

Helping RAILS Libraries Tell Their Stories/Prove Their Value Campaign Calendar Year 2019

INTRODUCTION

Goal two of the revised RAILS strategic plan (approved by the RAILS Board in September 2018) is: *Work with libraries of all types to tell the library story.*

In working towards this goal, the RAILS Communications Team will develop and implement a campaign to take place throughout calendar year 2019 to help RAILS libraries of all sizes and types (academic, public, school, and special) to more effectively tell their story and articulate their value to users, potential users, parent institutions, governing boards, funders, elected officials, and other stakeholders.

The campaign will meet libraries where they are, no matter what their size or financial situation, and provide knowledge and tools to help libraries in differing situations. There will also be a heavy sharing component for members to share their knowledge and experience, including what has and hasn't worked for them in telling their stories and what additional help they need.

The Need for This Campaign

During our 2018 strategic plan revision process, RAILS conducted extensive research on member needs to determine how we could best meet those needs. A key component of the research was asking members what kept them awake at night related to their professional lives. Research methods included:

- Inviting all staff at all RAILS member libraries to complete a needs assessment survey
- Conducting a listening tour that included holding focus group sessions throughout the RAILS area as well as special sessions for academic, school, and special libraries and online sessions
- Inviting member comment at quarterly RAILS member update sessions and via other in-person contacts

An overwhelming concern voiced throughout this research was our member libraries' need for help in promoting their value and telling their stories more effectively. The following reflect the many comments we heard from members regarding this issue.

- *People don't know what libraries do. We need help telling the library story.*
- *How can we reach out to taxpayers more effectively? What marketing tools and verbiage should we use to let people know what a gem the library is to the community?*
- *How can we promote the library to key decision makers (city councils, other elected officials, etc.)?*
- *Being from a small rural library, I want to make sure that we are seen as being an asset to the community... We don't have a website because we do not want to worry about meeting the Open Meetings Act. What else can we do?*

- *We would love to have an ad in the paper every week or produce flyers and other marketing materials, but governmental agencies are being watched very closely in terms of how they spend their money. Marketing is never looked upon as something we need to do.*
- *Should we be using social media? It takes a lot of staff time. Also, some people in town don't have internet access at home.*
- *I have no idea how to draft a marketing plan.*
- *I have school board members who don't think we need books since "everything can be found on the internet." I need tips on how I can advocate for what a school librarian does.*
- *Sometimes library trustees don't understand the value of the library and how libraries have changed.*
- *Libraries need to know how to foster partnership development and how to be good partners with other community organizations to build a stronger and more informed support base in the community.*
- *I stay up at night worried that small rural schools won't continue to fund libraries and professional librarians. Those who provide funding don't seem to realize our impact on a student's education.*
- *How can I promote my special library's resources to other employees? Many don't come to the library at all. We have to "push" services to them.*
- *I have faculty members that asks, "What do you do all day?" We don't tell the tale effectively and need a new story.*
- *I would like my academic library to have a seat at the decision-making table. Currently, I am not included, even when something focused on the library is being discussed.*
- *I would like a toolkit or step-by-step guide on how to talk to my administration.*
- *How can I 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.*

Libraries also voiced their desire to share knowledge and best practices with each other:

- *I have a zero-dollar advertising budget but still have a multilayered marketing plan. I'd be happy to share our marketing calendar to show how we leverage free resources without overburdening staff.*
- *How can libraries share anecdotal stories to validate all of the good things we can do?*
- *I would like to have a place where we can all bounce ideas off each other.*
- *I'm from an academic library and see the need for collaboration with high school and public libraries. Can RAILS help us get over some of the barriers that exist between the different types of libraries?*
- *Is there a place where we can share best practices? I would like to know what has worked (and hasn't worked) for other libraries when trying to promote their value.*

The RAILS "Helping RAILS Libraries Tell Their Stories/Prove Their Value Campaign" will address all of these needs and provide multiple opportunities for members to share their knowledge, best practices, issues and concerns, and anything else related to the campaign theme.

Audience

This campaign is designed to address a major need expressed by RAILS member libraries of all types during our strategic planning process described above. As a result, the primary audience for the campaign will be RAILS members.

Many sections of the online portal described below will be available for any interested library to view. In addition, anyone can subscribe to the weekly *RAILS E-News*, which will also include information designed to help libraries tell their stories throughout 2019.

Campaign Components

Research Phase

As mentioned above, RAILS received a great deal of feedback regarding our members' need for help telling their story and promoting their value during our strategic plan revision process. We are not as clear on what our member libraries of all types and sizes are currently doing to effectively tell their stories. At the start of the campaign, we will use a number of tools to glean this information, including surveys and in-person encounters.

We will also investigate what information and tools already exist to help libraries tell their stories, and research what other library-related organizations are currently doing or plan on doing in this area so we can share all of this important work and avoid a duplication of effort.

Online Resources

Campaign Website

We will develop a separate website for the campaign with a separate URL, similar to what we have done with other RAILS projects, such as eRead Illinois, Find More Illinois, Explore More Illinois, BiblioBoard, etc.

The website will be highly interactive. While we will include the information gathered during our initial research on what RAILS members are currently doing to tell their stories, we will also actively solicit best practices throughout the campaign and encourage members to share this information on the campaign website. Members will also be able to share questions and concerns and other helpful information.

The website will also include the following information with the ability for members to make contributions in all of these areas. We may include other information as well, based on feedback received from members throughout the campaign.

- Talking points libraries can use in their promotional efforts, including talking points on general library issues, e.g. the value of libraries, etc.; specific talking points for different types of libraries (academic, public, school, and special); and talking points covering RAILS programs/services available to library patrons, e.g. BiblioBoard, Find More Illinois, Explore More Illinois (when fully

developed), etc.

- Templates for marketing materials that libraries can reproduce as well as written pieces to plug into library newsletters and other communications
- An advocacy section highlighting/linking to major, current issues libraries should be paying attention to and talking points to use when speaking with elected officials about important issues
- Links to upcoming RAILS and other continuing education workshops, webinars, conferences, etc. related to telling the library story
- Other information and links to tools libraries can use to demonstrate their value to various stakeholders

RAILS E-News

RAILS will feature regular articles/other content related to the campaign in our weekly *RAILS E-News*, including adding a new section to highlight advocacy-related information and to feature different strategies members are using to tell their stories and other related information.

Social Media

The campaign will feature a strong social media component, including using RAILS social media to promote the campaign and highlighting ways members can use social media in their libraries to tell their stories and prove their value.

Heavy Member Involvement and Sharing

RAILS will regularly encourage members to share their knowledge, ideas, and questions related to the campaign via the online tools described above. We will also:

- Feature reports from members that are successfully telling their stories at RAILS member updates
- Recruit library champions from different types and sizes of libraries to help us promote the campaign and to contribute knowledge and best practices

Continuing Education

As mentioned above, the campaign website will include links to CE events designed to help libraries of all types tell their stories more effectively. RAILS will also discuss other possible opportunities with the RAILS Director of Consulting and Continuing Education and take advantage of member expertise when possible to educate libraries on effective ways to promote their value and tell their stories.

Promoting the Campaign

RAILS will use a variety of strategies and tools to promote the campaign and to encourage member involvement, including:

- Regularly promoting the campaign in the weekly *RAILS E-News*
- Developing a social media calendar to promote the campaign
- Promoting the campaign via in-person encounters with members
- Developing promotional pieces to spread the word about the campaign
- Finding ways to “reward” members that share information on successful strategies for telling the library story and other information, e.g. contests, drawings, etc.
- Focusing 2019 RAILS conference exhibit booth activities on the campaign