

V-Cat Strategic Planning 2025-2028 Survey Summary

Prepared by WVLS with assistance from Claude AI¹

Library Participation

WVLS received 35 survey responses from 23 libraries and WVLS. The survey was open to anyone who works at a V-Cat member library and WVLS staff.

V-Cat Purpose

Participants were asked to summarize the purpose of V-Cat in their own words. Key themes expressed:

1. Resource sharing (materials, technology, expertise)
2. Cost-sharing and efficiency through collaboration
3. Standardization of practices across member libraries
4. Support services and guidance for member libraries
5. Enhanced patron access and experience
6. The concept of achieving more together than libraries could individually

Library Challenges

Participants were asked to share the biggest challenges facing their library that affects lending materials to library users and participating in V-Cat. The most common themes include

1. Budget Constraints and Funding Issues
2. Staffing Challenges
3. User Experience and Interface Problems
4. Material Availability and Sharing
5. Delivery and Logistics Issues
6. Community Expectations vs. Capability
7. Cataloging and Collection Management
8. Political Climate and Book Challenges

Some libraries reported minimal or no challenges, while others are facing multiple issues simultaneously. The responses suggest that smaller libraries particularly struggle with budget and resource limitations that cascade into other challenges, such as user holds wait time, which is the second most common theme. Operational and procedural issues are also a concern for smaller libraries.

¹ Claude AI was used to analyze open ended questions for this high level summary. Responses from Claude AI have been edited for brevity. Notes in italics were added by WVLS staff. Any non-open ended questions were summarized entirely by WVLS staff. Disclaimer: [Claude can make mistakes. Please double-check responses.](#)

Staffing challenges are much more prominent among medium and large libraries. Respondents from larger libraries were more likely to bring up concerns about Political/censorship concerns (book bans), Material management specifics (loss, delivery issues), disparities among libraries' resources and practices based on library size.

WVLS staff identified additional challenges concerned with long-term sustainability rather than immediate operational impacts including adaptation to change and tension between local library focus and consortium effectiveness.

Future Challenges in the next 3-5 Years

Some respondents don't foresee major challenges, but most expressed at least one significant concern about future operations and ability to serve communities effectively

Key challenges libraries anticipate facing:

1. Budget constraints and funding concerns
2. Shifting usage patterns and physical/digital format preferences
3. Transit and resource sharing challenges
4. Changing role of libraries
5. External pressures and concerns
6. Staffing issues

Smaller libraries also emphasized space limitations. Medium and large libraries shared concerns about resource sharing complications related to risk and cost of damage and placed more emphasis on digital service improvements.

V-Cat Goals and Focus

Survey participants were asked to consider the challenges and suggest areas of focus they would like to see included in V-Cat's strategic goals for the next 3-5 years.

These themes suggest that libraries are primarily focused on optimizing their existing resources and systems rather than implementing entirely new solutions, with particular emphasis on improving the experience for both staff and patrons.

1. User Experience Improvements
2. Resource Sharing and Collection Management
3. Record Standardization and Quality
4. Digital Resources and Services
5. Training and Staff Support
6. Funding and Financial Concerns
7. Policy Consistency

Interest in Potential V-Cat Projects

Participants were asked to rate their level of interest in a variety of projects and identified the following as top projects:

1. Improve Access: Allow library users to place holds on high demand items owned by other libraries to be filled when items are no longer considered high demand
2. User Experience: Notify library users when their library card is near the expiration date automatically by email, text, or phone notice
3. Future Focused: Prioritize standardization of Sierra settings and record standards to make V-Cat and WVLS operations more efficient
4. Future Focused: Standardize practices and procedures to make V-Cat and WVLS operations more efficient (Rated more highly than cataloging specific projects.)
5. Support: Automate patron record changes at 18 years of age

None of the cataloging projects presented were in the top results across all questions. A special project to add inclusive subject headings to improve discovery was the highest rated and came in at 12. See the end of this document for a list of all potential projects listed and ratings from participating library directors and staff.

The lowest priority project across all questions is to evaluate and review discovery products to consider an alternative to Aspen Discovery.

Small libraries also highly valued increased cataloging training for library staff and allowing text message notifications sign up within Sierra notices (instead of requiring user to text SIGNUP to opt in). Medium and larger libraries highly valued standardizing practices and procedures to make V-Cat and WVLS operations more efficient, implementing a library catalog mobile app, and automating circulation notices so library staff don't need to run them one or more times daily.

In addition, WVLS staff highly valued automating review and improvement of bibliographic records.

Discovery Improvements

Survey participants were asked for suggestions to make finding resources in the library catalog easier. These were the most popular specific suggestions

1. Mobile App Development - This was the most frequently mentioned specific improvement, with multiple respondents expressing interest in a dedicated mobile application.
2. Search Refinements - Particularly the ability to narrow searches by format, location, and availability received multiple mentions.
3. Improved Subject Headings and Metadata - Several responses focused on better bibliographic records and standardized subject headings to improve discovery.

4. Home Library Prioritization - Multiple responses mentioned making it easier to see what's available at the patron's home library.
5. Saved Search Preferences - The ability to save search settings or create profiles for different types of searches.

These themes indicate that libraries are primarily focused on making their catalogs more intuitive and user-friendly through better search capabilities, mobile access, and clearer indication of item availability and location.

Material Sharing Improvement Suggestions

Respondents identified the following opportunities to make borrowing materials from another library easier for library users

1. High Demand Item Hold Improvements
2. Notification and Communication Enhancements
3. Mobile Access
4. Transit and Delivery Improvements
5. Catalog User Experience Improvements

Several libraries specifically mentioned that the current high demand item restrictions create frustration for patrons who then need to remember to place holds months later. The most popular suggestion was implementing a system that allows patrons to place holds on high demand items immediately, with those holds activating once the restriction period ends.

Support Rating

Survey participants were asked to rate WVLS's support in troubleshooting and resolving service issues with Sierra/Aspen/V-Cat matters.

All responses indicate that WVLS is offering Good or Excellent support.

53% Reported Good support that meets most of their needs

47% Reported Excellent proactive support that exceeds my expectations

No responses indicate that support is limited or insufficient.

Support Suggestions

Participants were invited to suggest Sierra/Aspen/V-Cat support improvements for WVLS to consider. The most common suggestions involved

1. Training improvements
2. Communication enhancements between WVLS and library staff
3. Catalog functionality fixes
4. WVLS staffing considerations

The responses suggest that while users are generally satisfied with the support they receive, they would benefit from more accessible training resources, improved communication channels, and specific catalog functionality improvements.

Training Attendance

At least 80% of respondents reported that they have participated in V-Cat training, and half of those report participation in the past year.

Training Quality

Respondents who have participated in V-Cat Training at any time reported that training was of good or excellent quality. With 69% reporting that training was excellent and highly relevant and 31% reporting that training was good quality and mostly excellent. No participants rated V-Cat training as basic, inconsistent, irrelevant or low quality.

Training Improvements

Survey respondents had the opportunity to suggest how WVLS can improve Sierra/Aspen/V-Cat training for library staff.

Based on the responses, here are the main themes identified:

1. Training Format Preferences
2. Training Level Differentiation
3. Content Expansion
4. Accessibility Concerns
5. Resource Considerations

The most popular theme appears to be format preferences, with particular emphasis on having multiple options (in-person, virtual, recorded, and written) to accommodate different learning styles and scheduling needs.

The most frequently mentioned format preference is in-person/hands-on training, which was explicitly requested by four respondents, suggesting this is the most desired training format among the respondents.

Following V-Cat Guidelines

Respondents self-reported how consistently their library is able to follow V-Cat guidelines. The majority of V-Cat libraries report being able to follow V-Cat guidelines most or all of the time. No libraries reported that they are rarely able to follow V-Cat Guidelines.

27% All of the time

67% Most of the time

3% Some of the time (one response)

0% Rarely

3% I am unable to answer this question (one response)

Improving Guideline Consistency

Survey participants suggested improvements V-Cat and/or WVLS could make to increase consistency in following V-Cat guidelines.

The most prevalent theme is the tension between standardized guidelines and local flexibility. Multiple respondents emphasized that while guidelines are important, libraries need to adapt to their specific community needs and patron situations.

The second most common theme is accessibility of information, with several comments about the difficulty of finding policies when needed and suggestions for better organization of guidelines.

Regular communication and training appears as the third most popular theme, with requests for ongoing reminders and better training resources, especially for new staff.

1. Flexibility vs. Guidelines
2. Accessibility of Information
3. Training and Communication
4. Specific Policy Requests

V-Cat Participation Rating

Respondents self-reported how often they feel their library is able to fully participate in V-Cat decision making processes.

Responses indicate that libraries are able to participate in V-Cat decision making most or all of the time.

- 17% Reported their library is able to fully participate all of the time.
- 69% Reported their library is able to fully participate most of the time.
- 14% Reported they were unable to answer the question.

No responses indicated that they are only able to participate some of the time or rarely.

Responses from individuals in leadership roles reported an even higher ability to participate.

- 20% Reported their library is able to fully participate all of the time.
- 80% Reported their library is able to fully participate most of the time.
- 0% Reported they were unable to answer the question.

V-Cat Participation Improvements

Survey participants were asked if there is anything that would allow their library to more fully participate in V-Cat decision making processes.

The most common responses indicated that there were two main hurdles

1. **Time constraints and work-life balance** are the most frequently mentioned barrier to participation, with multiple respondents directly referencing this challenge.
2. **Knowledge/expertise barriers** seem to be the second most significant theme, with specific concerns about participating in specialized areas.

The responses suggest that any solution for improving hybrid meeting participation should primarily address these two concerns - making participation more time-efficient and creating more accessible entry points for those without specialized knowledge in certain library functions. Communication Systems were also mentioned.

Low Value Services

Participants were invited to identify a low value WVLS V-Cat service they suggest be paused, dropped, or reduced.

Many respondents (approximately 9 out of 20) indicated they couldn't think of any services to reduce or stated "N/A" or "unsure." Some explicitly stated that all current services provide value.

The most frequently mentioned specific service to consider pausing or reducing was Digital Bytes, followed by automated reports, with the other suggestions receiving single mentions.

Valuable Aspects of V-Cat

Respondents were asked to identify the most valuable aspect of V-Cat membership.

1. Resource sharing and access to wider collections
2. Collaboration and peer support
3. Shared infrastructure and cost savings
4. In-person meetings and networking
5. Collaborative decision-making
6. Support for smaller libraries

The most popular themes are clearly resource sharing and peer collaboration/support, which appear consistently throughout the responses. The value of shared collections and the human connection between library professionals seem to be the cornerstone benefits of membership in this library consortium.

Combined Project Ratings - Library Responses

		Weighted Average	Not a priority	Low priority	Medium priority	High priority	I'm not sure
1	Allow library users to place holds on high demand items owned by other libraries to be filled when items are no longer considered high demand	2.6	0%	3%	33%	63%	0%
2	Notify library users when their library card is near the expiration date automatically by email, text, or phone notice	2.57	0%	13%	17%	70%	0%
3	Prioritize standardization of Sierra settings and record standards to make V-Cat and WVLS operations more efficient	2.5	0%	7%	27%	63%	3%
4	Standardize practices and procedures to make V-Cat and WVLS operations more efficient	2.47	0%	10%	33%	57%	0%
5	Automate patron record changes at 18 years of age	2.47	0%	7%	30%	60%	3%
6	Implement a library catalog mobile app	2.43	3%	10%	27%	60%	0%
7	Automate circulation notices so library staff don't need to run them one or more times daily	2.37	3%	10%	33%	53%	0%
8	Automate regular residency code verification process	2.3	0%	13%	33%	50%	3%
9	Provide increased report training for library staff	2.28	3%	10%	41%	45%	0%
10	Allow text message notifications sign up within Sierra notices (instead of requiring user to text SIGNUP to opt in)	2.27	3%	13%	17%	60%	7%
11	Adjust Sierra settings to fill holds for library users more efficiently	2.2	0%	13%	33%	47%	7%
12	Special project to add inclusive subject headings to improve discovery	2.13	3%	10%	37%	43%	7%
13	Conduct a user survey to evaluate the library user experience	2.13	0%	17%	53%	30%	0%
14	Implement preferred name in patron records	2.1	7%	27%	17%	50%	0%
15	Increased cataloging training for library staff	2	3%	13%	43%	33%	7%
16	Special project to improve series information in bibliographic records	1.93	3%	17%	43%	30%	7%

17	Add a shared WVLS collection of popular materials to meet demand and reduce hold wait times for library users	1.87	7%	23%	37%	30%	3%
18	Automate patron record changes at 16 years of age	1.87	10%	13%	37%	33%	7%
19	Adjust paging lists to be more equitable and efficient	1.83	3%	27%	33%	30%	7%
20	Implement online library card applications or renewals	1.8	17%	10%	40%	30%	3%
21	Automate high demand item type changes while ensuring items remain in the library's new materials collection	1.77	20%	20%	13%	43%	3%
22	Complete an ILS Evaluation and Review process to consider alternative products to Sierra	1.73	7%	30%	27%	30%	7%
23	Collaborate on collection development efforts with a partner library or small group of libraries	1.73	3%	20%	47%	20%	10%
24	Pursue partnership with another Wisconsin public library system to share resources within a larger pool of libraries	1.73	10%	30%	37%	23%	0%
25	Increased WVLS staff review and improvement of bibliographic records	1.7	0%	20%	50%	17%	13%
26	Increased library staff review and improvement of bibliographic records	1.63	0%	20%	57%	10%	13%
27	Automate review and improvement of bibliographic records	1.57	0%	17%	50%	13%	20%
28	Take steps to prepare for a future migration away from Sierra to a different integrated library system	1.53	17%	20%	27%	27%	10%
29	Expand V-Cat to include more public libraries, academic, school, or special libraries	1.5	13%	33%	33%	17%	3%
30	Allow patron initiated linking in the online catalog	1.43	7%	17%	33%	20%	23%
31	Set standards for what types of new materials libraries set to high demand status	1.4	7%	50%	20%	17%	7%
32	Evaluate and review discovery products to consider an alternative to Aspen Discovery	0.83	30%	30%	27%	0%	13%