
January 22, 2024

TO: RAILS CONSORTIA COMMITTEE

FROM: GRANT HALTER

SUBJECT: RAILCAR Project

This memo includes an overview describing progress of the RAILCAR data project. RAILCAR stands for the RAILS Consortia Annual Report. RAILCAR's primary goal was to provide a tool for analysis of quantitative and qualitative data related to LLSAP operations and member libraries, with a focus on informing prospective libraries about the landscape of LLSAP library membership. The initial datasets used include the zILLANE report, IPLAR, IPEDS, and Certifications. After reviewing each data source and compiling a list of data points, we then created the RAILCAR questionnaire, which was submitted along with the LLSAP Support Grant, to supplement the dataset with information directly from the LLSAP that was not available elsewhere. Each dataset was then cleaned and combined in a Tableau database for analysis.

The first phase of analysis focuses on an overview of the LLSAPs themselves and trends of their public libraries. The zILLANE report and RAILCAR questionnaire were used to get a better understanding of the unique operations of the organizations. The differences in the number of training events, tickets per library, and details and expenses of their ILSs were particularly interesting. Though, not surprisingly, the information shows a stark difference in how each LLSAP operates and reinforces the challenges when comparing one LLSAP to another.

Similar patterns have emerged from the IPLAR dataset after combining libraries by their LLSAP. A look at operating expenditures, collection expenditures, and counts of library staff make clear the differences between LLSAPs like CCS and Pinnacle who have larger, more well-funded libraries compared to RSA at the other extreme and SWAN ranging to both extremes. The relationship between the IPLAR data and LLSAP operations information will be especially interesting to correlate trends.

Other next steps will be to dive into the academic, school, and special libraries, the geography of LLSAP members, and to make the dataset available to the LLSAPs themselves to explore further. I am also interested in fine-tuning the datasets by either adding or dropping data points moving forward to balance the data collection demands with the usefulness of the analysis.