

23 July 2021

**TO: RAILS Board of Directors**

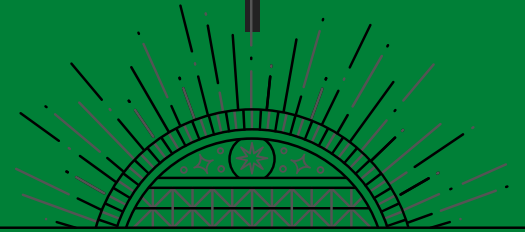
**FROM: Deirdre Brennan**

**SUBJECT: Strategic planning process**

In your packet you will find the overview from Constructive Disruption for our strategic planning process. You will also find a document that lays out the steering committee responsibilities. Stephanie Chase and Cindy Fesemeyer will both be at the board meeting, Stephanie via Zoom and Cindy in person. We will update you on the process and timeline for planning and discuss the makeup of the steering committee.

PROJECT PROPOSAL

# RAILS STRATEGIC PLAN



**CONSTRUCTIVE  
DISRUPTION**

PROPOSED BY  
STEPHANIE CHASE,  
CONSTRUCTIVE  
DISRUPTION, LLC

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# CONSTRUCTIVE DISRUPTION ABOUT US

At Constructive Disruption, we believe a good plan is created in consultation with staff and the community served. When staff contribute to a plan it is more likely to become part of their everyday work life. This may be direct participation in writing the plan, leading sessions with colleagues, collecting community input, consulting in how to operationalize the plan, embracing the mission, presenting to the stakeholders, revising the data collected in order to support the goals in the finished plan — there are a multitude of possibilities. When the member libraries contribute, they're more likely to take ownership of and feel pride in their library system.

## BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS TO PROGRESS

We believe the planning process is strongest when staff leverage their expertise, and take a leadership role in collecting community aspirations. **At Constructive Disruption, our planning processes are built with this collaborative mindset at the heart.**



### **A strengths-based, human-centered approach sets our consultancy work apart.**

Of course, when appropriate, we undertake the role of expert or “play the heavy;” there are certainly times when a message delivered by a consultant will be a message heard.

The main goal of our work is to ensure sustainability by unlocking organizational capacity and providing staff across all levels in the organization the insights and techniques that enable them to successfully carry the work forward. **If you believe your organization's greatest asset is its people, we're the consulting group for you.**



# OUR VIEW ON ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

**Your library system is stronger when it closely reflects the needs and wants of the service population—your member libraries—with those served leading the way.**

Together we will determine the best tools for collecting community opinions. Our approach centers around community aspirational thinking; our menu of community input methodologies and toolkits to shape our engagement questions and activities includes:

- The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)'s **Public Participation Pillars**;
- Harwood Institute tools of engagement, including the **Turning Outward** process;
- A **range of brainstorming methods**, giving ample opportunity for individual and group, verbal and non-verbal, and written and kinesthetic options for contributions. **A particular favorite is the World Cafe method**;
- Principles of **Design Thinking**, including empathy mapping and prototyping;
- **Passive collection**: post-its, dotting, or other individually interactive methods;
- **Asset Based Community Development**;
- **Government Alliance on Race and Equity** (GARE)'s **toolkits**.

Many of these tools are best leveraged when staff are trained in using them and assist in collecting community opinion. This builds leadership within your organization and ties the library system more closely to its member libraries. That said, we also recognize the need to have outside consultants gather public information and are happy to simply do the work ourselves. We bring expertise in one-on-one interviews, facilitated group discussions, person-on-the-street surveys, and traditional survey methods. The tools and methods used for your plan will be decided together.



## OUR VIEW ON ENGAGEMENT DATA & RESEARCH

**Research and the collection of data is an opportunity to move beyond the bias of the status quo. In public service, we often fall prey to serving the customer profile we interact with the most, seeking to continuously improve that customer's experience. Constructive Disruption will help you move beyond that tendency.**

Traditional input, particularly in libraries, typically falls into what we would describe as “more:” more hours, more training, more availability, more resources, etc. It is important to go deeper and engage around what these requests for “more” truly mean.

Our planning processes provide you an opportunity to:

- **Reach out to a potential new partner group**, particularly one that represents a voice not typically reflected;
- **Rigorously examine the gaps** between what collected data shows and what services are actually used and requested;
- **Test what opportunities we are missing** in our volunteer or leadership programs;
- **Seek to understand what implicit “keep out” messages** we are sending, and engaging members in how to turn them into messages of welcome.



# PROJECT TEAM



## STEPHANIE CHASE, FOUNDING PRINCIPAL

With more than twenty years of experience in local and municipal government, serving communities ranging from the small and rural in New England, resort communities, and some of our largest urban centers on both the east and west coasts, Stephanie is an accomplished innovator and change leader with significant experience leading organizational design and effectiveness and community engagement initiatives.

In addition to her leadership roles, Stephanie was the founder of two non-profits, has been active in local government organizations, and currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Public Library Association.



## CINDY FESEMEYER, ENGAGEMENT SPECIALIST

Helping information organizations see the big picture as they strive for equity and social justice is Cindy Fesemyer's passion as the Principal of Fesemyer Consulting, LLC. Community engagement staff trainings, strategic planning, engaged leadership, and keynoting are her areas of expertise. She is employed at the WI State Library as their first Adult and Community Services Consultant. Previously she served seven years as Director of the Columbus Public Library (WI), named a finalist for Library Journal's 2017 Best Small Library in America. She sits on the board of the Public Library Association and is a Trustee for the Madison Public Library.

Librarianship is Cindy's second career. After 14 years managing non-profits, she earned her MLIS from UW-Madison in 2012.

# PROJECT APPROACH

With 2021 marking the 10th anniversary of the creation of RAILS, there is a unique opportunity to engage with members to learn more about what has been valuable and what they hope RAILS will continue to provide in the future, celebrating the successes of the past decade. In this period of celebration and reflection, we can build upon your history and explore the possibilities for the future, using what RAILS learns from this engagement as a starting point for strategic planning work.

The project approach on the following pages outlines a process that will achieve these outcomes:

- Continuous communication and collaboration between Constructive Disruption and RAILS staff;
- Engagement with staff, Board members, stakeholders, and members through formal and informal opportunities;
- Facilitation, including reporting out, of member engagement sessions, held in-person and/or virtually;
- Increased awareness by RAILS members of existing, and potential, services or programs.

In addition to the stated outcomes, our work will be structured to develop specific goals under each of the major initiatives, paving the way for RAILS to develop annual work plans.

It is our priority to ensure the proposed recommendations are realistic, based on staff capacity and available resources.

This scope of work does not include revising the current mission and vision statement, but rather, building on those statements and exploring what needs to happen now to continue to move your work forward into the future.





# PROJECT APPROACH

## PHASE ONE: ENGAGEMENT WITH RAILS' DATA & RAILS STAFF

RAILS has an excellent opportunity to capitalize on its 10th anniversary and engage with members.

As ongoing strong relationships and connections between RAILS and members are crucial, we propose that RAILS staff take these summer months to engage with member libraries, reaching out to supporters, connecting with quieter or disengaged members, and reviewing and selecting data to share with Constructive Disruption.

For example, it may be beneficial to review the questions asked during the last strategic planning round to explore how member attitudes and perceptions have changed. While Constructive Disruption can coordinate and lead this initial member outreach for an additional fee, we believe it will build a stronger foundation if RAILS staff coordinate and lead this work. We recommend holding focus groups or member input sessions or administering a survey, and sharing the data gathered with Constructive Disruption.



### **Throughout the months of July and August, Constructive Disruption will:**

- hold a virtual kick-off meeting with key staff and the proposed staff and member stakeholder group;
- hold two virtual discussion and engagement sessions, one with all RAILS staff and one with the Board of Directors;
- offer up to four hours of planning support for RAILS leadership;
- engage in the review of research, including reviewing the extensive existing data and learning more about RAILS from RAILS staff and members.

# PROJECT APPROACH

## PHASE TWO: ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

**During September and October, Constructive Disruption will:**

- meet with RAILS staff to brainstorm a list of community stakeholders, such as public and community college library staff, county and state officials, organizational partners, and representatives of the Heartland and Chicago Public systems, identifying and remedying demographic gaps;
- hold up to 6 one-on-one or small focus group sessions for members;
- hold two virtual two-hour town halls for all staff, to ensure awareness of the strategic planning process and solicit staff feedback and contributions;
- hold two rounds, of up to four sessions each (for a total of eight engagement opportunities), of virtual "town hall" listening sessions for members;
- biweekly planning support/project check-ins with RAILS leadership;
- Support RAILS staff in developing and implementing frequent passive engagement opportunities.

Engagement methodologies used may include community conversations, 1:1 interviews, and passive engagement activities.



The goals for this portion of the work with member libraries include:

- discovering potential priorities;
- crafting attainable goals;
- developing potential measurements of success, testing the proposed initiatives with member library staff while frequently testing these desired outcomes against previously collected data.

Staff will take part in a number of the community engagement methods in order to 1) collect organizational aspirations and 2) prepare them to be involved in collection of qualitative community data. We encourage staff to participate in data collection as we believe continuity for the community is key. With staff as part of the process, relationships with members will be strengthened.



# PROJECT APPROACH

## PHASE THREE: PREPARE FINAL STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

**During November, December, and January, Constructive Disruption will:**

- hold an engagement session in early November with chosen RAILS stakeholders to finalize strategic initiatives and goals (we propose a virtual, week-long session with two hours of synchronous engagement on both Monday and Friday and up to 4 hours of independent work between);
- continue to support RAILS staff with informal and passive engagement with member libraries;
- prepare the draft of the final report, including:
  - proposed strategic initiatives and supporting goals;
  - a framework for a first year action plan;
  - and additional information on our methodology, such as a listing of participants, and a summary of input received in order to assist RAILS in preparing a final report or overview document;
- biweekly virtual planning support or project check-ins with RAILS leadership.



Constructive Disruption will provide RAILS leadership with the final draft of the plan ahead of the Christmas holiday, in order to give staff time to provide feedback and make changes before the plan is presented to the Board of Directors in January 2022.

With the brainstorming/stakeholder engagement session, we can hold the training in-person at a location of RAILS' choosing over the course of two days, with a half-day of meeting time each day. This will add approximately \$2,000 to the proposed budget for travel expenses.



# PROJECT APPROACH

## TASK FOUR: FOLLOW UP SUPPORT

In preparation for the presentation of the Strategic Plan to the Board of Directors, Constructive Disruption will:

- complete the final report, incorporating RAILS staff feedback;
- offer up to two hours of additional virtual planning support or project check-ins with RAILS leadership;
- attend the January 2022 Board of Directors meeting to present the strategic plan;
- following the Board of Directors meeting, make adjustments to the strategic plan as deemed necessary by RAILS leadership;
- support RAILS leadership in developing an implementation plan.

Following the presentation of the framework to the Board of Directors, Constructive Disruption may be able to work with RAILS leadership to ensure confidence in operationalizing the strategic initiatives, and may be available for additional support in rolling out the implementation and/or in support for the first year of the completed strategic plan.



IT'S NOT JUST  
ABOUT THE  
WRITTEN  
REPORT...LET'S  
BUILD CAPACITY  
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WITHIN STAFF  
TO ENSURE  
SUSTAINABILITY.

# PROJECT TIMELINE

|                                  | Description of Work  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Phase One: July & August         |  |
|                                  | Virtual kick off for RAILS leadership & stakeholder group    |
|                                  | Staff discussion session                                     |
|                                  | Board discussion session                                     |
|                                  | Biweekly check in meetings with RAILS leadership             |
|                                  | Review data provided by RAILS                                |
| Phase Two: September & October   |  |
|                                  | Virtual brainstorming session for member engagement sessions |
|                                  | Staff Town Halls (virtual, two sessions, two hours each)     |
|                                  | Member Town Halls (virtual, 8 sessions, two hours each)      |
|                                  | Biweekly check in meetings with RAILS leadership             |
|                                  | Support and preparation for passive engagement               |
|                                  | Up to six small focus groups/1:1 conversations               |
| Phase Three: November & December |  |
|                                  | Virtual Stakeholder Brainstorming Session                    |
|                                  | Board check in session; review work to date                  |
|                                  | Staff check in session; review work to date                  |
|                                  | Draft strategic plan   |
|                                  | Biweekly check in meetings with RAILS leadership             |
| Phase Four: January              |  |
|                                  | Present plan at January BOD meeting                          |
|                                  | Biweekly check in meetings with RAILS leadership             |
|                                  | Strategic Plan revisions                                     |
|                                  | Present plan to the RAILS staff                              |

# PROJECT COST PROPOSAL

| <b>Description of Work: Direct Member &amp; Staff Engagement</b>                                      | <b>Hours</b> | <b>Cost</b>     |
|---|--------------|-----------------|
| Virtual kick off for RAILS leadership & stakeholder group, preparation and presentation               | 12           | \$1,800         |
| Initial staff and Board discussion sessions, preparation and presentation                             | 16           | \$2,400         |
| Virtual brainstorming session for member engagement sessions, preparation and facilitation            | 6            | \$900           |
| Staff Town Halls (virtual, two sessions, two hours each), preparation, presentation, and facilitation | 9            | \$1,350         |
| Member Town Halls (virtual, 8 sessions, two hours each), preparation, presentation, and facilitation  | 32           | \$4,800         |
| Up to six small focus groups/1:1 conversations  | 9            | \$1,350         |
| Virtual Stakeholder Brainstorming Session   | 32           | \$4,800         |
| Board and staff check in sessions to review work to date, preparation and presentation                | 6            | \$900           |
| Presentation of final plan to Board and RAILS staff, preparation and presentation                     | 12           | \$1,800         |
| <b>Description of Work: Project Management</b>  |              |                 |
| Biweekly check in meetings with RAILS leadership  | 28           | \$4,200         |
| Support and preparation for passive engagement  | 4            | \$600           |
| General Project Management  | 10           | \$1,500         |
| <b>Description of Work: Strategic Plan Development</b>  |              |                 |
| Review data provided by RAILS   | 20           | \$3,000         |
| Draft and revise strategic plan   | 40           | \$6,000         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>236</b>   | <b>\$35,400</b> |



## REFERENCES



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## RAILS Strategic Plan: Steering Committee

As RAILS begins the process of updating its strategic plan, involving staff, member libraries, Board members, and other stakeholders is crucial. While there will be many opportunities for engagement, one of the key avenues is through the work of the Steering Committee.

**The Steering Committee is a working group of 12 to 15 that will be deeply engaged in the work of developing the plan and communicating with colleagues and member libraries.** This group should include no more than two Board members, four staff members (not including the lead for the strategic planning process, Monica Harris), and should strive for representation across library types and geography. If possible, the Steering Committee could have a member library trustee on the roster. Special care should be taken to include representatives from libraries in rural areas serviced by RAILS.

RAILS staff will determine how the membership of the group is developed and the process used for confirming members.

**The Steering Committee is a working committee: participants will need to be able to allot time to the work of the group,** which may be, over the course of the five month process, average approximately 15 hours a month, or 75 to 80 hours total. There will be weeks when there is little to no time requirement, and others, such as when we have member town hall sessions, where participants may be more active. Steering Committee members will play a key role in developing the language of the plan and act as champions with colleagues for the planning process.

At this time, all Steering Committee and member engagement work is planned to be virtual.

As members of the Steering Committee, participants will:

- *Take part in a kick off meeting*, currently anticipated for mid-September, to learn more about the process and the work ahead.
- *Contribute to efforts to re-engage member library staff with the current plan priorities.* While RAILS staff will handle large-scale efforts, each Steering Committee member is a visible advocate for contributing to the plan development and participating in engagement opportunities. This can be as simple as making sure your staff and/or your colleagues participate!

Stephanie Chase  
Constructive Disruption  
July 2021

- *Participate in the two rounds (8 total) of member library engagement sessions and report their discoveries.* While these sessions will be planned and facilitated by consultants Stephanie Chase and Cindy Fesemyer, Steering Committee members will be essential as small group guides and notetakers, and may take a more visible or significant role if they so choose.
- *Meet with RAILS project lead Monica Harris on a schedule as determined by the group.*
- *Contribute to the synthesis of the data into concepts to be used in goal development, aligning goals with member expectations for success.* We will work on this together in a virtual work session that is a combination of group and individual time that we can estimate to be about 8 hours.

A group this size allows for smaller subgroups to be formed, giving ample opportunities for Steering Committee members to contribute based on their strengths.