

Building a discovery tool RFP: a compilation of unique components and duplicative ILS RFP data.

Lisa Smith, MLS, Deputy Director, Gibson D. Lewis Health Science Library, University of North Texas Health Science Center, Fort Worth, Texas;
Lisa Clark, Texas Woman’s University School of Library and Information Studies, Denton, Texas.

Who we are:

The University of North Texas Health Science Center is located in Fort Worth, Texas. The University is comprised of 4 schools: The Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine, The Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, The School of Health Professions and the School of Public Health. The Gibson D. Lewis Health Science Library supports the education, research, patient-care, and community service goals of the University.

Project rationale

The library has utilized the Innovative Interfaces Millennium ILS system for 5 years. The proliferation of competing Discovery Tools, ILS products and Open Source Systems led the library to analyze current products within the marketplace to determine their relevance and applicability for our existing patron population.

Method

The UNTHSC Library began analyzing the Discovery Tool and ILS products available on the market in February 2010 to determine if a system migration should be considered. The project consisted of researching the library literature to determine items most commonly incorporated into ILS RFPs, researching RFP best practices literature contributed from the business community and reviewing vendor demonstrations of Discovery Tool Products.

Results

A Discovery Tool RFP was devised that included relevant components suggested in the ILS RFP literature coupled with concepts that are unique to Discovery Tool products. The resultant RFP also integrated data from the broader systems procurement literature.

Conclusion

A well constructed Discovery Tool RFP may provide a framework for vendors when submitting bids to solicit university business and can serve as a guidepost for library staff when analyzing the current specifications of their existing systems. Building the RFP aids system migration committee participants in carefully analyzing existing systems and determining unique components of a Discovery tool, while helping committee members become more educated about the library’s needs and relevant Discovery Tool features offered by vendors.

Peripheral benefits of building an RFP

- Provides a checklist for library staff when analyzing the existing system performance
- Helps staff prioritize system specifications/functionality
- Increases staff awareness of existing system features & future system capabilities
- Increases staff knowledge of current vendor products
- Increases staff knowledge of existing library system architecture

Standard RFP development guiding principles

There is extensive literature describing RFP best practices and guidelines for constructing a well defined RFP. Many of the recurring themes, assumptions and guiding principles found within the literature are summarized below.

Functionally mature product market = shorter RFPs (no need to point out the obvious)

RFP’s don’t have to be an exhaustive list of functional features. Shorter weighted lists can lead to a more effective, decisive and less time consuming analysis.

Vendor supplied RFP’s = don’t utilize, too biased!

Well crafted RFP’s serve to [1]:

- Increase decision making objectivity
- Enable uniform direct comparisons
- Reduce organizational risk
- Increase final contract efficiency

Line item data should :	examples
Be Specific, clearly defined	Avoid : “report writing capability”
Be Unambiguous, not subjective	Avoid : “sufficient lead time....”
Not include verbiage that is attempting to assess usability	Avoid : “easily navigable user interface”
Include qualitative comments field	Add section for vendor comments so they may further explain their product capabilities

Include Company Specific Questions (ex: Staffing numbers, Total annual revenue) for smaller firms.

Customer References and Interviews must happen early in the process! Not as a tagged on closing item on the checklist.

Use the RFP as one of 3 decision making tools. Base decision making on [2]:

- product demos
- customer interviews
- RFP

Business Community RFP trends / suggestions

Keep the functional specifications component simple.

Consider using creative briefs to help build the RFP Objectives section.

Ensure the products’ target audience needs are addressed in the functional requirements section.

Include specific legal & operational requirements that can help minimize risk.

Identify the product customer base:

- ILS customer base: Librarians, Library Staff and Patrons.
- Discovery Tool customer base: Patron centric audience.

Standard ILS RFP components [3,4,5]

- Library Overview
- Statement of Purpose, Narrative profile of Library
- Scope of Work
- Vendor Requirements & Qualifications
- RFP Submission Rules, contracting procedures
- Plan for evaluating the vendor RFP
- Functional Requirements (usually comprises 70% of the document)
 - Public interface – customization & search features
 - Technical modules – Cataloging, Acquisitions, Circ, ILL/Doc Delivery, Serials
 - Management Statistics and Report Generation
 - Inventory Functionality
- Standards to be accommodated (XML, ANSI, etc)
- Training / Product Documentation
- Vendor ongoing product support
- Security
- Delivery, Installation, migration, maintenance
- Warranties and Reporting requirements
- Cost Proposal

Discovery Tool RFP: functional requirements component

While the standard components of an RFP remain relatively consistent across bidding organizations, the functional requirements section contains the most detailed, product specific component of the RFP. The core RFP components from an ILS can be easily customized and transformed into a Discovery Tool RFP with the exception of the functional requirements section.

Two common approaches to describing functional requirements include requirements expressed as:

1. Itemized listing of specific system functionality required.
2. Listing of questions and topics (a more open ended questionnaire) that must be addressed by each vendor.

A detailed overview of items to consider for inclusion in the ‘requirements’ section is noted below.

Indexing Features

- Index type (federated, unified or hybrid)
- Index Metadata Harvesting Sources (Internal Library databases ; external database vendors)
- Indexing of customer subscribed databases? List databases available for indexing
- Mechanics of how Databases are loaded into the Discovery Service (ex: Catalog, Institutional Archives)
- Frequency of indexing, updates to index
- Frequency of harvesting of database content, who determines the frequency (vendor or library)
- Guided Discovery features
- Content pre-harvested into unified search index from commercial databases
- Vendor affiliated database indexing techniques (unified index components, which databases are indexed in the core unified index)
- Unified Index Construction (how is content provided/obtained by vendor)
- Federated Searching of databases not affiliated with the bidding vendor (speed of searching)
- Indexing granularity (bidding vendor produced database indexing techniques vs. indexing of other subscription databases)
- Optimal Indexing – premier /advanced indexing available for which databases/products
- List of metadata providers (example: LexisNexis); List of provider metadata tags searched

Standards Support / compliance

1. Standards Supported:
 - a. MARC, Dublin Core, FRBR, Z39.50, OAI, etc.
2. Accessibility Compliance (W3C’s accessibility Guidelines)

Database / Content composition/navigationity

1. Databases Searched
 - a. Locally Subscribed databases
 - b. Discovery Tool Vendor databases searched
 - c. Other Library Applications
 - d. Freely available non-subscribed Databases
 - e. Institutional Repositories (external repositories / contracting library’s repository)
 - f. Library Information Systems & Applications Inventory (verify integration w/ vendor product)
2. Search functionality variance - Premier Search Functionality Provided for which vendors
3. Other database vendors under contract to provide future data
4. Core number of databases provided in ‘basic’ subscription package (when are additional fees incurred for adding databases)
5. Compatibility with which ILS systems (List), which systems offer enhanced functionality
6. Institutional Repository Search capabilities
7. ILS features searched (ex: Course Reserves ; must the ILS module be produced by the bidding vendor to be searchable)

Searching Features

1. System search mechanics
 - a. Federated Searching
 - b. Speed (rate of results returned)
 - c. Search method
 - i. Real time
 - ii. Previously indexed
 - d. Data Normalization (UMLS, RxNorm, etc)
 - e. Search granularity of holdings information
2. User search options (how does the system search & display results)
 - a. Full text searching
 - b. Keyword
 - c. Faceting Searching
 - d. Limits (list available limits)
3. Results Display
 - a. Duplicate v. de-duplicated records
 - b. Local content prioritized in display hierarchy (y/n)
 - c. Relevancy ranked items
 - d. Linked item images (book jackets, etc)
 - e. Article Abstracts
 - f. Presentation of other vendor’s data, how is it displayed

Interface Customization

1. Branding with Institutional Graphics/ Logos
2. Customizable toolbar
3. Toolbar color choices
4. Insertion of widgets
5. Tagging feature
6. Choice of facets
7. Availability of skins (how many)

Record Management

1. Exporting to Bibliographic management tools (list compatible tools)
2. Link Resolver compatibility (vendor neutral y/n)

Web 2.0 Functionality

1. Tagging available
2. Widget Integration
3. Linking to online course development software (ex: Blackboard)
4. Popular choices features (ex: your library recommends)

Additionally, questions concerning vendor affiliation, product maturity and future product development should be included in the RFP.

Vendor specific questions include:

1. What other products are developed by the same parent organization or affiliated corporations?
2. What is the current version of the product being reviewed for purchase? How many preexisting versions exist?
3. What is the average annual number of major product releases for this product?
4. What modules and functionality are currently under development related to this product?



References:

- [1] Karamouzis, F, Longwood, J. Guidelines of an RFP process for standardized IT Service Provider Selections. Gartner Research Group. ID Number: G00150965. October 1, 2007.
- [2] Richardson, J. Tips for Evaluators: Better Business Intelligence RFPs. Gartner Research Group. ID Number: G00167840. May 11, 2009.
- [3] Cohn, JM, Kelsey, AL. The complete Library technology planner: a guidebook with sample technology plans and RFP’s on CDROM. New York, NY: Neal-Schuman Publishers; c2010: 93-113.
- [4] Sno-Isle Libraries. Request for proposal for an integrated library system. Issued May 3, 2010. Accessed via CDROM contained within: Cohn, JM, Kelsey, AL. The complete Library technology planner: a guidebook with sample technology plans and RFP’s on CDROM. New York, NY: Neal-Schuman Publishers; c2010.
- [5] Denver Seminary. Carey S. Thomas Library. Request for Proposal for an Integrated Library System. Issued May 15, 2008. Accessed via CDROM contained within: Cohn, JM, Kelsey, AL. The complete Library technology planner: a guidebook with sample technology plans and RFP’s on CDROM. New York, NY: Neal-Schuman Publishers; c2010.

Bibliography:

Cohn, JM, Kelsey, AL. The complete Library technology planner: a guidebook with sample technology plans and RFP’s on CDROM. New York, NY: Neal-Schuman Publishers; c2010: 93-113.

Denver Seminary. Carey S. Thomas Library. Request for Proposal for an Integrated Library System. Issued May 15, 2008. Accessed via CDROM contained within: Cohn, JM, Kelsey, AL. The complete Library technology planner: a guidebook with sample technology plans and RFP’s on CDROM. New York, NY: Neal-Schuman Publishers; c2010.

Hodgson, C. The RFP Writer’s Guide to Standards for Library Systems.c NISO 2002. Website. www.niso.org/publications/pres/RFP_Virtuere_Suite.pdf . Accessed April 18, 2010.

Karamouzis, F, Longwood, J. Guidelines of an RFP process for standardized IT Service Provider Selections. Gartner Research Group. ID Number: G00150965. October 1, 2007.

Lassman, J. How to develop a RFP for Unified Communications. Gartner Research Group. ID Number G00174413. March 24, 2010.

National Defense University Library System. RFP. (NDU ILS) Bid Solicitation number: LCFDL11R6000. Agency: Library of Congress. Original posting date: 7.16.10 Posted to FEDLINK online database. Website. <http://www.fbo.gov> Accessed September 17, 2010.

Prenice, B. Rethinking the RFP: how to source for simplicity. Gartner Research Group. ID Number: G00201524. June 22, 2010.

Richardson, J. Tips for Evaluators: Better Business Intelligence RFPs. Gartner Research Group. ID Number: G00167840. May 11, 2009.

Sno-Isle Libraries. Request for proposal for an integrated library system. Issued May 3, 2010. Accessed via CDROM contained within: Cohn, JM, Kelsey, AL. The complete Library technology planner: a guidebook with sample technology plans and RFP’s on CDROM. New York, NY: Neal-Schuman Publishers; c2010.

University of Michigan Library Article Discovery Working Group. Final Report . Review matrix and top Discovery tool features, Discovery tool feature preferences. January 29, 2010. Website. www.lib.umich.edu/files/adwg/final-report.pdf . Accessed April 9, 2010.