

V-Cat Council Meeting Minutes

Thursday, August 1, 2024, 9:30 a.m.



Call to Order and Announcements:

Chair, J. Ziebell (Neillsville), called the meeting to order at 9:33 a.m.

Members Present in WVLS Office: J. Jochimsen (Abbotsford), T. Edge (Antigo), V. Calmes (Colby), J. Roth (Three Lakes), M. Handel (Medford), K. Heiting (Granton), T. Hall (Loyal), K. Sabelko (MCPL), J. Ziebell (Neillsville), L. Ollhoff (Merrill), H. O'Hare (Tomahawk), and R. Ludvigsen (Gilman).

Members Present Via Zoom: L. Renel-Faledas (Crandon), S. Bedroske (Dorchester) (leaving at 10:37), F. Albrecht (Laona), A. Brill (Greenwood), C. Huston (Stetsonville), V. Roberts (Rhineland), T. Blomberg (Rib Lake), C. Soderstrom (Thorp), J. Hanson (Wabeno), M. Highfill (Westboro), B. Hardin (Withee), L. Peterson (Owen) (arriving at 9:41 and leaving at 12:03).

Also Present: K. Sullivan (MCPL), J. Bauer (MCPL), C. Luebbe (MCPL), D. Lacy (MCPL), K. Kolstad (MCPL), R. Metzler (WVLS), K. Raddatz (Minocqua) as a proxy for P O'Connell were present via Zoom. K. Zimmermann (WVLS) and M. Sepnafski (WVLS) were present in the WVLS office.

Absent: P. O'Connell (with K. Raddatz (Minocqua) as proxy).

Approval of the Consent Agenda:

K. Heiting (Granton) moved to approve the consent agenda as presented, seconded by L. Ollhoff (Merrill). Motion carried.

NICE (Northern Wisconsin ILS Consortium Exploration) Project Report and Discussion

K. Zimmermann (WVLS) presented.

K. Zimmermann (WVLS) shared that she, M. Sepnafski (WVLS) and R. Metzler (WVLS) had checked in with V-Cat Council representatives and library directors in the past few weeks, in addition to the first round of check-ins in March. Check-ins provided WVLS the opportunity to answer questions, clarify information, and receive feedback from each member library. Member public library directors had the opportunity to review each of the recent NICE Recommendation documents and other documents presented to the Council today, as well as the [NICE Frequently Asked Questions page](#).

K. Zimmermann briefly reviewed the documents presented to the Council including [NICE Key Takeaways](#), [the NICE Report](#), [Why Merge](#), [Benefits and Common Questions](#), [V-Cat NICE 2025 Draft Budget Estimates](#), and [DPI's Letter of Support](#).

Zimmermann asked Council members if they had questions about the information as each document was reviewed. One question was raised about the meaning of LSTA, which was not clarified in the documents. K. Zimmermann (WVLS) responded that LSTA stands for the Library Services and Technology Act, which is federal funding for libraries, which is funneled through Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

The Council was informed that on July 18, 2024, the member public library directors of the Northern Waters Library Network (NWLN) discussed the NICE Project Recommendations and Report. The discussion about an ILS merger highlighted benefits to patrons, DPI support of an ILS merger, concerns about the NICE Holds Recommendation, satisfaction within NWLN services and resource sharing, and whether the financial savings were enough of a benefit to justify the change.

The NWLN directors voted against merging the ILS with V-Cat. 15 voted to not merge, 5 voted to merge, 3 abstained, 6 did not attend nor send a proxy.

The NWLS Board of Trustees voted to uphold the NWLN recommendation against merging the ILS at their July 20, 2024, meeting,

K. Zimmermann (WVLS) noted that it will take time to have follow up conversations and process through the information the NWLS members shared. Until we know more, we don't know whether there is room to keep talking about a potential ILS merger anytime soon. K. Zimmermann (WVLS) shared that she was not in attendance at the NWLN meeting. An initial follow up conversation is scheduled with NWLS' ILS admin team on August 6. K. Zimmermann (WVLS) expressed hope to be able to share more information at the September V-Cat Council meeting. Regardless, WVLS and NWLS staff will continue to collaborate, and it is anticipated that future planning will include discussions about potential ILS mergers.

A discussion followed the presentation of the documents. K. Zimmermann (WVLS) asked Council members to set aside the NWLN vote and consider the future financial challenges for V-Cat, the benefits to patrons, the needs of their library and V-Cat as a whole. Council members were asked to answer three questions:

1. What benefits can you see in an ILS merger?
2. What sticking points do you see with an ILS merger?
3. Do you have any other relevant comments about an ILS merger?

All V-Cat member libraries were able to share their thoughts, which are anonymized and grouped by question:

1. What benefits can you see in an ILS merger?

Several Council members, especially those from libraries near the NWLS/WVLS border, see benefits for crossover patrons that routinely use both a NWLN and a V-Cat library.

Multiple Council members see potential opportunities for reduced time spent on WISCAT requests. One mentioned that their ILL librarian currently looks for WISCAT loan items within NWLN first, noting that 25% of their ILL already comes from NWLN*

Multiple Council members see potential for professional collaboration with NWLN libraries.

Many Council members cited an expanded collection as a key benefit of an ILS merger. One member mentioned additional titles by popular authors as a benefit.

A Council member expressed appreciation that it expands collections without requiring a lot of extra training - especially for smaller libraries.

Many Council members noted financial savings as a benefit.

A Council member noted that an expanded collection with a wider variety of incoming materials as a benefit both for the patrons and for staff involved in collection development.

Many Council members noted that this is an opportunity to be proactive leaders within the state and make a change on V-Cat's terms instead of being forced to make a change in the future. It was noted that if V-Cat is not proactive about a merger, we may be forced due to tight budgets. Multiple Council members raised concerns about funding not being available in the future to assist with an ILS merger.

One Council member shared that the ILS merger could provide more support for ILS Administration staff, which could increase their capacity for support to libraries.

One Council member noted that collaboration is always best. Trying to work without fellow libraries or system support would be very hard.

2. What sticking points do you see with an ILS merger?

A Council member shared that the sticking points were likely to be in the details and encouraged others to be flexible and open.

Multiple Council members noted they did not see anything but benefits with an ILS merger and did not see any negatives.

Once Council member expressed concerns about the questions that cannot be answered:

Is there potential for an increase in hold times for patrons?

What is the value of the expanded collection for WVLS libraries?

A few libraries expressed concern about the value of unique items in both the NWLN and V-Cat collections - noting that some unique items may not be of value or may not be shared via courier.

Multiple Council members expressed concern about the potential for increased staff workloads, noting that a 10-20% change is a big number with limited funds and limited staffing. In addition, some libraries noted that the financial savings would not be significant if more staff hours are needed.

One Council member noted that some of the workgroups were challenging, and staff are concerned about future collaboration.

One Council member noted that there will be a learning curve but added that with time we will get used to the new processes and procedures.

Multiple Council members noted that a potential sticking point is the difference in the way NWLN, and V-Cat currently handle holds. (The use of Local Holds Priority at NWLN libraries and High Demand collections at V-Cat libraries) It was noted that the workgroup conversations about holds were the most difficult.

Many libraries expressed concern about the importance of maintaining High Demand collections to allow patrons to browse new materials.

[K. Zimmermann (WVLS) clarified that continuation of High Demand collections are written into the NICE Holds Fulfillment recommendation. Within the current NICE Collaborative Decision-Making structure, the existence of High Demand collections is protected. V-Cat would have to approve a change. In addition, K. Zimmermann (WVLS) clarified the way High Demand collections and Local Holds Priority can work in tandem. High Demand will be honored first, then local hold priority kicks in.]

One Council member noted the size of collections and expressed concern that since V-Cat would contribute $\frac{2}{3}$ of the shared collection and NWLS would contribute $\frac{1}{3}$, V-Cat would give more and NWLN has more to gain.

One Council member expressed concern about the overnight delay in the process using a form or sheet for cataloging unique items instead of creating a brief record within the ILS.

One Council member noted that she did not see the benefits applying to her library.

3. Do you have any other relevant comments about an ILS merger?

Many Council members feel their libraries are ready for the change and can handle the changes including a potential increase in circulation, pull list, and items in transit.

A Council member expressed appreciation to all involved in compiling the NICE project information and making it accessible to library staffs, board members, and curious patrons.

One Council member shared that when working at a previous library, staff experienced twice the amount of courier with about the same amount of staff at their current library. They noted that it is possible to do the work quickly and efficiently.

Multiple Council members acknowledged that change can be difficult and scary.

One Council member shared that they see the writing on the wall with shrinking library budgets, and that they saw the ILS merger as a tool to help keep doors open and serve patrons with materials, services and programs.

A concern was raised that merging with NWLN is no longer an option due to the NWLN vote. [K. Zimmermann (WVLS) clarified that without knowing more about why the NWLN vote was not to move forward with a merge, the conversation can continue.]

Multiple Council members supported continued exploration of a merger with NWLN or with another consortium.

One member library noted that the time needed to manage WISCAT ILL is not a big deal for small libraries.

A concern was expressed that cost savings are guesses. [K. Zimmermann (WVLS) clarified that NICE Budget numbers are estimates based on actual quotes received from vendors.]

One Council member preferred to let other groups go through an ILS merger process first so they could work out all the bugs and we could learn from their process - with less work and more knowledge.

One Council member commented that a merger won't be a quick win or easy but would be worth it in the end.

Multiple libraries asked if V-Cat would consider merging an ILS with another system if a merger with NWLS is not successful. [K. Zimmermann (WVLS) noted that more follow up conversations with NWLN are necessary]

When considering budget challenges, one library shared that they rely on WVLS staff and does not want to lose their services.

One Council member noted that the benefits listed outweigh the negatives, but the benefits may be greater for the smaller libraries. The size of the library seems to matter. Smaller libraries overall expressed an ability to handle the 10-20% increase. Larger libraries were more likely to express concerns about staffing challenges.

Multiple libraries commented on the amount of time spent on the daily pull list and how many times the pull list is run throughout the day. A Council member proposed a review of library processes for the pull list and courier practices, with advice from an efficiency expert.

One Council member noted that V-Cat might need to simplify how damaged items are handled to make the workload easier.

A question was asked about why the grant was pursued in the first place, and whether a merger was encouraged by the state. [K. Zimmermann (WVLS) clarified that ILS mergers have been encouraged by the state since the Public Library System Redesign Project which identified shared ILS over larger service areas as a desired outcome. NWLN and WVLS applied for the grant because NWLN and V-Cat were both considering whether to continue with Sierra or pursue another ILS vendor around the same

time. She shared that the intent is to have consortiums and library systems pursue grassroots collaboration, rather than it being a top-down mandate. However, it was noted that V-Cat is funded both by individual libraries and by library system funds. At any time, the state legislature can drastically change funding for library systems. K. Zimmermann (WVLS) encouraged V-Cat to consider sustainability.]

It was suggested that some of the concerns V-Cat has about merging with NWLN would be flipped if V-Cat was considering merging with a different, larger consortium.

One Council member suggested a survey of patrons. First to gather information about hold fulfillment to see if patrons value browsing collections and holds fulfillment differently than library staff. Secondly, to involve them in the process. Having patron buy-in can help them adjust to the changes they will experience. Third, to identify what services are the most important to patrons to help libraries make decisions as budgets are constrained and libraries are not able to do everything.

In response, two Council members mentioned that the recommendations and report include flexibility. They noted that a possible merger is the first step. There will be an opportunity to improve and change. We have to start somewhere; we have built in opportunities to check in and survey patrons and make improvements.

A Council member proposed that if High Demand collections is a sticking point, a shared collection of additional bestsellers could be created to help meet demand, or lucky day collections could be considered as another alternative.

A Council member asked if the focus on merger integration would pull focus away from continued innovation? [K. Zimmermann (WVLS) answered that limitations on innovation are more likely to be determined by the amount of staff time we have. There would be a pause on other new things if we merge because the ILS merger would be the innovation - stepping away from the status quo to do something different. There would be a period of time when other new projects would be on hold. But it would open up the opportunity for more innovative projects with a larger team of people providing ILS administration and support. There would be the ability for more specialization and more targeted support. Libraries have already seen this with Lean WI.]

Has the state seriously stated that if library systems do not start merging, they will be forced to merge without support?

One Council member shared that all libraries, and all systems do things differently. It is understandable that some libraries have concerns about serving patrons, but from their perspective, most library users are happy and grateful for library services. As librarians, if we don't know the answer, we know how to find it - by relying on each other. We are better together. Collaboration is always best.

A Council member asked if the potential merger has been encouraged by the State. K. Zimmermann (WVLS) answered that yes, this merger would align with goals from the PLSR project and has been supported by state grant funds. She added that the timing was also good because both systems were investigating ILS products.

K. Zimmermann (WVLS) shared that all V-Cat libraries list the retention of High Demand as a priority for the future. WVLS staff heard that Library Directors are interested in the merger if High Demand continues as an option. The one-year review of High Demand, recommended in the Holds Fulfillment Recommendation, will not lead to the end of High Demand if V-Cat universally wants to keep it.

Clarification of the Holds Fulfillment Recommendation was requested by a Council member. K. Zimmermann (WVLS) noted that if materials are set to High Demand, holds will operate the same way as they do now with

High Demand limitations. Holds on local High Demand items will be limited to local patrons. When Local Holds Priority is also put in place along with High Demand, High Demand comes first. For example, a library has a High Demand item that is currently checked out, with 10 holds on that title and none of the holds are local patrons. When the item is checked in, it will return to the shelf at the owning library as part of the High Demand browsing collection. Just like libraries experience now. Once that item comes off High Demand, and there are 10 holds on that title, but none of them are local patron's holds for local pickup, holds will be filled oldest to newest. If while the item is checked out to a patron, a hold for local pickup is placed, as the 11th hold, the local item will come to the local patron first when returned. The combination of High Demand and Local Holds Priority is the current NICE Holds Fulfillment recommendation.

A Council member commented that the Holds Fulfillment Recommendation is a piece of the project that has been well thought out, and another noted it could be very useful for older titles that become popular.

K. Zimmermann (WVLS) reminded the Council that, as part of the NICE Holds Fulfillment Recommendation, a temporary item record will be added when all items on bibliographic record are set to High Demand to allow for the placement of holds for all patrons.

The topic of workload concerns was discussed by the Council. K. Zimmermann (WVLS) shared that there may be ways to make changes to paging priority to balance this workload. Another option may be that if a library is running the paging list more than once per day, only the items for local patrons get pulled during the second or third pull of the day. If helpful, this is something that could be put forth as a V-Cat Recommendation.

A Council member asked if it has been seriously telegraphed at the state level that if library systems do not start merging, they will be forced to merge without support. M. Sepnanski (WVLS) answered that while Library System budget increases have been passed by the legislature in recent years, there are legislators who oppose the increases we've had. Some budgets are barely passed. It would be possible for the legislature to reduce system funding at any time. The idea for merging now has more to do with being proactive and following the recommendations of the statewide Public Library System Redesign study. There has not been an immediate threat. The State supports increased collaboration.

Break – 11:40

A Council member shared their knowledge of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation budget cuts which resulted in local redundancies becoming centralized for cost savings.

Chair, J. Ziebell (Neillsville) illustrated two options V-Cat Council could choose to take at this meeting.

Take no action at this time and bring this agenda item back to the September V-Cat meeting.

A V-Cat motion and vote on the ILS merger between NWLN and V-Cat.

K. Zimmermann suggested when a vote is taken, that V-Cat use a non-anonymous ballot instead of a roll call vote, explaining that an anonymous ballot would not be feasible due to the way V-Cat counts weighted votes.

A Council member asked if libraries have had a chance to discuss a merger with their boards. A few Council members shared that they had not yet had a chance to do so, and that they wanted to share the NWLS vote with them.

A Council member asked what will happen now since NWLS decided they did not want to move forward with the merger, K. Zimmermann clarified that regardless of the V-Cat vote, more negotiation would need to occur to move forward and that this vote is limited to V-Cat Council's desire to either move forward or not. K. Zimmermann (WVLS) said that throughout the process we have talked about a no vote as an opportunity for further conversation, considering any adjustments that could be made. V-Cat could vote on a merger with the recommendations in place or V-Cat could vote with an intent to continue the conversation with NWLN. It would depend on the language of the motion.

A Council member who served on the NICE Team reminded the Council that the recommendations that NWLN voted on have been reviewed many times. The Council member asked if we can figure out why NWLN voted no, and if there is something that they want V-Cat to change, or compromise more on will V-Cat do that?

K. Zimmermann (WVLS) encouraged the Council not to close the door completely on the merger. She shared that it would be good for the V-Cat Council to have an official vote on the path to take.

It was asked how open the NWLN will be with the information from the meeting. K. Zimmermann (WVLS) shared that the leadership teams have intentions to meet and discuss both the NWLN and V-Cat Council meetings, as well as the intention to meet with system directors. Reports will be made to NWLS and WVLS system boards as well as to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. K. Zimmermann noted that NWLN minutes are not publicly available and that she does not know if they will be shared. NWLS board minutes are publicly available.

A Council member asked if one more month will be enough time to inform Library Boards on the project.

Council members that requested more time indicated that the reports came out in late June, and that boards were able to review the material in July. Library boards would have another month to discuss the NICE project and take action in August.

M. Handel (Medford) moved to table the vote on an ILS merger with NWLN until the September 5 Council meeting. The motion was seconded by V. Roberts (Rhineland).

A Council member emphasized a desire to vote in September and not put it off again. It was noted that V-Cat Council had a good turnout at this meeting and encouraged all Council members to attend the September meeting or be sure to send proxies.

A Council member emphasized the importance of communicating with library boards about the NICE project and what this vote means.

Chair, J. Ziebell (Neillsville) called for the vote. Motion carried.

Request for Agenda items:

It was requested that K. Zimmermann (WVLS) share more information about the NWLN vote ahead of the next meeting.

K. Zimmermann noted that there may be an additional item including lessons learned from the NICE project and next steps for V-Cat, depending on the outcome of a vote.

Adjournment:

K. Heiting (Granton) moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by L. Ollhoff (Merrill). Motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 12:05.