NETWORK ADVISORY COUNCIL

SUPPORT MATERIAL FOR OPEN SOURCE ILS DISCUSSION
AT COUNCIL'S MARCH 23, 2010 MEETING

This document contains the text of a March 19, 2010, E-mail response from Milla
Cummins, Library Director, Livingston-Park County Public Library, to Bob Cooper's
(Council Chair) request that she provide the Council with a brief summary of her
experiences with Koha.

From Milla Cummins: "Unfortunately, I am unable to attend
the NAC meeting next Tuesday, but I will be happy to
provide a synopsis of our library's particular experience
with KOHA here...

I began exploring open source options for my library
entirely as an economic decision. With the costs (building
insurance, liability insurance, health insurance,
utilities) of simply opening the doors every day just
running away while revenue remained fairly static, I was
looking for every possible opportunity to trim
expenditures.

We began by moving to Ubuntu Linux and OpenOffice, which
eliminated software licensing fees. When I started to look
at migrating our outdated online catalog, I was encouraged
to explore open source solutions by our Network Manager
Blaine Fleming. I obtained copies of the ALA Library
Technology Reports on open source through ILL. ALA
currently has available a three-set package of Tech Reports
plus a 2008 book by Marshall Breeding (Open Source
Integrated Library Systems). This latter title is the one I
read.

Since Blaine was confident that we could implement KOHA, I
asked him to test his opinion by creating a sample patron
database from our existing patron records. (Our library
was seriously burned by a proprietary vendor when we
converted from an old Follett program to Athena in 1999,
because neither the Athena conversion program that we had
purchased nor the Athena "support" team could decode the
check digits Follett had used to signify the end of a
patron record. As a result, we ended up re-entering over
10,000 patron records by hand!)

Since Blaine's test successfully moved our patron records

from Athena to KOHA with no problems, I decided that we would move to KOHA. Blaine completed this conversion on a Saturday, staff came in and trained on the new system on Sunday afternoon, we tested the system on Monday (a holiday) and were open for business on Tuesday. During the first week of operation, staff identified a couple of KOHA features they felt were cumbersome, and Blaine altered the code to change these items.

The bottom line. As a director I am responsible to provide the best services possible with the resources available. Implementing KOHA cost our library (and, hence, our taxpayers) only an additional eight to ten hours of Blaine's time, and using KOHA does not require that we budget an annual fee for support or maintenance. By comparison, at the time I was researching a catalog migration, our out-of-pocket costs to join the MSC would have exceeded $15,000 and resulted in an ANNUAL expense of at least $1,800.

I am, of course, well aware that our library could not have made the move to open source solutions without the expertise of our network manager. Employing a part-time network manager, however, is not a direct cost of using KOHA but rather a result of our library's growth. When we had a small NT network, I was able to manage our IT needs with occasional professional assistance, but our network needs outpaced my abilities long ago, and a network manager is now a necessity for our library.

One more thought. Mike (Price) notes a variety of things he says KOHA can't do. I think these assertions indicate that the point of an open source system has been missed. If KOHA DOESN'T currently do these things, it is because users have not felt it needed to. If need is identified, what KOHA does can be changed by the community of users, who can rewrite the code as needs dictate.

I hope this (admittedly rambling) discourse is of some help. If there is other particular information you think I could provide, please let me know."