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Interim Executive Director Report, January 2023

Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

RAILS Minute

RAILS Minute, our short informational videos about what is going on at RAILS, is back! After some time recording these over Zoom, we're trying something new and getting back to recording them out of the Burr Ridge office. In December's RAILS Minute we talked a bit about my professional background and then discussed the timeline for the RAILS Executive Director Search. In January we discussed the School Data Project, the Partnership meetings with AISLE and other stakeholders, our recent collaborations with IHLS, and some highlights coming up for 2023. I've received some great feedback from members who love these brief, informational updates.

Cards for Kids

The Universal Services Committee had a great discussion about the member adoption of the Cards for Kids Act and the Cards for Kids expansion at their December meeting. Some relevant takeaways included the need to have all information about Cards for Kids in one central place for members, the need for additional talking points about the value of the Cards for Kids Expansion, and the possibility of a program proposal for ILA Annual with a panel of public library directors and trustees who had adopted expanded service for the unserved through the Cards for Kids Expansion. Talking points have already been created and were recently shared with the Advocacy Committee at their January meeting.

Models best practices in equity, diversity, accessibility, and inclusion

Board Election Process

The Policy Committee has continued to discuss potential ways to revise the board election process. As part of the January meeting, the RAILS Board will discuss the types of diversity represented by board members, and work with the board to determine what types of diversity are important to them.

Assist member libraries in preparing for the future

Legislative Meetups

The ILA Advocacy Committee reported on changes to the Legislative Meetup process for 2023 at the ILA Public Policy Committee meeting in January. Two virtual meetings are planned. The first will be focused on new legislators and will introduce issues important to libraries to them and give them a chance to introduce themselves to library stakeholders. The second event will train library stakeholders on how to have effective meetings with their legislators and share the issues aligned with ILA's legislative priorities. Then library stakeholders will be encouraged to have individual meetings with their legislators, take a photo, and report back to ILA. Dates have not yet been announced for the legislative meetups, but we highly encourage you to attend these important events and will share pertinent information when we know more.

On the national level, ALA and COSLA are working together to organize two fly in dates in March. This is a smaller scale event than past year's events, with Veronda Pitchford and Lynn Stainbrook representing Illinois in 2023.

Secretary of State Library Enhancements Transition Team

I was fortunate to have several conversations with Heidi Smith, Executive Director of the Highland Park Public Library and Chair of the Library Enhancements Transition Committee for Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias. The committee developed a list of potential priorities for Secretary Giannoulias which are being developed into a formal report by his team. The committee's list for consideration included statewide access to databases, changes to the Local Records Act, broadband for libraries, ebook pricing, and those unserved by public libraries in Illinois. It was a great list, and Chair Heidi Smith did a great job of synthesizing the many issues important to Illinois libraries and library users.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Visit with Illinois Heartland Library System

I was very pleased to have the opportunity to meet with Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS) Executive Director Leslie Bednar and Associate Director Ellen Popit in December at their office in Champaign. We had a good conversation about recent developments at both systems, a plan to have a regular meeting to discuss statewide programs, an in-person meeting of the leadership teams of RAILS and IHLS later in the Spring, and a social event for all system staff and trustees attending ILA Annual in Springfield.

Several other RAILS staff have also had recent meetings with IHLS Staff. Mark Hatch met with IHLS' new Delivery and Facilities Director, John Becker, and gave him a tour of the RAILS Delivery hub in Bolingbrook. RAILS Human Resources Manager Samantha Daly and RAIL Finance Manager Sharon Swanson are in regular contact with their counterparts at IHLS, and several staff at RAILS are regularly meeting to discuss library programs, data projects, and continuing education.

Meeting with Chicago Public Library

I am continuing to regularly meet with Chicago Public Library (CPL) Commissioner Chris Brown. CPL remains interested in the potential of Explore More which you will hear more about during the January Service of the Month report. Commissioner Brown will also be a guest on the RAILS Sparks podcast next month to discuss The Book Sanctuary, the CPL project to support intellectual freedom and the freedom to read.

This year also marks the 150th Anniversary of Chicago Public Library. We join them in celebration of a wonderful library and look forward to the opportunity to celebrate their success together this year!

We are in the process of creating a rebrand for Explore More Illinois. Since Explore More is a statewide program, we will discuss the rebrand with partners IHLS, CPL, and CARLI as we look forward to this new incarnation. The Board will hear the latest about Explore More during the January Service of the Month report.

Service Inequities Project

While undergoing the RAILS Strategic Planning process, we heard from several members who reported feelings of being underserved by RAILS for their library type. We are undergoing a study of the perception of service inequities experienced by RAILS Members and we hope we will learn more about the best way we can address this. The Board will hear more during the January Board Development Report.

Sparks Podcast

A new RAILS Sparks podcast will be available in January. AISLE Executive Secretary Carolyn Kinsella will discuss the evolution of the Partnership, the monthly meetup of Illinois library organizations interested in supporting school libraries and school library workers. RAILS Data Research Specialist, Janette Derucki, also joins to tell us more about the School Data Project.

RAILS Service Centers

Our lease is up at our Bolingbrook hub later this year and we are investigating whether our current location is still the best space for our needs. Ten area properties have been identified as potential alternatives. We should know more about how we plan to proceed later this spring.

Looking Ahead to February

- **February Service of the Month – RAILS CE program: gathering and responding to member feedback**
- **Board Development topic – Report on RAILS' Statewide Access to Electronic Resources proposal**
- **ILA Legislative Meetups – Dates to be announced**



This Month at RAILS – December 2022 – January 2023

THE TOP THREE

In response to board member feedback, each month we provide brief talking points on select This Month at RAILS items to help you spread the word about our programs/services. Here are this month's top three:

All RAILS Members Must Certify by March 31

All RAILS members must complete the annual, online certification process by March 31 to continue to receive system services (delivery, continuing education, etc.) and Illinois State Library grants. Certification is done via L2, and members can find complete details on the [RAILS website](#). Avoid the last-minute rush! Certify now!

All Types of Libraries Encouraged to Share Stories to My Library Is... Blog

RAILS is looking for stories for the [My Library Is... blog](#) that demonstrate the value of all types and sizes of libraries that we can share with elected officials and other stakeholders to help demonstrate the need for continued/additional library funding. Members have a variety of options for sharing stories on how their library has improved the lives of their patrons, including the new My Library Is... hotline. Find more details on the [RAILS website](#).

2023 RAILS Grants for Member Libraries

RAILS is now accepting applications from member libraries for two grants. [CE Event Grants](#) allow individual libraries, networking groups, and library consortia to apply for up to \$2,000 to plan training of interest to RAILS member library staff and trustees. Applications received by February 10 will receive first consideration.

Any RAILS school library is eligible to apply for up to \$5,000 for our [My Library Is... Grants for School Libraries](#). These grants help recipients plan projects that tell the library story and increase visibility and support for school libraries. The application deadline is March 2.

Enhance sharing of knowledge and best practices

New RAILS Website and Email List Software Scheduled to Debut in Early 2023

As previously reported, RAILS is in the midst of a website redesign. We anticipate going live with the new site in late February or early March. The URL for the new site will be railslibraries.org. This will replace the current .info extension, which will continue to work while members adjust to the new URL. New support sites for Find More Illinois and Explore More Illinois will likely go live around the same time. The new eRead Illinois support site will go live in the summer or early fall.

Much of the data migration for the new RAILS website has already taken place. Our contractor, Aten Design Group, is in the process of implementing the design. Aten is also working on building a new version of the Fast Facts survey creation tool.

Our installation of the LISTSERV email list software (which will replace the Mailman application currently in use) is substantially complete. We expect to add a few LISTSERV email lists for select member groups to test within the next month and are developing a migration plan for all existing Mailman lists.

If all goes according to plan, we plan to demo the new site for the RAILS Board at their March 24 meeting.

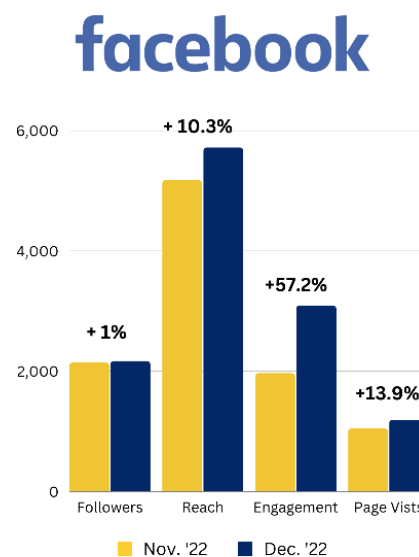
RAILS Social Media Efforts Increase Member Engagement

RAILS is taking advantage of the growing popularity of social media to grow our member engagement efforts. Ola Gronski, who began working as RAILS' first Digital Marketing & Communication Specialist on November 7, is leading these efforts with help from other staff.

Facebook Analytics

Facebook engagement was up 57.2% in December, and our social media users are regularly commenting, reacting, and sharing to their own profiles.

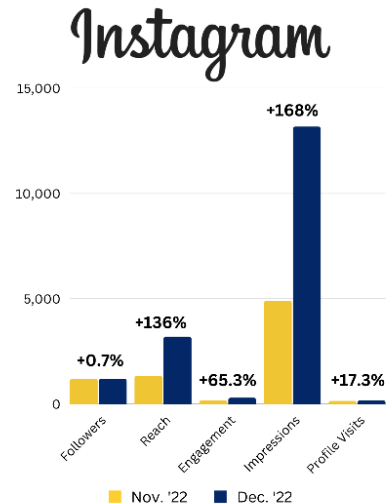
	November 2022	December 2022
Followers	2,140	2,162
Reach	5,172	5,715
Engagement	1,964	3,088
Posts	35	36
Page Visits	1,043	1,188



Instagram Analytics

Instagram impressions were up 168% in December. More accounts are being exposed to RAILS content, whether or not they decide to follow us. This is great for brand awareness!

	November 2022	December 2022
Followers	1,188	1,197
Reach	1,337	3,194
Impressions	4,896	13,160
Engagement	176	291
Posts	11	26
Profile Visits	144	169



RAILS Staff Visit 18 Member Libraries in November and December

To finish calendar year 2022 on a high note, RAILS staff visited 18 member libraries around our service area. Most of these visits were in-person; two were online. Visits are continuing in 2023. Any RAILS library can request an in-person or online site visit via the [RAILS website](#).

Library Visited/Location (if not indicated by library name)	Type
Black Hawk Community College (Moline, IL)	Academic
Greig Memorial Library (Oneida, IL)	Public
Milledgeville Public Library	Public
Mount Prospect Public Library	Public
Barbara Rose School - Barrington Community Unit School District (CUSD) 220	School
Belvidere CUSD 100 (online)	School
Deer Path Middle School - Lake Forest School District 67	School
Glenview Middle School - East Moline SD 37	School
Harvard CUSD 50 (online)	School
Komarek Elementary School – Komarek School District 94 (North Riverside, IL)	School
Lindblom Math & Science Academy - City of Chicago School District 299	School
Oregon Elementary School - Oregon CUSD 220	School
Prairie Ridge High School - Crystal Lake Community High School District 155	School
Roberto Clemente Community Academy - City of Chicago School District 299	School
Rondout Elementary School - Rondout School District 72 (Lake Forest, IL)	School
St. Charles North High School – St. Charles CUSD 303	School
Washington Elementary School - Bloomington School District 87	School
West Chicago Community High School - Community High School District 94	School

RAILS Library Chats on Challenged Materials

In December, RAILS held two online discussion sessions to address the current environment on materials challenges for academic, public, school, and specialized libraries. Tasha Squires, School Librarian at O'Neill Middle School in Downers Grove, led the sessions. Participants were invited to share their experiences responding to materials challenges either anonymously or at the session. Over 100 registered for the two events and around 40 people participated live. The sessions were not recorded.

RAILS Online Roundtable on Starting a Networking Group

Over the past two years, RAILS has seen a continuous growth in members interested in starting their own networking group. We're hosting an online roundtable on Monday, January 23 from 1 – 2 p.m., to provide more information on creating, leading, and sustaining a group. The event will feature short presentations by three current RAILS networking group convenors:

- Jessica Banko, West Chicago Public Library
- Angela Campbell, Rock Island Public Library
- Jenn Hovanec, Northbrook Public Library

More information is [available in L2](#). The roundtable will be recorded and posted to the RAILS YouTube page.

Leverage economies of scale to provide greater purchasing power

Swank Group Purchase Sign-Up Results

RAILS completed the sign-up and renewal for our [Swank](#) Movie Licensing USA public performance license group purchase in December. The total purchase of \$69,838 netted a savings of \$36,033 for the 159 participating public libraries, which include 94 renewing libraries and 65 new sign-ups. This year, Swank included an additional one-time 3% loyalty discount for libraries renewing their RAILS group purchase.

The annual license allows unlimited showings of thousands of movies, from classics to new releases. Select movies for outdoor viewings are also included in the license coverage for a limited time. The license is valid from January 1 - December 31, 2023.

BookBrowse Group Purchase Sign-Up Results

RAILS also completed the sign-up and renewal for our [BookBrowse for Libraries](#) group purchase in December. The total purchase of \$6,550 netted a savings of \$2,765 for the 15 participating public libraries. BookBrowse is an award-winning readers' advisory resource for librarians and patrons. The subscription runs from January 1 - December 31, 2023.

Career Online High School Update

[Career Online High School](#) (COHS) is an 18-credit, vocation-based high school completion program. RAILS coordinates and administers the program for libraries statewide and negotiates lower fees for the scholarships that participating libraries award to students.

The following table provides the latest information on the program as of January 5.

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
356	161	93	61%/53%



Recent COHS graduates from Rockford Public Library

Work collaboratively to identify and support shared catalog solutions and expand resource sharing

eRead Illinois Fee Structure Change

The current formula for determining member fees for [eRead Illinois](#) is 10 years old. Beginning July 1, RAILS is adjusting the fee to sustain a vibrant shared collection, and to ensure that every library is contributing equitably. One hundred percent of the annual fee goes to further developing the shared collection.

Fees for academic and school libraries will be based on enrollment, public library fees will be based on operation expenditures, and specialized library fees will be based on population served.

Anna Behm, E-Content Specialist, and Leila Heath, Director of Library Resources & Programs, met individually with each of RAILS' [six shared catalog consortia](#) to discuss the fee structure change. They also met with the 33 libraries that will be most highly impacted by the change (24 school libraries, 7 public libraries, and 2 academic libraries).

Most of the meetings were positive, and libraries shared their appreciation for the eRead Illinois program and for advance notification of the change. They also provided additional helpful feedback. For example, many school libraries expressed an interest in gaining access to more popular titles translated into Spanish. Anna is working with Baker & Taylor on creating a plan for ordering more K-12 Spanish content as a result.

Inkie.org and Inkie.org Library Update

[Inkie.org](#) is a suite of resources - available to everyone in Illinois at no charge - that supports local authors with online creation and publishing tools and helps readers access locally produced content.

The Inkie.org Library includes the Indie Illinois collection of self-published e-books by Illinois authors and RAILS Community Collections, featuring content added by local libraries. RAILS recently added a collection of [306 Arcadia Publishing and History Press titles](#) that focus on Illinois town histories and other people, places, and historic events relevant to the state. The collection of simultaneous use titles is available for statewide access.

Anna also gave a virtual presentation for Bellwood Public Library about inkie.org and the Inkie.org Library in November.

Use of RAILS E-Resources

eRead Illinois Axis 360 Checkouts

Time Period	E-Books	Audiobooks	Total
November 2022	19,759	13,911	33,670
December 2022	18,883	14,334	33,217
FY 2023 (July 2022 – June 2023)	123,932	93,130	217,062

Inkie.org Library Views

Time Period	Number of Views
November 2022	1,148
December 2022	1,674
FY 2023	8,831

Explore More Illinois Update

[Explore More Illinois](#) is RAILS' statewide online cultural and recreational pass program. As of December 31, 412 Illinois libraries participate (326 RAILS and 86 Illinois Heartland Library System libraries) and there are [49 attractions](#).



Patrons from participating libraries made 245 reservations in November and December. The most popular attractions during those two months (measured by number of reservations) were Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago (96), Chicago Children's Museum (30), Fox River Grove Memorial Public Library (27), DuPage Children's Museum in Naperville (25), and Peoria Riverfront Museum (19).

In December, Explore More Illinois added the Fossil Ridge Public Library in Braidwood, with a discount offer for their January book sale. We also ended the year adding the German American Heritage Center and Museum in Davenport, IA, our first Iowa attraction.

In 2022, 832 reservations were made in Explore More Illinois, making it the most successful year ever for the program. The most popular attractions of 2022 were:

1. Peoria Riverfront Museum - 155 reservations
2. Chicago Children's Museum - 124 reservations
3. Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (Springfield) – 74 reservations
4. Museum of Science and Industry (Chicago) – 60 reservations
5. Anderson Japanese Gardens (Rockford) – 60 reservations

Patrons from the following libraries made the most Explore More Illinois reservations in 2022:

1. Fox River Grove Public Library District – 59 reservations
2. Peoria Public Library – 34 reservations

3. Morton Public Library District – 30 reservations
4. Alpha Park Public Library District – 29 reservations
5. Barrington Area Public Library District – 27 reservations

Assist member libraries in preparing for the future

Help member libraries of all types and sizes demonstrate their value



New Round of My Library Is... Grants for School Libraries

In 2022, RAILS awarded \$78,232.80 in My Library Is... Grants to 20 school libraries. These grants help recipients focus on projects that tell the library story and increase visibility and support for school libraries.

In December, RAILS announced the opening of applications for the 2023 [My Library Is... Grants for School Libraries](#). Any RAILS school library is eligible to apply for up to \$5K in funding. Applications are due Thursday, March 2.

In February, RAILS will host three separate “office hours” sessions to answer questions about the grants. This is an opportunity for prospective applicants to discuss the process, kick around ideas, or learn what other libraries are planning. No registration is necessary. More information is available on L2 for these dates:

- [Tuesday, February 7](#), 3 - 4 p.m.
- [Thursday, February 16](#), noon – 1 p.m.
- [Wednesday, February 22](#), 3 – 4 p.m.

RAILS Members Encouraged to Add Stories to My Library Is... Blog

RAILS is looking for stories that demonstrate the value of all types and sizes of libraries that we can share with elected officials and other stakeholders to help demonstrate the need for continued/additional library funding. The stories also give other members inspiration for strategies and programs they can try at their libraries.

There are several [ways that members can share stories](#), including recording them on the new My Library Is... hotline at 630.734.5005. Stories do not need to be long and should provide examples of how patrons’ lives have changed in some way, small or large, by using the library. The above link includes many examples of possible story topics.

Future-focused professional development and member engagement efforts

RAILS 2023 CE Event Grants

RAILS is now accepting applications for our 2023 RAILS CE Event Grants. Individual libraries, networking groups or library consortia may apply for up to \$2,000 in support of training for member library staff and trustees. We will prioritize events focused on equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) training, but will consider all topics of

broad interest to RAILS members. Applications received by February 10 will receive first consideration. [More information](#) is available on the RAILS website.

Statewide Online Trustee Development Portal

The Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS) received a grant from the Illinois State Library to create an interactive trustee training portal. Once completed, the portal will be available to trustees statewide. IHLS created advisory and feedback committees to help develop and review content for the portal. Both committees consist of IHLS and RAILS system staff, system and library board members, and public library directors. RAILS representatives include:

Advisory Committee

Carolyn Kinsella, Trustee, Carlock Public Library District
Laura Long, Director, East Moline Public Library
Brian Shepard, Director, Indian Trails Public Library District
Becky Spratford, RAILS Board & Trustee, LaGrange Public Library
Tom Stagg, RAILS Board & Trustee, Alpha Park Public Library District
Joe Filapek, RAILS staff

Feedback Committee

Genna Buhr, Director, Fondulac Public Library District
Vanessa Villarreal, RAILS Board & Trustee, Lake Villa Public Library District
Monique Williams, Trustee, Harvey Public Library District
Monica Harris, RAILS staff

An initial meeting for both committees was held on January 10.

Planning Begins for 2023 Directors University and Directors University 2.0

Planning is underway for both Directors University and Directors University 2.0. Directors University will be held in the summer and is an intensive week-long training and networking event for first-time public library directors statewide. Directors University 2.0 invites back alumni from Directors University to explore new topics and expand on others (budgeting, HR, etc.). While DU 2.0 was originally planned to take place every other year, the overwhelming number of applicants in 2022 led to the decision to offer it again this year. DU 2.0 is tentatively scheduled for late April.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Strengthen collaborative relationships with partner library organizations

December and January Meetings with AISLE, CPS, IHLS, ILA, and ISL

RAILS has monthly meetings with representatives from the Association of Illinois School Library Educators (AISLE), Chicago Public Schools (CPS), Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS), Illinois Library Association (ILA), and the Illinois State Library (ISL) to discuss ways we can work collaboratively to support school libraries. Topics discussed in December and January included RAILS' school library data project, materials challenges and the possible formation of a rapid response team to support libraries facing challenges, an online School

Library Training Event (see next article), and overviews of the Cards for Kids Act and the Act expanding the Cards for Kids Act.

Fall 2023 Illinois School Library Training Event

RAILS is working with representatives from AISLE, IHLS, ILA, and the Illinois State Library to plan an online event for school library workers. A date has not yet been set. The event will be specifically designed for:

- Individuals who are working in school libraries with no formal library education
- Individuals with or without a teaching certificate
- Paraprofessionals
- Individuals considering getting a school library endorsement

RAILS Partnering with CARLI on SCOERs Grant

RAILS is a project partner for the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI) [SCOERs \(Support for Creation of Open Educational Resources\) grant](#) to create open textbooks. Anna Behm, RAILS E-Content Specialist, met with the SCOERs grant committee on December 12 to discuss next steps. Additional grant awardees were selected to create OER materials.

All RAILS Members Must Certify by March 31

All RAILS members must complete an annual online certification process to retain system membership and eligibility for Illinois State Library grants, including public and school library per capita grants and public library construction grants. Members must also complete the [ILLINET Interlibrary Loan & Reciprocal Borrowing Statistical Survey](#) as a prerequisite of certification.

Certification is done on the primary building or agency level (main school district office for schools, and main library building for other library types). Members can find [step-by-step instructions, a YouTube video, and other helpful items](#) on the RAILS website.