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## Selecting a Shared 21st Century Management System

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## Selecting a Shared 21st Century Management System

### Abstract

This paper describes the factors that led the Orbis Cascade Alliance, a 37 institution academic library consortium in the Pacific Northwest, to move to a shared library management system. The steps that the Alliance and its 37 member libraries took over a period of years are summarized, including the work of several research and planning groups and a formal Request for Information process. A subsequent Request for Proposal (RFP) process ended in the selection of Ex Libris Alma management system and Primo discovery services for Alliance libraries. The paper also describes the Alliance's vision for the shared library management system, including collaborative technical services and cooperative collection development.

### Keywords

Integrated Library Systems; Request For Proposal; Orbis Cascade Alliance; Ex Libris Alma

## Selecting a Shared 21<sup>st</sup> Century Management System

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### Abstract

This paper describes the factors that led the Orbis Cascade Alliance, a 37 institution academic library consortium in the Pacific Northwest, to move to a shared library management system. The steps that the Alliance and its 37 member libraries took over a period of years are summarized, including the work of several research and planning groups and a formal Request for Information process. A subsequent Request for Proposal (RFP) process ended in the selection of Ex Libris Alma management system and Primo discovery services for Alliance libraries. The paper also describes the Alliance's vision for the shared library management system, including collaborative technical services and cooperative collection development.

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### Introduction

The advent of the integrated library system (ILS) was a milestone in the world of library operations. In place of stand-alone electronic files and/or paper files, it was now possible to have one system that brought library data together that could be accessed by the entire library staff. Most libraries have been through the process of selecting, purchasing, and implementing an integrated system and many libraries have been through several generations of systems and vendors. The basic components of an integrated library system – cataloging, serials, acquisitions, circulation, and public catalog – have been the standard for many years.

This model has served libraries well, but has become increasingly outdated as the needs of libraries and the services they provide have undergone a radical transformation. It is no longer possible to maintain a strict division between public and technical services in library operations as the continuing integration of data has blurred the lines between providing access and delivery of materials to patrons. Every job in the library is now seen as a service job, as libraries have embraced the new patron-centered user

model.

In addition to ongoing library trends, the integrated library systems in use are proving to be unable to meet these new patron service demands. It is often difficult to get data extracted from the legacy systems, there are often limitations on the types of searches they can perform, and they often have structural barriers that prevent data being shared with libraries that are not part of the system.

Another drawback to the legacy systems is the high cost of purchase and maintenance of these products. With a typical integrated library system, the library needs to make an expensive investment in hardware, software maintenance, and specialized support staff. However, as library budgets have been reduced and staffing has either been frozen or decreased, it is more and more imperative for the library world to move towards a more resource-sharing model to stretch limited material budgets.

The automation marketplace has responded to the limitations of the legacy systems by offering products usually branded as “next-generation”

catalogs or discovery layers that share a few common traits: they can manage both print & electronic resources on an equal basis; they are able to provide easy access to both local and remote materials; they offer a rich user experience through the use of social media, visual information, ratings, tagging, etc.; and, they offer the user a single point of entry for all the content and services offered by the library.

But, even with next-generation products in the marketplace, do they allow for the level of cooperation anticipated in this new world of resource sharing? In many cases, consortiums formed to share their bibliographic data and streamline searching and borrowing from each other but these groups are still based on the model of each library having its own individual library system. It is cooperation in one sense of the word but not a truly shared system that would allow for even greater advances in the new paradigm of library services.

The idea of a shared integrated library system (SILS) is a natural step in the evolution of library technology and philosophy. With the growth and flexibility in technology, cooperation on a wider scale is now possible that would not have been possible in previous years. The idea of one library having everything within its walls to satisfy patron needs has also evolved to a worldview of providing access to materials instead of ownership.

One of the pioneers of consortial sharing is the Orbis Cascade Alliance (or, the Alliance), a consortium of 37 academic institutions in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. The member libraries of the Alliance work to provide a high level of service to their students and faculty on their home campus, while also making their resources available to the other member libraries. The primary way these libraries share resources is through Summit, an online catalog that permits faculty, staff, and students to search and borrow materials from other member libraries. This is similar to catalogs used by other consortiums for resource borrowing and has proved to be very popular with all members of the Alliance.

The establishment of the Summit catalog was an important first step for the Alliance but the Strategic Agenda<sup>1</sup> of the Alliance called for much more integration of the member libraries than a shared catalog. It anticipates a world where collaboration involves not only public services and interlibrary loan, but also technical services, collection development, digital initiatives, and an enhanced discovery experience. To help achieve these ambitious goals, the need for a new type of library system became paramount.

The idea for the SILS grew out of the desire for developing a system that went beyond the stand-alone integrated library systems that were in use by member libraries. In keeping with the Mission Statement<sup>2</sup> of the Alliance, the goal of greater collaboration mandated some sort of system that could be shared by member libraries but also would retain enough of a local flavor to be the information gateway for individual campus libraries.

The Orbis Cascade Alliance plan was not only for the sharing of the traditional public services operations (searching, circulation, interlibrary loan), but also in the realm of technical services. The system envisioned by the Alliance would provide for the possibility of shared collection development, shared vendor files, serials holdings information, and electronic resource licenses. The concept was one system for all members, with the emphasis on sharing, to the extent possible, all library operations that were not either private or restricted to one institution. This paper will illustrate the process that the Orbis Cascade Alliance used to realize this goal and to pioneer the library system of the future.

### Foundational Steps

Given the benefits of a move to a shared library management system, the Alliance and its member libraries began a multi-year process of exploring systems options and performing planning work for a potential migration. In 2008, following a difficult negotiation with Innovative Interfaces over the continued use of Innovative's INN-Reach consortial borrowing software, the Alliance migrated its returnable borrowing ser-



vice support from INN-Reach to OCLC's WorldCat Navigator. Prior to this migration, all Orbis Cascade institutions used the Innovative Interfaces Millennium system to support local library operations and INN-Reach to support consortium borrowing. The migration encouraged staff at the Alliance and at member libraries to think more broadly about management systems and automated library services. In the following year, the Alliance Council (composed of the directors of the Alliance libraries) identified the future of integrated library systems as a strategic area of emphasis.

As a follow-up to setting library management systems as a strategic priority, the Alliance Council created two groups to perform exploratory work. The first was a Shared ILS Team, which was tasked with investigating the legal and governance aspects of a migration to a management system shared by all Alliance libraries. This team also investigated the total costs (including software, hardware, and local staff) that Alliance members were paying for library management systems. The total cost of ownership study included several specific conclusions on support, server, and FTE costs that were presented to Council. These figures helped to guide the subsequent Request for Information (RFI) and Request for Proposal (RFP) efforts, in that they provided a baseline of systems expenditures for member institutions running their own management systems.

The second group appointed by Council, to support the investigation of the future of the ILS, was the Network Library System Task Force. This group had a fairly narrow charge, to work with OCLC to explore, develop, and test additional WorldCat circulation functionality and to report findings to Council. Team members performed research and testing on the circulation and acquisitions components of the software that eventually became OCLC WorldShare Management Services (WMS). One of the beneficial aspects of this work is that WMS shares a set of attributes in common with several other emerging library management system products. OCLC WMS is cloud-based; it is based on a shared data model (for example, with

a shared vendor database across the WMS community); and, it provides Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) that enable extension of the product. As a result, this experience proved valuable to the Alliance in the subsequent RFI and RFP processes. This effort represented the most in-depth engagement with a management system vendor prior to the Alliance's RFI and RFP processes. Beyond this, as the Alliance considered the possibility of a procurement process, staff at the Alliance and its member libraries worked to become more informed about management and discovery system options, both commercial and open source. This included communicating with vendors, attending presentations at conferences, and participating in product release webinars.

During the same period, the Alliance continued to develop its policies for collaborative collection development. In November 2007, Council adopted this statement:

As an Alliance, we consider the combined collections of member institutions as one collection. While member institutions continue to acquire their own material, the Alliance is committed to cooperative collection development to leverage member institutions' resources to better serve our users.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, beyond the vision for collaborative technical services described in the introduction, the Alliance needed a management system capable of supporting cooperative collection development. Both this need and opportunities for cost reduction were factors in moving the Orbis Cascade Alliance towards a procurement process for a shared management system.

Finally, a Collaborative Technical Services Team worked in 2011 to develop a set of "shared practices around the creation of bibliographic records in a shared database."<sup>4</sup> These practices - or mandates - are designed to guide Alliance libraries in areas such as the selection of bibliographic utility (with OCLC used as the primary bibliographic utility) and the structure and completeness of bibliographic records. This team's work enabled Alliance libraries to more



closely align their technical services operations prior to any procurement decision or SILS implementation.

### **Request for Information**

As a follow-up to the Shared ILS Team's work in 2010, Council approved the creation of another Shared ILS Team in November 2010 to support a Request for Information process. A team of six librarians, led by the Alliance's Executive Director John Helmer, created an RFI document<sup>5</sup> and oversaw the subsequent RFI process.

The RFI document described both the intent and the limits of the process. It defined the Alliance's strategic goals and an envisioned timeline, along with the notification that the RFI was "issued solely for information and planning purposes and does not constitute a solicitation." Two aspects of this process are worthy of attention. First, the instructions in the RFI encouraged vendors to think creatively in offering solutions to meet the Alliance's goal of moving to a shared management system. Second, based upon the RFI responses and vendor presentations, the Alliance's RFI team would assess whether or not the market was mature enough to support a follow-up RFP process to select a management system that, in the words of the RFI, "exceeds traditional ILS capabilities."

The RFI document was issued in early February 2011, with a due date for written responses of March 31, 2011. While RFI participation was not tied to the subsequent Request for Proposal process, both of the RFP finalist vendors (Ex Libris and Innovative Interfaces) and three of the four vendors selected to participate in the presentations portion of the RFP also participated in the RFI process.

Four vendors - Equinox, Ex Libris, Innovative Interfaces, and OCLC - presented their responses to the RFI on June 9, 2011 at the University of Washington in Seattle. The attendees from the Alliance side included members of the Alliance's RFI team, the heads of related Alliance groups, and some members of Council. The ninety-minute sessions were informally structured, giv-

ing vendors wide latitude in their presentations. Some chose to have more structured product presentations with PowerPoint slides followed by discussion, while others opted for a more conversational and informal approach. The RFI team created a set of discussion questions<sup>6</sup> that was distributed to each of the vendors prior to the presentations. These questions focused on issues such as component separability (for example, the ability to separate management services from discovery services), the integration of the proposed management solution with the existing OCLC WorldCat Navigator consortium borrowing system, cost requirements, and expected timeframes for solution implementation.

As a result of this process, the RFI team concluded that proceeding to procurement for an SILS was the best course of action. The team's final report noted that "there is an active and reasonably competitive market for new library management products that hold the promise of replacing traditional ILS, expanding service to patrons, supporting key Alliance goals such as collaborative technical services, and significantly lowering the total cost of ownership."<sup>7</sup> From a business standpoint, the team also recommended that the Alliance serve as the lead agency in any procurement process.

In summary, the RFI process was a critical step in the Alliance's move to a shared library management system. Unlike the subsequent RFP process that followed, the RFI process included in-person meetings with vendor representatives. It provided a less formal process for the Alliance to judge the maturity of the library management system market. Based upon the written responses from vendors and the in-person presentations, the RFI team concluded that there was a reasonable chance that the Alliance would be able to procure a shared management system product with improved functionality and reduced costs in comparison with legacy ILS products.

### **Request for Proposal**

#### **A. Creation of the Shared Implementation RFP Team**



Once the decision had been reached to proceed with the project after the positive responses to the RFI, the Alliance's Board of Directors (composed of the Alliance's Executive Director and a subset of the directors on Council) began by soliciting members for the Shared ILS Team (SILST). A message<sup>8</sup> went out to all staff in the 37 member libraries soliciting nominations to serve on this team, with the stated goal to "create, advertise and score a formal Request for Proposal; gather input from members; and communicate with vendors."

Staff were encouraged to nominate colleagues in their libraries with the needed skills to help accomplish this goal or to self-nominate if they were interested in serving on the team. The Alliance Board sought a broad representation of skills from member libraries, stating that "input from staff with many different skills and backgrounds will be needed for this project, including user interface design, systems, resource sharing (ILL, Summit, etc.), reference, instruction, communication, cataloging, administration, and acquisitions."<sup>9</sup> The nomination form that the applicants filled out included a text box to explain the qualifications and other relevant information about why the nominee should be selected to serve on the Shared ILS Team. This information would help the Alliance Board in the final selection of members. The announcement also included information on the time commitment expected for this task, with the bulk of the work being done between September 2011 and July 2012.

The solicitation for volunteers brought in over 60 applications to serve on SILST from a variety of backgrounds. From the pool of applicants, 12 librarians were chosen to be members. Not only did the skill sets among the members chosen represent a variety of backgrounds and perspectives, but also diversity in the types of libraries and geographic location. The breakdown of SILST members' home institutions is shown in Table 1.

## **B. Shared Integrated Library Systems Team (SILST)**

### **1. Organizing the SILST's work**

SILST was chaired by the Executive Director of the Orbis Cascade Alliance. To help make the writing of the Request for Proposal more manageable, the other SILST members were divided into several working groups, with each member assigned to one (or more) groups. The working groups and their areas of responsibilities are shown in Table 2.

### **2. Team communication**

With the geographic diversity among SILST members, email and conference calls were the main forms of communication. Each working group used Google Docs as a way to facilitate writing the sections of the RFP that their members were responsible for producing. Various drafts could be reviewed and shared not only with the other working group members but also with all members of SILST.

### **3. The RFP timeline**

The timeline for the Shared ILS project, including the RFP process, was very concentrated. From the formation of the SILST in September 2011, the RFP was due to be drafted and ready to publish by the end of December 2011. This proved challenging for all the members but, with weekly conference calls, two in-person meetings for the entire team, and the assistance of the Alliance staff with logistics, the deadline was achieved.

## **C. The RFP process**

### **1. Drafting the RFP**

Each working group was responsible for drafting their portion of the RFP under the general direction of the working group chair (selected by the Alliance Board). The members of the working groups worked in a collaborative fashion to draft and critique the documents being written by their colleagues, often using emails or conference calls to share concepts or language

TYPE OF INSTITUTION	NAME
State academic universities	University of Oregon, University of Washington, Washington State University, Southern Oregon University
Private colleges and universities	Willamette University, Reed College, Linfield College, University of Puget Sound
Community colleges	Portland Community College, Chemeketa Community College

Table 1

WORKING GROUP	NUMBER OF SILST MEMBERS	AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITIES
Cataloging/ Acquisitions	3	Acquisitions management, serials management, electronic resources management, collection maintenance, description and metadata (cataloging, holdings management, authority control, etc.)
Circulation and Resource Sharing	2	Borrowing and lending processing, circulation (billing & payments, course reserves, patrons, etc.) statistics and reporting, communication and notification, circulation/ILL integration
Discovery and User Experience	2	Discovery, user-system interaction, interface design & Integration, APIs and user-centered data
Systems	4	Reliability, scalability & performance, architecture, data security & data access, authentication, integration & extensibility, migration, vendor support
Sister Consortia	2	Communicate with other consortia that are potentially impacted by the Shared ILS initiative: summarize each group's goals and desired approach.
Communication	1	External communication to member libraries on Shared ILS project
Council Liaison	1	Keep Alliance Council (composed of the directors of all 37 member libraries) apprised of SILST activities

Table 2

suggestions. In some cases, members from other Alliance libraries who were not officially part of SILST but had expertise in a certain area were invited to join the discussion and help draft the document. At the weekly conference call with the entire SILST, the chair of each working group provided a status report on the progress being made and what areas of the RFP were yet to be finished. This process helped to keep all members of SILST on track and current with the work of the entire team.

## 2. Elements included in the RFP

Due to the nature of the Alliance project, the RFP was to be a departure from the standard

RFP language. At the time of the RFP process, a library system that would accomplish the goals of the Alliance project did not actually exist in a final form. Although many vendors had begun to develop parts of the ideal system, no vendor had a completed system that was available for purchase. This meant that the members of SILST had to determine a way to put into concrete words the end results that they would like to see in a new system that were achievable and realistic.

Although the Alliance RFP followed the traditional format of RFPs, it differed in several important aspects. First, each section of the RFP began with an introduction, outlining the ambi-



tious concept of system development that the team wanted to see from each vendor. Because this system was to be a fully integrated public and technical services system, clarification from vendors on system integration models for member libraries was essential. The introduction for each section, which often stressed the collaborative nature of this project, helped anchor each section under the same general theme.

Second, it was not enough for SILST to just list all the requirements that were to be included in each section, although that was certainly part of the final RFP. Instead, each working group came up with a set of questions that asked the vendors to describe how their solution would address whatever scenario was proposed. This allowed the vendors to be creative in their responses to the RFP. Allowing the vendors to propose their own solutions to library workflows, collection management, system architecture, etc., opened up the process. This approach helped to prevent both the team and the vendors from looking at each required element through a single lens of an existing system and to start thinking about new methods of achieving the Alliance's goals.

However, much specific detail was included in the RFP that followed traditional RFP standards. For example, there were questions as to whether the proposed solution would be able to integrate with OCLC WorldCat and support RDA (Resource Description and Access), NCIP (NISO Circulation Interchange Protocol), and RFID (Radio Frequency Identification). Although the Alliance was envisioning the next generation of library system software, the selected vendor had to be able to support the current standards in use today. The 40 page Alliance RFP can be found at:

<http://www.orbiscascade.org/index/rfp>.

### 3. Evaluation

Once the drafts of the RFP were completed, the SILST turned its attention to the evaluation process. From the beginning of the process, demon-

strations of the proposed solution to the Alliance RFP were included in the planning. Because this would be a two-step process -- first the written RFP, followed by the product demonstrations -- the group decided to compile two separate evaluation scores, one for each step. The top scores for the written RFP portion would be invited to give product demonstrations; the top scores for the product demonstrations were added to the RFP scores to determine the vendors to be considered for the final contract negotiations.

It was imperative that the tool used for scoring be as fair and accurate as possible, allowing for multiple systems to be compared on the same set of metrics. To achieve this goal, the SILST devised a ranking system that assigned a numerical value to different components of the RFP and the RFP process. Based on the ranking numbers for each vendor, a percentage would be assigned to each component, resulting in a grand total for both the written RFP and the product demonstrations.

The point system that the SILST developed was the result of long discussions during one of the in-person meetings of the group. Working groups suggested the number of points that they thought were appropriate for their section based on how critical that piece of the RFP was to the eventual success of the system that was selected. All members of the SILST were invited to give their opinions on the suggested rankings and they were often adjusted up or down based on the consensus of the group.

The SILST also decided to allow vendors to bid on two options in response to the RFP. They could bid on the total package (including the staff functions and discovery) or on just one of the elements (either staff functions or discovery). All the vendors but one responded with a bid for the total package; the other response was for the discovery element only.

The ranking system is described in Table 3.



	Phase 2: Proposal	Phase 3: Product Demo	Total possible points	% of Total
Responsiveness to RFP	5	N/A	5	2.5%
Collections and Resource Management	10	30	50	25%
Description and Metadata	10			
Circulation and Resource Sharing	10	20	30	15%
Discovery and User Experience	10	30	40	20%
Systems	10	20	30	15%
Price	30	N/A	30	15%
Business references and vendor capacity	15	n/a	15	7.5%
TOTAL	100	100	200	100

Table 3

#### 4. Finalizing and issuing the RFP

Once a draft RFP had been prepared by the Shared ILS Team, it was sent out to all member library staffs for their review and input. The draft RFP was released to member libraries on December 1, 2011 with a deadline for comments by December 19.

To collect the comments/suggestions, the SILST set up a web form on the Alliance web site, which could be used by any library staff member. Comments could be identified or anonymous on the web form and could be as detailed or general as desired. Library staff members were also encouraged to send emails either directly to the members of the SILST or to their Institutional Representatives for the Shared ILS Initiative. (Note: Each member institution of the Orbis Cascade Alliance chose a representative from their library to serve as the point person for any questions about the new ILS project from their staff.) In addition, many member libraries held staff meetings to go over the RFP and often provided a single library-wide response from their campus to the proposal.

In addition, the SILST hosted a series of webinars in mid-December to explain the concepts in the RFP and to seek feedback from the viewing audience. Each webinar was led by the chair of the working group (Systems, User Services, and Circulation/Resource Sharing). The Alliance staff facilitated the setup and operation of these

webinars, which proved to be an effective way to reach a wide audience. There was no webinar offered for the Cataloging/Acquisitions Working Group because that community held a conference, open to all member library staffs, in December that dedicated part of its agenda to the RFP.

Feedback from the emails, web forms, webinars, and meetings was consolidated by the SILST into spreadsheets and distributed to all members of the team. These comments proved to be very helpful in adding elements to the RFP that had been overlooked or to clarify the language in the RFP to make it more understandable. Due to the sheer number of comments and limited time frame, it was not possible to reply individually to each library staff member. All were assured, however, that their comments had been read and considered by the SILST.

It also became apparent after reading the comments that there was some level of confusion as to why the RFP did not include more specific detail in each section. As has already been noted, the SILST approach was to write the RFP in broad outlines of what was hoped for, leaving it up to the vendors to respond with new ways to achieve the outcomes. Not presuming a particular approach to any library workflow question provided maximum flexibility to the vendors to be creative, but was a difficult concept for some library staff members to grasp.

The written RFP was issued on January 2, 2012 through library listservs, direct emails to vendors, and publication in Oregon and Washington newspapers. Many vendors, already familiar with the project by their written response to the RFI in 2011, were notified of the RFP publication.

Any vendors that were interested in responding to the RFP were required to submit a Declaration of Intent to Bid form by January 16. The final date for the submission of responses to the RFP was February 29, 2012.

At the end of February, the Alliance had received responses from the following vendors:

- EBSCO Industries, Inc.
- Ex Libris (USA), Inc.
- Innovative Interfaces, Inc.
- OCLC Online Computer Library Center, Inc.
- Serials Solutions, a ProQuest business

#### 5. Evaluation of the RFP

Early in March, the Shared ILS Team met in-person to review the written portion of the RFP. Based on the scoring system that had been devised, each vendor's response was graded for the completeness of their answers and how well they answered the specific questions. Each section of the RFP was scrutinized and grades were assigned, discussed, and revised throughout the two day meeting. Based on the final grades, four of the vendors (all of which included a staff function and discovery option) were invited to provide a demonstration of their products.

#### 6. Product Demonstrations

The product demonstrations were planned to be open to all staff at the Alliance member libraries. This would be the first time that many of the staff would be exposed to their products, and it was an important part of the entire process.

To avoid having the vendors present a standard sales presentation that might not address the specific issues that the Shared ILS Team had identified as critical, various scenarios were compiled by the working groups to highlight these areas. Each working group drew up a series of scenarios involving anticipated patron transactions or library workflows that would address multiple issues in the RFP. These scenarios were sent to the vendors in advance to guide them in the preparation for their product demonstrations.<sup>10</sup>

The first week in April 2012 was designated for product demonstrations. Each vendor was given one day for their presentation, allocated as shown in Table 4.

Each vendor was required to host a live webinar, and make available a recording of the webinar for those staff that were not able to view the product demonstrations at the appointed day and time.

The logistics of setting up four different webinars from various vendors proved to be challenging, but with exception of a few minor connection problems, the demonstrations were successful. Each session was moderated by the chair of the working group, whose mission was to follow up on any answers that were not complete or did not address the scenario. The SILST decided against soliciting questions from the

9:00am -10:00am	Systems
10:30am-12:30pm	Collections & resource management, description and metadata
1:30pm-2:30pm	Discovery
3:00pm-4:00pm	Circulation and resource sharing

Table 4



audience, fearing that the vendors may get too overloaded with overly specific inquiries and run out of time to address all the scenarios. Instead, audience members were urged to submit their questions through the Alliance web site or via email to the chairs of the working groups. These questions were collected and sent to the vendors at the end of the week for their responses.

#### 7. Checking customer references

Included in the RFP was a requirement that each vendor supply three references from other libraries that were not current members of the Orbis Cascade Alliance. In addition, the Alliance reserved the right to seek two additional references of its choosing, making a total of five references per vendor.

Once the RFPs were officially submitted, a group of Shared ILS Team members began calling these references to solicit feedback on their experience with the RFP vendors under consideration. The feedback from the reference calls was shared with the other SILST members during the weekly conference calls, and also were part of the discussion at the in-person meetings of the entire team.

#### 8. Evaluation of the Product Demonstrations and Final Grade

In mid-April, the SILST met for a final in-person meeting to do an evaluation of the product demonstrations. The product demonstrations were graded according to the scoring system that had previously been developed. Just as in the case of grading the written portion of the RFP, the grades were discussed, revised, and adjusted as each team member gave feedback. At the end of the process, the grades for the written portion of the RFP were combined with the grade for the product demonstrations to arrive at a final grade per vendor. This final grade represented the consensus of the group as to the overall quality of the proposed solution and how it compared to the other vendors' solutions. The grades served as the basis for the SILST's recommendation to the Alliance's Council on moving forward in the pro-

urement process.

#### Negotiation

The next step of the process was negotiation. The Alliance's Board decided to appoint a new team for this stage to bring in a different set of skills and expertise. Moving to a smaller team would also help move this process along quickly, as the RFP process had taken somewhat longer than expected. The Negotiation Team members were the Executive Director of the Alliance, the Treasurer of the Alliance and university librarians at Oregon Health Sciences University and Willamette University, and the Associate Dean at University of Washington Libraries (who also had served on the RFP team). Each of these team members had a deep background in business processes and negotiation with vendors, as well as bringing the perspectives of different types of libraries within the Alliance. The University of Washington team member also brought significant technical depth and product knowledge.

The SILST that oversaw the RFP process had ended their work with two vendors to consider, Ex Libris and Innovative Interfaces. Without a single partner for negotiation, the Negotiation Team decided to start their process by creating a Letter of Intent with both vendors. Creating a full contract at this stage would require a significant amount of time and work, not to mention the cost of a lawyer, so starting with a Letter would formalize important aspects of an eventual contract and help narrow the choice down to a single vendor.

The process of finalizing Letters of Intent with both vendors was iterative, with drafts going back and forth between the parties for weeks. The Letter of Intent set out what the Alliance agreed to with each vendor, but was non-binding. It detailed what the price of the system would be, the implementation schedule, the nature of the relationship, and a commitment to outcomes. This commitment to high-level outcomes was a useful tool to indicate a holistic expectation of a successful system without delineating the many evolving details of what that system would look like.



Working with the vendors in writing these letters was a good way to see what they would be like as partners and if their vision matched that of the Alliance. Communication problems at any stage in the negotiation could mean there were differences in understanding that might have repercussions in the future.

The main challenges in creating these Letters were crafting a pricing formula and drafting a plan for the timing of payments. As the Alliance was unsure of which libraries would be migrating in what cohort, the pricing had to be a formula, instead of an exact number to be paid at certain times. The Negotiation Team also needed to figure out how to split costs within the Alliance in an equitable way, as well as create a payment plan that was acceptable for the vendors. The team spent considerable time and energy analyzing various cost distribution formulae, considering the pros and cons of perpetuating current expenditures, and looking at approaches to phasing in new costs.

Once the Letters of Intent were finalized and signed, the Negotiation Team brought the Letters and a proposed cost distribution formula to the Alliance Board. In the end, the proposed formula was 60 percent weighted by three-year average student FTE and 40 percent flat fee regardless of the size of the institution. This fairly simple formula has been used to distribute Alliance membership fees for many years so it is familiar to consortium members. Based on the Letters of Intent and the entire RFP process, the Negotiation Team recommended that the Alliance proceed with Ex Libris. The Board endorsed the vendor recommendation as well as the fee formula, and the decision passed to Alliance Council for the final decision.

The Council voted in three rounds, interspersed with discussion of the vendors and the process. Each Alliance member institution has one vote on matters before Council. The first round addressed whether or not the Alliance should even move forward with a shared ILS or wait for the market to evolve further. There was one vote to wait and 36 to move forward. The next two votes looked at each of the candidate vendors and the result was

in favor of Ex Libris. While there was some initial division in opinion, the Council discussed the options in detail and the ultimate vote for Ex Libris was unanimous. The move throughout the meeting toward unanimity showed the culture of collaboration within the consortium and the willingness of the group to trust each other and put forth effort toward a shared goal.

In announcing the Alliance's decision to license Alma and Primo, Executive Director John Helmer noted that "Ex Libris was a clear standout and judged to be the preferred option. Such alignment and consistency across 37 members engaged in a two-year long effort is both remarkable and gratifying."<sup>11</sup> Several attributes of the vendor and the products created this alignment, including Ex Libris' focus, as a company, on support for academic libraries. The Alliance came into the RFI and RFP processes with the intent of moving to a set of services that exceed traditional ILS functionality and the Alma management system and extensions to its consortium functionality will enable the Alliance to achieve this goal. The architecture described in its RFP response includes a Network Zone, a shared bibliographic records catalog for Alliance libraries that maps well to the Alliance's plans for collaborative technical services. Additionally, institution-level catalogs will support the storage of local data fields. Data will be drawn from the Network Zone and an institution's catalog to support resource discovery in Primo. While the Primo discovery system wasn't being used by any of the Alliance libraries, it was highly scored during the RFP process and is optimized for the Alma management system. Finally, Ex Libris had a track record of providing API access for its products such as Primo, and the ability to extend Alma and Primo functionality to meet user needs was another attractive attribute of Ex Libris' proposal.

After the Council decision to proceed with Ex Libris, the Negotiation Team started work on a contract. There were a number of complicated issues to decide between the Alliance and Ex Libris. Chief among them were the service level agreement, patron data security and privacy issues, the terms for new consortium members to join the shared system, and once again, the tim-



ing of payments. While the Letter of Intent had addressed some of these issues, the Letter was non-binding and did not include many details so the contract needed to spell out any potentially contentious points or areas where misunderstandings might occur. The process of crafting a contract was iterative once again, with drafts going back and forth between the Alliance and Ex Libris negotiation teams.

The final contract is in the form of a main document with several annexes or appendices. The main contract contains standard language about term, limitation of liability, governing law, and *force majeure*. Several of the appendices cover housekeeping issues such as data about the size of each school, while others cover payment terms and the service level agreement. An important appendix for both parties details the commitment to outcomes, working relationships, and what success will look like for this project. This concept was included in the Letter of Intent, but restating it in the contract imparted a broader sense of commitment to a working relationship and the high-level goals expressed throughout the RFP process.

Once the contract was substantially complete, the Alliance sent it to a contract lawyer for review. To avoid heavy legal costs, a lawyer was only brought in to review legal aspects of the document once business and technical matters were firmed up. The Alliance recently transitioned from functioning as part of the University of Oregon (a state agency) to an independent nonprofit 501(c)(3). This meant that the Alliance could contract with outside legal help, rather than working through university legal and purchasing requirements. Functioning as an independent organization helped move the project along quickly.

Finally a contract was created and signed by both parties. The Negotiation Team felt that the process went well and they were happy with the result. The most challenging parts were the amount of time required to create this contract, scheduling complexities for team members distributed across many time zones, the speed with which the contract needed to be created to meet internal

deadlines, and the complications of version control when editing a document as a group. However, the end result was satisfactory for both parties and the Alliance could move on to implementation.

## Conclusion

After the negotiation process, the Alliance had a contract for Ex Libris Alma and Primo. Since the Alliance is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, it did not need to run an RFP to choose a vendor. Instead the consortium could have simply polled its members and chosen. However, the process itself was worthwhile because it provided a formal scoring system that considered issues like conflict of interest. Members could point to a rigorous process when talking with staff in purchasing and contracting offices on their campus, since some schools have strict state regulations to consider. One downside of an RFP was that open source products were not in the candidate pool, because they had no organization that could place a bid. The RFP provided a formal structure to the Alliance process but drove the candidate pool toward commercial vendors.

The Alliance's decision to license the Ex Libris Alma management system and Primo discovery solutions is consistent with a trend noted by library technology expert Marshall Breeding. Given the increasing interdependencies of discovery and management functions (including Electronic Resources Management and OpenURL knowledge bases), "comprehensive product suites" like Alma and Primo have a great deal of appeal, particularly to accomplish complex activities such as collaborative technical services across a consortium.<sup>12</sup>

The next step for the Alliance is implementation. A project manager has been chosen and she will manage an Implementation Team to help the consortium implement the new ILS. The core team will have seven members from the Alliance, besides the project manager. The members represent cataloging, acquisitions, serials/e-resources, circulation and resource sharing, discovery, systems, and collection development. Each member has a working group to help them, except the



collection development member who will rely on the standing Collection Development and Management committee of the Alliance. This Implementation Team will focus on migration to the new system while a sister team called the Collaborative Technical Services Team will focus on establishing best practices for member libraries. An additional Policy Team will consider high-level policy issues that affect the entire consortium. The first cohort of libraries is scheduled to migrate in June 2013, followed by three more cohorts staggered six months apart.

As the Alliance proceeds toward implementation of the new shared ILS, the member libraries can rely on their fellow institutions for help and support. There was a strong consensus within the Alliance backing the vendor choice and many opportunities for participation and input from consortium members throughout the RFP process so the consortium can be confident that all member libraries will put the work in to make the new system succeed. The selected system meets the goal of exceeding traditional ILS functionality as well as providing a discovery layer that will bring together the collections of the member libraries. Alma and Primo will provide a platform from which to investigate even more ways for the Alliance libraries to collaborate. There are many challenges ahead with the implementation of this new system, but the Alliance's drive and ability to work as a team will make this migration successful and a model for other consortia to follow.

## References

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<sup>5</sup>Orbis Cascade Alliance. *Request for Information: Consortium Library Management Service*. 2011. [http://www.orbiscascade.org/RFI\\_2011\\_02.pdf](http://www.orbiscascade.org/RFI_2011_02.pdf).

<sup>6</sup>Orbis Cascade Alliance. "Appendix A: RFI discussion questions" from *Final report, Shared ILS Team: Prepared for the Council of Library Directors Meeting on 2011 July 13-14*. 2011

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<sup>8</sup>John Helmer, e-mail message to Alliance Announcements listserv, August 5, 2011.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>Orbis Cascade Alliance. "Shared ILS RFP: Product demonstrations." 2012

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<sup>11</sup>Orbis Cascade Alliance. "RFP for a shared library management service." 2012

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<sup>12</sup>Marshall Breeding. "The Systems Librarian: Tech review and forecast for 2013" from *Computers in Libraries*, December 2012

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