

Northern Waters Library Service and Wisconsin Valley Library Service ILS Merger Feasibility Report

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Executive Summary

Background

Northern Waters Library Service (NWLS), Wisconsin Valley Library Service (WVLS), and their respective Integrated Library System (ILS) consortia are concurrently considering transitioning to a new ILS and evaluating existing products to find the most suitable solution at the best price. Northern Waters Library Service's ILS consortium is the Northern Waters Library Network (NWLN) and Wisconsin Valley Library Services' ILS consortium is V-Cat. For purposes of this report, "system" will be used throughout to refer to NWLS and WVLS.

Because of their mutual ILS explorations, it was a logical point for the systems to engage in a comprehensive joint project to determine the value and feasibility of a merger between the two Integrated Library System implementations and respective ILS consortia. In 2022, funded through state-allocated LSTA funds, the systems hired WiLS, an outside consultant, to manage the process, collect and analyze data via surveys and focus groups, and write a final report. At the project outset, the Northern Wisconsin ILS Consortium Exploration (NICE) Team was formed to provide ideas and input for the process and its outcomes and to act as liaisons to their libraries and within their consortia and systems.

Key Findings

95% of survey respondents saw improved access for patrons to a larger and diverse collection as either a "benefit" or "significant benefit" of an ILS merger.

Survey respondents and focus group members saw improved access and a consistent patron experience as key top benefits of an ILS merger.

There are financial savings possible if the systems pursue a shared ILS.

Focus groups identified the potential to widen their network of experts and grow access to timely system staff and ILS support as key benefits of an ILS merger.

Increases in cross-system collaboration, more examples of successful mergers, financial realities, and changing meeting needs make conditions for increased ILS collaboration more feasible.

Research completed for this process shows an ILS merger has strong potential to result in an improved patron experience, and there is much to gain from a merger beyond critical financial savings. Ninety-five percent of survey respondents saw improved access for patrons to a larger and diverse collection as either a "benefit" or "significant benefit" of an ILS merger. Member libraries and system staff, in focus groups and on the survey, were aligned in their belief that increased ILS collaboration could improve the patron experience. Focus group participants

shared the feeling that “patrons don’t see the borders we do” as a reason to pursue an ILS merger that would eliminate differences in policies and procedures between systems, especially at system border locations.

There are rising costs of operation at the consortium and library levels. In WVLS, ILS costs increased 40.8% from 2016 to 2023, and the WVLS total consortium budget saw an increase of 23% in the same period. Conditions are similar for NWLS, where there is an increased need for a wide scope of talents from the library system staff and rising costs for system operations in general. The NWLS ILS consortium costs increased by nearly 30% from 2016 to 2023, and the total consortium budget increased by 35%. In addition, rising operational costs are coupled with reduced or limited funding increases for member libraries of both consortia. Simply put, if conditions remain unchanged, the increasing costs of ILS provisions mean that member libraries are likely to see either an increase in expenses or a cut in service.

This research shows that an ILS merger has a strong potential to result in cost savings, though that savings may not be universal for each member library. Depending on the ILS vendor, a combined ILS could result in first-year annual cost savings of as much as \$32,000. Ongoing time and cost savings could also be realized as workflows and processes are deduplicated should the two ILSs standardize their practices over time.

Additional factors in a merger have yet to be calculated, including discovery layers, bibliographic utilities, authority vendors, bibliographic cover images, extraction services, hosting costs, text messaging services, e-commerce fees, system staff travel, and continuing education. Costs per member are unknown at this time and will depend upon the products selected and the funding formula chosen by the consortia. However, an initial joint purchase of an ILS clearly results in savings.

Additionally, member libraries in focus groups identified the potential to widen their network of experts and grow access to timely support from system staff as key benefits of an ILS merger. They also indicated that increased system collaboration was a way to develop connections beyond the ILS. Similarly, system staff saw the ILS collaboration as a gateway to other collaboration, learning, and connection-making.

The systems have established partnerships with each other and have increasingly collaborated across system boundaries. This culture of collaboration made it possible for NWLS and WVLS to explore ILS merger feasibility despite a past effort, Project WIN, that did not result in a merger. However, as research shows, financial, organizational, and cultural conditions for Northern Waters Library Service and Wisconsin Valley Library Service have shifted in the past decade. There are more examples of successful mergers, meeting needs and expectations have changed, and relationships between the two systems and their member libraries are stronger than ever.

Feasibility

93% of survey takers supported increased collaboration around the ILS; this support was true for both systems.

The full Project NICE Team agreed that a scenario that would see the systems purchasing an ILS together, with steps towards sharing practices and policies, was feasible. This scenario was the most supported by survey takers as well.

Member libraries' concerns related to an ILS merger must be carefully considered and addressed transparently and equitably.

All data strongly indicate that an ILS merger is feasible between NWLS and WVLS. 93% of survey takers supported increased collaboration around the ILS, 53% supporting a scenario that would see systems purchasing an ILS together, with steps towards sharing practices and policies.

Both survey respondents and focus group members emphasized that the patron experience is paramount, citing improved access and consistent patron experience as top benefits of an ILS merger. Any future ILS changes need to center around the patron experience, and a merged ILS would meet that goal of improving patron access.

Cost savings was both an identified need and benefit for the systems and member libraries, and research shows that an ILS merger would reduce platform costs for both systems. In addition, focus group participants identified additional potential cost savings of an ILS merger in collection development, purchasing, and staff time with streamlined processes.

Survey respondents' and focus group attendees' concerns about an ILS merger included the logistics of moving physical resources over a large geographic area, finding consensus and hearing voices equitably in a larger consortium, potential strains on local collections, and the unknown financial implications. Of note, survey results showed that libraries with the most concerns tend to be the smaller libraries with the newest staff and have budgets that make it the most difficult to absorb even slight increases in required payments. However, findings indicate that perceptions of the benefits of a merger outweigh perceived concerns.

Recommendation

The NICE Team recommends that NWLS and WVLS pursue a joint ILS and move towards shared practices and policies.

The team further recommends that a clear roadmap of the next steps and key decision points should be further developed.

NICE Team members reviewed and assessed the data and believe an ILS merger between NWLS and WVLS is feasible. The team recognized the concerns raised by member libraries but agreed they could be addressed in the next phase, should the merger be pursued. Research into successful mergers supports this; findings show that standardization in policies and procedures is not immediately necessary. In fact, some consortia have started with autonomous policies and circulation configurations but eventually developed standardization after a time for efficiency and ease for staff and patrons.

In their assessment, the NICE Team found positive changes in the landscape supporting more collaboration and noted no insurmountable barriers that would prevent the systems from moving forward with the project. The NICE Team recommends that NWLS and WVLS pursue a joint ILS and move towards shared practices and policies. The team further recommends that a clear roadmap of the next steps and key decision points be further developed so stakeholders can easily participate and understand the process.

Process Overview

Structure and Team Members

At the project outset, the Northern Wisconsin ILS Consortium Exploration (NICE) Team was formed to provide ideas and input for the process and its outcomes and to act as liaisons to their libraries and within their consortia and systems. The team was reflective of the two systems and their member libraries. ILS staff at both systems served on the Leadership Team.¹

Northern Waters Library Service	Wisconsin Valley Library Service
Susan Heskin, Superior Public Library Jackee Johnson, NWLS Molly Lank-Jones, Hayward Public Library Gina Rae, NWLS Teresa Schmidt, Mercer Public Library	Tammie Blomberg, Rib Lake Public Library Alexander Johnson, Marathon Co. Public Library Rachel Metzler, WVLS Peggy O'Connell, Minocqua Public Library Katie Zimmermann, WVLS

The NICE Team met monthly between October 2022 and June 2023. The Leadership Team met every two weeks. Project managers joined each NICE Team meeting and at least one Leadership Team meeting a month. Team members reviewed documents and any gathered information and data between meetings.

Process Phases

Phase I: Development of Foundational Principles (November-December)

This phase focused on the development of a shared understanding of the process, expected outcomes, and the start of information gathering. Work included developing and approving a communication plan and shared principles for the process.²

Phase II: Information Gathering and Informed Decision-Making (December-April)

This phase focused on determining the questions, stakeholders, and mechanisms needed to identify the benefits and barriers of an ILS merger. Work included a review of existing documentation, including past efforts of involved systems to merge ILSs, research into other consortia and shared ILSs, the development and deployment of a stakeholder survey, and focus group discussions. The NICE Team identified key themes from the information gathered and assessed the feasibility of moving forward.

Phase III: Report Creation (May-June)

This phase focused on the development of the NICE Team's report to determine the feasibility of an ILS merger and identify concerns and barriers to a merged ILS, the benefits of a merged ILS, and the conditions that make a merged ILS desirable.

¹ An overview of process roles can be found in [Appendix A](#).

² The Communication Plan and Project Principles and Goals can be found in [Appendix B](#) and [Appendix C](#) respectively.

Information Gathering and Stakeholder Engagement

The NICE Team comprises staff from systems as well as member library directors and staff who represent libraries of varying sizes to ensure a variety of perspectives were represented in the process. An email account and a [project website](#), where meeting materials and an FAQ were publicly maintained, were created to ensure transparency and clear communication with all stakeholders. Additionally, the exploration process was discussed at various regular system board and ILS consortia meetings, and updates were shared in system newsletters.

The NICE Team sought direct input from stakeholders at two key points in this feasibility study. The first was a survey of system and member library staff that have at least some connection to the respective ILSs. There were 118 survey responses, with 38% of survey respondents from WVLS and 62% from NWLS. All but five libraries in both systems had at least one response. Secondly, four focus groups were held; one with system staff and the other three with member library staff. There were a total of 45 participants: 26 from the NWLS system and libraries and 19 from the WVLS system and libraries.

Stakeholder engagement was supplemented with research into Project WIN, which was an earlier attempt to explore ILS mergers that involved NWLS and WVLS, successful ILS mergers, system comparisons, funding formulas, and costs.

Key Findings

The information-gathering process of this project focused on determining the questions, stakeholders, and mechanisms needed to identify the benefits and barriers of an ILS merger. Part of the process was also to review past ILS collaboration attempts and a review of other successful ILS mergers.

Changes Since Past ILS Collaboration Efforts

A key collaboration attempt was Project WIN. This project was initially a three public library system (Wisconsin Valley Library Service, Indianhead Federated Library System, and Northern Waters Library Service) effort to explore the challenges and rewards of merging three separate consortia into a single ILS. The extensive process started in the summer of 2013 and concluded in June 2014 with a final report. NWLS and WVLS committees voted in July 2014 against the proposal for a joint ILS consortium.³

Since 2014, **there have been considerable changes to the public library landscape**, especially how public libraries and library systems in Wisconsin interact and collaborate and technological and financial changes. Many of these changes have clear implications related to the feasibility of an ILS merger.

Library systems across Wisconsin, including NWLS and WVLS, are collaborating now more than ever. NWLS and WVLS have grown and deepened collaborations in significant ways to provide continuing education, inclusive services, a kit partnership, technology platforms and support, grant collaborations, and ILS-related support to their member libraries.

Technology and meeting expectations have changed. Both systems have put forward extensive efforts to provide a better patron experience by implementing discovery layers, and the advancement of meeting technologies has helped to improve hybrid and fully virtual meetings. The COVID-19 pandemic proved that libraries and library systems can do their work and even thrive in virtual environments. Online meeting platforms have proven reliable and inclusive. This advancement has helped to make meetings and collaborations among geographically disparate groups more feasible.

Financial realities faced by both systems have had an impact since Project WIN. Funding has increasingly become tight for libraries and library systems as costs continue to rise.

Successful ILS Mergers

The NICE Team identified three successful ILS mergers to review in order to reveal potential benefits and concerns of ILS mergers and conditions that make an ILS merger successful.⁴

³ Additional information on Project WIN can be found in [Appendix F](#).

⁴ Additional information on successful ILS mergers can be found in [Appendix G](#).

Several systems were interviewed about the process, timeline, the barriers and obstacles they had to overcome, their strategies and outcomes, and the governance models they employ.

Each interviewed system noted **open discussion and communication are valuable** to the process, calling out clear communication as imperative, and that efforts need to be in place to ensure everyone is heard, has a voice, and feels valued.

The groups all noted that **reviewing and comparing data, policies, and procedures to identify major differences** was important. This set clear expectations and goals for the project as well as allowed them to focus on the similar philosophy and goals of the systems, as they noted that **focusing on shared values helps to build camaraderie** and goodwill.

Systems that have **merged ILSs have seen significant cost savings and a larger pool of resources for patrons**. This has played an important role in the decisions to merge ILSs.

The systems also noted that **standardization of procedures and policies is not immediately necessary**. Some consortia began with autonomous policies and circulation configurations, but it was noted that many eventually pursued standardization after a period of time due to efficiency and ease for staff and patrons.

Survey and Focus Groups

In February 2023, a survey⁵ was sent to NWLS and WVLS system and member library staff. 118 people responded to the survey. Of those respondents, 38% reported belonging to WVLS and 62% belonged to NWLS. The respondents included a robust representation from all the solicited library roles at each system, including library directors, library staff, and system staff. The respondents varied in length of time in their current roles, ensuring the survey included representation from both newer and seasoned staff members.

Survey respondents were asked to consider different potential benefits of an ILS merger. On every item presented, at least 75% of respondents indicated it would either be a benefit or a significant benefit. The top benefit library directors and staff identified was **improved access for patrons to a larger and more diverse collection**. The top benefit identified by system staff was **opportunities for new services as a result of the deduplication of system staff efforts**.

The survey also asked about potential concerns of a merged ILS. The top concern identified by system staff and library directors was **a potential increase in cost**. Library staff's top concern was a **loss of autonomy in setting local policies**.

Library staff concerns differed by the municipal population they serve. The biggest concern from NWLS libraries that serve municipal populations under 5,000 is a loss of autonomy in setting policies, while smaller WVLS libraries' biggest concern is delivery logistics.

⁵ Survey results can be found in [Appendix D](#).

Larger NWLS libraries' biggest concern is potential changes in collection expenditure standards, while for WVLS, larger libraries' biggest concern is delivery logistics and potential changes to patron access/filling holds.

Overall, when comparing how respondents rated the potential benefit statements versus concern statements, averages indicate that people's **overall perception of the benefits of a merger is higher than their perceived concerns.**

In addition, survey respondents were asked to consider statements about the impact as well as willingness to consider changes that combining ILS services could require and select their level of agreement from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." All items had at least 75% of survey respondents indicate some level of agreement. System staff and library directors agreed the most strongly that **combining ILS services would improve service to libraries**, while library staff agreed the most strongly that **combining ILS services would improve service to patrons.**

The statements were selected for the survey to identify if there were any unknown major areas of concern that the NICE Team would need to be made aware of. For example, if most people didn't think combining ILS services would improve services to libraries, then a merger or combined ILS would not be feasible. All the statements in the survey had a high level of agreement, and no "deal-breakers" were identified.

Finally, survey respondents were asked to identify a scenario that most aligned with their preference. The **majority support a scenario of a shared platform and collections with steps towards sharing practices and policies (53%)**, followed by one consortium with a shared ILS, collection, and practices/policies (29%), and a shared ILS platform with limitations (10%). **Only 7% of respondents selected no change as their preferred scenario.**

Information gathered from the focus groups aligned with the survey's key findings.⁶ Few differences were presented between the two systems, with members from both systems identifying similar opportunities and concerns.

Common benefits identified by the focus group participants include:

- Increase access to resources for patrons, including increased access/ease of use for those who live on the border of systems
- Potential cost savings for systems and libraries due to the shared cost of the ILS
- Potential cost savings due to changes in collection development and purchasing
- Potential cost savings of staff time with streamlining processes

Throughout the focus group, it was made clear that patron experience is paramount, and any future ILS changes need to center around the patron experience. It was noted that "**patrons don't see the borders we do,**" therefore, increased collaboration among the systems would be an advantage to the patrons they serve. Open communication and organization of the project

⁶ Focus group themes and transcripts can be found in [Appendix E](#).

were also identified as imperative to an ILS merger process. **Participants support the idea of increased ILS collaboration but are looking for a prioritized and scheduled list of issues** to be addressed in a future phase. This list should be clearly communicated and easy for stakeholders to understand and access. In addition, the focus groups confirmed that all system staff are unified in their support for increased collaboration around the ILS.

System Comparisons

To better understand the similarities and differences between the way NWLS and WVLS govern and manage their respective ILS consortia, a comparison document was developed. This document can serve as a baseline for any future ILS collaboration as it identifies all areas of the ILS consortia structures.⁷

Both consortia are similar in the type of staffing they have to support their respective ILS. They differ, though, in how they catalog. NWLS supports centralized cataloging, while WVLS employs cooperative cataloging. While agreement on this specific aspect is optional to begin the sharing of an ILS, it may be a topic on which the systems will want to discuss and eventually come to an agreement on.

Both systems are a part of the LEAN WI technology partnership, and both currently host their ILSs in the LEAN WI facility. In addition, they both utilize the help ticketing system, Help Scout, for library staff to create support tickets for any ILS issues. Both systems also offer various training related to the ILS as well as provide extensive support documentation for their members.

The two systems have differences in their governance and voting structures. In the NWLS ILS consortium, each library member has one vote. All actions are decided by simple majority vote, (51%) of those members present, either physically or electronically. In the case of a tie vote, and a tie is not a majority, the motion for adoption is lost. If, for any action, the vote result is inconclusive, a roll call vote is taken.

The WVLS ILS consortium employs a dual voting model and strives to reach unanimous consent. When unanimous consent cannot be reached, a simple majority of voting representatives will carry the vote for adoption of the agenda minutes and adjournment. When unanimous consent cannot be reached for all other actions, a two-thirds majority vote based on weighted representation and a two-thirds majority of the representatives will carry the vote. Majorities for both votes will be determined based on all voting representatives, present or via proxy.

Currently, both systems utilize the same ILS vendor, Innovative Interfaces, and the same ILS platform, Sierra. There are differences, though, in the ILS-related products they use, including discovery layers. NWLS uses Pika Discovery Layer, whereas WVLS uses Aspen

⁷ The NWLS & WVLS ILS System Comparisons document can be found in [Appendix H](#).

Discovery. In addition, both employ a third-party vendor for authority control; however, the vendors are not the same.

Costs and Funding Formulas

It has been clear throughout this process that funding and the cost of a potential ILS merger are primary concerns for those involved. Prior to this project, both systems requested quotes from ILS vendors, both standalone and combined. A review of these quotes was completed to identify any potential savings.⁸ **The two systems would see cost savings for all vendors for the first few years.** For year one, the systems could see potential annual cost savings of between \$7,000 and \$32,000, depending on the chosen vendor. Year two would see similar savings of between \$2,000 and \$33,000 if merged.

NWLS and WVLS are both currently on Innovative Interfaces Inc.'s Sierra. However, if they were to merge to one Sierra ILS, there would be a migration cost to bring the two systems together. If a shared ILS is pursued with either of the other two vendors, NWLS and WVLS would see cost savings on implementation with a merger, as opposed to implementation individually.

There are several additional ILS-related costs that will need to be taken into account as a part of any next steps. It is unknown at this point what type of cost savings, if any, these will have. NWLS and WVLS staff have been putting efforts towards documenting all additional costs and obtaining quotes from vendors to identify costs if the two were combined. This work will continue into the next stage.

Should NWLS and WVLS decide to merge at this feasibility study's conclusion, cost formula scenarios will need to be addressed. The NICE Team identified several scenarios that could be used to determine individual library costs. Each scenario is based on known formulas utilized in the two consortia and other cost-sharing collaborations throughout the state. In addition, a scenario is also presented that would offer an even split between the two systems so each could determine and utilize its own cost formula for member library costs. This would provide the opportunity for the two systems to begin working together and then slowly investigate a more thoroughly combined formula in the future that is equitable for all.

⁸ NWLS & WVLS ILS Merger Cost Narrative can be found in [Appendix I](#).

Feasibility Findings

NICE Team members analyzed the data sets outlined in the previous section and completed worksheets as part of this process.⁹ These worksheets asked members to consider the information and identify themes shared across data sets. The group was also asked to indicate if they felt the data and information supported increased ILS collaboration and, if so, what degree of collaboration was the most feasible. On the worksheets and in a team meeting, the members reported that they found a shared ILS to be feasible, and nearly all recommended that the systems share an ILS platform and collections and take steps towards sharing practices and policies the most feasible.

Current circumstances and future opportunities point to the feasibility of a shared ILS platform and collections. In past successful mergers, a commitment to collaboration was key, and there is robust support for collaboration from libraries and system staff in both systems. This support is predicated on the shared belief that maintaining and improving the library experience for patrons can be achieved through a shared ILS platform and collections, the documented potential for ILS cost savings overall, and a shared understanding that service from library systems to libraries can be strengthened through increased ILS collaboration.

Both systems have worked to unify policies and practices within their individual consortia, showing that through consensus building, change can happen. Importantly, the two systems have already begun working together to troubleshoot issues and support each other on ILS-focused work. Survey takers were aware of this collaboration as well; 58% felt that library systems are collaborating more than they did ten years ago, creating a more positive environment to consider merging the systems.

Survey responses indicated that the systems and their respective libraries are ready to seriously consider an ILS merger. Most notably:

- When comparing how people rated the potential benefit statements versus concern statements, respondents viewed the benefits of a merger more clearly as benefits. This indicates that **people's overall perception of the benefits of the merger is higher than their perceived concerns.**
- **93% of survey takers supported increased collaboration** around the ILS; this support was true for both systems.

One of the main perceived benefits (and concerns) related to an ILS merger of any sort was cost. ILS costs have risen significantly over the past years for both library systems. For WVLS, ILS costs have increased by nearly 41% from 2016 to 2023, while the total consortium budget increased by 23% from 2016 to 2023. The same pattern is true for NWLS, which has seen rising costs in operations in general, and more specifically, NWLN has seen a 29.5% increase in ILS costs from 2016 to 2020. This resulted in a total consortium budget increase for NWLN of 35%

⁹ A blank worksheet can be found in [Appendix J](#).

during this same period. Coupled with this are rising operational costs of member libraries and reduced funding or limited funding increases for member libraries. Finding ways to save money at the consortium level is paramount, and an ILS merger has the potential for initial savings as well as long-term savings through capacity finding and cost-sharing.

There are factors that will impact the success of an ILS merger between the two consortia. These include:

- Libraries of varying sizes and in different locations have unique needs that need to be addressed in order for collaboration to succeed
- Logistics and the transport of physical resources over a large geographic area
- A larger consortium with more voices can make it harder to find consensus and could result in a loss of autonomy and representation
- The strain on local/browsing collections
- Financial implications/costs

While none of these factors were seen as “dealbreakers” at this point, participants in focus groups and members of the NICE Team noted that often “the devil is in the details” and that while a merger of some sort is feasible, it may not be easy.

In sum, at a minimum, a shared purchase of an ILS is definitely feasible. It is also feasible for the shared purchase of an ILS to be complemented by shared collections with the intention to move towards shared policies and procedures over time, though there are concerns that need to be addressed for this option to be successful. These concerns have been noted in this section and are central to the future considerations laid out in the following section. However, it will be critically important that stakeholders, including future team or committee members, system staff, member library staff, and even library and system board members, commit themselves to the decision-making principles the NICE Team laid out in this process. These principles intentionally reflect the values of the NICE Team and, more importantly, the stakeholders they represent. There will undoubtedly be points in any next steps that will necessitate discussion and consensus-finding. A merger of any sort will only be feasible if the next stage of the process centers not on individual, though valid, details but rather on the larger shared principles.

Future Considerations

As the NICE Team recommends that NWLS and WVLS pursue a joint ILS and move towards shared practices and policies, it is also recommended that a clear roadmap of the next steps and key decision points be further developed. The team recognizes the concerns raised by member libraries but agrees they could be addressed in the next phase, should the merger be pursued.

A list of key issues and next steps have been identified and prioritized in three phases. The tasks in each phase may be developed and worked on simultaneously.

Phase I

Maintain the current NICE team structure as the main project body.

A single governing body for the project is recommended. Members of the team may change as member availability and process needs change. It is also recommended that the committee develop ad hoc groups of experts to work on specific issues throughout the next phase to research and make recommendations to the NICE Team.

Develop decision-making and process guidelines.

The current NICE Team has drafted decision-making principles to guide the process in the next phase.¹⁰ The principles are intended to be broad and act as a check to ensure that any shared decisions conform to core values as much as reasonably possible. These core values reflect what the NICE Team heard from stakeholders throughout the initial stage of work. A decision-making rubric was also drafted for use in the next phase. The team will also need to determine the approval process for the project, which stakeholders need to be involved, and when.

Develop a communication plan.

The NICE Team will need to create a clear and agreed-upon project purpose and goals for the next phase as was created for this current phase.¹¹ This communication plan will need to clearly identify and utilize communication channels, materials, responsible team members, and any other communication-related resources to ensure open, two-way communication. It is also recommended to develop opportunities for relationship-building within the process.

Create a timeline.

It is recommended that a timeline with identified goals and any projected outcomes be developed. This timeline should be made available to the community, and updates to the timeline, goals, and outcomes should be communicated regularly.

Determine which vendor and product will be pursued.

¹⁰The Complete Decision Making Matrix can be found in [Appendix K](#).

¹¹The current Communication Plan can be found in [Appendix B](#).

The selection of vendors and products will be determined by the appropriate stakeholders (consortia members, system trustees, etc.). Based on that decision, the funding formula for the shared costs will need to be determined, and which ILS-related costs will be shared. The NICE Team has begun work on developing possible cost scenarios and formulas.¹² However, it is understood that the two ILS consortia will bring final cost formulas and ILS funding recommendations to the Boards of Trustees at NWLS and WVLS to decide on such matters.

Phase II

Review and make decisions on policies.

The NICE Team will need to identify which policies in the below areas should be agreed upon and which can be worked toward in future phases after the ILSs are merged. The team may need to create ad hoc committees or workgroups with experts in each of the areas to address specific issues and make recommendations to the NICE Team.

- Circulation policies and standards (loan rules, fines, holds, etc.)
- Cataloging policies and standards (centralized, decentralized, etc.)
- Database policies and standards (record maintenance, retention, etc.)

Determine delivery structure.

Working with the courier service a cost estimate and plan for delivery will need to be developed, including the mapping out of routes with additions of potential hubs within each system.

Develop system ILS and contracted ILS staff responsibility and support plan.

This task should be the responsibility of the current ILS staff during the next phase. They will need to determine how the two systems' ILS staff will share and divide ILS responsibility among themselves.

Phase III

Create a list of potential changes and impacts for staff.

Should the merger move forward, the task could fall within this phase or be done during migration. This may be developed to help the community understand and be prepared for changes to their current workflows.

Determine governance and voting structure.

The determination of any shared governance and voting structure will depend on the ILS merger scenario chosen by the systems. If the two choose to share the ILS cost but keep all policies and governance separate, this step will not be needed. However, if the two choose to work toward a shared governance body, the structure and voting will need to be determined.

ILS training.

Once a decision has been made and approved, the systems will need to put forth a thorough and comprehensive training plan.

¹² NWLS & WVLS ILS Merger Cost Narrative can be found in [Appendix I](#).

Appendices

APPENDIX A: PROCESS ROLES

Exploration Team:

- Provide ideas and input for this process and its outcomes (i.e. help generate ideas for focus group attendees, offer feedback on findings, identify big themes and ideas, etc.)
- Attend monthly meeting and do any pre-meeting homework to make sure meetings are efficient and effective
- Respond to emails and requests for feedback/input in a timely fashion
- Be open, honest and transparent.
- Have fun and get to know each other!

System Leads:

- Provide ideas and input for this process and its outcomes (i.e. help generate ideas for focus group attendees, offer feedback on findings, identify big themes and ideas, etc.)
Supply data and information to the Exploration Team and WiLS as needed.
Act as liaisons and communication points (between the team and other stakeholders, and between WiLS and the team)
- Coordinate monthly meetings by sending out agendas, taking minutes, and sharing materials as appropriate; help ensure they start on time
- Record meetings
- Attend monthly meeting and do any pre-meeting homework to make sure meetings are efficient and effective
- Respond to emails and requests for feedback/input in a timely fashion
- Be open, honest and transparent
- Have fun and get to know each other!

WiLS:

- Project facilitation and providing structure and support
- Process and decision making documentation, for this group and your stakeholders
- Attend meetings, help draft agendas, along with System Leads, and do appropriate information gathering so you have the ability to make informed decisions.
- Provide any pre-meeting homework in a timely, easy to understand manner
- We will draft report findings
- We will help this group stay on target, keep our focus on bigger picture goals, while documenting the details that will inevitably come up
- Attend monthly meeting and help ensure they start on time
- Respond to emails and requests for feedback/input in a timely fashion
- Be open, honest and transparent
- Help the group have fun and get to know each other!

APPENDIX B: COMMUNICATION PLAN

Goal: Open, transparent, clear communication

This exploratory process will rely on transparency and will hinge on open, honest and communication. The NICE Team will be responsive to stakeholders and receptive to their input throughout the process.

Email Account

The NICE Team's email account, **niceproject@wils.org**, will be checked by the process facilitators daily.

Team Meetings and Website

A NICE Project website has been established, <https://nicelibraries.org/>. Agendas and minutes will be posted to this site along with meeting documents. Meeting agendas will be sent out six days in advance with any pre-work that needs to be completed before the meetings. Team meetings will take place on the third Tuesday of each month (November 2022 - June 2023) from 8:30 - 10:30 am. Notes will be posted within one week of the meeting. The website will have a form for questions and comments, which will help inform the site FAQ and other communications.

Team Members

The Exploration Team is made up of staff from both systems as well as staff from member libraries, representing both systems and different library sizes. The Team serves important roles, including sharing information and acting as a process liaison.

Name	System	Role	Location
Jackee Johnson	NWLS	System Staff	NWLS
Gina Rae	NWLS	System Staff	NWLS
Teresa Schmidt	NWLS	Library Director	Mercer
Sue Heskin	NWLS	Library Director	Superior
Molly Lank-Jones	NWLS	Library Director	Hayward
Katie Zimmermann	WVLS	System Staff	WVLS
Rachel Metzler	WVLS	System Staff	WVLS
Tammie Blomberg	WVLS	Library Director	Rib Lake
Alexander Johnson	WVLS	Library Support Services Manager	MCPL
Peggy O'Connell	WVLS	Library Director	Minocqua

Communication Materials

Materials created and shared throughout the process will be saved in an internal drive containing all team documents related to this process. An ongoing FAQ will be established for team members to share with stakeholders throughout the process. The FAQ will provide either answers to questions or an indication of when it might be answered. Team members will consistently review and refer others to the FAQ to ensure consistency and address follow up questions, should they not already be answered.

Communication Matrix

Tactic	Stakeholder(s)	Timing	Description
Website/blog updates	Member libraries, system staff, and system trustees	Monthly, within a week of preceding team meeting	Short post that will be shared on the project web page that provides highlights of the team's work.
Website FAQ	Member libraries, system staff, and system trustees	As needed, frequent updates anticipated. Standing agenda item at monthly team meeting	The process will create a Frequently Asked Questions section on the project website to share answers or indicate when questions might be answered in future phases of work.
Newsletter articles (using existing system newsletter)	Member libraries, system staff, and system trustees, and other interested parties that are subscribed to newsletter(s)	Monthly; in newsletter that follows most recent meeting	Short article that provides highlights of the team's work and calls for participation.
Updates at System Board Meetings - standing agenda item	System trustees	As board meets	Brief updates, provided by a team member from system staff or the system director.
Updates at Directors Meeting for each System - standing agenda item	Member libraries	As meetings occur	Brief updates, provided by a team member from system staff or the system director.
Updates at/for member library boards as appropriate	Member libraries and trustees	As needed	Brief updates, provided by a team member from system staff, member library or the system director.
Press releases / newspaper article content	Community members	As needed, likely towards the end of the process with any notable findings or outcomes	Short article that provides highlights of the team's work.

APPENDIX C: PROJECT PRINCIPLES AND GOALS

Process Principles

- Members of the exploration team and process facilitators will assume good intentions and take part in this process with sincere curiosity
- The process will operate through and depend upon clear, open, and transparent communication. It will be achieved through and by:
 - consistent messaging and open communication, shared with all stakeholders
 - encouraging open, shared conversations - by team members and stakeholders alike - as much as possible
 - building trust by providing as clear of answers as possible, in as timely manner as possible and being honest that not all questions will have immediate answers
 - developing a question base with answers that can be referred to throughout the process
 - communications to stakeholders that address concerns and questions
- Team members will review and learn from past successes and trials (ie Project WIN) and will specifically look to team members that were participants in those efforts for their expertise and explanations
- The process will maintain a big picture focus, while capturing details that might be better addressed in future phases of work
- The process will establish and share clear priorities/outcomes
- The process recognizes that there may be a fear of the unknown and will work to counteract that fear by providing the clearest answers possible, while acknowledging that there may not be answers for every question or scenario.
- A clear timeline for this phase and future phases will be established
- The autonomy of all stakeholders will be recognized
- The process will work to understand differences (and similarities) in existing system governance
- The process will acknowledge the different needs of libraries of varying sizes and geographic locations

Project Goals/Outcomes

This is, in many ways, a feasibility study that will uncover and document potential advantages and disadvantages of an ILS merger and is not a decision-making process. It will result in:

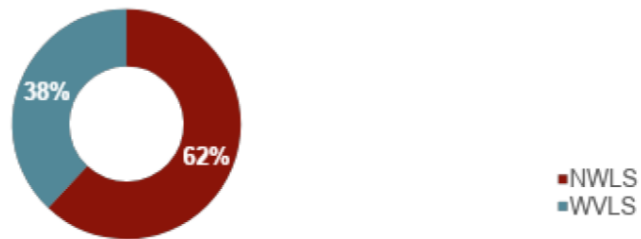
- A clear understanding of financial implications, including a projected budget
- A clear understanding of benefits for patrons, member libraries, and other stakeholders including and tools for directors to share with their boards throughout the process
- A final report detailing outcomes, benefits, concerns, etc. that contains an executive summary of key findings
- An examination of existing cultures of individual systems/libraries (how they work together- is everyone involved, committees, etc.)
- Articulated priorities and values of stakeholders and an examination of where they overlap

- Identification of gaps in knowledge (how the systems are already collaborating and awareness of this)
- Exploration of existing governance structures and recommendations for future structure(s)
- Successful delivery of the research grant goals (from the LSTA Grant Application) to the best of the team and consultant's ability.

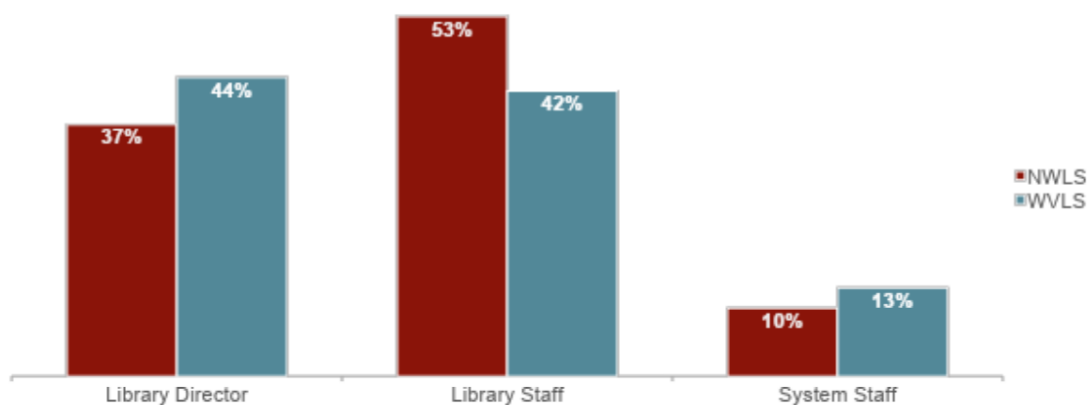
APPENDIX D: SURVEY RESULTS

In 2022, Northern Waters Library Service (NWLS) and Wisconsin Valley Library Service (WVLS) embarked on a joint consortium exploration study funded through state-allocated LSTA monies. As part of the information gathering phase, a survey was distributed to both systems for response from both system and member library staff members and directors. 118 people responded to the survey.

Which group is your library a member of?

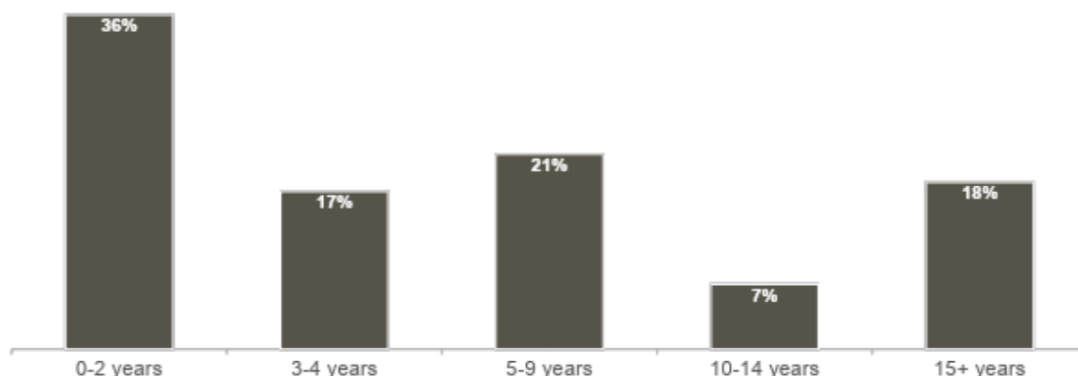


The survey responses included robust representation from all the solicited library roles at each system.



Survey respondents varied in length of time in their current role, ensuring the survey included representation from both newer and seasoned staff members and directors.

How long have you been in your current role?



Survey respondents were asked to consider different potential **benefits** of a merged ILS on a scale from “not at all a benefit” to “a significant benefit.” On every item, at least 75% of all respondents indicated it would either be a benefit or significant benefit.

Item	% Selected “Benefit” or “Significant Benefit”	Weighted Average*
Improved access for patrons to a larger and more diverse collection.	95%	3.53
Potential for cost savings.	87%	3.37
Potential for increased access to more ILS resources.	89%	3.28
Opportunities for new services as a result of deduplication of system staff focus.	80%	3.19
Improved group buying options.	84%	3.13
Additional system staff support available through collaboration.	87%	3.12
Potential for more efficient use of library staff time and improved library operations.	81%	3.04
Increased standardization across large service area that would result in increased consistency for patrons.	75%	2.93

*Scale: Not at all a benefit (1) – A little bit of a benefit (2) – A benefit (3) – A significant benefit (4)

While all items were viewed as potential benefits, people's "top" benefit differed by role.

Item	System Staff Weighted Average	Library Director Weighted Average	Library Staff Weighted Average
<i>Improved access for patrons to a larger and more diverse collection.</i>	3.42	3.40*	3.66*
<i>Potential for cost savings.</i>	3.33	3.36	3.39
<i>Potential for increased access to more ILS resources.</i>	3.17	3.16	3.39
<i>Opportunities for new services as a result of deduplication of system staff focus.</i>	3.50*	3.21	3.08
<i>Improved group buying options.</i>	3.25	3.28	3.00
<i>Additional system staff support available through collaboration.</i>	3.42	3.00	3.11
<i>Potential for more efficient use of library staff time and improved library operations.</i>	3.33	2.84	3.08
<i>Increased standardization across large service area that would result in increased consistency for patrons.</i>	3.08	2.68	3.05

*viewed as the greatest benefit for that role

Scale: Not at all a benefit (1) – A little bit of a benefit (2) – A benefit (3) – A significant benefit (4)

Survey respondents were asked to consider different potential **concerns** of a merged ILS on a scale from "not at all concerned" to "significantly concerned."

Item	% Selected "Concerned" or "Significantly Concerned"	Weighted Average
<i>A potential increase in cost.</i>	47%	2.61
<i>Loss of autonomy in setting local policies.</i>	52%	2.57
<i>Potential changes to patron access and how holds are filled.</i>	45%	2.43
<i>Delivery logistics.</i>	44%	2.37
<i>Potential changes in governance model.</i>	39%	2.32
<i>Need for training or learning new procedures.</i>	45%	2.31
<i>Potential changes in collection expenditure standards.</i>	41%	2.31

Scale: Not at all concerned (1) – A little bit concerned (2) – Concerned (3) – Significantly Concerned (4)

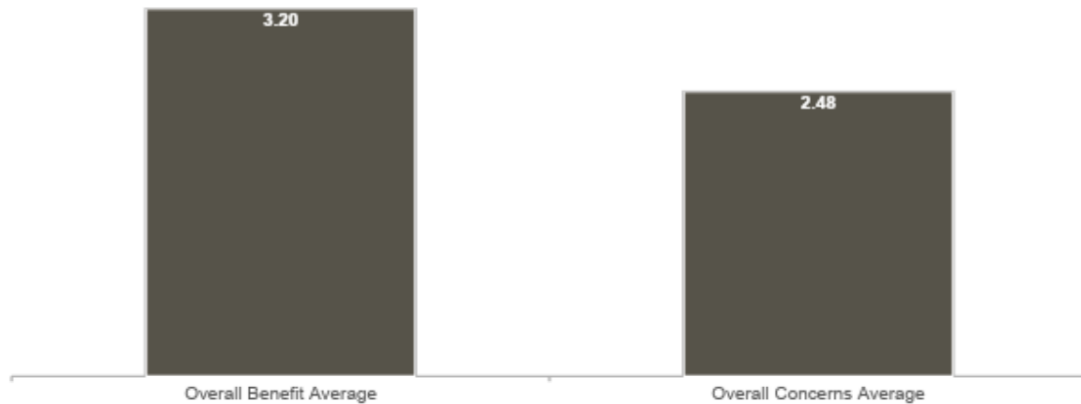
Levels of concern varied depending on library role. As a general trend, library directors had the highest overall levels of concern (overall concern average of 2.58), followed by library staff (overall concern average of 2.48), followed by system staff (overall concern average of 1.90).

Item	System Staff Weighted Average	Library Director Weighted Average	Library Staff Weighted Average
<i>A potential increase in cost.</i>	2.33*	2.96*	2.47
<i>Loss of autonomy in setting local policies.</i>	2.00	2.72	2.66*
<i>Potential changes to patron access and how holds are filled.</i>	1.75	2.68	2.53
<i>Delivery logistics.</i>	1.83	2.40	2.53
<i>Potential changes in governance model.</i>	1.75	2.48	2.39
<i>Need for training or learning new procedures.</i>	2.25	2.28	2.34
<i>Potential changes in collection expenditure standards.</i>	1.42	2.56	2.42

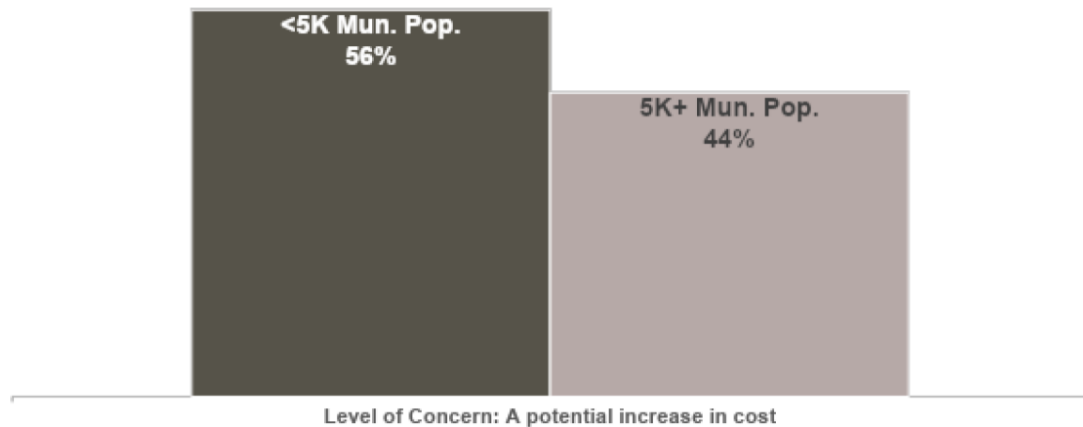
*viewed as the greatest concern for that role

Scale: Not at all concerned (1) – A little bit concerned (2) – Concerned (3) – Significantly Concerned (4)

When comparing how people rated the potential benefit statements versus concern statements, respondents viewed the benefits of merger more clearly as benefits. These averages indicate that people's overall perception of the benefits of merger are higher than their perceived concerns.

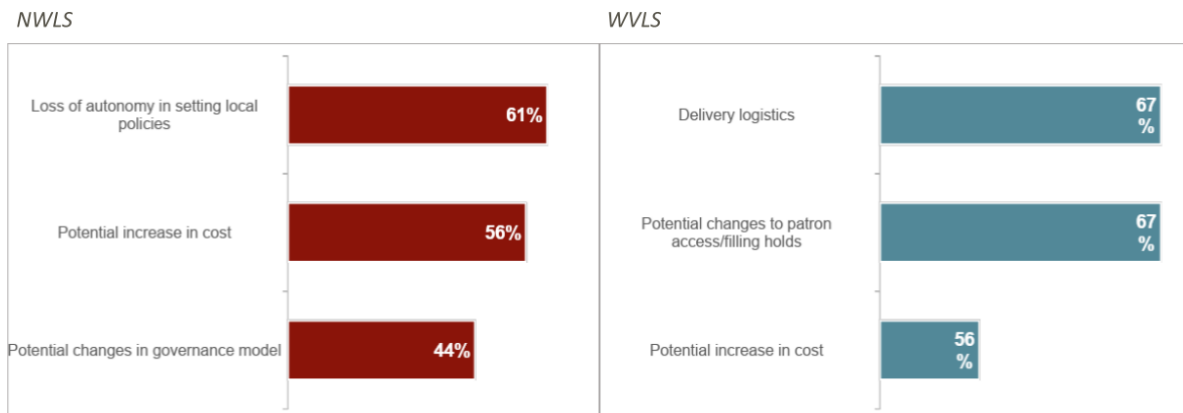


Items of concern varied based on the municipal population served. The potential of an increase in cost was the top-selected item of concern/significant concern for survey respondents working in a library serving a municipal population size under 5,000.



Libraries serving municipal populations **under** 5,000 have different concerns depending on system.

% of respondents indicating concern or significant concern

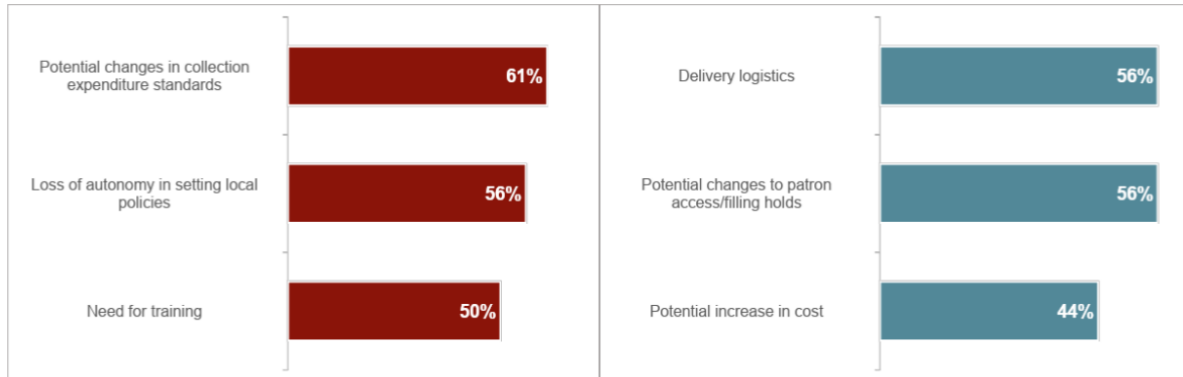


Libraries serving municipal populations **over** 5,000 have different concerns depending on system.

% of respondents indicating concern or significant concern

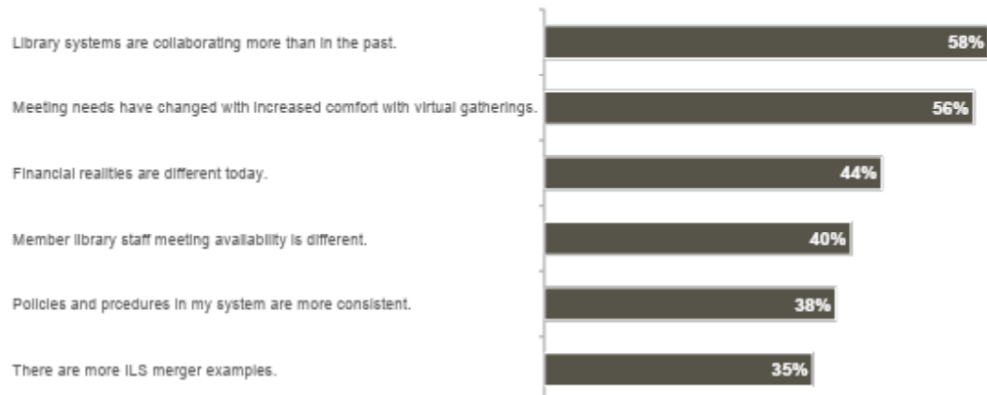
NWLS

WVLS



Approximately 10 years ago, an ILS merger was explored that did not take place between NWLS and WVLS. Survey respondents were asked what factors might have changed since then to make a difference today. Increased library system collaboration over the past decade was the most selected item that could contribute to a big difference in outcome today.

How big of a difference do you think the following might make on decisions today? (% selected "A big difference")



Survey respondents were asked to consider different statements about combining ILS services and select their level of agreement from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” All items had at least 75% of survey respondents indicate some level of agreement.

Item	% Selected “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”	Weighted Average
<i>Combining ILS services would improve service to libraries.</i>	93%	3.19
<i>Combining ILS services would improve service to patrons.</i>	90%	3.18
<i>Patrons would benefit from standardized circulation policies and practices.</i>	85%	3.13
<i>My library would be open to changing ILS platforms, if needed, to combine services.</i>	89%	2.96
<i>My library would be supportive of new/different staff focuses if combine services results in staff role changes.</i>	84%	2.91
<i>My library would be open to changing governance structures, if needed, to combine services.</i>	78%	2.88
<i>My library would be open to changing circulation periods, if needed, to combine services.</i>	75%	2.87
<i>My library would be open to changing voting practices, if needed, to combine services.</i>	78%	2.78

Scale: Strongly Disagree (1) – Disagree (2) – Agree (3) – Strongly Agree (4)

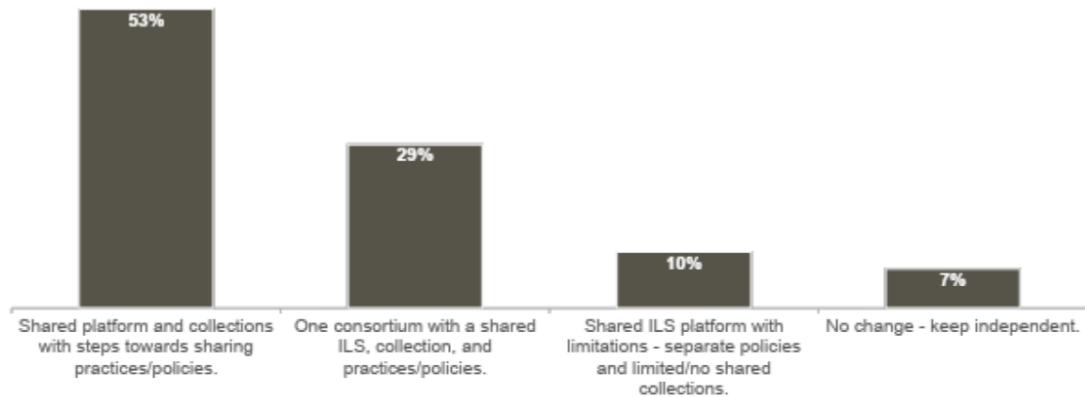
While agreement was high regardless of role, the level of agreement was weighted differently depending on a person’s library role.

Item	System Staff Weighted Average	Library Director Weighted Average	Library Staff Weighted Average
<i>Combining ILS services would improve service to libraries.</i>	3.55*	3.09*	3.18
<i>Combining ILS services would improve service to patrons.</i>	3.27	3.08	3.25*
<i>Patrons would benefit from standardized circulation policies and practices.</i>	3.50	3.02	3.16
<i>My library would be open to changing ILS platforms, if needed, to combine services.</i>	3.00	2.94	2.97
<i>My library would be supportive of new/different staff focuses if combine services results in staff role changes.</i>	3.00	2.88	2.93
<i>My library would be open to changing governance structures, if needed, to combine services.</i>	3.50	2.85	2.80
<i>My library would be open to changing voting practices, if needed, to combine services.</i>	3.25	2.80**	2.65**
<i>My library would be open to changing circulation periods, if needed, to combine services.</i>	3.25	2.88	2.80

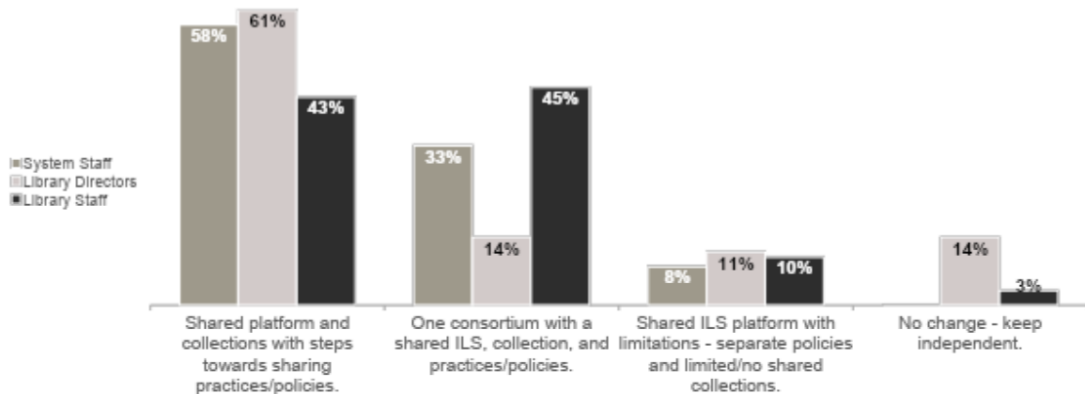
*highest level of agreement for that role
 ** lowest level of agreement for that role
 (Note: System staff had 100% agreement)

Scale: Strongly Disagree (1) – Disagree (2) – Agree (3) – Strongly Agree (4)

Survey respondents were asked to select the scenario that most closely aligned with their preference for how NWLN and V-Cat should operate an ILS platform.



Ideal scenario varied by library staff role.



- **The patron experience matters.** The top perceived benefit of a shared or merged ILS was Improved access for patrons to a larger and more diverse collection
- Survey takers' **perception of the benefits of the merger is higher than their perceived concerns** overall.
- **Differences by system, municipal size, and role exist** in some places, but those are most **helpful for messaging and addressing potential concerns** versus indicating a group is going to be against a potential ILS merger of sorts.
- The vast majority of people **support an ILS merger of some sort**
- Early analysis of **focus groups shows alignment** with these key findings.

APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP THEMES

Overall Themes

- From the member library perspective, the patron experience is primary. Any change needs to center the patron experience. An increased collection was noted as a central reason to share an ILS and collection, but participants also need any changes to be easy for patrons to understand. In much the same way, system staff centers the member library experience and, by extension, the patron experience.
- Participants support the idea of increased ILS collaboration but are looking for a prioritized and scheduled list of issues to be addressed in a future phase, which should be clearly communicated and easy for stakeholders to understand and access.
- Efforts to increase collaboration will succeed if all parties work to trust each other and the larger process. Communication will need to be open and transparent. Participants indicated a desire for efforts to combine the ILS, collections, and/or policies to have clear ground rules from the start, including shared goals, practices, and deadlines.
- System staff are unified in their support for increased collaboration around the ILS.
- Member libraries expressed concern that system staff might be at risk should collaboration increase; they valued the services and people that support the ILS. They saw increased collaboration as a way to get more 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.

Successful ways to have positive, collaborative experiences

- All participants understand end goals and objectives/ground rules are clear
- Guidelines in place that everyone agrees upon
- Shared purpose/goals (noted in member and system focus groups)
- Have relationship building points/opportunities within projects
- Many modes of communication (in-person and virtual)
- Safe space/trust building (noted in member and system focus groups)
- Participants have an open mind (noted in member and system focus groups)

Opportunities to improve ILS consortia through collaboration

- Increase access to resources for patrons, including increased access/ease of use for those that live on the border of systems (noted in member and system focus groups)

- Cost savings for systems and libraries due to the shared cost of the ILS but also potential cost savings due to changes in collection development and purchasing. As well as cost savings of staff time by streamlining processes.
- Strong/larger system staff that could provide more robust support and quicker response time to issues (noted in member and system focus groups)
- Collaboration allows for tapping into other people's experiences and expertise (noted in member and system focus groups)

Concerns about increased ILS collaboration

- Logistics and the moving of physical resources over a large geographic area
- Larger consortium/more voices/harder to find consensus/loss of autonomy and representation (noted in member and system focus groups)
- The strain on local/browsing collections
- Financial implications/costs (noted in member and system focus groups)

ILS Sharing Scenario

- The scenario in which the consortia purchase an ILS together, share collections, and move towards policy and procedure sharing was seen as the most patron-centered approach allowing libraries to ease into a collaboration while keeping some autonomy. ("Patrons don't see the borders we do.")

Critical information needed for stakeholders

- Timeline with goals and projected outcomes (noted in member and system focus groups)
- Costs (noted in member and system focus groups)
- Potential changes/impacts on staff
- A clear sense of the process and the "why."

APPENDIX F: PROJECT WIN

What was Project WIN

Project WIN was initially a three public library system (**W**isconsin Valley Library System, **I**ndianhead Federated Library System, and **N**orthern Waters Library Service) effort to explore the challenges and rewards of merging three separate consortiums into a single working integrated library system (ILS). The extensive process, started in the summer of 2013, concluded in June 2014 with a final report. NWLS and WVLS committees voted in July 2014 against the proposal for a joint ILS consortium.

How conditions have changed since Project WIN

More mergers and more libraries joining an ILS consortium

At the time of Project WIN, there were few examples of successful ILS mergers or individual libraries joining a consortium. Today, NICE project members have more and different examples to learn from.

Systems, including NWLS and WVLS, are collaborating more at this point than in the past

Library systems across the state are collaborating more with each other now than ever before. Complex, collaborative work is being done in a variety of ways. NWLS and WVLS work together on Continuing Education, Inclusive Services, a Kit Partnership, technology, grant collaboration, and significantly, the ILS managers and staff members at WVLS and NWLS collaborate on ILS related questions and support.

Internal system processes and policies have changed

During Project WIN, some noted that policies in the individual systems were so inconsistent that it was very difficult to imagine a bigger group of libraries across a large geographic area making shared decisions. Since then, both systems have worked internally to significantly unify policies.

Financial realities are different

System funding is tight, though helped by recent statewide increases, while the costs related to ILS continue to increase. Systems and member libraries are increasingly faced with rising costs for health benefits and flat or reduced budgets.

Meeting needs and expectations have changed

In many Project WIN survey responses, library and system staff noted concerns related to travel for training and meetings. Today, technology improvements and participant comfort levels make virtual meetings a good solution to this issue.

Technology/platform changes

Both NWLS and WVLS have worked to make the discovery layer more public library user friendly, showing that the systems are working on the same issues and in some cases come to the same conclusions to make the ILS experience more library user friendly.

APPENDIX G: SUCCESSFUL ILS MERGERS

The NICE Project Committee identified three successful ILS mergers to review to help reveal potential benefits and concerns of ILS mergers, as well as conditions that make an ILS merger successful.

Key Findings

- Open discussion and communication is valuable.
 - Clear communication is imperative. Making sure everyone is heard, has a voice, and is valued is critical.
- With ALS/SHARE the decision to merge the two ILS systems happened before all configuration decisions were made.
 - This was an important step in their process. It was determined that the benefits to the merger were greater than the differences in circulation policies.
- Doing comparisons of data and policies to see where there are major differences and exploring those first is valuable.
- Consensus is valuable and helps to build good will.
- Focusing on the philosophy and goals of each system to find similarities is valuable.
- Identify shared values first and then everything else eventually falls to standardization.
- Systems have seen significant cost savings with ILS mergers. A larger pool of resources for patrons also has played a large role in decisions to merge ILS.
- When encountering issues where there is a split decision, utilizing a subcommittee to explore a different aspect of the issue and report back or make a recommendation can help to resolve any large scale issues.
- Perceptions and historical relationships can be big barriers to ILS mergers. Meetings facilitated by an impartial third party and open communication can be helpful in overcoming this particular barrier.
- The technical migration itself can be a big barrier. The technical impact on servers and their reporting capacity as well as server capacity and technical capabilities is an issue that should be noted and addressed immediately.
- Standardization isn't necessary right away. Some consortia have started off with autonomy to policies and circulation configurations but many do eventually fall into standardization after a period of time due to efficiency and ease for staff and patrons.
- Many concerns that libraries had around lending issues never came to fruition as it is most common for those libraries to see neutral interlibrary loan patterns.

Arrowhead Library System (ALS) & Lakeshores Library System (LLS)

Information was gathered from project manager first-hand knowledge and interview with Jim Novy, LLS IT & ILS Manager.

Background and Timeline

In September of 2016 Arrowhead Library System formed an ILS Exploration Committee to identify and review possible ILS upgrade options for the Arrowhead Library

System. The Committee was responsible for:

- Investigating and reviewing all ILS upgrade options including possible ILS mergers with neighboring systems.
- Evaluating and rating all potential options.
- Presenting findings and recommendations to the ALS Directors.

The Committee identified perceived barriers to renewing their current ILS, migrating to a new ILS, or merging ILSs with another system. Options were identified including standalone systems and merger options. The group made recommendations to their Director Committee in March of 2017. The committee approved and work to merge ALS' ILS with LLS' SHARE was completed later that year.

Barriers and Obstacles

One of the biggest challenges identified was cost; cost of migration and annual maintenance, as well as cost for training and staff time. In addition, the ability to achieve equity among the libraries was identified as a potential obstacle. The Committee wanted to be sure that all voices were heard in a shared system, both small and large libraries.

An additional initial identified barrier was that an ILS can codify what the staff does/how they interact with patrons and it can be difficult for libraries to give up procedures that don't translate to new policies or technology.

Overcoming Barriers and Obstacles

Pre-merger, both ALS and SHARE independently strove to find consensus for decision making. The two bodies valued open communication and discourse among the membership.

Open discussion throughout the entire process was critical. The decision for ALS to join SHARE was made before all configuration decisions were made. This was an important step in their process. It was determined that the benefits to the merger were greater than the differences in circulation policies. To tackle those differences, the group did comparisons of data and policies to see where there were major differences and explored those first during the merger.

While cost was an initial concern, the benefits of the merger outweighed the cost of stand-alone systems.

Outcomes and Strategies

The ALS exploration committee focused on the philosophy and goals of the systems they explored. Instead of focusing on specific details and differences of current operations of each system, the group focused on the willingness of the systems to be flexible and supportive to meet the needs of the member libraries.

Both systems agreed that consistency in circulation policies was not mandatory, but the group made the determination to make similar circulation policy changes to help create a more consistent patron experience as well as ease of use for staff.

There was a significant cost savings to the systems with the merger. The shared ILS costs, as well as staff costs were extremely beneficial and influenced the decision. The larger pool of resources for patrons also played a large role in the decision to merge.

Governance

Policies and procedures are based on consortia-wide practices that are approved by the membership. The shared ILS is governed by members from all involved systems.

Officially in SHARE, each library member has one vote. When the consortium encounters issues where there is a split decision, they utilize one or more of the four subcommittees they have in place, which explore a different aspect of the issue and report back or make a recommendation to the directors council. This helps to resolve any large scale issues.

Additional Information

Standardization

SHARE hasn't always had standardization across all of their libraries. They noted that they typically have some minor exceptions but overall do strive for standardization in circulation policies for ease of staff and patron use.

Lending Patterns

After the merger both systems noted a marked increase in delivery and the number of materials traveling to and from the libraries. Both systems employed marketing strategies regarding the enhanced resources that proved to be successful as holds were at an all-time high post merger. There was also a corresponding decline in ILL and requests to purchase new materials.

The systems noted that the larger libraries tend to be net borrowers, and smaller libraries tend to be net lenders. SHARE does allow for Lucky Day/Jackpot collections (browsing collections only) as long as the library has another circulating copy.

In addition, SHARE does maintain priority on local materials for patrons.

Outagamie Waupaca Library System (OWLS) & Nicolet Federated Library System (NFLS)

Information was gathered from email conversation with Bradley Shipps, OWLS Director.

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Background and Timeline

OWLS and NFLS libraries joined OWLSnet in 1995 before the libraries were automated; in fact the libraries were automated to create Infosoup. Because automation came after they had joined a shared network, the ILS merger process was different from those being explored by NWLS and WVLS.

Barriers and Obstacles

While the obstacles for Infosoup are different to that of two systems merging ILSs, they still have had to overcome some differences. The consortium does not have priority on local holds. They maintain a first-come-first-served mentality, but this is a topic that they discuss every few years.

Governance

InfoSoup/OWLSnet is governed by an Administrative Advisory Committee. They hold at least four meetings per year. That group makes most decisions by consensus. In some cases, all members will agree with the decision; in others, some members consent to the decision for the good of the group, despite reservations. When a consensus cannot be reached, but a large number of libraries still wish to make a change, a vote will take place. Their bylaws require a proposal to be approved by 2/3 of the libraries and 2/3 of the fee shares in order to pass.

RAILS Library System

Information was gathered from interviews with RAILS staff members, Monica Harris, Interim Executive Director, Anne Slaughter, Director of Technology Services, and Mary Witt, Director of Marketing & Communications.

Background and Timeline

RAILS currently provides all six Local Library System Automation Program shared catalog consortia in the RAILS service area through a mix of financial support and in-kind services. These consortia are funded by participating members and through the system annual area and per capita grant from the Illinois State Library, a division of the Office of the Secretary of State. Support is provided by an annual grant program. The consortia range in size from 6 libraries to 150 libraries.

Barriers and Obstacles

RAILS found that perceptions and historical relationships were big barriers to mergers. And these perceptions were often the reason the groups were disparate in the first place. Meetings facilitated by an impartial third party were helpful in overcoming this particular barrier.

Governance was another identified issue. How decisions would be made, who would make those decisions, and the structure of those decisions was a concern.

RAILS has found that the most common barrier/issue to a migration process is the technical migration itself. The technical impact on servers and their reporting capacity has been problematic. They noted server capacity and technical capabilities is an issue that should be noted and addressed immediately.

Overcoming Barriers and Obstacles

At the beginning of a merger process, RAILS noted it is imperative to identify shared values first and then everything else eventually falls to standardization. Communication is key to a

successful merger. Within all of their consortia, there is a concerted effort to make sure everyone is heard and valued.

The perception issues initially identified were resolved by the open communication as well as having an impartial, third party facilitated process.

Governance concerns were addressed head on and they strove to identify and answer all questions and concerns immediately.

If there were any concerns of loss of autonomy or loss of voice, having a third party facilitator allowed for open communication and increased individual's comfort sharing concerns. They found this help to build goodwill among the groups.

Outcomes and Strategies

With all of the ILS mergers that RAILS has facilitated, they noted that, universally, the biggest benefit has been the increased access to materials for patrons.

Within the six different consortia, there are differing levels of sharing. There are a few that fully share resources and policies and others that have some autonomy to policies. They noted that many of those tend to come to standardization after a period of time due to efficiency and ease for staff and patrons.

Governance

All of their consortia are organized differently; one is not-for-profit and the others are government entities with boards. The different sizes have driven different structures. The largest system with 150 libraries has a board that meets regularly. All members are at-large members that meet only a few times per year.

Additional Information

Standardization

Standardization as well as priority on local materials varies across the six consortia. Most strive for standardization as it eases staff and patron use.

Lending Patterns

For those libraries moving from a smaller to larger consortia, they found they do move more materials in and out of their libraries and post merger, reciprocal borrowing patterns typically change for all library types. It is noted that most concerns that libraries had around lending issues never came to fruition as it is most common for those libraries to see neutral interlibrary loan patterns.

APPENDIX H: SYSTEM COMPARISONS

Snapshot

	NWLS / Northern Waters Library Network	WVLS / V-Cat Consortium
<i>Number of libraries</i>	30 libraries, 32 locations (including NWLS mail-a-book)	25 member libraries, 35 locations (WVLS is not counted)
<i>Number of counties</i>	8	7
<i>Number of physical items</i>	695,334	1,115,824
<i>Number of bibliographic records</i>	337,379	456,121
<i>Number of authority records</i>	304,624	683,829
<i>Number of systems provided electronic resources</i>	9*	6**
<i>Number of registered borrowers</i>	50,091	153,245
<i>2022 circulation</i>	698,665	1,555,167
<i>Service population</i>	155,000	284,089

**NWLS electronic resources include: Overdrive, Novelist Plus, Novelist Select, BadgerLink, Kanopy, CreativeBug, Transparent Languages, New York Times, NYT Cooking*

***WVLS electronic resources include: Ancestry, Foundations in Wisconsin, Gale Courses, NoveList Plus including NoveList Select, Overdrive, Badgerlink*

Staffing

NWLS

The NWLN budget covers parts of 4 staff members salaries who provide ILS and other Network services. None of the staff costs are covered completely by the NWLN budget and are subsidized by NWLS. Additionally, funding for centralized cataloging is provided through the system Resource Library contract.

- ILS Administrator
- ILS and Database Support Specialist
- Centralized Catalogers
- Resource Sharing Coordinator
- IT Director
- System Support Specialist
- NWLS Business Manager

WVLS

WVLS staff in the following roles provide support to the V-Cat Consortium:

- LS Administrator
- ILS Support Specialist
- WVLS Cataloging Partners
- Technology Support Specialist
- WVLS Business Manager
- WVLS CIO

The V-Cat budget covers a portion of the ILS Administration human resources costs (salary and benefits) and additional cataloging support. The remainder is subsidized by WVLS. An effort is being made to work toward developing sufficient funding of V-Cat to ensure the stability of its operation and to alleviate the risk in the event of changes to regional library systems in Wisconsin.

Procedures

The following section compares the types of procedures each system employs for various aspects of the ILS. This document describes the type of procedure and whether they are policies, best practices, or guidelines, as well as provides a high-level overview of each procedure.

Cataloging

NWLS

NWLS supports centralized cataloging. There is centralized cataloging performed by contracted member staff (Superior Public Library) on behalf of all libraries with full MARC records being transferred into the Sierra ILS from SkyRiver and via z39.50 protocol. The procedures for the libraries, Superior Public Library, and NWLS can be found on [NWLS website here](#).

Do you vote on/approve the procedure?

The choice to move to centralized cataloging was approved by the network. Cataloging decisions or changes are discussed with system staff, centralized catalogers and occasionally the staff in libraries that are responsible for attaching items.

Is it a guideline or best practice?

Centralized cataloging is our policy.

WVLS

WVLS employs cooperative cataloging. All WVLS catalogers must attend training to be able to save records into the V-Cat database, cataloging procedures vary depending on an individual's level of training. WVLS uses [standards](#) set by the V-Cat Bibliographic/Interface Committee, as well as [training guidelines and standards](#).

Circulation

NWLS

What procedures do you have related to circulation and user services? The NWLN Policies and Best practices are [here](#). We have policies about Lucky Day collections, Online Patron registration and Best practices for Book club requests, Requesting items for display, Procedures for unauthorized materials, Guidelines for material inspection, Patron Registration, and Patron notes and messages.

Do you vote on/approve the procedures?

Typically vote on both policies and best practices for NWLN.

Are they guidelines or best practices?

NWLN has a mix of both. There is a committee and calendar in place to review policies on a regular basis.

WVLS

What procedures do you have related to circulation and user services?

Libraries are expected to follow V-Cat Guidelines available [here](#). In general, guidelines cover item records, patron records, labeling of physical materials, and circulation. Additional guidelines focus on aspects of resource sharing and maintenance including reports and follow up, how to handle damaged items or items missing pieces. Libraries are expected to complete some circulation tasks and clean up reports on a regular basis. They are outlined in this [document](#).

Expectations for member libraries are outlined in section 5 of the [V-Cat Participation Agreement](#) and in article 3 of the [V-Cat Bylaws](#).

Do you vote on/approve the procedures?

V-Cat guidelines are approved by V-Cat Council with formal vote. Best practices procedures can be suggested by WVLS staff and do not necessarily require approval. However, WVLS staff generally seek input from V-Cat Committees and/or V-Cat Council when a new procedure or changes to a procedure are recommended.

Are they guidelines or best practices?

Some ILS settings automatically enforce some guidelines. Most of the guidelines that are not automatically enforced are treated as best practices, and member libraries are encouraged to follow them.

Additional Database Standards

NWLS

What procedures do you have related to circulation and user services?

The NWLN Policies and Best practices are [here](#).

Do you vote on/approve the procedures?

Typically vote on both policies and best practices for NWLN.

Are they guidelines or best practices?

It depends. Some are policies, some are best practices.

WVLS

What procedures do you have related to record maintenance (items, patrons) and user services?

Libraries are expected to follow V-Cat Guidelines available [here](#). In general, guidelines cover item records and patron records. Additional guidelines focus on aspects of resource sharing and maintenance including reports and follow up. Libraries receive reports of items that need attention on a regular basis.

Libraries are expected to complete some clean up reports and follow up on a regular basis. They are outlined in this [document](#). WVLS provides reports of items that need attention on a regular basis. Expectations for member libraries are outlined in section 5 of the [V-Cat Participation Agreement](#) and in article 3 of the [V-Cat Bylaws](#).

Do you vote on/approve the procedures?

V-Cat guidelines are approved by V-Cat Council with formal vote. Best practices procedures can be suggested by WVLS staff and do not necessarily require approval. However, WVLS staff generally seek input from V-Cat Committees and/or V-Cat Council when a new procedure or changes to a procedure are recommended.

Are they guidelines or best practices?

Most of the record maintenance guidelines are not automatically enforced, and are treated as best practices. Member libraries are encouraged to follow them.

Support

NWLS

In cooperation with WVLS and IFLS, NWLS is a partner in the LEAN WI technology partnership. Help Scout is utilized for library staff to create support tickets for any topic. When a ticket is received in the help desk, staff can assign the ticket to themselves and provide the needed

answers. Using the help desk lets all staff view and recycle answers. All NWLS staff have access and provide support in the help desk.

NWLS provides ILS related training virtually and in-person as needed. A video archive is available to address helpdesk FAQs. Short reminders, tips and tricks are provided in the weekly newsletter.

New library directors receive mentorship if requested as well as new director orientation from NWLS staff. Technical services staff often receive short individual training sessions (usually virtually) to address any questions from NWLS staff. New features are often quickly demoed during regular NWLN meetings. Our centralized cataloging team meets monthly to discuss progress, set goals, provide updates to standards and check in.

WVLS

In cooperation with WVLS and IFLS, WVLS is a partner in the LEAN WI technology partnership. Help Scout is utilized for library staff to create support tickets for any topic by sending an email to help@librarieswin.org. When an email is received, WVLS staff can assign the email to themselves and provide the needed answers. Using the help desk lets all staff view and recycle answers. Seven WVLS staff have access and provide support in the help desk.

ILS related trainings are provided in spring and fall on a variety of topics. Instructional documents and videos are developed and shared on the V-Cat Training page of the WVLS website. Brief Aspen and Sierra trainings and tips are provided at each V-Cat Council meeting. Library staff may also email specific WVLS staff directly and request consultations / training on an as needed basis.

New library directors receive mentorship pairings and a general V-Cat orientation from WVLS staff. Colleagues are encouraged to communicate with one another and with V-Cat Committee members regarding best practices and local procedures.

Governance

Committees

NWLS

Northern Waters Library Network holds at least six meetings per year. All member libraries are eligible to attend. NWLS is a non voting participant in the Network.

There is an Executive Committee of the Network that is made up of the Officers of the Network. The purpose of this committee is to investigate and make recommendations regarding matters requiring the action of the Network, and to review a preliminary budget. This group is very informal and does not meet regularly.

The Network may also employ various Ad hoc committee such as:

- Circulation
- Resource Sharing

- Collection Development
- Database Maintenance and Management
- Digital Services
- Bibliographic Records and Standards
- Public Relations
- Training and Professional Development
- By-Laws Review
- Other issues as needed

WVLS

V-Cat Council holds at least five meetings each year on the first Thursday of February, April, June, September and November. Additional meetings may be scheduled as needed. A summary of V-Cat Committees including committee charge, membership, and general meeting schedule [can be found here](#).

V-Cat bylaws outline the following standing committees:

- V-Cat Executive Committee
- V-Cat Bibliographic/Interface Committee
- V-Cat Cooperative Circulation Committee
- V-Cat Executive Committee
- V-Cat Migration Committee (not currently active)
- V-Cat PR/Communications Committee (not currently active)

Additional V-Cat committees are created based on recommendations of WVLS staff or the V-Cat Council. The V-Cat Chair shall appoint committee members as necessary. Committees must have at least three members. Terms on committees are for one year, or until such time as new appointments are made.

Additional Committees Currently Active:

- V-Cat ILS Evaluation and Review Committee
- V-Cat Steering Committee

Budget

NWLS

The Network budget which includes the ILS and other items is broken down by a base cost of 1 percent of the budget and a 3 year average of collection size and circulation. NWLS historically has paid a contribution to the Network budget. This will decrease overtime. In 2022 the contribution was \$25,800.

WVLS

The WVLS V-Cat Steering Committee creates the V-Cat Budget and the V-Cat Council approves this as a recommendation for approval by the WVLS Board of Trustees. The formula for the V-Cat budget and annual maintenance fee covers central site expenses and the ILS vendor annual maintenance fee.

The intent of the annual maintenance fee is to cover 100% of the central site costs. The formula is the simple averages of each member's portion of their annual circulation and total holdings within the consortium. Each portion will have equal weight so the average of the two percentages will be used to determine what percent of the annual maintenance fee each library needs to pay. The total circulation will be taken from the annual reports that each member public library files with the state. The count will be used from the annual report of two years prior to the budget year.

Each year WVLS subsidizes the V-Cat Consortium's ILS Administrative costs. Currently WVLS staff support, Novelist databases and other infrastructure including office supplies, administrative support, rent etc. are subsidized. However, an effort is being made to transition towards annual maintenance fees that cover 100% of the central site costs.

Voting

NWLS

From NWLS bylaws: Article VII: Voting Section 1. The Network shall adopt its recommendations by vote. All actions will be decided by simple majority vote, (51%) of those members present, either physically or electronically. Each Network member has one vote. In case of a tie vote, since a tie is not a majority, the motion for adoption is lost. If for any action, the vote result is inconclusive, a roll call vote will be taken.

WVLS

From WVLS bylaws: The V-Cat Council shall attempt to arrive at decisions by unanimous consent via voice vote. When unanimous consent cannot be reached, decisions will be made via a formal vote.

- i. For adoption of the order of agenda, adoption of the minutes of previous meetings, and adjournment, when unanimous consent cannot be reached, a simple majority of voting representatives will carry the vote.
- ii. For all other actions, when unanimous consent cannot be reached, a two-thirds majority vote based on weighted representation AND a two-thirds majority of the representatives will carry the vote. Majorities for both votes will be determined based on all voting representatives, present or via proxy.

Abstentions will not be counted as a vote for or against a motion.

The V-Cat Council shall assign weighted representation:

- i. After the annual V-Cat budget is passed by the WVLS Board of Trustees, and no later than January 1st of each year, weighted representation shall be recalculated and published by WVLS using the most recent applicable data available.
- ii. Membership Shares Calculation - For each member, a base of one (1) point per one (1) percent of the member's share of the total of the current operating year and two (2) previous years of V-Cat Membership Shares will be allocated to the member inclusive of fractions.
- iii. Net Lender Calculation – Up to one (1) additional point for values greater than zero (0) of one (1) minus the average of the ratios of circulation of items sent to V-Cat libraries to items received from V-Cat libraries during the three (3) most recent calendar years for which there is adequate data will be allocated to each member inclusive of fractions.
- iv. Weighted Vote Calculation – For each member, the total of the points from (2) and (3) above inclusive of fractions shall be rounded up for fractions at one half (1/2) of one percent or more and rounded down for lesser fractions to the nearest whole number.
- v. Members weighted representation may not be less than one (1).

ILS and Related Vendors

ILS

NWLS

NWLS currently uses Innovative Interfaces' Sierra. They are software only and self-hosted. As of 2022, they are in the first year of a three year contract. Their current Sierra package includes the following features:

- Acquisitions including electronic ordering; multiple funds management and invoicing
- Authority control and duplicate record control
- Cataloging management of bibliographic and item records
- Circulation and patron record management
- Circulation notifications offered through email, phone and text (via integration with Shoutbomb), text and paper formats
- Autonotices for title and item paging
- E-Commerce for online fine payment
- Collection Agency
- Holds management functionality for both staff and patrons that includes the ability to set local hold priority;
- Offline circulation;
- Online catalog or discovery catalog

- Online library card registration
- Inventory

WVLS

WVLS currently uses Innovative Interfaces' Sierra. They are software only and self-hosted. They are not under contract and renew on an annual basis. Their current Sierra package includes the following features:

- Acquisitions including electronic ordering, funds management, and invoicing
- Agency Holds (available, but not currently used)
- Authority control and duplicate record control
- Batch Bib Utility Interface
- Cataloging management of bibliographic and item records
- Circulation and patron record management (including internally stored patron images option available, but not currently in use)
- Circulation notifications for library users offered through email and paper formats. (Text message and voice telephone notifications are available through Shoutbomb integration.)
- Community Reviews (available, but not currently used)
- Content Cafe cover images and enriched content subscription
- Consortium Management Extensions
- Create Lists Reporting
- Classic Inventory Control (available, but not currently used)
- Decision Center reporting and collection analysis
- E-Commerce for online fine payment with PayPal.
- EDI - Electronic Invoicing, serials (available, but not currently used)
- Extended Approval Plan (available, but not currently used)
- Holds management functionality for both staff and patrons that includes the ability to
 - limit hold placement and hold fulfillment on items by patron type and owning location,
 - freeze and unfreeze holds,
 - designate multiple priority levels for paging,
 - set local hold priority
- Inventory Express (available, but not currently used)
- Inventory management (Circa)
- Interlibrary Loan
- Item Status API
- Materials Booking (available, but not currently used)
- Multiple IP support for Web Access Management
- OCLC Interactive Via the Network
- Offline circulation
- Online message log for batch bib interface
- OPAC Export
- Online patron catalog or discovery catalog

- Online library card registration (available, but not currently used)
- Output Accounting Info (available, but not currently used)
- Patron Authentication API
- Program Registration (available, but not currently used)
- Resequence attached records by location
- REST APIs
- Scheduler
- Serials management (including electronic serials invoicing - available, but not currently used)
- Sierra Express Lane Self Check Licenses
- Sierra Homebound / Remote Patron
- SIP2 Interface Licenses
- SQL Access for Custom Reporting
- Statistical Reporting
- Synchronize bibliographic locations
- URL Checker
- Web Access Management with Multiple IP support
- Web OPAC menu languages: Spanish
- Web PAC and AirPAC mobile

Discovery Layer

NWLS

NWLS uses the open source Pika Discovery Layer developed by the Marmot Library network. It is based on the open source discovery vuFind. Each library has their own individual site that allows libraries to feature their own collections of new or featured items.

WVLS

WVLS uses the Aspen Discovery open source product supported by ByWater Solutions. Each library has their own individual site that allows libraries to feature their own collections of new or featured items.

Authority Control

NWLS

NWLS uses Marcive, Inc. for authority control. They update their records monthly.

WVLS

WVLS uses Backstage for authority control. Records are updated quarterly.

Other ILS Related Tools (self check, PC management, cover images, etc.)

NWLS

- Four libraries in the system use self-check stations with a total of five Sierra Express Lane self-check units.
- Fifteen of the system libraries use a public PC time management software called Pharos. This application is hosted on its own server and uses a gateway connector to access the current ILS database for certain patron fields. These fields are: patron barcode, patron birthdate, patron fines amount, and a custom field called “net-reg” that has been added to block patron use of patron PCs.
- NWLS utilizes Content Cafe’s service to provide custom cover images for bibliographic records.
- Shoutbomb for texting and phone notification.
- Princh for printing management (at some libraries)

WVLS

- V-Cat libraries utilize 7 Bibliotheca self-check units, two Innovative Express Lane self-check units, and one automatic materials handling (AMH) sorter using 3M - Bibliotheca (in transition to Envisionware/Lyngsoe for sorter). May replace other technology in the mid-range future. (Logitech and Envisionware are being considered for self-check, security gates)
- Pharos, Cassie, and Princh are used for printing and PC management.
- Content Cafe is used for cover images and additional enhanced content. (Syndetics is being considered for cover images and additional enhanced content.)
- Shoutbomb is used for text and voice phone notifications.
- V-Cat uses Novelist Plus and Novelist Select for enhanced content in the online catalog. (This cost is subsidized by WVLS.)
- WVLS uses Backstage for authority and bibliographic record improvements.
- V-Cat uses PayPal for eCommerce fine payments.
- V-Cat uses OCLC for cataloging utility
- Hosting for the ILS is provided by LEAN WI

Other Electronic Resources

NWLS

Individual Network libraries offer patrons access to Mango Language, Newsbank, Heritage Hub, Hoopla.

WVLS

Individual libraries offer patrons access to Digital Sanborn Maps, Mango Languages, New York Times, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Wisconsin Communities, Statistical Abstract of the United States, Tumblebooks, ValueLine.

APPENDIX I: COST NARRATIVE

The costs and scenarios listed below are meant to be used to help guide the process of the NICE project. The projected and estimated costs are not actual costs and are subject to change. At this point in the project, a cost formula scenario is not being selected. Discussion of various scenarios and options is an important step in the feasibility process and is essential in preparation for next steps at the end of the feasibility study should the two groups determine to move forward.

The following are projected estimated costs based on quotes provided by Integrated Library System (ILS) vendors in 2022. The following three sections include implementation and migration costs, which are one time expenses typically due upon completion of the implementation at the beginning of year one; year one costs, which includes the subscription costs for the ILS software for the first full year; and year two costs, which includes the subscription costs for the ILS software for the second year plus any incremental costs.

ANTICIPATED IMPLEMENTATION COSTS - ILS ONLY

Vendor	Savings if Combined
Current Vendor	n/a
Vendor A	\$7,140.00
Vendor B	\$4,000.00

NWLS and WVLS are both currently on the same platform so there is no implementation cost, however if they were to merge, there would be a migration cost to bring the two systems together on one platform. For this reason, there is no cost savings here for implementation with the current vendor, but with the other two vendors, NWLS and WVLS would see a slight cost savings on implementation with a merger.

ANTICIPATED YEAR ONE COSTS - ILS ONLY

Vendor	Savings if Combined	Total savings compared to current standalone costs
Current Vendor	\$31,928.00	
Vendor A	\$6,980.00	\$69,353.00
Vendor B	\$14,999.00	\$81,929.00

With all three vendors there would be cost savings in year one should the two systems jointly pursue vendors. The *Savings if Combined* column shows the savings the two systems would receive from a particular vendor if the two choose to pursue that vendor jointly. The *Total Savings Compared to Current Sierra Standalone Costs* column shows the total amount that would be saved if the two systems were to pursue a combined ILS compared to what they are currently paying individually.

ANTICIPATED YEAR TWO COSTS - ILS ONLY

Vendor	Savings if Combined	Total savings compared to current standalone costs
Current Vendor	\$32,886.00	
Vendor A	\$2,380.00	\$73,581.00
Vendor B	\$26,699.00	\$88,857.00

With all three vendors there is a cost savings in year two as well should the two systems jointly pursue vendors. The Year Two Costs chart similarly shows the savings if an ILS is pursued combined as well as the total savings compared to the current standalone costs.

ADDITIONAL COSTS

There are additional costs associated with the ILS that should be considered, some of which may or may not increase with a merger. For each of these associated costs, there are different ways to pay, including the system paying, member libraries paying, or a combination of the two. These costs include, but are not limited to discovery layers, bibliographic utilities, authority vendors, bibliographic cover images, extraction services, hosting costs, etc. Determining whether and how these costs will be combined will be a priority during the next phase of the project.

FORMULA SCENARIOS

Should NWLS and WVLS decide to pursue a merger at the conclusion of this feasibility study, cost formula scenarios will need to be addressed. Below are example formulas that could be used to determine individual library costs.

Scenario 1: % of total cost based on previous three year average of collection size and circulation

This scenario is based on the current [NWLS model](#). After a full budget is determined, the amount subsidized by NWLS is subtracted. NWLN libraries all pay a base cost of 1% of the remaining balance. The difference of the full budget minus the base cost is paid as follows: A three year average of circulation & and collection cost is determined to provide the circ component (half) and collection component (half).

Scenario 2: % of total cost of 25% based on extend service population size from most recent annual report data and 75% based on previous three year average of collection circulation

This scenario is based on the current model that the Wisconsin Public Library Consortium (WPLC) has used for their shared buying pool for the past several years. It employs a formula that uses 25% population and 75% three year circ average and uses that total to determine each library's cost. For example if a library has 25% of the total population of the combined systems and 15% of the previous years' circulation and the total budget is \$100,000. To find the percentage of the budget that library would need to contribute, we would need to multiply the percentage of the previous year's circulation by 3 to weight it at 75% and add the library's percentage of the population: $(15 \times 3) + 25 = 70$ and then divide that number by four to find the percent of the total the library with contribute: $70/4 = 17.5\%$ or $17.5\% \times \$100,000 = \$17,500$.

Scenario 3: % of total cost based on previous three year average circulation

This uses only the past three years of circulation of each library to determine cost for each library's ILS payment. In this scenario, we would take the past three years' circulation, so if a library's past three years circulation was 182,345, 174,222, and 193,245, then their average would be 183,271. Then compared to the rest of the libraries, let's say 183,271 is 12% of the total circulation of all the libraries, and the total budget is \$100,000 or $12\% \times \$100,000$, then this library's payment is \$12,000.

Scenario 4: Simple average of each member's portion of their annual circulation and total holdings within the consortium

This scenario is based on the current [V-Cat Consortium model](#). Each portion will have equal weight so the average of the two percentages will be used to determine what percent of the annual maintenance fee each library needs to pay. The total circulation and count of holdings will be used from the annual report two years prior to the budget year. In addition, this scenario matches closely with the recommendation from Project WIN.

Scenario 5: Even Split by Library System

The cost of the ILS would be split evenly between the two systems. For example, if the cost of the ILS was \$100,000 NWLS and WVLS would each be responsible for \$50,000. Each system would determine each individual library's cost depending on a local formula.

Scenarios No Longer Under Consideration

Below are scenarios that the NICE Committee reviewed but deemed not worthy of further consideration. Both of the following scenarios were considered not equitable for all member libraries.

- **Scenario 1: Even Split**

The cost of the ILS would be split evenly by the number of libraries. For example, if the cost of the ILS was \$100,000 and there were 65 libraries, the \$100,000 cost would be divided by 65 and each library would pay \$1,538.46 annually.

- **Scenario 2: % of total cost based service population**

This scenario looks solely at service population size and uses that information to determine each library's ILS cost based on their population size. If a library's service population is 36,783 and the total population of the two systems is 442,395, the library's service population is then 8% of the total population. If the total budget is \$100,000, or 8% * \$100,000, then the library's payment is \$8,000.

Other Considerations

Regardless of the formula chosen, it may be important for the systems to investigate phasing into a joint budget over a period of time. With a new formula, if it is anticipated that costs for member libraries will be dramatically different, it may be valuable to consider a phased approach to implementing a new funding formula.

APPENDIX J: NICE TEAM WORKSHEET

Data and Information Analysis

Your Name:

Review worksheet directions as well as the data and information slide deck, and if you have the time, each of the gathered data sets

- Survey Results
- Focus Group Findings
- Project WIN Research
- Successful ILS Mergers
- Budget and Savings Narrative

Focus Group Findings

NOTE: We know that some critical pieces of information are still unknown and won't be available at this stage. Try to answer these questions using the data gathered to date and with the perspective of what you are learning from the broader stakeholder community.

1. What overarching themes or ideas are emerging using the data gathered in this process? You can be very broad and high-level in your answers.
2. Based on the information gathered, do you think some form of an ILS merger is feasible?

If yes,

- a. What level of collaboration do you think is most feasible?
- b. What data or information would you point to that helps you come to this conclusion?

If no,

- a. Why and what data or information would you point to that helps you come to this conclusion?
- b. Are there mechanisms that could be put in place or further information that could be gathered that would change your opinions about feasibility?

3. What should be in the final report that will best explain the feasibility of an ILS merger?

What do you find to be the most compelling information or data gathered?

APPENDIX K: DECISION MAKING MATRIX

Decision-making Principles for Next Steps

This feasibility report does not endorse a governance model, shared policies, or funding formulas, as this is work that should be completed in the next stage should system boards approve of the NICE project moving forward. However, the NICE project team has dedicated time to thinking about principles for decision-making.

The team created the following set of principles or core values to apply to future decisions. The principles are intended to be broad and to act as a check to ensure that any shared decisions conform, as much as reasonably possible, to core values. These core values reflect what the NICE project team heard from stakeholders throughout the initial stage of work.

When assessing either shared governance, policies, or funding formulas, the following should be considered:

- Does the policy/practice/formula **center on the needs of library patrons?**
- Does the policy/practice/formula **encourage sharing** amongst members (either ideas or materials)?
- Is the policy/practice/formula **equitable?**
- Does policy/practice/formula **offer simplicity?**
- Does the policy/practice/formula **support sustainability?**
- Does policy/practice/formula **maintain or improve existing relationships** between and among ILS consortium members?

Decision-making rubric

Principle	Strong	Adequate	Weak
Centers the needs of patrons	Clearly, and with real-world examples, this decision improves the patron experience, especially through increased access to library resources and decreased barriers to use.	This decision may or may not improve the patron experience, but it will not decrease it either; there is no harm, but not necessarily a clear improvement.	The patron is not centered in this decision; this decision may diminish the patron experience. It may decrease access to library resources and increase barriers.
Encourages Sharing	Clearly, and with real-world examples, this decision will increase either the sharing of ideas or collections, benefitting patrons member libraries, and system staff. This decision encourages stakeholder participation.	This decision may or may not increase the sharing of ideas or collections, but it will not decrease either; there is no harm, but not necessarily a clear improvement.	Sharing is not encouraged by this decision. Barriers to sharing may be created by this decision.
Equitable	Clearly, and with real-world examples, this decision is equitable/improves equity for stakeholders. It is fair to systems, member libraries, and library patrons alike.	This decision may or may not improve equity, though it will not decrease it or result in unfairness to stakeholders.	This decision is demonstrably unfair or uneven for some stakeholders. It will result in a loss of equity.
Offers simplicity	People will easily understand the reasons for this decision and how it will be applied.	The decision is complicated or complex, but most people will understand the why and how of the decision.	The decision is very complicated, making it difficult or impossible for people to understand the why and how of it. It may result in confusion or a lack of transparency.
Supports sustainability	The decision itself is sustainable and will strengthen the sustainability of the collaborative work and member libraries. This may mean that the decision will be long-lasting and meaningful, or it may improve member library sustainability.	The decision may be quickly outdated (note: this is not necessarily a negative, it may be a necessity), or it will have little impact on the sustainability of either the collaborative efforts or individual stakeholders.	The decision is likely to be quickly outdated (note: this is not necessarily a negative, it may be a necessity) and may result in instability or harm the sustainability of either the collaborative efforts or individual stakeholders.
Maintain or improve relationships	Clearly, and with real-world examples, this decision will improve existing relationships.	This decision will maintain existing relationships.	This decision has the potential to harm or damage existing relationships.