

April 17, 2023

TO: RAILS Consortia Committee
FROM: Anne Slaughter, Grant Halter
SUBJECT: LLSAP Grant Processes and RAILCAR Data Collection

In January and April 2022, the Consortia Committee and its LLSAP Sustainability Working Group engaged in a series of discussions focused on LLSAP affordability, the potential issues that can arise when a library cannot afford or is otherwise not well suited for LLSAP membership, and measures RAILS can take to ensure that our members have the tools they need to make informed decisions about their automation and resource sharing options. These discussions have resulted in an interconnected set of tactics targeting strengthened criteria and process for the Catalog Membership Grant and supported by a new data collection and analysis tool called RAILCAR, which will be developed in part with additional data collected through the LLSAP Support Grant application. At the April 2023 Consortia Committee meeting, we will present our plans for the development of RAILCAR and associated adjustments to our LLSAP-related grant programs. We have [a file for your review at this link](#) that includes information about the full planned RAILCAR dataset, and look forward to your feedback on the items in the LLSAP Support Grant tab, as that finalized list will be included in the data collection requirements for the FY2025 LLSAP Support Grant application distributed in summer 2023.

Background: LLSAP membership growth, challenges, and RAILS support

Illinois Administrative Code charges library systems with eliminating barriers to library participation in shared catalogs and finding ways to support online access to all member library holdings. To accomplish this, RAILS offers two annual grant programs (LLSAP Support Grant and Catalog Membership Grant) and an interlibrary loan platform (Find More Illinois). RAILS Catalog Membership Grants to member libraries offset eligible one-time costs associated with joining an LLSAP such as ILS licensing, migration costs, retrospective conversion, and necessary technology equipment. Since 2015, this program has provided a total of \$1,752,889 across 71 grant awards to individual libraries as well as several group migrations, with additional awards anticipated after the April 30 application deadline for FY2023 funding.

LLSAPs may apply their own membership criteria that libraries must meet before joining, but the RAILS LLSAP definition also requires them to be open to membership by libraries of all types, and to support overall growth in LLSAP participation and resource sharing activities among RAILS libraries. In some cases, however, the impact of membership growth on LLSAP operations isn't necessarily positive. The costs to the LLSAP to add and support the membership of libraries with challenging funding situations (such as ILS licensing fees, the cost of providing other services, and staff resources) are not always offset by the low fees assessed to the libraries. In addition, some libraries don't have the resources to support even modest annual fee increases the LLSAP may need to institute to keep up with their own increasing costs and to support additional services LLSAP members want and need. Individual LLSAP member libraries each bear a responsibility to the other members to participate in ongoing ILL and cataloging activities, collection development, etc. If they are unable to do so, there can be a detrimental impact on other member libraries if they have to disproportionately shoulder the burden of costs and resource sharing activities.

The Catalog Membership Grant has historically required applying libraries to commit to sustaining LLSAP membership for at least five years, and non-automated libraries to share their plans for sustaining LLSAP

membership, including buy-in from the library's board or other administrative body. The LLSAP Director is also required to provide their sign-off on the application before submission. However, given the persistence of the above issues, a coordinated reassessment and implementation of strengthened grant requirements supported by additional tools and guidance for libraries is in order.

Objectives

- Sustainably maximize resource sharing participation for each individual library within the most suitable automation and resource sharing solutions
- Ensure that our members have the tools they need to make informed decisions about their RAILS-supported automation and resource sharing options
- Provide support for a comprehensive and realistic assessment of whether LLSAP membership is the best decision for an individual library
- Reframe the decades-long narrative that all libraries should be in LLSAPs, and present Find More Illinois as an alternative resource sharing solution, informed by an understanding that some libraries will never join a shared catalog

Deliverables

Refined criteria for the Catalog Membership Grant

Criteria aimed at more rigorously documenting a library's active engagement with the LLSAP and their full understanding of the costs, responsibilities, and practical realities involved with automation and consortium participation will be embedded into the grant process as either new requirements or strengthening of existing criteria. A new two-phase framework was established in FY2023 that employs more structured prerequisites for libraries not already using fully featured catalog software, and will be augmented by the following deliverables as they become available. The application is posted [on the RAILS website](#).

Guide to RAILS-supported automation options

This guide will assist libraries in evaluating their options for catalog software and interlibrary loan participation (LLSAP membership, Find More Illinois with a consortial or standalone catalog, and the future catalog software solution that will connect nonautomated and other eligible libraries to Find More Illinois) and determining the most affordable and sustainable solution for their organization. Content will include a comparison of options; detailed information about the necessary costs, ongoing responsibilities, and other components of automation; and useful data points for the library's investigation. It will take shape in FY2024, paired with preliminary RAILCAR data, and incorporated into the Catalog Membership Grant as phase one of the application process. Until the guide is ready for broader distribution and independent use, it will be implemented by RAILS staff working one-on-one with nonautomated libraries interested in LLSAP membership.

RAILCAR: an LLSAP-focused dataset

RAILCAR will provide a tool for analysis of quantitative and qualitative data related to LLSAP operations and member libraries, with a focus on supporting library assessment of the affordability and sustainability of LLSAP membership. Grant Halter's review of existing data from the zILLANE report, IPLAR, and other authoritative sources revealed that we do not currently have the data points needed to observe potential patterns that could then be used to identify useful indicators of affordability and has led us to the development of a new set of supplementary data points collected directly from the LLSAPs. This direct data collection will be done via the LLSAP Support Grant process beginning with the FY2025 application (distributed in summer 2023), with pattern identification and iteration to follow. RAILCAR will also be useful to RAILS in better understanding and

supporting LLSAPs and will be available for use by the LLSAPs themselves. We will review the full scope of the dataset and would like your feedback on the proposed supplementary data points.

Sequence of events

This sequence shows the interrelationships among RAILCAR and the two LLSAP-focused grant programs as incremental development progresses throughout a full annual cycle. The details are subject to change and evolution, but we expect this general cycle to serve as a repeating framework and ongoing conversation between these programs for as long as necessary.

March 2023

- New two-phase Catalog Membership Grant application process is finalized and released

April 2023

- RAILCAR presented to RAILS Consortia Committee for feedback
- FY2023 Catalog Membership Grant applications due

May 2023

- FY2024 Catalog Membership Grant application preparation begins, incorporating any feedback received via the FY2023 process and Consortia Committee discussions
- Work on the FY2025 LLSAP Support Grant application begins

June 2023

- First round of RAILCAR questions ready
- Work on the FY2024 Catalog Membership Grant and FY2025 LLSAP Support Grant applications continues

July 2023

- FY2025 LLSAP Support Grant applications sent to LLSAPs
- Consortia Committee meeting – will include pertinent updates
- Planning for Find More Illinois catalog for nonautomated libraries commences
- Work on RAILS data hub commences

September 2023

- FY2025 LLSAP Support Grant applications due
- Analysis of RAILCAR data begins

October 2023

- Catalog Membership Grant first round applications due

November-December 2023

- RAILCAR data analysis continues – preliminary identification of patterns
- RAILS makes preliminary decision as to incorporating RAILCAR findings into the FY2025 Catalog Membership Grant application

January 2024

- Consortia Committee meeting – present initial RAILCAR findings and potential impacts on grant processes

February-March 2024

- Determine RAILCAR requirements for FY2026 LLSAP Support Grant application data collection

April 2024

- Catalog Membership Grant second round applications due
- Evaluate Catalog Membership Grant process to inform phase one content for the FY2025 application
- Consortia Committee meeting – report on RAILCAR, Catalog Membership Grant and LLSAP Support Grant processes, and progress of Find More Illinois catalog software for nonautomated libraries

May 2024

- FY2025 Catalog Membership Grant application preparation begins, incorporating feedback received via the FY2024 process and Consortia Committee discussions along with RAILCAR findings and guidance
- Work on the FY2026 LLSAP Support Grant application begins