



Resource Sharing Alliance NFP  
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Subject: A Brief History of the Resource Sharing Alliance NFP (RSA)

A quick review of RSA's founding principles and guiding philosophy help clarify today's RSA. Prior to the system merger that created RAILS in 2011, RSA had a long history of working directly with library systems and working through system mergers.

RSA was founded as a Not for Profit organization in the early-1980's by a small group of libraries to share data entry and other electronic services. Over time it expanded to encompass libraries belonging to four different regional library systems. RSA started providing an integrated library system (ILS) in the 1990s to meet the growing needs of the member libraries.

The following extract is from the Illinois Secretary of State Website, Heritage Project [https://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/library/heritage\\_project/home/chapters/a-new-era-for-the-state-library-the-1990s-and-2000s/a-reduction-in-library-systems/](https://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/library/heritage_project/home/chapters/a-new-era-for-the-state-library-the-1990s-and-2000s/a-reduction-in-library-systems/)

*In western and central Illinois, the Corn Belt, Great River, Illinois Valley, and Western Illinois systems were in discussions to form one large library system covering over 13,000 square miles, or 22 percent of the state. Such cooperation among the four systems was nothing new. For over a decade, they had participated in a cooperative computer system known as the Resource Sharing Alliance. That system had served as a model for the rest of the state, and the four systems were lauded for their efforts at cooperation for better patron service. They eventually joined to become the Alliance Library System, established in July 1994.*

Right from the start, the Alliance Library System (ALS) and RSA driving vision was for all ALS member libraries to be members of RSA. At the time, membership was split between fully automated libraries and Union List libraries who cataloged their collection in the system but did not use the system for operations. Having all RSA member library materials in one database enabled libraries to search and request materials easily. ALS supported RSA's operations and provided grants for all types and sizes of libraries to join RSA. In June 1999, RSA dissolved as a separate Not for Profit organization to merge fully into the Alliance Library System. ALS then started to provide even more support towards the goal of having all ALS libraries participate in RSA.

In 2006, RSA entered into a contract with SirsiDynix to replace an aging The Library Corporation / CARL ILS with SirsiDynix's Unicorn ILS. One of the primary goals of the 6-month contract negotiation process was the creation of a first-ever, 'starter' level of fully automated library inside the vendor contract. RSA named this the Basic Online level; an idea and practice that has now spread across the library industry. At the time

of the contract, RSA had 75 fully automated members and 98 Union Listing, non-circulating members. The new contract provided inexpensive licensing terms allowing RSA to upgrade Union Listing members to a fully automated status with cataloging, circulation, holds and online catalog services. The price for Basic Online membership was set as low as possible, \$1,300, with the intent of automating most of the 98 Union Listers.

ALS fully supported the expansion of services and hired an additional RSA staff member to help support the increased workload in 2007. Staffing after the new hire was 5.5 FTE. Additionally, ALS increased support to RSA by expanding the roles of the five ALS Library Consultants. During their site visits, ALS Consultants would talk about RSA's services and goals, provide basic support, and record each library's questions, concerns and thoughts about RSA and its services. After their visits, they would discuss the visit notes with RSA staff for details and issue resolution. All of this work rapidly increased the number of automated libraries using RSA's system. At the time the five Northern Illinois Library Systems merged in 2011, RSA had 75 Full Online members, 51 upgraded Basic Online members and 25 Union Listing members.

Uncertainty surrounding the outcome of the 2011 Library Systems merger led RSA, as well as the other consortia tightly integrated inside other library systems, to break away from the library systems. The Boards of both ALS and RSA quickly split out assets and contracts prior to the 5-system merger on July 1<sup>st</sup> that year. In April 2011, RSA returned to NFP status and was granted 501c3 status by the IRS. After the library system merger concluded, RSA gained an additional 2.5 FTE to help replace the support ALS provided and to keep RSA running smoothly. Over the years, RAILS allowed the addition of 4 more FTE to the RSA Support Staff. Those staff built out a cataloging department providing in-depth services and original cataloging services for our members, very few of whom have in-house experience. RSA currently has 12 FTE supporting operations. RSA expected to expand to 15 FTE with the new staff hiring process to begin 1 July 2020. Those staff were never hired due to the COVID-19 issues.

RAILS has continued to support the growth of LLSAPs by providing grant funding for libraries to join LLSAPs. RAILS provided grants to cover the entrance of several new RSA member libraries, including Quincy PL and Warren County PL, and to upgrade over a dozen RSA Union Listing libraries to Basic Online membership. Without this support, it is likely that none of these libraries could have afforded to join RSA or upgrade their membership.

In short, RSA was formed by local libraries to provide early library automation services. Over time it was absorbed into the Alliance Library System with the goal of automating as many libraries as possible regardless of their size or type. ALS and RAILS have both contributed large amounts of time, resources, and money to ensure the viability of RSA and keep it open to libraries of all types and sizes. RSA, once again a separate Not for Profit organization, continues its long tradition of serving all libraries and enabling outstanding patron experiences.