

## Reaching Across Illinois Library System (RAILS) Talking Points - DRAFT March 2019

Below are a variety of talking points for RAILS Board members to use when talking to legislators and others about the system. There will likely never be a time when it will be possible to cover all of these points in one conversation. Different points will work in different situations and it is always best to choose the topic that you think will be of greatest interest to the person you are speaking with. For example, when speaking to library trustees, it may be best to lead with the information about the training opportunities available to them through RAILS.

Board members may also want to “mix and match” these talking points. Instead of memorizing the different points word-for-word, it may be more helpful to pick a point or two that particularly resonates with you or to combine separate elements from different points into a new talking point. You do not have to say a lot. The important thing is to feel comfortable in what you are saying and to get the conversation about RAILS started. Anything you can do to help spread the word about the system and the programs/services we offer will help!

It is also recommended that you give the person you are speaking with a copy of the RAILS program/services booklet and advise them to contact the RAILS Communications Director (Mary Witt) or to visit the RAILS website ([railslibraries.info](http://railslibraries.info)) for further information about RAILS or for clarification on any of these points.

### System Funding

Ask legislators to fully fund state appropriations for Illinois Secretary of State grant programs, including annual grants for library systems.

If they ask how RAILS is currently funded:

RAILS is funded by an annual grant from the Illinois State Library and the Secretary of State’s Office, with funds appropriated by the Illinois General Assembly.

### About RAILS (General Information)

RAILS is one of three library systems in Illinois. We offer a number of important services to approximately 4,000 individual library buildings in a 27,000 square mile area. Together these libraries serve over 8 million Illinois residents of all ages. RAILS also offers additional services that are available to every Illinois resident.

RAILS’ main mission is to help our libraries to be the best they can be and to provide the best possible service to their customers/communities. No one library is able to provide everything their users need. RAILS optimizes the use of tax dollars by helping libraries to collaborate and share their resources with each other.

RAILS offers a number of services for every type of library (academic, public, school, and special). You are probably familiar with public libraries and may also know that there are libraries in colleges, universities, and elementary and high schools. Many people don't know about "special" libraries, which are found in law firms, hospitals, museums, and other business and nonprofit organizations. RAILS serves them all!

## Specific RAILS Programs/Services

### Resource Sharing

#### Support for Shared Library Catalogs

It used to be that every library had a separate catalog that only included the items in that library's collection. RAILS provides support for shared online catalogs, where a number of libraries join together to make their materials available through one catalog. This means library users can find out what hundreds of other libraries own in one search, and they can make that search at their convenience—anytime and anywhere.

RAILS also offers grants that make it much more affordable for a library to participate in one of these shared catalogs.

RAILS' Find More Illinois catalog provides access to even more resources from even more libraries by making it possible to search many different shared online catalogs, as well as catalogs from individual libraries.

#### Delivery

Once someone finds an item they need in an online shared catalog or in Find More Illinois, they don't have to travel miles to pick it up. They can request that it be delivered to their home library via the RAILS delivery service. We deliver over 9 million items per year between Illinois libraries, at a cost of approximately 31 cents per item. You will not find a high-quality delivery service like ours that comes anywhere close to that low cost!

#### E-Books/E-Resources

RAILS also delivers information electronically. Our BiblioBoard service is available to anyone in Illinois at no charge and whether or not they have a library card. There is no limit on simultaneous use and items in the collection can be read by 1 or 100 people at the same time. Offerings include popular titles, open educational resources (OERs) for students, and a wide variety of e-books and other materials for all ages.

We also offer the eRead Illinois service, which provides very affordable access to over 42,000 e-books and e-audiobooks. About 440 libraries currently participate in eRead Illinois.

## **Continuing Education**

RAILS offers continuing education for library staff to help them provide the best possible service to their customers. Last year, we offered 307 events at 44 unique locations, including a wide variety of online webinars. Over 4,000 library staff members registered for these events.

RAILS provides a broad range of training on topics ranging from basic skills to new technologies and other innovative services. This training helps libraries remain relevant to the customers/communities they serve. RAILS CE is offered at no charge to libraries through their membership in the system. If every individual library had to seek out the training their staff needed on their own, the costs and the number of hours spent to find CE to fill all of their needs would be astronomical.

RAILS CE helps library staff to navigate an ever-changing world and to respond to a variety of customers, all with differing needs. Library customers include children, adults, students, job-seekers, businesspeople, homeless populations, non-English speaking people, people who are not able to read or write, and more. The library is the only place where many of these people can turn to find the information they need and to have someone help them find the best information.

RAILS CE also helps libraries deal with issues such as the opioid crisis and helping people to decipher “fake news.” Libraries will also be major players in ensuring that Illinois has as accurate a count as possible in the 2020 Census. RAILS will help them fill that role as well.

## **Continuing Education for Library Trustees**

RAILS offers a variety of training opportunities for library trustees. Since the library board is the governing body of the library, the training RAILS offers to trustees results in better library service for Illinois taxpayers.

## **Discounts**

RAILS uses economies of scale to provide greater purchasing power for our member libraries so they can offer more resources to their customers than they would be able to afford on their own

RAILS negotiates with library service providers and vendors to provide discounts on a wide variety of products and services that are beneficial to our libraries. This includes discounts on electronic resources that library customers can use at home. The cost for a single library to offer all of these products/services would be extremely high. Because of RAILS’ collective purchasing power and influence, libraries can purchase these products/services at very low cost.

## **Networking Opportunities**

RAILS offers staff from all types of libraries (academic, public, school, and special) a variety of opportunities to share best practices, knowledge and expertise, and to develop innovative solutions to common issues and challenges. There is no need for libraries to recreate the wheel as long as RAILS is around!

### **Underserved/Unserved/Reciprocal Borrowing**

RAILS takes a leadership role in ensuring that library service is readily available to all Illinois residents, no matter what their income, ethnic background, or where they live.

Because of RAILS, Illinois residents can use their public library card at almost any Illinois public library they choose to visit.