

Selection and Procurement Strategies

The procurement, selection, and implementation of any strategic library automation product has always been a complex process for libraries. These products are involved with almost all aspects of the library's operation, so any change must be made carefully to ensure the least disruption through any transition, and the library must have a high level of confidence that any new system will offer substantial benefits.

The process for procuring integrated library systems is well established. Each library must follow its own procurement rules and processes required by its governing agency or organization. The functional specifications for library technology products tend to be shared widely. A library undergoing a selection process can develop its own set of specifications and requirements that are informed by procurement documents that might be available. Each library naturally has its own set of concerns and operational issues that it expects to be addressed by the new product.

The need to acquire a new product can be driven by a variety of circumstances or issues:

- The incumbent system is no longer supported by its supplier.
- The needs of the library have changed since the incumbent system was implemented. A common scenario involves the need to manage electronic resources in ways not addressed by the incumbent product.
- The library is not satisfied with the performance of the supplier.
- The cost of maintaining the current system is determined to be higher than the value received and there is evidence that a new product could be acquired and operated at a lower level of cost.

The emergence of the new library services platforms provides an alternative that many libraries may see as beneficial. The existence of a new category of resource management products also complicates the selection process to the extent that libraries may have to decide whether to pursue a library services platform or an integrated library system.

The current state of the library technology industry does not lend itself to processes that are specifically limited to one or the other category: library services platform or integrated library system. Any decision to focus on one category over the other will usually come only after the library has established its strategic priorities and has done a preliminary review of the capabilities of the available products.

In developing a library technology strategy, some of the key considerations might include these:

- Whether to automate as a stand-alone library or to join in a shared implementation with other library partners. Those already sharing a system via a consortium may want to evaluate possibilities of expanding to include new members or merging with other consortia with mutual interests. Libraries that have historically operated their own independent automation systems may want to investigate any opportunities to form a new alliance or join an existing consortium. Independent implementations will remain the most common strategy.
- Assessment of the scope of collections and services expected to be managed by the new system. As noted in chapter 1, many libraries have ended up with a fragmented technology support environment. The availability of library services platforms opens up the possibility that multiple systems

could be subsumed into a single platform. Libraries will need to assess the extent to which they expect specialized collections such as archives or digital resources to be within the scope of the proposed new system.

- As discussed in chapter 3, several options apply to how a library will manage patron discovery relative to a library services platform. Many libraries may prefer, or at least be willing, to accept the discovery service packaged with a library services platform. Others may have discovery services in place that function well and are expected to remain in place.
- Existing product scenarios. Libraries with a positive relationship with the vendor of their integrated library system or discovery service may be interested in pursuing its library services platform via a sole-source procurement process. Libraries that ultimately pursue a sole-source process do so only after considerable investigation of all the alternatives.
- Many institutions may be required to always follow a competitive procurement process, even when they have a predisposition toward a particular vendor or product.
- When conducting a competitive procurement, libraries may opt for different approaches, depending on the expectations or requirements of their business offices and on their preferred methods for gathering sufficient information to evaluate products and make a selection. Some may

follow a more lightweight approach where they develop a vision document or request for information that articulates their general characteristics and high-level strategic requirements and invites vendors to respond with proposals that describe how their product would meet those expectations. Another approach might involve the development of a detailed request for proposals that not only expresses general expectations but also presents a detailed list of functional requirements in each area of library operations the system is expected to address. The creation of such a detailed RFP requires a significant amount of time and effort by library personnel but can lead to more clarity in the specific capabilities that may or may not be present among the competing systems.

- Consideration of an open-source product is usually addressed as part of the high-level strategy discussions. In the integrated library systems arena, there are open-source products supported by commercial firms that can be considered in most procurement scenarios. Only one open-source option, Quali OLE, is available in the library services platform category. Libraries interested in this option would likely pursue an engagement with the project's existing library partners and commercial support affiliates rather than expect the product to fit into a standard competitive procurement process. As the product matures, commercial entities may be able to respond to RFPs oriented to library services platforms.