16 August 2019

TO: **RAILS Board of Directors**

FROM: **Deirdre Brennan**

SUBJECT: **System membership standards status update**

RAILS staff and member library staff have been working on the development of system membership standards since 2014. The standards that were first drafted have changed markedly in five years as we have tested them with members and worked with staff at the Illinois State Library and the Illinois Library Association, organizations that also have strong interest in standards. And, more changes are coming. This memo is designed to bring new board members up to speed on where we are and to lay out planned next steps for the board to discuss.

The Illinois State Library has had concerns about the standards since the beginning of our work on them, mostly focused on the possible effects of the standards, particularly for small or underfunded libraries of any type, and fears that they would make bad situations worse by potentially denying libraries access to grants and system services. The RAILS board, staff and members have certainly understood these concerns, but we also feel strongly that it is important to provide standards that recognize the difference among libraries in funding and in the needs of their users. The current one-size-fits-all, very minimal standards contained in certification is not the answer either.

In June of 2018 the RAILS board approved the release of the draft system membership standards for data collection. RAILS staff worked for several months to create a web based form for collection of data about core standards only. Data collection began on December 4, 2018 and ended on March 31, 2019. A total of 774 libraries completed the form.

The data collection showed the problems that libraries have with answering subjective or qualitative questions. We have also had internal discussions about what core standards we absolutely need to keep in order to understand where libraries are and how we can help them.

We have communicated regularly with ISL about the status of standards and how we might come to consensus and move forward together to incorporate RAILS standards in ISL data collection and their certification process for libraries.

At this point, we have reached substantive agreement on a number of major points, as well as on a general approach to the issue of standards.

1. We will take a future oriented not retrospective approach. Standards will, when implemented, confirm that all current system members are in compliance with core standards.
2. The framework for the standards will be developmental.   We want to encourage libraries to do better, to enhance their services. Development, or a pathway to excellence, is inherent in the framework and three levels of standards – core, accomplished and exemplary.
3. Best practice documents are necessary to assist libraries in explaining the reasons and benefits of development and the standards.
4. The administrative code already has a requirement that libraries must have an online catalog/provide access to resources through a shared bibliographic database by 2022. Other requirements that we (ILS/RAILS) establish could be conveniently tied to this date for other compliance.
5. The relationship between ILA standards, RAILS standards and ISL requirements will be examined to ensure alignment and eliminate duplication.
6. The RAILS standards are designed to be multitype. The ISL has no oversight of school, academic or special libraries, although the school per capita grants do establish a relationship that requires school libraries to report to ISL in order to be awarded a grant.

I have drafted a new version of the core standards that includes:
- Hours open
- Education and training (including continuing education)
- Collection expenditures
- Discoverability and sharing of materials

We expect that these standards will be incorporated into the certification process for FY 2021. There are other changes underway in the per capita grant applications for school and public libraries. The Illinois Library Association has just completed their revision of *Serving our Public,* the guidelines for Illinois public libraries.

We will be working between now and 2021 to create one data entry point for libraries to use for their data collection compliance and to develop other resources for all RAILS system members to proceed along the pathway to excellence.

This has been a long and complex process. This memo can only skim the surface; I will be happy to answer questions in more detail at the meetig.