

19 February 2021

TO: RAILS Board of Directors

FROM: Deirdre Brennan

SUBJECT: Executive Director Report – February, 2021

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

Quarantine changes

We have continued to monitor changes and advances in the science and data around COVID-19 transmission. Members have asked, at meetings and in emails, if and when we planned to reduce our quarantine time. RAILS staff have agreed that 24 hours is now best practice (see [relevant documents](#) on the RAILS pulse page). We met via Zoom with Greg McCormick, Leslie Bednar, Anne Craig and other staff to discuss potential changes. IHLS has announced they are reducing their quarantine to 48 hours, but RAILS is moving to 24 hours on February 24.

School library data

We have been talking with AISLE and the state library about the lack of data about Illinois school libraries. This is a longstanding problem, made worse by the pandemic. We also were contacted by Keith Curry Lance, a noted library data analyst, and informed that he is working on a national [study](#) of the current state of school libraries. Half of the data missing, nationwide, is from Illinois. I will explain more at the meeting, but I think it is a real priority now to get to the bottom of this situation. Without a good understanding of the state of school libraries - staff, budgets, collections, facilities - we cannot adequately serve them nor advocate for them.

SWAN board meeting

On January 22, Paul Mills, Anne Slaughter, Monica Harris and I met with the SWAN board to discuss their concerns and questions about the LLSAP funding formula. Included in this report is a document that shows the funding supplied by RAILS to all of the consortia/LLSAPs for the past several years. In 2018, we converted what had been a very subjective and historically based funding mechanism into a grant program with a funding formula based on objective, measurable data to ensure that all LLSAPs are treated equitably. The formula looks at such items as resource sharing data, multitype membership, member library collection budgets and operating budgets/ability to pay, as a way to assist less well funded consortia. At the same time, we directly

encouraged LLSAPs to develop financial sustainability plans and to work on becoming less financially dependent on RAILS in case system funding is cut. We did this during the time that the RAILS budget was only 67% funded for two years. Support for the LLSAPs is a major part of our budget, as it should be; they do a large percentage of the frontline work of resource sharing. We will discuss this more at the meeting so we can provide more historical and fiscal background. It is important that the board have a good understanding of our financial support of the LLSAPs and why we do it the way we do.

Statewide database funding

At the Universal Service Committee, strong support was expressed by committee members (including board members) for seeking legislative and State Library support in next year's budget for statewide database access. This topic is on our board agenda and relevant documents are included in the packet.

Member update

We had another excellent member update, with attendance of almost 300 people. The major topics were changes to the administrative rules related to non-resident cards, a demonstration of the new certification form and vaccination for library workers.

Work with libraries of all types to tell the library story

ILA Legislative Meetups

RAILS staff and board members have attended all of the meetups that have occurred so far. The presentations have been excellent, with lots of examples of libraries serving their communities in innovative and important ways throughout the pandemic. Many of the stories came from RAILS libraries and via our *My Library Is* website. The legislators have also been extremely supportive of libraries and somewhat surprisingly already knowledgeable about what libraries have been experiencing and doing during the pandemic. Apparently they got phone calls when the libraries were closed!

Podcast

Our most recent podcast was with the Director and Marketing Director of the Quincy Public Library District, Kathleen Helsabeck and Burgundy Hill. They have done amazing work in publicizing the damage of possible budget cuts and a campaign to have patrons attend city council meetings and explain the value of the library to them and their families, personally.

Help libraries be the best they can be

Certification

Every year, all members of the library systems in Illinois are required to complete a certification process. Certification was suspended last year because of the pandemic. This year, there are changes to the process that we think will be very beneficial to members.

- Certification will be done on L2, not on a separate platform with separate login. This was a change requested by libraries.
- The timeline is different this year to accommodate additional development of L2. It will begin on February 15 and end on May 15.
- Certification for RAILS members will include additional questions for public libraries **only** that were developed as part of our standards work. These questions are about collection expenditures, hours open and educational level of the director.

These additional questions will add to our understanding of our member libraries and help us serve them better. The State Library has also expanded their per capita grant application this year to provide more complete information about public libraries.

These questions are informational only! There will be no impact on system membership.

Prepare libraries for the future

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

On February 18, we held our second meeting of the RAILS Board Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee. We had an excellent and productive discussion of priorities for the committee and training needs for committee members.

Universal Service

The committee met on February 5 for the first time since November 2019. It was an excellent meeting. We reviewed all of the changes in administrative rules related to non-residents, talked about pursuing statewide database funding and had a great conversation about the role of community colleges. Gail Bush is on the board of Oakton Community College and Jennifer McIntosh of COD and our board are both on the committee, which is extremely helpful.

Vaccines for library workers

We have been working with ILA, the state library and member libraries to advocate for inclusion of library workers into Phase 1(b) or (c) for vaccination. We have talked with members who have also worked with their local and county health departments to include library staff. We do not expect any statewide guidance or designation; it's very much a local or county decision. But we all keep trying! Please note that the [CDC does have library staff in 1\(c\)](#).

Aim to be the best library system in the country

Board engagement

Thanks to all of you who have completed the survey so far. We will continue our discussion of engagement at the February meeting.

OSHA complaint and response

We received a letter from the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) notifying us that a complaint had been filed against our East Peoria site about failure to observe and enforce appropriate health and safety concerns specifically related to COVID-19. The complaint and our response are in the packet. We do not anticipate any further action on OSHA's part. We were, and are, following every requirement and in some cases going beyond.

Nominating Committee

It is time to appoint a nominating committee for the board election. We are seeking members in order to have a diverse committee that will be able to recruit diverse candidates. We also have ideas to improve our recruitment.

This Month at RAILS – February 2021

RAILS Board members – please remember to complete our board engagement and communication survey at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/685MD9L>. You can comment on this report, as well as a variety of other RAILS activities and tools designed to make your time on the board as rewarding as possible. All feedback welcome. Thank you!

Promoting/Supporting/Expanding Resource Sharing

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

RAILS E-Book Grant Update

Last fall, RAILS received a \$125,000 [grant award](#) through the Illinois State Library (ISL) to purchase e-books and audiobooks for K-12 users for our [eRead Illinois](#) shared collection. Our expenditures thus far are on track with the spending plan submitted to ISL. Spending will continue on a monthly basis through May.

Grant Expenditures through January 31, 2021

Item	Number of Items Purchased	Money Spent
E-Books	1,144	\$25,562
Audiobooks	311	\$15,219
Totals	1,455	\$40,781

We've had several suggestions from member libraries for K-12 titles to purchase with grant funds and continue to encourage them to [recommend titles](#).

RAILS Vendor Privacy Policy Pilot Project Update

About 20 RAILS public libraries have added their vendor/e-resource information to our [Vendor Privacy Policy web page](#), which debuted in January. The page contains links to privacy policies for third-party vendors who provide e-resources to public libraries. Libraries can easily create a customized list with links to their resources.

We're encouraging all RAILS public libraries to add their library's information to make this tool as comprehensive and useful as possible.

eRead Illinois Update

RAILS is developing a dashboard to help public libraries retrieve statistics on the number of e-books and audiobooks in [eRead Illinois](#) for their [Illinois Public Library Annual Report](#) (IPLAR). We will make the dashboard available to our member libraries once it's finalized. [Get a sneak peek here](#).

BiblioBoard Update



THE GREAT GATSBY
F. SCOTT FITZGERALD



[The Great Gatsby](#) is now in the public domain and a part of the “Recovering the Classics” collection in the BiblioBoard Library. It has been viewed about a dozen times since it was added last month.

[The cover](#) is also freely available to Illinois library staff to use for programming and/or promotional purposes.

ALA’s Core E-Books Interest Group Meeting at ALA Midwinter

RAILS staff attended ALA’s [Core E-Books Interest Group](#) meeting in February. This group works to be influential with e-book publishers and vendors to benefit libraries and library users. The meeting included an update on e-book activity around the country, including proposed legislation in different states.

Explore More Illinois Update

We are working with attractions and onboarding libraries in hopes of restarting [Explore More Illinois](#) on April 1. Currently, 323 libraries (282 RAILS, 41 IHLS) participate in our online cultural pass program.



RAILS hosted an ePass networking group meeting on January 19. (ePass is the software used for Explore More Illinois.) Attendees included staff from cultural pass programs in New York City, California, and Portland, Oregon. Participants shared how they were coping with the pandemic and plans for moving forward. The group plans to meet on a quarterly basis.

Providing Greater Purchasing Power

RAILS Offers New Patron Point Discount

RAILS negotiated advantageous pricing for Patron Point, a fully-featured marketing automation platform that connects seamlessly with integrated library systems and other data sources. Patron Point allows libraries to automate their day-to-day customer messaging and enhance their marketing into high-impact targeted campaigns. Currently, several RAILS libraries subscribe to Patron Point.

Swank Group Purchase and Outdoor Movie Showings

RAILS migrated nearly 100 renewing public libraries to the RAILS Swank group purchase in January. Swank extended the group license for an additional year in response to the pandemic. Swank also [approved select titles](#) for outdoor showings to give all subscribing libraries even more flexibility this year as part of the annual license coverage. Libraries with licenses ending after January 1, 2021 will have options to join the next RAILS group renewal.

RAILS Efforts to Gather More Data on Schools

RAILS staff have been working to compile an accurate data set for schools and districts. We will use this information to analyze potential discounts for our school libraries and to set up renewals and pricing for resources such as eRead Illinois.

Career Online High School/Smart Horizons Career Online Education

Smart Horizons Career Online Education (SHCOE) will provide all services for Career Online High School (COHS) by July 31, 2021. SHCOE has provided student training since the inception of the program, while Gale handled the recruitment process and library engagement. RAILS has been working with SHCOE, Gale, and participating libraries to ensure a smooth transition.

In February, RAILS negotiated new pricing for COHS scholarships with SHCOE. The cost was decreased \$200 per scholarship, a 15% savings, making it possible for more libraries to participate. A form to purchase scholarships is available on the RAILS [Deals & Discounts web page](#).

We also hosted the first RAILS COHS networking group meeting on January 28. COHS counterparts shared ideas, and learned more about how libraries promote and develop the program. The group plans to meet quarterly. RAILS will also start a mailing list for the group.

Building Collaborative Relationships & Fostering Networking

Recent RAILS Roundtables

RAILS held three popular online roundtables in late January/early February. Recordings for all three are available via the [RAILS website](#).

Roundtable	Date	Registered	Attended
Trustee Update	January 20	205	150
DEI Programming during a Pandemic	January 26	155	94
Promoting New Titles Virtually for Schools	February 2	91	42

RAILS Helps Launch New Online Programming Networking Group

In January, RAILS helped launch the [RAILS Online Programming Consortium](#). This networking group is open to all RAILS member libraries to encourage collaboration around online programming. The group launched by proposing two upcoming programs with authors Alex Kotlowitz and John Sandford.

RAILS Continues to Connect with Members Virtually

Deirdre Brennan, Dan Bostrom, and Monica Harris continue to make virtual visits to [RAILS networking groups](#) to connect with them during COVID-19, and to ask them about their successes and challenges during the pandemic and what RAILS can do to help.

These visits have produced a lot of great feedback and opportunities to hear our members' success stories. We're sharing many of these stories via the [My Library Is... blog](#), and have also shared them with ILA for use at their statewide legislative meetups.

Groups visited recently include:

- Adult Services Managers of Larger-Sized Public Libraries
- ATLAS/SLAM (Suburban Libraries Administrators)
- Business Interest Group (BIG)
- Central Illinois Regional Children's Librarians
- Children's Librarians' Association of the South Suburbs (CLASS)
- CIRC Roundtable
- Collection Development Librarians
- Genealogy & Local History Librarians
- Heart of Illinois Marketing
- Kankakee Area Libraries
- Librarians Working Together
- Long Distance Libraries
- Managers of Children's and Teens
- Moline Area Libraries Group
- North Suburban Libraries Group
- Peoria Area Librarians
- RAILS Technical Services
- Rural Directors
- School Facilitators
- Small Libraries United
- West of 47 Networking Group

Helping Members Get to Know Each Other via Facebook

In April 2020, RAILS began asking 10 "this or that" questions via Facebook to give everyone a chance to get to know members from different types of libraries. The program was so successful, we're running it again with 10 new questions. All RAILS library staff are [invited to take a brief "this or that" survey](#) and to submit a headshot. Each week, on Thursday morning, RAILS will feature a new library staffer.

Telling the Library Story

Helping Members Tell Their Story



Celebrating the Anniversary of the *Elders of the Internet* Video

To help celebrate Library Lovers Day (February 14) and the first anniversary of the launch of our [Elders of the Internet](#) video featuring Nick Offerman, RAILS relaunched the video with a new media kit to help libraries answer that frequently asked question: "Why do we need libraries when we have the internet/Google?"



The [media kit](#) includes:

- Links to three different versions of the video
- List of 25 ways libraries can promote the video
- Sample social media posts
- Sample copy for library print or e-newsletters
- [Talking points](#) library staff can use when asked the "why libraries?" question

Meeting with IHLS Staff to Discuss My Library Is... Partnership

On February 16, the RAILS Communications Team met with IHLS staff to discuss ways we could partner on the My Library Is... campaign. We will continue to discuss ways we can encourage libraries of all types throughout Illinois to tell their stories without duplicating efforts.

My Library Is... Blog Continues to Grow in Popularity

More RAILS members are contributing to the My Library Is... blog and sharing their stories of how their library is making a difference during the pandemic and beyond. Recent posts include:

- How [Poplar Creek Public Library District's](#) knitting and crochet group helped "stitch" the community together by making hundreds of items for those in need
- How [Carol Stream Public Library's](#) "Binge Box" service helped build relationships and boost use of the library collection at the same time
- How [Warrenville Public Library](#) took their fledgling adult craft program online and made kits with all necessary supplies available via curbside pickup
- How [Paw Paw Public Library District](#) created "Ag in the Classroom" bags to provide hands-on activities for kids who were "computered out" during the pandemic
- How [Lisle Library District](#) continues to "grow" their seed library and related programming
- How [Flossmoor Public Library](#) adapted its services to the pandemic through the use of hotspots, Kanopy, STEM and Grab & Go Kits, and more

- How the [University Libraries at Northern Illinois University](#) implemented a parcel locker system to deliver materials safely during the pandemic
- How [Henderson County Public Library District](#) celebrated 20 years of building/ decorating gingerbread houses and continued the tradition during the pandemic
- How [Glenview Public Library](#) continued to reach patrons when their doors were closed through parking lot wi-fi and checking out laptops
- How [Illinois Prairie District Public Library](#) adapted their popular “Date Night at the Library” program to the pandemic to continue to promote library offerings

Advocating for Libraries

RAILS’ Partnership with AISLE to Support School Libraries

RAILS continued our monthly meetings with AISLE and IHLS, and welcomed representatives from ILA, including Executive Director Diane Foote. The group also met with library data specialist Keith Curry Lance and Illinois State Library Director Greg McCormick to discuss the need for more data about Illinois school libraries and librarians.

RAILS is also partnering with AISLE and IHLS to offer librarians, classroom teachers, and administrators the opportunity to learn more about system e-resources available to educators. On March 4, we will offer “[System E-Content and E-Resources for Illinois Educators](#),” featuring panelists from IHLS and RAILS. PDH credits will be available through AISLE. This event will be recorded and archived for those who can’t attend the live session.

Helping Libraries Be the Best They Can Be

Ensuring Ongoing Library Staff Development

Recent RAILS CE Highlights

Over 250 RAILS members registered to attend the February 15 webinar “Grab & Go Library Programs,” which explored the various ways libraries have reimagined their services to young people through the use of grab & go kits. Kits themed around STEM, early literacy, teen relaxation, and fandom were featured. A panel of librarians from Lincolnwood Public Library, Homewood Public Library, Shepard Middle School, and the Public Library of Brookline (Massachusetts) participated.

Board members interested in viewing the recording of this event can find it on the [RAILS CE Archives](#).

Upcoming RAILS CE Highlights

Upcoming CE in March includes webinars on: [database searching](#) (March 2), [salary benchmarking](#) (March 10), and a three-part grant writing series (beginning March 25).

Helping All Libraries Provide the Best Possible Service

Annual Library Certification Process Now Open

The annual library [online certification process](#) will run from February 15 to May 15, 2021. All RAILS members must complete certification to continue to receive RAILS services and Illinois State Library (ISL) grants.

Certification will be done through L2 this year, and libraries will no longer need a separate login to certify. Certification for RAILS members will include additional questions for public libraries only about collection expenditures, hours open, and the educational level of the director. RAILS added these questions to aid our understanding of our members and help us serve them better. Answers to these additional questions will not affect a library's eligibility for system services or ISL grants in any way.

Developing Library Leaders

Elevate Illinois Libraries Leadership Program

Registration is now open for the [2021 Elevate Illinois Libraries Leadership Program](#) on Saturday, April 24, from 8:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., via Zoom. Elevate is a statewide library initiative to recruit and nurture future Illinois library leaders and is a collaborative effort between RAILS, IHLS, ISL, and ILA.



The half-day online workshop will focus on EDI and feature speaker Mark Puente, Associate Professor and Associate Dean for Organizational Development, Diversity, and Inclusion at the Purdue University Libraries and School of Information Studies. Staff/trustees from any library type are invited to submit an application to attend. The application deadline is March 5.

Preparing Libraries for the Future

Helping Libraries Respond to Change

New Data in Libraries Pulse Page

The RAILS [Data in Libraries Pulse Page](#) went live on January 26. We created the page to meet the growing need for libraries to have easier access to useful data, better understand how to

use their data, and have a central place to find RAILS data-related services and resources. We expect to regularly update the page and will also add resources based on member feedback.

Second Round of EDI Training for RAILS Staff

RAILS EDI Consultant Elizabeth Lindsay-Ryan will present the second EDI training session for all RAILS staff on March 3 and April 7. The half-day mandatory training will build upon the staff training last fall and explore gender socialization and messages and other topics.

Helping the Unserved/Underserved

New Information on Cards for Kids Act on Universal Library Service Pulse Page

RAILS members have asked a lot of questions about the recent [Cards for Kids legislation](#), which specifies that K-12 students living in unincorporated areas who are eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches under the National School Lunch Program, shall not be charged a nonresident fee to use the library. In response, RAILS has included a variety of information on the act on our [Universal Library Service: Serving the Unserved Pulse Page](#).

Library staff have also asked what to say when asked why giving “free” library cards to kids/students is a good idea, or to justify providing additional library services to nonresidents in general. RAILS created [talking points](#) to help meet these needs and posted them on the pulse page as well.

We also posted [Library Cards for Underserved and Unserved Minors: FAQ/Best Practices](#). Catherine Yanikoski, Deputy Director, Joliet Public Library, created this document to provide detailed information on the Cards for Kids Act and to answer a number of frequently asked questions.

Aiming to Be the Best Library System

Member Communication/Engagement

January Member Update Recording Available

The [recording from the January 28 RAILS Member Update](#) is available on the RAILS YouTube page. Topics included 2021 certification, a report from the Illinois State Library on the Cards for Kids Act and the Public Library Per Capita Grant, attorney Julie Tappendorf of Ancel Glink discussing library personnel policies and the COVID-19 vaccine, efforts to prioritize vaccines for library staff, the RAILS e-book grant, and much more.

Evaluating the Impact of RAILS Programs/Services

RAILS E-News Evaluation Project

RAILS Communications and Data staff are evaluating the performance and format of our weekly *E-News* to determine areas for possible improvement. We are currently digging into MailChimp usage data to uncover patterns and insights, and also plan to create and send a survey to members asking for their feedback. The last time the *E-News* was evaluated was in 2017. There are currently approximately 6,074 subscribers.

RAILS Staff News

RAILS Staff at American Library Association Midwinter Conference

Several RAILS staff members attended the virtual ALA Midwinter conference (January 22-26). Monica Harris, RAILS Associate Executive Director, attended for the first time as an ALA At-Large Councilor. Council business included discussion of privacy concerns from the Intellectual Freedom Committee and a request to have library workers classified by the CDC as part of group 1b for vaccination.

Monica was also appointed to the ALA CORE Membership Engagement Coordination Committee and will serve through 2022.

Leila Heath, Library Resources & Programs Manager, and Anna Behm, E-Content Specialist, also attended the conference. Anna especially enjoyed “Fortifying Your Catalog for the Next Digital Content Challenge,” which explored the impact of pandemic-related closures on e-content usage in libraries across the country. Anna also enjoyed the author talks and the many discussions about libraries’ EDI efforts.

Leila’s highlights included programs such as “Rising to the Challenge,” which discussed some of the accelerated and new library innovations in response to COVID-19. Leila also found programs discussing inward and outward approaches to data, and the need to consider data neutrality, especially relevant.