



Illinois Heartland Library System

TO: IHLS Board of Directors
FROM: Cassandra Thompson, IHLS Associate Director/SHARE Director
DATE: February 24, 2026
RE: FY2027 Travel Procedures

As we begin planning the FY2027 budget, one area with some variability is the travel line items, which depend on upcoming conferences. Next year, important conferences include the Illinois Library Association (ILA) Annual Conference in Peoria, the AISLE Annual Conference in Lombard, as well as Reaching Forward South, Innovative User Group (IUG), Association of Rural and Small Libraries (ARSL), International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC), and American Library Association (ALA) annual conferences.

Like many other organizations, Illinois Heartland Library System encourages our team to learn and grow through professional development, but we are unique because we also attend Illinois conferences as exhibitors/sponsors; promote programs like CMC, iLead, and SHARE; share expertise as presenters; and, most importantly, utilize these opportunities to network with a large number of our members.

After a successful pilot program last year, we are rolling out a new procedure to identify necessary travel for staff members, with a new Continuing Education and Conference Opportunity interest form. Within this form, we explain that conference and training attendance must align with the responsibilities of the position and are contingent on the available budget.

We ask our team to indicate their first- and second-preferred opportunities so supervisors and budget planners can review team members' interests and obligations, like committee participation and speaking opportunities. We want to meet business needs, invest in professional development for staff, and make the best use of our travel dollars. We ask that each person requesting travel funds indicate the purpose of their travel (Speaker, Committee, Organization Representative, Continuing Education, Operate Booth) as well as describe why they would like to attend.

Here are some of the responses for FY2027:

- I would like to network with librarians throughout the state, learn from some of the sessions, and help operate the IHLS booth.
- Things will likely start moving fast as AI advances, and I want to stay in-the-know.
- Being visible and social at conferences strengthens our relationships.

IMAGINING TOMORROW ~ DELIVERING POSSIBILITIES TODAY!

- Conferences are a way for me to gauge what is trending in libraries and learn more about library issues affecting our members.
- Talk with vendors about partnership opportunities.
- Get an overview of new areas I'm covering.
- Support committee work for outside organizations, like PLA and ILA.

These are some great examples of why our team attends conferences, showing the various responsibilities system staff have while attending these events.

Another major purpose for conference travel that cannot be overstated is representation for our organization and our members, having a “seat at the table,” being part of the synergy that happens when partnerships are being created and decisions are being made.

Recently, IT Director Troy Brown attended the National Digital Inclusion Alliance, where he shared that he connected with a colleague who expressed interest in providing financial support to provide technology to our members. He noted that spontaneous conversations during lunch or dinner may lead to new ideas, innovation, partnerships, and opportunities.

This new travel process will help our organization budget appropriately, schedule staff to support sponsorship goals, and ensure business needs are being met. For our team members, it is also an opportunity to express interest in continuing education, reflect on why they want to attend specific events, demonstrate their leadership through speaking engagements, and represent the Illinois Heartland Library System and IHLS members in both the Illinois library community and the broader library field.