



19 September 2018

TO: RAILS Board of Directors

FROM: Deirdre Brennan

SUBJECT: Strategic plan

In the packet, you will find a final (hopefully!) revision of our updated strategic plan, along with a tracked-changes version from the last board meeting. (As I stated at the board meeting in August, the bullet points have been removed as they were just examples).

We made some minor editorial changes to the vision on page 3.

We moved the quotes around on pages 4, 5 and 6.

We strengthened the objective at the top of page 4.

We added an objective about diversity at the bottom of page 5.

We changed the language in two objectives and in goal 5 on page 6 to strengthen and clarify them and to highlight diversity.

We added 3 objectives on page 7, and revised some language, also to strengthen and clarify them and to further highlight the importance of diversity.

I hope the board will approve the strategic plan.

Reaching Across Illinois Library System (RAILS) 2018-2022 Strategic Plan

Introduction and background

RAILS was established in July 2011 through a merger of five predecessor library systems. In 2013, the RAILS Executive Director asked the board for a strategic planning committee to help develop the first RAILS strategic plan. The planning committee, consisting of four board members and RAILS leadership staff, worked with consultants to develop the plan, which was approved by the board in February 2014. We have put this plan to good use, accomplishing many of its goals and undertaking many projects to meet the needs identified by RAILS members during the planning process.

The process used to develop our first strategic plan 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; held several focus groups for all types of libraries (academic, public, school, and special); and conducted member surveys, an environmental scan, and a needs assessment. The member input we received was crucial to the development of the plan and a major reason why it has helped us to be so successful since that time.

Plan update process

For this 2018 update, we used a more “lightweight” process. Beginning in November 2017, we:

- Provided RAILS members, board, and staff with an overview of the 2014 plan, how it was developed, and the input we received from member libraries during the development process
- Reported on what we have accomplished to meet the needs members identified in 2013 (posted on RAILS website at railslibraries.info/about/strategic-plan-progress)
- Sought input from members about their current challenges and concerns. Conducted in-person and online meetings (webinars) with members throughout the RAILS area, asking the question “what keeps you up at night” to prompt discussion of issues and concerns.
- Developed a needs assessment survey and encouraged all staff at all RAILS libraries to respond
- Gathered input from RAILS staff and board members
- Analyzed all feedback received and determined how current needs line up, or do not, with the goals and objectives of the 2014 plan. Modified or created new goals and objectives accordingly.

Throughout this process, we kept uppermost in mind that our new plan should be:

- Aspirational, grounded in reality, and future-focused
- Developed through a planning process that is transparent to members
- Reflective of member input gathered throughout the planning process

Data Analysis

The needs identified through all of the research specified above can be broken down into these broad categories:

RAILS libraries want help optimizing their resources, including varying types and levels of support to help them share resources more effectively, cooperative purchases and other programs/ services to help them optimize available tax dollars, and opportunities to share expertise and best practices with each other.

RAILS libraries want help deciphering and meeting the needs of an ever-growing diversity of patrons and potential patrons.

RAILS libraries want help articulating their value to users, potential users, funders, elected officials, and other stakeholders; assistance from RAILS in advocating for issues affecting libraries as appropriate; and help learning how to advocate for themselves.

RAILS libraries want help in becoming the best they can be through staff development, training, and other means, so they can continue to be vital and relevant players in their organizations or communities.

RAILS libraries want help in becoming more resilient and better prepared for the future. This includes assistance keeping abreast of trends and innovations in the library field, as well as changes in the overall environment that affect library service. Libraries would also like RAILS to help ensure the future of libraries and librarianship as a profession by preserving and advancing core professional values.

As a next step, we crafted these categories into a vision of success and goals and objectives delineating how to achieve the vision, keeping in mind our mission as a library system.

RAILS Mission & Vision Statements

Mission Statement

A mission statement defines an organization's core purpose or reason for existence. RAILS mission statement is:

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.

Vision Statement

A vision statement focuses on the desired future of an organization, including goals and aspirations. The following is the proposed vision statement for RAILS, keeping in mind all of the data collected during the strategic plan revision process.

~~Because RAILS is~~As a leader, innovator, and partner in encouraging and supporting a powerful network of vital and energetic libraries RAILS envisions a future where:

- *All RAILS members share resources seamlessly and robustly.*
- *All RAILS members are resilient and prepared to meet the ever-changing future.*
- *All RAILS members are highly-valued and seen as essential to anyone who lives, works, or goes to school in the state of Illinois.*

RAILS mission is to push us.

Kewanee listening tour comment

Strategic Goals & Objectives

Goal One: Promote, support, and expand resource sharing to optimize use of tax dollars and other funding and help libraries share resources to the fullest extent possible

Because libraries are stronger together, RAILS advocates for and works with them to share their resources through traditional means, such as physical delivery of library materials, and we constantly seek innovative strategies to expand resource sharing, such as providing access to digital content and creating opportunities for library staff to share knowledge and expertise. RAILS also leverages economies of scale to increase our libraries' purchasing power.

- Objective: ~~Develop and implement a plan to promote~~Promote, support, and expand resource sharing among RAILS libraries and beyond
- Objective: Lead and work with RAILS-area consortia and standalone libraries to expand resource sharing
- Objective: Work with the Illinois State Library, Illinois Heartland Library System, and other stakeholders to improve physical delivery services through streamlining and standardizing operations and evaluating alternative methods and best practices
- Objective: Develop and implement innovative projects to expand access to a wider variety of resources for Illinois residents, including providing access to digital content/e-resources and expertise
- Objective: Use economies of scale to provide greater purchasing power for member libraries so they can offer more resources to their customers than they would be able to afford on their own
- Objective: Offer members a variety of opportunities to build collaborative relationships to share best practices, expertise, and to develop innovative solutions to common issues and challenges
- Objective: Foster networking and collaboration between staff from all types of libraries (academic, public, school, and special) to create a community of connected peers and to build on the strengths of multitype cooperation

I didn't know the library did that!

Freeport Public Library listening tour-overheard patron comment

Goal Two: *Work with libraries of all types to tell the library story*

It is important that all libraries learn to effectively tell their story so that users and potential users know what libraries have to offer and so that taxpayers and other funders understand the value of library service. RAILS helps our members articulate their value to users, potential users, funders, elected officials, and other stakeholders. RAILS also articulates the importance of all types of libraries, advocates for issues affecting libraries as appropriate, and helps libraries advocate for themselves.

- Objective: Help member libraries ensure that current/potential customers are aware of all of the programs/services/resources the library has to offer

Objective: Help member libraries prove their value to administrative bodies, funders, elected officials, etc.

Objective: Advocate for and help members advocate for all libraries as they face funding and other challenges

Nobody knows what a special library does.

Listening tour comment

Goal Three: Help libraries be the best they can be

RAILS wants to help staff in all of our member libraries grow and develop so they can help their libraries be the best they can be and to help them be vital players in their organizations or communities. We provide a broad range of training and consulting - from basic skills to new technologies and other innovative services. We also encourage and support the development of library leaders, leadership skills, and staff development in general.

Objective: Continue to provide continuing education (CE) to ensure ongoing staff development for all levels of staff at all types of libraries

Objective: Ensure that all libraries are able to offer the best possible service to their community of users

Objective: Ensure the ongoing education of library leaders and the development of leadership skills for library staff

Objective: Ensure that library staff and trustees represent the diverse communities they serve

RAILS continuing education is very valuable! A lot of libraries have no other options for providing training for their staff.

Indian Trails Public Library District listening tour comment

How do we say yes to our students?

Academic library webinar comment

Goal Four: Prepare libraries for the future

RAILS strives to ensure the long-term sustainability of all libraries. Libraries have always played a vital role in building a civil and engaged society by upholding core library values such as intellectual freedom, access to information, and providing resources and services that educate and inform all library users and potential users.

RAILS helps our members to stay resilient by providing leadership on issues affecting them, helping them to navigate an ever-changing world, and assisting them in determining how to best respond to their customers' changing needs. In addition to preparing our member libraries for the future, RAILS also helps to ensure the future of libraries and librarianship as a profession by preserving and advancing core professional values.

Objective: Help libraries anticipate understand, and respond to ~~or even anticipate~~ changing social issues

Objective: Help libraries anticipate and respond to the needs of an ever-changing and diverse customer needsbase and to engage the entire community to work together to build the library of the future

Objective: Partner with libraries and other stakeholders to ~~create~~foster an educated, engaged, and ~~civil~~civic society

How do we serve a moving target of user needs and skills?

Indian Trails Public Library District listening tour comment

I don't want people to stop coming to the library because they don't feel safe.

Freeport Public Library listening tour comment

Goal Five: StriveAim to be the best library system in the country

RAILS needs to be the best we can be as a system to help our individual member libraries be the best they can be. This means doing all the necessary work "behind the scenes," including maintaining a solid infrastructure, ensuring fiscal sustainability, engaging and maintaining the highest quality staff possible, implementing numerous and varied communication channels targeted to our different types of libraries, and modeling innovative and best practices for all members.

Objective: Fully communicate and engage with members from all types of libraries throughout the RAILS area to ensure they are aware of system programs/services of benefit to them and to better understand, anticipate, and meet their needs

Objective: ~~Continue to~~Continuously evaluate RAILS programs ~~and~~ services to ensure that they are ~~meeting member needs~~

~~Objective: Ensure that having an impact and are helping to create the~~ best possible future for all of our libraries

~~Objective: Recruit and engage a~~ RAILS Board ~~that is engaged,~~ representative of the system membership, and that ~~new~~creates and models best practices for board leadership

~~Objective: Ensure members receive a thorough and effective orientation to~~that all aspects of the system~~RAILS organization use and model best practices in all that we do~~

Objective: ~~Continuously strive for~~Deliver on the promise of organizational excellence by being ~~an organization that is~~ agile, innovative, future-oriented, and member-focused

Objective: ~~Maintain~~Engage in innovative projects on a ~~robust technology infrastructure to support~~ statewide, national and international level and help RAILS ~~operations, member services, and member communication efforts~~members model these projects

~~Objective: Ensure financial sustainability for~~ RAILS their community of users

Objective: Provide excellent stewardship of RAILS financial resources to ensure maximum benefit to member libraries, library users, and Illinois taxpayers

Objective: Maintain a research and development role to provide leadership and innovation to help members provide the best possible service to their customers

RAILS is an example of good consolidation.

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