RAILS
REACHING ACROSS ILLINOIS LIBRARY SYSTEM

3 August 2021

TO: Senator Laura Murphy

FROM: Deirdre Brennan

SUBJECT: Statewide database funding proposal – information from other states

Cost – How long – Taxpayers satisfied?
Contracts are usually 5 years, or 3 with 2 additional 1 year options
Illinois
Spend $5.0 million/year (proposed) – Population 12.62 million (.40 per capita)

Wisconsin: BadgerLink – Wisconsin's Online Library
Program inception: 1998 (23 years)

Spend $2.4 million/year – Population 5.88 million (.41 per capita)
$74 million (What it would collectively cost to license BadgerLink resources on a per library basis)

Funding Sources: Department of Public Instruction (DPI), Universal Service Funds appropriated through Wisconsin's biennial budget, and federal funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Ohio: OWL Ohio Web Library
Program inception: 2008 (13 years)

Spend $4.5 million/year – Population: 11.75 million (.38 per capita)
(EBSCO online resources cost approx $3 million > $57 million - What it would collectively cost to license EBSCO resources on a per library basis)

Funding Sources: Federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant through the **State Library of Ohio**, which provides about $1.5 million per year for five years. In addition, the three Libraries Connect Ohio library networks—**INFOhio**, **OhioLINK**, and **OPLIN**—provide about $2.5 million in state funds each year from their current budgets.

Indiana: Inspire – Indiana's Virtual Online Library
Program inception: 1998 (23 years)

Spend $2.2 million/year – Population 6.732 million (.33 per capita)

Funding Sources: Indiana General Assembly through Build Indiana Funds and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), and through a partnership with the Academic Libraries of Indiana (ALI).

Michigan: MeL – Michigan eLibrary
Program inception: 1992 (29 years)

Spend $4.0 million/year – Population 10 million (.40 per capita)
$96 million (What it would collectively cost to license MeL resources on a per library basis)

Funding Sources: State of Michigan as well as federal funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Quotes from State residents:
"These resources are critical for us to support students and faculty."

"I've been using BadgerLink since becoming a school librarian. I see BadgerLink as the core online library resources."

"BadgerLink prepares our students to be college and career ready."

"I love the fact that BadgerLink does the heavy lifting for us. We don't have to find the time to pull everything together to have a 'full resource.' If there is a need, they likely have it or have access to it. It's a value add for Wisconsin taxpayers."

"Every time I pay my taxes I put in a note saying I don't mind paying them as long as they keep the library open."

"I am re-entering the workforce and the LearningExpress Library resume builder enabled me to easily create a professional looking resume. The questions it asked and suggestions it offered gave me confidence that I was including all of the information that today's employers are looking for in a format that would put my skills and experience in their best light. I haven't had to create a resume in over ten years and LEL eliminated the stress from this portion of the job seeking process. Furthermore, I am visually impaired and I can use this program successfully with my Windows screen enlargement program."

"I can't tell the difference between real news and fake news and MeL is real."

"MeL is not just MeLCat; it's databases, teacher resources, library training resources, career resources, and all those other things. I appreciate that MeL is finding a way to teach people "how" to use all of MeL and to recognize its usefulness to ALL library types and sizes."

"I love the fact that I can link resources from Mel to my school website. I teach 4th grade and we teach a lot of informational reading and research. Teaching the students what credible sites are and what credible information is is very important. Introducing this site will be wonderful. I will specifically link Britannica School Elementary and the ebook k-8 collection."

Annual Usage Statistics (2019):

Indiana: 330 million searches
Wisconsin: 78 million searches
Michigan: 30 million searches

Document 8.4
125 Tower Drive
Burr Ridge IL 60527
630.734.5000
Fax: 630.734.5050
railslibraries.info

RAILS
REACHING ACROSS ILLINOIS LIBRARY SYSTEM

Proposal for Statewide Access to Online Databases for All Illinois Libraries & Residents
March 2021

The Proposal

On behalf of the approximately 1,800 libraries and the nearly 13 million residents of Illinois, the Reaching Across Illinois Library System (RAILS) requests a $5 million annual appropriation for a suite of online databases that would be available to every resident of the state. The appropriation would be an addition to the Secretary of State/Illinois State Library budget and would supplement current library and library system funding.

Illinois is one of only two states that does not currently provide statewide access to a core group of vital online information resources for residents. (The other is Colorado.) Once the appropriation is approved, librarians from all types of Illinois libraries (academic, public, school, and specialized) will work together to select the databases based on current usage data. The selected databases will be available without charge to Illinois residents of all ages, including the 1 million residents who do not currently have access to library service.

We greatly appreciate the ongoing support Illinois legislators have demonstrated for libraries, including your continued support for per capita grant funding for public and school libraries, and library systems. Without this funding, libraries and systems would not be able to provide all of the programs and services that make them such a valuable part of their communities.

Unfortunately, this funding has not helped libraries keep pace with the cost of living, or with the rapid and costly growth in the amount of essential information that is available online. The demand for online resources has only intensified during the pandemic and shows no sign of slowing down. Since library system funding has been flat for many years, the three library systems in the state (RAILS, Illinois Heartland Library System, and Chicago Public Library System) are not able to fund database access for our member libraries, let alone the entire state.

While the additional appropriation for a statewide database package would represent a very small portion of the state budget, it could have an impact on every Illinois resident and would put Illinois on the same level as other states in providing vital and essential information to its residents, no matter what their financial situation or whether or not they had access to a library.

Growth in the Use of Electronic Resources

More and more Illinois residents are searching for the information they need online. This has been especially true during the pandemic, when online library resources were available even though physical library buildings were closed. Though use of electronic resources has steadily risen during the pandemic, the trend toward using online sources of information was apparent even before the pandemic began. Illinois public libraries report a 33% increase in use of electronic resources since 2015.

In addition, while Illinois library expenditures for print materials have decreased 6% since 2015, electronic material expenditures have increased 35%. Public libraries alone spent nearly $28 million on electronic materials in 2019, and this represents 33% of their total collection expenditures.

Need for a Core Database Package for All Illinois Residents

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, and other needs is available for free on the internet. And the information that is available is not regulated for accuracy or quality. The top items that appear in Google search results are often advertisements or represent sites that pay for that top position.

By contrast, through paid subscriptions to online databases, libraries provide access to authoritative information found in magazines; newspapers; business, scientific, and scholarly journals; and other authoritative reference works. This information is carefully researched, written, and updated by experts. It is expensive to create and therefore not available for free. And more and more of this information is only available online.

Few Illinois residents can afford these resources, including those who need it the most. Libraries are operating under ever-dwindling financial resources as well. Some libraries are not able to afford any online databases 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.

A recent survey of Illinois libraries revealed that:
- 19% of library respondents have $0 budget to spend on databases
- 25% have a budget below $700
- 75% have a budget below $33,000

This results in a tremendous inequity of available information for Illinois residents. Online databases can fill a variety of important needs, for example:

- When looking to make the best investment of their hard-earned dollars, the general public can find objective comparisons of different consumer products, from cars to refrigerators
- Students can explore opposing viewpoints on current controversial issues without having to decipher "fake" from "real" news
- Job-seekers can find a variety of helpful resources for their employment searches, and those just getting started in the work world can explore different career options
- Entrepreneurs can find tools needed to get their business started, and small business owners can learn how to make their ventures more successful
- Retirees can continue on the path to lifelong learning and discover new hobbies and interests to help them find a sense of purpose and deal with increased isolation

Having access to a core database package would level the information playing field and ensure that everyone in the state has an equal opportunity to meet these and many other needs, no matter what their financial situation or whether they have access to a library.

Optimizing Use of Tax Dollars

Currently, those libraries that are able to afford online databases are in most cases purchasing the same core databases. The statewide database appropriation would eliminate this duplicate purchasing, resulting in a more efficient use of tax dollars and other library funding. Libraries could use their precious local dollars on other critical programs.

A statewide database package would also provide better economies of scale. Due to the power in numbers, it would be much easier to negotiate a better deal for statewide access to these online resources than any individual library would be able to negotiate on its own.

Summary

RAILS requests a $5 million annual appropriation for a suite of online databases that would be available to every resident of the state. The appropriation would be an addition to the Secretary of State/Illinois State Library budget and would supplement current library and library system funding.

By making this offer available to all residents, Illinois would no longer lag behind the other 48 states that are already providing this service. The core database package would equalize the information playing field and give every single person in the state the same access to essential and authoritative resources that can help them navigate their daily lives.

Statewide Database Proposal Talking Points
March 2021

- We very much appreciate the support Illinois legislators have shown for libraries, including continued support of per capita funding for public and school libraries and for library systems. Without this funding, libraries and systems would not be able to provide all of the programs and services that make them such a valuable part of their communities. The increasing demand for online resources is a new priority that has intensified during the pandemic and shows no sign of slowing down. Many libraries cannot afford these resources with current funding levels.
- The $5 million dollar appropriation for a statewide database package represents a relatively small portion of the state budget, and can have a positive impact on every single person in Illinois, and libraries of all types (academic, public, school, and specialized) throughout the state.
- Illinois is one of only two states that does not currently offer statewide access to a core group of online databases. (The other is Colorado.)
- The selected databases will be available without charge to the approximately 13 million Illinois residents of all ages, including the 1 million residents who do not currently have a library card or access to library service.
- Illinois public libraries report a 33% increase in use of electronic resources since 2015. This growing trend has intensified during the pandemic.
- Public libraries alone spent nearly $28 million on electronic materials in 2019 – 33% of their total collection expenditures. This figure does not include dollars spent on electronic materials by academic, school, and specialized libraries.
- Online databases provide access to authoritative information found in magazines; newspapers; business, scientific, and scholarly journals; and other authoritative reference works. This information is carefully researched, written, and updated by experts. Much of it is only available online. It is expensive to create and is not available for free on the internet.
- Libraries are operating under ever-dwindling financial resources and some cannot afford to subscribe to online databases 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.
- Because libraries across the state provide widely differing levels of access to online databases, this has resulted in a tremendous inequity of available information for Illinois residents. Having access to a core database package would level the playing field and ensure that everyone in the state had an equal opportunity to meet their information needs, whether they had access to a library or not.
- There is a concern about students falling behind. Many do not have access to a school library. Others do not have access to online resources other students have due to their financial situation at home. Having resources that are available to all Illinois students will greatly help with this problem.

- Currently, many libraries are purchasing the same databases, resulting in unnecessary duplication. The appropriation would eliminate this duplication of resources throughout the state, resulting in a more efficient use of tax dollars and other library funding.
- The information available in online databases can fill a wide variety of needs. Consumers can find objective comparisons of different brands before making major purchases. Students can explore opposing viewpoints on controversial issues. Job-seekers can get help finding employment. Entrepreneurs can find tools to help get their business started. Retirees can learn about new hobbies to ease their sense of isolation. Everyone can find resources to help meet their lifelong learning goals. These are just a few of many examples of the valuable and essential information that can be found in online databases.