Why I Voted Yes

On February 27, as a board member of Duraspace, a non-profit company, established in New York State, I voted "yes" to merge Duraspace with LYRASIS. The board vote will result in the end of Duraspace's existence as an independent non-profit. The new combined organization (LYRASIS) will continue to support open source software projects through its new Duraspace Community Supported Projects Division. Erin Tripp, currently CEO of Duraspace, will lead this new division as an employee of LYRASIS.

As a board member of Duraspace, I needed to do the right thing for the people and projects served by Duraspace. As the project director of one of those projects, I needed to do the right thing for the project. As it turned out, I believe the right thing to do was to vote yes to merge. I will not be a board member of the new organization.

Duraspace was incorporated in 2007. I became a board member in 2013 and became the VIVO project director in 2015.   Throughout its short history, Duraspace has worked to clarify its purpose, its projects and its services. It has lived on the edge financially. Erin Tripp became the CEO in 2018. Erin has done a marvelous job in clarifying the role of Duraspace in support of VIVO.

LYRASIS was founded in 2009 with a collective history of legacy networks dating to 1936. Robert Miller became the CEO in 2015 after ten years at the Internet Archive. Under his leadership LYRASIS has had great success.

The two companies are quite different. LYRASIS has financial strength, and proven leadership. But its members are mostly small and many are public libraries and museums rather than academic. Duraspace has a large international user community, and significant experience with some of the largest research universities in the world. Both support open source community projects while having complementary strengths.

The new organization will have the resources and position to engage the community in important discussions regarding the role of community supported open source projects and programs in the world of scholarship. But there are concerns.

The new organization will have limited experience outside the United States. Duraspace's international experience will be diluted. This is a significant liability. Much of the interesting work in open scholarship is occurring outside the US. The new organization will have interest in this work, but there will be much to learn and much to prove to gain the trust of those who are leading the way. I believe the new organization must move quickly to gain required international experience and gain the trust of the international community.

The new organization will have very limited experience outside the library community. This is a tremendous liability. While libraries play a critical role in advancing the scholarly ecosystem, and have generously led and supported open initiatives, there are many stakeholders to be engaged, most notably, the scholars. It is their work we collect, represent, showcase, archive, and preserve. There will be much to learn and many changes to be made to engage scholars across the world in efforts to further open scholarship for world participation.

VIVO is a test case for the new organization. The project is gaining internationally -- this momentum must be maintained. The project is well-recognized outside the library community -- among those in expert finding, in the FAIR movement, in US biomedicine, in the ontology community, at Research Data Alliance, Force 11, and elsewhere. This must also be maintained. Many VIVO sites are outside the United States and most are outside libraries, with support by academic offices, offices of research, and by research organizations.

There will be new opportunities for the VIVO community to engage with the new organization, most notably through continued membership, participation in the work of the project, and participation in the Leaders Forums of the new organization. There is investment opportunity, as well as potential for improved support.

Despite the concerns, I expect the new organization to be stronger and more capable of advancing its projects. And so I voted yes.