



Empowering Librarians: The Impact of Library Open Workflows

A low/no-code solution that gives librarians autonomy and agility

Academic libraries today face a landscape defined by rapid technological change, increasing demands from campus stakeholders and the ongoing challenge of doing more with less. As collections diversify and services expand, librarians are tasked with managing complex workflows across multiple systems — often with limited resources and staff time. The need to streamline operations and integrate disparate platforms is felt acutely in every department, from acquisitions to outreach services.

Library teams often rely on IT support for even the simplest operational updates whether that's batch-editing records, sending patron notices, or moving data between Alma and campus systems. This dependence slows down progress and limits agility.

Now, Ex Libris Alma is addressing this challenge with a secure, low-/no-code solution built directly into its platform. Library Open Workflows (LibOW) offers a visual, drag-and-drop interface that enables libraries to design and run automations, either to streamline operations within Alma or to integrate Alma with third-party services. With LibOW, scripts and API requests can be run securely and non-coders can design and implement their own processes with minimal IT support.



"Library Open Workflows offers a place in the cloud where you can run your scripts performing the API requests, as well as a way also for non-coders to create their needed workflows and processes on their own."

Dr. Mathias Kratzer, Chief Information Officer, Bavarian State Library

By reducing complexity and enabling integration, LibOW helps academic libraries move beyond the limitations of legacy systems and manual processes. It is fostering a culture of experimentation, collaboration and continuous improvement, where every librarian, regardless of technical background, can contribute to the library's mission of service and innovation.



Accelerating automation throughout the library

LibOW accelerates library innovation by lowering the barriers to automation and process improvements, making these capabilities accessible to staff regardless of their technical background or size of their team. Traditionally, automating library workflows — such as updating records, managing notifications, or integrating systems — required specialized programming skills or dedicated IT support. With Library Open Workflows, staff can design, implement and modify workflows using intuitive, visual interfaces that rely on drag-and-drop functionality rather than code.

This democratization of automation means that frontline librarians, circulation staff and department managers can directly address operational challenges and experiment with new solutions. They can quickly build workflows to handle repetitive tasks, respond to changing needs and improve service delivery without IT intervention. As a result, libraries become more agile and responsive, and staff are empowered to innovate and contribute to the library's strategic goals. By putting powerful tools in the hands of those who understand library operations best, LibOW fosters a culture of continuous improvement and shared ownership of technology-driven change.

"This helps to overcome the classic process based on a huge ticket system where requests pile up waiting for support by the IT department."

Dr. Mathias Kratzer, Chief Information Officer, Bavarian State Library



Increasing autonomy without losing control

LibOW provides centralized oversight and access that enables libraries to view and manage all automations, integrations and permissions through a single, consolidated interface. Workflow data and actions are securely hosted within the Clarivate cloud and protected under the same security and compliance framework that supports Alma.

Further, LibOW Supports privacy and control. Workflows and outputs are isolated based on Alma role assignments, allowing both individual and institutional oversight. Shared or exported workflows exclude credentials and sensitive data, and all actions are logged for transparency and audit purposes.

Because staffers can't "break" workflows, they're encouraged to experiment and stretch their abilities, while leadership has confidence that expertise and oversight reigns.

Real librarian experiences: Motivations and challenges

When the Bavarian State Library (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek - BSB) migrated its systems to the cloud with Alma, the goal was to modernize infrastructure and free staff from the overhead of local database management, scripts and manual jobs. Alma provided a robust, cloud-based platform for core library operations.

Yet, some specialized workflows still required IT support and scripting, creating queues of routine requests. LibOW offered a complementary solution. With its cloud-based environment for automating and customizing workflows, the State Library could enable staff across departments to design and run processes independently, while IT focused on more advanced technical challenges. Recognizing the potential of this new approach, BSB became one of the first Development Partners for LibOW — helping to shape the platform while gaining early access to its capabilities.

"Both coders and non-coders can now work efficiently while IT resources are freed for more complex challenges."

Dr. Mathias Kratzer, Chief Information Officer, Bavarian State Library

For System Librarian Peter Heller, LibOW stood out during a presentation at IGeLU (The International Group of Ex Libris Users) 2024. While Alma jobs efficiently handle large-scale updates, they apply uniform values across records. At BSB, some updates required greater variation. With LibOW, staff could process a single list where each line carried different values — all in one workflow.



"The flexibility struck me immediately — it added a level of customization and efficiency that supported our day-to-day work."

Peter Heller, System Librarian, Bavarian State Library

That flexibility quickly translated into practical wins. One of the most popular examples was a workflow related to PO Lines. According to Heller, "It was quick to build, but saved my colleagues a number of mouse clicks every time they dealt with an item. One coworker even thanked me with a box of chocolates — it showed just how meaningful these small automations can be."

The University of Kentucky is also a development partner that's finding efficiencies with LibOW. For example, managing branch library hours was a time-consuming, manual process — especially during unexpected events like winter storms. Traditionally, updating hours required manually entering exceptions for each branch, a task that fell solely to the systems librarian. Using LibOW, systems librarian Jason Griffith created a form that automated the process, making it more efficient and sharing responsibility across staff, reducing bottlenecks and empowering others to contribute.

Since then, LibOW has sparked new ideas for integrating external systems, like Smart Lockers and the library's online calendaring and scheduling platform, demonstrating its potential for bridging gaps between library technologies.

At the Los Rios Community College District in California, libraries collaborate closely within a shared Alma institution on systems, technical services, fulfillment, electronic resource management, analytics and discovery, often working together through committees. The libraries previously relied on custom PHP and Python scripts to automate processes like updating item-level data or running API-driven tasks. They turned to LibOW to make automation development faster, easier and more reliable. The LibOW platform has enabled workflows that had previously been unfeasible due to resource constraints, opening new possibilities for integration and efficiency.



"LibOW has dramatically increased my development speed, improved existing automations, and made it much easier to schedule and respond to inputs like form submissions — without the fear of breaking fragile scripts."

Jeff Karlsen, Technical Services Librarian at Sacramento City College

For these libraries, LibOW has become a catalyst for collaboration, empowerment and innovation across library teams, by making automation accessible to non-technical staff.

Enhancing Collaboration: IT and Library Staff

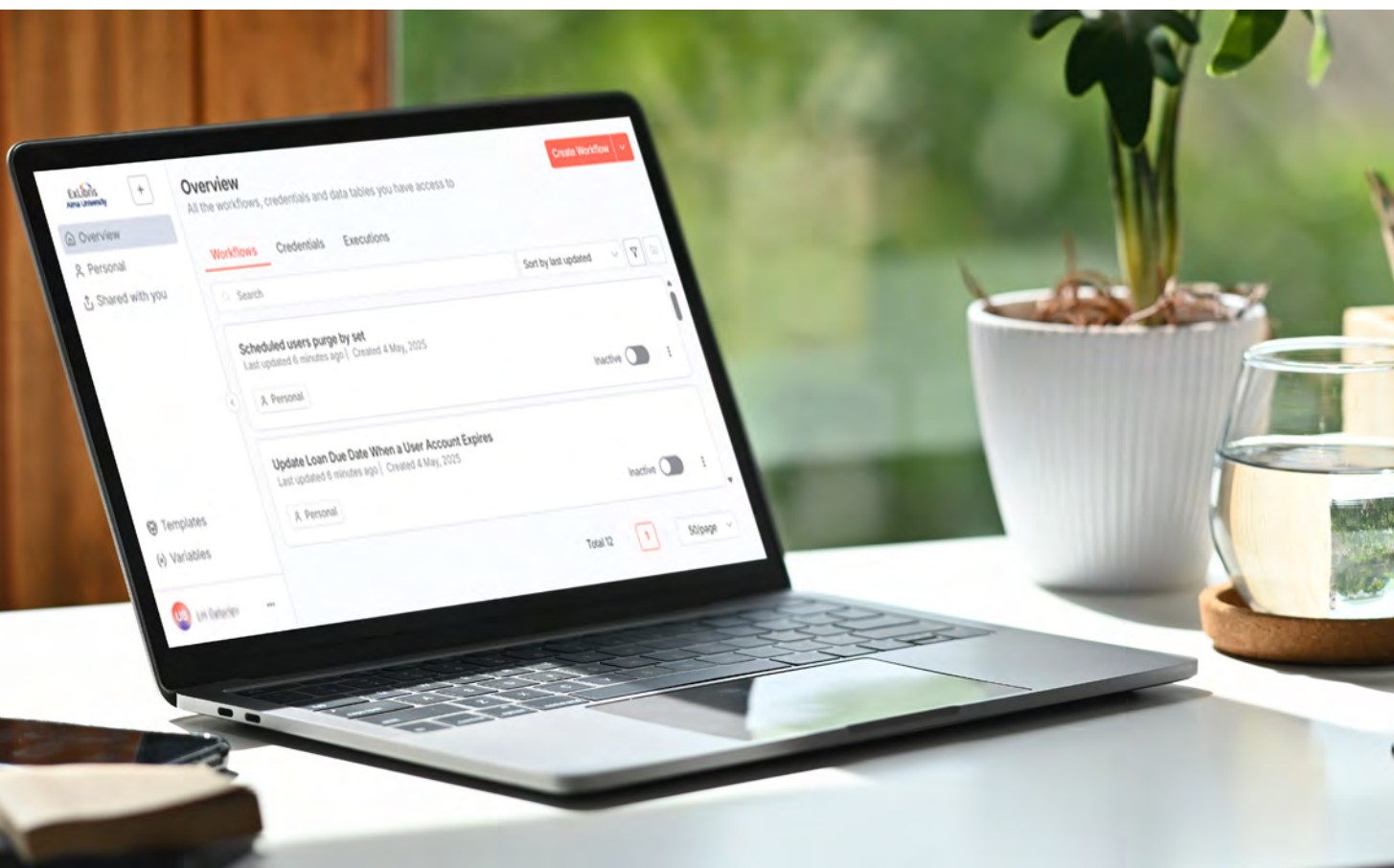
LibOW is revolutionizing the way library teams handle technical tasks and fostering greater collaboration across departments. By making automation more accessible, the platform enables staff from all backgrounds – not just those in IT — to contribute to problem-solving and innovation.

At the University of Kentucky, for example, interest in LibOW extended well beyond the technical staff. After a presentation on the platform, many employees who previously felt disconnected from technology initiatives expressed enthusiasm and curiosity, recognizing its relevance to their everyday work.

"We recruited project members for the development partnership from all the other departments of the library, not only IT. Many of them have tried out the proposed examples and I think they were inspired."

Dr. Mathias Kratzer, Chief Information Officer, Bavarian State Library

Closer collaboration between IT and other library departments has produced tangible benefits. Regular meetings have created opportunities for open discussions about challenges and solutions, blending technical knowledge with the unique insights of non-technical staff. As a result, library employees who lack coding experience now have the tools and support to explore new possibilities, leading to a more empowered and collaborative workforce.



Community and Future Directions

The ongoing development of LibOW is driven not only by the efforts of individual libraries but also by the shared commitment and innovation of the wider global library community. As more libraries embrace automation and integration, the platform's features and positive influence continue to expand.

A key factor in this evolution is the growing spirit of sharing and collaboration among institutions. The ability to contribute and access shared workflows within the platform has encouraged participants to build upon one another's solutions in a safe and secure environment – no chance of “breaking” another's workflow. What began with just a few shared workflows has quickly multiplied, as more community members and development partners actively contribute their ideas and examples. This collaborative environment is fostering rapid growth and promises even greater expansion as engagement increases.

"New workflows will push the enhancements of other components because now they are appealing to a larger group of people and the demands will increase massively."

Peter Heller, System Librarian, Bavarian State Library

Community input is also playing a crucial role in shaping the platform's future. As librarians work with LibOW, their needs and suggestions are directly influencing improvements to APIs, webhooks and other technical components. The increasing adoption of automation by a broader range of users is raising the bar for new features and capabilities, ensuring the platform continues to evolve in line with the community's expectations.

"It's not only us in the IT department, it's the colleagues and it will also be the community sooner or later. I'm very confident that this will work out."

Dr. Mathias Kratzer, Chief Information Officer, Bavarian State Library



How libraries are using Library Open Workflows

Early development partners are already using Library Open Workflows to streamline recurring and high-impact library processes, including:

- Waiving aged fines (for example, items older than five years) using an Analytics report as input.
- Transforming and standardizing metadata for union catalog alignment, exchanging records in bulk through API based workflows.
- Accelerating serials receiving by simplifying item creation, often integrating Alma with spreadsheet-based workflows.
- Sending targeted notifications and performing batch item updates without relying on custom code or local infrastructure.
- Generating reports and statistics to support data-driven collection management and resource analysis.

How Library Open Workflows works (at a glance)



- **Build visually:** Create flows by connecting steps on a drag-and-drop canvas; add conditions, loops, inline data transformations, and embed code if needed for exceptional use cases.



- **Use Alma safely:** Interact with all Alma and Primo APIs through a dedicated node; easily map form inputs to API parameters; view outputs in real-time on the canvas to validate results.



- **Trigger flexibly:** Start flows manually, scheduled, via webhook (from pre-designated Alma actions) or by presenting web forms to library staff. The dedicated Cloud App allows form submission by any staff, regardless of workflow builder permissions.



- **Connect your stack:** Drop-in prebuilt connectors for common external services (Google Workspace, Microsoft, Slack, Dropbox, FTP, etc.). Integration with OpenAI, GitLab, GitHub, and other advanced services is also available (OpenAI requires separate subscription and secure configuration).



- **Share, reuse and extend:** Start from out-of-the-box workflow examples; export/import workflows in standard file formats; share with other Alma institutions or contribute designs back to the community. Workflows are always stripped of credentials and sensitive data for secure exchange.

Technical notes: Workflows must include at least one Ex Libris-developed node and cannot be run for general campus automations outside the library's Alma and Primo environments. No backend development or new API "creation" is needed — users consume and orchestrate existing APIs.

Build confidence, empower staff and reduce complexity

LibOW as an empowering platform that encourages collaboration and innovation across teams. The tool is accessible and impactful, making automation part of daily routines rather than a specialized task. Its cloud-based features enable both technical and non-technical staff to create workflows that suit their needs, promoting broader participation. As more library staff engage with these tools, the diversity of ideas and solutions grows, helping academic libraries streamline operations, connect systems, and stay prepared for future challenges.

Empower your team with Library Open Workflows.
[Schedule your personalized demo here!](#)

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