



Communications Audit

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Focus Communications

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Communications Audit

THE ASSIGNMENT

NLLS leadership wondered if their communication efforts were meeting the needs of their stakeholders: member libraries, board members, municipalities and school boards. Focus Communications was asked to assess the effectiveness of Northern Lights Library System (NLLS) communication methods and content. NLLS serves member libraries, providing cost-effective technology and resources, support and training. It maximizes the benefits of economies of scale by licensing platforms and pooling materials that are available throughout the entire region. Effective communication is a key support to achieving the NLLS Mission Statement, and annual goals and objectives.

NLLS MISSION STATEMENT

Bringing the world to our communities by collaboratively providing efficient, effective, and exceptional library service.

METHODOLOGY

Focus Communications conducted a communications audit in April, 2023. The audit process included:

- Interviews with seven staff, board members and member librarians
- A content review of two Weekly Reports
- A content review of several sections of the website
- A navigation review of the website
- A review of website analytics
- A review of the NLLS survey
- A review of social media content and analytics

General Observations

NLLS uses a number of tools and platforms with which to communicate to stakeholders:

- Website (including Knowledge Base and Board meeting information)
- Weekly Reports
- Coffee Chats
- Niche Academy
- Teams Channels, Groups I.O
- Emails, ASK and access to consultants

First, NLLS is to be commended for offering so many ways in which to connect with stakeholders. These attempts demonstrate the organization's commitment to communication.

Most tools are intended for library managers and board members. There is no specific area dedicated to information for funders (municipalities and Province of Alberta), which might be helpful.

While there are many tools, there does not seem to be clarity as to which tools are targeted to which audiences. For example, the NLLS website should be targeted to member libraries and board members, yet one librarian thought it was targeted to the public. Additionally, there are patron-serving components on the website that do not seem to be consistent with NLLS' mission. Most interviewees said they only used one or two tools. Some efficiencies can be gained by discontinuing tools that are not resonating with target audiences, and putting emphasis on the tools that people want to use.

ANALYSIS – STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

We interviewed seven individuals, including staff, board members and member librarians. In each of the tables below, rows highlighted in turquoise represent high scores. Rows highlighted in light green represent the lowest scores. Rows not highlighted are in between.

How do you currently receive news and information about NLLS, and how do you want to receive it?

	Currently use	Want to use
NLLS Website	3	2
Knowledge Base	3	0
Weekly Reports	6	4
Coffee Chat	2	1
Teams Channels	4	4
Niche Academy	2	1
YouTube	0	0
NLLS HQ Groups.IO	2	2
NLLS staff (consultants, IT, etc)	5	1
Email	6	3
ASK	2	1
Other (specify):		Phone (1)

Rate your level of agreement with the following statements, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree

	1	2	3	4	5	Ave
NLLS provides me with timely information about its services			2	1	2	4
NLLS keeps me connected to latest news about libraries		3	1	1	1	3
I know who to contact if I have questions		1		1	4	4
NLLS asks for my opinion on its services	1		1	1	2	3.6
I get timely responses to my questions		1	2	1	2	3.3
I know where to find information on NLLS services		2	2	1	1	3

Please tell us what topics you would like to know more about:

Topic	Check all that apply:
Technology services provided by NLLS	4
Consulting services provided by NLLS	3 (good idea)
Leading-edge news about libraries from other sources	4 (like this)
Success stories, shared by member libraries	5
Upcoming courses, webinars available to NLLS member library staff	4 (James does this)
Advocacy efforts, campaigns and resources	3
Tools to help publicize local library programs and services	4 (incl outside region)
Other: Run Zoom training on how to use the kits	1

Thinking about the current communication and information resources, please indicate how frequently you use them:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Average
NLLS Website	1	2	2	1	2.5
Knowledge Base	1	3			1.75
Weekly Reports				6	4
Coffee Chat		1	2		2.5
Teams Channels			1	3	3.75
Niche Academy		3	1		2.25
NLLS HQ Groups.IO				2	2
NLLS staff (consultants, IT, etc)		1	3	1	3
Email			1	4	3.8
ASK			1	2	3.6

If you don't use some of these resources, can you tell us why?

For those rated 'rarely' – I generally just ask staff, or look at internal resources

Website – getting the info from committees, board meetings. Feel on top of things. Be good to check on it occasionally.

Keep board members informed.

You are required to go to Teams to get info. Coffee chats hit or miss – not well attended. Niche Academy – only go in it when a link is shared.

Website – should serve public not libraries/boards. Not searchable. Like Boxclever.

Knowledge Base - Can't find it, need help with how to use it.

YouTube – promotional materials only, not necessary/training needed

Is there any advice you wish to give NLLS leadership about communication, or any other observations you wish to share?

Doing pretty good. Nothing to add.

With any communications, be more strategic about how to distribute info. People fall through the cracks and miss info. Needs to be said more than once – 2, 3 times to ensure people see it.

Be open, transparent, keep communicating.

Has sufficient info to keep Council colleagues informed, but others might need more info. Could be some supports to help Councillors talk about libraries in their towns. Do get the weekly report of highlights that we can share with Councillors. Do all board members get the weekly report? Easy to read, pinpoint issues/topics, click on links.

Pick a spot and keep info there. One place that people can find. Knowledge Base and Niche Academy not a place to go and search for things. Everything used to be on website, then it got pulled. Some things in Teams, some in Knowledge Base, some in Niche, etc. Put it all in one place. Sometimes it's dependent on which staff person is posting it. No rhyme or reason to where things are placed. Partly due to staff changeover. Info moved to different places, some info lost. Too many channels. Don't know where to look for things. Time consuming to have to do that, especially if having to look in unfamiliar places. Lots of change – if it ain't broke don't fix it.

Need to be conscious to talk to libraries before they make decisions. Consult with member libraries first to see where there might be gaps and duplication. Libraries are busy, don't have time to keep taking on new things.

Continue to communicate, consult member libraries before making changes that affect member libraries. Operational issues, not budget. Especially when services cross into member library responsibilities.

Would like to see more of a focus on creating slides (e.g. hoopla) for use on social media. If they exist, I can't find them. Peace Library System puts on their Facebook page. I want to reuse things created by others. Peace Library System is very clear that people need to go through member library (for services). NLLS should post to Facebook so libraries can repost easily. Schedule often.

Instead of focusing on schools, get library staff to create social posts.

Moved to Teams without consultation, communication or training. Just got a notice saying here it is.

Helpful if everything was in one place and only one place. Make sure people know how to use the platforms where the info is.

Consistency.

Seems like staff don't want to answer ASK tickets in a timely way. Usually takes a day or two for response. Would like to (be able to) mark ASK tickets high priority vs. those that can wait for a day or two. Would prefer to email consultant or IT people directly. Some urgent items – (want staff to) pick up the phone for immediate answers. Van delay (s/b there by 11:30), sent ticket, sent email – no response by 5pm. Worried the driver had been in an accident? *emergent/urgent items need immediate response.

Lots of respect for executive. Everyone working together brings ideas to fruition. Puts into practice open and transparent, and help libraries (customers). It takes all of us – bring something to the table to others might not

have thought of. Collaborative approach important. Representation from all quadrants of region, Indigenous at executive board table. Want to hear from all parts of region and have a voice at the table.

FINDINGS

While NLLS employs a number of communication channels, it appears that not all are being used effectively. This perception is reinforced by the 2022 NLLS Annual Survey, where it states on page 10 “We have several communication channels, and this can lead to confusion if library managers are not interacting with those channels regularly. Continued refinement of channels of communication will mitigate against this over time.”

Interview respondents currently USE and PREFER:

- Weekly Report
- Email
- Teams

Everyone loves the **Weekly Report**! It is concise, information-filled and includes links to Niche Academy or information on the NLLS website or other websites. Its simple presentation makes the Weekly Report a quick and easy read. See the material review for comments on how to enhance this report.

Email and **Teams Channels** were also well-supported, although a couple of people would like training on how to use Teams.

They do not use the **website** as a source of information (see next section for website analysis), which is ostensibly its main purpose. This is a significant gap that will need to be addressed. They also do not use Knowledge Base, Niche Academy or YouTube.

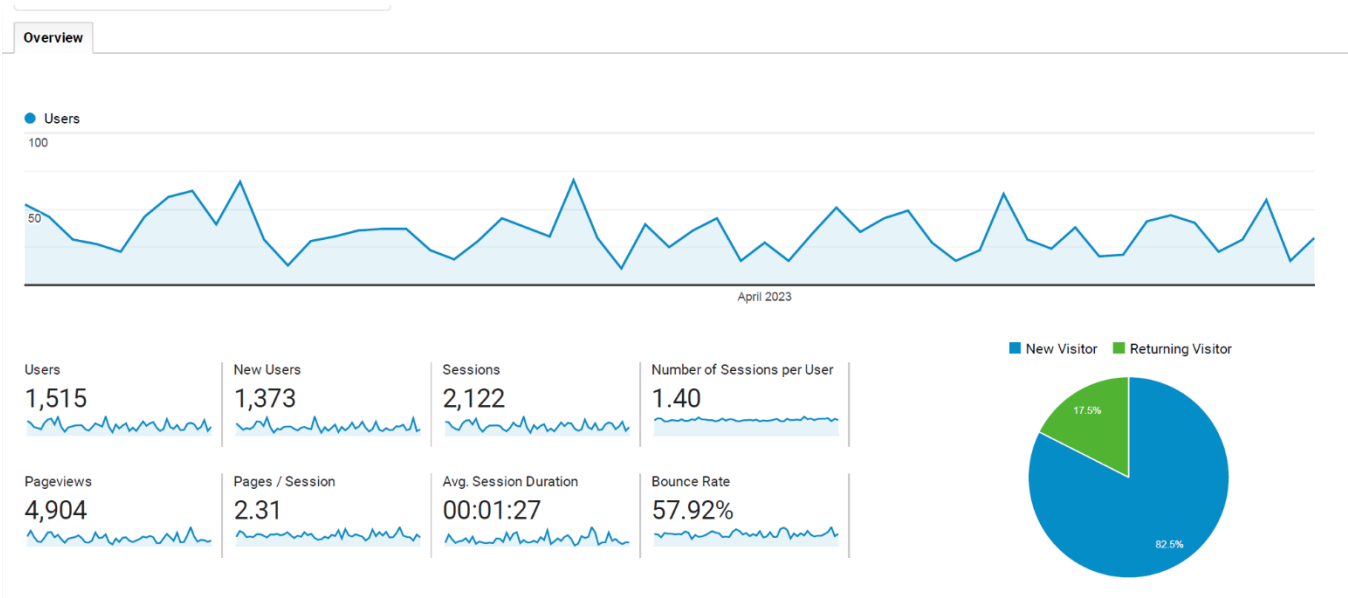
Customer service seems to be an area of concern, noted both in the interviews and in the 2022 NLLS Annual Survey. Several interviewees expressed displeasure with the ASK ticket system. IT issues, in particular, need swift response, yet there doesn't seem to be a way to prioritize requests. As one interviewee said: “I would like to (be able to) mark ASK tickets high priority vs. those that can wait for a day or two. Would prefer to email consultant or IT people directly. Some urgent items – (I want staff to) pick up the phone for immediate answers.” In the Annual Survey, one person commented, “I get very frustrated with the time it takes to get a question answered as well as rarely speaking to someone. It is difficult to explain the questions in an email at times. Often I just need a quick response and end up calling a member library to get the answer.”

Several interviewees expressed concerns that **systems were changed**, in their view, with neither consultation with the member libraries, nor adequate training. Lack of training was cited as a main reason why people are not using Niche Academy and Knowledge Base. Similarly, several people said that all the information used to be contained in the website, and now they don't know where to look. One interviewee said, “Info moved to different places, some info lost. Too many channels. Don't know where to look for things. Time consuming to have to do that, especially if having to look in unfamiliar places. Lots of change – if it ain't broke don't fix it.”

With respect to **topics** that interest the interviewees, there are opportunities to broaden the range of information provided through communication channels. Several expressed a desire for success stories and sharing among and between member libraries. Some want to know about innovation happening outside the region.

ANALYSIS - WEBSITE

NLLS.AB.CA (Analytics: March 1-April 24, 2023)



GENERAL

Google analytics show there are about 50 users per day, with an overwhelming number of new users during the report period. With 82.5% new visitors, this means that the target audiences are not returning to the website on a consistent basis. When combined with the bounce rate of nearly 58%, it likely suggests that many visitors go to the website in error and quickly leave. It is concerning to see so many new visitors for a site that is provided as an information source for member libraries, board members and other stakeholders. Ideally, the graph would be reversed, with a high number of returning visitors.

The average time on site, 1:27, is typical of most websites. It can be interpreted that people have found the information they're seeking, and they are reading or downloading it. Alternately, it can reflect people who are searching for information they cannot find. This is supported by the 2.31 pages/session statistic, which is a little high.

The lack of a search function on the website was mentioned by several people, who added they might use the site more if they could search for the information they need.

From a design perspective, the website is a bit dated, and could benefit from more images, especially of people. Images are engaging and draw people in. They also break up lengthy content. Contemporary website design is more dynamic and compelling, with intuitive navigation and interesting elements.

WEBSITE CONTENT EVALUATION

In this review, we look at readability statistics and identify errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation. These factors are important as they speak to the credibility of the organization. Credible organizations provide factual information, proofread text and demonstrate a high level of professionalism.

Below are excerpts of text taking from the respective parts of the website, followed by the assessments of each:

Website – Our Services – Member Library Services

Our Mission is to provide our members with access to training, tools, and resources that you would expect from a large municipal library while allowing members to enjoy the close-knit small community library and lifestyle. Each member library is assigned a consultant from our team of professional librarians and is invited to meet and communicate with them frequently throughout the year. Our consultants have a wide range of skills and backgrounds, and are experts in **problem solving** and teamwork!

Website – Our Services – Operations and Delivery Services

We Deliver, Communities Grow!

In Operations we make things happen. We are the team that keeps every other team in motion. We deliver the goods, we fix what's broken, we solve problems, and make sure all of the books and materials that pass through our hands look and feel their best.

If you got a problem, **yo** we'll solve it.

Check out our books while are drivers are rollin'.

Website – Our Services – Indigenous Services

Welcome!

Northern Lights Library System and Indigenous Services

Northern Lights has committed to endorsing a new relationship with Indigenous communities. This means extending an invitation and introduction to library services and programs. We make space for local Indigenous perspectives and content in library collections and work to improve access to library services. Within the geographical area of the Northern Lights Library System, there are eight different First Nation communities and four Métis Settlements.

Website – Our Services – Information Technology Services

How can we help?

Technology Services and Infrastructure (TSI) manages the network of computers, devices, and systems that connect our libraries to the world. TSI follows industry standards and best practices in administering and maintaining the NLLS network. Member libraries can rely on our team to offer technical support, monitor

bandwidth, implement firewall protocols, troubleshoot connection issues, and perform software updates, all to minimize downtime.

Online Consultations

We provide online options for meetings when in-person options are unavailable. We strive to provide the tools and training necessary to reach our geographically dispersed members. The use of tools like Teams, Zoom, GoToAssist, and more allows us to consult with our members and resolve issues in a timely manner. Online consultations reduce barriers to our support and increase member engagement.

FINDINGS

READABILITY STATS (Targets)	Grade Level (Gr 8-9)	Reading Ease (>50; 60-70)	Passive Sent. (<10%)	Complexity (<15 wds/sent)	Errors (0)
Member Library Services web	14	40	33%	26	1
Ops and Delivery Services	5	82	0	11	1*
Indigenous Services	12	29	0	13	0
ITS	12	37	0	16	0
AVERAGES	11	47	8	16	0.5

*while slang can be fun, it can also quickly be dated or take on an alternate meaning. Best to avoid.

This chart shows the readability statistics and identifies two errors in the text. Some things to note:

- Your text averages a Grade 11 reading level, which although high for public standards, is appropriate for your target audiences.
- The reading ease score shows that sentences and words are too complex to be read easily. Our target is to aim for a score between 60 and 70, however, scores above 50 are acceptable. To improve this score, create sentences with fewer words, and use words with fewer syllables.
- Passive sentence score shows that, for the most part, text is being written with the active voice. Just something to keep an eye on.
- Complexity again refers to the number of words per sentence. We want to keep this below 15 words.
- The number of errors is low, which is a good thing. Improved proofreading will help keep this in check.

WEBSITE NAVIGATION EVALUATION

One of the tests we run is about navigation, and how easy it is to find specific information on the website. We engaged our staff members who are unfamiliar with NLLS to find the following:

- Spark and Ignite Conference video
- Get answers to questions (Knowledge Base, but without using the name of the service)
- Board meeting minutes
- Executive meeting minutes
- Service Catalogue 2022-23

For each of the above, we asked three staff to track how many clicks it took them to find the information, and provide any observations.

Item	Number of clicks	Comments
Spark and Ignite Conference video	8 20+ 30+	"Resorted to making my way through the pages one at a time." "Sub-menus should have drop-downs" (2 people) "Navigation not intuitive"
Get answers to questions	2 1 Did not find	Found Knowledge Base (2 people)
Board meeting minutes	3 2 2	"Pretty easy to find" (3 people)
Executive meeting minutes	3 2 4	"checked Board sub-menu and the Executive Director Weekly Reports before finding it" "Seemed properly placed to me" "Went back to About Us because I thought 'executive' meant staff, not the Board."
Service Catalogue 2022-23	7 6 3	"Looked under Our Services, Plan of Service first" "Feel like it should be under Our Services" "Found in About Us sub-menu"

Who is the primary audience for the website?

- Employees and clients
- Employees and board members
- Member libraries and the public

Any general comments about the website?

- Navigation is not intuitive. Should be able to roll over topics to make things easier to find.
- Visually unappealing
- Should better understand who the site is for
- Most items were reasonably easy to find
- Generally, it feels consistent. Better navigation would help – the only reason I found some items was because I had already been through the entire site looking for the first topic

FINDINGS

There seems to be general confusion about the target audience for the website. There are some parts that are intended for patrons that seem inappropriate on this website (ME Card, E-Resources and the Search function for TracPac). Since NLLS does not serve patrons directly, we recommend removing these three areas.

Several people interviewed said they would prefer to have a site search function to replace the TracPac function. This would help them find content more quickly.

Some areas would benefit from better titles. For example, “Executive Blog” appears to just be the minutes and committees, and is not a ‘blog’ per se.

The About Us section could be reorganized to clearly identify information meant for member libraries/librarians, trustees, and municipalities.

ANALYSIS – MATERIALS

Two Director’s Reports were reviewed using the readability rubric: February 24 and February 17. Below is the text that was reviewed.

FEB 24 DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Family Day Monday

- Tuesday there is a TRAC **director’s** meeting
- Also **Tuesday** Vicky and I will present to the Towns of Vegreville and Viking
- Library **Manager’s** Council is on Wednesday
- Friday is our regular board meeting at 8am. [The agenda is available online](#) which includes the
- Zoom link to attend – meetings are open to the public.

WORK THERMOMETER

- At the end of this **week** we have 57 open requests in our helpdesk actively being worked **on**
- Staff responded to 142 requests from our members last week
- Ops manager and finance officer, Terri Hampson, is on vacation this week – lucky!
- TSI were out to Vermilion and Morinville to install new Fortinet devices on the network

BOARD

- The Executive Committee meeting minutes are [now available](#).
- The Executive approved our 2023 [implementation plan](#).
- The first annual system [survey report](#) is now available.

OPERATIONS

- Circulation is up year over year from 2021 to 2022 by 38,400 system wide.
- Our Little Free Library (fridge) has returned home for repairs. **Its** seen some good

FEB 17 DIRECTOR’S REPORT

NEXT WEEK

- On **Monday** Vicky and I present to the County of Two Hills
- On **Tuesday** Vicky and I present to the County of Vermilion River

WORK THERMOMETER

- At the end of this week we have 50 open requests in our helpdesk actively being worked (down from 58)

- Staff responded to 109 requests from our members last week (down from 148 – we did have one less day this week)

BOARD

- We had an excellent Board Meeting today. The Draft minutes of the meeting is available at this link.
- Looking for a quick synopsis to share with your councils? Here are the highlights.
- The Library Manager's Council was held this week. Check out their report in the minutes linked above.

OPERATIONS

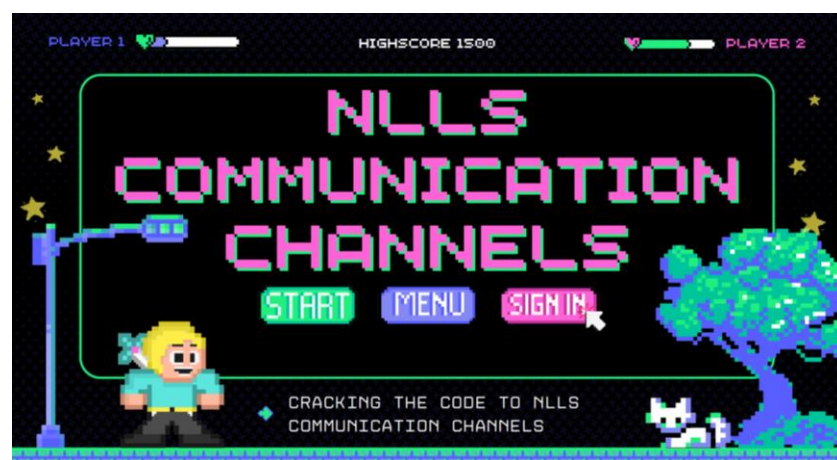
- We've started our spring cleaning early. Our two work experience students are busy whipping the building into shape!

READABILITY STATS (Targets)	Grade Level (Gr 8-9)	Reading Ease (>50; 60-70)	Passive Sent. (<10%)	Complexity (<15/sent)	Errors (0)
Director's report Feb 17	10	40	0	10	6
Director's report Feb 24	4	76	12	5	7
AVERAGES	7	58	6	7.5	6

Errors = three spelling, one grammar, two punctuation

Errors = three spelling, two grammar, two punctuation

The Director's Report is a clear winner in terms of communication style and content that people want. It rated highly through the interviews for being timely, concise and informative. It comes in at a very good grade level, and the reading ease score is right in the wheelhouse. Text could likely benefit from some proofreading to check for spelling, grammar and punctuation. The report could start to include some of the topics that people said they wanted to see.






NLLS created a presentation to explain the various communication channels, primarily to member library staff. While creative and fun, this presentation is hard to read. The dark background and pixelated characters (reminiscent of old video games) are distracting and make it difficult to get through the information.

ANALYSIS – SOCIAL MEDIA

FACEBOOK

NLLS uses Facebook as a way to connect primarily with member library staff. As seen in the analytics, below, the posts are reaching about 140 on average, however, the engagement is very low, ranging from 1-10.

Content				Create a post	Last 60 Days ▾	Date ▾
	-- Mon, Feb 27	Post reach	Engagement	Boost unavailable		
		206	10			
	-- Mon, Feb 27	Post reach	Engagement	Boost unavailable		
		144	2			
	-- Fri, Feb 24	Post reach	Engagement	Boost unavailable		
		76	1			

Page overview

Create a post

Last 28 days

Discovery

Post reach

152

Post engagement

11

New Page likes

1

New Page Followers

2

Interactions

Reactions

2

Comments

0

Shares

2

Photo views

3

Link clicks

0

Other

Hide all posts

0

Unfollows

0

These analytics show that both the number of posts, and the engagement with posts, are very low. NLLS should set a content calendar, and content guidelines, in order to refine what it posts on Facebook. Alternately, NLLS could discontinue use of this communication channel, since its main audiences are stakeholders and not the public.

LINKEDIN

NLLS is also on LinkedIn, but only has 102 followers. The last post was six months ago, and so the account is inactive. We recommend this channel be discontinued.

FINDINGS

Social media is not the best use of communications efforts. Most organizations that are business-to-business use social media to attract new clients and increase sales. Since neither of these is an objective for NLLS, it makes sense that social media is not relevant for its core audiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

REDO THE WEBSITE

- Focus content on primary stakeholders: member libraries, board members, funders (municipalities and the Province), and set the navigation accordingly.
- Move away from the organizational structure for the web navigation, and move to a user-based navigation.
- Consolidate all the helpful content for member libraries under one tab. Make it easy to find information.
- Similarly, consolidate board member meeting minutes, agendas, etc., training, and other board information
- Create a funders' tab that features the value proposition for libraries, quick fact sheets, and other information that funders seek
- Remove all patron-serving content (ME card, e-resources, TracPac)
- Add a search function for the website

KEEP THE DIRECTORS' REPORT

- People love this report because it gives them easy, quick information about NLLS and member libraries.
- It's easy to read and contains links to the website and other resources as needed.
- Consider providing a little more context (so what?) to help people see the big picture
- Institute rigorous proofreading to enhance and sustain credibility
- Incorporate more topics that people are interested in, especially success stories and news from member libraries

USE TEAMS CHANNELS AND EMAIL

- Teams channels are a quick way to get information and connect
- Some people prefer email as it remains a record until deleted, unlike Teams content which can disappear after time.

ELIMINATE SOCIAL MEDIA

- Social channels are not targeted at NLLS' key stakeholders.
- Both Facebook and LinkedIn are essentially inactive, with few followers and limited engagement.

ELIMINATE COFFEE CHATS

- People stated that these were good during the pandemic, but most do not have the time to participate any longer.

PROVIDE TRAINING ON HOW TO USE NICHE ACADEMY AND KNOWLEDGE BASE

- None of the interviewees knew anything about Niche Academy or Knowledge Base.
- These resources are underused.
- Consider holding specific training sessions on these channels to help people understand what they are for and how to make best use of them.
- Reach out to small libraries and provide greater support on how to use these channels.
- Revisit in one year to see if use has improved. If not, consider discontinuing.

SET SERVICE STANDARDS

- Set response standards for ASK tickets, and communicate those standards to stakeholders.
- Allow member libraries to call in with minor inquiries to consultants and IT.
- Provide some sort of mechanism to deal with urgent matters – whether it's a 'priority' tag on tickets or a specific person to call.