

VALE Assessment Survey: Executive Summary

Preface

As a grassroots, self-funded consortium of New Jersey academic libraries founded in 1998, the membership of The Virtual Academic Library Environment (VALE) represents all sectors of higher education in the state, including public, private and proprietary institutions. Working together, these libraries have developed a strong network dedicated to furthering excellence in learning and research through innovative and collaborative approaches to information services and resources.

In 2007, VALE commissioned an assessment study of its services and benefits. This document summarizes the findings of the first phase of this research. The full report, 2007 VALE Assessment Survey Report, describes the research methodology and provides a detailed account of the survey results.

The second phase of the research which focuses on cost-savings realized by the VALE members will be available in the fall of 2007.

Executive Summary

VALE (The Virtual Academic Library Environment of New Jersey Consortium) was the subject of a survey assessment project conducted by PALINET Consulting Services in Spring 2007. The project, consisting of a Web-based survey, telephone survey, and the development of a cost-savings model, was implemented to assess, document, and report the economic value and benefits of VALE services to its member libraries, their constituents, and the New Jersey higher education community.

The Web survey was conducted from April 3 to April 27, 2007. The sample for this part of the study consisted of all 52 members of VALE. A total of 46 institutions completed the survey, for a response rate of 88 percent, which is extremely high by market research standards. All but four of the respondents held the top administrative position in their library. The telephone survey, conducted from May 8 to June 4, 2007, reached the directors of 11 VALE member institutions to probe further into their use of and assessment of VALE services.

The Web survey researched a variety of components of VALE service, including: savings derived from leveraged purchasing of electronic databases; efficiencies derived from services related to purchasing as a consortium; VALE committee accomplishments; the value of networking, collaboration, and programming opportunities; VALE's overall value to member institutions and perceptions of future value; VALE's Web site,

conferences, and other communication vehicles; and awareness of VALE among members and constituents.

The value of VALE was ranked high for all 13 of the service areas listed in the survey, especially in providing electronic scholarly resources at lower costs and expanding the choice of electronic resources available. When asked the impact on their institution if VALE did not exist, 98% of the respondents said they would not be able to provide as many databases as they have through VALE, and 78% felt their faculty would have fewer scholarly resources. Almost 90% said there would be databases their institution could not afford without the benefit of VALE's consortial pricing. Finally in this area, 98% of the institutions rated the scope of VALE database offerings as excellent or good.

Further comments on VALE's value to libraries and to the state noted that "VALE serves as a role model for collaboration among New Jersey higher education institutions" and "as a result of VALE, New Jersey academic libraries have a greater cohesiveness now than ever before."

Almost every respondent to the VALE Assessment Survey made additional comments on how VALE services help their library be more effective. Some of the comments were general: "as a mid-sized library, VALE's networking opportunities have been invaluable. We have benefited tremendously from learning how other libraries deal with common problems." This notion of community extended to other comments as well. VALE's services "make us aware of the common interests we have with librarians in all sectors of higher education in New Jersey," said one librarian.

The work of 9 of the 12 VALE committees was favorably rated, and there were suggestions to improve the work of all of the committees. The VALE conference was deemed to be of the greatest value of any type of library conference members could attend. More than half of the respondents gave the highest possible value rating to the annual VALE conference, more than twice the percentage for any other statewide conference.

Members noted the need to increase awareness of VALE, particularly among administrators, legislators, funders, and faculty. The top suggestion to accomplish this goal is to develop an awareness-raising campaign targeted to specific external groups.

Respondents were asked to rate the value of 20 future steps or initiatives that VALE might take in the next five years to improve its services to members. "Negotiating with database aggregators to get what we want" and "Expanding New Jersey Knowledge Initiative resources and opportunities" were the top choices in this area.

The survey also asked for improvements needed in VALE services. Improvements in committee work, further expansion of database offerings, and improvements to the VALE Web site were key findings here.

Two quotes from the survey responses sum up the findings of the VALE Survey Project: “VALE has made a tremendous amount of difference in enhancing the resources and services we supply to our students” and “VALE is the best thing that has happened to New Jersey libraries.”