

October 25, 2018

The latest on our new initiatives

More projects on the drawing board for FY19

The new federal fiscal year began October 1, and it's going to be a busy one here at NLS. You've been hearing a lot in *On the Move* about several projects that are well under way, such as Duplication on Demand and the braille eReader. We've also outlined more than a dozen projects aimed at determining the best approach to enhancing NLS products and services. Here's a look at what we're working on.

We are studying the feasibility of using a **modified smartphone** as the next-generation talking-book player. This includes evaluating smartphones currently on the market, what modifications they would need before they could search the NLS catalog and play talking books, how difficult they would be for patrons to set up and use, how much they would cost for NLS to buy and maintain, and many other factors. By this time next year, we could be getting close to focus-group testing of one or more devices.

We are creating a prototype **voice user interface** (voice UI) for searching the NLS catalog and playing talking books. From this we hope to learn more about the technical requirements of voice UI and what patrons would expect it to do. A pilot with patrons from around the country could begin next spring.

We will be assessing patron acceptance of magazines produced using **text-to-speech** rather than human narration. Using text-to-speech could allow timelier production of magazines at lower cost. As part of this, we also will assess what level of quality assurance patrons expect for magazines produced with text-to-speech—for example, will they mind if a few words are mispronounced? *Talking Book Topics*, the bimonthly listing of new talking books in the NLS collection, is one candidate for production using text-to-speech. A pilot could begin next spring.

In the year ahead, we also will be exploring "**self-service**" tools such as a virtual agent on the NLS website or BARD Mobile that would interact with patrons and reduce the workload of network library reader advisors. And we will be testing a **streaming service** that would enable patrons to receive the data from files contained in an NLS book as they listen to it instead of having to download the entire book. Streaming would let patrons start listening to a book faster, and it would reduce the volume of traffic on NLS servers.

"We're excited about the potential of each of these ideas," Director Karen Keninger said. "But first we need to determine if they really will improve our service, assess how patrons will react to them, and, of course, figure out how much they will cost. That's what we'll be doing in the year ahead."

Not all of these ideas may become reality. But we're always looking for new ways to keep NLS on the move.

Watch for the next issue of *On the Move* in your inbox on November 29!