



10 November 2017

TO: RAILS Board of Directors

FROM: Deirdre Brennan

SUBJECT: RAILS Strategic Plan Update

The RAILS strategic plan was approved by the RAILS board in February of 2014. We have put this plan to good use, accomplishing many goals of the plan and undertaking many projects identified by RAILS members during the planning process.

It has been almost 4 years, so it is time to take a close look at the plan and update it so that it remains a valid and robust blueprint to guide RAILS in the future.

The process we used last time was extensive as was appropriate; RAILS was a brand new organization, the system merger was recent and there was a lot of mistrust and fear among libraries about the enormous and sudden changes that had occurred. We hired an outside consultant to lead an objective planning process; we held several focus groups, member surveys, an environmental scans and a needs assessment. This member input was very important to the development of the plan and a major reason why it has helped us be successful. Also, a board subcommittee worked directly with staff and the consultant to develop the vision, mission, strategic initiatives and goals.

I have been thinking a lot about the process to use to update the plan and talking to staff and colleagues in member libraries about the best way to gather member input and move forward. I want to be sure that we get the plan we need but I don't want to waste anyone's time – members, staff, board – in the process.

Here are the key elements I want to see in our new plan:

- An aspirational plan that is grounded in reality and future focused
- The planning process is transparent to members
- Member participation in the updating of the plan

Below are some thoughts on a possible process and timeline:

November 2017

Discuss anticipated process with RAILS Board

December 2017

Create strategic plan webpage on RAILS website – feature as Trending Topic

- Describe process to update plan, including opportunities for member feedback – link to current plan documents
- Post strategic plan accomplishments document
- Invite member feedback via webpage
- Publicize webpage and process to update plan in *E-News*
- Refer to page on member visits

January 2018

Discuss strategic plan at January 18 RAILS Member Update

- Ask members to come prepared to provide feedback

Design needs assessment survey and send to all RAILS members

- Base survey on strategic plan accomplishments document
- Publicize survey in *RAILS E-News*
- Publicize survey via multiple RAILS list to get feedback from libraries of all types
- Gather input from RAILS staff
- Publicize on member visits

January – April 2018

Deirdre travels to libraries in different RAILS regions to conduct “listening tour.”

- Publicize tour via *RAILS E-News*, mailing lists, asking directors at involved libraries to spread the word, etc.

Deirdre contacts RAILS library leaders to gather input

- Get input on who to contact from leadership team

May 2018

Analyze all member feedback

Draft revised strategic plan and present to RAILS Board for discussion. Make changes based on board input.

June 2018

Ask RAILS Board to approve final revised plan

I look forward to discussing this important project with the board at our meeting. I hope it goes without saying, but I will say it anyway, I welcome board participation and we will keep the board updated on progress throughout the process.

RAILS STRATEGIC PLAN
Approved by RAILS Board, February 28, 2014

RAILS VISION STATEMENT

RAILS is a leader, innovator, and partner in anticipating and meeting the needs of all member libraries.

RAILS MISSION STATEMENT

RAILS is a multitype regional library system that fosters collaboration and resource sharing among libraries to empower them to better serve their clientele or library users.

RAILS VALUES STATEMENTS

Resource Sharing:

RAILS values sharing resources and expertise among libraries because it strengthens all.

Access to Information:

RAILS values access to information for all Illinois residents and the role of libraries in providing it.

Diversity of Members:

RAILS values the different types and sizes of libraries and the individuals and communities they serve.

Customer Service:

RAILS values exceptional, member-driven services that meet the needs of a diverse membership.

Innovation:

RAILS values creativity and innovation to inspire and support libraries to provide the best services possible.

Collaborative Culture:

RAILS values teamwork and open dialog among members and staff as we build for the future.

Stewardship:

RAILS values responsible stewardship of our financial and human resources and operates with integrity.

Definitions

Values

Values are the social principles or standards held or accepted by an individual, class, society, etc. In the planning process, the statement/s of values describes the principles, beliefs, standards or code of behaviors that guide RAILS. This is an opportunity to define what RAILS desires or strives for in its culture and dealings with staff and members.

Vision

- A clear and succinct description of what the organization or community should look like after it successfully implements its strategies and achieves its full potential
- An expression by the people about what they want the organization to be – a preferred future, a word or picture of an organization a group chooses to create
- Positive and inspiring
- Does not assume that the organization will have the same framework as it does today
- Be open to dramatic modifications to current organization, methodology, and services

Mission statement: A mission statement is a broad statement of the purpose of the organization.

A mission statement:

- Specifies the fundamental reason/s for the organization's existence
- Establishes the scope of the organization's activities
- Provides overall direction for the organization
- Acts as a foundation for the development of general and specific objectives as well as program plans

Goals

Goals are broad, typically not completely achievable, and not measurable. Goals organize ideas or subject areas under which strategic initiatives can be arranged.

Strategic Initiatives

Strategic initiatives are used to group activities that lead to the accomplishment of the initiative and move toward the goal.

Activities

Organized under strategic initiatives, the activities are concrete actions that the organization takes to implement the strategic initiatives.

RAILS Strategic Plan
Goals/Rationales/Strategic Initiatives

Goal 1: Resource Sharing

RAILS fosters and promotes a robust, holistic vision of resource sharing in Illinois that will enable and encourage all libraries to share materials as freely and widely as possible.

Rationale: Libraries are stronger together. Our primary role as a system is to promote, support and expand resource sharing among Illinois libraries. We support traditional resource sharing through library consortia, physical delivery and other methods of discovery and fulfillment; we facilitate and encourage the sharing of library and librarian expertise for the benefit of all members; we undertake innovative projects that expand existing resource sharing and provide access to digital content; we provide economies of scale for collaborative purchasing initiatives; we build cooperative relationships with and among member libraries and with other stakeholders in Illinois and beyond.

Strategic Initiative A: Develop and implement a plan to promote, support, and expand resource sharing among RAILS libraries to enable and encourage all libraries to share materials as freely and widely as possible.

Strategic Initiative B: Lead and work with Local Library System Automation Programs (LLSAPs), independent consortia and standalone libraries to expand resource sharing of materials.

Strategic Initiative C: Work with the Illinois State Library (ISL) and other stakeholders to continue to improve physical delivery services through streamlining and standardizing operations and evaluating alternative methods and best practices.

Strategic Initiative D: Evaluate alternative methods for finding and obtaining resources that will improve access for libraries and library users.

Strategic Initiative E: Provide access to digital content and collections and assist libraries in identifying and digitizing local special collections to expand resources available for Illinois residents.

Strategic Initiative F: Use economies of scale to provide greater purchasing power for member libraries.

Goal 2: Access to Information

RAILS supports access to information for all Illinois residents and the roles of libraries in providing it.

Rationale: We believe that all residents should have equitable access to information. We collaborate with other stakeholders to seek solutions to the problems of underserved and unserved Illinois residents. We support the delivery of library services to the blind and physically handicapped through the Illinois Talking Book and Braille Service.

Strategic Initiative A: Work with stakeholders in Illinois to provide access to libraries for unserved residents.

Strategic Initiative B: Work with stakeholders to identify and improve library services for the underserved.

Strategic Initiative C: Support and strengthen talking book and Braille services to the blind and physically handicapped.

Goal 3: Member Engagement

RAILS engages broadly and deeply with members from all library types throughout the RAILS area in order to understand, anticipate, and meet their needs.

Rationale: RAILS exists to serve its members in a variety of ways. The needs of members are diverse and constantly changing as the needs of their customers and communities change. RAILS must engage broadly and deeply with members from all library types throughout the RAILS area in order to understand, anticipate and meet their needs. Through virtual means and in-person communication, RAILS engages with members and facilitates their engagement with colleagues and peers so that together we provide the best possible library services to all library users.

Strategic Initiative A: Develop implement and evaluate a robust member engagement program that will strengthen libraries individually and build a stronger system.

Strategic Initiative B: Develop and maintain ongoing communication tools and strategies to ensure that all RAILS members are aware of the system programs and services that can directly benefit their specific type of library.

Strategic Initiative C: Foster a networking infrastructure to create a community of connected peers and build on the strengths of multitype cooperation.

Strategic Initiative D: Seek member input and feedback through a variety of channels on a continuous basis to ensure that RAILS is meeting member needs in the most effective way.

Goal 4: Continuing Education and Consulting Services

RAILS provides continuing education and consulting services to meet the diverse needs of all members.

Rationale: Staff in member libraries and at RAILS must have access to the latest and best information and ideas to drive innovation and continuous improvement of library and RAILS services. RAILS provides continuing education and consulting services to meet the diverse needs of all members. RAILS staff seek out and share best practices within the library industry and outside of it, as well as the latest and best information available through professional organizations and other sources. We develop partnerships that enable us to deliver cost-effective, timely and high-quality learning opportunities for all members.

Strategic Initiative A: Develop, implement and evaluate a continuing education program that meets the needs of all member libraries and that leverages partnerships and expertise within RAILS and among other organizations and partners.

Strategic Initiative B: Develop, implement and evaluate a consulting program that meets the needs of all member libraries and that leverages partnerships and expertise within RAILS and among other organizations and partners.

Goal 5: Leadership and Innovation

RAILS provides leadership and innovation to assist member libraries to better serve their communities.

Rationale: RAILS provides leadership on issues that affect member libraries. We work with the Illinois State Library, other Illinois library systems, consortia and other library organizations to move libraries forward. We keep our members informed of trends and best practices, and support in any way possible new ideas and experiments that will help us to better serve Illinois library users.

Strategic Initiative A: In partnership with the Illinois State Library (ISL), Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS), Chicago Public Library System, Illinois Library Association (ILA), Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI), Illinois School Library Media Association (ISLMA), and other library stakeholders in Illinois, develop projects that will strengthen individual libraries and assist in communicating the value of libraries to users.

Strategic Initiative B: In partnership with the Illinois State Library (ISL), the Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS), Chicago Public Library System (CPLS), Illinois Library Association (ILA), Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI), Illinois School Library Media Association (ISLMA), and other Illinois library stakeholder groups, identify best practices, encourage experimentation and develop projects that will help libraries innovate and move all libraries forward.

Strategic Initiative C: In partnership with other stakeholders, provide leadership to the Illinois library community in anticipating or responding to important or controversial issues that affect the health and vitality of libraries.

Strategic Initiative D: In partnership with other organizations, develop a plan for professional trained staff in every library.

Goal 6: Organizational Excellence

RAILS is committed to being an organization that is agile, future oriented and member-focused.

Rationale: We are committed to the vision, mission and values of RAILS and work as a team to deliver excellent customer service at all times. We attract and retain the best staff possible because that is how we best serve our members. We are a stable, agile, and member-focused organization.

Strategic Initiative A: Attract, retain, develop, and reward a superb RAILS staff.

Strategic Initiative B: Foster a collaborative RAILS culture that seeks continuous improvement.

Goal 7: Stewardship

RAILS provides excellent stewardship of financial resources to ensure maximum benefit to member libraries, library users, and Illinois taxpayers.

Rationale: We are excellent stewards of public funds and always look for ways to use our funding

more effectively to the ultimate benefit of member libraries and their clientele. We practice transparent government and management; our financial resources are aligned with our organizational goals; we operate at the highest levels of efficiency and integrity; we lessen our impact on the environment.

Strategic initiative A: Practice transparent governance and management at all times.

Strategic Initiative B: Establish program budgets for all services to ensure excellent reporting and tracking of resources and appropriate alignment of budget and goals.

Strategic Initiative C: Establish and monitor an investment policy that is fiscally sound and provides the best possible return on prudent investments.

Strategic Initiative D: Explore and identify opportunities to lessen the environmental impact of RAILS and provide model projects and practices for member libraries.