What’s the short scoop on the Illinois Reading Council (IRC)? IRC is an affiliate of the International Reading Association that serves approximately 5,000 members, publishes both a refereed journal and a quarterly newsletter, awards over $60,000 in grants for literacy projects in the state and internationally, and attracts over 3,000 attendees at its annual conference that yields a profit of over $320,000. IRA’s 2012 annual convention will take place in our “home court” next spring.

Like other state IRA councils, the IRC advocates quality literacy opportunities for all learners and serves as an organization to provide educators at all levels access to research, materials, and methodologies to promote and teach lifelong literacy and learning. Recognizing that its strength is in its membership, the IRC supports an active, well-organized system of local and special interest council and state committees that, in turn, provide a viable network for communication, exchange of information, and grass roots involvement of a diverse membership.

Local and Special Interest Councils
There are 27 local councils in communities in Illinois and five special interest statewide councils, including the Illinois Council for Affective Reading Education (ICARE), Secondary Reading League (SRL), Illinois Title I Association (ITA), College Instructors of Reading Professionals (CIRP), and the Illinois Language and Literacy Council (ILLC).

In addition, there are 11 standing committees, 14 special committees, and two ad hoc committees. Among the committees are those devoted to legislation, studies and research, intellectual freedom, international, and RTI/Common Core. As one can imagine, when there are as many cogs in the wheel as there are within the IRC, high-quality, well-functioning leadership is a must!

Permanent Executive Office
Almost 25 years ago, the elected leadership of IRC had the foresight to realize the organization’s future role as a comprehensive state literacy organization within Illinois, and it voted to establish a permanent office staffed by a full-time Executive Director. Arlene Pennie has served as the Executive Director since the creation of the position, and the state IRC staff has expanded to also include an Assistant Executive Director, Carrie Sheridan; a Membership Coordinator, Brenda Ferrara; and an Exhibits Coordinator, Kendra Kornfeld.

Each year, the Board of Directors meets bimonthly to review state and local council events and activities. These regular meetings help us maintain a strong statewide connection and system of support and communication for our council and members. In addition, each summer the IRC hosts a three-day Leadership Retreat for Local Council Officers, State Committee Chairs, Regional Directors, and Executive Officers.

Expanding Use of Technology
Personal, face-to-face communication is augmented by our expanding use of technology. In addition to an ever-expanding website, the IRC is now on Facebook, and has its own social networking site, IRC Ning, at http://illinoisreadingcouncil.ning.com, where members can create their own page, host discussions on topics of interest, share photos, post and retrieve conference handouts, and much more. A new Technology Committee facilitates use of technology during, and shares classroom tips, at each of our IRC board meetings.

Membership Values
Members may join a local council of their choice, with the price of joining the local council included in the $40 state membership fee. Local councils support their members in myriad ways. Most hold three or more local events annually, such as speakers, conferences, or Family Reading Nights at their libraries.

IRC’s five special interest councils also host regular offerings and special events throughout the year, including a stand of sessions during the annual statewide conference.

- The Secondary Reading League (SRL) sponsors a number of annual events, including Illinois’ premier secondary reading and literacy conference with over 20 concurrent sessions featuring the latest best practice in reading and literacy instruction.
• The College Instructors of Reading Professionals (CIRP) will be hosting a teleseminar, Chasing Grant Dollars, on January 30, 2012, to help members and other interested participants update their grant-writing skills.

• The Illinois Council for Affective Reading Education (ICARE) is accepting submissions for Books Created for Illinois Students, By Illinois Students. This unique literacy project is designed to gather information about statues, memorials, or monuments in communities throughout Illinois.

• The Illinois Language and Literacy Council (ILLC) hosts a statewide Young Authors’ Conference each May. Designed as a celebration to honor exceptional writing by students in grades K through 8, the conference provides an opportunity for these young writers to meet published authors and to hear how the authors themselves create the characters and stories that have become their books.

• Illinois Title I Association (ITA) promotes successful instructional practices. ITA members are kept current on research, regulations, and policies associated with Title I programs in Illinois and the nation through regular meetings held throughout the year.

A full listing of these and other upcoming state and local events may be found on the IRC website at www.illinoisreadingcouncil.org/eventscalendar.html.

Publications
Members also receive our highly acclaimed journal and newsletter, both of which are packed with relevant and interesting articles and information about upcoming opportunities. The Illinois Reading Council Communicator is a quarterly newsletter to keep members up-to-date on current activities. The Illinois Reading Council Journal (IRCJ) is published four times a year exclusively for IRC members with topics, issues, and events of interest to teachers, reading specialists, and administrators involved in literacy programs at all levels of education. Both publications are also available online for IRC members.

Annual Statewide Conference
On March 15 to 17, 2012, the IRC will host its 44th Annual IRC Conference, “Literacy in the Land of Lincoln,” in Springfield, Illinois. This statewide annual conference is held each year in March, and features many popular authors, exhibitors, and the opportunity to network with friends and colleagues from all over the state. This year’s conference will feature sessions by Donna Ogle, Gary Paulson, Patricia McLachlin, Jack Gantos, Harvey Daniels, Sonia Whitaker, Victoria Risko, Sally Hampton, and Laurie Henry, to name but a few of the many authors and researchers scheduled to appear. Information about the conference

Cynthia Wilson, President, Illinois Reading Council
“As President of the Illinois Reading Council, I look forward to seeing members of the International Reading Association converge upon the wonderful windy city of Chicago and the magnificent state of Illinois for the 57th IRA Convention this spring! As usual, IRA will be providing an incredible opportunity for teachers from all over the world to network with other educational professionals and authors for some of the most exceptional professional development available. Welcome back to Illinois, IRA!”

Arlene Pennie, Executive Director, Illinois Reading Council
“In my 25 years as an employee of Illinois Reading Council, the most memorable, positive, and exciting activities with IRA are the Leadership Training Workshops planned by the LDA’s. These meetings have allowed our council to network and share with other state leaders and it has allowed our council to grow to the council it is today. Other highlights over the years are the IRA Board members and IRA Staff that have presented at our state conferences contributing to our conference successes.”

Karen Ringas, Director of Membership Development, Illinois Reading Council
“I love the opportunities the IRC has provided for me to grow as a literacy professional, and leader. Each year I attend the annual IRC conference with colleagues. I benefit by having conversations with other teachers and sharing their teaching practices, meeting authors of my favorite books and hearing literacy leaders from around the country speak about current topics.”

Patricia Ann Braun, President-Elect
“IRC will hold its 44th Annual Conference, Literacy in the Land of Lincoln, from March 15 to 17, 2012, at the President Abraham Lincoln Hotel, Hilton Springfield Hotel, and Prairie Capital Convention Center in Springfield, Illinois.”
Grants and Awards
IRC has an exceptionally strong grant program aimed at promoting literacy development in the school and community and providing professional development opportunities related to the improvement of reading and writing instruction. Grant awards range from a few hundred to several thousand dollars depending on the project, and projects vary widely in topic.

We also confer a number of awards to recognize those individuals who have excelled in their efforts to promote literacy development within Illinois. These honors include the Barack Obama Library Award, the Prairie State Award for Excellence in Writing for Children, the Legislator of the Year Award, the Illinois Reading Educator of the Year Award, the Parents and Reading Award, the Gene Cramer ICARE for Reading Award, the Hall of Fame Award, the Illinois Reading Educator of the Year Award, and the IRC Service Award.

External Collaborations
Recognizing the importance of statewide collaboration for literacy, the IRC has established strong ties with several organizations and agencies in Illinois. Liaisons from the Illinois State Board of Education, the State Foundation for Literacy, the Rebecca Caudill Award Committee, and the Illinois School Library Media Association serve as members of the IRC Board of Directors. The Executive Director and representatives from the IRC are also frequent exhibitors at the national IRA conference as well as at conferences hosted by a variety of other professional educational and civic organizations.

Stimulating Professional Growth
The IRC's mission is to stimulate the professional growth of literacy educators in Illinois. With support from IRA, the Illinois Reading Council continues to seek new ways to collectively foster the expansion of our vision within and beyond our state borders. Explore our website at www.illinoisreadingcouncil.org or call our office at 1-888-454-1341 to learn more about how you can establish and maintain a vibrant state council that truly serves to support and expand literacy in your state.

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Educators from all around Asia recently gathered for the 2011 Asian Literacy Conference in Penang, Malaysia. International Reading Association (IRA) Global Operations Unit staff, in conjunction with the Chair for the International Development in Asia Committee (IDAC), organized a full day leadership workshop on October 11, 2011, at the Berjaya Georgetown Hotel. The main focus of the leadership workshop was to encourage council and affiliate leaders in Asia to work on literacy leadership and capacity building activities for their organizations and to take advantage of the IRA resources available to members.

In attendance were representatives from Bangladesh, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, and Thailand, as well as the IDAC Chair Ms. Merlene Alon from the Philippines, former board members Rizalina Labanda and Dr. Maryanne Manning, Amy Awbrey Pallangyo (Project Manager of the IRA-GLPDN project), and three members of the IRA Global Operations staff, Sakil Malik, Amy Kushner, and Elizabeth Ndungu.

The leadership workshop included various topics such as: modeling and mentoring in leadership, capacity building, and membership development. The participants were also updated on the new IRA member network Engage as well as other online resources available to IRA committees. The IDAC committee members were presented with a handbook to guide them on IRA’s online resources and a guide to IRA awards and grants.

Preceding the leadership workshop was the IDAC business meeting conducted by IDAC Chair Ms. Merlene Alon. Participants discussed issues concerning the national affiliates in Asia, future national and regional conferences, and promising contacts and potential new affiliates in Timor-Leste, Nepal, Iraq, and Iran.