

13 November 2020

TO: RAILS Board of Directors

FROM: Deirdre Brennan

SUBJECT: Executive Director Report – September, 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

Census 2020

Amy de la Fuente's last day with RAILS will be November 30. Amy did an amazing job on the census project and has been a great colleague and friend for us all at RAILS.

Amy's background and experience has largely been in social services, and she also has a Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Chicago. Pre-pandemic, we had conversations with her about social workers and public libraries and how RAILS might assist libraries in need of social work assistance. Unfortunately, our budget will probably not support any additional programs this year, but we are very happy to have the benefit of her advice and perhaps in the future we can revisit this possible service, which has been asked for by member libraries frequently.

REALM project

REALM released Test 5 and the Literature Review of October 14th. On Tuesday, October 27, RAILS reduced the quarantine time for delivery materials from 7 to 3 days (72 hours). RAILS also continues to monitor the guidance released by the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and other public health agencies. Other than that, the steering committee has not met since the last board meeting. I was interviewed, however, by a staff member at the evaluator firm that IMLS hired, about my experience and impressions of the project.

Delivery report from consultant Greg Pronevitz

Greg is a former system director in Massachusetts. He has a lot of expertise in delivery. He will join us via Zoom to report on his recommendations for the future of our delivery. We will send you a power point a day or so before the meeting.

Baker and Taylor webinar: Impacting Community Outcomes at the State, Consortia and Local Level

On October 26, I was a panelist, along with Wendy Cornelisen, Assistant State Librarian for GA and Kelvin Watson, Executive Director at Broward County, FL, to discuss how innovators at the state, consortia and local level are using digital services to drive partnerships between library, school and broader community. I talked about e-Read, naturally, and the increased use of e-resources in our member libraries during the pandemic. All three states have seen similar increases.

Certification and L2

As we have reported previously, now that the redo of L2 is completed, we have moved into final development of additions to the platform so that library certification can be done using L2 in 2021.

This will be extremely beneficial to our members, as they will not have to navigate among platforms to complete certification, and we will be able to add our questions about library hours, collection development expenditures, administrator education and experience, and the library's plans to add their holdings to a bibliographic database.

Work with libraries of all types to tell the library story

Update on ILA PPC and Advocacy Committee meetings

The ILA Public Policy Committee and the Advocacy Committee met on November 9. ILA Executive Director Diane Foote presented a document that called for ILA, and PPC specifically, to take a broader approach to legislation and advocacy this year, focusing on budget issues and educating legislators about libraries and their value. I certainly support advocacy for library budgets, especially this year when we should expect many financial challenges for libraries. However, I am worried about specific proposals that got a lot of support from RAILS members, specifically the statewide database funding, cards for non-residents under 18, and reducing barriers for public libraries that want to join together to form a library district. These proposals would certainly help library budgets. These proposals came from our RAILS Universal Services Committee and Resource Sharing Committee. You may recall the surveys that we did last year about both topics.

The ILA Advocacy committee discussed further development of train-the-trainer advocacy sessions.

Trustees and advocacy

At previous meetings, board members Tom Stagg and Percy Harris talked about the ILA Trustee Forum and other possible ways to enhance public library trustee advocacy. Tom suggested a trustee networking group or listserv, but when we checked with Julie Tappendorf she had concerns that Trustees using a listserv might violate the Open Meeting Act – by conducting library business electronically - without even realizing it. We really need to increase the number of trustees who are actively involved in advocacy, as well as find more opportunities to provide training and continuing education for them. We are investigating an online trustee roundtable and are exploring how we might organize and manage this. The roundtable meetings could have a CE component, and also an opportunity for participants to talk via chat.

SPARKS Podcast

My most recent podcast was with Lauren Rosenthal, Director at Fox River Valley Public Library District (she is moving to Ela Area Public Library District in January). Lauren has had great success using data to keep the board and the community about library needs.

RAILS *Minute*

Dan Bostrom and I are continuing our RAILS *Minutes* on a bi-weekly basis.

Help libraries be the best they can be

ILA conference in October

As we discussed at the last board meeting, the ILA conference in October was virtual. ILA was pleased with attendance and how the conference went in general, however they did lose some money on it. We were pleased with the attendance and feedback for our programs.

AISLE meetings

We are continuing our monthly meetings with AISLE leadership. We talk about ways that RAILS can support AISLE with training and encourage partnerships with other types of libraries. In our Advocacy committee this week, we talked about partnerships between academic and school libraries to improve students' abilities to do research, but we also noted that without qualified school librarians, it is hard to create these partnerships and do this important work.

Prepare libraries for the future

RAILS, social justice and EDI

EDI committee – We have selected 17 member library staff to serve on this committee, along with board members and ex-officio staff. It is certainly a large committee, but I believe this is called for given that we want, and need, broad representation by library type, geography, job title, - as well as for all equity, diversity and inclusion reasons. We are now working on a first meeting date, in December, and an agenda.

We also had staff training in October, done by our consultant, as well as the second meeting of our Climate Team.

Aim to be the best library system in the country

WiLS – Wisconsin Library Service meeting

As Mary noted in “This Month at RAILS,” we met with staff at WiLS this month. We have been meeting annually with WiLS for a few years now. Previously, we met in person; this year via Zoom, of course. It is a great opportunity to share ideas and find new ways to collaborate. They have a new director, Jennifer Chamberlain. We learned today about WiLS work with libraries on strategic planning, and we talked with them about our EDI initiative. I find these meetings particularly useful because we share a border with WiLS and we always learn from each other. There are fewer and fewer systems in the US, so it’s great having one so close that we can confer with. WiLS has recently hired a data analyst and Grant has met with her also.

AETNA – new health insurance provider

Our health insurance cooperative, LIMRiCC, has made the decision to move coverage from Blue Cross/Blue Shield to AETNA. We agree with this decision because it means smaller increases in premiums and the AETNA coverage is excellent. There are however, some situations where specialists that some staff members depend on are not part of the AETNA network. We, and LIMRiCC are doing everything we can to persuade these doctors to join AETNA.

November Board development topic – Halle Cox – special libraries: trends and challenges

Looking forward to December & January

There will not be a board meeting in December.

The January board meeting will be on January 15 and for the board development topic I will talk about advocating for systems and libraries and opportunities for RAILS Board members to advocate and possible talking points.

This Month at RAILS – November 2020

Promoting/Supporting/Expanding Resource Sharing

Leading/Working with Libraries to Expand Resource Sharing

WiLS & RAILS Meet-Up

On November 10, RAILS had our annual meeting with colleagues at [WiLS](#) (formerly Wisconsin Library Services). These meetings provide a great opportunity for both library systems to share updates and insights on services provided to members, and to exchange ideas and best practices. Usually we meet in person; this year's meeting was held via Zoom.

RAILS shared news about our EDI initiatives and WiLS discussed strategic planning services. There were also breakout/small group discussions on cooperative purchasing and library grants, consulting and data services, CE and EDI, and e-book consortia.

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

RAILS Awarded E-Book Grant from Illinois State Library

RAILS applied for and received a \$125,000 grant offered through the Illinois State Library to purchase e-books of interest to K-12 students for the [eRead Illinois](#) platform. In addition to the many library partners already participating, over 50 school libraries have joined eRead since the start of the pandemic. This grant will help us improve offerings to students and children in need of remote learning opportunities. Project spending will begin December 1.

Other eRead Illinois News

RAILS continues to support and onboard new members to [eRead Illinois Axis 360](#). We added 10 more member libraries in the last month.

Explore More Illinois Update



Although the [Explore More Illinois](#) cultural pass program is still suspended due to COVID-19, we continue to add libraries in preparation for the relaunch when our attractions are ready. Currently, 318 libraries (281 RAILS, 37 IHLS) are enrolled. We also made modifications to the website this month for easier access and readability.

Soon to Be Famous Illinois Author Project Update

RAILS continues to partner with/support the [Soon to Be Famous Illinois Author Project](#) (STBF) to promote and encourage self-publishing and to expand access to a wider variety of resources for Illinois residents. Recent activities include:

soon to
be famous™
↑ Illinois Author
Project

- Over the last few months, we have been streaming “Pandemic Prose” discussions with winning STBF authors via RAILS Facebook Live.
- The third year of the STBF Manuscript Contest is underway. Submissions are in and judging will begin soon, with the announcement of the winner in early 2021.
- STBF is starting a Spanish language version of the project and is now seeking fluent Spanish speakers for judging.
- On November 6, STBF announced the second YA winner and seventh adult winner for the original contest. *The Secret Journal: God Stones, Book 1* by Otto Schafer won for YA fiction. In validation of the success of the manuscript project, Hollie Smurthwaite, the 2019 manuscript winner, went on to win this year’s adult fiction category for her book *The Color of Trauma*.

Providing Greater Purchasing Power

Growth in Use of RAILS HR Source Discount Membership Program

RAILS offers a discounted membership/training program with HR Source that includes continuing education opportunities for all RAILS members, as well as discounted membership rates for public libraries with an annual operating budget under \$1,000,000.

As the FY 2021 registration period for the program comes to a close, 65 RAILS members have joined or renewed their subscriptions. This represents an increase of approximately 20% over last year. More information on the program is included in the list of Offers for RAILS Libraries on our [Deals & Discounts](#) web page.

Gale Career Online High School (COHS) Program

More than 1.1 million or 11% of Illinois adult residents do not have a high school diploma. COHS is an 18-credit, vocation-based high school completion program that enables libraries to offer adult learners accredited high school diplomas along with career certificates in one of 10 high-demand employment fields.

Gale provides extensive training, implementation, and student recruitment support, and this is paid for by RAILS. We are currently updating COHS documentation, including procedures for libraries accepting out-of-district students and the list of RAILS scholarship recipients.

Other RAILS Deals & Discounts News

RAILS has discounted pricing for a new resource, Gale Engage, a tool for targeted outreach. We also renegotiated terms for established Gale resources, which saved current member library participants \$8,300 in renewal costs. Communico negotiations resulted in savings or added value of up to \$76,000 for current subscribers.

About 50 RAILS member libraries attended webinars highlighting advantageously priced resources, including Gale Engage/Analytics and Communico.

Leila Heath, RAILS Library Resources and Programs Manager, presented the latest information about RAILS deals & discounts at the October 19 RAILS [Board Consortia Committee](#) meeting.

Visit the [Deals & Discounts](#) page on the RAILS website for information about all of RAILS offers.

Building Collaborative Relationships & Fostering Networking

RAILS Helps Form New BIPOC Networking Group in Response to Member Feedback

Library workers who identify as Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color have a new networking group to foster connections, share resources, and discuss specific experiences in a safe, welcome, and open space. The BIPOC Library Workers group will meet virtually every other month for two hours via Zoom. For more information, see [the group listing in the RAILS networking directory](#).

RAILS Online Roundtables

RAILS holds regular online roundtables via Zoom to help members share best practices on topics of interest. All [roundtables are archived](#) for later viewing.

November/December roundtables

- Approaches to Genrefication, held November 19. Three libraries discussed their approaches to replacing the Dewey Decimal Classification system.
- [Easy ILL for School Libraries](#), Wednesday, December 9, 4–5 p.m. RAILS Technology Special Projects Coordinator Eric Bain will talk about Find More Illinois, the RAILS program that allows students to search multiple Illinois library catalogs at once.

Telling the Library Story

Helping Members Tell Their Story



RAILS Offers Grants to Help School Libraries Promote Their Value

RAILS is offering up to ten \$1,000 [My Library Is... Grants for School Libraries](#) to help them promote their value and tell their stories in a more impactful way. We sought input from our AISLE Board colleagues in developing this program to ensure that school libraries would be able to meet grant requirements. AISLE will also help us promote the grants to RAILS school libraries.

School libraries can choose to work collaboratively (with other libraries, organizations, etc.) or alone. We are looking for creative approaches that emphasize some aspect of marketing, promotion, storytelling, and/or advocacy. Examples could include (but are not limited to):

- Designing printed material to promote the value of the school library
- Planning a coordinated campaign using various types of media (print, email, social media, etc.)
- Creating a video, podcast, or other form of multimedia promotion

In addition to a written application, school libraries may submit a video description of their project. Applications are due Friday, January 15, 2021. **We ask RAILS Board members to help us spread the word about this grant opportunity to any RAILS school library colleagues you know!**

New My Library Is... Blog Posts

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

- A [guest post](#) from Eti Berland, Youth and Teen Services Librarian at Lincolnwood Public Library, about the community's Junior Justice League club's "Get Out the Vote Project" and how the library partnered with the village to help make this a successful in-person and virtual program.
- A [post](#) about RAILS' presentation on "Effective Library Marketing Campaigns" at the 2020 ILA Annual Conference, featuring Dan Bostrom, RAILS Member Engagement Manager; Burgundy Hill from Quincy Public Library; and Ann Reeves from Eureka Public Library District. The post includes a YouTube link to the presentation.

Advocating for Libraries

AISLE/RAILS/IHLS Meet to Help Support School Libraries

On November 2, RAILS staff met with colleagues from the [Association of Illinois School Library Educators](#) (AISLE) and the Illinois Heartland Library System. Discussions focused on helping school libraries during the pandemic; RAILS' My Library Is... campaign, including [talking points](#) and [grants for schools](#); and other possible advocacy initiatives. We have scheduled monthly meetings for the remainder of the school year.

Helping Libraries Be the Best They Can Be

Ensuring Ongoing Library Staff Development

Recent RAILS CE Highlights

RAILS' "Managing Meetings – the Virtual Meeting Experience and Beyond" interactive online workshop was one of our most well-received trainings during October. John Newton, HR professional and professor, led the workshop. John has previously conducted sessions for RAILS on facilitation, succession planning, harassment prevention, and other topics. The October workshop provided guidance on navigating the virtual meeting environment along with some tips on managing available technologies. Due to high member demand, a second session was added for November 19.

Upcoming RAILS CE Highlights

Upcoming RAILS CE events include:

- ["Compliance with the Open Meetings Act \(OMA\)"](#) webinar, Tuesday, December 8, 10:00-11:30 a.m.
- Webinar offered in partnership with the Adult Reading Round Table on ["Diversity Audits for Library Collections,"](#) Wednesday, December 9, 2 – 3 p.m.

Aiming to Be the Best Library System

Member Communication/Engagement

RAILS Board Members Invited to Attend December 8 Member Update

The next RAILS member update will be Tuesday, December 8, from 1:30 – 3:30 p.m., via Zoom. Greg McCormick from the Illinois State Library will discuss the public library per grant application, the Cards for Kids legislation, and the 2021 annual library certification process.

There will also be an update on the REALM study and RAILS' three-day quarantine period, the latest results from our survey on library reopening plans, information on RAILS EDI efforts, a demo of the new statewide Library Directory & Learning Calendar (L2), an update on our My Library Is... campaign, and more. Participants will also be able to share what is happening at their libraries. [View agenda](#). Register in advance using [this link](#), and you will be sent details on how to join the Zoom meeting.

RAILS at AISLE Conference, November 5 - 14

RAILS hosted a virtual booth at the 2020 AISLE Conference with information about RAILS programs/services especially for schools. RAILS E-content Specialist Anna Behm and Member Engagement Manager Dan Bostrom also hosted a demo presentation highlighting all we have to

offer our school libraries. We do not yet have any data on the number of visitors to our virtual booth.

RAILS Illinois Library Association Booth Recap

RAILS had 236 unique visitors to our ILA virtual booth. Though this is not close to the number of visitors we usually attract in person (last year we had a record 592 visitors), we considered it successful for the online environment.

Booth visitors were invited to indicate specific RAILS programs/services they would like more information on. CE and trustee training were the areas mentioned most often, and there was also interest in the *RAILS E-News*, RAILS e-resources, the My Library Is... campaign, networking opportunities, Explore More Illinois, and deals & discounts. RAILS staff are following up on these requests.

RAILS Staff News

Virtual Training Opportunities for RAILS Staff

In lieu of an in-person RAILS staff development day this year, the staff development planning committee is offering virtual learning opportunities for RAILS staff during the fall months. Two recent opportunities included a webinar on office safety and ergonomics and a presentation from staff at Princeton Public Library and Kishwaukee Community College Library describing how their library services have evolved during the pandemic.

RAILS Staff at Virtual Conferences

Mary Witt, Marketing & Communications Director, attended the Content Marketing World 2020 conference in October. Email marketing (including e-newsletters and email lists) was a big area of focus, as email is the only place where people, not algorithms are in control. Customers also opt-in to receive your content, so you have a captive audience. There was also an emphasis on giving people added content that will help them navigate today's uncertain times, as RAILS does with our pulse pages.

Nicole Zimmermann, Marketing & PR Specialist, attended the Library Marketing & Communications Conference in early November. Many sessions focused on current challenges, including COVID-19 and racial justice.

Several RAILS staff will attend the December [Research Institute for Public Libraries](#) (RIPL). RAILS is sponsoring this conference and our staff can attend programs without charge. Sessions focus on data and evaluating the impact of library programs and services. Our friends from LASA (Laboratory for Applied Spatial Analysis) will present a program on Geographic Information Systems (GIS). They will also discuss their work with RAILS in studying delivery frequency and the location/number of delivery hubs.