# My Library Is… Survey Results & Next Steps

## January 2022

## Introduction/Background

In November 2021, RAILS conducted four separate surveys targeted at our four types of libraries (academic, public, school, and specialized) to measure awareness of the [My Library Is… campaign](https://www.mylibraryis.org/) and to determine what changes we could make to help libraries more effectively demonstrate their value to different stakeholders, justify the need for continued/increase library funding, and more.

We invited all interested staff members at all RAILS libraries to complete the survey and invited IHLS to distribute the surveys to their member libraries as well. RAILS publicized the survey via our home page; repeated articles in the weekly *RAILS E-News*; individual encounters with members; and targeted, repeated messages to the following mailing lists:

* RAILS Directors Only list
* RAILS Academic Libraries list
* RAILS Public Libraries list
* RAILS School Libraries list
* RAILS Special Libraries list
* AISLE (Association of Illinois School Library Educators) statewide list
* IACRL (Illinois Association of College and Research Libraries) list
* Special Libraries Association – Illinois chapter list

We also asked RAILS Board members and AISLE Board members to help spread the word.

The following table shows the number of respondents from each library type and system. (The unidentified respondents did not complete the survey or did not indicate their library system.)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Type of Library | RAILS | IHLS | Unidentified | Total |
| Academic | 18 | 1 | 4 | 23 |
| Public | 180 | 1 | 64 | 245 |
| School | 86 | 12 | 20 | 118 |
| Specialized | 14 | 0 | 4 | 18 |

## Awareness/Purpose of Campaign and Campaign Website

Survey respondents were asked if they were aware of the My Library Is… campaign. The following table reflects awareness of the campaign by library type.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Type of Library | Aware of Campaign | Unaware | Number of Respondents |
| Academic | 78.26% | 21.74% | 23 |
| Public | 84.77% | 15.23% | 243 |
| School | 50% | 50% | 118 |
| Specialized | 66.67% | 33.33% | 18 |

Many respondents were aware of the campaign but were unclear about the purpose or the target audience (i.e., all staff at all type of libraries). Interestedly, smaller libraries thought the campaign was aimed at larger libraries, and larger libraries thought the campaign was aimed at smaller libraries. Some thought the campaign was only aimed at staff holding marketing-related positions. Some academic, school, and specialized library respondents thought the campaign was aimed at public libraries.

***Next Steps***

To ensure that as many Illinois libraries as possible are aware of the campaign and how it can help them, RAILS will:

* Continue to publicize the campaign via regular *RAILS E-News* articles. Currently, most *E-News* articles promote My Library Is… blog posts. We will expand this coverage to promote additional campaign activities and tools as well.
* Clarify the purpose of the campaign on the My Library Is… website and look for every opportunity to make it clear that the campaign is designed to help staff at all levels and all types and sizes of Illinois libraries.
* Continue to work with the My Library Is… Advisory Group to promote the campaign to staff at different types and sizes of libraries.
* Work with AISLE, IACRL, and SLA-Illinois to promote awareness of the campaign to nonpublic libraries. Provide specific examples of how the campaign can help these different types of libraries.
* Review all content on the campaign website; determine what additional content is needed, what content is no longer relevant, etc. Ensure that the website includes content of relevance to all types and sizes of Illinois libraries.

## Campaign Offerings

Survey respondents were given a list of campaign offerings and asked to identify which ones they had used. Offerings included:

* Used the talking points for one of the four library types
* Used the *Elders of the Internet* video featuring Nick Offerman to promote the library
* Viewed a webinar available on the My Library Is… website
* Viewed special campaign website section for one of the four types of libraries
* Read at least one My Library Is… blog entry
* Contributed a blog post
* Posted a best practice or successful promotional tool to Sharing Showcase on campaign website
* Implemented or adapted another library’s Sharing Showcase contribution
* Applied for a My Library Is… grant or a My Library Is… grant for school libraries

“Read at least one blog post” was the only offering selected by over 50% of respondents from each library type. This may be because RAILS regularly publicizes new blog posts on our home page and in the weekly *RAILS E-News* as indicated above.

Other resources frequently used by different library types included:

* *Elders of the Internet* video (academic and public library respondents)
* Talking points for specific library types (public, school, and specialized library respondents)
* Special website sections for different library types (academic and specialized library respondents)
* My Library Is… grants for school libraries (school library respondents)

***Next Steps***

* RAILS will take advantage of the number of people looking at My Library Is… blog posts. In addition to inviting libraries of all types to post to the blog, we will actively recruit posts on specific challenges members are facing and best practices members share via our different mailing lists.
* Survey feedback also included calls for help compiling blog posts for those who are not natural writers. RAILS will offer the option of interviewing members and either posting a video of the interview or writing a blog post based on the interview.
* Due to the overwhelming number of positive comments RAILS received when we released the *Elders of the Internet* video, we will explore the option of producing another video, perhaps to address the need for increased/continued library funding since this is a challenge for all types and sizes of libraries (see below).

## Major Challenges

Survey respondents were given a list of challenges targeted to their type of library and asked to rank how much each challenge affected their library specifically. They also had the option of noting additional challenges. Funding was the only major challenge identified by over 50% of respondents from all types of libraries.

Other major challenges identified by many respondents from different library types included:

* Communicating the value of the library to administrators (academic and school library respondents)
* Attracting non-library users, including specific age groups such as teens and young adults (public library respondents)
* Staffing shortages and justifying the need for additional staffing (public, school, and specialized library respondents)
* Low staff morale, apathy, or getting staff to accept promoting the library as part of their daily responsibilities (public library respondents)
* Difficulty getting patrons back into the library following COVID-19 related closures or patrons being angry about COVID-19 restrictions such as requiring masks (public library respondents)
* Communicating the different services the library has to offer in addition to lending books (public library respondents)
* Modernizing library buildings or spaces, including adopting current technology and the need for all libraries to have broadband access (public and school library respondents)
* Ensuring that I am at the decision-making table when something related to my library is being discussed (school library respondents)
* Demonstrating the library’s impact on student success (school library respondents)
* Increasing the library’s visibility in the organization (specialized library respondents)

***Next Steps***

* RAILS will develop toolkits on the My Library Is… website focusing on some of the major challenges identified by survey respondents, including funding, staffing issues, attracting new customers, and modernizing library buildings/library spaces. Each toolkit may include:
  + Examples of library best practices
  + CE webinars
  + Relevant My Library Is… blog posts
  + Specific talking points on the issue that staff from different types of libraries can use
  + Links to other helpful information/resources
* RAILS will explore the possibility of producing a video showing the importance of funding/supporting all types of libraries.
* RAILS will identify ways to address some of the other challenges identified via the survey, including producing/recruiting blog posts, and adding other relevant content to the My Library Is… website.

## How RAILS & IHLS Can Help

Respondents were given a list of possible ways that RAILS and IHLS could help them via the campaign and asked to identify their top three choices.

* Respondents from all types of libraries chose “provide talking points to use with specific stakeholder groups” as one of their top three choices.
* Academic, public, and specialized libraries ranked “offering more CE to help libraries show their value” in their top three.
* Academic, school, and specialized libraries selected “share best practices from libraries that have successfully dealt with funding and other challenges” in their top three.
* Public and school libraries chose “provide templates of promotional materials I can customize to promote the library” in their top three.

***Next Steps***

* RAILS will examine existing talking points to see how they might be recast to deal with specific situations and develop additional talking points as well. We will include talking points to address specific challenges in the toolkits mentioned above.
* As mentioned above, RAILS will more actively recruit blog posts and will help library staff develop posts as needed to encourage the general sharing of best practices. We will also include best practices in the toolkits mentioned above.
* RAILS will share the survey results with the RAILS CE team and continue to post existing CE webinars from other organizations on the My Library Is… website as appropriate.
* RAILS will investigate the possibility of contracting with a graphic designer to develop templates to use to help libraries with major challenges, for example, a customizable piece to show the return-on-investment users get for the small percentage of their tax dollars that goes to public libraries and a piece showing how use of academic and school libraries contributes directly to students’ success. A template for a marketing plan could help all types of libraries.
* Though we have not had much luck recruiting libraries to post templates to the Sharing Showcase on the campaign website thus far, we will continue to ask them to do so.

## Continuing Education Webinar Topics

Respondents were asked to identify how likely they would be to attend webinars on assorted topics related to the campaign. The following results indicate the top three webinars respondents from each library type would be very likely to attend.

* Academic library respondents chose “outreach activities to promote the library to others in the college/university” as their top choice. This was the third top choice for school library respondents.
* Public, school, and specialized library respondents chose “Using data to demonstrate the impact of the library” as their top choice. This was the third ranked choice for academic libraries.
* Academic, school, and specialized library respondents chose “Advocacy tips for speaking with administrators/funders about the library” as their second choice.
* Public library respondents chose “How staff at any level can advocate for the library” as their second choice, and “Using social media to promote the library” as their third choice.
* Specialized library respondents chose “Graphic design tips and tricks” as their third choice.
* Public library respondents were the only library type to add write-in suggestions for CE webinars. Topics mentioned by multiple respondents included:
* Topics related to EDI, including inclusive marketing, signage and marketing audits for diversity, and effective ways to reach multiple demographic groups and attract their attention
* Marketing and promotion to teenagers and young adults
* How small libraries with limited funds can promote the library, including free and inexpensive tools they can use

***Next Steps***

* As mentioned above, we will share these results with the RAILS CE Team.
* We will also look for CE webinars on these topics by outside organizations for inclusion on the campaign website.
* RAILS will arrange podcast interviews with “experts” on the topics above as appropriate.