

NICE Project Benefits & Common Questions

What is the NICE Project?

The Northern Wisconsin ILS Consortium Exploration (NICE) Project is an effort of Northern Waters Library Service (NWLS), Wisconsin Valley Library Service (WVLS), and their respective consortia to determine the value and feasibility of a merger to a shared Integrated Library System (ILS). The ILS is database software and related services are necessary to maintain the core library mission of lending physical materials.

Benefits of a Shared Integrated Library System (ILS):

Improved library user experience with minimal change for library users

An ILS merger significantly increases the number of materials available to library users in central and northern Wisconsin and offers unprecedented access to more unique titles and more copies of popular titles. Library users may experience shorter wait times for items outside of the local consortium. Library users will have access to more libraries with one library card. Minimizing changes to the enhanced public library catalog will maintain a consistent experience for library users.

Increased and more sustainable support for member libraries

An ILS merger would build on existing NWLS and WVLS partnerships and collaboration to provide improved and more impactful, sustainable support to member libraries across a broad range of mission critical services. A larger team for ILS administration and support will allow system staff to gain expertise and enhance services in targeted areas rather than maintain the current duplication of broad services currently offered. Added benefits of a larger team include sustained coverage for ILS administration and support during staff absences.

Proactive change in the face of fiscal realities for member libraries and systems

A shared ILS offers economies of scale while increasing ILS administration efficiencies and expertise. Funding for libraries has not kept pace with ILS operations cost inflation.* This erosion in purchasing power will make it increasingly difficult to maintain the current levels of service. Documentation that illustrates the potential savings for an ILS merger has been shared with libraries.

Increased collaboration among library systems across the state

Member libraries in NWLS and WVLS already benefit from the services, support, and economies of scale offered through the LEANWI collaboration. A merged ILS builds on this success. Five of 15 library systems in Wisconsin currently participate in ILS sharing including some recent ILS mergers. The state-wide [Public Library System Redesign Report](#), completed in 2019 following a two year study, "envision[s] larger regions of service for Integrated Library Systems throughout the state." The WI Department of Public Instruction supports this collaborative effort and currently offers grant funding for this purpose.

*WVLS ILS Consortium Budget increased 23% from 2016 to 2023, while library budgets increased by 7.2% from 2019 to 2023. NWLS ILS Consortium Budget increased 35% from 2016 to 2023, while library budgets increased 4.8% from 2019 to 2023.

Common Questions about a Shared Integrated Library System (ILS):

What changes are expected for library users?

- Library users will have access to more materials via the online catalog at nearly double the number of locations including more unique titles, and more copies of popular titles.
- Library users will need only one card to access materials at NWLS and WVLS libraries.
- Library user requests across a larger service area are expected to be filled in a similar timeframe to the current experience. For titles not available in the current service area, items may be received more quickly than through WISCAT interlibrary loan.
- Requests for materials will continue to be filled in a way similar to current practices within each consortia, allowing for sharing of materials across the larger service area.

What changes are expected for library staff?

- Groups working on NICE recommendations made every effort to minimize changes for library staff.
- Library staff will continue to use the familiar Sierra ILS software interface.
- Library staff may be asked to update select item or patron records.
- Library staff may need to learn new usernames, passwords and codes.
- Staff from eight member libraries will be asked to join the ILS Advisory group to assist with collaborative decision making. Others may be asked to provide input in their areas of expertise.
- Workload changes related to each library's circulation and interlibrary loan activity are anticipated. Library staff may spend less time processing out of consortium interlibrary loans. With more titles and items readily available for library users, library staff may spend more time processing materials coming from and going to other libraries to fill patron requests.
- As consortium members, library staff will continue to adapt to changes in processes and procedures to increase efficiency and best serve library users as the need arises.

What cost savings are expected?

- LSTA grant funds are available to cover most implementation costs.
- Documentation that illustrates the potential savings has been shared with libraries.
- Until a full ILS merger is completed, it is not possible to know precisely what workload changes each library will experience related to circulation and interlibrary loan activity or how this might impact individual library budgets.

What support is available for library staff?

- NWLS and WVLS will provide ILS support and administration with increased expertise and ability to enhance services in targeted areas.
- NWLS and WVLS will provide ILS specific training to member library staff in a variety of formats.
- The ILS vendor will provide migration specialists to assist with the ILS merger process.
- LSTA grant funding will provide additional system staffing to assist with the ILS merger.
- NWLS and WVLS leadership will facilitate development of a shared culture, open communication, consensus and compromise.
- NWLS and WVLS staff will assist with reassessment and readjustment of the merger recommendations to enhance ILS performance as needed.