



NICE Project

Stakeholder Engagement Key Takeaways

Overview

Northern Waters Library Service (NWLS) and Wisconsin Valley Library Service (WVLS) recently formed the Northern Wisconsin ILS Consortium Exploration (NICE) project. The two systems were awarded Wisconsin LSTA Improved Discovery Solutions Grant funds to engage in a comprehensive joint consortium exploration project to determine the value and feasibility of shared Integrated Library System (ILS) software and other possible collaborations. As part of this project, the Systems contracted with WiLS to provide process facilitation and information gathering, which will result in a feasibility report.

Information gathering included a survey of and focus groups with member libraries and system staff.

- 118 people responded to the survey; 38% of survey respondents were from WVLS and 62% from NWLS. Except for 5, every library in the two systems was represented in the survey data.
 - 45 people participated in 4 focus groups; 26 from NWLS system and libraries and 19 from WVLS system and libraries. Representatives came from various roles, including directors, assistant directors, catalogers, outreach coordinators, youth and adult service staff, and administrative assistants.
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Key Takeaways from Stakeholder Engagement

The vast majority of people support an ILS merger of some sort.

- Findings indicate robust interest in pursuing a shared ILS platform, with the majority favoring a shared platform and collection with a movement towards sharing practices and policies.
- Only 7% of survey respondents indicated they wanted no change and to keep ILS' independent.

The patron experience matters.

- 95% of survey respondents felt a merged ILS would benefit or significantly benefit patron access to a larger collection.
- Focus groups also identified improved patron experience, including increased access and ease of use, as a key benefit.
- One participant encapsulated this with, "Patrons don't see the borders we do."

The perception of merger benefits is higher than perceived concerns overall.

- Survey takers were more likely to give benefits a higher weight than concerns.

Concerns exist, but for many, a clear plan and transparent communication will go a long way in building support.

- Participants support the idea of increased ILS collaboration. Still, they are looking for a prioritized, scheduled, easy-to-access (and understand) list of issues to be addressed in a future phase.
- Concerns include delivery logistics, impact on staff time, changes to governance/decision-making, and potential cost increases.

System staff and member libraries see an ILS merger impacting more than the collection.

- In focus groups, member libraries shared they valued the services and people supporting the ILS and saw increased collaboration as a way to get timely support and grow connections.
- Increased system collaboration was seen as a way to grow connections beyond the ILS. Member libraries and system staff saw the ILS as a gateway to other collaboration, learning, and connection-making.