
Proposal for Statewide Access to Online Resources for All Illinois Libraries July 2022

The Proposal

On behalf of all Illinois libraries and the nearly 13 million residents of the state, the Reaching Across Illinois Library System (RAILS) requests that the Illinois Library Association (ILA) and the Illinois State Library (ISL) support a \$2.5–\$5 million annual appropriation for a suite of online resources to support all Illinois libraries of all types and sizes. This would be an addition to the ISL budget.

Our original intent was to request \$2.5 million. We are revising that figure to include a range based on research on the per capita spending for similar online resources in other states and the overwhelming response from Illinois libraries of all types (academic, public, school, and specialized) to the statewide survey described below. While \$2.5 million would be a good start in providing statewide online resources to all Illinois libraries and residents, ramping up this figure over time would be the most effective way to meet Illinois' needs in the future. The additional funds would allow licensing of a wider variety of resources.

A national survey reveals that Illinois is currently one of the only states in the country that does not offer statewide access to a core group of vital online information resources for residents. Illinois has long been considered a leader in library resource sharing, and the addition of statewide access to online resources would enhance this reputation.

Under this proposal, the selected resources will be available without charge to the 12 million Illinois residents currently served by public libraries and to the over 1 million residents who currently do not receive public library service. The best practices established through years of successful experience by other states will help guide our efforts. Once the appropriation is approved, a committee, representative of Illinois library system members from all types and sizes of libraries, will work together to evaluate and select the online resources. ISL will serve as the fiscal agent for the offer.

Based on research on the costs of comparable offers in other states, we project that over time the Illinois suite of online resources will cost approximately \$5 million dollars annually.

State	Population	Cost	Per capita
Illinois (proposed)	12,700,000	\$5,080,000	\$0.40
Massachusetts	6,940,000	\$1,500,000	\$0.22
New Hampshire	1,000,000	\$400,000	\$0.40
New Jersey	10,000,000	\$1,300,000	\$0.13
Texas	29,000,000	\$9,500,000	\$0.33
Wisconsin	5,800,000	\$2,400,000	\$0.41

General Need for Core Online Resources Package

The need for statewide access to a core group of online resources is clear. It is a myth that all information that Illinois residents need for school, work, business development, health purposes, lifelong learning, etc. is available for free on the internet. While more information than ever may be free via the internet, it is not regulated for quality or accuracy. By contrast, the authoritative information found in magazines; newspapers; business, scientific, and scholarly journals; and other online authoritative reference works, is carefully researched, written, and updated by experts. It is expensive to create and therefore not available for free.

The cost to obtain this authoritative information can also be significant for individuals, students, researchers, and businesses, both large and small. Those who need the information the most are often least likely to be able to afford it. To ease this burden, libraries try to offer these resources online on a community-by-community basis when possible. This has resulted in a patchwork approach to meeting a real need in our state. It has also resulted in tremendous inequities for Illinois residents.

In addition, libraries are operating under ever-dwindling financial resources. Some libraries are unable to afford access to any online resources. Most school libraries fall into this category, even though students are high on the list of those needing access to the high-quality, easy-to-access information these resources provide. Many libraries that could once afford access have been forced to reduce the number of online products they offer and are no longer able to meet all the needs of their customers.

Over the past several decades, Illinois libraries have shared resources to make as effective and efficient use of limited funding as possible. Illinois library systems help with these efforts by offering access to online catalogs and to discounts for some other online resources. However, as many libraries are not able to afford even discounted prices, this does not help to equalize the playing field or to ensure that all Illinois residents have access to a core group of essential and authoritative resources that will help them in their daily lives.

Through the proposed appropriation, Illinois would achieve the advantages other states have already realized in providing a statewide, core online collection of resources to

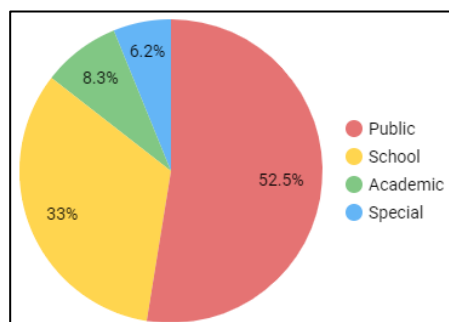
residents. Individuals, students, researchers, businesses, and all libraries would greatly benefit from this collection.

Specific Needs of Illinois Libraries

RAILS has strong anecdotal evidence about the need for Illinois libraries of all types and sizes to provide access to online resources. To gather more factual evidence, RAILS surveyed Illinois libraries in November 2019. We invited member libraries of RAILS, the Illinois Heartland Library System, and the Chicago Public Library System, to complete the survey. The following is an analysis of the 373 survey results received.

Statewide Online Resources Survey Results

RAILS asked library survey respondents to indicate which online products they currently offered and how important each product was to their library. We also asked libraries to indicate other online resources that would be of significant interest to them if available without cost, and the total amount their library spends on online resources annually.



The response to the survey was overwhelming and instantaneous as soon as it was released. The figure to the left shows the percentage of responses from each type of library. We were particularly impressed with the response from school libraries as it is often difficult to get responses from this library type.

Survey results demonstrated that libraries do not have a lot of money to spend on online resources:

- 17% of respondents had \$0 budget to spend on online resources.
- 25% had a budget below \$1,500.
- 75% had a budget below \$50,000.

The following online resources were identified as being of the most critical importance to libraries:

- ProQuest: Ancestry.com (31% of respondents)
- Gale: Gale in Context: Opposing ViewPoints (24%)
- EBSCO: MasterFILE Complete (Includes Consumer Reports) (25%)
- Gale: Gale Virtual Reference Library (24%)
- World Book: World Book Student (24%)

Other online resources that were mentioned as being of critical importance included:

- The New York Times
- ProQuest: Global Newsstream

- Gale in Context: Opposing ViewPoints
- Gale: Research in Context
- JSTOR
- Reference USA
- Novelist

Summary

In summary, RAILS requests support for an annual appropriation to the Illinois State Library for a statewide suite of online resources for the following reasons:

- The appropriation would ensure that all Illinois libraries and their customers have access to high-quality information resources, no matter how small or underfunded the library and no matter the type of library. It would also help ensure a minimum standard of resources for all Illinois libraries and residents.
- A statewide package of online resources would provide better economies of scale. Due to the power in numbers, we would be able to negotiate a better deal for statewide access than an individual library would be able to negotiate on its own.
- Precious local library dollars could be spent on other critical programs and resources
- The appropriation would eliminate the current unnecessary duplication of resources throughout the state, resulting in a more efficient use of tax dollars and other library funding. Currently, many libraries are purchasing the same online resources, and the costs to provide this access are astronomical. Libraries that are currently able to provide some access can use those dollars to support other important library programs and services.
- Time spent by individual libraries on evaluating online resources and negotiating offers could be spent on other library programs and activities.
- A statewide package of online resources is especially important for schools. School libraries are in trouble in Illinois and beyond. Many cannot afford to provide any access to online resources to students. The appropriation would ensure that all Illinois students have access to the same authoritative information.
- By making an offer of this nature available to residents, Illinois would no longer lag behind most of the other states.
- The appropriation would also provide vital information resources to unserved residents in Illinois. Many of these residents have no other place to go for this information since they do not have access to a public library.
- This is an excellent leadership opportunity for the Illinois State Library to leverage economies of scale and increase the ability of all Illinois libraries to offer needed resources to their clientele. Providing statewide access to a vital collection of online resources would also return Illinois to its rightful place at the top of the library resource sharing world.