



125 Tower Drive
Burr Ridge, IL 60513
630.734.5000
railslibraries.info

Document 7.3.1

Executive Director Report, February 2023

Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

Executive Director Position

I want to share my deep thanks with the RAILS Board of Directors for hiring me as the next Executive Director of RAILS. I am honored and humbled by the opportunity, and I will devote my best efforts into making sure that RAILS continues its path of collaboration, excellence, and innovation on behalf of all member libraries.

We are in the process of updating the job description and posting for the Associate Executive Director of RAILS. I expect the position to be posted by the March board meeting. We will give serious consideration to filling this crucial role at RAILS.

Meet and Greets with RAILS Executive Director Coming This Spring

RAILS is in the process of planning a series of events this Spring intended to further introduce me to the RAILS membership. A Member Update is planned over Zoom on Tuesday, February 28 at 3pm, which will introduce the RAILS membership more generally to my perspective and vision for RAILS, and there will be opportunities for questions and feedback. A series of in-person member networking events is also being planned for this Spring. These events will be targeted in the areas of: Bourbonnais, Burr Ridge, Coal Valley, Northern Chicago Suburbs, Peoria, Quincy, and Rockford. In addition to these in person meetups, I am also planning a series of site visits to the individuals on the RAILS Board of Directors and to the RAILS Delivery hubs. A more detailed schedule of events will be available soon.

Succession Planning

After the hiring of the next Executive Director, the Policy Committee suggested RAILS consider developing a formalized succession plan that would detail practices related to responsibilities of the RAILS Executive Director. I agree that this type of formalized document is an important tool for Boards and organizations in defining key processes and making sure that the right leaders are in place in a time of rapid change. RAILS will begin work on this document with feedback from the Policy Committee, and we will share a draft with the full Board after it takes shape.

In addition to a formalized succession plan, I've been working with RAILS Finance Manager, Sharon Swanson, on evaluating current financial processes and updating procedures to reflect best practice where the need arises. Sharon has been very diligent in her continued evaluation of these processes, and we will continue to offer suggestions to the Board for updates as the need arises.

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

Board Election Process

The January discussion of Board Diversity led to additional opportunities to define and understand what is meant by our strategic goal of expanding board diversity. The Policy Committee met and recommended that a statement noting the Board's commitment to diversity be added to materials for the Nominating Committee and procedural documents related to mid-year Board appointments. A short update related to the Nominating Committee will be shared at the February Board meeting.

Meeting with Biz Lindsay Ryan to Discuss EDI Efforts in FY24

RAILS Director of Consulting and Continuing Education, Joe Filapek, and myself recently met with EDI consultant Biz Lindsay-Ryan to discuss RAILS plans related to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) for FY24. Plans include defining the direction of another learning cohort for FY24, continued work with the RAILS Climate Team, and an equity lens policy review of the RAILS employee handbook. In addition to our ongoing work with Biz, RAILS is considering additional continuing education opportunities for RAILS members from other experts in the field. Biz will attend the April Board meeting to present on RAILS efforts related to EDI programs and services as a board development topic.

Assist member libraries in preparing for the future

Legislative Meetups

The Illinois Library Association announced two virtual meet-ups for 2023. They are:

Get Ready to Advocate (Wednesday, February 22, 10-11am)

This virtual event will prepare library advocates to meet with their legislators. The presentation will include highlights from the [Ready, Set, Advocate](#) program. You will leave with resources and be ready to advocate with confidence. This session will be recorded for later viewing.

Library 101 for Legislators (Monday, February 27, 10-11am)

This statewide, virtual event will focus on bringing together newly elected legislators and library advocates rather than being geographically centered. Library trustees, directors, and staff from public, school, and academic libraries are encouraged to attend and participate. The event will be similar to the 2021 and 2022 meetups and there will still be opportunities for Q&A. What won't change is our commitment to advocating for Illinois libraries! This session will not be recorded, primarily due to the rapid pace of legislative developments and content may change.

There is still time to [register](#) to attend these virtual events. Your participation is highly encouraged.

SPARKS Podcast with Chicago Public Library Commissioner Chris Brown

I had the opportunity to sit down with Chicago Public Library Commissioner Chris Brown to discuss their Book Sanctuary project, which provides opportunities to expand local access to banned or challenged books. Chicago Public Library is also encouraging other libraries and individuals to consider establishing their own [Book Sanctuaries](#) through the project. Through the course of the podcast interview (which will be released on February 21) we also discussed Chicago Public Library's 150th Anniversary Celebration and the great collaboration happening between RAILS and CPL.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Joint Staff Meeting with Illinois Heartland Library System

Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS) Executive Director Leslie Bednar and I have started preliminary planning around a joint staff meeting in Springfield this Spring. This one day meeting will allow for additional collaboration around shared goals and needs from member libraries, and should also allow staff with similar roles the opportunity to talk with and learn from one another. We are grateful to the Illinois State Library for offering to host the meeting at their beautiful library.

RAILS Staff & Service Center News

Budget Amendment

After consulting with the Illinois State Library, we've determined that we need to make a budget amendment to the FY23 budget to reflect staff compensation related to the tentative contract approval by the Board at the Special meeting on February 7th. This budget amendment will be available for the Board's review at the March meeting.

Updates to Burr Ridge Office Space

The RAILS Facilities Team has been updating some unused office space at Burr Ridge to reflect the current needs of the organization. The Data team will be housed in old Training Lab Space, while the Find More Illinois and Cataloging group will move to the former IT space. These changes will allow those groups to work together more collaboratively and efficiently in Burr Ridge. These spaces will be updated by March 2023 – feel free to look at the changes next time you're in Burr Ridge.

Appraisal of Burr Ridge Property

On January 2, 2023, we contracted with Property Valuation Advisors, Inc. to complete a market appraisal of the Burr Ridge property. The last evaluation completed on the property was in 2017 and the property valued at 2.2 million dollars with an expected increase to \$3,065,000 upon the completion of the pending renovations. Today's evaluation valued the property at \$3,660,000 a 65% increase above the 2017 appraisal.

Staff Engagement and Retention Meetings

RAILS Human Resources Manager Sam Daly has conducted a series of interviews with staff hired at RAILS in 2022 to investigate their perspective on staff culture, onboarding, and the hybrid work environment. Feedback received was very positive, with many staff especially appreciating the flexibility and collaboration of their coworkers, and the virtual and in person opportunities for staff engagement and feedback. We will continue these efforts to received feedback on new staff onboarding and orientation.

Looking Ahead to March

- **March Service of the Month – Demo of new RAILS website**
- **Board Development topic – Update on RAILS School Library Data Project**



This Month at RAILS – February 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:

Special RAILS Member Update with New RAILS Executive Director

All levels of staff at all types and sizes of libraries are invited to our special member update on Tuesday, February 28 from 3:00 – 4:30 p.m., via Zoom. Monica Harris will talk about her plans for RAILS moving forward, and members will have the opportunity to share feedback via Zoom Chat, including responses to these questions:

- What do you like best about RAILS?
- If you could add a RAILS program/service, what would it be?
- How can RAILS communicate with you more effectively?

You can [register for the member update on L2](#).

Visit RAILS at Illinois Youth Services Institute

RAILS is sponsoring and will have a table at the March 16-17 [Illinois Youth Services Institute](#) at the Marriott Bloomington-Normal Hotel and Conference Center. This will provide an excellent opportunity to engage with youth and teen services library staff from our member libraries. If you're attending the conference, please stop by the RAILS table!

Attend March 9 "Fostering Inclusion in the Workplace" Webinar

RAILS will host a webinar on fostering inclusion in the workplace on Thursday, March 9 from 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. You'll learn about historical inequities of American libraries and gain a deeper understanding of our unconscious biases. You'll also learn new strategies for fostering inclusion in hiring practices and the workplace environment. [See more details and register on L2](#).

Enhance sharing of knowledge and best practices

Spreading the Word about RAILS' New Executive Director

RAILS announced the appointment of Monica Harris as our new Executive Director via a [news item](#) on the RAILS home page, an article in our weekly *RAILS E-News*, a message to our RAILS Directors Only mailing list, recording a [RAILS Minute](#) with Monica on her appointment, and posting the news to our social media channels. We also sent a news release to local Illinois and national library press outlets.

Our social media posts produced the most measurable reaction thus far as indicated below.

Social Media Platform	Impressions	Reach	Engagement
Facebook	3,840	3,654	1,149
Instagram	622	591	80
LinkedIn	1,182	N/A	123
Twitter	522	N/A	59

Impressions refer to the number of individual times content is viewed on a screen, reach to the number of people that actually see the content we post, and engagement to the number of reactions, comments, and shares on our posts. You'll find more info on RAILS' social media efforts in general at the end of this report.

Special RAILS Member Update with Monica Harris

All RAILS Board members and member library staff are invited to our special member update on Tuesday, February 28 from 3:00 – 4:30 p.m. Monica Harris will talk about some of her plans for RAILS moving forward, and members will have the opportunity to share feedback via Zoom Chat. The meeting will also be recorded. [Register for the February 28 Member Update](#) via L2.

RAILS at Illinois Youth Services Institute

RAILS is sponsoring and will have a table at the March 16-17 [Illinois Youth Services Institute](#) at the Marriott Bloomington-Normal Hotel and Conference Center. This will provide an excellent opportunity to engage with youth and teen services library staff from RAILS member libraries.

January RAILS Library Visits

RAILS staff visited the following member libraries in January. A few visits were postponed due to weather.

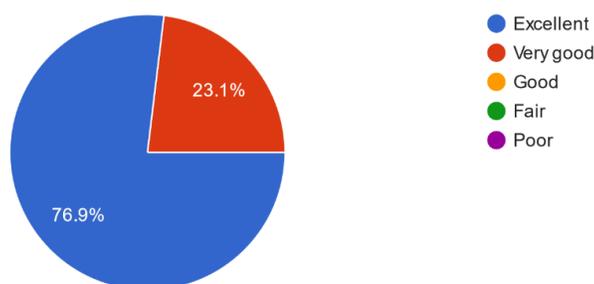
Library Visited/Location (if not indicated by library name)	Type
Palatine Public Library District	Public
Americana Elementary School - Queen Bee PSD 16 (Glendale Heights)	School
The Joint Commission Resource Center (Oakbrook Terrace)	Specialized
Pritzker Military Museum (Chicago)	Specialized

RAILS Library Visit Feedback

After each library visit, RAILS sends the library a form to gather feedback. The following chart shows feedback from December and January visits:

How would you rate the information presented in the meeting?

13 responses



A final question is open-ended: “How can RAILS help your library succeed?” Recent responses include:

- *Access to others in similar positions.*
- *Advocating for statewide database access*
- *Keep advocating for libraries across the state. We need libraries more and more every day. You are integral to helping all students and people across the state.*
- *Keep supporting libraries of all kinds*
- *Get databases for the whole state*
- *Advocate with the State Library to provide databases like they do in NY, OH, and PA*
- *Continue to advocate at the state level and promote best practices*
- *Your support means the world to me!*
- *Keeping in touch*
- *Just keep in touch. Doing a wonderful job so far.*

New RAILS Networking Groups

RAILS is helping to launch three new networking groups. Most will hold their first meetings this spring.

- [North Suburban Adult Programmers](#)
- [RAILS Music Librarianship Group](#)
- [Social Work in Libraries Networking Group](#)

The [RAILS Networking Group Directory](#) has more information on these and other groups.

January RAILS Online Roundtable Addresses Member Interest in Starting Networking Groups

As reported last month, RAILS scheduled an online roundtable on starting a networking group to respond to the growing member interest in this topic during the past two years. Thirty-seven members registered and 24 attended live. All RAILS Online Roundtables are archived on the [RAILS YouTube page](#).

Leverage economies of scale to provide greater purchasing power

READsquared Renewal/Sign-up

RAILS public libraries must renew/sign up for the READsquared group purchase by March 1. Over 25 RAILS libraries currently subscribe to this online tool for managing reading programs such as 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten, Summer Reading, Read Across America, and more.

New subscribers can log into the [RAILS Deals & Discounts page](#) to view pricing/subscribe. Renewing libraries received a confirmation email from RAILS. The subscription is valid from April 1, 2023 - March 31, 2024.

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 February 1.

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
367	161	97	60%/53%

Seek greater efficiencies, innovations, and enhancements to delivery services

Delivery App and iPad Rollout

RAILS IT staff developed an iPad app for delivery drivers to move pages of handwritten documentation and item counts into an app that makes it possible to aggregate and analyze real-time maintenance and route data, as well as handle incident reporting. This multi-year collaborative project between IT and delivery staff involved identifying feature requirements, planning and executing the development phases for the app itself, purchasing iPads and necessary peripherals, and planning training and ongoing support. Rollout began with an initial pilot of the app and iPads with delivery staff in Bolingbrook, and we are in the process of expanding the program to all RAILS delivery hubs.

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

eRead Illinois Update

As reported last month, beginning July 1, RAILS is adjusting the [eRead Illinois](#) member fee for the first time in 10 years. The eRead team has met with nearly 50 library participants to discuss the fee change, and most meetings continue to be positive.

In response to feedback from these discussions, RAILS is purchasing additional popular e-books and audiobooks in Spanish for the collection. RAILS is subsidizing the planned \$15,000 purchase and negotiated an additional \$1,500 spending bonus from Baker & Taylor, our eRead vendor.

Anna Behm, RAILS E-Content Specialist, gave a brief presentation about the benefits of eRead Illinois at the January PrairieCat Delegates Assembly. (PrairieCat is one of [six RAILS-supported shared online catalogs](#).) She also discussed the fee structure change. PrairieCat is considering joining eRead Illinois as a consortium and will vote on this possibility in the coming months.

Use of RAILS E-Resources

eRead Illinois Axis 360 Checkouts

Time Period	E-Books	Audiobooks	Total
January 2023	23,701	17,634	41,335
FY 2023 (July 2022 – June 2023)	147,632	110,762	258,394

Inkie.org Library Views

Time Period	Number of Views
January 2023	1,975
FY 2023	10,806

Explore More Illinois Update

[Explore More Illinois](#) is RAILS' statewide online cultural and recreational pass program. As of February 7, 413 Illinois libraries participate (327 RAILS and 86 Illinois Heartland Library System libraries) and there are [48 attractions](#).



In January, 183 reservations were made. The top five attractions (by number of reservations) were the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago (48), Chicago Children's Museum (35), Fox River Grove Memorial Public Library (26), DuPage Children's Museum in Naperville (25), and Peoria Riverfront Museum (16).

RAILS staff met with staff from the Oakton Community College Library in January. Oakton will be the third community college to join our pilot program. We also met with staff from Chicago Public Library to discuss next steps with Chicago Public Library joining Explore More Illinois.

SimplyE Pilot Project Update

RAILS has been a partner organization for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) [SimplyE for Consortia: Three Clicks to All Your E-books](#) grant project. SimplyE was intended to offer single sign-on access to multiple e-book platforms (Overdrive, eRead Illinois Axis 360, and Bibliotheca Cloud Library).

Several years ago, [Minitex](#) and RAILS collaborated to set up a handful of RAILS libraries as a pilot project to test the system. SimplyE stalled in 2021 due to development issues and lack of community-wide direction. After discussion with RAILS in January, Minitex notified the test libraries that the SimplyE servers will be shut down on March 1. Libraries interested in a similar solution can consider [the Palace Project](#), managed by Lyris and [DPLA](#) (Digital Public Library of America).

Assist member libraries in preparing for the future

Future-focused professional development and member engagement efforts

Spring Public Library Trustee Training Events

RAILS Board members Becky Spratford and Tom Stagg, and staffer Joe Filapek all serve on the Illinois Library Association Trustee Forum. The Forum finalized [three spring trustee events](#) for March, April, and May on library buildings, finance, and running efficient board meetings. Recordings will be available to participants after each session.

Directors University Update

Directors University is a joint project of RAILS, the Illinois Heartland Library System, the Illinois Library Association, and the Illinois State Library. This annual training event is intended for first-time library directors and directors new to Illinois from public libraries of all shapes and sizes.

The planning committee is exploring moving the event to early August and incorporating online learning with in-person sessions in Springfield to address feedback from past participants who felt it was difficult to be away from their library at the start of their summer reading programs. Offering some training online will result in fewer in-person days and more time for discussion and small group work.

Upcoming RAILS CE

- [Consistent Content Marketing](#) – Two-part webinar series, February 27, and March 6
- [Fostering Inclusion in the Workplace](#) – March 9

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Strengthen collaborative relationships with partner library organizations

February Meeting 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. February meeting topics included an update on RAILS' school library data project, materials challenges and the possible formation of a Regional Rapid Response Team to help libraries facing challenges, and a fall online training event for those working in school libraries with no formal library education.

RAILS Staff & Service Center News

FY 2023 IT Project Update

RAILS IT staff have been busy with major upgrades and equipment replacements across our technology infrastructure. So far in FY 2023, successfully completed projects include:

- Replacing the storage area network appliance (SAN), core network switch, and the uninterruptible power supply (UPS) in the Burr Ridge datacenter
- Implementing two-factor authentication for all staff across all applications that require network logins
- Making critical updates to the ticket systems used for many RAILS services in response to a major change in Microsoft's support for email interoperability

Additional projects planned through June include replacing aging Wi-Fi access points, videoconferencing equipment, and domain controller servers at all RAILS locations.

RAILS Staff at ALA LibLearnX Conference

Several RAILS staff members attended the American Library Association's LibLearnX conference in New Orleans in January. There were approximately 1,700 attendees, which is a low number for this conference. Presentation highlights included:

- A panel of academic and public library recipients of ALA's [Resilient Communities: Libraries Respond to Climate Change](#) grant spoke about efforts to support climate crisis education, including innovative programming, film screenings, and community dialogue.
- ALA's Office for Public Policy and Advocacy "Hammer, Vise, Lever: Better Tools, Stronger Advocacy" program featured speakers from across the country, including the Executive Director of the Virginia Library Association, who came up with the idea of creating a fake invoice to present to a person who had submitted several material challenges to a local school board. The invoice tallied up all of the staff time and resources use to respond to these challenges.
- The "Book Bans, Libraries, and the Law: Standing Up to Library Censorship in Louisiana and Beyond" program featured a panel including two legal experts who discussed the First Amendment and the legal definitions of obscenity and someone who sued community members who harassed her online for opposing book bans.

Staff also attended presentations on self-publishing resources available to library patrons, building a robust collection of Spanish titles for young readers, DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) initiatives in a consortial setting, Indigenous authors, augmentative and alternate communication devices, techniques for improving presentations, and how libraries are tackling the digital divide. Staff also met with several vendors to discuss possible RAILS deals and discount offerings.

Social Media Analytics

HOW WE MEASURE OUR DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES



followers

The number of individual accounts that are subscribed to our social media accounts. This ensures that our content shows up on their homepages.



reach

The number of individual people that actually see the content we posted. This includes both subscribers and those who just stumble across our content.



impressions

The number of individual times our content is seen on a screen. This includes if someone sees the same post more than one time.



engagement

The number of reactions, comments, and shares on our posts. People interacting with our content boosts the chances of us being seen by new audiences.

● Facebook ● Instagram ● Twitter

followers



	December 2022	January 2023
	2,162	2,023
	1,197	1,205
	1,384	1,295

reach



	December 2022	January 2023
	5,715	20,472
	3,194	2,006
	N/A	N/A

impressions



	December 2022	January 2023
	N/A	N/A
	13,160	7,216
	2,138	2,751

engagement



	December 2022	January 2023
	3,088	2,748
	819	403
	N/A	N/A