



**Strategic Plan  
FY22-FY24**

## Introduction & Background

PrairieCat is an integrated library automation system serving 136 multi-type library members of the Reaching Across Illinois Library System (RAILS) across 21 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 RAILS 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 January 2021. 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 and is excited about the focus this plan will bring through 2023. We hope this plan inspires growth and innovation over the next three plus years that lead to increased member connectivity and growth.

PrairieCat engaged in a strategic planning process with assistance from consultant Amanda E. Standerfer from [Fast Forward Libraries](#). The Planning Team included:

- Carolyn Coulter, PrairieCat
- Chelsey DeSplinter, PrairieCat
- Emily Faulkner, DeKalb Public Library
- Elizabeth Smith, PrairieCat
- Julie Wayland, Princeton Public Library

The Planning Team met several times during the strategic planning process starting in September 2020 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

In order to create a cohesive, actionable plan, the Planning Team reviewed the progress towards previous plan goals, conducted a survey of member libraries, held three listening sessions with members, and conducted member interviews.<sup>1</sup> The survey was key for understanding current member training needs, thoughts about PrairieCat leadership, governance, and culture, and overall member experience.

The survey was completed by 75 consortium members. 80% of participants represented public library members, and 84% represented libraries that are full participants in PrairieCat's services. A total of 24 people attended listening sessions or participated in an interview. Feedback indicated that member participants are generally very satisfied with PrairieCat's efforts at member engagement, governance, and end user experience goals over the past 3 years. Survey ratings for training goals were just slightly lower at moderately to very satisfied.

At the November Administrative Council retreat, we reviewed process learning and the updated strategic directions and goals. Staff focused on possible activities to achieve the plan goals and presented the draft activity plan at the December Administrative Council retreat. The session brought cohesion to the developing plan and allowed for the plan's design to emerge. Final plan documents were prepared for approval at the January 2021 Delegates Assembly meeting. In addition, the Planning Team also discussed plan evaluation and reporting as part of the implementation process.

## 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.***

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<sup>1</sup> See full *Learning Report* in Appendix.

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 member listening sessions, the discussion focused on the 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. Consortium 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 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 PrairieCat PING</li> <li>• Continue social media presence</li> </ul>
2) Members have strong relationships through personal connections and peer networks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer forums, mentoring, and virtual networking</li> <li>• Special interest groups</li> <li>• Online forum participation</li> </ul>
3) Members are empowered, feel valued, and actively participate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruiting</li> <li>• Onboarding plan includes mentoring</li> </ul>

### Potential Measures of Success

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member surveys indicate increased overall satisfaction with PC communications</li> <li>• Member 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</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>Form ad hoc Task Force to engage in discussions with RSA about collaboration and recommendations for possible merger or other cooperative agreement</li> <li>Continue to work with RAILS on aspects of independence</li> </ul>
2) PrairieCat has a learning culture supported by continuous improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff professional development</li> <li>Report to members key takeaways from trainings/workshops</li> </ul>
3) PrairieCat is innovative and creates an inspiring vision for members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Occasional messages/updates to members about interesting info</li> <li>Innovation section of peer forum</li> </ul>

### Potential Measures of Success

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased membership numbers</li> <li>Increased overall member satisfaction</li> <li>Staff surveys indicate high satisfaction and increased access to professional development opportunities</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RSA collaboration investigated and potential collaboration undertaken</li> <li>Increased independence from RAILS as appropriate</li> </ul> |
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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>• Enhance Talent LMS offerings</li><li>• Post-training evaluations</li></ul>
2) A mix of training and continuing education is provided to enhance member knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Annual continuing education survey drives calendar</li><li>• Continue PUG Day</li></ul>
3) Training content and materials are regularly evaluated to ensure their quality and effectiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Core competencies checklist developed</li><li>• Learning objectives evaluation</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

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

Each goal and activity PrairieCat undertakes has the end user’s experience in mind, however some goals are more specific to end users than others. Ease of end user engagement with the catalog interface is a top priority for our library members. Finding new ways for all users to learn about the ILS and continually providing up-to-date functionality and services for users 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>• End user and library staff surveys or interviews to learn about needs</li> </ul>
2) PrairieCat seeks opportunities to enhance services to further meet the needs of diverse users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How-to videos to help end users learn how to best utilize the ILS</li> </ul>
3) PrairieCat pursues vendor relationships to offer expanded services to end users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek out innovative ILS enhancements that improve the experience of end users</li> <li>• Investigate new discovery layer</li> <li>• Refine and add functionality to the app</li> </ul>

### Potential Measures of Success

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• End user and library staff feedback is positive for ease of access through various ILS features</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• End users utilize how-to videos (video view counts) and report increased understanding of the ILS</li> </ul> |
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## 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.