



What are the differences?

Reaching Across Illinois Library System (RAILS) is a government agency that provides services to libraries in the northern and west-central areas of Illinois.

RAILS is one of three state-funded regional library systems in Illinois (the other two are the Illinois Heartland Library System and Chicago Public Library).



PrairieCat is a consortium of libraries that share an integrated library system (ILS).

PrairieCat is also a government agency. Member libraries each have a legal intergovernmental agreement (IGA) with the other PrairieCat members to share services and the ILS.

RAILS is governed by a 12-member board, elected by member libraries.



PrairieCat is governed by two bodies. The Delegates Assembly includes a delegate from each circulating member and the four Union List representatives.

The Administrative Council is an 11-member board elected by the library delegates.

RAILS is a multitype library system serving more than 1,250 academic, public, school, and specialized libraries.



PrairieCat is a multitype system serving 138 academic, public, school, and specialized member libraries.

Two levels of membership use the PrairieCat for circulation and patron empowerment features. The third level, Union List, only uses the system for interlibrary loan.

All member libraries must comply with requirements as defined by Administrative Code Rules, Illinois Library System Act ([23 Ill.Admin. Code 3030.200](#)).



All member libraries must comply with requirements as defined in the IGA and organization bylaws. RAILS membership is required to be a PrairieCat member.

RAILS receives most of its budget through the Illinois State Library, a part of the Illinois Secretary of State's Office.



PrairieCat receives a grant from RAILS to provide services and support to member libraries, which covers approximately 30% of PrairieCat costs.

RAILS members do not pay dues to be part of the system.



PrairieCat libraries pay membership fees which cover about 70% of the costs to operate the consortium. The Delegates Assembly approves the budget and member fees based on a formula.

RAILS has around 80 staff members based out of five locations around northern Illinois. Around half of RAILS staff members are involved with interlibrary loan delivery services.



PrairieCat has 12 full-time staff members that maintain and support the system and run the organization.

PrairieCat Benefits:

PrairieCat manages the ILS (Sierra and Vega Discover) for member libraries. That includes cataloging and database management, reports, notices, training, and communication with Innovative and other vendors. PrairieCat also provides **continuing education**, and **shared technology** through e-commerce and an optional mobile app.

The website is a great starting point and provides links for the help desk and online forms: support.prairiecat.info

RAILS Benefits:

Delivery of interlibrary loan materials – System members can get interlibrary loan materials delivered to and from any other Illinois library for free. This includes books, movies, music, and more.

Continuing education – RAILS holds frequent low cost/no cost webinars and workshops on topics related to libraries (i.e. library programming, collection development, increasing circulation). Most events are archived and available to watch at any time.

Grants – RAILS offers a number of grants for members including the Continuing Education Event Grant, which allows members to host their own professional development at no cost, and the My Library Is... Grant, which helps fund programs that promote library services.

Deals and discounts – RAILS offers members a number of cooperative purchasing programs and vendor discounts at no cost.

Support for e-books – Any system member can participate in a fee-based program called eRead Illinois, which offers affordable access to Baker & Taylor's Boundless platform.

Email lists and networking groups – Members also have the opportunity to connect and discuss new ideas and best practices. Any staff from any library can join one of our 40+ email lists or meet up with a networking group in their area.