
MEMO

October 20, 2025

TO: RAILS Board Consortia Committee

FROM: Grant Halter, Data Analysis Manager

SUBJECT: Reimagining Delivery Count Project Overview and Update

The purpose of RAILS's delivery count is to provide numbers to the Illinois State Library on the volume of material RAILS processes throughout the year. The count occurs once a quarter for a week, where member libraries are asked to count the number of items and bins sent each day. The results from those four counts are used to estimate the total annual volume. The Delivery Department also uses the data for internal decision making around staffing and routing. The major challenges of the current process are relying on library staff to manually count and report material, and the limited duration of the count only covering roughly 7.5% of the total delivery operation. The goal of the reimagining delivery count project is to address these challenges by gathering ILS reports to supplement a much smaller manual count.

Gathering data from the LLSAPs would return many benefits in terms of efficiency and accuracy but are not without their own challenges. We began last year by requesting a simple ILS report from each LLSAP containing the date, sending library, receiving library, and item count for each day, which coincided with the existing manual delivery counts. The LLSAP staff provided insights into how to create the reports and described the types of items that moved through delivery but may not be captured by the reports. Short of a detailed analysis, these reports offered an initial view of what benefits and challenges gathering the data in this way would provide.

The main benefit is that these reports require much less staff time and labor since they are coordinated by a single LLSAP staff member. However, a physical count will still be necessary to capture any items not included in the generated reports. The automated reports will also allow us to receive a fuller picture of the delivery volume by receiving data covering the entire year. This will greatly improve our analysis of delivery operations and allow us to provide more detailed reports of the work and inform future decision making. These two benefits are the biggest drivers for moving to automated reports; however, they are not without their own challenges.

The ILS reporting presents new challenges focused around ensuring we capture all items moving through delivery and the logistics of running, gathering, and cleaning the reports. The LLSAPs use several different ILS software, as well as each having their own internal borrowing policies and procedures. We need to gather more information from each LLSAP about how libraries process material for delivery, which will be crucial to building confidence in the reports as a replacement for the physical count. The data management of the reports will require more work upfront but should get easier over time as we become more familiar with the report structures. Coordinating data collection from the six LLSAPs has presented some challenges that we'll need to resolve before reaching out to non-LLSAPs, where the complexity will increase significantly due to the wide range of ILS platforms and policy configurations. Despite these challenges, we believe the net benefits of gathering data this way greatly outweighs the difficulties we currently face with the physical count.