



Polaris in action: smarter workflows, better service

Insights from library leaders on thriving in the digital first era

Public libraries are evolving rapidly to meet the needs of their communities. As trusted institutions, they provide access to information, foster lifelong learning and serve as inclusive spaces for all. Yet, public librarians face increasing pressure to do more with less—managing diverse collections, engaging patrons, adopting new technologies and ensuring accessibility, all while operating within tight budgets.

This report brings together insights from public library leaders from [Jacksonville Public Library](#), [Grove Village Public Library](#) and [STELLA \(Sharing & Technology Enhancing Local Library Access\)](#) who are seizing technology to realize their visions as modern, user-friendly hubs of community engagement – the heart of a connected local scene.

The modern library landscape

Balancing tradition and innovation

Public libraries are dynamic community hubs offering digital resources, educational programming and technology access. As expectations grow, so does the need for systems that support both traditional services and modern demands. Forward-thinking libraries are embracing innovative solutions to stay relevant in the digital age, providing patrons with cutting-edge tools and resources while maintaining the rich heritage of community engagement, literacy training and education as their core missions.

Whether serving small towns or large urban populations, libraries aim to be responsive, inclusive and easy to work with. As vital community anchors, they offer safe spaces for social interaction, cultural exchange and intellectual exploration. Programs such as adult education classes, children's story time and multicultural events exemplify the library's commitment to fostering a sense of community and promoting lifelong learning.

The evolution of library technology

Advances in library management systems have transformed libraries, making them more efficient and user-friendly. The best systems employ intuitive interfaces to automate and simplify circulation, cataloging and acquisitions, allowing staff to focus on the higher-value responsibilities that separate public libraries from any other civic institution and make them irreplaceable:



- Ensuring free and equitable access to information
- Supporting digital and information literacy
- Preserving cultural heritage and local history
- Encouraging civic engagement

On the user experience side, modern systems offer improved experiences through faster notifications, intuitive searches, and seamless access to digital resources. Libraries that prioritize accessibility standards and transparent transaction histories further support user satisfaction and underscore the role of the public library as a safe, trusted institution that serves everyone in the community.

Practical magic: Real stories from real librarians

Public librarians, whether serving in large urban centers or small community facilities, are simplifying the lives of staff and patrons with technologies like Polaris, an advanced integrated library system (ILS) from Innovative, part of Clarivate. Polaris is designed specifically to address the unique needs, challenges and opportunities facing public libraries, delivering time-savings and modern experiences, while prioritizing trust, security and support.

What does this look like in practice? A group of librarians from across the U.S. shared how Polaris has positively impacted their work and communities.

Faster, simpler workflows...

Polaris simplifies core library operations through Polaris Leap, a modern, browser-based interface. Staff can access the system from any device with an internet connection—ideal for mobile work or remote locations. It supports circulation, cataloging, acquisitions, patron management and more with a responsive design that's optimized for use on laptops and tablets, making it flexible for use at service desks, in the stacks or off-site. Changes made in Leap are reflected immediately in the Polaris ILS database.

"We couldn't live without the ease of use."

Debra Nelson, Director, Elk Grove Village Public Library

The Leap client's single search box is a standout feature at Jacksonville Public Library: "You can put in a barcode, customer ID, or even an email address—and it finds it," said System Administrator Stacey McClain. "You don't have to be a librarian to understand what you're trying to search for."

"The Leap web client helps our staff be in the stacks helping people. It helps our staff go out to do outreach."

Eric Lozauskas, Director, STELLA Consortium

For Debra Nelson, Director of Elk Grove Village Public Library, it's daily manual tasks that have been automated or simplified that have improved operations at her stand-alone library. The automation of library card expiration notices sent by email eliminates a "really labor-intensive process. So, no more FTP-ing — that's another streamlining process. It's friendly, it's intuitive. It's just so much faster to find what you're looking for. Staff don't have to remember what function keys they need to navigate around."

"One of our branch managers said, 'You know, I've been here 20 years and we've had a lot of new systems and they always say it's going to make my life easier. And Polaris actually did.'"

Stacey McClain, Library Systems Administrator, Integrated Library Systems, Jacksonville Public Library

...at libraries of all types and sizes

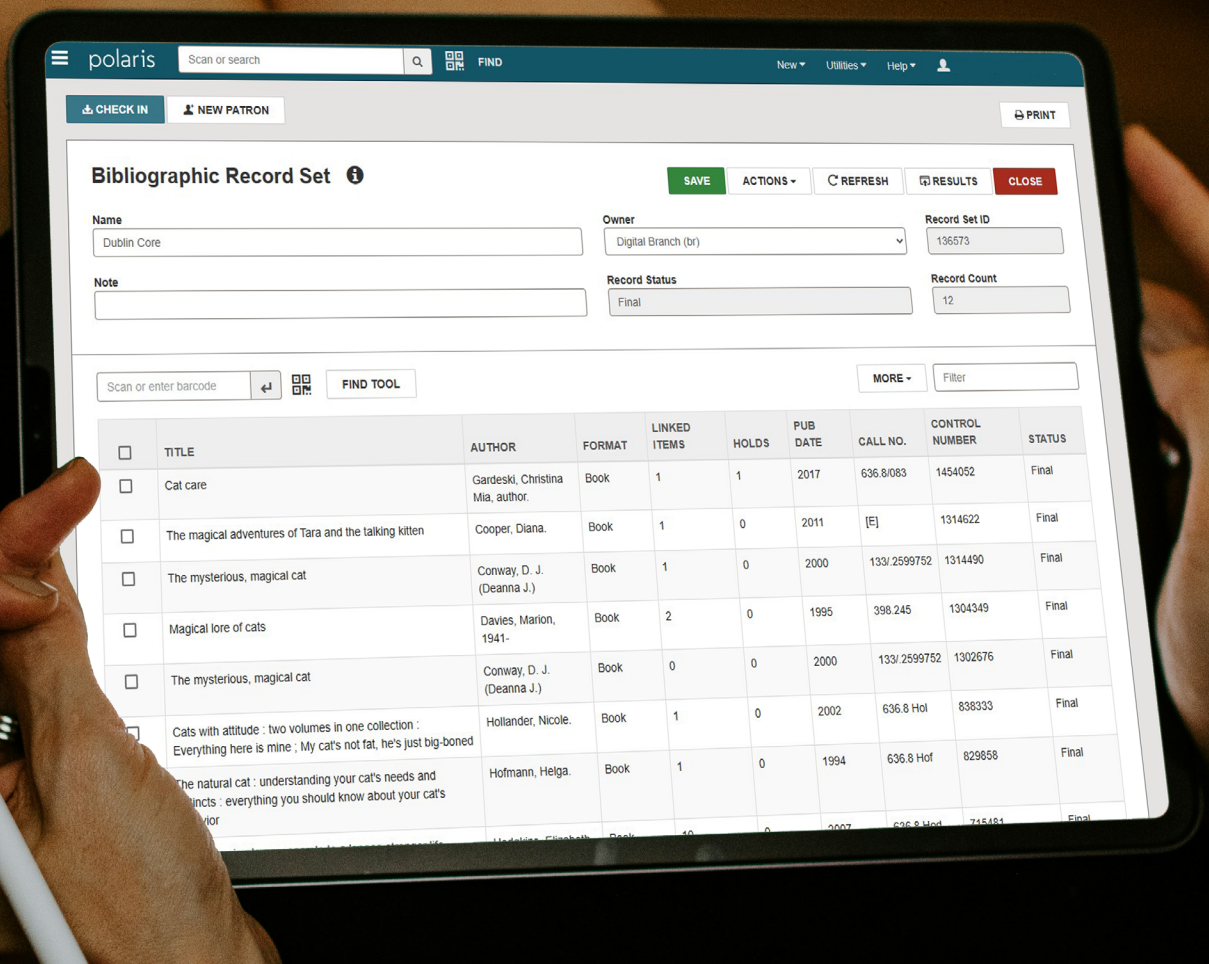
Polaris supports both centralized and decentralized workflows, making it ideal for libraries of all sizes and structures. One standout feature is “record sets,” which allow staff to group items or patrons and perform bulk operations. Eric Lozauskas described how this helps manage renovations and displays: “You can create a simple record set of all of those items, change the shelf location and it’s super easy to do a bulk change and move them back later.”

Record sets are especially powerful in large systems with multiple branches or frequent operational changes. They allow libraries to temporarily reclassify or suppress items without altering the underlying catalog structure. For example, during renovations or emergency closures, entire collections can be marked as “in storage” or “not requestable” with a few clicks. When the situation changes, those same items can be restored just as easily.

"Record sets are the future. They make things so much better."

Stacey McClain

This functionality replaces more cumbersome legacy methods, such as manipulating circulation maps or manually editing item records. It also supports creative programming—like holiday displays or pop-up collections—by allowing staff to group and manage themed materials efficiently.



Improving patron experience

Polaris is designed to deliver the experiences that today's patrons expect. It's fast and flexible with accessibility at its core – essential for public libraries, which are inherently for all community members.

"Polaris does active testing for accessibility throughout the development process, which is a great thing for us."

Stacey McClain

Debra Nelson, director of the Elk Grove Library, highlighted faster notifications, intuitive search and flexible communication options. "Patrons receive their holds much quicker. We've had patrons who have been in the building when they received notification."

"When they want it, they want it now. That's the culture we live in."

Debra Nelson

Vega Discover further improves usability. Eric Lozauskas gave a simple example of the better patron experience, "It rolls up all records into a single result, Audio, print, ebook appear as tabs at the top of the result so the patron can select the format that they want."

"Hands down, just a complete night and day difference between our old catalog and Vega. And it's responsive. Like whatever device you're using it on. It's just really nice to be able to have an interface that's reliable for customers."

Stacey McClain

Stacey feels improvements in staff support translate into better support for patrons. For example, making it simple for staff to review a patron's account. She emphasized the robust access in Polaris, remarking: "There's so much more information about the transactions... staff can troubleshoot a lot better."

"Sometimes the smallest things make the biggest difference."

Debra Nelson

Building trust and ensuring security: Enterprise-grade protection

Polaris is accredited with ISO certifications and operates a dedicated security operations center 24/7. Supported by Clarivate, Polaris is equipped to allocate resources towards enhancing security measures and regularly engages third-party partners for testing purposes.

"Security is crucial," noted Eric. "Libraries are trusted as an institution, and we hold patron data that's personally identifiable. We have to make sure that we keep that secure, as secure as possible. So that was one of the big focuses that we had when looking at different ILS products."

"Innovative did more than the other ILS vendors. They actually have ongoing protections in place. They're monitoring their servers and systems and they're accountable. If something were to happen, they're there to assist. The support that comes from a very large company supporting the product was important to us."

Eric Lozauskas

The Jacksonville Public Library is part of the city of Jacksonville, where Stacey notes, "they are extremely, extremely concerned about security here."

She connected their dedicated system engineer from Polaris with the city technical team to ensure all the city's requirements were met. "And that goes back to what we said about implementation: we had an assigned team that knew us and knew what we were doing and then could really interact with our IT department on security levels," said Stacey.



Migrations that are simple and smooth

Public libraries are daily operations that can't go off-line or close doors for a system upgrade. Staff often wear multiple hats and adding more work by way of learning new systems can make any library leader balk at making a technology change. Yet, librarians consistently describe their Polaris migration as smooth.

Jacksonville Public Library and the STELLA consortium had accelerated timelines, moving from contract signing to "go-live" in six months. Eric Lozauskas described their journey: "We were migrating to Polaris and at the same time we were having four new libraries join our consortium. Massaging all that data and making it all map correctly is quite an undertaking. But we had some 'wizards' over at Innovative that were really fantastic at this. Everything was laid out very clearly in the proposal for us. And there were no surprise costs."

Jacksonville Public Library also migrated in six months, despite a hurricane delaying their go-live by three days. Nevertheless, "We were ready to go," reported Stacey..

"This was the smoothest migration—we really didn't have any big hiccups."

Stacey McClain

Polaris's training resources were critical to smooth transitions. Libraries used a mix of in-person sessions, online tutorials, and captioned videos, which Debra notes are great for staff sitting at the reference desk. She describes a quick adoption process. "It is not a steep learning curve whatsoever. After the pandemic, we had some new staff come in, younger staff who are used to web-based searches. Polaris Leap is like that too. It was almost seamless because the platform is so familiar to them."

"The learning curve is like next to nothing. It's just such a familiar experience. Plus, the staff could see all the potential and all the flexibility in the product. They were excited for it."

Debra Nelson

Polaris customers benefit from consistent support contacts who understand their library's needs. Stacey described Jacksonville Public Library's experience as "a real collaborative relationship." During implementation, they had a dedicated manager and used "Basecamp" for centralized communication. Now in ongoing support, "we have a main support contact. I'm not having to explain everything from the beginning every time."

Building stronger connections through technology

The experiences shared by librarians highlight how Polaris plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of library services. By streamlining workflows, enhancing user experiences and addressing the nuanced challenges of public libraries, this innovative system fosters efficiency and community engagement. Polaris empowers library staff to focus on what truly matters — their patrons — and positions libraries as hubs of accessible knowledge and modern convenience. With its robust features and dedicated support, Polaris demonstrates how technology can be a meaningful partner in advancing the mission of public libraries across the nation.

**Experience the difference Polaris can make in your library.
Schedule a personalized demo today to explore how its
innovative features can transform your operations and better
serve your community.**

[Contact us now to get started!](#)

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