

Cooperative Cataloging Project

Executive Summary

Background



Northern Waters Library Service (NWLS) initiated a statewide LSTA-funded project to gather information on Wisconsin public library cataloging processes in an effort to create and apply standards to make cataloging data cleaner and provide a more consistent experience for users discovering materials; to make cataloging materials easier through the development of a baseline of best practices and standards; and prepare for a potential state-wide shared discovery layer. Eight Wisconsin public library systems collaborated on the project, with fourteen participating in the data-gathering portion.

Key Takeaways

There are vast differences in how public library systems in Wisconsin approach and deploy cataloging practices. There are few consistencies in ILS platform, authority control use, discovery layer platform, or usage of a discovery layer, as well as no overlap in internal cataloging structures; some systems utilize a centralized structure while others employ a decentralized or cooperative cataloging structure within their system. In addition, the cataloging processes, policies, and standards used across the Wisconsin public library systems are not consistent. However, there are several similarities among the public library systems that provide a starting point for considering the next steps, including system-led management and administration of their ILSs, bibliographic utility usage, order record usage, and controlled vocabularies.

It has been deemed beneficial when catalogers learn from one another by sharing and participating in large-scale cooperative cataloging¹. Consistency in the patron experience is a primary benefit of shared and standard cataloging practices. In addition, with shared practices and standards, deduplication of efforts will be achievable. There is some sharing already in place among public libraries and library systems in Wisconsin when it comes to cataloging that can be built on to increase efficiency and promote cross-system learning and best practices developed across the state for cataloging processes. For example, several years ago, the public library systems agreed to share records by opening up access to their ILSs via z39.50. Many catalogers have utilized this access to implement efficiencies in their workflows.

Along with the benefits, barriers to shared standards and practices were identified. The vast differences currently existing among systems – predominantly between those that employ centralized versus decentralized or cooperative cataloging – are some of the biggest barriers to account for in planning for collaborative efforts across the state. Additional identified barriers include limited staff time and capacity, varying levels of staff experience and skills, challenges to identifying and establishing effective communication channels, and the need to establish and maintain an easily-accessible repository of standards and procedures.

¹ For more information, see ALCTS Consortial Cataloging eForum [Summary](#).

Future Considerations

In order for the public library systems of Wisconsin to create more efficiencies in their cataloging work and to move toward statewide standards – with the potential of preparing for a statewide shared discovery layer in the future – there are several steps that should be taken into consideration. Those include completing a comparison analysis of each Wisconsin public library system’s bibliographic records to identify differences and similarities; identifying and sharing vocabularies; seeking out and utilizing grant funding where possible to assist systems with authority solutions as well as to conduct further investigation into the feasibility of the shared purchase of an authority control vendor; and, exploring group offerings of training opportunities and tools designed in support of cataloging staff. The creation of a statewide cataloging committee is a key recommendation to facilitate the aforementioned tasks and to effectively collect, review, and maintain recommended standards.

Recommendations for Next Steps
Development of a Statewide Bibliographic Standards Committee
Hosting of a Shared Repository of Cataloging Standards and Documentation
Conduct a Bibliographic Records Analysis
Identify a Shared Vocabulary/Vocabularies
Develop an Inclusive Subject Headings List
Identify Potential Solutions for Authority Control
Facilitate Shared Training Opportunities and Tools
Conduct a Catalog Maintenance Analysis

