



PrairieCat FAQ

1.) What is PrairieCat?

137 libraries that are also members of the Reaching Across Illinois Library System (RAILS) share an integrated library automation system known as PrairieCat. The consortium is a separate legal entity, an Illinois intergovernmental instrumentality, that contracts with RAILS for services to support the daily operation of the shared catalog. PrairieCat membership and service fees cover approximately 70% of the operating costs, with the remaining support coming from RAILS.

Mission: PrairieCat assists members in the successful sharing of resources and services, expanding the quality and quantity of information accessible to our library users.

Vision: Connecting libraries to strengthen communities.

Values:

- **Collaboration** – We strive to share member resources as effectively and economically as possible.
- **Diversity** - We value and respect the contributions of others who have talents and abilities, constraints and opportunities that are different than our own, and strive to provide equal footing for libraries of all types and sizes.
- **Responsiveness** – We strive to provide excellent services by focusing on the needs and wants of our customers.
- **Engagement** - We value collaborative members with involved, well-trained, competent staff.
- **Access** – We strive for an effective, well-maintained catalog supporting strong member collections.
- **Innovation** – We work to sustain a consortium that leverages our size to the benefit of the members, and provides the appropriate resources, leadership and services in pursuit of excellent library service.

2.) What is the difference between PrairieCat and RAILS?

RAILS is one of two multi-type library systems in Illinois. Library systems are established by state law (75 ILCS 10/, the Illinois Library System Act). Funding for Illinois Library Systems is provided through the Illinois State Library and the Secretary of State, with funds appropriated by the Illinois General Assembly.

The RAILS service area covers northern and western Illinois. The system serves more than 1,300 private, public, school, and university library members, representing more than 4,200 library facilities in a 27,000 square mile area. RAILS is governed by a Board of Directors, elected by member libraries.

RAILS core services are delivery and support for more than 600 libraries' shared online catalogs. RAILS staff also facilitate continuing education, consulting, and communication to support these core services.

PrairieCat membership is separate from RAILS membership, but is optional for RAILS member libraries. PrairieCat contracts with RAILS for services to support the daily

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operation of the shared catalog. As of July 1, 2018, PrairieCat directly employs its own staff.

3.) Delivery is an important service for my library. Is that provided by PrairieCat?

No, delivery is provided by RAILS and funded entirely through the RAILS budget for PrairieCat members. It is an integral piece, however, of effective resource sharing. It is important that all PrairieCat members understand and follow proper RAILS delivery procedures, which can be found on the RAILS website:

<https://www.railslibraries.info/services/delivery>

4.) How does membership work in PrairieCat?

There are 3 levels of membership:

- **Fully Participating members** have the option of using the full suite of products that PrairieCat offers. Fully participating members perform all of their circulation transactions on PrairieCat. Their patrons are eligible to use patron-initiated systemwide holds.
- **Basic Online members** are fully circulating members but have limited use of the suite of products that PrairieCat offers. Their patrons are eligible to use patron-initiated systemwide holds.
- **Union List members** have their holdings in the PrairieCat database, and share their resources with other PrairieCat libraries. Union List libraries use staff-initiated holds to request materials for their users from other PrairieCat libraries.

There are also representation tiers so that the interests of all sizes and types of libraries are considered on the Administrative Council, the PrairieCat board. Administrative Council elections are held annually for open seats. Each Fully Participating and Basic Online Member will vote for its own category (public tier 1-3, school, or academic/special) and for the at-large seats in each election. Delegates are encouraged to reach out to their representatives with any questions or concerns. You can find more information about AC representation in the General Policy Manual and Bylaws found on the the governance page of the PrairieCat support site.

The public library tier levels are based on the amount of the annual payment for PrairieCat services. The total amount of public library payments is divided into thirds to determine the tiers. You can find your public library's tier on the governance page of the PrairieCat support site.

5.) PrairieCat has a lot of committees and meetings. How is PrairieCat governed? What meetings are most important for my library to participate in?

Delegates Assembly is the membership body that approves the budget, strategic plan, major purchases, and membership changes for the consortium. The Assembly also provides input to help shape Administrative Council decisions. The Assembly meets quarterly in July, October, January, and April each year. Each Fully Participating and Basic Online member library appoints its chief administrator or another staff member to act as the Delegate on the Delegates Assembly. The Delegate may also designate, in writing, an alternate to vote in their absence. The four Union List member representatives are also voting members of the Delegates Assembly. Delegates Assembly attendance is a membership requirement for Fully Participating members, Basic Online members, and the four Union List representatives.

Administrative Council is an eleven member board elected by the Delegates Assembly. The Council sets policy, receives and approves recommendations from standing groups, oversees fiscal operations, and makes recommendations to the Delegates Assembly for purchases more than \$20,000 outside the approved budget. The Council meets monthly. The Council has two subcommittees: the Finance Committee and the Resource Sharing Committee.

Circulation Committee (CircC) is an eleven member elected committee. The committee meets bi-monthly to fully discuss circulation and OPAC topics, is empowered to make decisions on procedure and some policy decisions, and to make recommendations to Administrative Council for higher level policy decisions. All Fully Participating, Basic Online, and Union List members of PrairieCat are encouraged to run for seats on CircC. All interested members are welcome to attend meetings.

Technical Services Committee (TechC) is an eleven member elected committee. The committee meets bi-monthly to fully discuss technical services topics, is empowered to make decisions on procedure and some policy decisions, and to make recommendations to Administrative Council for higher level policy decisions. All Fully Participating, Basic Online, and Union List members of PrairieCat are encouraged to run for seats on TechC. All interested members are welcome to attend meetings.

Training and Enhancements Committee is a committee of volunteers from PrairieCat members who review and create training and marketing resources for member staff and patrons, and review and recommend Innovative enhancements for voting by members. The Training Committee meets in August, November, February, and May. Any PrairieCat member staff is welcome to participate.

User Experience Committee is a committee of volunteers from PrairieCat members who discuss and recommend to the Administrative Council services and configurations in order to optimize usability, in order to better serve both patron and staff end users. The User Experience Committee meets quarterly in September, December, March, and June. Any PrairieCat member staff is welcome to participate.

6.) What are other important PrairieCat events or networking opportunities?

PrairieCat Users Group Day (PUG Day) is held in September annually and all PrairieCat members are encouraged to send staff. The professional development day is a mix of PrairieCat-specific and general library sessions. PUG Day has moved to a virtual event in recent years, however we intend to return to at least a hybrid conference when possible.

PrairieCat Member Updates are held twice a year, in the Spring and Fall, in seven locations across the PrairieCat service area. All seven events are the same, and the agenda includes updates from the board, committees and staff, as well as brief demos and an opportunity for Q&A and local networking. PrairieCat members are welcome to attend wherever is convenient for them. All levels of staff are welcome and encouraged to attend. Again, these member updates have moved to virtual meetings due to recent circumstances. In-person meetings will resume when possible.

7.) How do I know all the policies and procedures that PrairieCat members follow?

PrairieCat members have worked hard to implement a number of legal and policy documents that detail all approved shared policies and procedures. These documents

are all available on the PrairieCat support website. It is important that all members understand and follow these policies and procedures.

These documents are on the Governance page on the PrairieCat website:

<https://support.prairiecat.info/gov>

Intergovernmental agreement (IGA) – the contract between each of the PrairieCat members that are part of the PrairieCat intergovernmental instrumentality
<https://support.prairiecat.info/system/files/Public/201808/Approved%20PrairieCat%20IGA.pdf>

Bylaws – the basic rules approved by the PrairieCat membership to provide a framework for the consortium’s operation and management
<https://support.prairiecat.info/system/files/Public/202008/Approved%20PC%20Bylaws%20200729.pdf>

General Policy Manual – administrative policies approved by the consortium
[https://support.prairiecat.info/system/files/Public/202107/Approved%20General Policy Manual%2020210402.pdf](https://support.prairiecat.info/system/files/Public/202107/Approved%20General%20Policy%20Manual%2020210402.pdf)

These documents are under the Resources page on the PrairieCat website:

<https://support.prairiecat.info/gov>

In addition, PrairieCat staff provide regular training on use of the integrated library system and proper procedures by software module. The full schedule of training is available in Library Learning (L2) <http://www.librarylearning.info> and on the PrairieCat website. Class descriptions are found on the PrairieCat website.

Some classes are also offered On Demand. The PrairieCat website also includes a vast array of tools under the Resources section, including training documents, technical bulletins, cheat sheets, and more.

8.) What are some basics on how resource sharing works within PrairieCat?

Holds – patrons and staff of Fully Participating and Basic Online members of PrairieCat can place holds on materials via PrairieCat. Union List members have one ILL patron record they use to place holds for their library; patrons of Union List members cannot place holds themselves. PrairieCat libraries can choose to keep newly acquired materials as “new” so they are only holdable by their local patrons for 15 weeks. “New” materials are then automatically updated to a systemwide holdable setting after 15 weeks. Patrons of the owning library of the material always have priority for filling holds.

Reciprocal Borrowing – public libraries in PrairieCat all participate in reciprocal borrowing where a patron of a public library can check out materials at another public library. It is optional for academic, school, and special members of PrairieCat to participate in reciprocal borrowing.

ILL Barcode program – PrairieCat allows non-PrairieCat or I-SHARE libraries to place holds on PrairieCat using a single ILL barcode. ILL Barcode libraries pay a convenience fee of \$1.00 per hold.

9.) *Is there any other basic terminology that it might be useful to be familiar with?*

LLSAP – local library system automation program – an Illinois term for a consortium that is partially supported by an Illinois library system. PrairieCat is one of six LLSAPs supported by RAILS.

ILS – integrated library system – also known as a library management system (LMS), is an unified computer system for a library or group of libraries, used to track items owned, orders made, bills paid, and patrons who have borrowed. An ILS usually comprises a relational database, software to interact with that database, and two graphical user interfaces (one for patrons, one for staff). Most ILSes separate software functions into discrete programs called modules.

Innovative Interfaces, Inc.– the vendor that supplies the software for PrairieCat’s integrated library system, based in Emeryville, CA. It was recently acquired by ExLibris, another ILS corporation, which was in turn acquired by ProQuest.

Sierra – the name of the staff software that PrairieCat uses.

Encore – the name of the public catalog software that PrairieCat uses.

iTiva – stands for telephone notification system. PrairieCat uses iTiva to make automated calls to patrons for holds pickup and overdues. Patrons can also call in to renew materials at 888-542-7259.

L2 – stands for Library Learning and is the statewide registration system for PrairieCat, RAILS, and other library events (<http://librarylearning.info>)

Zoom – the web meeting software tool that PrairieCat and RAILS use for remote access to meetings and training classes. Information on connecting to the remote event are found in the L2 listing for the event.

TalentLMS – The learning management system that PrairieCat uses to deliver online training classes to members, available 24/7/365.

10.) *Where can I go to get questions answered and find additional information?*

There are a number of ways that staff at member libraries can get support, have questions answered or find additional information.

PrairieCat Support by Phone: 877-542-7257 – available hours:

- 8:30 a.m. - 9:00 p.m. Monday-Friday
- 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Saturday
- 12:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. Sunday

PrairieCat Help Desk – <http://helpmenow.prairiecat.info> – incidents are routed to the proper PrairieCat staff member for follow-up. Help Desk submissions are preferred for non-emergency issues.

PrairieCat Website – <http://support.prairiecat.info> – includes a list of PrairieCat members, general PrairieCat information, a calendar of events, meeting agendas and minutes, reports and statistics, training tools and resources, and more.

PrairieCat Catalog –<http://search.prairiecat.info/iii/encore> – default public catalog home screen.

PrairieCat Encore Launch Page - <https://www.prairiecat.info/> - enhanced Encore homepage that can be customized by your library; this is an optional feature.

Reports and Statistics – <https://support.prairiecat.info/statistics> - all reports and statistical reports run regularly systemwide are posted on the PrairieCat website. Members can also take training to run individual library reports themselves, or can request custom reports by submitting a Help Desk request.