



Reaching Across Illinois Library System Fax: 630.734.5050 | railslibraries.info

125 Tower Drive | Burr Ridge IL 60527 | 630.734.5000 |



19 February 2018

TO: RAILS Board of Directors

FROM: Deirdre Brennan

SUBJECT: Strategic planning brainstorming

At our board meeting on Friday, we will engage in brainstorming to inform the update to our strategic plan.

We brainstormed at our last member update and at the consortium committee meeting. We have included the notes from these two meetings to provide both insight to the board on what members are telling us, and to help you all think about the question “what keeps you up at night?”

Revising the RAILS Strategic Plan
RAILS Member Update Discussion
January 18, 2018

Introductory Remarks

Deirdre Brennan, RAILS Executive Director, gave opening remarks on what RAILS members told us was most important to them during the 2013/2014 strategic planning process. The following are needs members told us were very important at that time:

- Continuing education and consulting were the top ranked needs by members
- Service to the unserved
- Cost savings (RAILS offering discounts/group purchases)
- Providing networking opportunities with other members, both of the same library type and of different library types, i.e. bringing libraries together.
- Resource sharing in general
- Discover layer with ways to include libraries not in consortia (standalones, etc.) and libraries that cannot afford to automate or join a consortium
- Providing easy and economical access to e-resources

RAILS has worked on all of these items and will continue to work on them. We want to make sure that we are still on the right track and are doing what we can to help our members meet their major needs and challenges.

What currently keeps RAILS members awake at night?

Member update attendees were asked: what keeps you up at night? They gave the following responses. (These responses are grouped by category.)

Library Customers

- Social problems libraries face, including patrons with medical, housing issues, disabilities, etc. Library staff don't have the expertise to deal with many of these issues. Some libraries have hired actual social workers. Not all libraries are able to do this.
- School age kids need places to go after school and meaningful activities to engage in. Many of their families cannot afford child care and they send their children to the library. How can the library engage them?
- Serving growing, diverse populations
- Growing number of autistic kids and others with special needs. Libraries need training on how to effectively serve these children and marketing materials to advertise the services we are able to offer them.
- We are struggling to serve everyone within our district while we have growing numbers of patrons from neighboring communities.
- Patron and staff safety – keeping everyone safe

- As a small-town, solo librarian, I worry about ways to provide programming to keep us engaged with the community that doesn't require me to be in the basement meeting room and also trying to work in the library upstairs.

Unserved

- How we as public libraries can serve our unserved population – advice on how to reach them, what we can say to them, etc.

Library Staff

- Overqualified staff that have library degrees that are not necessary for their job function. The library can't afford to pay them for their degree.
- Aging of the profession – transition of leadership and succession planning. Do we have the talent to replace those who are retiring?
- Keeping staff motivated and interested in new things
- Dealing with underperformers – employees who are toxic to other staff

Preparing for the Future/Staying Resilient

- Depend on RAILS to keep libraries up-to-date on what's new in the library world and help them look to the future and things that they should be thinking about. This includes requirements they need to know about (like the new sexual harassment policy requirements) and trends they should be paying attention to.
- Need help keeping the library relevant and keeping people coming in the door
- The more libraries have to cut hours, the less relevant they will become. People will find other places to go.
- If Net Neutrality isn't saved, our small standalone library could be devastated. We wholly rely on a free, open internet for catalog access, marketing, communications, and patron computer use.
- Libraries should start thinking about consolidation. Mandatory consolidation of government agencies may force this issue.

Continuing Education

- Education for new directors is a continuous need. RAILS has done a good job with this.
- Coordinating training so the maximum number of staff can attend and there are still enough people to staff the library
- Education for library trustees on the changing role of libraries. (As an example, how libraries are called upon to deal with social issues more than ever before – see above category.)

Funding

- Potential property tax freeze
- Future of the per capita grant – can we rely on this?
- Libraries are having to lay off staff. How can we keep the remaining staff motivated and boost morale?
- How to continue to offer enough current materials to patrons and still stay within budget. I'd also like to offer talks/speakers, but have no budget for that. I'm not serving my community effectively by providing only "old" information and a rapidly aging collection.

Cost Savings

- Need discounts/group purchases – every penny I can save helps.
- Libraries want access to resources they are not able to afford on their own.
- Being able to offer patrons opportunities without cost through RAILS programs like the museum pass program

Space Planning/Building Issues

- How to make the most effective use of limited library space (need a quiet room and collaborative spaces and don't have enough room)
- Storage issues
- Need help with capital assessment. I need assistance in finding sources to provide information on space issues, including the use of existing space and whether a new building needed.
- Planning for capital needs improvements. They don't teach this in library school.

Digital access/E-resources

- Will the library be able to provide all of the items that younger people and others want?
- How to provide e-access to bestsellers/hot items. Need help dealing with major publishers and licensing issues.

Networking

- Need networking opportunities with staff from other libraries
- Want to feel that "I am not alone"

Advocacy/Marketing

- People don't know what libraries do. We need help telling the library story.
- We need to embrace such initiatives as the RAILS overlay project to demonstrate to lawmakers how effectively we can work together to share resources and not keep them locked in a silo. We can effectively serve our own unique taxpayers and collaborate/share in a way that benefits us all.
- How to get people to see the library as something to use in the workforce (including special libraries). People can get essential information and do research to help them in their job and career.
- How to effectively reach out to taxpayers – what marketing tools and verbiage should we use to let people know what a gem the library is to the community?
- How to promote the library to key decision makers (city councils, other elected officials, etc.)
- Making people aware of existing services and finding out what additional services they want
- Aligning what people want from the library with the reality of the library budget – libraries are so different in what they are able to offer and there is no consistency. This makes advocacy harder.
- Libraries in same area have different hours – the public doesn't know what to expect. Libraries should have uniform hours.

School Library Issues

- Disappearance of library profession in the school. Need help advocating for what a school librarian does – how they impact school achievement, what they add to schools (social and emotional component, academic assistance, etc.).
- Making every dollar go further, including providing cost-effective training
- Have school board members who think that the library doesn't need books and there are signs that they might do away with us. Officials think the library might be obsolete in two years anyway.
- Maintaining and increasing funding for school libraries is essential. I worry that as the only librarian in our district, I won't be replaced when I retire.

Revising the RAILS Strategic Plan
RAILS Consortia Managers Meeting Discussion
January 22, 2018

At the January 22 Consortia Managers meeting, attendees were asked “what keeps them awake at night?” The responses from attendees appear below and will help RAILS as we revise our strategic plan.

Library Customers

- Determining what’s essential and what’s not. Staff think that the public needs certain resources because they are literary and of high quality. The public doesn’t want these resources. Sources like Hoopla are draining the library budget, but patrons want it. Have we gone too far in buying whatever patrons want?
- How to say no to increasing patron demands. The needs of the community are extreme and in many cases, only the library can meet them. We can’t just keep adding programs/services just because the public says they want them.
- How to best discover what the community wants to make the best decisions for the library, including gathering and using data and utilizing outcomes-based evaluation and ROI in this research.
- How to update the metrics on what makes a library successful to show to staff, board, etc. that all library users are relevant, not just those who check out the most items. The person who comes in to read the newspaper and virtual users are just as important.
- How to collect the best and most meaningful data to inform decision-making. We could use benchmarking more effectively if libraries would work together more.
- Serving users from very diverse backgrounds
- Serving disadvantaged and displaced populations (homeless, people with mental illnesses, etc.)
- Protecting user privacy and intellectual freedom

Library Staff

- Workforce diversity
- Helping staff adjust to a world of constant change
- Improving staff morale
- Employee engagement – helping library staff grow and develop

Preparing for the Future/Staying Resilient

- How to ensure that libraries continue to be relevant
- Being prepared for the future/being resilient
- Staying on top of technology trends and figuring out which trends I should be implementing in my library

Continuing Education (CE)

- Finding no-cost CE options for library staff
- Staff development – mentoring new staff to help them grow professionally so they can continue to move the library forward (succession planning)
- Training and developing library trustees

Funding

- Reduced funding and long-term viability

Space Planning/Building Issues

- Space for people vs. space for collections is an issue

Digital Access/E-resources

- Purchasing electronic resources, negotiating licenses, and managing all of the library's e-content (e-books, e-journals, databases, etc.)
- Being able to use the ILS for one-stop shopping for patrons and how to give them a more "seamless" experience. This includes having all patron information in one place (items checked out, meeting registrations, etc.) and integrating e-books into the online catalog more seamlessly.
- Security data breaches/malware/ransomware
- Data privacy

Networking/Collaboration

- Partnering with other types of libraries to make the best use of the library dollar. For example, public libraries partnering with their local school library on databases.
- How can different types of libraries work together throughout a patron's lifetime? For example, a patron starts out in a public library, then goes to a school library, then an academic. How can the different types of libraries work together to ensure that the patron has the best library experience possible?
- Building partnerships with public and private organizations to strengthen connections in my community

Advocacy/Marketing

- Promoting the value of libraries

School and Academic Library Issues

- Schools getting rid of their librarians
- How students use the public library vs. the academic library. For example, should the academic library have popular materials and duplicate what the public library offers?
- Some large academic libraries are not in I-Share.
- Getting access to items students need for research
- What direction is the larger institution going in and how can the library follow? For example, how does the university chancellor foresee the future for the university? The library needs to know and follow.