



Wisconsin Valley Library Service | 300 North First Street Wausau, WI 54403

June 15, 2021

Marathon County Public Library Board of Trustees  
300 North First Street  
Wausau, WI 54403

Dear MCPL Board Members,

As WVLS staff with primary responsibility for V-Cat administration, we are writing to provide additional context in response to statements made under the leadership of the former MCPL Director about V-Cat cataloging processes and projects. Most specifically, we would like to respond to the Catalog Presentation that was given at the May 2021 MCPL Board meeting and related information shared in the Director's Report at the February 2021 MCPL Board meeting.

WVLS staff is continuously working in tandem with the V-Cat Bibliographic and Interface Committee, chaired by MCPL cataloging staff, to assess the state of the library catalog and to identify areas that warrant further investigation and possible improvements. **WVLS staff had been working on improving records without subject headings as time allowed. When MCPL staff came to WVLS staff with concerns in 2020, the Committee gave higher priority to these records. A system-wide effort to review and remedy related records is in progress and is expected to be completed by the end of 2021.** We would like to note the following about this record improvement project:

- MCPL's work in addressing subject headings is part of a broader V-Cat initiative.
- **Bibliographic records without subject headings make up a small part of our shared V-Cat collection, approximately 2.7% of V-Cat records** (approximately 14,300 of 538,000 total records).
- Over 80% of the records without subject headings are for materials that are over 20 years old.
- WVLS would never require libraries to weed items. Rather, we support individual libraries in their collection decisions and are available to offer consultations as needed.
- The Committee recognized that older materials may have historic value and recommended that libraries consider the value and relevancy of individual materials to library users before improving records, to ensure time spent on them is efficient.

**Subject headings are important, but keyword searches have the power to reference multiple access points in a record, as demonstrated in the catalog presentation given at the May 2021 MCPL Board**

**meeting.** Keyword searchable access points in the V-Cat Catalog include *subject headings*, as well as author, title, notes, table of contents, summary, and more.

For this reason, the V-Cat online library catalog defaults to keyword searching. Many library users searching the catalog for a particular topic use a keyword search. Library users are not usually familiar with the prescribed language of *subject headings*, and all topics do not have their own *subject heading*. A *subject heading* search may not bring up good results if the user does not know the exact *subject heading* language, but a keyword search can bring back satisfactory results, even if the user does not know the exact *subject heading*.

Broad keyword searches can produce a large list of results. Adding a more specific keyword can bring back fewer and better results allowing library users to find what they need without knowledge of exact prescribed *subject heading* language. The example given in the May 2021 presentation of a broad keyword search of 'cats' produces a large list of results, adding more specific keywords of 'elderly cat health' brings back more relevant results. The example 'elderly cat health' would not have returned any results as a *subject heading* search, because 'elderly', 'cat', and 'health' do not appear in a prescribed *subject heading* language. The keyword search for 'elderly cat health' is referencing the keyword searchable access points from the table of contents, summary, subject headings, and title. (Relevant subject headings in this case would be 'cats – aging', 'cats – health', 'cats – diseases', and 'veterinary geriatrics')

**We are pleased to share that the vast majority of the Marathon County Public Library users report satisfaction with search and discovery in the V-Cat library catalog.** To better gauge the search and discover needs of library users, V-Cat conducted a [survey in the Fall of 2020](#). Of the [976 MCPL library users surveyed](#), 91% reported that they are satisfied to very satisfied with the V-Cat libraries' catalog search. **Earlier this month, V-Cat Council selected [Aspen Discovery](#) as a library catalog add-on enhancement. This product will further enrich library users' search and discovery experience and will be available in late 2021 or early 2022.**

The V-Cat Bibliographic and Interface Committee also considered addressing records without OCLC record numbers after MCPL inquired about them in 2020. At that time, the Committee determined the main interest in these numbers was not record enhancement for library users, but preparation for a possible migration from one Integrated Library System (ILS) to another. Since V-Cat as a whole was not yet preparing for a migration process, records without subject headings were considered a higher priority for V-Cat member libraries. The Committee agreed to re-visit records without OCLC numbers once the subject heading project is complete.

**Cooperative cataloging has value for our consortium. It allows multiple libraries to share the workload of cataloging, and also allows libraries to have economical access to crowd-sourced quality catalog records created by professional cataloging librarians.** V-Cat member library staff are equipped to bring preexisting professionally created OCLC records into the V-Cat library catalog under the guidance and direction of the WVLS degreed cataloging librarian using [OCLC standards](#). Record comparisons were


shared with the MCPL Board as part of the May 2021 cataloging presentation to selectively highlight less detailed records in the V-Cat catalog. It is important to note that all catalogs are the product of human effort and even consortia with centralized cataloging practices, such as South Central Library System's LinkCat, have some less detailed records. Improvements are made in library catalogs on a daily basis. Consequently, a library catalog is not the same today it was a month ago – or even yesterday.

**Experience, attention to detail, ongoing training, and accuracy are qualities of a good cataloger.** V-Cat member library catalogers are a diverse group when it comes to education and experience; some have master's degrees, and others have years of experience. Librarians holding master's degrees are expected to take one or two classes on organization of information as part of their course work, but most don't practice cataloging regularly.

As librarians with master's degrees and former MCPL employees, we know the value of quality cataloging and recognize the skills, expertise and integrity of MCPL's cataloging staff. MCPL's two catalogers do not have master's degrees, but they do collectively have over 30 years of experience and do *excellent* work.

**We welcome the MCPL Board, Interim Director, and MCPL Staff to bring questions, concerns, and suggestions to the WVLS Board, WVLS staff, and V-Cat committees. We look forward to working with MCPL on further V-Cat catalog improvements.**

Respectfully,



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