

In the revised RAILS strategic plan, universal library service is a part of our Goal 4 efforts to prepare libraries for the future. One of the objectives is that we will

“partner with libraries and other stakeholders to create an educated, engaged, and civil society by expanding access to library resources and services, addressing issues related to unserved Illinois residents and continue working toward a statewide library card.”

The lack of universal library service in Illinois is a huge problem. There have been many worthy attempts in the past to solve this problem. We need to understand why these attempts failed in order to find alternative solutions that might be successful.

The first thing we need is information.

- Identify successful strategies in other states
- Identify states with universal service
- Identify states with unserved but making progress
- Develop demographics of Illinois unserved areas (Why unserved?)
- Understand Farm Bureau objections and identify solutions for taxing issue (compare with community colleges)
- Review previous efforts. What worked/what didn't work? Why?
- In particular, why can't unserved get an ISL library card?

Then we need to communicate and educate about what we find.

- Form RAILS board and member task force or committee to oversee progress in bringing library services to unserved residents in Illinois
- Educate RAILS members on number of unserved residents
 - Talk to networking groups
 - Listening tour of libraries with highest unserved to understand the impact of this issue
- Educate RAILS resource sharing department on how libraries become a district to better support libraries
- Illinois Department of Revenue map—publicize its usefulness to help members better support unserved
- Awareness campaign aimed at school districts where an Intergovernmental Agreement would help them
- Awareness campaign and video highlighting value of libraries for all, especially kids

Some possible steps we can take in the short term:

- Create a RAILS page on how to become a district so that libraries can be educated consumers when talking with their attorneys
- Template for Intergovernmental Agreement on RAILS website
- Use Biblioboard to provide access to digital content to the unserved
- CE/consulting programs on:
 - Becoming a district library
 - Contracting with other districts without physical library
 - Expanding a district
 - Encourage libraries to do awareness campaigns for nonresident service
 - Community college list of which offer library service to district residents

Long term:

- Form statewide taskforce of stakeholders to move solutions forward in a coordinated way
- Work with ILA to identify sympathetic legislators and work with them to draft legislation
- All Illinois taxpayers contribute to Live and Learn funds and General Revenue; reallocate some funds for service to unserved
- Foundation or other fundraising to help cover costs of nonresident service for disadvantaged Illinois residents
- Financial assistance or incentive for libraries planning to expand their districts
- Beta project- Pick an area with a high number of unserved and experiment. For example, libraries near an unserved area could provide limited library service to unserved residents (through Bibliolabs platform for example) to see if that has an impact on them wanting to become a district