



Executive Director Goals FY 2018

Report on progress

1. Continue to implement the goals and objectives of the strategic plan.

Implementing the goals and objectives of the strategic plan is the work of everyone at RAILS, every day. My role is to keep us on track, advise the board on budget allocations for plan goal areas, ensure project funds are spent appropriately, measure progress on projects, and so on. As part of our update of the plan (see next goal) we will provide a progress report on our current plan in the coming months. We provide this report to the board at least annually.

2. Analyze the strategic plan and update it as needed.

As discussed at the November board meeting, we are working on an update to our strategic plan. A timeline for this work calls for completion of the update by the end of this fiscal year so that the board can approve it. Mary Witt is working on documents for member feedback and we will discuss the planning process at our member update on January 18. We will analyze the feedback we get and look at other factors as we update the plan. I will provide an overview of the process at the board meeting.

3. Ensure financial sustainability for RAILS by finding efficiencies and cost savings, streamlining processes and procedures, and setting service priorities that still serve all RAILS members.

We are always looking for increased efficiencies, big and small. Some examples: our work with the Laboratory for Applied Spatial Analysis (LASA) at SIU Edwardsville to analyze and adapt delivery routes and schedules for better service to libraries and to reduce costs; ongoing efforts to reduce staff time spent on internal processes by simplifying and streamlining, such as with the performance evaluation system and staff training registration; examination of open positions to ensure that the responsibilities of the position match and further service priorities; working with the State Library and Heartland to assess whether Cataloging Maintenance Center services can be made more available to member libraries and save member libraries money; analysis of OCLC costs to member libraries and exploration of alternatives to OCLC; changes to staffing in the Human Resources department to reduce costs; to name just a few. Every year during budget development we align our service priorities with budget expenditures and present a program budget to the board so that the allocation of financial resources is clear and accountable.

4. Lead discussion of LLSAP funding changes based on need for sustainability, equity and stewardship.

We have started the process of changes in funding to RAILS LLSAPs. The changes will take effect in FY 2020, to give the LLSAPs and all consortia the time to prepare financially and to provide RAILS with data that will determine the specific funding levels.

5. Support development and implementation of ILL/resource sharing overlay.

We are about to sign a contract for the overlay, Find More Illinois.org. This has been a long project and thanks to Jane Plass and many member library volunteers, it is about to launch. As it has evolved over 3 years, Find More can be more than a tool for sharing between consortia and standalone libraries, it may also serve as an online catalog for libraries unable to join existing consortia, and it may provide an alternative to OCLC for obtaining catalog records, as well as direct interlibrary loan borrowing for library users. We expect Find More Illinois to build over the next few years and to provide critical services to libraries that have not been able to fully participate in resource sharing because of financial or other limitations.

6. Implement Explore More Illinois.org program

Explore More Illinois is an online pass system that will be available to residents of RAILS and Chicago through their public libraries. Participating institutions will include museums, state parks and other cultural institutions that are interested. It should launch in the spring of 2018. It will be a very affordable and inclusive way for libraries to work with museums and other cultural or recreational organizations in Illinois to make their resources available and discoverable to millions of Illinois residents and provide public libraries with a new and exciting service to offer to their communities.

7. Develop RAILS expertise in Design Thinking methodology

We are continuing to work with the Design Thinking methodology with the Chicago Public Library and other RAILS member libraries. It is a very useful tool for planning and implementing new services or updating existing ones. As part of our consulting role, we believe this tool can be very useful to libraries. We are also investigating other ways in which we can act as consultants to members; 20 staff members will be trained in facilitation skills this winter and we will then be able to offer this service to members.

8. Develop long term plan to consolidate buildings and delivery hubs (continuation)

The LASA project I cited earlier in this report may assist us in determining what hubs to consolidate when. The Coal Valley building is on the market and there have been signs of interest. I continue to believe that owning buildings limits our agility to make necessary changes in services, particularly if funding difficulties continue or escalate. Long term, we would like to consolidate all PrairieCat staff in one location, both to cut costs and make it easier for staff to work together to serve members.

9. Encourage resource sharing and cooperation among different types of libraries

Most of what I have talked about in this report is about the expansion of resource sharing in a variety of ways; the overlay, Find More Illinois and Explore More Illinois are new efforts in this area. Ongoing encouragement of resource sharing is seen in our multitype collaborative grants, group purchases, financial support for consortia and delivery, and numerous training sessions and networking events.

10. Measure the importance and impact of RAILS services.

We completed the evaluation of member visits and incorporated many of the findings from the evaluation. We are now moving on to evaluation of our communications with board members, and orientation of new ones in particular. We also are incorporating evaluation of the impact of our projects in all our work.

11. Communicate with board members so board members can make timely, informed decisions.

We provide numerous reports for the board on a monthly, annual and special basis (this report is one of them) and are always looking for ways to improve communication. In these reports, we attempt to “tell the story” of RAILS – what we do, why we do it, and how it helps member libraries. We also keep the board informed about critical RAILS issues – funding and legislation for example – and about new library issues. We travel to different parts of RAILS for our board meetings, weather permitting, so that the board can learn personally about different parts of the system and member libraries, and to make it possible for board members far from Burr Ridge to meet the staff and other board members. We use email and the polycom technology to help us bridge the not inconsiderable geographic challenges that face us. I visit board members and their libraries, and we encourage all board members to visit Burr Ridge for a tour and to meet the department heads. I hope to use the board development agenda item more effectively this year to educate and inform the board about what they need to know.

Despite all of these efforts, I am not sure that our communication with board members is as effective as it might be. I think that our evaluation of the communication will be helpful and improve overall understanding of RAILS for board members.



18 January 2018

TO: RAILS Board of Directors

FROM: Dee Brennan

SUBJECT: Executive Director Report – January 2018

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- Lead discussion of LLSAP funding changes based on need for sustainability, equity and stewardship.
- Support development and implementation of ILL/resource sharing overlay.
- Implement ExploreMoreIllinois.org program
- Develop RAILS expertise in Design Thinking methodology
- Develop long term plan to consolidate buildings and delivery hubs (continuation)
- Encourage resource sharing and cooperation among different types of libraries
- Measure the importance and impact of RAILS services.
- Communicate with board members so board members can make timely, informed decisions.

My monthly reports are organized according to the goals of the strategic plan and these goals.

Resource Sharing

The overlay project that we have been working on for more than 3 years has an official name: Find More Illinois.org. We have completed very successful contract negotiations with Autographics, the vendor of ShareIt the software we have selected. The budget recommendation is an agenda item today; we are asking for board approval to move forward. We have 17 libraries, at the current count, ready to go as part of the pilot project which will begin in February of 2018 – next month.

Explore More Illinois.org is the new official name of our online pass program for museums, state parks and other cultural attractions. This project should launch in the spring.

Membership Standards

We completed the beta test of approximately 50 libraries across Illinois and are still analyzing the data. When our analysis is complete we will present the results at a board meeting. I will be working with the ILA committee that is revising *Serving our Public* to be sure that system membership standards and *Serving our Public* are complementary and not in any conflict or contradiction.

We have had conversations with Mary Petro, Director of the North Suburban Library District about their possible migration to PrairieCat, and about other member libraries of the Northern Illinois Consortium (NIC) potentially moving to PrairieCat.

Access to Information

I visited the Warren County Public Library District in Monmouth on December 12 to meet with Michelle Simmons and the Library Director Larissa Good. They are very interested in doing a demonstration project for unserved residents along the borders of Warren County. At this point, Larissa is researching the number of residents that are unserved in the area and the potential cost of library cards for all of these residents. In order to serve them all, and get the best results from the project, it might work best if RAILS funds the cost of the library cards, depending on the number of residents.

Member Engagement

After my meeting in Monmouth, I traveled to Quincy to facilitate strategic planning brainstorming sessions with the Trustees on December 12 and the staff on December 13.

I also visited the Oak Lawn Public Library on December 1 and toured the library with Jim Deiters, Director, and Joe Skibinski, Oak Lawn Trustee and RAILS board member.

I met with Mary Case, Director of the Libraries at UIC, and Gwen Gregory on December 8 and discussed many items: the overlay, polycom, continuing education and open electronic resources.

We had a member update on January 18 that was very well attended. We had more than 130 attendees including 80 streaming on RAILS Live. The main topic of conversation was the strategic plan. I asked attendees the question “what keeps you up at night” and got an amazing array of answers including:

- Growing social problems in libraries
- The unserved

- Funding
- How to serve increasingly diverse populations
- Communicating the relevance of the library

We will use this conversation as we update our plan, and continue to ask this question on our listening tour.

Organizational Excellence

I visited the Coal Valley Service Center on December 11 to meet with the delivery staff there and answer their questions and hear their concerns. I am planning in person meetings with all of the delivery staff over the next couple of months; since they are not able to attend staff meetings this is my best opportunity to hear directly from them. I met with the Bolingbrook staff on January 12 and the East Peoria staff on January 17.

A small group of staff are currently reviewing the entire Employee Handbook for an overall update. We have updated policies, and added new ones since the Handbook was first approved in 2011. This review will ensure that all policies are aligned and up to date. I expect to bring a draft to the Policy Committee in March.

20 staff members from across RAILS will receive facilitation training in 2 all day sessions, one in January and one in March. The presenter is John Newton, a consultant and adjunct professor at DePaul University. This training will be very beneficial for RAILS staff; it will improve our ability to work together as a team, to lead meetings at RAILS and with members, and we will be able to offer this service to member libraries. We have been getting an increasing number of requests for meeting facilitation assistance from members.