

OWLSnet Planning Process Report

Presented to AAC September 20, 2013

Introduction

While NFLS and OWLS have consistently had technology and resource sharing plans in place, for a variety of reasons, OWLSnet has been without a current plan for several years. To remedy this situation a process was begun in May 2012 to work on a new plan. Since then the planning process has taken a number of twists, turns, and detours. The original intent was for planning to be done at regular AAC meetings. Later a Planning Committee was appointed, and, finally, this planning document was completed by staff.

The outcome of this process is a set of OWLSnet priorities and action steps for addressing the priorities. The priorities and steps are based on input from AAC with some feedback from the Planning Committee, and written by OWLSnet staff. What follows is a description of how the process evolved and the priorities and steps.

The planning priorities and steps contained in this document were presented to the OWLSnet membership at the September 20, 2013 AAC meeting. While the AAC did not formally endorse the OWLSnet planning priorities and steps, they will provide guidance to the OWLSnet staff until they are modified by the AAC or the soon to be established Planning Committee.

Planning Background

AAC Involvement: At the May 18, 2012 AAC meeting, those in attendance brainstormed a preliminary list of planning issues that should be considered during a planning process. Following brainstorming and clarification of the topics, attendees were given an opportunity to vote on the issues they believed were most important to address. Although several libraries declined to vote, the following issues were identified as most important to address during a planning process: technology/OWLSnet competencies; fees, fee structure, and finances; hardware infrastructure, eContent.

Additionally, it was proposed at the May 2012 meeting that staff would create background papers on each of these topics for discussion at upcoming AAC meetings. An OWLSnet eContent Discussion Paper was prepared by Evan Bend and presented at the September 2012 AAC meeting. The paper outlined a number of issues, and comments were solicited from attendees. At the November 2012 AAC meeting, Bradley Shipps presented a discussion paper on OWLSnet Competencies for Library Staff. The group agreed that OWLSnet competencies are a higher priority for OWLSnet to address than general technology competencies, and a number of suggestions were given in response to three discussion questions. Unfortunately, given the very difficult and time-consuming transition to Innovative's Sierra software, additional discussion papers have not been prepared.

However, two other significant planning issues have been discussed at AAC meetings. First, in July 2012, Gerri Moeller presented information about the possibility of using a Discovery Layer to replace the current OPAC. While staff was only in the beginning stage of exploring various options, the group concurred that discovery layer options should be explored. Second, given the difficulty of the transition to Sierra, there have also been a number of discussions at AAC meetings about the desirability of switching ILS vendors.

Committee Involvement: At the March 2013 AAC meeting, Rick Krumwiede proposed that a planning committee be formed to work on a new plan because the originally proposed process had gotten bogged down. He asked for volunteers, and a committee was formed. Members include Rebecca Buchman, Kristie Hauer, Krumwiede, Mark Merrifield, Jennifer Thiele, and Melanie Waldron. The committee met following the May 2013 AAC meeting and agreed on how the process should continue.

It was agreed that system technology and resource sharing plans could appropriately be completed prior to completing a new OWLSnet plan because those plans are really more for state and federal compliance purposes. They tend to focus on documenting current activities and how they will be continued in the future.

The committee also concurred that it is difficult to develop meaningful OWLSnet plans because 1) OWLSnet technologies and services can change quickly, 2) OWLSnet activities are decided by the AAC on an ongoing basis, and 3) it is difficult to develop measurable objectives for OWLSnet plans. Consequently, the committee discussed the possibility of creating a plan that would contain outcomes we'd like to achieve and suggested strategies, rather than objectives, for achieving them. The advantage of this model is that suggested strategies would be illustrative rather than prescriptive, allowing actual activities to be determined by AAC or OWLS staff as needed.

The committee briefly discussed some possible outcomes based on the original list of issues and issues that had emerged in the past year, including the following:

- Develop OWLSnet competencies and related training program for staff
- Increase the availability of e-Content for library patrons
- Review fee structure
- Hardware infrastructure needs
- Criteria for switching ILS vendor
- Replace the OPAC with a Discovery Layer
- Review and establish an efficient and cost-effective ILL system to optimize resource sharing outside of OWLSnet

While outside of OWLSnet interlibrary loan did not emerge from AAC as an issue, the Committee agreed that out-of-OWLSnet interlibrary loan should be considered as part of an OWLSnet planning process. Because NFLS provides ILL service to libraries in both systems and because ILL processes are very connected to the ILS, it makes sense to consider ILL as an OWLSnet planning topic.

OWLS Professional Staff Involvement: Based upon previous work and discussions, Krumwiede drafted some possible outcomes for feedback from OWLS professional staff before sharing them with the Planning Committee. After considerable discussion, Bend, Moeller, and Shipps proposed that, given the way that AAC is regularly involved in decision-making, the most helpful OWLSnet plan would document priorities and list steps that should be taken to work on the priorities.

Consequently, in July 2013 this group of staff members reviewed the previous planning activities and information in an attempt to develop a plan that would identify OWLSnet priorities and focus on how we should proceed to address them.

Furthermore, staff agreed that outcomes of this planning approach should include:

- Active participation of member libraries in implementation
- Educational opportunities for library staff
- Transparency about OWLSnet's priorities and activities
- Opportunities for better decision-making
- Greater knowledge of current technology developments
- Proactive, rather than reactive, development of services

OWLSnet Priorities and Steps

The proposed OWLSnet priorities and steps were developed by staff, and they were discussed with the Planning Committee on August 29, 2013. (Rita Schiesser replaced Hauer on the Committee.) While Planning Committee members did not recommend the proposed priorities and steps for adoption by AAC, they concurred that they should go to AAC for discussion at the September meeting. Planning Committee members also recommended the creation of an ongoing planning committee to monitor, evaluate progress, and recommend additions or modifications to the priorities.

Integrated Library System (ILS) Evaluation

OWLSnet moved to Sierra, Innovative's new ILS, in September 2012. The move has not been a smooth one, and there are lingering concerns about the product and the company. While it's too soon to evaluate right now, OWLSnet will need to decide if Sierra meets our needs or if we should look at other options. OWLS staff recommend beginning the ILS evaluation in February of 2014, because that will be about a year and a half after our move to Sierra, about a year before the Sierra application server should be replaced, and immediately before the 2014 Innovative Users Group conference. If we decide to stay with Sierra, we need to put a plan in place to evaluate the ILS on a regular schedule in the future, and we should also continue to evaluate our ILS whenever our server hardware is due for replacement.

Step/Activity	Target
Begin evaluation of Sierra ILS	February 2014
Determine if Sierra continues to meet OWLSnet's needs	April 2014
If yes, set a timetable for future evaluations	May 2014
If no, begin examining ILS alternatives	May 2014

Discovery Layer Search

OWLSnet libraries have expressed potential interest in adding a Discovery Layer, which is a next-generation public interface that would replace the current OPAC. While our current InfoSoup interface has served us well, it's aging, and there are many newer interfaces that offer better search capabilities, social interactivity, and eContent integration. One of the biggest challenges may be cost, because a Discovery Layer is likely to be a subscription-based ongoing cost, rather than a one-time investment. Another challenge is the rapidly changing nature of the ILS and Discovery Layer market, which is likely to influence whether we choose a product soon or wait for the available products to mature. We need to consider our Discovery Layer options, and look for an InfoSoup replacement after we've decided if we're going to stay with our Sierra ILS for the near future.

Step/Activity	Target
Monitor Discovery Layer options in the marketplace	Ongoing
Hold an OWLSnet CE program on Discovery Layers (2-3 hrs.)	Nov. – Dec. 2013
Develop criteria for a desirable Discovery Layer	April 2014
Begin investigating available Discovery Layers	May 2014
Determine which Discover Layer best meets our needs in light of our criteria and our decision about whether to stay with Sierra	Fall 2014

eContent

eBooks, downloadable audiobooks, and newer digital materials represent a fundamentally different type of eContent than has been traditionally offered by libraries. Whereas periodical databases and various online reference and learning resources tended to supplement library offerings, this new type of eContent duplicates and possibly replaces traditional circulating material. The legal status of this type of eContent also radically changes how libraries can purchase and circulate materials. Most eContent license agreements are not favorable toward libraries. There is no right of first sale, no real ownership, and no guarantee of access. Given the complexity of this new eContent world, and its potential to fundamentally change library service, it seems wise to plan, however tentatively, a way to navigate toward this this unknown future.

It is important that OWLSnet libraries be able to provide their patrons with access to a robust, easy-to-use digital collection that includes eBooks and other current and emerging digital formats. However, all of the continually evolving legal, social, economic, and technological issues that affect libraries and eContent can seem overwhelming. It is important that we keep up with the eContent related news and developments, both in the marketplace and library world, and we need to be prepared to make adjustments as the landscape changes.

Step/Activity	Target
Hold an OWLSnet CE program on the state of the eContent world (3 hrs.): What's happening in the publishing industry, and what plans do WPLC and the library world have?	Annually in April
Hold an OWLSnet conversation on eContent availability, possibilities for the future, and recommendations with funding implications	Annually in May
Provide regular updates at AAC meetings	Ongoing

Network and Local Infrastructure

To provide technology-related services efficiently and effectively it's important that OWLSnet and its member libraries have a robust, well-maintained infrastructure in place. Maintaining the technology infrastructure is a partnership between OWLSnet, the systems, and member libraries.

OWLSnet regularly maintains and upgrades all critical network components (i.e., hardware and software) and regularly monitors bandwidth needs and advocates for increased bandwidth for member libraries. System staff assists member libraries in acquiring, updating, and maintaining local hardware and software.

Member libraries have a responsibility to regularly maintain and upgrade their local hardware and software. Old, obsolete, or poorly maintained local hardware can consume a disproportionate amount of system staff time spent correcting hardware problems or developing software workarounds, which may not be the most effective use of their time. Replacement of local library hardware on a regular cycle would be likely to free system staff time, allowing development projects to be completed in a timely manner.

Step/Activity	Target
Develop computer replacement standards for OWLSnet libraries	December 2013
Develop a model computer replacement schedule	December 2013
Publish a list of hardware devices and software supported by OWLSnet	Annually in December
Expand replacement standards to include additional technologies	March 2014
Hold an OWLSnet conversation on the possibility of requiring member libraries to implement technology replacement plans	2014-2015
Voluntarily implement technology replacement schedules or revise membership agreements to require technology replacement schedules	2014-2015

Finances and Fees

OWLSnet needs to have sufficient and stable funding available to continue providing the agreed upon services to member libraries. This requires a cost-sharing arrangement that is equitable and affordable. In addition, OWLSnet must regularly set aside funds to pay for future migrations and significant upgrades, and member libraries need to be able to make informed decisions about increasing their fees to finance new projects or services.

While OWLSnet libraries haven't expressed concerns about how their fees are assessed, our current methodology is difficult to explain to others, and it's been many years since our fee structure has been evaluated. It would be useful to have a fee structure that is based on specific metrics, but it might be difficult to change our fee structure unless it can be done in a way that would avoid significant cost increases for any libraries. We also have an interest in exploring a fee structure where costs would vary based upon resource-sharing activity because currently libraries that are net borrowers do not necessarily pay more than net lenders. There is some concern that there is little incentive for OWLSnet libraries to develop their collections when they can meet their patrons' needs by borrowing from other libraries. It is not unusual for an ILS consortium have variable fees based on resource sharing activity.

Step/Activity	Target
Annually discuss and make recommendation regarding next year's membership fee	May
Annually report to member libraries on the status of OWLSnet's future projects fund	June/July
Review current fee structure, consider alternatives that base fees on different factors or metrics, and decide whether to keep current fee structure or implement new structure	2014-2015
Explore desirability of modifying current or new fee structure to create variable fees based on resource sharing activity (e.g., higher fees for net borrowers and/or lower fees for net lenders)	2014-2015
Develop guidelines for increasing fees to finance new projects or services	2014-2015

OWLSnet Competencies

All member library staff need to be competent in using the ILS and other OWLSnet-provided technology resources related to their jobs. Staff who are adequately trained and confident in using these tools will provide better service to patrons more efficiently and with fewer errors, requiring less support from supervisors and OWLSnet staff. OWLSnet member library directors are best positioned to identify the training needs among their staff and to convey to staff the importance of mastering competencies by allowing staff to complete training during work hours and by incorporating competencies into performance reviews. Because there are many potential topics for training, and because of the constantly changing nature of technology, OWLSnet staff will develop training on an ongoing and iterative basis, checking with AAC members at least annually to identify new priorities.

Step/Activity	Target
AAC members and OWLSnet staff develop a list of OWLSnet technology competencies	March-May 2014
AAC members prioritize training needs based on the areas in which staff currently lack competency and the areas in which achieving competency will have the greatest impact on improving service	July 2014
OWLSnet staff develop training and make it available to member library staff in a variety of formats	August 2014-Ongoing
Member library directors encourage and enable library staff to participate in training opportunities	October 2014-Ongoing
AAC members and OWLSnet staff evaluate the impact of training and improve it as needed	October 2014-Ongoing

Interlibrary Loan

Technically, interlibrary loan beyond OWLSnet is not an OWLSnet service. It's a system service that is provided by both systems to their member libraries. In reality, the current ILL service for sharing beyond OWLSnet is very closely tied to OWLSnet. OCLC ILL charges are paid from the OWLSnet budget. The NFLS ILL department provides ILL service for libraries in both systems, and the way OCLC interloan functions is related to how OWLSnet uses OCLC for cataloging. Practically speaking, it's impossible to develop outside-of-OWLSnet ILL procedures without considering OWLSnet procedures or using the ILS. Consequently, the planning committee agreed to consider ILL in the context of OWLSnet planning.

NFLS and OWLS staff have examined the current out-of-OWLSnet ILL service and are in agreement that the service is not functioning well. It is neither as efficient nor as cost-effective as we'd like. Several years ago, NFLS and OWLS switched from using WISCAT to using OCLC for resource sharing beyond OWLSnet, and the systems agree that this grand experiment has proved to be unsatisfactory. Frankly, OCLC ILL loan has been expensive, difficult to manage, cumbersome to use, and nearly impossible to separate OWLSnet ILL costs from other NFLS ILL costs.

Consequently, NFLS and OWLS recommend that the out-of-network ILL service be rebuilt from scratch using WISCAT resource sharing software. The trend in Wisconsin public library systems has been to move away from operating interlibrary loan clearinghouses, and OWLSnet members must decide if, or how far, we should go this direction. Clearly, considerable input will be needed from member libraries in order to create an efficient and effective ILL service that meets member libraries' needs.

Step/Activity	Target
RL&LL staff present current options for WISCAT implementation to OWLSnet membership	Fall 2013
OWLSnet membership determines appropriate local library and system roles for ILL, e.g., does system operate clearinghouse?	Sept.-Nov. 2013
Staff, with input from members, configure new ILL system	Dec. 2013-Jan. 2014
Begin transition to new ILL system	Feb.-Mar. 2014
OWLSnet determines the value of holdings continuing to appear in WorldCat	May 2014

Ongoing Planning

It is important for OWLSnet to continually monitor, evaluate, and up-date its priorities and activities. While this generally occurs as a result of AAC discussions and interactions between staff and member libraries, it would be useful to have a committee charged with monitoring, evaluating progress, and recommending changes to OWLSnet plans, priorities, and activities on an ongoing basis.

Step/Activity	Target
AAC establishes an ongoing planning committee	Nov. 2013
Committee develops job description, procedures, activities, etc.	Nov. 2013-Jan. 2014
AAC endorses Committee activities and procedures	Jan. 2014
Committee regularly engages in activities and reports to AAC	Ongoing