

Proposal for Statewide Access to Core Database Suite for All Illinois Libraries November 2019

The Proposal

On behalf of all ILLINET libraries and the nearly 13 million residents of Illinois, 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 databases 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 database packages in other states and the overwhelming response from Illinois libraries of all types to the statewide database survey described below. While \$2.5 million would be a good start in providing statewide database access 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 databases.

On November 4, 2019, ILA's Public Policy Committee voted to move this proposal forward, pending more detail. This document provides the requested detail. More information will be forthcoming after the close of a survey that RAILS is currently conducting of Illinois libraries regarding statewide database access.

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 database access would enhance this reputation.

Under this proposal, the selected databases 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 databases. 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 database suite 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 Database Package

The need for a statewide database package is clear. It is a myth that all of the 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 online database access at all. 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 databases provide. Many libraries that could once afford database access have been forced to reduce the number of 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 digital collection of resources to residents. Individuals, students, researchers, businesses, and all libraries would greatly benefit from this collection.

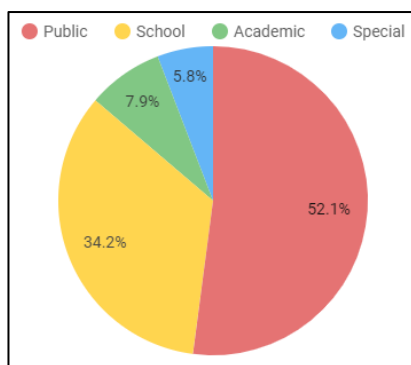
Specific Needs of Illinois Libraries

RAILS has strong anecdotal evidence about the need for Illinois libraries of all types and sizes to provide access to online databases. To gather more factual evidence, RAILS is currently conducting a survey of Illinois libraries. Member libraries of RAILS and Illinois Heartland Library System, as well as the Chicago Public Library, are invited to complete the survey.

The deadline for completion is November 14, 2019. We will provide a complete analysis of survey results after that date. The following is an analysis of the 240 survey results received by 8:30 a.m. on November 7.

Preliminary Statewide Database Survey Results

RAILS distributed its survey on statewide database access on November 1. We asked library respondents to indicate which database products they currently offer and how important each product was to their library. We also asked libraries to indicate other general databases that would be of significant interest to them if available without cost, and the total amount their library spends on databases annually.



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

Survey results thus far demonstrate that libraries do not have a lot of money to spend on databases:

- 19% of respondents have \$0 budget to spend on databases.
- 25% have a budget below \$700.
- 75% have a budget below \$33,000.

In survey data thus far, the following databases are identified as being of the most critical importance to libraries:

- ProQuest: Ancestry.com (32% of respondents)
- Gale: Gale in Context: Opposing ViewPoints (26%)
- EBSCO: MasterFILE Complete (Includes Consumer Reports) (26%)
- Gale: Gale Virtual Reference Library (25%)
- World Book: World Book Student (23%)

Other database resources that were mentioned as being of critical importance thus far include:

- The New York Times
- ProQuest: Global Newsstream
- Gale: Research in Context
- Gale: World History in Context
- JSTOR
- Reference USA
- Novelist

As mentioned above, RAILS will provide a complete analysis of all survey results after the November 14 deadline for survey completion.

Summary

In summary, RAILS requests support for an annual appropriation to the Illinois State Library for a statewide suite of databases 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 database package 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, including possible support for the minimum wage increase in Illinois, which is a current major concern for most Illinois libraries.
- 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 databases, and the costs to provide this access are astronomical. Libraries that are currently able to provide some database access can use those dollars to support other important library programs and services.
- Time spent by individual libraries on evaluating databases and negotiating offers could be spent on other library programs and activities.
- A statewide database package is especially important for schools. School libraries are in trouble in Illinois and beyond. Many cannot afford to provide any database access 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 databases would also return Illinois to its rightful place at the top of the library resource sharing world.