How one Stanford department runs equipment booking for 250+ researchers across five buildings

Calira
Formerly Clustermarket

CUSTOMER	SPECIALTY	CUSTOMER	CUSTOMER SINCE	SWITCHED FROM
Stanford MEDICINE	Pediatrics	John Whitin (Senior Research Scientist, Dept. of Pediatrics)	March 2024	Outlook calendars, dummy Google & Yahoo accounts

From fragmented calendars to a functioning lab system

Before Calira, booking equipment in Stanford's Department of Pediatrics was, in John's words, "absolute chaos." Lab teams relied on fake Yahoo and Google accounts, outdated Outlook calendars, and no central point of control or visibility. This caused several core problems:

- **No visibility between labs:** researchers couldn't see and didn't know about equipment in other buildings
- **Frequent booking conflicts:** double bookings were common
- **No access controls:** anyone could, in theory, use critical equipment
- **No usage tracking:** impossible to audit or report on equipment utilisation
- **Maintenance confusion:** outages were communicated via sticky notes
- **Scattered documentation:** SOPs, manuals, and agreements lived in folders on individual desktops

> "We had people arriving to use a qPCR machine and find it was already running; you've got your plate, and you're in a panic. This was frequent."

Even the university's official core facility system, Agilent iLab, wasn't viable to be adapted for their departmental use: "As a user, I found [Agilent iLab] incomprehensible. I couldn't imagine trying to be an administrator of it."

With **51 independent labs spread across five buildings**, managing equipment access, visibility, and conflicts within the Department of Pediatrics was a time-consuming, manual challenge.
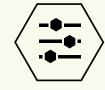
Making the switch to a purpose-built equipment booking system

Having previously heard about Calira during the pandemic, John secured buy-in and investment to begin rolling out the system in early 2024, one building at a time:

- Set the system up, naming each resource with building and room numbers
- Defined access levels: open booking vs. vetted and approved users
- Added QR codes to 60+ instruments for fast booking
- Transitioned lab teams from legacy systems one group at a time

> "We had no system. Calira created one."

User management for sensitive instruments like flow cytometers

Maintenance tracking with booking blocks and user notifications

Data extraction for usage, reporting, and cross-lab cost sharing

Equipment management including metadata, manuals, and SOPs

> I use it every day. Tasks that would have needed multiple different Excel sheets now takes seconds.
> Lab Manager, Department of Pediatrics

Stanford
MEDICINE

◇ Calira

What changed on the ground

1. Clarity across five buildings

Before Calira, researchers didn't know what equipment existed outside their own building. Now they can instantly search and reserve shared instruments across campus.

> "People didn't even know we had labs in some of these other buildings. Now they can see and book in seconds."

2. Downtime is now visible and planned for

When an instrument breaks or needs servicing, the department lab manager reserves the time slot and notifies users directly.

> "I can just book it out of the calendar, send the message through Calira to say the instrument is out because it's being serviced. So it's a really easy way to communicate with all our users."

3. User management protects sensitive equipment

Flow cytometers are highly used and highly regulated. Access requires signed user agreements and admin vetting.

> "We instituted a very strict user agreement ... that has worked out really well."

4. Straightforward equipment visibility and utilisation tracking

The department regularly shares its instruments with outside labs. To ensure fairness, the department lab manager uses Calira data to calculate contributions based on hours used.

> "We believe in sharing resources, but it shouldn't be a burden to our department."

5. A living equipment database

Each Calira equipment entry includes SOPs, user agreements, YouTube guides, and serial numbers in a single place.

> "It's not just a booking tool. It's our database. Instead of looking through folders on my computer, I go to Calira. It knows where everything is."

6. Smooth experience for end users

Researchers now scan a QR code, check availability, and book in seconds. If something's unavailable, they know instantly.

> "Our users have been really happy. I haven't had any complaints."

Why it matters

With hundreds of researchers, multiple sites, and shared assets under constant use, the Department of Pediatrics needed more than just a booking tool.

> "It gave us a framework for organizing our entire department. It's a unifying, transformative platform."

Could Calira help your lab?

If your team is juggling spreadsheets, struggling with equipment visibility, or simply tired of scheduling headaches, Calira might be the quiet fix you've been looking for. Let's talk about how we can help your lab run more smoothly, with less admin and more clarity.

Book a demo today calira.co/demo