NCIP Implementers Group
Minutes - In Person Meeting
September 22-24, 2009

Present:

Sue Boettcher - 3M
Susan Campbell - College Center for Library Automation (CCLA)
Rob Walsh - EnvisionWare (NCIP Maintenance Agency)
Mike Dicus - Ex Libris
Lynne Branche Brown - Innovative Interfaces (Tuesday, Wednesday only)
Karen Wetzel - NISO
John Bodfish - OCLC
Rob Corcuera - OCLC (Tuesday, Wednesday only)
Tony O’Brien - OCLC (Thursday only)
Dan Iddings - PALCI (Tuesday, Wednesday only)
Rob Gray - Polaris
Gail Wanner - SirsiDynix (Chair; Wednesday, Thursday only)
DJ Miller - TLC

Minutes prepared and submitted by:

Rob Walsh, EnvisionWare / NCIP Maintenance Agency

Tuesday, September 22

Implementation Status Updates

Walsh, in Wanner’s absence, opened the meeting and asked each attendee to provide a brief implementation status update.

* Polaris
  * doing NCIP with 3M using a self-service model
  * has tight integration with SirsiDynix URSA that has progressed over the past year
  * looking to do more integration with Ex Libris and III in an ILL environment
  * has some unique customers who want NCIP due to the security provided through HTTPS
  * using NCIP with CybraryN and Overdrive
  * all implementations are responders, and all are based on NCIP Version 1
  * has some prototype code written for NCIP Version 2

* TLC
  * have recently begun revisiting some older NCIP code
  * testing with Auto-Graphics for a possible release in a few weeks
  * have done some work with SirsiDynix for ILL
  * implementation is a responder and is based on Version 1
* OCLC  
  * has no concrete plans for Version 2  
  * has a number of products that act as initiators in ILL context  
  * working with Horizon, Unicorn, Symphony and Aleph in production environments  
  * working with Voyager (possibly in production)  
  * planning to work with Polaris and TLC

* 3M  
  * implemented Version 1 some time ago and have made no changes  
  * exchanging with Polaris and have some European implementations  
  * waiting for other people to support NCIP  
  * have no plans to implement Version 2 until more vendors support it

* Ex Libris  
  * Aleph and Voyager have responders  
  * both Aleph and Voyager are working with URSA and exchanging some messages with Relais  
  * all implementations are Version 1  
  * do not yet perceive a market need for Version 2

* PALCI  
  * using NCIP Version 1 at two or three Voyager sites and 7 or 8 SirsiDynix sites (with Unicorn and Symphony)  
  * migrating away from URSA and replacing with Relais  
  * working also with TLC  
  * has required all sites to be NCIP compliant as part of the URSA-to-Relais migration  
  * has encouraged III to develop an NCIP responder

Bodfish noted that OCLC has many consortia, and getting NCIP adopted across a consortia with multiple vendors can be quite challenging. He asked Iddings what compelling arguments convinced his vendors to implement. Iddings said that security was a big part of the decision. Telnet screen scraping is both insecure and difficult to implement. Some campuses have shut down Telnet access on the local networks. He said that, originally, the prices quoted for NCIP implementations were very expensive. Everyone, though, has made it affordable. What has been surprising, he said, is that each vendor seems to have a unique NCIP version for talking with Relais that is different from what is used to talk to SirsiDynix. Bodfish explained that this is due in part to the huge variety and the many options that exist in ILS. Iddings asked how he can be confident that the new implementations will work. Bodfish replied that it requires testing. However, he added, we can attempt to fix the core profiles and that will bring us closer to having an expectation that two vendors can seamlessly interoperate. Gray said that expectations around how reserves are handled can create confusion. "When the reserve is placed or a book comes in that we are not expecting, are we to automatically create a record, or will the ILL system tell us to create the reserve? We have to implement different business rules with our NCIP implementations to integrate with different vendors." Bodfish said that we need to surface these issues as we work through the core profiles. Iddings added that there are differences not just within the
various systems, but with library policies as well. Bodfish concluded that there needs to be some common understanding about what happens within the various systems that goes beyond the messages themselves.

Wetzel stressed the importance of working to address Version 2. “We cannot continue to maintain Version 1,” she said. Bodfish asked her to clarify whether she meant that Version 1 should no longer be used or whether the efforts of the Implementers Group should be focused primarily on Version 2. All existing implementations are Version 1, and they will continue to exist for some time. Wetzel explained that NISO feels that new efforts should be focused on Version 2, and implementers should be encouraged to develop support for Version 2. Iddings added that PALCI expects all of its implementations to be at Version 2 when the migration to Relais is complete. Brown said that the NCIP responder that Innovative Interfaces is working with PALCI to develop will be based on Version 2.

**New Website**

Walsh presented a new NCIP website that represents efforts to migrate existing information from the current website and to better integrate information that is housed at various NISO resources. The new website may be found at [http://www.ncip.info](http://www.ncip.info). The existing website may be accessed via [http://ncip.envisionware.com](http://ncip.envisionware.com), and the new site has several links back to the older site. Those links will remain until all the information from the older site is migrated.

The new site is based on Drupal, and it will allow the information to be more easily updated. Further, content in the new site is directly linkable. In the older site, only the main page was accessible directly.

Bodfish asked whether the content of the new site was arranged such that, when EnvisionWare vacates the position of Maintenance Agency, the site could be easily moved and re-hosted. Walsh explained that, in theory, that would be possible since it would require moving the Drupal database to a another Drupal installation.

**Core Profiles**

After a brief review of the Agenda, the group began a discussion of Core Profiles. Bodfish asked “What are they and what are they meant to accomplish?” Walsh said that one of the goals was to build a high level set of documents focused on tasks rather than specific details. Bodfish emphasized that there will remain, though, a need for the low level details that enable on system to talk with another.

The group divided into two smaller groups, one focused on brokered DCB and another focused on self-service. The goal for each group was to identify the core tasks and functions that occur in each workflow in order to determine when specific implementations begin to diverge.
The small groups reunited and reviewed the work each had done. Bodfish summarized the discussions from the DCB working group. They discovered that there are 6 basic steps: authenticate, request, fill, return, and complete. [Editor’s notes: clearly I missed a step since I have only 5.] However, even at the highest level, this is much variation.

Campbell asked whether the discussions really were at the highest level, or were they focused at a level with too much detail. Iddings said that at PALCI, there is much variability in library policy and process, yet they still manage to get it done with NCIP. Bodfish suggested that, with more time, he feels we could come up with a common understanding. “However, it would be full of variables and options.” Walsh asked Campbell whether, as a customer, a profile with many options would be useful. Campbell said that would put us back where we are now. She asked why it isn’t possible to define a Core Profile around the 9 core messages. Bodfish said that, even with those messages, there are options. How we identify them varies from system to system, for example. Even when we’ve agreed on the message, there are so many choices, and both partners in an exchange need to implement them the same way. Using Accept Item as an example, who is supposed to notify the patron? That isn’t clear in the protocol. Who creates the item record? Who puts the item on hold? These all require some interpretation of the standard, and we have to work with the other vendor to ensure that we agree on the interpretation. Gray added that it is up to the responder to make these decisions.

Campbell asked why vendors quote high prices when they need to expand an implementation to interoperate with another vendor with whom they have not worked in the past. Brown said that the problem is often a matter of not have a common language. “Each new partner,” she said, “may require a slightly different language.” Walsh said that he thinks of these as dialects. NCIP is the common language, but each implementation may use a different dialect. Bodfish added that these dialects may be as different as old and modern English. “This has created a difficult situation for customers because we can’t specify in an RFP enough detail to assure that two arbitrary implementations will interoperate,” he continued. Iddings suggested that there should be a goal to improve the process so that implementations are “plug and play.” He reminded the group that it took a long time to get to a point where MARC records were a commodity. Gray said that Z39.50 is the same way. Campbell asked whether one of the goals of Version 2 was improved interoperability, possibly through the core message set. Bodfish said he didn’t think that was a goal of Version 2. “It is a goal of the Implementers Group, and, while the core message set and Version 2 occurred at about the same time, they were not aimed at the same goals.”

Campbell suggested that the question “Can you do this task?” may need to change to “With whom can you do this task?” Gray said that, eventually, ILL implementations will go farther than those today. Some day, it should be possible for both parties to be initiators and responders so that the complete transaction can occur seamlessly and automatically between the two systems. Bodfish said that there may be a higher level with questions like “Do you do ‘traditional’ ILL where one side makes a request of another?” Brown said that an earlier effort by Wanner, Jackson, Campbell, and herself came close to achieving what Campbell is requesting. (This document is titled
Campbell agreed and asked why so much variability exists within the standard. “If minor changes are required in order to make two systems compatible,” she continued, “then those changes should be modest and reasonable.”

Walsh summarized the efforts of the self-service working group. He explained that, in many ways, self-service is simpler than resource sharing. As a result, there may be much less variability in self-service workflows. However, some self-service implementations may need only a single message, where others may use sequences of messages to complete a task. For example, self-service implementations that need only to determine whether a user is valid need only the Lookup User message. Automated materials handling systems (sorters) may need only Checkin Item. Self-service circulation kiosks, though, may need Checkout Item, Checkin Item, Renew Item, Lookup User, and Lookup Item. Regardless, of the 9 core messages, it seems that only 5 are truly useful for self-service. Further there are other common self-service functions, like paying fines (either as part of or independently from a circulation transaction), creating or updating patron records, and making deposits to library-hosted monetary accounts, that require messages outside the core set. Collectively, these issues complicate the question of what it means to support the core message set.

Change / Review Process

Walsh explained that in a recent ballot, the NCIP IG had approved a move from periodic to continuous review. ANSI still needs to officially approve the change, but Wetzel indicated that there should be no reason why it would not be approved. Walsh summarized the process that had been defined in the balloted documents. The group will be able to review defects and enhancements requests twice each year. These change requests need to be submitted in writing prior to a spring and a fall meeting. Ideally, new items will be raised during each conference call so that members are familiar with them prior to the meetings when they will need to be formally reviewed. The group agreed that we should have a form on the website that people may complete in order to submit a change request. When each item is reviewed, the group may decide to accept it without change, accept it with modification, accept it for further study, or reject it. (More information about the change from periodic to continuous review, along with a description of the process, is available at http://www.niso.org/apps/org/workgroup/z3983maint/download.php/2337/ContinMaintRequest_z39_83.pdf and http://www.niso.org/apps/org/workgroup/z3983maint/download.php/2336/ContinMaint_Procedures_z39_83.pdf. These documents are available only to members of the NCIP IG at this time. This information will be made available publicly once the change is formally approved by ANSI.)
As part of this discussion, the group identified the following criteria that will assist during the review of each change request:

* Overall value and usefulness of the requested change
* Compatibility with current version
  * Changes that break backward compatibility are reserved for major version changes (Version 2 to Version 3, for example)
* Scope and relevance of the requested change
* Specific reasons, justifications, and use cases for the requested change
* Negative impacts associated with the requested change
* General applicability of the requested change
* Any field or trial usage of the requested change (through an extension, for example)
* A draft of changes necessary to the schema in order to support the requested change

Further, the group agreed that the versioning format for future revisions should be X.YY where X represents the major version and YY represents the revision or minor version. For example, the first version of the standard is 1.00. The first revision was 1.01. The current version is 2.00, and the next revision will be 2.01. The group agreed also that the “.00” is optional when referring to the initial major version. For example, Version 1 and Version 1.00 represent the same version. Finally, as was noted above, changes that break backward compatibility must be introduced in a new major version. Otherwise, it may be assumed that, within a single major version, various revisions are compatible. This means that new data elements introduced in a minor revision may not mandatory since earlier versions would not know of their existence. Obviously, functionality that depends on new data elements would not be available in a system using an earlier revision, but the two systems should be able to interoperate with respect to existing functionality.

**NCIP Test Bed and Presentations with Live Demonstrations**

Gray suggested that is should be possible to create a simple web page that allows NCIP requests to be pasted as text into a field and sent to a responder. The responder’s response could be displayed as text in another field. This would allow an implemener to manually verify that the message was actually exchanged and that the response was formatted as expected. Bodfish said that this would be a good start, but he was hoping that we could do more. The ISO-ILL “bake-off” is something that continues to come up around this topic. Something where the customers present the various systems (rather than having vendors demonstrating) would be even more powerful. Campbell said that customers who are considering purchasing, though, probably want to deal with the vendors rather than other customers.

Walsh asked whether anyone has any concerns over this being a one-time event rather than something that would be continuously available. Bodfish said that IndexData has a way to execute a variety of Z39.50 requests and verify that they were executed properly.
Wetzel suggested that we consider organizing an event at next year’s ALA (annual) to demonstrate the functionality available through the core message set. Campbell suggested that such an event would be a good way to follow up this year’s LITA presentation at next year’s LITA conference. Iddings noted, though, that ALA may be better because it has a broader audience. However, Campbell said, LITA has fewer events that compete for people’s time. Wetzel suggested that we might do some kind of general promotion at ALA and follow it up with live demos at LITA.

Gray indicated that the protocol is not something that can be demonstrated effectively. “There’s nothing more boring that watching a demo intended to illustrate the use of a protocol,” he said. Iddings added that the issue isn’t that people don’t believe that NCIP works. “It is more about what it means to be ‘compatible’ or ‘compliant,’ he said. “A demo is simply proof that you can interoperate.”

The group agreed to revisit the idea of events at next year’s ALA and LITA conferences during a future conference call.

**PALCI’s Move to NCIP**

Campbell asked Iddings what the “ah-ha” moment was for PALCI members who were reluctant to move to NCIP. Iddings said that the move from URSA to Relais and a desire to move away from Telnet screen scraping were the primary motivators. Campbell asked when the staff realized that doing things with NCIP was better than doing them without. Iddings said that they were able to do the same tasks before NCIP, but the implementations based on Telnet were more fragile.

Bodfish noted that there may be three different issues related to demonstrate interoperability that need to be addressed separately:

* Not enough implementations to demonstrate interoperability
* Not enough push from libraries to force implementations
* Vendors not doing enough; high barriers to entry (possibly partially addressed with core messages)

Brown said that this discussion often rambles because we don’t do enough when we leave the meetings. “Much of the real work needs to be done back in the offices.” Wetzel suggested that scheduling live promotions might encourage people to follow through. Iddings added that the LAMA/RUSA STARS forum at this summer’s ALA had an impact on many of the directors from his member institutions. “They came back excited about what they heard discussed in that session.”

**NCIP Compliance**

Walsh asked what it means to be “compliant.” Wetzel said that, in the standard, compliance is the ability to exchange at least one message with at least one partner. Brown asked whether it is important in the marketplace to be able to assert compliance.
Bodfish said that it is a basic question that enables us to have another conversation. Campbell said that, from the standpoint of an RFP, there should be a series of questions:

* “Do you do NCIP?”
* “With whom do you do NCIP?”
* “Is your implementation available now?”
* “If I want something that you can’t do now, what will it cost me to get it?”

She added that compliance as it is currently defined is not really relevant because it doesn’t answer those questions.

Bodfish said that NCIP may not be necessary in order to accomplish a task. If the question is “Can I do resource sharing between system A and system B?” then I might not need NCIP. However, if the question requires that I do NCIP, then I must answer differently. Walsh asked why it matters whether NCIP is involved if the overall outcome can be achieved. Bodfish said that there might be an expectation that, if NCIP is used today to perform the task, then future functionality through NCIP should be available at a lower cost. Wetzel suggested that we consider the definition of “compliance” in a future revision of the standard. Walsh said that we would need either a better, more commonly accepted definition or we need to educate the community to stop asking for “NCIP compliance” in RFPs. Bodfish said we should focus on the latter. “We need to educate people to be specific about their needs. You need to specify what system you have (and not ‘OCLC’ but ‘WorldCat,’ for example), with whom you wish to exchange, and what particular task or workflow you want to perform.”

Boettcher said that, in the end, this doesn’t guaranty compatibility and interoperability because of the various options that are inherent in the protocol itself. Dicus asked whether there is a notion of “universal compliance.” Bodfish said that, with infinite time and resources, yes. Otherwise, it seems optimistic. Campbell asked whether “Are you compliant?” is a relevant question in an RFP. Dicus said that he feels it is relevant but not sufficient. “You need to know a lot more information before you know whether any two systems are interoperable,” he continued. “I don’t imagine a point in the future where a simple ‘Yes/No’ to ‘Are you compliant?’ is enough.” Bodfish said that the RFP needs to ask with what systems can you exchange, through what messages, and using what versions. Boettcher suggested that we should target educational efforts at consultants who provide assistance to libraries during the RFP processes.

Bodfish and Gray volunteered to review and revise the existing RFP guidelines with an intent to target consultants and to provide suggestions for how to ask questions that will provide useful and meaningful responses. Walsh suggested that Koppel has often expressed an interest in working on this document and that he should have the opportunity to participate in this effort.

Cambell and Brown volunteered to create a chart for implementers to use to indicate which core messages they support, with whom they are exchanging each message,
what versions are supported, and what role is played. Jackson was included in this effort since she has worked with Campbell and Brown on similar efforts in the past.

*Recall Item*

The group discussed whether Recall Item belongs as part of the core message set. When the core message set was defined in the April 2009 meeting, 8 of the core messages were identified by the number of implementations that used them. However, Recall Item was not widely implemented, and no one in the group could remember what justification was provided for including it in the core. Many in the group felt that Recall Item is not as generally useful as the other 8 messages, and some have implementations that include all the messages in the core except for Recall Item.

The group reviewed other messages in the core set in an attempt to determine if any presented the same challenges as Recall Item. Gray indicated that Accept Item can sometimes be tricky because it may either represent simple item information or a more complex request that requires several steps to complete. Iddings asked whether Renew Item supports the ability to have a patron make the renew request in the system from whom the patron picked up the material even though that may not be the system that owns the item, particularly in the context of ILL. The consensus of the group was that systems can and do support this functionality with Renew Item.

**Wednesday, September 23**

*Review Position on Core Profiles*

Walsh asked the group to review the discussion on Core Profiles and decide whether more time and effort should be invested in them. Brown said that she wasn’t sure they will help much. “They may not get us what we hope to achieve,” she said. “We want a consensus on the details of message exchange, but there’s too much variation in those details to make a profile useful.” Wetzel asked how profiles are being used now. Bodfish said that there are no Core Profiles today. “We use Application Profiles to describe how our applications use NCIP.” Brown added that to try to generalize the Application Profiles seems like a daunting task since we continue to run into variations very early in those discussions.

Bodfish suggested that the goal of a Core Profile should be to help new implementers discover what they should do. However, he continued, it would not be one profile for all ways to do resource sharing. Instead, it might be a set of practices that describe in general terms how to perform high level tasks: this is how to do a hold, here are ways to do something else. Maybe instead of Core Profiles, a set of recommended practices might be a better goal. Campbell said that Application Profiles seem to address the needs of the developers. “A recommended practices document,” she said, “would be at a higher level and aimed at those who may not understand the nuts and the bolts.” Bodfish agreed that they would be more like educational tools. Brown suggested, then, that they would need to be called something different. Campbell compared this new
type of document to the “Roadmap to NCIP.” Bodfish said that, different from the Roadmap, though, this document should address specific tasks like resource sharing and self-service circulation and define how they are done in NCIP.

Wetzel suggested that we might need one document to address the needs of the customer and another to address the needs of new implementers. Campbell said that the document for customers should be written such that a library administrator will understand it. “This might be a good way to explain how the core message set came into being. Why those messages and how are they used to deliver 80% of the functionality necessary,” she said. Bodfish asked what such a document (or pair of documents) will do for the NCIP standard. “Will it bring more customers, attract more implementers, or allow customers to be more effective in selecting solutions that work to address their needs?” he said.

Campbell noted that some of the existing documentation (and NCIP itself) sometimes seems too opaque. “People don’t know why they want or need it. They are told they need it because it exists,” she said. “Something explains what NCIP is and how it can be used would help to educate. I go back to the Roadmap - maybe that isn’t the right title, but something with similar content that explains what, why, and how could be useful.”

Bodfish suggested that the appropriate title might be “Getting Started with NCIP.” He indicated that it would explain how resource sharing and self-service work and where to go to get more information and assistance. Iddings said that the document should include the list of core messages since that helps to show why it isn’t necessary to implement 45 message pairs in order to make NCIP effective. Bodfish said that we will need to be careful that the document does not suggest, for example, that there is only one way to build a resource sharing application. “Using a brokered application to initiate recall item, for example, doesn’t make sense,” he continued. “The patron is not going to use the interface of the broker to recall an item.” Walsh asked whether this might be a “recipes” style of document. Bodfish said that those documents often fail to provide any narrative or cohesive story that explains what they are trying to accomplish. “This needs to be something that gives a customer enough information to have an intelligent and effective conversation with a vendor,” he said.

Bodfish volunteered to draft a very early, very thin document that demonstrates the type of content and style he feels is appropriate for this effort. He plans to focus on resource sharing. Walsh agreed to do take Bodfish’s draft and do the same for self-service. The goal is to be able to publish these documents at next year’s ALA Midwinter conference. The group further defined a goal statement and a set of objectives and other information to guide these efforts:

Goal: To prepare a document that gives a customer enough information to select a product that delivers on his or her goals and objectives for a specific functional area (resource sharing, self-service, etc.)
Objectives:
* Provide an overview of resource sharing (or other functional area)
* Describe how to think about NCIP
* Describe how the protocol helps to achieve the goals
* Identify where variations may complicate the issues
* Identify what other sorts of complexity might arise
* Outline the importance of communicating and discussing issues in detail with implementers
* Explain the significance of NCIP roles
* Identify some of the things that NCIP does not do so that customers will have reasonable expectations about what manual or external processes may still be required
* Encourage customers to review the RFP Guidelines

Target Audience:
* Primary - customers wanting to select a system that uses NCIP to accomplish a desired task
  * This includes consultants who aid in this process
* Secondary - new implementers wanting to develop NCIP systems

Publication:
* To consultants who help libraries select products
* To product managers at implementers who develop NCIP systems
* To libraries who might be thinking about selecting a product that uses NCIP

Theory of Use:
* Customer reviews the document
* Customer goes to the NCIP website to determine what support exists from current vendors (using an “Implementer Discovery” chart)
* Customer reads the RFP Guidelines and prepares the RFP
* Customer sends the RFP to potential vendors
* Customer reviews Application Profiles for specific vendors and functions desired in the system being considered
* Customer discusses details with implementers

Expanding the NCIP Implementers Group

Iddings asked who else should be part of this group. He suggested possibly reaching out to open source vendors, eXtensible Catalog (xC) project members, LibraryThing, Overdrive, IndexData, and CybraryN. Bodfish about the strategies we should use to attract these other vendors. “With some,” he said, “we’ve already tried and we’ve not been successful. Are we trying wrong, or are they really not interested in being part of this group?” Boettcher said that some may perceive this to be an open and implementable standard that does not require any level of involvement or participation with the body who maintains it. One does not, for example, join the w3c in order to send HTML. Wetzel said that there is a difference between joining the group and
interacting with the group. “Perhaps,” she said, “we should encourage a level of interaction short of full membership.” Bodfish suggested that, in that context, we may have already been successful with people like Overdrive and IndexData. They are getting the information they need to do what they want. Maybe we should encourage vendors to designate a contact person. That would help us keep them informed. In addition, we should encourage them to let us know of their implementations and their successes.

**Implementer Discovery and Status Reports**

Gray asked how implementers keep their status information up to date. Walsh said that implementers should send any updates to him, and he will make the necessary changes to the appropriate section of the website. He added, though, that this does not make it easy for us to learn about people who are implementing but who are not part of this group. Wetzel suggested that we create an on-line form that anyone could complete to report on their implementations. Iddings suggested that a Facebook presence might attract more people. Wetzel said that we need something aimed at implementers that describes what we would like for them to do to help keep us informed of their efforts. Bodfish added that we should reach out to those whom we even think have an implementation and make it easy for them to provide us with helpful information.

**Core Message Implementations**

Brown passed around a form for each implementer to complete to indicate which core messages are supported. She explained that this is a start of what she and Campbell are working on for identifying what support each implementer has in various products. The group spent a few minutes completing the forms and returned them to Brown.

**Enhancement Requests**

Bodfish indicated that OCLC would like to be able to send multiple item ids as alternative ways to identify an item. The group reviewed comments that OCLC included with their vote on Version 2.

- Request Item does not allow a combination of Bibliographic Id and Item Id, and it does not allow either to be repeated.

Walsh said that, in the past, we have identified a potential for ambiguity where the message could be construed to mean either ANY of the item ids or ALL of them. Bodfish suggested that there might be a need for a flag that designates which rule we want to the responder to apply. Gray said that these changes might have a large potential impact since many messages might ultimately have this ANY OF capability. Bodfish said that OCLC’s request is specific to Request Item. “In other cases (like Accept Item), the item has already been uniquely identified and a single, known id is available,” he said. “I think we need to find a community of users who are interested in
this kind of request and see if the details can be fleshed out.” Walsh indicated that Wanner has expressed an interest in similar functionality in the past.

Bodfish introduced a second request, also from OCLC’s vote on Version 2.

Bibliographic Record Id is not repeatable in Bibliographic Description of Accept Item. Why can’t an initiator send an OCLC number and an LCCN if it has both for the record?

Bodfish explained that OCLC wants to share all the information that it has about an item, possibly as an aid to collection development efforts. He said that there is no expectation that the information will become part of any public records or indices.

Bodfish agreed to have off-line conversations with interested persons, to draft an enhancement request, and to submit it in the future for consideration by the group.

Changes that were Dropped as part of the Version 2 Efforts

Bodfish reminded the group that there were changes that we wanted to incorporate in Version 2, but, due to constraints imposed during the final editing phase, we were not able to do so. Walsh agreed to review various notes from that period and compile a list of items that were dropped.

Review Core Workflows

Wanner said that she was expecting the Core Workflows to be an educational piece that allows customers to outline what they want to accomplish. Further, she said she thinks those documents should be something implementers could use to identify what messages (and what data elements) they support. “As a vendor,” she said, “if I knew what other implementers support which messages and services, then I know how I can interoperate with them without having to read lengthy vendor profiles.” Walsh said that sounded similar to the chart Campbell and Brown agreed to create. Bodfish suggested that we could add some data to the chart to identify the specific data elements that are supported. Campbell said that the existing Application Profiles might be more maintainable if the sections that describe the messages and data elements used could be linked to the chart in some sort of data driven fashion. Wetzel asked if it would be practical to make the entire profile into a dynamic electronic document rather than a static PDF. Bodfish said that there are several sections, though, that require lengthy text elements, and those may not lend themselves to electronic delivery. Most in the group agreed that pushing to get the data-specific portions into an on-line and electronic form is reasonable. Trying to put the text section in the same form, though, may be difficult.

Wanner suggested that we need some kind of form that vendors could fill in to indicate which messages and data elements are supported. “Many programmers,” she said, “tend to ignore the more verbose text sections and focus solely on the messages, data
elements, and state tables.” Gray said that we need to keep Version 1 and Version 2 information separate with respect to support for various messages. “It needs to be clear,” he said, “whether a responder is supporting only one or both versions.” Walsh asked if the form Brown and Campbell are designing could be expanded to include this information. Bodfish said that, given the depth of the schema, trying to create a form that replicates that depth may be challenging. Wanner suggested that we start with the messages and the top-level data elements. Gray agreed that, if we take care to identify the “gotchas,” then such an approach seems reasonable. Wanner said that it is often easier to steer programmers to something that is complete rather than pointing them at separate, incomplete documents. She volunteered to extend the form Brown and Campbell are preparing and provide something that takes the information to the next level of detail. Gray agreed to assist by addressing the responder side of resource sharing, and Boettcher agreed to undertake a similar effort for self-service. Bodfish recommended that Wanner, Gray, and Boettcher make note of areas where they see potential implementation challenges as they compiles the information.

**LITA Presentation Review**

Wanner, Campbell, and Brown provided a preview of the presentation scheduled to be given at this year’s LITA conference (October 2, 2009). The group provided feedback and suggested changes.

**Review Plans for Next ALA and LITA**

Walsh provided a brief summary of the discussion around the NCIP test bed and the idea about having a live demonstration or “bake-off” style session. He explained that, because of various technical challenges with an always-available test bed, the group had focused an idea to have an educational session at ALA, followed by a “bake-off” style demonstration at LITA. Wanner expressed a concern that many in the ILL community do not attend LITA. Walsh suggested that we could plan the sessions so that the ALA presentation could be aimed at those interested in ILL with the hopes that they would encourage the more technical people in their organizations to attend the demonstration at LITA. Wanner suggested that we should consider holding an event at a future resource sharing forum.

The group then revisited the idea of a test bed. Ultimately, the group reached the conclusion that, in many ways, an accessible test bed is as much or more work than the current approach we use to facilitate implementer-to-implementer testing.

**Demonstration of Prototype for Capturing Implementer Message Exchange**

Gray demonstrated a sample XML format for capturing, analyzing, and reporting the structure of NCIP messages exchanged between implementers. The goal of such a system would be to provide a foundation or database of information that might be used with the implementer registry. The group identified significant potential in this sort of approach, particularly as a fairly easy way to document sample messages that are
exchanged under certain circumstances. The group discussed some of the challenges and caveats. Wanner indicated that, while this seems like a very useful approach, there may still be a need to wade through the various samples and locate similarities and differences between the same messages exchanged between different partners. Bodfish said that he has a stylesheet that will go through XML messages and generate a spreadsheet to analyze sets of messages against which it is run. It could be used to generate a display that shows which products send which messages with what data elements.

Gray volunteered to continue work on the prototype, providing appropriate annotations where they are necessary. Bodfish stressed the importance of protecting patron confidentiality and privacy, and he strongly suggested that each vendor provide samples with “clean” data. Boettcher showed a document 3M sends to other implementers outlining the messages sent and the expected responses. The document includes actual XML samples, and Boettcher indicated that it would not be hard to extract portions and put them into the format Gray demonstrated.

Thursday, September 24

*Update on Recall Item*

Walsh read a message Jackson sent in response to an inquiry about the reasons why Recall Item is in the core message set. Her note indicated that she does not recall the specific details, but she does believe it is “useful to include in the core message set.” Boettcher said that, as a self-service implementer, Recall Item is not useful. “However,” she continued, “there are other messages that are not in the core message set that would be beneficial.” Wanner asked whether we should work toward a core set specifically for self-service in addition to the current core set which may be more aimed at resource sharing. Boettcher said that she believes that we should continue to promote the core set as it is, then encourage implementers to support an additional 5 or so messages that provide extra functionality (fines payment, undo checkout, etc.). O’Brien suggested that we make a point to revisit Recall Item and try to better understand why it is part of the core message set. This discussion should take place at a time when Jackson and Stewart can participate since they were the ones who lobbied for its inclusion at the April 2009 meeting. Walsh and Bodfish each agreed that an item should be placed on the agenda for the next conference call.

Campbell said that, if we leave Recall Item in the core, but the Implementers Group generally feels that it is unnecessary, then we may be back to where we were before the core message set was defined. If a library administrator specifies support for the core set, but he or she gets support for fewer than all 9 messages, then he or she is likely to be frustrated.

The group discussed the idea of defining a second set of additionally useful messages that provide functionality over and above what is available with the core set.
Bodfish said that part of the problem is that we don’t have a clear and agreed upon definition of what the core message set is. We might decide that other messages in the core are not necessary to provide 80% of the labor saving benefits of NCIP. Cancel Request, Renew Item, and Lookup Item, for example, may not truly be necessary to achieve a level of automation that provides real benefit.

Gray asked whether an implementer with support for 8 messages would need to add support for the 9th in order to say “We support the core message set.” In his specific case, there is no functionality that requires support for Recall Item. He could implement a response, but the response would always indicate that the Recall Item request could not be processed. Campbell suggested that the core message set could be defined as 8 messages for use in public environments where Recall Item is rarely or never used and 9 messages in academic environments where Recall Item may be both useful and required. O’Brien noted that the point of the core message set was to define a minimal implementation. “It was not meant,” he added, “to be 9 messages plus or minus one.”

The group continued discussing this point and concluded that, for the core message set to be useful for defining a minimal implementation, saying “Yes, I support the core message set” means that support is available for all the messages in the core. In the context of an RFP, this might mean answering a question like “Do you support the NCIP core message set?” with one of the following responses:

* “Yes, we support all the messages in the core message set except for Recall Item because Recall Item is not necessary in the context of our application.”  
* “No, we do not support all the messages in the core message set because Recall Item is not necessary in the context of our application.”

The group discussed the differences between how a responder uses the core message set and how an initiator uses it. O’Brien and Bodfish suggested that it should be possible for an initiator to claim support for the core set if all the messages necessary to perform the tasks the initiator can perform come from the core set. In other words, if an initiator who does checkout item uses the NCIP Checkout Item message, then the initiator supports the core set. This helps to address the situations where self-service applications may never need to support messages like Accept Item. Responders, though, need to support all of the messages in the core.

The group agreed that further discussions are necessary, both to address how initiators may be able to claim support for the core message set and to revisit the composition of the core message set itself.
Conference Call with Members of the eXtensible Catalog (xC) Project

Present on the call:

Jennifer Bowen
Randy Cook
David Lindahl
???

[Editor’s note: I did not catch the name of the third participant from xC]
Dan Iddings

Bowen summarized the work of the xC project. “We are developing open source software for libraries under various Mellon grants,” she said. She further explained that they are developing a suite of applications that may be used separately or together. The applications can harvest data, normalize it, aggregate it, and provide a UI built on Drupal so that libraries have the option to implement their own OPAC. There are four different toolkits: OEI, Metadata Services, Drupal front-end, and NCIP toolkit. The NCIP toolkit provides an interface to the ILS patron database, primarily for user lookup and account information. They are working to provide some circulation functionality, primarily for C-ILL. They will have some web services that provide other functions. In order to use the NCIP toolkit, a customer need ILS-specific software (called drivers), and there are xC partners who are building those components. They provide extensive documentation that enables Java developers to build these ILS-specific drivers. They hope to be able to share the drivers with other customers via the xC website. They implemented only a subset of the NCIP protocol. They meet level three of the ILS-DI task force requirements, and they have defined some additional messages to provide additional functionality (xcGetAvailability to get circulation status for a screenful of items and xcLookupUser to get patron information needed for ILS-DI but not exposed via NCIP). Other extensions to NCIP include improved error reporting (available in “loose mode”; strict mode uses only what is available within the NCIP standard). The NCIP toolkit is available via Google Code, and it includes sample Voyager and Aleph drivers. Cornell has added support for four additional NCIP messages in order to provide functionality specifically for their own environment. Ultimately, the level of support for the various messages depends on what data and services are available from the backend system.

Bodfish said that he has downloaded the code and was very impressed. “You should be proud of what you have accomplished,” he said. He asked the xC members what the NCIP IG can do to help make some of the extensions part of the standard. The xC group explained that they did not know what the process is for requesting changes, but the functionality that they added was necessary and were considered to be show-stoppers. Further, they found the error reporting facilities built into the standard to be insufficient for their purposes. Bodfish indicated that we will be moving to a process for continuous maintenance, and that will permit us to accommodate enhancements more frequently than on a five year cycle. Bowen volunteered to compile the various extensions the xC project has implemented, including some information about why they were needed and a specific contact person, and send those to the NCIP IG.
Wanner indicated that we would be interested in having a representative from the xC project as part of the NCIP IG, and we are interested in future collaboration, either in-person or by phone. Bowen said that they will keep that in mind for the future. What they are doing is working well for them right now. Wetzel suggested that they might want to subscribe to the NCIP community interest list.

A member of the xC project asked whether the NCIP IG tracked other open source NCIP projects. Bodfish said that we try to keep track, and we have heard that both Koha and Evergreen may be doing open source NCIP, but we haven’t seen anything. “They are partners with us, and we think they are using our toolkit,” replied the xC.

The xC project asked about the availability of a tool that would permit them to validate that their NCIP is correct. O’Brien asked whether the project uses any tools to parse the schema and generate Java code from it. “This helps to ensure that the messages conform to the schema,” he said. The xC, though, is interested in more than just simple message conformance. “We want a sample or test client that ensures that the entire NCIP conversation is handled correctly.” Bodfish said that all we have now are recommendations for tools that will help to ensure the messages are built properly. “I can’t imagine a more important missing piece,” responded the xC. Wanner said that, today, most of that testing is performed between specific implementers. Wetzel added that, although we’ve talked about a test bed, we’re finding it to be a very difficult undertaking. “We’re thinking now that it might be more practical to encourage vendors to make test systems public,” she said. Wanner suggested that there are probably several implementers who would be willing to test with the xC project. Bowen agreed to send Wanner some information that would allow initiators to test with the xC responder. Bodfish suggested that we add something to the NCIP website that allows implementers to find potential testing partners.

The xC asked if the NCIP IG would be able to help them find partners for developing drivers for additional ILS systems. Bowen added that they are specifically interested in support for SirsiDynix. Iddings said that there are members within PALCI using Unicorn and Symphony who might be willing to collaborate. Bowen also indicated that, while they have a partner using III with Oracle, they are interested in finding a III site using the non-Oracle version.

O’Brien asked what version of NCIP the xC project is using. Version 1 was the response.

Walsh asked how the developers who are building the ILS-specific drivers are getting the necessary technical information. The xC project indicated that the Voyager implementation uses a combination of direct calls to the database and, only when necessary, screen scraping. “We hope to upgrade our interfaces as ILS vendors provide more standard ways to access the systems.” They added, too, that their documentation provides a good guide for how to write drivers for additional ILS. Wanner asked if they will rely on the open source community to provide updates as
necessary to accommodate ILS updates and changes. “Yes, we feel that the community will continue to adapt and provide support for ILS changes.”

The groups thanked each other for participating on the call and agreed to exchange information that will allow us to keep each other informed of future progress and opportunities.

Bodfish said that it seems that we can help them and others like them if we make sure they know about out conference calls and meetings, help them find testing partners, clarify the defect reporting and enhancement request processes, and educate them about the various development tools that are available. Wanner added that the xC project underscored the challenges associated with testing implementations. Bodfish said that may mean that it is valuable to do a simple website tool like Gray suggested where XML messages could be pasted and sent and responses received and reviewed, just to ensure that the conversation occurred properly.

Social Event at ALA 2010

Wanner asked if we want to organize another social event at a future ALA. Boettcher asked how successful the last one was. Walsh replied that it was not particularly well attended. Bodfish added that we failed to attract anyone from the target audience: librarians. Wanner suggested that it might require us to establish a pattern at both midwinter and annual in order for the event to be successful. “We didn’t do enough promotion,” she added. Campbell said that it definitely needs to be promoted earlier and on the list serves that librarians use. Wanner asked whether it would be more successful if it were sponsored. Campbell said that she doesn’t believe that makes a very big difference. She suggested that the Next Generation Catalog for Libraries (NGC4LIB) list serve would be a good place to promote, as would the LITA-L list serve. Bodfish suggested Code4Lib. Wanner said that we could probably get the LAMA/RUSA group to post something.

Wanner then asked about organizing an educational session at ALA, and she suggested that we discuss it in a future conference call. Wetzel indicated that we have until April before we would need to book a room with ALA. She then asked whether we should begin planning an event a LITA 2010. Wanner suggested that we revisit the idea after this year’s LITA conference is complete.

Next Meeting

Wanner asked where we should hold our next meeting. Walsh reminded the group that the other two sites that had offered to host this one were Ottawa (Relais) and Baltimore / Washington, D.C. (NISO). Gray reported that he was investigating whether Polaris would host. Wanner indicated that would be very convenient for doing something with the eXtensible Catalog project. O’Brien offered that OCLC would host again. The group agreed to wait until Gray had information from Polaris before making a decision.
Implementation Profile for using REST

Bodfish indicated that OCLC is interested in working on a new NCIP Implementation Profile that would use REST over HTTP. The Jangle project (http://www.jangle.org and http://code.google.com/p/jangle/wiki/NCIPXMLSchemaForBorrowers) seems to be a step in this direction. Gray asked whether REST is secure. Bodfish said that it can be delivered via HTTPS. Wanner asked if the idea is to require support for REST or to simply make it possible to use REST. Bodfish indicated that it could be added to the list of supported transports, or it could be incorporated into a new Implementation Profile. Implementers would be able to choose whether to support REST either in addition to or in place of currently supported transports. Bodfish said that OCLC believes this to be a good idea because there are many tools available to facilitate REST. Also, just like HTTP, REST is better understood by firewalls and by network administrators. It is sometimes better handled by routers. It is not likely to make any existing implementations easier. Instead, it would be more difficult since implementers would have to add support for a new transport. However, it might make implementation less objectionable to some customers and new implementers. Bodfish added that some tools may be able to generate code to support REST and the current transports at the same time. Wanner suggested that we might encourage implementers to use REST with Version 2.

Bodfish agreed that OCLC will draft something like a proposal when they are ready to move forward and post it to the list so that it can be discussed in a subsequent conference call.

Adjournment

Wanner asked if there were any other new business items for discussion. Hearing none offered, she adjourned the meeting.
### Appendix A - Action Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>By When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Publish Continuous Maintenance procedures</td>
<td>Walsh</td>
<td>After ANSI approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss possible ALA and LITA presentations</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>October conference call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revise RFP Guidelines</td>
<td>Bodfish, Gray, Koppel</td>
<td>ALA Midwinter 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare chart for implementers to indicate which core messages are implemented with which partners; include version supported and NCIP role</td>
<td>Campbell, Jackson, Brown</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare a very rough draft of a “Getting Started with NCIP” document focused on resource sharing</td>
<td>Bodfish</td>
<td>Oct 9, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare a “Getting Started with NCIP” document focused on self-service</td>
<td>Walsh</td>
<td>Dec 7, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare finished versions of “Getting Started with NCIP”</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>ALA Midwinter 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review notes from Version 2 editing phase and compile list of changes that were dropped in order to determine if any need to be resubmitted as enhancement requests</td>
<td>Walsh</td>
<td>November conference call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extend the core messages support chart to add detail about data elements</td>
<td>Wanner, Gray (resource sharing), Boettcher (self-service)</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extend the message analysis prototype in an effort to build a system for identifying which systems send what messages with what data elements</td>
<td>Gray</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss Recall Item and whether it belongs in the core message set</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>October conference call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select the site for the spring meeting</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>October conference call</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Implementer Discovery

- Need to know what different vendors support/init vs. resp.
- Need to know messages & supported version

NCIP Compliance/Test Bed

NCIP Lists

RFP Guidelines (target consultants)

Action Items

Requested change evaluation & review process & criteria
Change review process [X.yy version]

- Written req. submitted to Gail or Karen (email, web form, etc.)
- Req. passed to NCIP-15 for future consideration
- Review new items during each call
  - Review and act on each item in queue at designated meeting

- Some factors to consider
  - Value, usefulness of change
  - Compatibility with current version
  - Scope/relevance
  - Specific reason/justification
  - Negative impacts
  - General applicability
  - Field usage (trial)
  - Draft schema with proposed changes
Action Items

- Revise RFP guidelines to encourage something more than "Is your system NCIP compliant?" Target dr.
  + publication efforts specifically at conference.

  - Prepare chart vendors may complete showing which core messages are supported with each vendor/platform/version. Include role and NCIP version.

- Early draft of Getting Started NCIP: Bodfish Resource Sharing
  - Walsh Self Service 12/7
Parking Lot

Review Position on Core Profiles

- Versioning

- Revisit idea of coordinating event at ALA and/or LITA 2010

- Determine why Recall Item is in Core Message set