



V-Cat ILS Evaluation and Review Committee Report

August 2023

V-Cat ILS Vendor/Product Recommendation

After a lengthy and detailed review, the V-Cat Evaluation and Review Committee's recommendation is that WVLS and V-Cat use Sierra from Innovative. The committee recognizes that the V-Cat Council may wish to delay action on this recommendation pending the resolution of the NICE Project.

While both Sierra and Koha have beneficial features, the committee found Sierra to have a slight advantage in the areas of cataloging, reporting, and acquisitions.

In addition, the committee found that library staff's familiarity with Sierra and associated workflows outweighed any of the potential benefits of a migration to a new product or vendor.

From March 2022 through August 2023, the V-Cat ILS Evaluation and Review Committee gathered product information from vendors, their customers, and library staff – comparing the capabilities of several systems to the different needs of V-Cat member library staff as well as the needs of the consortium as a whole. In addition to demonstrations, surveys, additional discussion and follow up with vendors and product users, the committee evaluated the final two candidate systems directly (through ongoing daily use in Sierra's case, and use of a sandbox version of Koha provided by ByWater).

Further details are available below.

Table of Contents

- V-Cat ILS Evaluation and Review Committee Members 3
- Overview of Process..... 3
- Requests for Information..... 5
- Post Demonstration Survey Results Summary 5
- Koha Site Visits Review Summary 7
- Additional Information Gathering..... 8
- Koha Overall Summary..... 9
- Sierra Overall Summary 11
- Final Evaluation and Recommendation to V-Cat Council 12
- NICE Project Overview and Considerations 13
- V-Cat ILS Evaluation and Review Committee Report Appendices 15
 - Appendix A – Sierra Staff Survey Results Overview..... 15
 - Appendix B – Gantt Chart 15
 - Appendix C – Request For Information..... 15
 - Appendix D – Post Demonstration Survey Results 15
 - Appendix E – Committee Post Demonstration Survey Results..... 15
 - Appendix F – Koha Post Site Visit Survey Results 15
 - Appendix G – August 2023 Product Rating Survey Results..... 15
 - Appendix H – Lessons Learned and Advice for Future ILS Evaluations..... 15

V-Cat ILS Evaluation and Review Committee Members

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*Replacing Dominic Frandrup (Antigo), who served March – May 2022

**Replacing Erica Brewster (Demmer/Three Lakes), who served March 2022 – February 2023

Additional regular attendees:

Jackee Johnson (NWLN)

Gina Rae (NWLN)

Overview of Process

Much of the committee’s work is documented in meeting minutes and agendas, here: <https://www.wvls.org/v-cat-ils-evaluation/>

Three ideas were recurring themes through the committee’s work, and guided the process accordingly:

1. Learning from other libraries/consortia who had gone through this process before
2. Involving V-Cat library staff and WVLS system staff regularly
3. Balancing the needs/benefits of the present with anticipated needs/benefits of the future

With those in mind, this was the process the committee used:

1. 2021: WVLS staff gathered preliminary information from library staff to understand satisfaction with Sierra’s different functionality areas.-Survey results were used to inform RFI development. An overview of survey results are included in [Appendix A](#), and full results are available here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-ZFH98VLQ9/>

2. February 2022: Reviewed other consortia's ILS Evaluation and Review processes (Milwaukee County Federated Library System and NWLS) and RFI documents
3. March 2022: Developed timeline. A Gantt Chart is available in [Appendix B](#).
4. April-May 2022: Developed RFI (with opportunity for staff comment), sent out RFIs to specific set of vendors based on compatibility with preliminary staff survey responses:
 - a. Innovative - Sierra
 - b. Innovative - Polaris
 - c. Sirsi-Dynix - Symphony/BLUEcloud
 - d. The Library Corporation CARL-X/CARL Connect
 - e. Koha - Supported by ByWater Solutions
 - f. Evergreen - Supported by Equinox
 - g. Evergreen - Supported by MOBIUS/MOSS
5. June 2022: Prepared list of questions for later vendor demonstrations.
6. July-September 2022: Reviewed all RFI responses (in closed session, pursuant to WI Statutes Section 19.85(1)(e) due to confidential pricing information) and selected three products to investigate further:
 - a. Innovative - Sierra
 - b. The Library Corporation CARL-X/CARL Connect (referred to as "CARL" moving forward)
 - c. Koha - Supported by ByWater Solutions
7. September-November 2022: Scheduled virtual demonstrations with remaining vendors for committee and other staff to attend, designed further evaluation procedures.
8. November-December 2022: Attended demonstrations, designed rating survey.
9. December 2022 - February 2023: Gathered and reviewed feedback from demonstration participants and committee members.
10. February 2023: Reduced field further, due to insufficient staff interest in CARL.
11. March 2023: Prepared for virtual "site visits" to Koha/ByWater customers (without vendors)
12. April-May 2023: Committee and other stakeholders attended virtual site visits.
13. June 2023: Gathered additional feedback from committee members, refined remaining questions
14. July 2023: Had final information-gathering meeting with ByWater, gathered feedback from consortia who migrated from Sierra to Koha, requested updated pricing information
15. August 2023: Made product recommendation and developed this report as well as lessons learned and advice for future ILS evaluations (available in [Appendix H](#)).

Requests for Information

Initially the committee cast a broad net for considering ILS products, and eventually selected promising candidates to move forward based on the following desirable criteria:

- products used in Wisconsin
- products being considered by MCFLS and/or NWLS
- products that are in active development
- products tailored to public libraries
- products/companies that have experience migrating libraries from Sierra
- companies / products that have worked with library consortia

The committee submitted a request for information (RFI) to vendors for the following six products: Symphony, Polaris, Sierra, Koha, Evergreen, CARL. The RFI document can be found in [Appendix C](#).

RFI responses were received from the vendors in early June 2022 and thoroughly reviewed. The committee reached out to vendors with additional follow up questions, and considered the responses. While the RFI responses indicated that each system had its strengths, three products stood out as promising enough for further investigation (based on suitability for V-Cat): Sierra, Koha, and CARL. Sierra stood out as a familiar choice that would have no new implementation cost, Koha stood out based on its potential as an open source system and ByWater's good support record with the existing Aspen discovery layer, and CARL stood out for a few key features (e.g. seamless offline circulation) and as a product used by another Wisconsin public library consortium (OWLSNet). The committee offered these three vendors the opportunity to demonstrate their products in the following months.

The committee reviewed ILS product scoring examples from MCFLS, NWLS, and V-Cat (2011) and the committee settled on comparing each function area, as well as discussion regarding whether committee members would recommend the product.

Post Demonstration Survey Results Summary

Product demonstrations were offered for CARL, Koha, and Sierra in November and December 2022. Demonstrations were split into sections based on areas of functionality and were recorded to encourage member library staff who could not attend at the scheduled time to participate. Attendees were invited to complete a post demonstration

survey. Questions were designed to gather ratings of, and feedback about, each product in the following function areas:

- Circulation / Holds & Paging / Circulation Notices / Interlibrary Loan
- Patron Records/Fine Management
- Basic Online Patron Catalog
- System Administration / Compatibility with Other Products
- Inventory / Reports
- Adding Item Records / General Records Management
- Cataloging / Serials
- Ordering / Acquisitions / Batch Record Loading

For CARL and Koha, respondents were asked to share their perception of how the functionality compared to Sierra. Survey respondents were also asked if they had additional questions about products in each function area to identify topics where more information might be needed.

Finally respondents were asked two evaluation questions based on the demonstration:

- 1) Did the product have the necessary functions for their individual library?
- 2) Would they recommend the product for our libraries?

Select survey results are available in [Appendix D](#). There were a total of 75 responses. A total of 14 libraries participated along with WVLS and NWLS ILS administration staff. Broken out by product: CARL 25, Koha 35, Sierra 15.

There was considerable concern about CARL. Nearly half, 48%, of survey participants reported that CARL did not have the necessary functions for their library. Furthermore, 88% of survey participants reported that they would not recommend CARL for our libraries. Meanwhile, 94% of respondents reported that Koha had the necessary functions for their individual library, and 75.3% reported that they would recommend the product for our libraries. When considering Sierra, 100% of respondents reported that Sierra had the necessary functions for their individual library, and 100% reported that they would recommend the product for our libraries.

As a follow up to the post demonstration surveys, V-Cat ILS Evaluation and Review Committee members were asked to review the post demonstration survey results alongside each vendor's responses to the Request for Information and complete a second survey to rate the products overall to determine a path forward. The results were useful to narrow the field from three products to two.

Select committee member post demonstration rating survey results are available in [Appendix E](#). There were a total of 11 responses, 9 from WVLS and 2 from NWLS. Ratings for Koha and Sierra were considerably higher than ratings for CARL. No survey participants recommended CARL for individual libraries or the consortium. However, responses were nearly evenly mixed between Sierra and Koha as recommended products for individual libraries and the consortium as a whole.

At this point the committee decided to drop CARL as a potential ILS for V-Cat. WVLS staff reached out to The Library Company to let them know that V-Cat would no longer be considering CARL.

Participants in the rating survey were also asked to list any outstanding questions about the products. The committee used these questions as a starting point for additional information gathering from the vendors, via virtual site visits, and through ongoing daily use in Sierra's case, and use of a sandbox version of Koha provided by ByWater.

Koha Site Visits Review Summary

To get an unfiltered customer perspective and see additional actual workflows in motion, committee members and a few additional stakeholders attended virtual “site visits” with three locations currently using Koha supported by ByWater: AspenCat / CLiC (Colorado Library Consortium), SEKnFind / SEKLS (Southeast Kansas Library System), and the Round Rock Public Library. The committee gathered feedback from attendees after each site visit to assess the viability of both systems given the new information.

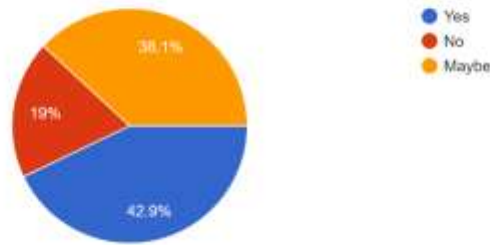
Total survey responses (across all three site visits): 21

WVLS – 19 (6 MCPL, 6 WVLS, 2 Granton, 1 each from Antigo, Medford, Merrill, Rhinelander, Tomahawk) NWLS – 2. Post site visit survey results are included in [Appendix F](#).

While the site visits were informative, they did not lead to consensus on whether Koha would meet the needs of each individual library or the consortium as a whole, as shown below:

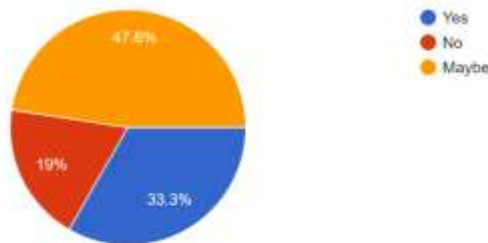
Considering the additional information from this library/library consortium, would you recommend this product for your library?

21 responses



Considering the additional information from this library/library consortium, would you recommend this product for V-Cat as a whole?

21 responses



The committee determined that additional information was needed to come to a decision about the viability of Koha as a potential ILS for V-Cat.

Additional Information Gathering

The committee gathered additional information about the acquisitions, cataloging, reporting, and performance with poor internet. This information was gathered by reviewing current workflows, testing in the Koha sandbox, a question-and-answer session with the ByWater team and conversations with library staff from consortia (CLAMS and Ocean State) and individual libraries (Santa Barbara Public Library) that recently migrated from Sierra to Koha.

Koha Overall Summary

The strengths of Koha supported by ByWater solutions include, record searching, customization of the interface, the open source nature of the product, superior customer service, and the straightforward pricing model.

After consideration and information gathering, concerns remained about Koha’s ability to meet the cataloging, acquisitions and reporting needs of V-Cat libraries. Concerns about an adjustment period during and after migration were also a factor.

Aspect	Pro	Con
Circulation, Searching, and Patron Records Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intuitive and easy for new staff to learn. • Superior keyword searching for all record types that displays partial matches as you type. • Ability to search by multiple patron fields including birth dates and partial matches for names and addresses. • Built in parent/child record management • Visible circulation notice history 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning a new product and adjusting to new workflows • Browser based printing
System Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good customer service and support team • Customizable interface • Transparent settings • Opportunity for future developments, and ability to provide input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning a new system
Compatibility with Other Products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large open source Koha community working on improvements • Ability to collaborate with others to fund developments • Would work well with Aspen as both products are supported by the same company 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some difficulties with EDIFACT ordering setup
Reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports can be scheduled to run and be emailed to staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some staff may need to learn SQL reporting

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Templates can be created for libraries to run their own reports • No limit on the number of reports or item in a report • Advanced reporting capabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May need to rely on ByWater support or the user community for assistance with some uncommon advanced reports
Cataloging and Records Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record editing and fast cataloging more accessible for staff who do not regularly catalog 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Macros not included • Adaptation of cataloging workflows would be required • Difficult to compare records to import • May take longer to select, import and edit records
Ordering and Acquisitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No additional cost for multiple libraries to use acquisitions • Hyperlinks to help with searching for order records 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability for multiple libraries using acquisitions is in development • Unable to determine full accounting tool capabilities
Financial Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedication to product improvement in the open source community • Cost savings are possible • Improved features are included in annual cost or are a one time development cost. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migration costs • Concerns about indirect costs due to increased staff time needed for acquisitions and cataloging
Costs tied to change/Lack of change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier to train new circulation staff • Updated training for all staff may have a unifying effect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long migration and post migration adjustment period

Sierra Overall Summary

The case for Sierra came primarily from two areas:

1. The lack of the need for workflow changes and migration (since library staff workflows by and large have been shaped over the years in order to work specifically with Sierra’s capabilities).
2. The strength of its specialized modules (cataloging, reporting, and acquisitions).

Sierra’s main flaws were noted as:

1. Difficulty in training new staff
2. Searching issues (requirement for exact match)
3. Arbitrary limitations on system capability (patron blocks tables, need to contact Innovative for administration, etc.)

Additional considerations are broken down by system aspect below:

Aspect	Pro	Con
Circulation, Searching, and Patron Records Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiar to current staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very picky searching (exact match often required) • Not intuitive for new staff
System Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiar to current staff, and existing support at other libraries is in place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovative's service is notably poor. • Some settings cannot be assessed or adjusted without contacting with the vendor
Compatibility with Other Products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspen and other products are already implemented with Sierra, and work mostly as intended 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As Innovative's attention moves away from Sierra, it may not be compatible with future products/features.
Reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiar and convenient tools for large-scale searching and record editing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited ability to query the database. The tools take significant time for new staff to learn.
Cataloging and Records Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fits well with existing cataloging model and high-volume workflow for record comparison. 	

Ordering and Acquisitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capable of handling detailed accounting for multiple locations in a way that works for a consortium. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional acquisitions units will cost considerably more
Financial Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost of migration will be delayed until the next evaluation process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All additional features would come at an additional annual cost. • Once migration cost is set aside, the cost of the product and the service agreement will be greater than it would for others.
Costs tied to change/Lack of change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no change cost, because there will be no change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New staff training will remain time-consuming due to unintuitive elements. • Existing problems will continue to require workarounds. • Possible stagnation with product development

Final Evaluation and Recommendation to V-Cat Council

The committee considered other organizations' ILS selection processes and determined a pre-meeting survey would be valuable to provide evaluation feedback prior to making a final recommendation. Committee members were asked to rate each product in each of the following areas:

- Acquisitions
- Cataloging and Records Management
- Circulation
- Reports
- Systems Administration
- Integration with Other Products
- Cost (including costs coming from the company/products)
- Costs (tied to change adjustments for system staff and member libraries)

Committee members were also asked to provide reasons for their ratings.

Ahead of the final evaluation survey, new quotes were requested for final product recommendation considerations.

The final evaluation scores did not show a clear consensus, and the committee considered the scores too close to be considered outright. Final evaluation survey responses are included in [Appendix G](#). For this reason, the committee chose to use a simple majority vote to recommend a product to V-Cat Council.

After thoroughly discussing the products and V-Cat's needs, a motion was made to present a recommendation to renegotiate the contract with Innovative to retain Sierra. A roll-call vote followed, and the motion carried by a narrow margin with 4-yes votes, 3-no votes, 2 abstaining and 1 member absent.

NICE Project Overview and Considerations

Wisconsin Valley Library Service (WVLS), Northern Waters Library Service (NWLS), and their respective Integrated Library System (ILS) consortia are both considering transitioning to a new ILS and evaluating existing products to find the most suitable solution at the best price. 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 fall of 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.

The NICE Project's original work came to an end this June. A [summary of key takeaways](#) and [full report](#) are available on the [Documents page](#) of the [NICE website](#).

All data strongly indicate that an ILS merger is feasible between NWLS and WVLS.

- The 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 with the following two recommendations:

1. NWLS and WVLS pursue a joint ILS and move towards shared practices and policies.
2. The refinement of a clear roadmap of the next steps and key decision points to be shared with all stakeholders.

With support from their respective board of trustees, WVLS and NWLS have applied for another LSTA grant to take the next steps towards a shared ILS and shared practices and policies in the coming year. Full details are available in the [August 2023 WVLS Board of Trustees meeting information](#).

The goal of the grant is to facilitate next steps toward a merged ILS including the following:

- Develop a mutually agreed upon project timeline
- Determine vendors and products to pursue
- Determine cost of initial migration to a merged ILS
- Determine merged ILS annual budget projections and calculation method for membership shares
- Make decisions on identified issues including delivery, circulation, cataloging, and database standards, and ILS support plan
- Establish timeline for migration including implementation plan, logistics, and steps needed for a merged ILS
- Determine record clean up processes, archiving needs, and contracted technical support necessary for a merged ILS.
- Pursue database and record clean up, and shared ILS adjacent services
- Establish cultural groundwork, address concerns, and establish communication pathways
- Craft policies and governance structure for cohesive membership and management

A joint ILS is contingent on both systems' decision to use the same ILS. For this reason V-Cat Council may delay a potential migration or contract negotiation until fall 2024 or when the NICE Team's work is complete.

V-Cat ILS Evaluation and Review Committee Report Appendices

The following appendices are included in a separate document due to file size limitations.

Appendix A – Sierra Staff Survey Results Overview

Appendix B – Gantt Chart

Appendix C – Request For Information

Appendix D – Post Demonstration Survey Results

Appendix E – Committee Post Demonstration Survey Results

Appendix F – Koha Post Site Visit Survey Results

Appendix G – August 2023 Product Rating Survey Results

Appendix H – Lessons Learned and Advice for Future ILS Evaluations