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*Strategic Technology Partnerships Plan*

For

Suburban Library Cooperative  
&  
The Library Network

March 26, 2007

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## ***About the Technology Planning Project***

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The Library Network (TLN) and the Suburban Library Cooperative (SLC) are engaged in strategic technology planning, for each consortium individually and also in regard to opportunities for enhanced cooperation between the two consortia. TLN and SLC engaged the consulting firm of Joseph Ford and Associates (JF&A) to conduct the strategic technology planning study.

Information gathering for strategic technology planning has included these activities:

- On-site visits in SLC and TLN libraries, focus groups with staff of SLC and TLN libraries, meetings with representatives of SLC and TLN libraries, and meetings with SLC and TLN technology staff.
- Four online surveys: staff and patron surveys for SLC, and staff and patron surveys for TLN. The surveys were administered online with access from member library websites.
- Information from suppliers (e.g., SirsiDynix) and potential suppliers (e.g., Michigan Library Consortium).
- Prioritization of potential planning topics, as provided by leadership representatives of each consortium.
- Discussions and feedback regarding the “Recommended Strategic Technology Directions” and “Recommended Strategic Technology Partnerships” provided to SLC and TLN by the consulting firm on November 30, 2006.
- Meetings and discussions with library staff, cooperative staff, and cooperative boards of both TLN and SLC, March 6–8, 2007.

## ***Why Strategic Technology Partnerships?***

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The Suburban Library Cooperative and The Library Network have much in common.

- Both are library consortia serving primarily public libraries.
- Both are in the Detroit metropolitan area, and are adjacent each other.
- Both operate the SirsiDynix Unicorn software, and manage support and services for their members.
- Both provide and/or support other, affiliated technologies, such as PC reservation and print cost recovery.
- Both provide other electronic resources such as database subscriptions.
- Both provide courier services to deliver materials from one library to another.

Not surprisingly, the two organizations also seek to identify and implement programs that can build on their similarities to improve services, reduce costs, or improve staff efficiencies.

## Strategic Technology Partnership Topics

Earlier in this planning project, the consultant provided SLC and TLN with a document that examined “Potential Strategic Technology Partnerships.” As part of the prioritization process for this planning project, both SLC and TLN determined a priority ranking for these potential partnership topics.

Table 1: Strategic Partnership Topics

SLC Preferred Sequence	TLN Preferred Sequence
Enhanced delivery between SLC & TLN	System sharing / system linking
System sharing / system linking	Enhanced delivery between SLC & TLN
Share maintenance and support of ILS	Administrative services sharing/ merger
Administrative services sharing/ merger	Share maintenance and support of ILS
Facilities sharing	Facilities sharing
Merger of the organizations	Merger of the organizations

For the purposes of this report, sharing of administrative services, facilities, and ILS support and maintenance are not considered reasonable undertakings, nor is an organizational merger.

Planning for strategic partnerships between SLC and TLN will focus on these topics:

- System linking of the SirsiDynix-provided Unicorn integrated library systems.
- Enhanced system features in Unicorn.
- Enhanced delivery between SLC and TLN.
- Joint investment in and operation of RFID-driven Automated Materials Handling.

These topics have the most likelihood of showing a good return on SLC-TLN investment of both finances and other resources, notably staff time. These topics were also prioritized as among the top by both cooperatives.

## Planning Principles for Strategic Partnerships

In developing Strategic Technology Planning Reports for TLN and SLC, the consultant provided a recommended set of “Planning Principles” that should underlie all technology planning for each cooperative.

In addition, the consultant urges this planning principle as TLN and SLC plan for strategic technology partnerships:

- The two cooperatives should work closely together in strategic technology planning and make technology decisions that are enough alike that the two cooperatives can interoperate.

## ***Sharing an Integrated Library System***

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The reality of any system sharing of the current ILS product is that it does not make technical, financial, or administrative sense to try to put both consortia onto a single system or single server, for these reasons:

- A single location for housing equipment would mean that one or both support staff would be required to relocate.
- Geographic spread is already a challenge for both cooperatives. Consolidating support in a single site would exacerbate that problem.
- SLC currently operates at just enough technical staffing to support its members. All indications are that TLN needs to increase its technical support staff. There are no significant staffing efficiencies to be gained by combining systems.
- Current software licenses and hardware would be inadequate to support a combined system. The software licensing agreements could probably be migrated, but there would be substantial technical and administrative overhead of that migration process. The disruption of developing new software agreements, of file unloading and reloading, new equipment purchase and installation, and shifting networks and related gear is far beyond any likely benefits.
- The two organizations operate very different Wide Area Networks, and both have recently made significant investments in the “front-end” linkages to those networks. Abandoning those investments would be costly, and the alternative, were the two organizations to merge their ILS server environments, would require one or the other to abandon existing network technology and invest in new technology.

## ***Linking the SLC and TLN Integrated Library Systems***

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Linking the integrated library systems of SLC and TLN is an entirely reasonable goal, both for technology and patron services, including reciprocal borrowing between the two cooperatives. The consultant recommends pursuing system linking as a major strategic technology partnership.

Two affiliated methods exist for linking that would produce the full range of interoperability sought by TLN and SLC, including reciprocal borrowing:

1. Through MeLCat, with the addition of a full NISO Circulation Interchange Protocol (NCIP) capability from Innovative Interfaces and SirsiDynix.

This opportunity appears to be in development as reported by contacts with Randy Dykhuis at the Michigan Library Consortium. With the pending participation of both SLC and TLN in MeLCat and with the pending implementation of fully compliant NCIP products from both vendors involved, this option will likely be the best opportunity for system linking, in conjunction with the second option of installing the EPS portal software.

2. Through installation of the SirsiDynix EPS portal software.

This option would provide catalog linking and would also make Federated Searching available.

A third, very limited, linking method is available but not recommended: Linking via installation and implementation of a Z39.50 feature in both SLC and TLN:

This feature would also link the catalogs but without the patron access and lending features needed for true system linking. It would be possible to see that an item exists in the other catalog, but without any of the features available that make access and circulation possible, such as item status and patron information. This step is not recommended since it provides too little real interoperability.

## **Consultant's Recommendations Regarding System Linking**

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The Planning Principles addressed in both documents, provided to SLC and TLN, are highly appropriate for this Strategic Partnership document as well. Rather than repeat in full with the recommendations set forth in the two other documents, a brief summary is offered here.

1. Develop a Strategic Planning Committee consisting of senior managers and technical personnel from both TLN and SLC, and have them conduct a planning process for how the catalogs will be linked, what the service goals and lending policies will be as regards borrowing across the two consortia, and how the two catalogs will be developed.
2. In partnership between TLN and SLC, acquire and install the EPS portal software, with MeLCat configuration a major focus.

3. Contract with SirsiDynix for on-site consultation in configuring the EPS portal software, and then for managing any special software development required to make the two products interact and display as SLC and TLN want them to.
4. Conduct a full rollout project with training, documentation, and patron assistance.

## **Federated Searching**

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In the separate planning reports prepared for SLC and TLN as part of this project, the consultant is recommending that both cooperatives pursue Federated Searching capability to increase use of the subscription electronic databases. Catalog linking of the SLC and TLN catalogs is an important piece of that strategy, as linking will allow patrons to search and access a wider range of electronic materials.

## **Enhance Unicorn Features**

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The surveys and site visits revealed that the staff of member libraries in both consortia want changes in display and software features in both iBistro and WorkFlows. For SLC, the consultants developed a set of recommended steps to help ensure that the Unicorn products meet as many SLC library and patron needs as possible.

For this Strategic Partnership document, the recommendations made for SLC are repeated and expanded. The thrust of this section is that the two consortia, SLC and TLN, should jointly fund and implement custom configuration and enhancement of the Unicorn products, to ensure that staff and patrons have the best interfaces and features available.

## **Making Use of Existing and Available Unicorn Features**

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From staff comments, the consultant extracted two sets of five items each as high-interest items based on focus groups and survey responses. We made those available to the vendor, SirsiDynix, for comment and advice. We also identified some performance issues. SirsiDynix has provided some responses that are incorporated into this document.

### **OPAC (iBistro) Features**

1. Improved patron experience with better on-screen iBistro controls; for example “Details” button.
2. Federated searching to include all the databases in use by SLC and TLN libraries.
3. Improved limiting and display features for media.
4. Better call number displays for local items, particularly on first screens.
5. Improved holds processes, for example, automatic patron notification when holds become available and timing of notification when holds are available.

### **WorkFlows Features**

1. Improved holds notices, routing slips, and patron binders.
2. Reduce keystrokes and steps required to handle routine tasks.
3. Improved printing from WorkFlows.
4. Improved multi-tasking, such as login to other system features (serials and circulation, for example).
5. Improved system speed; WorkFlows wizards are slow.

## **System Features**

1. Linking the two Unicorn systems to provide cross-platform search, retrieval, and display, as well as patron holds.
2. Response time improvements.

## **SirsiDynix Responses**

SirsiDynix offered an extensive set of screen displays and responses. The substance of the responses was that virtually everything that had been identified as an irritant, or an item in need of change to improve the feature or its performance, is a potential opportunity for SirsiDynix to improve.

Some examples include the following:

- OPAC displays, whether in iBistro or EPS portal, are all coded in HTML and could be modified either by local staff or by SirsiDynix staff under contract. Location of call numbers, text of screen controls, fonts, colors and locations of displayed data, all are available for modification and configuration by staff. If needed, SirsiDynix is prepared to undertake, for compensation, special configuration or coding services to customize the displays.
- Federated Searching is available as a product set from SirsiDynix, and the consultant recommends its use to help unite the catalogs of the two consortia, as well as bringing both consortia into MeLCat, and making the electronic databases subscribed by both consortia more readily accessible for patrons. Federated searching is covered in detail in each cooperative's individual *Strategic Technology Planning Report*.
- Holds processing could be handled more expeditiously, with automated features, particularly printing, that are built into the WorkFlows circulation client software, and could be made available for library staff use.
- The arrangement of software client features in WorkFlows is under control of staff, who could improve the capability of the software to handle specific tasks, and could contract with SirsiDynix for those services as well. Staff can create, with SirsiDynix's help, software wizards with specific features.
- Some of the Unicorn performance problems reported to the consultants may be related to software versions that have since been upgraded.

## **Consultant's Recommendations Regarding Unicorn Improvements**

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1. The Planning Principles apply most directly here; use them in setting priorities for and developing improvements to the SLC and TLN Unicorn implementations.
2. Solicit input from member library staff about product issues related to Unicorn, and assemble and maintain a priority list of desired features and requested changes. Make those details known to SirsiDynix and ask for costs and development plans that would make those features available.

3. Make use of the “Out of the Box Interfaces” (OBI) from SirsiDynix so long as they suit staff and patrons, but do not hesitate to have them modified if the OBI is not meeting staff and patron needs. Contract with SirsiDynix for such modifications if consortium staff is not comfortable with making them.
4. Ensure that the software upgrades from SirsiDynix are kept up to date.
5. Conduct Unicorn upgrade and refresher training at least annually, with on-site training provided by vendor personnel. Encourage library staff to bring problems to the training for discussion and potential resolution.

## ***Enhance Delivery Between SLC and TLN***

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The results of the various surveys conducted for this project make clear that patrons are interested in expanded materials access. The interloan numbers within each cooperative make it equally clear that catalog search and delivery systems are the methods of choice for most patrons to gain that access.

The two organizations are already experiencing 16 percent (SLC) and 19 percent (TLN) growth in interlending among each cooperative's libraries. With a linked set of catalogs and patron files, and with MeLCat in operation, lending between the two cooperatives will explode.

This is the strategic partnership effort for which the two organizations have the most planning and operational control. The development of an enhanced delivery system between the two organizations would require less third-party assistance than will be required (from SirsiDynix) for system linking.

One potential barrier exists for enhanced delivery between SLC and TLN, which is that SLC contracts for delivery, and TLN operates its own delivery. Should the two organizations elect to have their delivery systems linked in some enhanced form, there may need to be negotiation between the two courier services.

## **Consultant's Recommendations: Delivery Operations**

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These recommendations are offered in addition to those recommendations made in the individual Strategic Technology Planning Report prepared for each cooperative.

1. The same Strategic Planning committee that provides an oversight and planning function for the system linking project should also work on the enhanced delivery project.
2. Consider some "rightsizing" of delivery services so that routes that SLC operates that could easily service TLN libraries, and vice-versa, are handled that way.
3. Have daily interoperation between the two consortia.
4. Merge policies, delivery marking, patron notification, message text, library designations, delivery bins, and other delivery features so that materials sorting and delivery look and feel the same regardless of where the materials start and where they end.
5. Of critical importance is to have both TLN and SLC operating the same version of the WorkFlows client software, and have SirsiDynix configure both versions to ensure that all the transit printing features are enabled for all member libraries.

6. Training will be absolutely critical for all libraries in both consortia. In addition, the merged set of communications policies should also be made available for all parties.
7. Develop an intranet for both SLC and TLN that can “push” new materials, such as lending policies, out to the entire membership of both organizations.
8. Undertake an in-depth search for potential sorting facilities, assuming that ultimately, transits and materials moving between the two consortia’s member libraries and MeLCat participating libraries will require Automated Materials Handling.

## ***RFID and Automated Materials Handling***

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The area of materials handling and delivery is one of impending serious need for both cooperatives, and an area where the consultant's recommendations are primarily recommendations for partnership activities between TLN and SLC.

The recommendations given here are also included in the individual Strategic Technology Planning Reports for each cooperative individually.

### **Consultant's Recommendations: RFID and AMH**

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The consultant recommends the following strategic undertaking as a cooperative venture between TLN and SLC:

1. Delegate the tasks of planning any developments in RFID or AMH to the Strategic Planning Committees of both cooperatives (see Planning Principles in the SLC and TLN reports).
2. Educate staff at all levels within SLC and TLN and the member libraries regarding the implications, features, benefits, and challenges of RFID and AMH.
3. Develop strategic goals for a shared sorting and delivery system.
4. Develop functional and operational goals with a strong emphasis on numeric values:
  - a. Number of libraries being sorted for.
  - b. Most effective routing for shared or interfaced routes with TLN and SLC.
  - c. Potential total daily, weekly, and annual sorting requirements by the end of a five-year usage period (e.g., if a sorting system were installed in 2008, what would be the sorting requirement be in 2013).
5. Issue a Request for Information and Quote for a sorting system, with an emphasis on sorting technologies required or supported. For example, could a vendor support barcode sorting, RFID sorting, or both?
6. Make a decision on whether or not to proceed with the sorting system based on vendor responses.