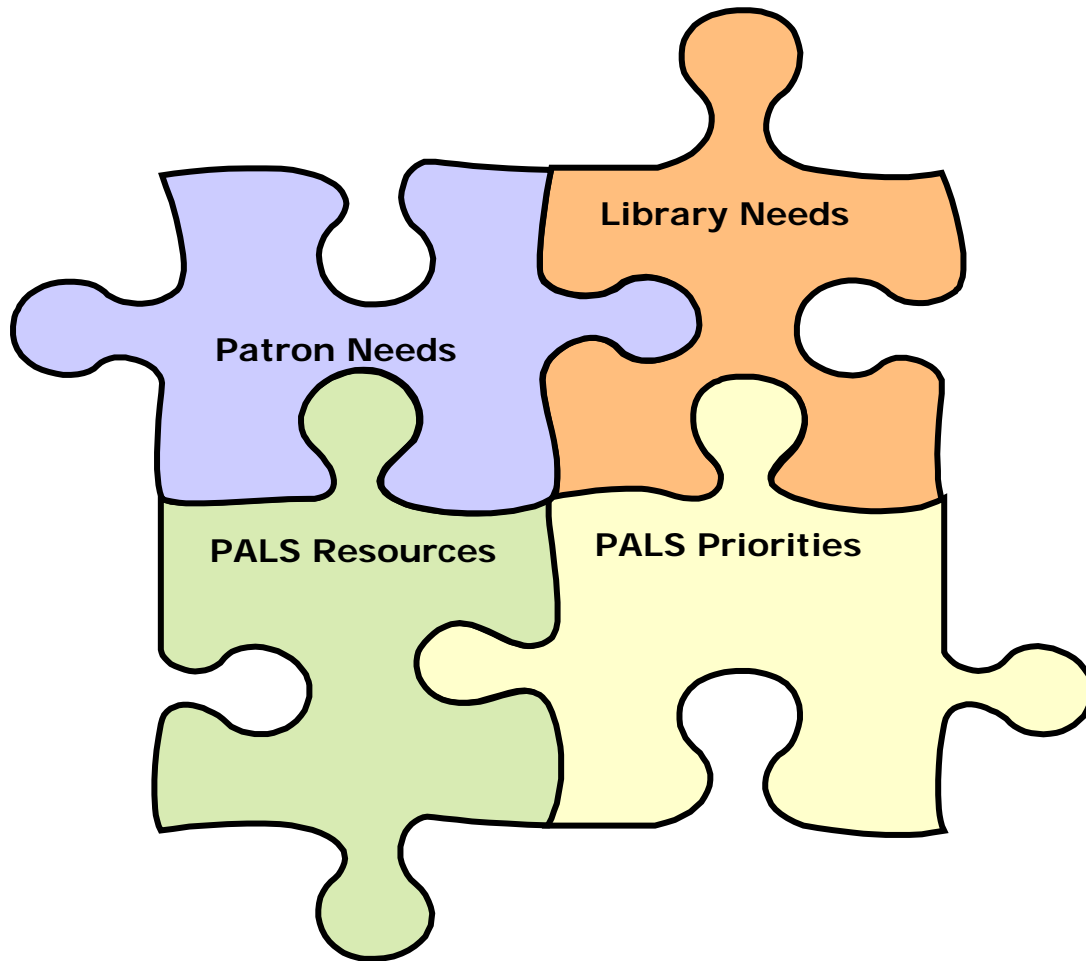


*Prairie Area Library System
Strategic Direction FY2010 – FY2013
Putting the Pieces Together*



Our Mission-Who We Are

*376 members in 26 counties and 184 communities
working together to improve library service to 1.9
million citizens in northern Illinois and eastern Iowa*

3.1. Current Long Range Program

Our Vision: Together We Make a Difference

It is our goal that the Prairie Area Library System will be recognized as a model regional library cooperative. We will be a community of striving, caring, and innovative personnel from all sizes and types of libraries working to create the best library service. We will use group leadership, initiative, and expertise to identify shared needs and opportunities and create effective, community-based service responses. We will save individual libraries money and create service solutions simply unattainable by individual activity. Our partnership will create significant opportunities for personal growth and development and lay the foundation for continuous adaptations and future accomplishments. Our participants have agreed to act as responsible citizens of the regional library community. They contribute individual energy and skill, commit local physical resources, and take pride of ownership in cooperative, reciprocal efforts.

The fruits of this vision will be excellent, cost-effective, customer sensitive and innovative programs. Participants in the regional library community will feel connected and committed. They will be committed to group solutions and know their library provides significantly better service due to its participation in its regional system.

3.1. Current Long Range Program

Our Guiding Principles

Inclusive – As a multi-type library organization, PALS 376 members serve an economically, socially, and politically diverse population. PALS programs and shared initiatives aim to recognize the broad cultural context within which member libraries operate.

Open, Accessible – PALS decision and policy-making processes are open to member library participation. The System strives for open, honest, straight-forward, and transparent communication.

Catalyst - PALS activities aim to combine and build on local effort and resources to create a commonwealth of high-quality, accessible library services for the patrons of participating libraries. PALS activities are not a substitute for local effort or local economic constraints.

Economies of Scale - PALS will use the benefit of its large size whenever possible for creating shared programs, group discounts, networking and leadership opportunities, etc.

Innovation – PALS aims to create an environment that helps libraries find and implement new ideas, products and services. Innovative members help create a System environment that fosters improvement throughout the system.

Teamwork - PALS aims to make effective use of teams and committees in order to understand and respect the divergent views of stakeholders and create better results. PALS aims for members to belong, participate, contribute, lead, and follow.

What Our Members Libraries Said About PALS

More than 120 member staff participated in neighborhood planning sessions in January 2008. This is a summary of data from that input.

- 1. Patron Service Response Priorities:** The top areas indicated were: connecting to the online world, stimulating imagination, creating young readers, satisfying curiosity, and succeeding in school. These form the ultimate set of priorities achieved through supporting libraries. It is no surprise that technology is a key to patron satisfaction. The other areas are supported at least in part by delivery services and resource sharing as well as continuing education.
- 2. Library Needs:** The major needs for libraries are in the areas of technology and library resources (delivery systems, ILL etc.) and leadership. Funding came in a close fourth. Library leadership is certainly something that systems have supported over the years. This is an area that requires further study as to what leadership means. Other topics suggest staff training and continuing education are critical areas for PALS.
- 3. PALS Role in Meeting Library Needs:** Staff Training emerges as the most critical role by a wide margin. Providing technology and resource sharing came in second and third. This provides more clues that training is a critical area for the future strategy. What people mean by training is very subjective. But it does mean that training is a role that they can't do on their own and they need PALS to be a primary provider.
- 4. PALS services:** Delivery, Interlibrary Loan and Continuous Learning are the three topics continuing the trend found earlier. The support for other services drops off sharply after the first three areas. Communication also had relatively strong support.
- 5. What does PALS do well:** The strongest service was delivery (by a wide margin), followed by interlibrary loan, and communication. Continuous learning and education received only adequate ratings. Consulting got a slightly higher score than training. This seems to indicate that while there is certainly no crisis, education, leadership development, and continuous learning could be major areas of focus in the upcoming plan.

What We Learned in the Initial Years of Our Time Together as PALS

1. We have a great diversity of needs and resources. One size does not fit all.
2. Trust and cooperation are critical to our success. We do well most of the time but it is still hard.
3. Advocacy for libraries and PALS needs to be constant especially in times when funding is flat and costs are going up.
4. We have to be flexible and learn how to deal with our differences.
5. PALS is a lot more than PrairieCat.

Where Are We Going? Our Priorities for a Desired Future

1. We will build upon our shared membership and PALS staff expertise. We will do this by:
 - Increasing the amount and effectiveness of our communication.
 - Identifying more opportunities for networking and collaborating.
 - Finding new ways of partnering both within and outside the library community.
2. We will build our services using the best practices available in order to enhance the effectiveness of our member libraries. Our primary services:
 - Should seek out innovative formats and be tightly woven around member needs.
 - Should take advantage of technology where desirable and cost effective.
 - Should take advantage of member expertise and opportunities for collaboration.
 - Should seek to balance what should be done centrally versus centered around neighborhoods.
 - Should connect with members as a unified system that uses neighborhoods where appropriate to help deliver services and create community.
 - Should strengthen the value of PrairieCat to our members.

3.1. Current Long Range Program

3. We will continue to improve our governance as a member driven cooperative. We will seek to:
 - Improve the timeliness and effectiveness of our decision making, aiming for transparency and alignment with our core values and mission.
 - Continually improve our ability to communicate the information our members need, and willingly listen to their concerns and needs.
 - Review the effectiveness of our boards, committees, networks and other forms of member engagement to ensure that the interactions are purposeful, productive, and aligned with our desired direction.
 - Ensure that PALS staff levels are able to support our mission and desired future.

4. We will advocate for vital libraries and insure that our stakeholders and funders understand PALS contribution to the success of our system members. We seek to:
 - Constantly refine our message and explore the best channels for facilitating the delivery of the information to our stakeholders.
 - Identify alternative funding sources for PALS and our member libraries.
 - Use best practice marketing processes to make the case for libraries.
 - Provide responsive, friendly and effective service to our member libraries

5. We will maintain a cost-effective, efficient infrastructure that facilitates excellent customer service to our staff and members. We will do this by:
 - Seeking creative ways of reducing the costs of our facilities while maintaining functionality and access by our members.
 - Maintaining the system infrastructure of facilities, networks and vehicle fleet for greatest cost-effectiveness and efficiency.

3.1. Current Long Range Program

We Will Measure Success By:

1. The success of our member libraries (IPLAR reports, successful referendums, increased circulation, increased staffing levels, and facility improvement etc.)
2. The degree to which member libraries are delighted with the service they receive especially in the areas of consulting, continuing education, materials delivery, and other forms of resource sharing. (Member Survey)
3. The amount of innovation in the design and delivery of our services as we improve service, reduce costs and focus the service on member needs. (Number of awards won, costs of service, customer satisfaction surveys)
4. The degree to which members utilize PALS services (Participation levels etc.)
5. The amount of member networking and collaboration with each other. (Number of projects)
6. How well we successfully advocate for PALS and member library's financial needs and library values. (Participation in legislative events, legislative success, avoidance of harmful legislation, satisfaction with marketing materials)
7. How much confidence members have in the profession and voluntary leadership of PALS (Member survey, ability to fill positions of leadership, ability to fill PALS staff positions with qualified professionals etc.)