

Reaching Across Illinois Library System (RAILS) Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Initiative

RAILS Workplace Climate Team

Emily Fister, Executive Assistant	Deirdre Brennan, Executive Director
Patty Kweram, RSA Member Services Coordinator	Diana Rusch, CE/Consulting Specialist
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Joe Filapek, Director of CE/Consulting	Samantha Daly, Human Resources Generalist
Eric Bain, Technology Special Project Coordinator	Dan Bostrom, Member Engagement Manager

The RAILS Climate Team began meeting in September 2020 and continues to meet on a monthly basis. The primary role of this team is to work with our EDI consultant (Elizabeth “Biz” Lindsay-Ryan) as a brain trust to think critically about the culture and climate of RAILS.

The first step in this process is to evaluate four primary interpersonal relationships. Climate team members are equipped with a toolkit including questions for each relationship that the team explores during our monthly meetings. Additionally, during each meeting the team goes through a “Stop/Start/Continue” activity for each relationship to look critically at the things that are working, not working, and areas to explore initiating. These four relationships are outlined below, along with sample evaluation questions from our toolkit:

- 1. RAILS Staff to RAILS Members**
 - a. What are the obstacles to building relationships with our members?
 - b. What do our members want from RAILS in the area of EDI?
 - c. How are we fostering an environment where everyone feels welcome and included?
- 2. RAILS Staff to Partner Organizations (Vendors, IHLS, ILA, LLSAPs, etc.)**
 - a. Do we consider equity and diversity and strive for varied identities in our selection of collaborators?
 - b. Do interactions between staff and our partners exhibit the same professionalism that we expect in our other relationships?
 - c. How do we communicate expectations for our partners?
- 3. RAILS Staff to RAILS Board**
 - a. How do you attempt to engage board members?
 - b. How does our current board reflect the diversity of our membership?
 - c. What are the current obstacles in having a diverse board?
- 4. RAILS Staff to RAILS Staff**
 - a. Does our staff have appropriate boundaries collaborations, and relationships with each other?
 - b. What internal policies foster inclusivity and respect the many identities of our staff?
 - c. Do all staff feel encouraged to voice concerns about their experiences with equity and inclusion?

After completing this evaluation/inventory phase, the climate team will focus on how to initiate change. This work will center on the following workplace priorities:

- Improve relationships across the organization
- Foster respect for everyone in the organization
- Create equity and consistency across the organization
- Help every constituent across the organization feel welcomed, safe and included so that every employee can realize their fullest potential

RAILS Staff EDI Training

A critical component of the RAILS EDI staff initiative is mandatory training for all employees. Our first half-day training session was held during fall 2020. To accommodate the various schedules across our organization (particularly within our delivery staff), this training was offered on two different dates.

The session served as an introductory training on navigating equity, diversity and inclusion within RAILS. The training included interactive discussions and exercises for staff to explore their own lens and build awareness. The conversation included understanding individual perspective and how it may impact those around us.

Our next mandatory training sessions will be held during March and April 2021. This session will build on the foundational framework of the first training and will begin to explore the concept of gender.

Topics will include:

- Gender Socialization
- Gender Messages
- Communication Norms
- Leadership/Authority
- Conflict
- Healthy Relationships
- Proactive Strategies

RAILS EDI Board Committee

- Dianne Hollister, Committee Chair, RAILS Board Treasurer
- Michael Campbell, RAILS Board President
- Jenna Nemecek-Loise, RAILS Board
- Sarah McHone-Chase, RAILS Board Secretary
- Becky Spratford, RAILS Board
- Megan Ballengee, Heartland Community College
- Victoria Blackmer, Robert R. Jones Public Library
- Cristina Bueno, Deerfield Public Library
- Rosie Camargo, Evanston Public Library

- Edith Craig, St. Charles Public Library
- Nate Gass, Cook Memorial Public Library District
- Amber Hayes, ALA Office of Diversity, Literacy and Outreach
- Emily Kiang, Downers Grove Public Library
- Stephen Koebel, Wilmette Public Library
- Shekinah Lawrence, Elmwood Park Public Library
- Michelle Nielsen Ott, Methodist College
- Kristen Rademacher, Marist High School
- Andrea Robinson, Library of Rush University
- Leora Siegel, Lenhardt Library, Chicago Botanic Garden
- Sarah Steiger, Chicago Public Schools
- Anna Wassenaar, Blue Island Public Library
- Leah White, Skokie Public Library
- Deirdre Brennan (RAILS ex officio)
- Monica Harris (RAILS ex officio)
- Joseph Filapek (RAILS ex officio)

The RAILS EDI Board Committee began meeting in December 2020. At the first meeting the group met with facilitator Elizabeth “Biz” Lindsay-Ryan to discuss an overview of the group, potential pitfalls and challenges, and to review the committee charge and EDI PULSE page. A second meeting is planned for February 18, 2021.

Goal: To provide advice and support for RAILS efforts to create and maintain a more equitable, diverse and inclusive library community where all feel welcome, supported and able to thrive.

Charge: Develop a shared understanding of the nature of systemic racism and bias in libraries and library related organizations and how to combat it; advise the RAILS board and staff about appropriate equity and accountability goals to which RAILS and libraries should aspire and recommend ways to assess progress toward achieving those goals. As part of this charge, the committee will also help to:

- Identify barriers in libraries and the library field and solutions to eliminate them
- Develop ideas and programs to increase awareness about systemic racism and bias among member libraries, staff and boards
- Facilitate system wide discussion about equity, diversity and inclusion