

15 May 2020

**TO: RAILS Board of Directors**

**FROM: Deirdre Brennan**

**SUBJECT: Executive Director Report – May, 2020**

**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**

COVID-19

Not unexpectedly, much of our work during May has focused on COVID-19.

As has been the case since RAILS and member libraries closed in mid-March, an extraordinary array of creative virtual services are being offered to library users- story hours, e-books, book clubs, chat reference – these are just a few examples. A more complete list is available on our COVID-19 Pulse Page. Also, plans are underway for virtual summer reading programs, some using products and cooperative purchasing deals that Leila Heath developed.

Resource sharing of COVID-19 related issues continued, with heavy use of our Directors list, our Pulse Page and Zoom meetings. A Zoom webinar for public library trustees on May 14 about the pandemic and libraries attracted an audience of more than 700 attendees. Paul Mills was our emcee and speakers included public library trustees, HR Source, Jamie Rachlin and Diane Foote, Leslie Bednar and me. It was a really great collaborative project and we will probably do more of them.

We have had two meetings with state library staff, IHLS staff, Anne Craig and Andrea Telli from Chicago Public Library to discuss delivery and reopening plans. We are also leading meetings of a midwest library consortia from Michigan, Kansas, Missouri and other states to discuss their situations and plans.

As always, there is an incredible amount that we learn from our colleagues, one of the greatest benefits of the library field.

## **Work with libraries of all types to tell the library story**

### COVID-19

We embarked on a new service, thanks to the inspiration of Dan Bostrom. We are recording a weekly “RAILS Minute” where Dan interview me via Zoom about new developments with COVID and libraries for literally one or two minutes. This is posted on Facebook and other social media. It’s another way we can reach out directly to members and users to keep them informed.

## **Help libraries be the best they can be**

### COVID-19

RAILS is continuing to provide training, of course, in the form of webinars. We are also continuing virtual networking sessions and visits with member libraries. We have seen increasing demand for and use of our online training during the pandemic.

### REALM – Reopening Archives, Libraries and Museums

REALM is the official name of the study that is being led by IMLS, OCLC and Battelle Labs. You can find the website [here](#). I am on the steering committee, which meets weekly and also the operations working group. The first phase of the project is focused on public libraries, the second on other types of libraries and museums, and the third on monitoring new developments. Testing of different types of library materials – books, CDs, paperbacks – and how long the virus can live on them is underway, as is a literature search about the epidemiology of the virus. Hopefully, we will get some definitive science on the safe handling of library materials this summer.

## **Prepare libraries for the future**

Several of us attended the ILA Public Policy Committee and Advocacy Committee meetings this month. We heard from the ILA legislative consultant that the General Assembly will be back in session next week for 3 days to consider an FY 2021 budget.

Monica, Joe and I met with Elisabeth Lindsay-Ryan on May 13 to discuss our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion staff training initiative. We hope to launch this later in the summer.

The State Library has agreed to relax the rules related to non-resident cards during the crisis. Libraries have been offering temporary cards so that families and students can access their online resources for educational and other purposes – surely related to filing for unemployment, job search, understanding the stimulus bills, etc. Resources as well as online access to professional assistance from librarians is critical for everyone during this time.

### **Aim to be the best library system in the country**

It has been amazing and gratifying at how our members have turned to us for information during the pandemic. I think we have really helped to bring libraries and librarians together virtually and that it has helped all of us deal with the crisis more effectively. I have also been concerned because members want definitive answers from us – when is it safe to reopen for curbside service? How long do we need to quarantine materials? are frequent questions. It has been very difficult to not be able to provide definite answers. I have started to begin all of my answers to these questions with statements like “we are not medical experts. We are providing the best information we can find to help you make decisions. Sometimes the information is contradictory.” Everyone is looking for certainty and there just isn’t any.

We are beginning to work on plans to reopen delivery and to return to our offices. We want delivery to be ready when the libraries are ready.

Our board election has concluded and the Nominating Committee meets next week to review the results.

As has been true in past years, the May board meeting will be held at 10 am to accommodate Memorial Day weekend plans.

The June board meeting is a week early (June 19) because of ALA, which is cancelled.

## This Month at RAILS – May 2020

### *Promoting/Supporting/Expanding Resource Sharing*

#### Leading/Working with Libraries to Expand Resource Sharing

##### **RAILS Meeting with ILS Consortia**

RAILS facilitated a meeting with ILS (integrated library system) consortia in our area in early May to begin discussing reopening plans. This meeting was useful for all, and we will continue these conversations as the situation continues to evolve and we find opportunities to coordinate our reopening efforts.

##### **RAILS Offers New Cataloging Course in Response to Member Feedback**

Nincy George, RAILS Cataloging Services Coordinator, is offering a new cataloging course called “MARC 21: An Introduction.” This course was developed in response to a need for more beginning basics for those who need this prerequisite to the longer cataloging and classification basics courses. Originally planned for in-person delivery, Nincy quickly adapted the course to the webinar format, and it will be offered in two sessions (May 28 and June 4). Registration for both classes filled quickly.

#### Providing Access to Digital Content/E-Resources/Other Innovative Projects

##### **eRead Illinois Axis 360 Update**

As previously reported, RAILS recently automated and streamlined the renewal process for participating [eRead Illinois](#) libraries. This has greatly expedited the process for both libraries and RAILS staff.



As of May 8, 191 libraries have renewed, as well as all [RSA](#) member libraries. In addition, three school districts and two public libraries have joined eRead Illinois since having to close their physical locations due to COVID-19. Several of our existing school library members have also added additional school buildings to their eRead Illinois subscription. To support this time of increased demand, RAILS is offering complimentary immediate access to new subscribers until the renewal start date of July 1, 2020.

##### **BiblioBoard Update**

RAILS is working on building a dashboard to allow libraries to easily view their BiblioBoard usage statistics. We shared our progress with BiblioBoard at a meeting on May 7.

We are also exploring the option of adding content to the [BiblioBoard collection](#) as part of the RAILS census grant. We are looking at incorporating titles related to the census, as well as e-books about self-care, healthy habits, classic titles, and this year’s summer reading themes.

### **E-Content and COVID-19 Stay at Home Period**

RAILS is collecting information from various e-content consortia in our service area on the impact COVID-19 related closures are having on digital collections and e-content usage. We plan on sharing this information with members in the coming weeks.

### **Soon To Be Famous Illinois Author Project**

RAILS has partnered with/supported the [Soon To Be Famous Illinois Author Project](#) (STBF) since its beginning in 2013. The 2020 STBF manuscript contest winner was recently announced. [Kate Robards](#) won for her manuscript *The Songbird Baby*. The main STBF contest is currently accepting submissions. That contest will close on May 31.

### **Explore More Illinois Update**



RAILS

With [Explore More Illinois](#) being temporarily suspended due to COVID-19, RAILS contacted directors from member public libraries that haven't yet joined our online cultural attractions pass program. We have received positive responses from about 10 libraries thus far, and are working on adding them to the program.

## **Improving Physical Delivery Services**

### **Delivery Update**

RAILS has had several meetings with Midwestern consortia responsible for delivery, [ASGCLA's Physical Delivery Group](#), and IHLS, [CARLI](#), and the Illinois State Library to discuss reopening delivery and coordinating reopening plans where possible. RAILS is in the process of developing a phase one plan that will allow us to return materials currently being held at RAILS delivery hubs to owning libraries that can accept them.

RAILS also conducted a survey from May 13 - 21 to gather information on library reopening plans and when/how libraries will be equipped to receive RAILS delivery. Survey results will help us make decisions about delivery service to best serve the needs of our member libraries.

## **Providing Greater Purchasing Power**

### **Deals and Discounts Announced**

RAILS recently partnered with new vendors to offer special deeply discounted rates for RAILS member libraries. More information is available on the [Deals & Discounts page](#) of the RAILS website.

### **READsquared**

READsquared allows libraries to customize and track their reading programs online. Subscriptions include pre-packaged customizable themed and seasonal programs like Summer

Reading (through READsquared partners iREAD or CSLP), as well as Read Across America, 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten, and more.

#### Team One Discount on PPE Products

Team One is offering a discount on personal protective equipment (PPE) products. As a federal government contractor, Team One has access to desk shields, masks, gloves, and a unique kiosk from HP. They also offer discounted pricing for library technology product solutions.

### **Building Collaborative Relationships & Fostering Networking**

#### **RAILS Provides Zoom Access for RAILS Networking Groups**

In response to requests from RAILS networking groups, RAILS is offering a limited number of [Zoom licenses](#) to groups that meet on a regular basis. Eligibility requirements include:

- Groups must have an updated listing in the RAILS [networking group directory](#).
- Groups must meet at least twice per year.
- At least 75% of the group's members must be staff from RAILS member libraries.

#### **Upcoming RAILS Online Roundtables**

[RAILS Online Roundtables](#) are hour-long forums on a specific topic held via Zoom that give system members a chance to network and share best practices. Each roundtable features a brief presentation by one or more presenters. All library staff from all Illinois libraries are welcome to attend. RAILS held these roundtables in April/May:

- Libraries & Facebook Live – April 15
- Hosting an Online Author Visit – April 24
- Shaping a Library Podcast – April 29
- Creating, Implementing, & Assessing Virtual Programs - May 4

In total, more than 350 people registered for these events and more than 250 attended “live.” Each of these sessions was recorded and recordings are available on the [RAILS YouTube page](#).

#### **New Time for RAILS Online Water Coolers**

RAILS offers weekly “water cooler” networking sessions to help library staff stay connected with other colleagues throughout the system during the COVID-19 stay-at-home period.

Conversations typically focus on library activities, but there are also opportunities to talk about non-library activities as well. These drop-in events will now take place on Thursdays at 3 p.m.

RAILS Board members are welcome to attend. The final May water cooler is scheduled for [Thursday, May 28](#), at 3 p.m.

## Telling the Library Story

Helping Members Tell Their Story



### **RAILS Talking Points “Hit the Streets!”**

RAILS recently debuted the [talking points](#) we gave you a sneak peek at last month on the My Library Is... website. We developed the talking points in response to frequent member requests for this type of tool. We worked with Marci Merola, former Director of the Office for Library Advocacy at the American Library Association, to develop handy infographics with talking points for libraries of all types.

Many members (and RAILS Board members) provided feedback for the talking points, including the Association of Illinois School Library Educators (AISLE) Board. In a message to the AISLE mailing list about the talking points, an AISLE board member noted that “a first class advocacy tool has arrived to show the benefits of school libraries!!!” and thanked RAILS for creating them and recognizing the importance of school libraries and librarians. We look forward to receiving feedback from other types of libraries as well.

### **My Library Is... Blog Helps Libraries Tell Their Stories**

Recent posts to the [My Library Is... blog](#) include:

- A [guest post from David Kelsey](#), Outreach Services Librarian at St. Charles Public Library District, sharing tips and tricks for reaching seniors during the COVID-19 social distancing period
- A [guest post from Anne Craig](#), Executive Director of CARLI, on the importance of the academic library director position

The blog is one of the most popular features of the My Library Is... website. If you know a RAILS library staff member who would like to share a topic of interest to help libraries promote their value via the blog, please have them contact [communications@railslibraries.info](mailto:communications@railslibraries.info).

### **Deadline for RAILS My Library Is... Grant**

The [RAILS My Library Is... Grant](#) program provides an opportunity for libraries to focus on projects that help tell the library story and that increase visibility and support for all types of libraries. Libraries, working alone or with partners, can apply for up to \$5,000 in funding to support a campaign or project that promotes library programs or libraries in general. To give more libraries an opportunity to apply for funding, RAILS extended the application deadline to Friday, May 22.

## Advocating for and Helping Members Advocate for Libraries

### Working with AISLE to Advocate for School Libraries

As previously reported, RAILS staff meet regularly with AISLE Board members to discuss ways we can collaborate to support school libraries. At our April 23 meeting, we discussed:

- RAILS' new talking points for school libraries (see above)
- Available COVID-19 virtual programming and services for school libraries
- How systems can help AISLE and school libraries collaborate with public libraries on summer reading activities
- Professional development opportunities available for school libraries
- And more!

### Helping Libraries Be the Best They Can Be

#### Ensuring Ongoing Library Staff Development

#### RAILS Online Continuing Education (CE) Opportunities

RAILS continues to offer online CE opportunities to our members, averaging one to two events per week during the shelter-in-place period. In the last month, we offered nine such opportunities and over 2,000 people registered. These included COVID-19 related topics ("Virtual Programming on the Fly," "PPE Use for Library Staff," etc.) and other topics ("Dementia Awareness for Libraries," "Dashboard Designs, Part 1 and 2," etc.).

One of the webinars to receive the most positive responses was the May 8 "PPE Use for Library Staff" workshop presented by the Director of Quality and Patient Safety for Amita Health. This webinar provided practical advice on the use of gloves and masks and other safety measures related to the use of PPE (personal protective equipment). As one attendee commented, "My Director and I both thought it was one of the best things we've seen on this topic. It was easy to follow and the presenter was very confident and explained everything very well. . . . Thank you for all that RAILS is doing to support us during this time."

#### RAILS CE Event Grant Award

RAILS awarded one [CE Event Grant](#) during our most recent grant period to Oak Park Public Library for their June event: "Just Relationships: Transformational Tools for Cross-Cultural Communication, Understanding, and Resilience." This event will be held online and will be open to RAILS members to register throughout the month of May.



## ***Preparing Libraries for the Future***

### **Helping Libraries Respond to Change**

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to create a wide variety of challenges for RAILS member libraries of all types. The following are recent RAILS activities to help our members respond to these challenges. You'll find information about other COVID-19 activities in other sections of this report as well.

#### **Helping Libraries Make Decisions on Curbside Delivery**

With feedback/help from some of our member libraries, RAILS compiled [guidelines and a list of questions](#) for libraries considering curbside service or partially reopening to help them determine the best course of action for their individual situation. We've received very positive comments on the guidelines/questions from members thus far.

#### **RAILS Collaborates with ILA and IHLS on Bigger Than a Building Campaign**

Monica Harris, RAILS Associate Executive Director, and Mary Witt, RAILS Communications Director, worked with ILA and IHLS staff on an ILA ad-hoc advocacy team. The ["Bigger Than A Building"](#) campaign team developed resources for the library community to use to demonstrate how essential libraries are during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.



Resources included tips for libraries, talking points, sample press releases and letters to decision makers, and resources to help libraries make decisions about curbside delivery or partially reopening their buildings.

#### **Essential Actions and Services Survey**

To help RAILS identify the essential services libraries are providing during the COVID-19 pandemic, we asked members to complete a [survey](#) on their activities related to a variety of different categories, including: digital connectivity, communication, food/nutrition, education and childcare, medical/behavioral health, and more. Our libraries are providing a number of very valuable services to their communities, as you will note from viewing the [survey results](#).

## ***Aiming to Be the Best Library System***

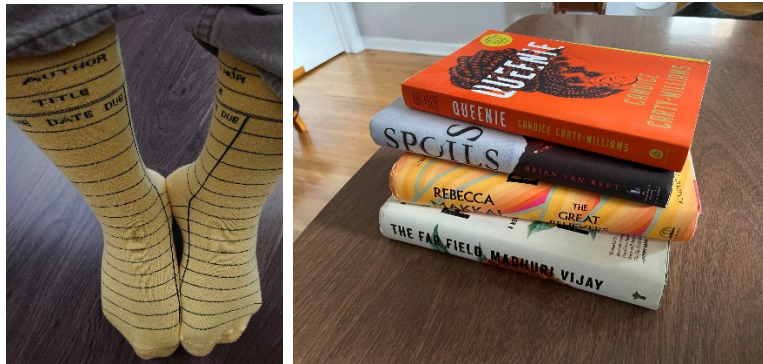
### **Member Communication/Engagement**

#### **Social Media Engagement Activities**

In April/May, RAILS introduced several new, fun social media activities to help our members feel connected to each other despite being "socially distanced." Activities included:

- Weekly “Show Us Your... “ Facebook post – asking participants to post a picture of something related to libraries and books, for example, their “to-be-read” pile, an amusing library/reading t-shirt, etc.
- “This or That” quiz – asking participants 10 questions about different preferences (coffee or tea, *Star Wars* or *Star Trek*, fiction or non-fiction, etc.). We highlighted one response on our Facebook page each week.
- Monday Meme – sharing a funny/amusing image about libraries/reading/work life via Facebook.

RAILS will continue to introduce new social media activities to engage our members.



Examples of images our RAILS Facebook audience posted to “show us” their library socks and their “to-be-read” pile.

## Evaluating the Impact of RAILS Programs/Services

### Update on RAILS Data Collection & Evaluation Activities

During the past year, RAILS staff, working with Grant Halter, RAILS Data Coordinator & Research Analyst, have made great strides integrating data collection into their regular activities. Combining existing staff expertise with data expertise has helped us enhance many projects, including our work with system membership standards, re-evaluating our LLSAP Support Grant program, and digging into vendor data to help negotiate new deals & discounts.

Projects currently in progress or on the immediate horizon include the [newly redeveloped L2](#) and a revamped standards collection process. Both will help us create a more robust aggregation of data that will be readily available for staff and our members to use in their work.

In addition, RAILS has conducted several surveys to help us make more informed decisions and to support advocacy initiatives. These include surveys on Statewide Database Access, Libraries’ Delivery Experiences, and Helping the Unserved in Illinois.

Grant is also working directly with members, doing on-site training and virtual presentations to help library staff become more familiar and comfortable working with data. We are all excited

for the future of RAILS data, and look forward to providing continued leadership and innovation in the library data world.

## RAILS Staff News

### **RAILS Staff EDI Initiative**

RAILS continues to move forward with the EDI (equity, diversity, and inclusion) initiative mentioned in last month's report. Plans include having regular training for all staff and an EDI-focused staff climate team to keep the initiative growing in summer/fall 2020. We also look at this effort as a way to help us model best practices for our member libraries.

### **RAILS Delivery Staff Training**

RAILS delivery staff are currently using LinkedIn Learning (formerly Lynda.com) to engage in online learning during the shelter-in-place period. We created a Delivery Staff Learning Path in LinkedIn Learning that identifies specific training videos of relevance for our drivers and sorters. Topics include general productivity tips, communication, teamwork, and technology skills. Delivery staff will be accessing these videos on a staggered schedule throughout May.