



## **Strategic Plan FY25-FY27**

## Introduction & Background

PrairieCat is an integrated library automation system serving 138 multi-type library members of the Reaching Across Illinois Library System (RAILS) across 22 counties in northern Illinois. Founded in 2010 as a legal entity, PrairieCat contracts with RAILS libraries to provide automation of resource sharing through a shared catalog. This online catalog contains records for over 1 million library materials and provides seamless access to member libraries and their patrons for circulation of items, inventory and holds management, and access to patron accounts. Three PrairieCat membership levels are provided to accommodate libraries of all types and sizes: Fully Participating, Basic Online, and Union List. PrairieCat currently has 12 full time staff that support member libraries.

This plan represents the overall strategy for PrairieCat over the next three years and is presented to the Delegates Assembly for approval in April, 2025. Upon approval, PrairieCat staff will finalize an activity plan to support the overall strategy and evolve while working toward goals. Staff will regularly review progress toward meeting plan goals using an evaluation framework and report to the Administrative Council on a regular basis.

The planning process was inclusive and affirmed that PrairieCat is on the right path with this refreshed strategic plan. PrairieCat remains committed to their membership and their core services. PrairieCat is excited about the focus this plan will bring through 2027. We hope this plan inspires growth and innovation during the next three years that lead to increased member connectivity and growth.

The Planning Team included:

- Carolyn Coulter, PrairieCat
- Chelsey Knippel, PrairieCat
- Beth Ryan, Johnsburg Public Library
- Elizabeth Smith, PrairieCat
- Jenna Diedrich, Galena Public Library

The Planning Team met during the strategic planning to ensure momentum and give input on various aspects of the process. The Planning Team and the Administrative Council both played a vital role in developing the final plan documents.

## Planning Process & Data Highlights

To create a cohesive, actionable plan, the Planning Team reviewed the progress towards previous plan goals, conducted a survey of member libraries, surveyed our standing groups and committees, and held a planning session with staff. The survey was key for understanding current member training needs, thoughts about PrairieCat leadership, governance, and culture, and overall member satisfaction.

The survey was completed by 80 consortium members. 87.5% of participants represented public library members, and 82.5% represented libraries that are full participants in PrairieCat's services. 51.25% of respondents were directors, the remainder of respondents being from various positions within the libraries.

At the September in-person staff meeting, staff reviewed the current strategic directions and goals. Staff focused on possible revised activities to achieve the plan goals, and the most popular ideas were compiled. Using these activity ideas, members of PrairieCat committees were surveyed to rank suggestions, as well as suggest new activities for goals that they had.

Results from the staff and committee surveys were combined with the results from the member survey. Ideas/activities were then ranked, and a new strategic plan was formulated. The Strategic Planning team then reviewed the new plan and passed it on to Administrative Council for approval.

## Vision

***To satisfy individual and library needs through equitably shared resources.***

Our vision remains unchanged and states our commitment to resource sharing through our members.

## Mission

***We engage members in sharing resources effectively and equitably, expanding the quality and quantity of information accessible to our library users.***

Our mission is how we carry out our work to achieve our vision. The vision and mission statements work in tandem to reinforce our core message and strategic directions. Our mission simplifies our work to communicate the focus of our operations.

## Strategic Directions

This plan is divided into four strategic directions:

### ***Engagement / Governance / Training / End User Experience***

During all information gathering regardless of format, the emphasis has been on key ways PrairieCat should move forward to prioritize and improve member engagement, overall governance, training for members, and the user experiences of both libraries and their end users. Key learning from these discussions include:

- Creating meaningful connections between PrairieCat and member libraries as well as between members themselves is a continued priority.
- Deepening the understanding of the services PrairieCat offers all stakeholders both virtually and in-person will help the organization grow, while transparency and responsiveness of leadership will guide the organization to more sustainable and independent operations.
- Expanded training opportunities for members will provide library staff with skills that improve their patrons' end user experiences both within the library and virtually through web and mobile interfaces.

## Goals, Activities, Measures

The following graphic summarizes the strategic plan, followed by additional detail for each strategic direction, including potential activities for each goal and possible metrics. PrairieCat staff will draft the activity plan that will serve as an implementation guide. Regular activity updates will be presented at future Administrative Council and Delegates Assembly meetings.

## ENGAGEMENT

*Members are actively engaged at all levels, which creates connections and advances the organization.*

PrairieCat's members want to feel that they matter to our organization and bring value to the overall consortium. Increased participation at all levels of membership is possible when we focus on inclusive communication, personal connections, and networking between members. Flexibility and relationship building are priorities while we seek to expand membership engagement and improve services at all levels.

Goals	Possible Activities
1) Members feel informed and connected through targeted communications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to develop website/newsletter/meeting reminders</li> <li>• Send email to all staff instead of just directors (send newsletter to PrairieCat ILL email addresses)</li> <li>• Targeted newsletters to targeted groups</li> <li>• Solicit input from schools for newsletter/find someone to write for newsletter from schools</li> <li>• Public facing communications and platforms are designed to meet digital accessibility standards</li> </ul>
2) Members have strong relationships through personal connections and peer networks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Meetups" among staff groups: children's, youth, reference, technical services, etc.</li> <li>• Promote/use forums on website</li> <li>• "Buddy system"/mentoring with new members and staff</li> <li>• Encourage regional meetings</li> </ul>
3) Members are empowered, feel valued, and actively participate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scheduled site visits, prioritizing new directors and noncompliant libraries (those libraries who are not compliant with PrairieCat requirements)</li> <li>• Keep "library spotlight" in newsletter, expand participation</li> <li>• Target nonmember libraries, invite to meetings</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage PUG Day/member presentation</li> <li>• Survey new members after implementation of new services or software: what went well, what didn't?</li> <li>• Meetings and lists for nondirectors</li> <li>• Improve engagement with small libraries, libraries with a small number of staff or solo librarians</li> </ul>
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### **Potential Measures of Success**

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member surveys indicate increased overall satisfaction with PrairieCat communications</li> <li>• Member survey feedback indicates increase in those feeling valued and empowered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased level of participation in networking, mentoring, forums</li> <li>• Increased social media post engagement, use of forums</li> </ul>
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## GOVERNANCE

*Leadership is transparent, responsive, innovative, and accountable.*

Our organization seeks to provide easy access to information for all levels of membership in a responsive and professional manner. We aim to balance sustainability and growth with an eye to transparency and improvement. Innovation for members, development for staff, and continued communication with RAILS are all objectives for this strategic direction.

Goals	Possible Activities
1) PrairieCat is sustainable and continues to pursue organizational growth and independence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Formalize succession planning and documentation reviews</li><li>• Re-evaluate fee structure</li><li>• Keep up multi-year budget forecasting</li><li>• Review membership levels (FP/BO/UL) and what each level is entitled to (what each "gets")</li><li>• Review UL participation and encourage potential upgrades or movement toward Find More Illinois if reasonable and prudent for them</li><li>• Review "barcode" participating libraries and encourage movement to Find More Illinois if reasonable and prudent for them</li><li>• Welcome new membership, encourage upgrades from Union List level</li><li>• Create a task force to investigate ILS options for the consortium</li><li>• Evaluate staffing levels considering increased workloads due to software changes and implementations</li></ul>
2) PrairieCat has a learning culture supported by continuous improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Keep up training funding, invest in Udemy, others</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Suggestion box" form on website for anonymous comments and suggestions</li> <li>• Cross training for staff (inter-departmental)</li> <li>• Staff is surveyed annually for workplace satisfaction</li> </ul>
3) PrairieCat is innovative and creates an inspiring vision for members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create easy-to-follow workflow with as little disruption as possible (when rolling out new software/services)</li> <li>• Staff should keep up with library innovations, pass on information to members, focus on being "influencers"</li> <li>• Create and promote "innovation" forum topic on website</li> <li>• Staff should welcome new innovations and be prepared for the changes</li> <li>• Director hosts open office sessions to take member feedback regarding organizational direction</li> </ul>

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### Potential Measures of Success

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- Annual satisfaction survey reflects Increased overall member satisfaction
  - Stable staff turnover
  - Staff surveys indicate high satisfaction
  - Increased access to professional development opportunities
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## TRAINING

***Learning opportunities equip members to provide excellent service to end users.***

Through a lens of continuous improvement, PrairieCat provides accessible training with a variety of virtual and in-person offerings. We will regularly survey members to ascertain the most needed topics for training and continuing education while offering opportunities for member-driven sharing around best practices. Regular evaluation of trainings will ensure we provide the most helpful offerings to the various library types we serve.

Goals	Possible Activities
1) Training opportunities are well advertised, and materials are easily accessible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include training changes in newsletter</li> <li>• Foster "refreshers" in LMS (develop refresher courses)</li> <li>• Feature training module in each newsletter</li> <li>• Review participation after 1 month registration in LMS</li> <li>• Keep up newsletter/email notices/websites</li> </ul>
2) A mix of training and continuing education is provided to enhance member knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand circulation training targeting supervisors</li> <li>• Staff keep virtual "office hours" concentrating on popular topics</li> <li>• Use Cataloging Maintenance Center training/cross promote RAILS trainings more</li> </ul>
3) Training content and materials are regularly evaluated to ensure their quality and effectiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer review/committee review of training before release</li> <li>• Review by training committee every 2 years (for each class)</li> <li>• Review 1 module on a rotating schedule after publication</li> <li>• Create training for mobile app/documentation</li> <li>• Add LMS questions to annual survey so we don't miss needs</li> </ul>

### Potential Measures of Success

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Members report high satisfaction with training topics, formats, and quality</li><li>• Increased number of members attend trainings and continuing education</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Members report increased knowledge and comfort level with new topics learned through trainings and continuing education</li></ul> |
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## END USER EXPERIENCE: PATRON

*Members are supported in their efforts to provide exceptional service to end users.*

Each goal and activity PrairieCat undertakes has the patron end user's experience in mind. Ease of end user engagement with the catalog interface is a top priority for our library members. Finding improved ways for all users to discover and access materials are among our most important objectives.

Goals	Possible Activities
1) Services are focused on meeting user needs and improving user engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop ILS tips/topics members can use on their social media</li><li>• Continue to advocate for catalog enhancements important to PrairieCat</li><li>• Produce patron-facing training videos</li><li>• Survey patrons regarding ease of catalog use, access and performance</li><li>• Implement user roles in the catalog for improved user experience and branding</li></ul>
2) PrairieCat seeks opportunities to enhance services to further meet the needs of diverse users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Update/enhance authorities with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in mind</li><li>• Seek patron feedback regarding accessibility</li><li>• Provide an expanded number of foreign language interfaces to the catalog, communicate their availability to members</li></ul>
1) PrairieCat pursues vendor relationships to offer expanded services to end users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide mobile app for all circulating libraries (provided we can fund)</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perform more vendor demos for new software</li> <li>• Keep up with beta involvement to ensure we have a "voice" in future development</li> <li>• Provide more vendor feedback in online forums and enhancement tools, encourage libraries to participate more</li> </ul>
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### Potential Measures of Success

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• End user and library staff feedback is positive for ease of access through various catalog features</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced helpdesk requests for catalog and UX refinements</li> </ul>
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## END USER EXPERIENCE: MEMBER STAFF

*PrairieCat provides exceptional service to member staff end users.*

Ease of staff member engagement with the ILS interface is a top priority for PrairieCat. Finding new ways for all staff member to learn about the ILS and continually providing up-to-date functionality and services for library users are among our most important objectives.

Goals	Possible Activities
1) Services are focused on meeting staff user needs and creating more efficient processes for day-to-day operations of the ILS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep up with ILS updates</li> <li>• Survey for roadblocks caused by ILS configurations, address those that can be remedied</li> <li>• Create advanced-level training, offer certifications</li> <li>• Improve communication to members regarding ILS changes and enhancements</li> </ul>
2) Staff users can easily access support resources, including helpdesk services. Helpdesk services respond in a timely and thorough fashion to submitted tickets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor timeliness of helpdesk ticket responses and address any outstanding issues.</li> <li>• Provide feedback on ongoing issues to keep members "in the loop".</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain “known issues” on support website and keep up to date with presented information</li> </ul>
3) Staff are provided with statistics and reports that they need to best operate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey for reporting needs and ascertain annually if needs are being met.</li> <li>• Staff continues to provide IPLAR support, including “office hour” support for member libraries</li> </ul>

### Potential Measures of Success

- Helpdesk tickets decrease and response times improves
- Indicators on member satisfaction surveys show improvement in areas of concern

## Next Steps

After this plan is adopted by the Administrative Council, staff will complete the activity plan to guide implementation. Implementation is a continual process, as the timing of certain activities will be determined by priority. Review and adjustment of the activity plan will happen on a regular basis.

Evaluation of the plan will be ongoing once the plan implementation is underway. Measurements for each goal will vary, and some activities will be best evaluated by collecting data through member surveys. Other activities will be evaluated based on information collected in-house such as training attendance and evaluation. Continued reporting of successes and challenges will ensure that PrairieCat is transparent about progress and open to input. PrairieCat commits to a comprehensive review and update of this plan at its completion. This plan will move our organization significantly forward in guiding next steps on plans for continued growth, independence, and improved member services. This plan is an investment in the future of PrairieCat as a valued asset of the library community.