Booking

“Booking” refers to the process of reserving a physical item (such as equipment, rooms, or special library materials) for use during a specific time window. Unlike a standard hold request, which simply places a patron in a queue to borrow an item when it becomes available, a booking request guarantees that the item will be available at a particular date and time chosen by the patron. This is especially useful for items that support time-sensitive activities, such as laptops needed for a class presentation, media equipment for a project, or course-reserved materials that must be used during a scheduled session.

When a booking request is created, Alma manages the item’s availability so that it cannot be loaned to another user during the reserved period. The system automatically adjusts the item’s loan rules, ensures it is returned in time for the booking, and alerts staff when the item must be prepared for the next scheduled user. In short, booking in Alma is a scheduling tool that coordinates timed access to high-demand or time-sensitive resources, ensuring fair and predictable availability for all patrons.

Current Use of Bookings in Alma

Booking in Alma today serves two distinct use cases:

Supporting Remote Researchers

Booking is often used to schedule access to materials that require staff mediation, such as archives, special collections, or items that need digitization. A researcher can place a booking request through Primo or Alma, specifying the date they need the material. Staff then prepare the item for scanning, consultation, or controlled access.

This workflow ensures that high-demand or sensitive materials are available exactly when needed, even if the researcher is not physically present. It also helps libraries coordinate limited staff time and manage expectations for turnaround.

Managing Rooms and Equipment

Booking is widely used for rooms, equipment, and other time-sensitive resources. Libraries configure items such as study rooms, laptops, cameras, or lab equipment as “bookable” resources in Alma, allowing patrons to reserve them through Primo or internal Alma staff screens.

Many institutions extend this functionality through Alma’s APIs, enabling custom booking interfaces, mobile apps, or campus-wide scheduling systems. Whether accessed through Primo, Alma, or an API-driven integration, booking provides a unified mechanism for timed reservations, ensuring predictable availability and smooth coordination across different types of library resources.

For an example, see Graphical Calendar Interface to Booking using Alma API.

Planned Enhancements

The following enhancements to the Alma booking component are planned as part of the booking theme:

Recurring Booking Requests

The system will allow the placement of recurring booking requests on dates or date patterns selected by the patron. For example, a faculty member wil be able to select 10 weekly dates to reserve a media cart for a semester. After processing the series, the confirmation page will display which dates were successfully booked and which failed, giving the patron a clear overview of the entire recurring pattern. This functionality will appear in both the Alma booking form and the Primo GetIt form.

Access to recurring bookings will be controlled by policy so that only designated user groups, such as faculty or advanced researchers, can use it. This will ensure predictable access to high-demand resources while preventing long-term blocking by general users.

Improved Booking Availability Interface

This plan introduces a set of targeted enhancements to the booking interface in Primo and Alma to make availability clearer and the booking process far more intuitive. Patrons will be able to view an item's availability calendar independently, request a specific duration of time, and immediately see the earliest slot that can accommodate their needs. The system will also automatically correct common user errors, such as selecting an end time that overlaps with another booking or choosing a time that extends past closing, so that users don't need to understand the system's minute-level rules.

The interface will also better reflect real-world conditions that currently confuse patrons. For example, overdue items will no longer appear as permanently unavailable; instead, their calendar cells will display a distinct color indicating uncertain availability.

Together, these improvements create a clearer, more accurate, and more user-friendly booking experience, reducing frustration for patrons and minimizing the need for staff assistance.

Extend Persistent Blocks to Booking Actions

Persistent blocks in Alma currently prevent patrons from placing holds, borrowing items, or submitting ILL requests, but they do not stop a blocked patron from making bookings. Extending persistent blocks to include booking actions ensures that the same access rules apply across all fulfillment workflows, giving libraries clearer control and preventing misuse of limited or time-sensitive assets.

Pre-Booking Reminder Notifications

The system will send an automated reminder to patrons, a configurable amount of time before their booking becomes active. Libraries will be able to define the reminder window, such as 30 minutes, two hours, or one day in advance, ensuring that notifications align with local policies and the nature of the booked resource. This will help patrons arrive on time, reduce no-shows, and improve overall utilization of rooms, equipment, and other scheduled resources.

This will support smoother operations and reduce staff intervention. Patrons will be less likely to forget upcoming reservations, and resources are less likely to sit unused due to missed bookings. This enables the library to manage high-demand assets more effectively.

Booking “Tail Time” Policy

A booking policy will allow libraries to define a configurable “tail time” - a buffer period after a booking ends or a loan is due during which the item is still considered unavailable. During this tail time, no new bookings can be placed, ensuring staff have adequate time for tasks such as equipment checks, room resets, cleaning, or preparing the item for the next user. This prevents back-to-back reservations that leave no operational margin, helping to maintain service quality.

By making tail time a policy-controlled setting, libraries can apply different buffer durations to different item types based on their local workflows. This enhancement ensures smoother turnover, reduces scheduling conflicts, and improves the reliability of availability-related information for patrons.