

OWLSnet Planning Committee Meeting Notes

January 5, 2007

Appleton Public Library Board Room

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:17 a.m. Mark Merrifield, Joan Denis, Becca Berger, Rick Krumwiede, Gerri Moeller, Ann Hunt, Elizabeth Timmins, Barb Kelly were in attendance.

Current Issues Facing OWLSnet

Planning Committee members were asked to discuss some of the immediate issues facing OWLSnet.

1. Attorney General's Opinion and Use of a Collection Agency

Even back in November DPI was concerned that our use of a collection agency might not be legal. While a library board can set rules for use of a library by its patrons, it can't set rules for the use of other libraries by its patrons. Because our proposed use of Unique was based on sending patrons to a collection agency by home agency, DPI viewed this arrangement as a library board setting rules for its patrons on the use of other libraries. OWLSnet intended to deal with this concern by adding new language to membership agreements so all library boards would agree that patrons using their library might be referred to a collection agency even if they didn't participate themselves.

When the Attorney General's opinion was released, DPI interpreted it to mean that information cannot be released to a collection agency or to local law enforcement officials without a court order. DPI, as an agency of the state, is bound to follow opinions of the Attorney General. Because library systems are also accountable to the state and regularly rely upon Attorney General's opinions, NFLS and OWLS believe they are obligated to abide by this opinion. Consequently, the systems have decided not to move forward with the collection agency project. If a local library, after conferring with their local attorney, feels that the Attorney General's opinion is not applicable and decides to follow the guidance of their local attorney - that is a local decision.

Becca mentioned that it would be useful to have a bulleted list that explains the consequences of this opinion - what does it mean for libraries and library staff - what can and can't they do according to the opinion. OWLS or NFLS will ask DPI if they can write up such a list to provide guidelines for libraries. If DPI declines, Mark and Rick will work on such a document.

Because of this opinion, the state law will need to be amended before libraries can legally share information with third parties in order to effectively administer their libraries. Even if the law is amended, we will still need to deal with the way that Innovative sends patrons to a collection agency within the consortium.

2. Enhancement Process

Recently, OWLSnet staff met with our Innovative Customer Sales Consultant to review some new products. Much of the meeting was spent discussing changes we'd like including how renewals are counted and tracking transactions by checkout agency. We will submit enhancement requests and will pursue the possibility of paying for custom programming to accomplish tracking by circulating agency.

3. Statistics

It does look like many libraries have experienced a downturn in circulation this year. Decreases may be the result of renewals being calculated differently or our improved ability to exclude ineligible checkouts.

The lender borrower numbers (while much, much higher than in Geac) would probably be even higher if reported with the Geac methodology. In Geac, it was counted whenever material from another library arrived at your library for a hold, whether or not an item was checked out. In Innovative, it's only counted when an item is actually checked out.

Committee members discussed how circulation could be down in some libraries if lender/borrower numbers are up so much. Clearly, there is a change in patron behaviors. They are placing more holds for pickup rather than browsing the shelves. It was requested that a narrative be prepared that explains some of the reasons why circulation numbers could vary between 2005 and 2006.

4. Materials Too Long In Transit

There is a perception that there is a growing problem with things going missing in transit. A preliminary look at this problem seems to indicate that the percentage of things that are too long in transit mirror the percentage of things that are actually in transit at any point in time. DVDs don't seem to represent a higher percentage than are in transit. Also, the number of things that are set to missing seems to be relatively low. We will conduct a six month study to determine the scope of the too long in transit problem - what things are hitting the list and what things are coming back.

OWLSnet Values

Many issues faced by OWLSnet in the past can be traced to lack of a commonly understood philosophy or vision. System and member library staffs have differing perceptions of OWLSnet membership responsibilities, the roles of individual libraries, and the roles of the systems. Rick hypothesized that it would be very helpful for OWLSnet to achieve consensus on some guiding principles or values. An agreed upon statement of values would guide the development of the plan and would aid in decision-making by system staff, member library staff, the AAC, and the OWLS Board.

Rick distributed a long list of possible values for inclusion in a values statement, and the group spent much of the meeting discussing them. Some of the comments and discussion are summarized below:

- Golden rule - libraries are free to make any decision they want unless it has an impact on other libraries
- "Our purpose is to facilitate resource sharing and provide services that help member libraries do things better or more efficiently." The ease of use of InfoSoup has helped patrons rather than made libraries' lives easier.
- Our stated purposes focus more on libraries than customer service. These are really two different tracks.
- Resource Sharing - we want to make it easier for patrons to get stuff they want as fast as possible. We want to work with libraries to help them efficiently share resources.
- One of the major reasons for establishing library systems was equalization of library service through out a region. That seems to be a major purpose of OWLSnet as well.
- OWLSnet attempts to accommodate the differing needs of all member libraries.
- People deserve access to library service regardless of where they live.
- Any member library of OWLS or NFLS is entitled to become a member of OWLSnet.
- It is a goal of OWLSnet to increase standardization of policies, procedures, and practices, but not at the expense of reasonable local control. There was a lot of disagreement on the issue of standardization.
- Member libraries have a responsibility to be good citizens of OWLSnet by adhering to policies and procedures, participating in decision making, providing required information as needed, and freely lending library materials.
- Member library have a responsibility to develop collections to meet needs of their local patrons.
 - Do libraries have a responsibility to buy materials to meet the needs of all patrons in the consortium?
 - It is an appropriate goal for libraries to have a lending to borrowing ratio close to one.
 - Should there be a fee for libraries whose lending ratios are below a certain point?
 - Use the high demand holds list to say that a library needs to buy at least one circulating copy for every 5 patron holds?
- A value of OWLSnet has been for the AAC to arrive at its recommendations by consensus. Operating by consensus makes us stronger as a group, but some libraries don't seem to understand that a decision made by consensus is as binding as one resulting from a vote.
 - There are pros and cons to taking more votes on issues. It results in winners and losers, but it forces libraries to take positions on issues.
 - Perhaps the bylaws should be changed to require that votes be announced on meeting agendas.
 - Decision-making via consensus results in fairly weak decisions, i.e., overly vague or permissive.

- Enforcement of compliance with group decisions in a major issue for OWLSnet. Some feel that there is no effective enforcement mechanism.
 - It was suggested that there be a peer compliance task force - a mechanism where members of the consortium meet to look at complaints and act as an enforcement group.
 - This group should be nominated and selected by AAC
 - What actions could be taken by this group?
 - What happens if that library continues to be out of compliance?
 - Libraries want to work together, but compliance issues arise because there is not really a consensus.
 - If there is a committee to look at compliance issues, then another committee should look at policy issues.
 - Perhaps some libraries aren't complying with policies or procedures because they don't have enough resources to accomplish them, not because they don't know about them or don't want to do them.
 - Once we've gotten all of the policies updated and together, we should publish a checklist of member library required tasks.
- Member libraries have a responsibility to participate in OWLSnet via AAC, to attend AAC, to inform staff members of what happens, and to keep aware of policies.
- Once libraries join the network we won't require them to contribute additional capital funds.
 - We value making the consortium affordable to libraries of all shapes and sizes who wish to participate.
 - This also helps us with upgrades; we don't need to fund-raise to get additional funds.
 - We all pay equivalent amounts regardless of the needs and uses of the system services, and the costs incurred for the libraries on their behalf.
 - The systems subsidize OWLSnet to make this possible.
- Should we have values related to training?
 - OWLS will train new circulation and cataloging staff.
- Do we need to establish core competencies for library staff? There are certain functions that everyone should know how to do before they are allowed to touch Millennium.
 - Establishing competencies will help strengthen hiring processes.

Areas in Need of Policies or Procedures

The group discussed some areas that are in need of new or revised policies or procedures. Some of the comments and discussion are summarized below:

- In order to protect our own libraries and other libraries, requirements for patron registration need to be strengthened.
 - Require an ID and collect from the home agency for lost materials if they didn't properly verify patron information
 - It would be helpful to define internal and institutional patrons

- There should be some requirements for circulation policies because local library practices have an impact on other libraries.
 - Should every library be required to have fines?
 - Even if there are no fines, libraries need to make a serious effort to get the items back, especially items belonging to other libraries.
 - Recommended policy: Libraries should not waive fines charged by another library (whether it's because that library charges higher or different fines for checkout, or a dispute over when the library it was returned to checked the item in. Those charges should be taken up with the library in question.)
- It would be good for us to come up with a list of recommended practices, such as inventory, shelf-reading, etc.
- It's possible we could do some cooperative collection development in specific areas, such as standing orders for Recorded books or large print.
 - Mark suggested we look at a grant in the Humanities area for collection development work in this area.

The group did not get to the last three agenda items: 1) issues related to governance, decision-making, and compliance, 2) priorities for the development of OWLSnet services, and 3) identification of additional issues that need to be addressed by the Planning Committee or OWLSnet membership.

The next meeting was scheduled for February 9, 2007. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Gerri and Rick