

1.1 Narrative Report

Introduction

This narrative provides information on the Reaching Across Illinois Library System’s (RAILS) FY 2020 activities and accomplishments. These activities/accomplishments relate directly to the goals and objectives in our FY 2020 System Area and Per Capita Grant application and meet the requirements of the administrative rules for library systems. Our overarching goal throughout the year was to provide the highest quality service to RAILS member libraries of all types (academic, public, school, and special) and to help them provide the highest quality service possible to their customers.

Some of RAILS’ planned activities were curtailed or greatly modified due to the unexpected appearance of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. We quickly pivoted and successfully converted to administrative people working remotely and were able to continue core activities – bill paying for example – and we also took on activities that were not included in our FY 2020 operational plan in order to help our libraries navigate through the pandemic and continue to provide high quality service to library users. Those additional activities are included in this report.

As was the case with our FY 2020 operational plan, this report is arranged by RAILS strategic plan goals and objectives.

Strategic Plan 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

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
<p>Promote, support, and expand resource sharing among RAILS libraries and beyond</p>	<p>Provided continuing education (CE) and consulting on general resource sharing issues, interlibrary loan (ILL) and the ILLINET Interlibrary Loan Code, reciprocal access, reciprocal borrowing, nonresident services, etc. Activities focused on one-to-one training of library staff investigating different options for participating in interlibrary loan for the first time and directing member library staff to the appropriate delivery training resources on the RAILS website.</p> <p>Consulted with members to ensure that they followed the RAILS Resource Sharing Plan. During FY 2020, RAILS staff were notified of a few member libraries not abiding by the plan, and we followed up with those libraries to educate them on their ILL responsibilities as a system member.</p> <p>Provided resources and guidance to facilitate successful member completion of the ILLINET ILL Traffic Survey as part of the annual certification process (until it was suspended by ISL). See also below.</p> <p>Provided instructional information on the RAILS website, including ILL training videos and information on intergovernmental agreements</p>

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	<p>Offered ILL consulting targeted at school libraries, including consulting one-on-one with school library staff at the Association of Illinois School Library Educators (AISLE) conference</p> <p>Promoted/strongly encouraged resource sharing via RAILS communication tools and member encounters</p> <p>Worked with the RAILS Resource Sharing Committee to investigate and recommend ways to improve and increase resource sharing in Illinois, particularly among RAILS member libraries. The committee met in February to establish these goals for the upcoming year: increase statewide culture of resource sharing, improve awareness of resource sharing, and provide services for the unserved.</p> <p>Had annual meeting with colleagues at WiLS (formerly Wisconsin Library Services) to exchange ideas and best practices, which resulted in discussions to expand Explore More Illinois to Wisconsin and beyond</p> <p>Collaborated with the Illinois State Library (ISL), Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS), Chicago Public Library System (CPLS), AISLE, Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI), Illinois Association of College and Research Libraries (IACRL), Illinois Library Association (ILA), Special Libraries Association-Illinois Chapter (SLA-Illinois), and other stakeholders on a variety of resource sharing activities as detailed throughout this document</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Explore More Illinois</p> <p>Expanded and widely publicized the Explore More Illinois program as a way for RAILS and IHLS libraries to work with cultural/recreational organizations to make their resources available/discoverable to Illinois residents, and for libraries to foster community engagement, partnerships, and cultural literacy. At the end of FY 2020, 264 Illinois public libraries and 32 statewide attractions participated.</p> <p>Temporarily suspended the program due to the pandemic and the closing of Explore More attractions. Continued to recruit libraries that had not yet joined, including IHLS libraries.</p> <p>Created a promotional video for library users and potential attractions with step-by-step instructions for using the program</p> <p>Discussed expanding the program to Wisconsin with WiLS as referenced above. These discussions will continue in FY 2021.</p>

<p>Lead and work with RAILS-area consortia and standalone libraries to expand resource sharing</p>	<p>Held 4th annual Consortia Staff In-Service Day for staff from different consortia across Illinois to network and exchange news, ideas, and best practices; 50 consortia staff members participated</p> <p>During the pandemic, facilitated meetings with ILS (integrated library system) consortia to discuss reopening plans</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Promote/Support LLSAP Membership</p> <p>Implemented new annual LLSAP support grant program by providing a mix of financial support and in-kind services to six RAILS LLSAPs: CCS, Pinnacle, PrairieCat, Rock River Library Consortium, RSA-NFP, and SWAN. Approximately 549 RAILS libraries (individual buildings) participated in one of these LLSAPs by the end of FY 2020.</p> <p>Offered catalog membership grants to encourage libraries to join one of the six RAILS LLSAPs. Awarded six grants totaling \$182,086.</p> <p>Worked with the RAILS Consortia Committee to develop additional ways to enhance resource sharing</p> <p>Promoted the value of consortia membership to all types and sizes of RAILS libraries via RAILS communication tools and member encounters</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Expand and Promote Find More Illinois (FMI)</p> <p>Recruited libraries to join FMI. Provided training/consulting. Heavily publicized FMI via RAILS communication tools and member encounters. At the end of FY 2020, 1 academic library, 29 public libraries, and 3 school libraries participated.</p> <p>Reexamined FMI membership fees to make participation as affordable as possible. Assisted “early adopters” with implementation fees.</p> <p>Worked with Auto-Graphics, the FMI vendor, on software enhancements, including Patron Lookup functionality for easier reciprocal borrowing and OpenAthens compatibility to meet SWAN requirements</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Support High-Quality Cataloging</p> <p>Developed “Cataloging Basics” and “Classification and Subject Analysis Basics” as part of new, ongoing cataloging curriculum. Offered pilot training program. Both classes filled quickly with people on a waiting list. Tweaked curriculum based on feedback from the pilot.</p> <p>Developed “MARC 21: An Introduction” course in response to member requests. Adapted the course to webinar format due to the pandemic. Offered two sessions and registration for both filled quickly.</p>
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Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	<p>Presented program as part of panel at ILA conference on “Implementing Linked Data in Libraries”</p> <p>Widely promoted available cataloging training, including RAILS and Cataloging Maintenance Center (CMC) training</p> <p>Led an Exposing Consortial Holdings Working Group to identify methods for exposing consortial holdings on the web and facilitating resource sharing in the anticipated absence of OCLC’s OSMOSIS service</p> <p>Conducted survey to learn more about the special cataloging needs of member libraries and to determine what additional assistance RAILS might provide</p>
<p>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</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Provide Delivery Service Based on Member Need</p> <p>Worked with members to select the most appropriate delivery method to meet their needs</p> <p>Continued contracting with Continental Transportation (CTL) and Comet Messenger Service</p> <p>Investigated possibility of automating internal delivery paperwork by capturing information electronically with tablets or other devices. We anticipate that the in-house software developer RAILS hired in 2019 will perform this work in FY 2021.</p> <p>Worked with consultant to study whether outsourcing or providing delivery in-house would provide more efficient and cost-effective service to system members. Released an RFI seeking information from vendors across the country on potential efficient and cost-effective delivery strategies.</p> <p>As a part of consultant’s study, conducted a delivery experience survey to gauge members’ overall satisfaction with delivery service; 294 out of a possible 519 libraries responded. Responses reflected an overall satisfaction with the service provided by RAILS and CTL.</p> <p>Developed long term plan to optimize number and locations of RAILS buildings and delivery hubs based on our work with the Laboratory for Applied Spatial Analysis (LASA). (See also below).</p> <p>Asked ISL for assistance to offer more than one delivery point for the 400+ Chicago Public School libraries. This remained an issue at the end of FY 2020.</p>

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	<p style="text-align: center;">Delivery & COVID-19</p> <p>Conducted survey to gather information on library reopening plans and when/how libraries wanted to receive RAILS delivery. Received 456 responses from libraries of all types.</p> <p>Used feedback from above survey to develop plan to resume RAILS delivery. Heavily publicized plan and posted it on RAILS' COVID-19 Pulse Page. Further explained the plan during a member update session. Met with consortia managers to ensure that they were "in the loop." Developed FAQ and flowchart based on member questions.</p> <p>Followed through on plan to resume delivery in mid-June, with the first step of returning all items stored in our warehouses since the start of the pandemic</p> <p>Monitored ongoing results from the REALM Project studying the length of time the COVID-19 virus remains on library materials. Adjusted delivery procedures based on these results as necessary. Widely publicized all changes to delivery procedures.</p> <p>Met frequently with ISL, IHLS, CARLI, Midwestern consortia responsible for delivery, and ALA's Association of Specialized, Government, and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASGCLA) Physical Delivery Group to discuss reopening delivery and coordinating reopening plans</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Delivery CE/Consulting</p> <p>Consulted with members on delivery issues/concerns on a regular basis</p> <p>Widely promoted use of the delivery ticketing system via RAILS communication tools and member encounters</p> <p>Promoted availability of RAILS delivery staff to visit member libraries to consult on delivery</p> <p>Ensured that RAILS school libraries knew about available delivery options via consulting with individual schools and sharing information at RAILS' AISLE conference exhibit booth</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Quarterly Delivery Fine Counts</p> <p>Completed efforts to automate fine count process. Promoted counts and consulted with libraries on an individual basis as needed. Examined fine count data to determine potential changes to existing delivery routes. The final fine count of FY 2020 was cancelled due to the pandemic.</p>

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	<p style="text-align: center;">Statewide Delivery</p> <p>Provided high-quality statewide delivery services through ILDS to CARLI libraries</p> <p>Met with LASA staff to discuss next steps in LASA’s statewide delivery study to aid in making decisions about the best locations for delivery hubs, including the transfer hub where materials are exchanged between RAILS and IHLS</p>
<p>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</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Grow/Develop eRead Illinois</p> <p>Continued to grow the eRead Illinois Axis 360 program to meet library/user demand. At the end of FY 2020, eRead included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 47,596 e-resources for adults & children • 33,806 e-books • 13,790 e-audiobooks <p>Evaluated eRead content to ensure that it continued to meet member needs. Took critical look at eRead holds and fine-tuned practices for purchasing additional copies to best meet member needs.</p> <p>Recruited RAILS libraries and IHLS non-SHARE libraries to join Axis 360. Supported the training and marketing needs of participants. By the end of FY 2020, 442 libraries participated in eRead, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22 academics • 255 publics • 158 school buildings/districts (mix) • 7 specials <p>Streamlined/updated eRead Illinois signup and renewal process, resulting in an estimated 80% reduction in processing time for RAILS libraries and an estimated annual savings of at least 420 hours and \$8,400 for RAILS and eRead libraries</p> <p>Redesigned eRead support site to update content and to make it more user and mobile-friendly</p> <p>Continued working with Baker & Taylor to fix issues with the Axis 360 platform. Evaluated effectiveness of the platform in meeting member needs and began developing future plans based on this analysis.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Grow/Enhance BiblioLabs Partnership</p> <p>Continued to partner with BiblioLabs to offer a wide variety of e-resources via the BiblioBoard platform. By the end of FY 2020, BiblioBoard included over 44,000 e-content items.</p>

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	<p>Widely publicized statewide availability of BiblioBoard offerings</p> <p>Developed and widely publicized availability of BiblioBoard resources for schools, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worked with BiblioBoard to create a collection just for schools to address school library concerns about the age-appropriateness of some BiblioBoard content and to streamline the browsing experience for students. Heavily publicized this collection, including at RAILS exhibit booths at the AISLE and Illinois Digital Educators Association (IDEAcon) conferences, the weekly <i>RAILS E-News</i>, and a variety of other communication tools and member encounters. • Gave presentation on using BiblioBoard in schools at the AISLE conference <p>Launched inkie.org, a suite of resources, available to everyone in Illinois at no charge, to support local authors and allow readers to access locally-produced content. Since the October 2019 launch:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 175 e-books were created via Pressbooks • 71 e-books were submitted to the BiblioBoard Library • 15 e-books were added to Indie Author Project Select <p>Continued offering group purchase pricing on BiblioBoard products for self-published authors</p> <p>Began work on a dashboard to allow libraries to easily view their BiblioBoard usage statistics for their community of users</p> <p>Designed and ran series of ads promoting BiblioBoard and inkie.org to the general public, including two Facebook ads and two Instagram ads. Over 18,000 people saw at least one of these ads and they generated hundreds of link clicks.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Expand Member Access to E-Resources</p> <p>Started an e-content networking group to discuss issues surrounding access to e-content in libraries. Hosted regular meetings. Created an Electronic Content email list at the request of the group.</p> <p>Created “Library Pulse Page” on E-Content Publisher & Pricing Issues on the RAILS website to help libraries stay current on the latest issues and to share best practices</p> <p>Investigated and implemented new RAILS e-resources to meet member needs, including new discounts for Recorded Books Unlimited products and PressReader e-resources</p>

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	<p>Provided infrastructure support for the Electronic Content Consortium</p> <p>Worked with the American Library Association (ALA) to follow-up on 2018 national E-Book Summit. Provided continued leadership to ASGCLA interest group on consortial e-book platforms.</p> <p>Provided information to help members speak out against Macmillan Publishers’ embargo on library e-books. Provided information on other e-book publisher actions that negatively impacted libraries and publicized resources to help libraries speak out against these actions.</p> <p>Continued to participate in and support the Soon to Be Famous Illinois Author project to promote and encourage self-publishing</p>
<p>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</p>	<p>Continued to offer a variety of cooperative purchasing offers/discounts to meet member needs. Expanded number of offers, including adding offers to help members with pandemic-related challenges. RAILS saved members over \$1,000,000 through our deals/discounts in FY 2020.</p> <p>New offers introduced in FY 2020 included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burbio.com free community engagement calendar • ConverSight LIBRO Curbside Pick Up • Variety of EBSCO products • HF Group AcmeBinding • Hoonuit • OpenGov • PressReader for Libraries • RBdigital products • READsquared • Swank Movie Licensing USA – in response to numerous member requests in FY 2019 • Team One Discount on PPE Products • Transparent Language Online • Unique Curbside Communicator Discount <p>Continued providing scholarships to RAILS libraries to offer online high school diplomas to their communities through the Gale Career Online High School group purchase offer - 36 scholarships were awarded to students who started the program in FY 2020 and 24 students received diplomas</p> <p>Responded to member input on desired discounts/group purchases and implemented new offerings as appropriate</p> <p>Revised the Deals & Discounts page on the RAILS website to create a more user-friendly, streamlined experience for members</p>

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	Promoted the ISL Try-It! Illinois database trial to RAILS members
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	<p>Encouraged use of RAILS mailing lists/online forums. Established new mailing lists/forums as needed, including lists on: Census 2020; Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI); and Electronic Content</p> <p>Publicized existing networking groups. Assisted in the formation of new networking groups as needed, including: OMNI Overdrive Consortia, Preschool Partnerships, and the School Facilitators Networking Group.</p> <p>Scheduled 15 RAILS Online Roundtables (networking events) in which more than 650 people attended. Increased number of roundtables offered after the pandemic started. Topics covered included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Libraries & Facebook Live” – 68 attendees • “Hosting an Online Author Visit” - 23 attendees • “Shaping a Library Podcast” - 21 attendees • “Creating, Implementing, and Assessing Virtual Programs” - 139 attendees • “School Library Tech Tips” – targeted at schools moving learning online during the pandemic - 24 attendees • Co-hosted “Spark and Get Fired Up” online networking event with IACRL – 93 attendees • Co-hosted roundtable with AISLE on public and school library collaborations for summer reading – 62 attendees <p>Implemented weekly RAILS Online Water Cooler drop-in virtual networking events to help members stay connected with other RAILS colleagues during COVID-19. Held a total of 15 water cooler sessions.</p> <p>In response to requests from RAILS networking groups, began offering Zoom licenses to groups that met on a regular basis. By the end of FY 2020, eight networking groups had received Zoom licenses through RAILS.</p>
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	<p>Held a “member meetup” in-person member networking event for staff from all types of libraries with 11 attendees. Transitioned all member networking events online during the pandemic.</p> <p>Offered networking opportunities targeted specifically at staff from academic, school, and special libraries, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special library networking event at Deere & Co. in Moline, planned in conjunction with the Illinois and Iowa chapters of the Special Libraries Association - 30 people participated • School library networking event at Granite City Brewery in East Peoria – eight people participated

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosted event at American Association of School Librarians (AASL) conference in Kentucky. Staff from all Illinois libraries were invited. Approximately 30 school library staff members attended. • Co-hosted online professional development/networking opportunity for academic library staff with IACRL. Over 100 attendees.

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

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
<p>Help member libraries ensure that current/potential customers are aware of all of the programs/services/resources the library has to offer</p>	<p>Expand Campaign to Help All RAILS Libraries Tell Their Stories</p> <p>Created and regularly updated highly interactive My Library Is... (MLI) campaign website to share toolkits, templates, and other materials. Encouraged members to contribute/share best practices. Website had 27,355 pageviews and 10,072 users in FY 2020.</p> <p>Introduced video starring Nick Offerman and demonstrating why libraries are still needed in the age of the internet. Video was produced in response to numerous member requests for help in conveying this message. Conducted extensive social media and publicity campaign. Release of video resulted in highest one-day pageview total on MLI website. Social media posts reached over 81,000 users. ILA showed the video at legislative meetups.</p> <p>Offered a variety of CE opportunities related to the campaign in response to feedback from RAILS members. Over 1,000 people registered for 14 events. As possible, webinars were recorded and made available permanently on the MLI campaign website for anyone to view. To date, these recordings have been viewed over 700 times.</p> <p>Developed talking points for different types of libraries to use to promote their value. Talking points did not launch until April 27, 2020, yet were among the top ten highest viewed content on the MLI website in FY 2020.</p> <p>Designed Facebook and Instagram ads to publicize talking points. Instagram post garnered over 6,578 impressions. MLI website had one of the highest number of pageviews on the day the ads appeared.</p> <p>Invited all libraries to share talking points, marketing plans, social media posts and other efforts to tell their story via the MLI Facebook Challenge. Over 25 people participated and the event reached over 1,000 people on Facebook.</p>

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	<p>Scheduled networking events for different types of libraries to share best practices related to the MLI campaign, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnered with IACRL to host online roundtable on how academic libraries can promote their value - 30 attendees • Hosted roundtable on social media marketing – 15 attendees • Hosted roundtable on managing the marketing process in libraries – 29 attendees • Hosted roundtable on using library data for advocacy – 13 attendees <p>Revised existing RAILS Partnership grants to focus on awarding grants to projects that help libraries tell their stories and articulate their value. Awarded \$25,120 for seven MLI grant projects involving nine libraries.</p> <p>Revised existing RAILS CE event grants to focus on awarding grants to CE events, workshops, etc. that help libraries tell their stories and articulate their value. Awarded five grants totaling \$12,870.</p> <p>Held “Champions Training” session via Zoom to encourage more participation in the MLI campaign. Approximately 16 people participated and learned more about posting to the campaign website and how to promote the campaign to others.</p> <p>Created new video series based on the Champions training. Each video focuses on a different aspect of the MLI website.</p> <p>Highlighted campaign activities via RAILS communication tools and member encounters</p> <p>Heavily featured campaign at ILA and AISLE conference exhibit booths</p> <p>Presented “Telling Our Story: Articulating Library Value Across Type” program at ILA conference, featuring a panel of librarians from all four types of libraries. Over 50 people attended. Presented similar program at AISLE conference where 30 people attended.</p> <p>Wrote article for December 2019 issue of ILA’s bimonthly magazine highlighting successful strategies RAILS member libraries have used to tell their stories</p> <p>Partnered with other library-related organizations and stakeholders to avoid duplication of efforts</p>

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	<p>Developed additional campaign activities in direct response to member feedback</p>
<p>Help member libraries prove their value to administrative bodies, funders, elected officials, etc.</p>	<p>Collaborated with ILA and IHLS on <i>Bigger Than a Building</i> campaign. Served on ad-hoc team to help develop resources libraries could use to demonstrate how essential libraries are during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.</p> <p>Held two “Communicate to Educate” workshops to give school libraries an opportunity to share ways to communicate the importance of the school librarian to various stakeholders. Shared RAILS school library talking points (see above) with the 30 total participants who attended these sessions.</p> <p>The activities in the previous section also helped RAILS to meet this objective.</p>
<p>Advocate for and help members advocate for all libraries as they face funding and other challenges</p>	<p>Worked with RAILS Board Advocacy Committee to educate the board about issues affecting RAILS and libraries that may require advocacy efforts locally, regionally, or nationally</p> <p>Worked with AISLE and other stakeholders on challenges affecting school libraries. Met regularly with AISLE Board members to plan advocacy initiatives. Topics discussed included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How RAILS and AISLE could work together to promote the My Library Is... campaign and the talking points for school libraries • Results of AISLE survey on school professional development needs and how RAILS could help via our CE offerings • Collecting data on how many school districts in Illinois have a library and how many have a full-time certified librarian • Developing a school leader collaborative and identifying administrators who support school libraries <p>Helped libraries take advantage of and deal with the challenges of the new Illinois minimum wage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed a library pulse page on the RAILS home page with current information, talking points to use with library decision makers, and other helpful resources • Worked with a financial consultant to provide assistance to libraries in planning their budgets to meet minimum wage increases • Offered CE to help members implement the new minimum wage, including multiple sessions with HR Source to discuss HR/legal aspects, as well as a session with a financial

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	<p>consultant to discuss budget forecasting. The latter included a forecasting tool that was made available to all participants.</p> <p>Continued to work with the ILA Public Policy Committee to discuss upcoming legislation of importance to libraries. Kept RAILS libraries informed of important legislative issues.</p> <p>Worked with ISL and IHLS to plan for possible funding increases in FY 2021. Assisted in the development of a proposal to increase per capita grant funding which was supported by the Secretary of State, the Governor, and was ultimately included in the FY 2021 state budget.</p> <p>Led efforts to submit a proposal to establish statewide funding of online databases for all Illinois library system members. Developed a survey for RAILS libraries to determine database needs, and shared survey with IHLS. ILA adopted proposal as a legislative priority, but it was not funded by the General Assembly. Will resubmit proposal in FY 2021.</p> <p>Provided advocacy alerts as needed via the <i>RAILS E-News</i> and website to help members advocate on important issues</p> <p>Encouraged members to attend ILA legislative meetups and other events to advocate with legislators re the importance of libraries</p>

Strategic Plan Goal Three: *Help libraries be the best they can be*

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
<p>Continue to provide continuing education (CE) to ensure ongoing staff development for all levels of staff at all types of libraries</p>	<p>Offered consulting/CE on resource sharing, library advocacy, management and practice, and other core service areas. (See also other sections of this document for information on CE/consulting for specific core system services). Offered 62 CE events with approximately 6,500 attendees in FY 2020.</p> <p>Scheduled in-person CE events at different member library locations throughout the RAILS area to ensure that as many members as possible had the opportunity to attend</p> <p>Offered access to over 200 recorded webinars via the CE Archives on the RAILS website</p> <p>Continued to offer members access to live and archived webinars through People-Connect Institute (PCI) webinars. Topics included</p>

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	<p>library services, leadership and management, skills development, and technology. Approximately 35 webinars were accessed during FY 2020.</p> <p>Partnered with AISLE to offer CE to engage school library members, including multiple “Communicate to Educate” workshops with instructors Ruth Sheestan and Georgeann Burch</p> <p>Continued to gather member input on CE needs via post-event surveys, responding to requests for training during RAILS member updates and other member events, and direct one-to-one member correspondence. Implemented training in response to member feedback as appropriate.</p> <p>Continued partnership with HR Source to provide CE and discounted membership. In FY 2020, 44 members participated in membership program, with a total savings to participating libraries of over \$26,000.</p> <p>Continued partnership with Ancel Glink to offer statewide FOIA/OMA hotline. The hotline was accessed 87 times during FY 2020 and continues to be utilized by both IHLS and RAILS members.</p> <p>Continued to serve as a sponsor for library-related conferences as possible</p>
<p>Ensure that all libraries are able to offer the best possible service to their community of users</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Certification</p> <p>Worked with members throughout FY 2020 to ensure they meet membership standards</p> <p>Consulted with members on an ongoing basis about certification requirements until ISL suspended certification for FY 2020</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Revised System Membership Standards</p> <p>Worked with ISL on the incremental implementation of revised standards, focusing on standards related to education, collection expenditures, hours open, and bibliographic access or availability of an online catalog. Work will continue in FY 2021.</p> <p>Began making plans with ISL to incorporate new standards into FY 2021 certification process</p> <p>Began discussions with ISL and ILA about oversight and ownership of the standards, including responsibility for compliance and development</p> <p>Presented program at ILA conference on “System Membership Standards as a Pathway to Excellence”</p>

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
<p>Ensure the ongoing education of library leaders and the development of leadership skills for library staff</p>	<p>Made plans to sponsor and help plan/implement Directors University. The traditional in-person event moved online for 2020 due to the pandemic - 54 new public library directors from around the state attended; 30 were from RAILS member libraries.</p> <p>Made plans to sponsor and help plan/implement the Elevate leadership program, including serving on the Elevate Steering Committee. The event was canceled due to the pandemic.</p> <p>Offered CE workshops to help members develop leadership skills, including the four-part Director Essentials series by Kate Hall and Kathy Parker, authors of <i>The Public Library Directors Toolkit</i></p> <p>Continued partnership with United for Libraries to provide statewide online on-demand trustee training</p> <p>Provided in-person trustee training on running a successful board meeting at Bloomington Public Library, River Forest Public Library, and Schaumburg Township District Library</p> <p>Consulted with/attended library board meetings as appropriate to help boards meet legal requirements and develop leadership skills</p>

Strategic Plan Goal Four: *Prepare libraries for the future*

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
<p>Help libraries anticipate, understand and respond to changing social issues and customer needs</p>	<p>Identified/monitored issues and trends affecting RAILS members and provided CE/consulting to help members respond to those issues as describe elsewhere in this document</p> <p>Experimented with Data Consulting Visits as a new training service to offer a hands-on approach to building a data culture at member libraries. Visited Rockford Public Library to discuss how they could better implement data in their work.</p> <p>Established a new section on the RAILS website called the “Library Pulse” to share the latest information on key issues/trends, including RAILS offerings to help members deal with each issue/trend. Specific pulse pages are described elsewhere in this document.</p> <p>Produced regular RAILS <i>Sparks</i> podcasts featuring interviews on current issues/trends affecting libraries of all types</p>

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	<p style="text-align: center;">COVID-19</p> <p>[See Delivery section of this report for additional specific activities related to delivery and COVID-19]</p> <p>RAILS Executive Director served on REALM Project Steering Committee and the Operations Working Group. Helped keep members updated on research on how long the virus remains on library materials. Provided feedback from the field on research priorities.</p> <p>Created COVID-19 Pulse Page to keep members informed of the latest developments with the pandemic, RAILS offerings to help lead members through the pandemic, and other helpful resources</p> <p>Held regular member update sessions via Zoom to keep staff at RAILS libraries updated on the latest COVID-19 developments. Average attendance was 400 – 600 people. A record number of 800 people attended one of the sessions.</p> <p>Came up with idea for “Everything Library Trustees Need to Know during COVID-19” webinar, and invited IHLS and ILA to co-host. Invited all Illinois public library trustees and any interested Illinois library staff to attend. There were over 700 attendees. Made recording available on the COVID-19 Pulse Page on the RAILS website.</p> <p>Surveyed libraries and developed a list and map showing Illinois library closings. Libraries were able to update their closing information as plans changed. Posted list and map to COVID-19 Pulse Page.</p> <p>Developed survey to find out what libraries were doing to respond to the pandemic. Shared results on pulse page to give libraries ideas on activities/services they might implement.</p> <p>Surveyed libraries and compiled a list of the virtual programs and services libraries of all types were offering while their buildings were closed. Posted searchable results on pulse page.</p> <p>Surveyed libraries to identify the essential services they were providing during the pandemic in different categories, including: digital connectivity, communication, food/nutrition, education and childcare, medical/behavioral health, and more. Posted results to pulse page.</p> <p>Compiled guidelines and a list of questions for libraries considering curbside service or partially reopening to help them determine the best course of action</p>

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	<p>In conjunction with the RAILS Makerspace Networking Group, hosted an online roundtable to discuss how libraries could use 3D printing equipment to create shields for healthcare workers - 55 attendees</p> <p>To follow-up on previously mentioned roundtable, collaborated with makerspace group to create a spreadsheet to gather/organize information for libraries interested in making personal protective equipment (PPE) to distribute to local health care providers</p> <p>Hosted special online roundtable to discuss ways libraries are responding to COVID-19 – 187 attendees</p> <p>Provided several opportunities for libraries to keep up with changes in HR and personnel management related to the unique challenges presented by the pandemic. Offered Q&A with HR Source during member updates. Provided targeted programming and posted relevant updates to the pulse page.</p> <p>Offered a series of deals and discounts increasingly important to member libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic, including curbside pickup communication modules, Zoom and phone conferencing, PPE and protective gear, and increased access to e-resources through Biblioboard and eRead Illinois</p> <p>Participated in AISLE roundtable to discuss current issues facing Illinois school librarians during the COVID-19 pandemic and RAILS programs/services available to school library staff while working from home</p> <p>Developed “RAILS Minute” weekly YouTube series. Each brief video featured RAILS’ Executive Director talking about how RAILS was responding to COVID-19 related library issues and other RAILS news.</p> <p>Presented a series of webinars on pandemic related topics, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “COVID-19 and Collection Care” • “COVID-19 and Legal Issues for Public Libraries” • “Virtual Programming on the Fly” • “PPE Use for Library Staff” • “Trend Scanning During the Pandemic” • "Coronavirus: Employer Q&A" • "Legal Issues of Staff Reductions" • "Returning to Work" <p style="text-align: center;">Census 2020</p> <p>Submitted a grant application and received a \$775,000 grant from the Pritzker Administration and the Illinois Department of Human Services</p>

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	<p>to encourage full participation in Census 2020, especially in historically Hard-To-Count communities. Hired a Program Manager to lead our “Census 2020: It Counts!” grant activities.</p> <p>Worked with a number of subrecipients throughout the grant period, including both public libraries and county agencies. Switched gears to include more online activities in light of COVID-19, including working with a marketing firm on a social media campaign in different languages.</p> <p>Developed a Census 2020 Pulse Page to keep libraries informed about the latest census information and to share other helpful resources. The pulse page included a toolkit with promotional materials libraries could duplicate to help them “get out the count.”</p> <p>Offered two online roundtables on Census 2020 and invited all Illinois library staff members to attend. Approximately 70 people participated.</p> <p>In response to many requests from our member libraries, created a new email list for library staff to discuss Census 2020 issues</p> <p>Offered CE to help libraries maximize participation in the 2020 Census, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Libraries and the 2020 Census” – over 160 members attended • “Census 2020: Learn what is at Stake!” webinar – 68 attendees <p>Partnered with ISL and other stakeholders to “help get out the count”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">EDI (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion)</p> <p>Began work on an ongoing, internal initiative to teach staff EDI principles and to help eliminate unconscious bias and create a more equitable organization. Contracted with Elisabeth Lindsay-Ryan, a diversity and inclusion professor, trainer, and consultant based in Evanston, to help us with the initiative.</p> <p>Developed EDI Pulse Page to share information with members and to give them an opportunity to share their EDI activities</p> <p>Drafted statement for the RAILS Board’s review/discussion on “RAILS responsibilities to build a better society.” Statement detailed RAILS’ role in supporting libraries as they worked on racial injustice and bias, as well as the importance of examining RAILS itself through our internal EDI initiative.</p> <p>Began work on the development of a RAILS Board committee devoted specifically to EDI issues in libraries</p>

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	<p>Offered CE webinars to help promote EDI in libraries, including "Equity in Collections: Audits, Weeding, Purchasing, & More!"</p> <p>In response to member requests, created a mailing list for members to discuss EDI issues</p> <p>Publicized the availability of EDI picture books on BiblioBoard and antiracism resources available through eRead Illinois</p>
<p>Partner with libraries and other stakeholders to foster an educated, engaged, and civil society</p>	<p>Provided CE on customer/community engagement, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "How to Use Social Media to Build Community and Drive Engagement" webinar • "Marking and Community Partnerships" webinar <p>Continued to offer community engagement mailing list to provide a place for members to discuss relevant issues and share best practices</p> <p>Offered CE/consulting to promote core library values such as privacy, intellectual freedom, access to information, and net neutrality, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Wrangling Library Patron Data Privacy" webinar • "Libraries and Data Privacy Laws" webinar
<p>Expand access to library resources and services by addressing issues related to unserved and underserved Illinois residents and continuing to work toward a statewide library card</p>	<p>Continued to work with the RAILS Board Universal Service Committee to explore issues related to the unserved in Illinois</p> <p>Discussed ways to provide library access to children in unserved areas with the Universal Service Committee. Drafted legislation that would enable local public library boards to choose to waive nonresident card fees for minors. General Assembly ultimately adopted the Cards 4 Kids Act sponsored by Senator Laura Murphy. Will resubmit legislation in 2021.</p> <p>Conducted survey of RAILS public libraries to make sure we had accurate information on the scope of the unserved challenge in our area and the services libraries offer to the unserved. Received 240 out of 412 possible responses.</p> <p>Worked with the RAILS attorney to develop an amendment that would remove barriers for non-district public libraries wishing to merge with other libraries to form a district. Presented amendment to ILA Public Policy Committee and worked on recommended revisions. Will resubmit to ILA in FY 2021.</p> <p>Launched a library pulse page with current information and resources on universal service and serving the unserved</p>

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	<p>Discussed universal service/unserved issues at several RAILS member update sessions</p> <p>Consulted with members on issues related to intergovernmental agreements and promoted materials available on the RAILS website</p> <p>Consistently promoted the BiblioBoard platform as a way to deliver e-content to anyone in Illinois, including the unserved</p> <p>Began working with ISL and IHLS on an FAQ to reduce confusion among member libraries on the actual law and rules about unserved residents and nonresident cards. Shared possible FAQ questions with ISL staff person assigned to project for review.</p> <p>Continued to work with ISL, IHLS, and other stakeholders to eliminate barriers to unserved Illinois residents completing the 2020 Census</p>

Strategic Plan Goal Five: *Aim to be the best library system in the country*

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
<p>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</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Member Recruitment</p> <p>Consulted with libraries interested in RAILS membership. Visited potential members (in person or virtually) to ensure they met membership criteria. Worked with RAILS Board on new member recommendations for approval by ISL. (See also section 3.1.1.)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Ensure Accurate Member Information</p> <p>Widely publicized the importance of keeping L2 information up-to-date. Consulted/provided instructions. Promoted availability of L2 Help Desk. Worked on grant project to replace L2 (see below).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">General Member Communication/Engagement</p> <p>Promoted available programs/services to all types of libraries via RAILS communication tools and member encounters</p> <p>Visited libraries throughout the RAILS area, utilizing both in-person and online visits. See section 3.1.4 for specific details.</p> <p>Scheduled regular RAILS member updates to share the latest RAILS news with members. Increased frequency of update sessions during the pandemic as mentioned above.</p>

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	<p>Offered “New Director Welcome” online discussions to promote RAILS programs/services. Held 19 discussions in FY 2020, with directors from 16 public libraries, two academic libraries, and one special library.</p> <p>Exhibited at a variety of library-related conferences and events to engage with members and to promote RAILS programs/services, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AISLE Conference – 169 booth visitors • Health Science Librarians of Illinois (HSLI) Conference • IDEAcon (Illinois Digital Educators Association Conference) – 126 booth visitors, including teachers, administrators, librarians, and technology directors from schools around Illinois • IHLS Annual Member Day – approximately 200 IHLS members attended the event • Illinois Library Association – 592 booth visitors, including library staff and trustees from across Illinois - a new record for ILA booth engagement • Hosted reception at ILA to engage with members – approximately 150 people attended • PrairieCat Users Group Day (PUG Day) • SWAN Expo <p>Planned to exhibit at ALA Annual Conference in Chicago, Reaching Forward, and Reaching Forward South. These events were canceled due to the pandemic.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Multitype Communication/Engagement</p> <p>Conducted seven “School Library Tune-ups” to acquaint schools with RAILS offerings</p> <p>Gave presentations on RAILS resources for schools at the LibraryCon event - part of the Institute Day for Kane and DuPage County school librarians. Over 60 people attended.</p> <p>Had a table at the first-ever Chicago Research Summit at North Park University in Chicago. RAILS sponsored this event for universities and archives in the Chicago region through a CE Event Grant. About 80 people participated and 15 visited the RAILS table.</p> <p>Shared the latest RAILS news at the SLA-Illinois symposium</p> <p>Scheduled additional informational/networking meetings for different library types, including virtual meetings, as described elsewhere in this document</p> <p>Targeted nonpublic members for in-person and virtual library visits</p>

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	<p>Used available type of library mailing lists to communicate system membership benefits</p> <p>Hosted AISLE mailing list</p> <p>Presented programs/sponsored exhibit booths at conferences for different types of libraries as referenced elsewhere in this document</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Social Media Communication/Engagement</p> <p>Expanded/enhanced RAILS’ social media tools (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) to engage members. Grew total Facebook likes by more than 380 (a 30% increase) in FY 2020.</p> <p>Tracked social media metrics and made strategy adjustments as necessary</p> <p>Conducted survey on member library usage of RAILS social media. Over 200 members completed the survey. Results will be used to focus messaging and tailor content to specific platforms.</p> <p>Introduced several new, fun social media activities to help members feel connected to each other despite being “socially distanced” during the pandemic, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly “Show Us Your...” Facebook post – asking participants to post a picture of something related to libraries and books • “This or That” quiz – asking participants 10 questions about different preferences and highlighting one response on our Facebook page each week • Monday Meme – sharing a funny/amusing image about libraries/reading/work life via Facebook
<p>Continuously evaluate RAILS programs and services to ensure that they are having an impact and are helping to create the best possible future for all of our libraries</p>	<p>Integrated data collection into several RAILS projects and activities, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research on services libraries were offering during the pandemic, library openings, etc. • Work on revised system membership standards • Re-evaluating the LLSAP Support Grant program • Analyzing vendor data to help negotiate new deals & discounts • L2 redo project • Delivery – streamlining the collection of volume data from libraries • Aiding the FY 2020 certification process by making existing data about libraries more accessible • Analyzing eRead Illinois data to review usage patterns and inform purchasing decisions

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing usage data via Biblioboard dashboard • Reviewing usage data via Explore More Illinois dashboard • Reviewing usage data via My Library Is... dashboard <p>Solicited member feedback via RAILS communication tools and member encounters as mentioned throughout this document. Implemented changes/additions to RAILS programs/services based on member input as appropriate.</p> <p>Surveyed members on a variety of topics as described elsewhere in this document. Shared survey information with members to help them plan new activities. Used survey feedback to guide RAILS’ decision-making in a number of areas.</p> <p>Conducted research to find a more cost-effective platform to produce member surveys. As a result, RAILS is using several different survey tools depending on functionality. SurveyMonkey and Google Forms are most frequently used.</p>
<p>Recruit and engage a RAILS Board that is representative of the system membership and that creates and models best practices for board leadership</p>	<p>Communicated regularly with RAILS Board through board mailing list and other means</p> <p>Implemented board portal on RAILS website with all of the information RAILS Board members need to perform their board duties in one place</p> <p>Ensured that board was aware of key system services by presenting service of the month reports at monthly meetings</p> <p>Kept board informed about important issues for RAILS and libraries of all types via presenting board development topics at monthly meetings</p> <p>Planned/implemented orientation session at Burr Ridge service center for all new RAILS Board members in July 2019. Invited existing board members to attend for a refresher.</p> <p>Scheduled board meetings in different parts of the RAILS area as possible so the board members could learn about different areas of the system. Held networking sessions prior to the meetings to give members in the area a chance to interact with RAILS staff and board.</p> <p>Continued to promote and encourage diversity on the RAILS Board when recruiting new members</p>

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
<p>Ensure that all aspects of the RAILS organization use and model best practices in all that we do</p>	<p>As the pandemic intensified, pivoted from regular, ongoing operations - delivery in particular - to focus on providing leadership to member libraries. Collaborated with Illinois partners (IHLS, CPL, ILA, ISL), other Midwest systems, IMLS, and the REALM project to identify issues and solutions to providing library services during a pandemic. [As an editorial note, I must say that I am extremely proud of how the RAILS organization shifted focus in all areas to work with member libraries as they coped with the pandemic and made decisions about virtual services, reopening plans, and human resource and financial issues brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. – Deirdre Brennan, RAILS Executive Director]</p> <p>See other sections of this document for activities related to modeling best practices, including modeling innovative ways for members to share resources (BiblioBoard, SimplyE, Find More Illinois, Explore More Illinois, etc.); modeling effective ways to tell the library story; modeling effective ways to evaluate the impact of programs/services; etc.</p>
<p>Deliver on the promise of organizational excellence by being agile, innovative, future-oriented, and member-focused</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Support & Develop RAILS Staff</p> <p>Recruited RAILS staff as needed to meet roles specified in administrative rules and to support strategic plan goals and objectives</p> <p>Finalized revised RAILS Employee Handbook</p> <p>Launched internal EDI initiative to eliminate systemic racism and implicit bias in the RAILS organization as described above</p> <p>Encouraged/supported professional development for staff, including attendance at appropriate conferences</p> <p>Investigated the possibility of implementing a staff wellness program. We delayed implementation of such a program due to the pandemic.</p> <p>Conducted an employee benchmarking study in conjunction with HR Source</p> <p>Continued work of RAILS Employee Committee to develop collaborative activities for all staff</p> <p>Planned/implemented annual all-staff in-service day at Illinois Central Community College in East Peoria</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Lead Statewide Efforts to Replace L2</p> <p>Gathered information on L2 needs from all stakeholders, including the Illinois State Library, library system staff, LLSAPs, networking/CE</p>

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	<p>groups, and system member libraries, and consulted with them throughout the project</p> <p>Issued RFP for an L2 replacement platform and partnered with Aten Design Group to design and develop the new platform. RAILS staff also engaged in development work, data cleanup, stakeholder training, and other project tasks.</p> <p>Continuously encouraged members to update their L2 information in preparation for the “new L2,” utilizing a wide variety of RAILS communication tools and strategies</p> <p>Worked with designer on a new logo/branding</p> <p>Communicated with members and all other stakeholders throughout the project</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Maintain Robust Technology Infrastructure</p> <p>Hired developer to meet software development needs associated with RAILS initiatives</p> <p>Replaced GoToMeeting accounts with Zoom to increase member participation in RAILS events</p> <p>Continued providing subsidized conference calling accounts to appropriate RAILS member groups. Extended subsidized conference calling accounts to RAILS libraries to meet remote meeting needs, and began offering Zoom accounts to networking and CE groups.</p>
<p>Engage in innovative projects on a statewide, national, and international level and help RAILS members model these projects for their community of users</p>	<p>Helped to establish the REALM project and participated in Steering Committee and Working Group meetings as referenced above</p> <p>Worked with the ICOLC/OCLC task force to identify issues with OCLC services. Formulated questions and provided/shared data related to pricing disparities.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Grow/Enhance SimplyE Partnership</p> <p>Continued to partner with Massachusetts Library System, New York Public Library, and Minitex on IMLS SimplyE for Consortia grant project</p> <p>Continued to explore costs and development issues related to expanding our efforts to bring SimplyE to RAILS libraries. Adoption of SimplyE in libraries is progressing very slowly because of the refusal of some publishers and vendors to deliver content through SimplyE, as well as app development issues.</p>

Objectives	Activities/Accomplishments
	<p>Attended monthly national SimplyE Council meetings via Zoom. Worked with vendors regarding costs and strategies to implement the program when appropriate.</p> <p>Worked with Pinnacle Consortium to pilot test SimplyE for Consortia</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Grow/Expand Digital Public Library of America</p> <p>Provided ongoing support for the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) and Illinois Digital Heritage Hub, including RAILS Executive Director serving on Illinois Digital Heritage Hub Board</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Other</p> <p>RAILS Director of Technology Services was one of 25 people from around the state appointed to Governor Pritzker's Broadband Advisory Council to help guide statewide broadband expansion</p> <p>RAILS staff attended several national conferences and made presentations about RAILS programs/services.</p> <p>Other statewide/national innovative projects RAILS engaged in during FY 2020 are described elsewhere in this document, including Find More Illinois, Explore More Illinois, BiblioBoard and inkie.org, SimplyE, the My Library Is... campaign, etc.</p>
<p>Provide excellent stewardship of RAILS financial resources to ensure maximum benefit to member libraries, library users, and Illinois taxpayers</p>	<p>Closely monitored RAILS investments and make changes as appropriate</p> <p>Investigated and found efficiencies and cost savings for RAILS operations wherever possible</p> <p>RAILS Director of Finance and Human Resources served as a board member and treasurer of both of the insurance cooperatives to which RAILS belongs – LIMRiCC and LIRA</p> <p>Issued an RFP for audit services and selected a new accounting firm to conduct the audits</p>
<p>Maintain a research and development role to provide leadership and innovation to help members provide the best possible service to their customers</p>	<p>As noted elsewhere in this document, led or participated in a number of national and regional projects related to pandemic response</p> <p>RAILS staff attended a variety of different conferences and educational events in FY 2020, and brought back many ideas to implement at RAILS and/or to share with our members.</p> <p>See other sections of this document for activities related to research and development (SimplyE, LASA/delivery research, etc.)</p>