



## Every Lab Is Unique—Your ELN Solutions and Onboarding Should Be as Well

**Electronic lab notebooks with customizable features and personalized onboarding can ensure successful transitions for labs moving to digital**

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Labs are diverse work environments. They differ markedly in function, discipline, goals, workflows, culture, and size. For example, a small biotech start-up will share little in common with large Federal Drug Administration (FDA) labs, even if they overlap in discipline. A materials characterization lab and genomic sequencing lab are figurative worlds apart. The resulting individuality means that ‘one-size-fits-all’ solutions are rarely a perfect fit, yet lab software is frequently expected to be exactly that.

Electronic lab notebooks (ELNs) are increasingly employed due to the major benefits they

offer over paper notebooks. They offer substantial time savings, with more efficient record-keeping, correspondence, and task delegation. They introduce search functionality for easy, rapid data and information retrieval along with structural organization to consolidated research that makes it equally easy to browse experiments. Some packages support compliance with data integrity and regulatory guidelines. Other benefits of going paperless include a large contribution to lab sustainability efforts as well as facilitated collaboration and data sharing. While ELNs have been in use for decades, their continually growing popularity is indicative of their practicality and permanent place in the 'lab of the future'.



Audrey Apgar, customer success manager at SciNote

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When moving from paper to electronic notebooks or between ELN systems, labs face challenges including potential disruption to lab work. These concerns can be exacerbated when software is not a good fit for the lab or does not meet its needs. Customized solutions and onboarding smooth the transition and set a foundation for success.

## **Challenges to adopting a new ELN**

Transitioning between platforms can be difficult, especially if major organizational or structural changes are required. Documentation is so foundational to science that it impacts a lab's performance—while highly efficient systems boost performance, any change can temporarily slow lab activity during implementation and training. The greater the difference in structure between existing operations and the new system, the higher the potential for disruption and confusion. For the lab to maintain functionality, the system must be right for the lab.

Many challenges for transitioning labs are rooted in size, culture, or practice. For example, large labs may face added challenges with continuity and training across the group. Small labs may have greater difficulty with workload and lower bandwidth per person. There may be some natural reluctance from staff to change habits that work well for them. For a successful transition, buy-in to the proposed changes is absolutely required. Experienced ELN providers can help labs recognize potential challenges specific to their situation and prevent them from becoming problems.

## **How to ensure a smooth transition**

Customized solutions that offer ongoing, comprehensive support provide the best opportunity for a smooth, easy transition. Audrey Apgar, customer success manager with [SciNote](#), guides labs through the onboarding process. She notes the importance of connecting with clients early to learn about their needs, size, experience, timeline, and scope to map a custom path.

Tailored support accommodates the needs of any lab and, in SciNote's case, ranges from sharing resources with clients and providing support sessions as needed to collaboratively designing highly structured, week-by-week plans with specific, achievable goals and milestones.

Equally important is selecting software that is flexible or adaptable enough to grow or pivot with the lab, that can adjust to suit both current and future needs. A system that is customizable to best support a lab's workflows will require minimal changes to the way the lab functions, making for a more comfortable transition. SciNote's ELN is configurable to suit existing workflows and organization.

While many labs configure the ELN to replicate their existing structure, some take the

opportunity to reorganize and streamline their workflows. Support can help teams optimize their use of the ELN in either situation. Audrey finds that her experience in pharmaceutical research in a regulatory environment helps when working with clients to create different possible arrangements, though she emphasizes testing. “I help map out a couple of scenarios, and then [we] take it to the bench to see what feels the most intuitive and what works best.”

Personalized onboarding can make a transition more comfortable for everyone involved. While some teams are ready and eager to try a new ELN, others may be more hesitant or have concerns about the process. Audrey finds it helps to “try to make it less daunting to begin with” and notes that getting to the root of any unease is necessary to generate buy-in.

A few common themes surface around staff buy-in, and Audrey has some advice for approaching these situations. The “if it isn’t broke, don’t fix it” perspective is sometimes expressed amongst bench scientists accustomed to handwriting notes. Exploring the gains provided by ELNs together help, for example, demonstrating the quick location of a lot number through the search function compared to flipping through paper notebooks. For large labs or groups of labs, Audrey prefers to make it a very collaborative process, ensuring all decision makers are in the room for any planning sessions. For small teams, leading with the time savings achieved through new efficiencies and setting a clear plan can help maintain perspective, keep everyone motivated and on track, and introduce those time savings as quickly as possible.

Every group is unique, and each onboarding Audrey aids is different. Key is centering the group and their needs. Rather than saying, “this is what's going to make you successful,” she asks “how can I make you successful? What's going to help you?” Next is facilitating that success. “I leverage tools from my side to help them do that. Success to me is that these labs are able to achieve their goals.”

One last tip to ease into a successful transition—designating an enthusiastic point person on the team who is excited and feels ready to make the switch. Audrey recommends having them take the lead in setting up the structure to suit the team’s workflows and serve as an additional, internal point of contact for the rest of the team. Doing so can help ease the pressure on more hesitant team members, letting them approach the change

when they're ready and providing them with a familiar face for questions and learning within the context of the lab's workflows. Typically, once all staff's familiarity with the software grows, their comfort level with further shaping the structure for the workflows will as well.

There are numerous considerations for any lab implementing digitalization tools, and planning and preparation can help in [avoiding common pitfalls](#). A customized approach provides the best opportunity for success. Ultimately, finding the right partner is key to successful adoption of lab software that underlies operations. A trusted service that can adapt to the needs of your lab—especially if you operate in a regulated environment—is essential. If you are considering a transition to a new ELN, learn how to select and implement the right ELN for your lab in [this detailed webinar](#) featuring scientists who have made the switch.

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