalk sale.

**I bought books at the sale to use for day care, or home school or for my classroom.**

You can still easily buy our books right from your computer. Our books are one click away in our BWB online sidewalk sale.

Pinder says BWB offers a good solution to every library’s problem of what to do with discards and donations. She says the company is easy to work with and provides a good shopping experience.

*“When books don’t circulate anymore we need to get rid of them in the best and most efficient way possible. Better World Books is a great partner for achieving this goal.”*