

Vendor Evaluation

The decision facing the board

Does the proposed service solve a defined library problem well enough to justify its cost, obligations, and risks?

What boards need to know

Begin the discussion with the need. A demonstration can show appealing features without establishing that the service fits the library's staffing, community, or budget. Ask for a comparison that includes continuing the current approach, improving an existing service, and purchasing something new.

For privacy, ALA recommends including requirements in the purchasing process and addressing data use, retention, ownership, security, and incident response in vendor agreements. Its guidance also addresses deleting user data when the relationship ends. [Source: ALA, Choosing a Third-Party Vendor, Agreements, and Ending the Library-Vendor Relationship sections.](#)

Those provisions are one part of the decision. The board also needs a clear account of who will implement the service, what success will look like, and what the library will do if the service disappoints.

Questions to ask

- What specific service problem are we trying to solve, and how will we recognize improvement?
- Has staff tested the proposed workflow, including accessibility needs, with representative tasks?
- What will implementation, training, ongoing support, and eventual migration cost?
- Which important promises appear in the written agreement, and which remain sales statements?
- What happens if pricing, ownership, or product features change?
- Can we obtain usable data and continue service if we leave?

A practical next step

Request a short comparison of the realistic options, with evidence for each major claim. Set the library's essential requirements before scoring attractive features. Where an essential requirement remains unresolved, identify the evidence or contract change needed before proceeding.

Illustrative discussion: A proposed service costs less than the current one but requires substantial staff cleanup after migration. Ask staff to include that work in the comparison and explain what other service would be delayed. The subscription price alone does not answer the purchasing question.