
RAILS Catalog Membership Grant FY2026 Application

Grant Program Basics

Strengthening library resource sharing in Illinois by increasing membership in shared catalog consortia, or Local Library System Automation Programs (LLSAPs), is a crucial aspect of RAILS' "We Connect Libraries" mission. The funding provided through this grant helps to make LLSAP membership more attainable by offsetting many of the one-time startup costs involved in joining.

Funds will be awarded for projects with expenditures beginning in FY2026 (July 1, 2025–June 30, 2026), with a grant period of 18 months from the time that funds are disbursed. Awards are subject to funding availability, and the amount that RAILS budgets for this grant may vary from year to year.

Libraries are responsible for the ongoing costs of LLSAP membership and can receive guidance in preparing for these costs through the process of planning their projects and applying for funding. RAILS provides additional funding to the LLSAP organizations through its annual LLSAP Support Grant, helping to support their operations and make annual fees more affordable.

About LLSAPs

"Local Library System Automation Program means an integrated library system open to membership by full library system members of all types developed by or receiving financial or in-kind support from a library system." (23 Ill. Adm. Code 3030)

RAILS LLSAPs are:

- Cooperative Computer Services (CCS)
- Pinnacle Library Consortium
- PrairieCat
- Rock River Library Consortium (RRLC)
- Resource Sharing Alliance (RSA)
- System-Wide Automation Network (SWAN)

FY2026 Application Deadlines

- November 1, 2025
- April 15, 2026

Overview of Application Requirements

Review this application form and all guidance thoroughly to ensure you understand the required information and steps to apply. A successful grant application requires:

- ☐ Eligibility for grant funding and LLSAP participation
- ☐ Completed application form that supplies ALL required information and attachments, including:
 - ☐ Detailed project plan and timeline
 - ☐ Budget detailing the intended use of all requested funds
- ☐ Direct engagement with LLSAP staff throughout the process, including LLSAP Director's review and approval of the application before submission
- ☐ Commitment to the joining requirements, ongoing responsibilities, and financial obligations of LLSAP membership
- ☐ For nonautomated libraries: review the [Guidance for Nonautomated Libraries document](#)

Additional Documents

Documents required for various phases of the grant lifecycle can be found on the [RAILS website](#). Please ensure that you save them to your own computer before completing any forms. These documents include:

- Application form
- Budget template
- Guidance for nonautomated libraries
- Quarterly report template

RAILS staff can provide a template of the grant agreement and examples of successful applications upon request.

Contact

Questions about the specific LLSAP you wish to join, membership requirements, services offered, joining process, and other LLSAP-specific details should be directed to LLSAP staff. Contact information and links to websites for each LLSAP can be found on the [RAILS website](#).

Questions about the grant process and application requirements, RAILS LLSAP support in general, or identifying which LLSAP you should join, can be directed to Anne Slaughter, RAILS Director of Technology Services, at anne.slaughter@railslibraries.org or 630-734-5127.

Eligibility

Who can apply?

RAILS member libraries of all types that meet the following basic criteria:

- Ability to complete the joining process and meet the ongoing membership requirements of the specific LLSAP, confirmed by LLSAP staff
- Ability to manage project activities and grant funds and submit quarterly reports to RAILS until all project activities have been completed and all funds expended
- Commitment to sustain membership in RAILS and the LLSAP for at least five years

Award determinations are based on funding availability, strength of individual applications, and the following priorities:

1. Nonautomated libraries that can sustain ongoing costs of LLSAP membership
2. Libraries with standalone integrated library systems joining an LLSAP
3. Current LLSAP members upgrading from union list or adding buildings
4. Mergers and partial mergers of existing consortia are prioritized with an adapted process developed in collaboration with RAILS staff

Not eligible:

- Individual libraries leaving a consortium to become a standalone library
- Individual libraries leaving one LLSAP for another
- Libraries upgrading from basic online to full participation

What costs are covered by this grant?

Expenses in the following categories may be funded, subject to the review process and available funds:

- Vendor implementation and data migration fees
- Conversion of paper catalog records to MARC format
- Technology equipment (e.g. laptops, receipt printers, barcode scanners) needed to meet minimum requirements for successful participation in the LLSAP
- Initial purchase of supplies (e.g., barcode stickers, patron cards, receipt paper) needed for successful participation in the LLSAP

The following expenses are **not eligible**:

- Library collections
- Furniture
- Special equipment not required for participation, such as self-check units, RFID equipment, automated material handlers, and library security systems
- Fees assessed to new members by consortia (e.g., reserve fund contributions)
- Ongoing costs such as annual fees for LLSAP membership, OCLC membership, telecommunications subscriptions, etc.
- Penalty fees assessed by vendors for early contract termination
- Personnel costs for permanent, full-time exempt employees
- Travel

Application Process

Initiate LLSAP membership

If your library currently uses fully featured catalog software and you are aware of your current automation-related costs and responsibilities:

1. Contact the Director of the LLSAP you wish to join to request a quote
2. Review services, costs, and membership requirements
3. Discuss the process and timeline to join
4. Confirm a mutual agreement to move forward, via the means established by the LLSAP

Nonautomated libraries: Prepare for LLSAP membership

If your library does not currently use a fully featured catalog software platform to circulate items and manage patrons, it is important to understand and plan for the significant and ongoing impact of this transition on your current operations and finances. These preparatory steps will vary depending on the library and LLSAP and are crucial in determining whether LLSAP membership is affordable for your library.

Nonautomated libraries applying for this grant must review the “[Guidance for Nonautomated Libraries](#)” document and complete the additional authorization requirement in the application form.

Develop project plan and budget

Gather the information needed to complete all budget and narrative sections of the application form.

1. LLSAP staff will provide critical information required for a successful application. Work with them to identify and plan for all steps, deadlines, and required elements of their joining process, including any tasks done by LLSAP staff and their catalog software vendor as well as tasks required of library staff.
2. Identify additional steps that are necessary for library staff to complete internally in areas such as procedures, training, collection management, marketing, and technology setup.
3. Develop a detailed timeline that accounts for all required activities within 18 months or less, including an anticipated go-live date or time window.
4. Identify all costs associated with the above activities and gather the information required in the budget template.
5. The project plan, timeline, and narrative sections of the application form must include details of how all requested funds will be used.

Complete application form

1. Complete all fields of the application form. All components requested in the description of each narrative section must be addressed.
2. Complete the Project Plan and Timeline document or documents. All components requested in the description of this required attachment must be addressed.
3. Using the [provided template](#), complete the budget spreadsheet, including details for all expenses as requested in the descriptions of each line. We cannot consider your application if this information is not supplied.
4. Submit completed application form and attachments to LLSAP Director for their thorough review and signature (at least one week before application deadline, or earlier as specified by the LLSAP Director).

Submit application

1. Before submitting your application, verify that you have completed all required components. Incomplete applications will not be accepted.
2. Email the application and attachments to Anne Slaughter, RAILS Director of Technology Services, at anne.slaughter@railslibraries.org.
3. Provide additional information if requested by RAILS staff during the review process.

Grant award and agreement

You will receive a letter with the results of the grant review process. The length of the review process may vary but is typically completed within one month. If funds are awarded, a grant agreement will be provided for review and signature. When the agreement is fully executed, grant funds will be issued via check.

Project activities and reporting

As your library proceeds with project activities, grant-related requirements include:

1. Complete project activities in collaboration with LLSAP staff, as outlined in your project plan and timeline.
2. Keep detailed records of all expenditures as required in the grant agreement.
3. Submit quarterly reports to RAILS throughout the duration of the grant period, including descriptions of expenditures and activities. Reports are required beginning with the quarter in which you receive funds and must be submitted each quarter until all project activities have been completed and all funds expended, even if no activities occur in a particular quarter. Additional instructions and deadlines will be sent when you receive your grant award.
4. If any part of your grant award is left unused after completing all project activities and planned expenditures, return all unused funds via a check made out to RAILS.
5. Update the [L2 directory](#) with your library's new automation status and any other new information.
6. Contact Anne Slaughter, RAILS Director of Technology Services at anne.slaughter@railslibraries.org as soon as possible if any questions or problems arise during the project. Deviations from the project plan, timeline, amounts of expenditures, or categories of expenditures may occasionally arise. These situations may require an amended budget, formal extension of the grant term, or other written approval from RAILS.
7. Additional steps may be communicated by RAILS staff, depending on project circumstances or changes to RAILS requirements.

Application Form

Library Information

Agency Name: _____

Website URL: _____

Number of buildings: _____

(Main and branch libraries, school libraries within a district, etc.)

Number of titles in library collections: _____

Number of items/volumes in library collections: _____

Annual circulation: _____

Number of registered patrons: _____

Population served: _____

- Public Library: Population residing in tax base. Please use latest IPLAR figure
- Academic or School Library: Full-time equivalents (FTEs) where FTE includes faculty and students, but not support staff
- Special Library: Full-time equivalents (FTEs) where FTE includes staff and affiliates served by the library and who are eligible to borrow materials

Automation Information

LLSAP Name: _____

Current Status:

☐ Not automated

☐ Automated standalone

Vendor and software: _____

☐ LLSAP member upgrading from Union List or adding a building

Explanation:

Library Contacts

Project Director

The individual responsible for coordinating and leading the activities in the project plan and ensuring that all grant requirements are met.

Name: _____

Title: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Work Mailing Address

Building Name: _____

Street or P.O. Box, City, ZIP: _____

Financial Contact (if different than Project Director)

The individual responsible for tracking the grant budget and keeping a record of all expenditures.

Name: _____

Title: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Work Mailing Address

Building Name: _____

Street or P.O. Box, City, ZIP: _____

Required Attachments

The Project Plan, Timeline, and Budget must accompany this form. These attachments must meet all requirements outlined in the descriptions below. Nonautomated libraries: refer to the additional required attachment described on page 11.

Project Plan and Timeline Document(s)

Attach a document (or documents) to describe the planned project activities and timeline. The document(s) can be formatted in the style of the library's choosing, as long as the information is clearly presented, understandable to an outside audience, and contains all required elements. Documents can be provided as additional pages in the application form PDF or submitted separately. Acceptable file types: Word, PDF, Excel. You may use the space on the following page to include additional information. If you are unable to provide your Project Plan and Timeline in a separate attachment, you may use the following page to provide the required information.

The following information must be included, at minimum, for your application to be considered:

- ☐ Detailed chronological **description of all project activities** performed by any individuals involved in the project, including LLSAP staff, library staff, vendors, and any others
- ☐ Descriptions of activities must include **references to all items requested in each category of the budget**, physical or otherwise, including information that demonstrates why the expenditure is necessary and how it will be used
- ☐ A **timeline** specifying when key phases and actions (e.g., planning, training, data migration, promotion) will take place. This may be provided as a separate document, or interspersed with the detailed description of activities, as long as the information is consistent and clearly presented
- ☐ Planned **go-live date** or time window no more than 18 months after anticipated receipt of grant funds
- ☐ Descriptions of any special circumstances, contingency plans, or other **unique details that may impact your project**

Budget Spreadsheet

Use the provided [spreadsheet template](#) to detail all eligible project expenses for which your library is requesting grant funding. All information requested for each category and item must be provided in the budget, and justification for all expenses must be included in the Project Plan as noted above for your application to be considered. The budget will be submitted as a separate document with the rest of your application. Please retain the original filetype and do not convert the budget spreadsheet to a PDF.

Instructions:

- Download and save the spreadsheet to your own files before you begin to enter information. Make sure to save your progress regularly.
- Review the INSTRUCTIONS tab
- Complete the SERVICES REQUEST DETAIL and EQUIPMENT REQUEST DETAIL tabs. The total request will be calculated automatically in the BUDGET SUMMARY tab.
- To start a new line within a cell, hold down the Alt key and press Enter.
- If you need more rows in a category, right-click on the hidden rows and select "Unhide." Hidden rows are indicated by gaps in row numbers on the far-left side of the sheet.

Project Plan and Timeline Information

You may optionally use this space to include additional information about or to supplement your attached document(s). If it is not possible to provide your Project Plan and Timeline in a separate attachment, you may use this page to provide the required information as outlined on the previous page.

Administrative Capacity

Financial Capacity

Describe the library's ability to manage grant funds and meet financial reporting requirements in 1-2 paragraphs, including:

- Procedures for managing grant funds and tracking expenditures
- Applicable policies for purchasing, hiring, or inventory management
- Any other internal financial controls
- Qualifications of personnel involved

Organizational Capacity

Describe the library's ability to successfully complete the planned activities within the required timeline in 1-2 paragraphs, including:

- How the Project Director and other key staff involved in this project have the experience and/or training to deliver activities proposed
- The roles of other individuals such as temporary employees or consultants, if applicable
- How this project aligns with strategic priorities, key projects or initiatives, or other relevant organizational factors

Resource Sharing and Community Impact

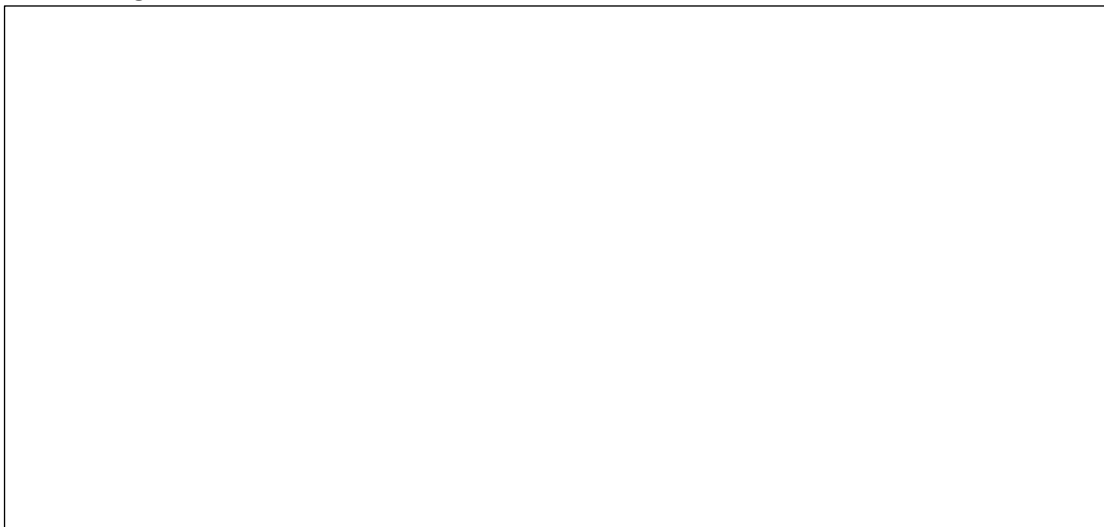
Describe the anticipated impact of this project, including:

- The community and/or target audience served by your library and their specific diverse needs
- How this project addresses your community's needs and makes your library services more accessible, inclusive, and equitable
- How your library's participation in the LLSAP will benefit other member libraries
- Information about any unique resources in your collection that could benefit a wider audience



Project Promotion

Describe your plan for promoting the project and its benefits within your community, including communication strategies and channels, how you will conduct outreach and provide support to existing patrons as well as non-users, and community partnerships you will leverage. If your library does not currently have a website, describe your plans to develop a website or provide other means of access to the online catalog.



Authorizations

Project Director Approval

I am authorized to submit this application, have read and understand the program requirements, and have completed all required steps. I affirm my library's commitment to complete the process of joining an LLSAP within 18 months of receiving grant funds and to remain a member for at least five years.

Project Director signature: _____

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____

LLSAP Director Approval

I have reviewed the application materials in full and confirm that they represent a comprehensive and appropriate plan for successful implementation within 18 months. I confirm that the Submitting Agency meets the membership requirements of my LLSAP and agree to commit our support and collaboration on this project as described.

LLSAP Director signature: _____

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____

NONAUTOMATED LIBRARIES: Governing Body Support

A nonautomated library is required to demonstrate that its governing body or parent organization has committed to sustaining the financial, policy, and other obligations of LLSAP membership. **Attach a copy of any formal resolution, affirmative vote, fully executed LLSAP membership documents, or other official demonstration of this support.** The attachment may be a PDF or Word document. You may also use the space below to provide a specific link and/or citation.