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Executive Director Report, May 2023

Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

Meet and Greets with RAILS Executive Director

We are continuing on our series of in person events this Spring intended to further introduce me to the RAILS membership. These meetings have been targeted in the areas of: Bourbonnais, Burr Ridge, Coal Valley, Algonquin, Peoria, Quincy, and Rockford.

We held an in-person meetup at the RAILS Coal Valley service center on Thursday, April 27. Seventeen people attended the meeting, and we had a good conversation about the future of libraries in Illinois. Feedback from the event included general library concerns about inadequate funding, schools not replacing their librarians upon retirement, and how they can tell their (sometimes complex) library story. They celebrated a new branch opening and a return to many metrics not seen since before Covid and they expressed appreciation for their delivery drivers, the catalog membership grant, group purchasing, and continuing education and networking. They expressed more support in finding alternatives to OCLC, help in understanding the role of the Illinois State Library, copy catalog contracting, and support for book banning and challenges.

Next was a meetup at the Rockford Public Library. Huge thanks to RPL Executive Director Lynn Stainbrook who hosted AND gave us tours of the interim library location and of the in progress Rockford Public Library construction site. I'll be thrilled to see it finished – it is a remarkable space already! Four RAILS members attended the Meet & Greet. Challenges expressed included the impact of inflation on new construction projects, minimum wage increases impacting hiring and compression, concerns about Artificial Intelligence and how to approach student performance, and prioritizing services based on public expectations balanced against limited resources. They are proud of their graduates of the Career Online High School program, addition of a makerspace, and an appropriately funded high school library. They expressed appreciation for RAILS delivery, deals and discounts, direct support given to libraries, and legislative updates. They'd like to see more help with the unserved including county level service adoption, help navigating the public perception around libraries, and continuing to facilitate connections and cooperation between libraries.

Finally was a meetup at the Algonquin Public Library – thank you to Executive Director Sara Murray for her offer to host and her enthusiastic reception of the group. Nine RAILS members attended the Meet & Greet. They expressed challenges related to potential library merges, complying with the Decennial Committee on Local Government Efficiency, book banning and first amendment audits, the unserved, and staff safety and burnout. They are proud of the intergovernmental agreements that one member had created with the local school district, beginning a renovation project, and positive community support for the library. They appreciate RAILS delivery, continuing education and networking, strong communication style, Deals and Discounts, and improvements to the Explore More Illinois program. They would love to see RAILS continue to

advocate for a statewide database program, and requested talking points for their Decennial Report on ways that RAILS provides efficiencies and value.

There is one more scheduled Meet & Greet at the Quincy Public Library on the morning of Thursday, May 25. Looking forward to this meeting in Quincy and will share more about feedback at the Board Meeting.

Visits to RAILS Board Member libraries and Delivery Hubs

Thanks so much to Alice Creason, who welcomed me for a visit to the Richton Park Public Library. I have enjoyed getting to know all your thoughts and priorities for RAILS through these meetings, and I look forward to the opportunity to meet with the rest of you soon.

I've also had the opportunity to meet with the Delivery staff at our Coal Valley location. Our meeting with the Rockford delivery staff had to be cancelled due to a staff absence but has been rescheduled for June. These straightforward conversations have given me an increased understanding of the crucial work they do, and I'm very grateful to them and the Delivery Service Managers that make these meetings possible.

I've also had the opportunity to attend grand openings at the beautiful new Helen Plum Library in Lombard – thanks to RAILS Board President Alex Vancina for the tour! I was honored to be welcomed to the grand opening of the Antioch Public Library District by Director Jennifer Drinka. I said a few words at their well-attended opening evening on behalf of RAILS and then enjoyed all of the activities they planned to show off their wonderful new space. I also had the opportunity to meet with the new directors to the La Grange Public Library (Jennifer Hovanec) and La Grange Park Public Library (Juanita Harrell) to welcome them to their new roles and ask them their thoughts about how RAILS can assist those beginning as library directors.

Reaching Forward

Just wanted to offer my thanks to RAILS Board Member Becky Spratford for her help in manning the RAILS booth at the event. Really appreciate your positivity and can do spirit!

Assist member libraries in preparing for the future

IL House Bill 2789

As you likely have seen, [Illinois House Bill 2789](#) requires public and school libraries to adopt policies against censorship and book banning to receive grant funding from the Illinois State Library. The bill has now passed both the House and Senate and is awaiting the signature of the Governor. It is expected that he will sign the bill soon. Illinois Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias drafted and is a strong proponent of this legislation, along with the Illinois State Library, the Illinois Library Association, the Association of Illinois School Library Educators (AISLE) and others.

IL Senate Bill 2419

A second piece of legislation, [Illinois Senate Bill 2419](#), otherwise known as the License to Read Act is also sponsored by Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias and is focused on allowing the State Librarian to negotiate with publishers of e-books and e-audiobooks on behalf of libraries in search of reasonable terms. The

legislation also allows the State Librarian to award grants that develop, expand, or support the acquisition of e-books and e-audiobooks in Illinois. This bill has also now passed the House and Senate and is awaiting the Governor's signature.

Secretary of State Budget

Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias' budget is also still being reviewed through the legislative process (HB4016), and the budget does currently include an ask for \$5 million to support a statewide database solution. The Illinois State Library remains cautiously optimistic for its passage.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

May ISLAC Meeting

The Illinois State Library Advisory Committee (ISLAC) met on May 18 in Springfield and I was able to attend in person. Anne Slaughter of RAILS and Troy Brown of the Illinois Heartland Library System presented on Broadband availability in Illinois, as well as the opportunities for library involvement in making digital equity a priority. A lively discussion followed and this topic will continue to be discussed at future meetings. There was also a discussion of the Equalization Aid for Public Libraries, which has not been updated since 2009, a legislative and budget update, the decision to disband the Illinois Digital Heritage Hub, and a discussion around the formation of a Diversity task force for ISLAC. The next meeting of the group will be in July and we will discuss the challenges of eBook lending in libraries and provide an overview of the eRead Illinois program.

Joint Staff Meeting with IHLS

We continue to pursue a joint staff meeting for the leadership of the Illinois Heartland Library System and RAILS. The meeting has been pushed back to the end of August, depending on the availability of the Illinois State Library to host.

Board Election

We've really been working on our efforts to get the word out about the Board Election, with mailings going out in Delivery, increased social media attention, and messages to our listservs and networking groups encouraging them to participate. We are currently up to about 215 votes which is 17.1% of our membership. This is a great number for us but we'll be working hard to continue to get the word out until the polls close on May 24.

Associate Executive Director Update

We are in the process of completing prescreening interviews for candidates and expect to schedule a first round of interviews for the position just after Memorial Day. We are optimistic about the talented pool of folks we received interest from and hire someone for this position by the end of June.

RAILS Staff & Service Center News

Retirement of RAILS Director of Marketing and Communications Mary Witt

After more than 36 years of dedicated serve, our own Mary Witt has announced her intention to retire this July. Mary has provided years of dedicated service to RAILS and holds huge stores of institutional knowledge for the systems, working for them since 1986. Mary is extremely productive, dedicated, and brilliant and she will be deeply missed. We wish Mary the best of luck on her upcoming retirement.

Looking Ahead to June

- **Board meeting one week early (June 16) due to the ALA Conference**
- **June Service of the Month – Find More Illinois**
- **June Board Development topic – My Library Is... campaign**



This Month at RAILS – May 2023

THE TOP THREE

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

Applications Open for Illinois School Library Workers Symposium

The Illinois School Library Workers Symposium will be held online on September 20. This event is designed for individuals who are working in school libraries with no formal library education, certified or non-certified, paraprofessionals, and those considering getting a school library endorsement. [Get all the details on L2.](#)

Solar Eclipse Information Sessions for Library Staff

There are two solar eclipses coming up in October 2023 and April 2024 that will be visible across Illinois. RAILS is offering a fun educational session with info on what eclipses are, when to look for the two coming up, easy ways to view them safely, and more. Identical events will be held on [June 7](#) at Rock Island Public Library and [July 25](#) at Peoria Public Library. See more details and register on L2.

New RAILS InfoBase Discounts

RAILS is offering discounted pricing for subscriptions to InfoBase streaming collections of interest to all age groups. Patrons can access thousands of videos available for simultaneous use. RAILS is also offering discounts on three InfoBase databases. Bloom's Literature, Science Online, and Ferguson's Career Guidance Center. [Visit the RAILS Deals & Discounts page](#) for more information.

Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

Enhance sharing of knowledge and best practices

RAILS at Reaching Forward Conference on May 5 in Rosemont



Reaching Forward is an annual professional development conference for library support staff. RAILS staffers Dan Bostrom, Ola Gronski, Mary Kate Murray, Brian Smith, and Nicole Zimmermann engaged with approximately 290 members at the RAILS exhibit table at the conference. Special thanks to RAILS Board member Becky Spratford for helping out at our table!

One of our visitors left this comment on the RAILS Facebook page: "The friendliest and most enthusiastic table at Reaching Forward!"

Member Engagement Manager Dan Bostrom also participated in a panel discussion on "Getting to Know Networking" in Illinois. Dan discussed how RAILS supports networking groups. Approximately 40 people attended.



RAILS Member Meetup at Northern Illinois University

Fifteen members attended the May 11 RAILS Member Meetup at the Founders Memorial Library at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb. The meetup provided an opportunity to connect/network with colleagues. Library staff gave a tour, which included a chance to experience Science on a Sphere, a global display system that projects planetary data onto a six-foot diameter sphere.

RAILS Participates in High School Networking Group Event

On April 27, RAILS participated in a discussion group with 20 high school library workers at the newly remodeled Highland Park High School. RAILS Board member Monica Caldicott and Member Engagement Manager Dan Bostrom spoke about current legislation, Find More Illinois, and the RAILS deals & discounts program.

Recent RAILS Member Library Visits

Dan Bostrom visited two schools in Matteson School District #162 in late April: Huth Middle School and Matteson Elementary School. The district is interested in participating in eRead Illinois and welcomed more information about grants and continuing education.

RAILS Social Media Engagement

See the report at the end for info on our April social media engagement efforts.

Leverage economies of scale to provide greater purchasing power

New RAILS InfoBase Discounts

RAILS offers discounted pricing for subscriptions to InfoBase streaming collections for all ages, including Access Video on Demand Master Collection, Just for Kids, and the World Cinema Collection. Patrons can access thousands of videos available for simultaneous use. Public performance rights facilitate library programming. For more information, members can [register for a webinar on June 8](#) or [visit the Infobase Streaming Resources Deals & Discounts page](#).

We are also offering discounted pricing on three InfoBase databases. Bloom's Literature features content on core authors, multicultural classics, contemporary literature, and more. Science Online helps with STEM research and learning. Ferguson's Career Guidance Center can help users assess career goals and interests, plan their education, learn workplace skills, find apprenticeships and internships, conduct a job search, and more. For more information, [visit the RAILS Deals & Discounts page](#).

Public Web Browser Annual Registration Key Available for RAILS Libraries

As a benefit of RAILS membership, all RAILS libraries have access to Team Software Solutions' [Public Web Browser \(PWB\)](#) free of charge for in-library use only. PWB allows libraries to lock down the web browser on computers and customize workstations for specific uses (e.g., a dedicated catalog computer). The RAILS annual subscription has been renewed through June 7, 2024.

Deals & Discounts Webinars

Jody Rubel, RAILS Library Resource Specialist, organized and hosted two recent vendor webinars for LOTE4Kids and EBSCO for Public Libraries. The two sessions had 42 registrations and the vendors reported new signups as a result of their presentations. A [recording of the EBSCO session](#) is available on the Deals & Discounts page.

Career Online High School Update

[Career Online High School](#) is an 18-credit, vocation-based high school completion program. The following table provides the latest information on the use of the program as of May 1.

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
373	166	94	60%/53%

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

Find More Illinois Update

[Find More Illinois](#) connects participating libraries' standalone and shared online catalogs. All Illinois libraries are eligible to participate, regardless of their size, type, or library software. Recent additions include Waukegan Public Library, Old Town School of Folk Music, and Annawan Community Unit District #26.



While we're excited about the Old Town School of Folk Music's great collection of LPs, of these three, Annawan best exemplifies the benefits of Find More Illinois to smaller libraries. The school district serves a community with a population of 876 people. There are 334 students in grades K-12. The school librarian is primarily a teacher with limited time in the library; she relies on community volunteers to aid with day-to-day operations.

The library has 6,774 titles. Through Find More Illinois, they have access to an added 2,114,893 titles. Since the Find More Illinois fee is related to a library’s book budget, this demonstrates how it is a very affordable way to dramatically increase access to resources for patrons at all types of libraries.

eRead Illinois Update

PrairieCat, one of the [six shared catalog consortia](#) RAILS supports, elected to join [eRead Illinois](#) as a complete consortium, adding over 40 new libraries as of July 1. PrairieCat member libraries will receive a discount on their eRead Illinois membership.

The eRead Illinois Axis 360 sign-up/renewal period continued in April, and as of May 10, 699 libraries have signed up/renewed their subscription, including 417 school libraries.

Anna Behm, E-Content Specialist, and Leila Heath, Director of Library Resources & Programs, met with the team from Baker & Taylor (B&T), our eRead vendor, to talk about B&T’s new app, Boundless. The Boundless app will eventually replace Axis 360.

We continue to purchase popular e-books and audiobooks in Spanish for the eRead collection, in response to suggestions from the meetings Anna and Leila have been holding with school libraries. As of May 10, 444 items have been added, including 242 e-books and 202 audiobooks.

Use of RAILS E-Resources

eRead Illinois Axis 360 Checkouts

Time Period	E-Books	Audiobooks	Total
April 2023	20,646	16,564	37,210
FY 2023 (July 2022 – June 2023)	210,993	160,347	371,341

Inkie.org Library Views

Time Period	Number of Views
April 2023	1,194
FY 2023	17,073

Explore More Illinois Update

[Explore More Illinois](#) is RAILS’ statewide online cultural and recreational pass program.

As of May 9, 421 Illinois libraries participate: 330 RAILS public libraries and two community colleges, and 88 Illinois Heartland Library System public libraries and one community college. There are [59 attractions](#).



Patrons from participating libraries made 161 reservations in April. The most popular attractions (by number of reservations) were Chicago Children’s Museum (35), Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago (34), DuPage Children’s Museum in Naperville (24), Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield (14), and the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum in Chicago (8).

Jessica Barnes, Special Projects Librarian, continues to work with Chicago Public Library and Museums in the Park on adding Chicago attractions. The following are now live in Explore More Illinois:

- Chicago Academy of Sciences Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum
- McCormick Bridgehouse and Chicago River Museum
- Museum of Contemporary Art
- National Museum of Mexican Art
- National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture

Assist member libraries in preparing for the future

Help member libraries of all types and sizes demonstrate their value

RAILS Awards 18 My Library Is... Grants for School Libraries

RAILS recently announced that [18 projects have been selected](#) to receive My Library Is... Grants for School Libraries. The total amount funded for these projects is \$58,346.09.



Future-focused professional development and member engagement efforts

Applications Open for Illinois School Library Workers Symposium

The [Illinois School Library Workers Symposium](#) will take place on Wednesday, September 20. This one-day, online event is designed for individuals working in school libraries with no formal library education, certified or non-certified, paraprofessionals, and those considering getting a school library endorsement.

RAILS is co-hosting this event with the Association of Illinois School Library Educators (AISLE), the Illinois Library Association (ILA), the Illinois Heartland Library System, and the Illinois State Library.

“Libraries and the Solar Eclipse” Information Sessions



A staff member from the Adler Planetarium is presenting three information sessions in the RAILS area about the two solar eclipses coming up in October 2023 and April 2024.

We had 28 attendees for the May 10 session at Burr Ridge, and it was great to see so many members at our service center again! Identical events will be held on [June 7](#) at Rock Island Public Library and [July 25](#) at Peoria Public Library.

RAILS at Recent Trustee Events

Joe Filapek, Director of Consulting & Continuing Education, co-presented an Illinois Library Association (ILA) Trustee Forum online workshop on May 13 titled, "A Meeting of the Kleintown Public Library: A Look Inside How to Run an Efficient and Effective Library Board Meeting."

Joe also spoke along with ILA Executive Director Cyndi Robinson at the LACONI Annual Trustee Banquet on May 19 in Oak Brook.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Strengthen collaborative relationships with partner library organizations

RAILS Participates in 2023 MLA/SLA Annual Conference

RAILS Engagement Manager Dan Bostrom attended the 2023 joint Medical Library Association/Special Libraries Association Annual Conference in Detroit, May 16-19. As SLA Illinois Past President, Dan helped organize a gathering of Midwest communities at the conference. He also assisted in planning presentations for SLA's Leadership & Management Development community.

May 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.

May meeting topics included an update on RAILS' school library data project, materials challenges and the formation of a Regional Rapid Response Team, an update on Illinois legislation, summer grant writing workshops, and the upcoming Illinois School Library Workers Symposium (see above). The next meeting of the group is June 6 at 4 p.m.

APRIL 2023: analytics

● Facebook ● Instagram ● Twitter ● LinkedIn

followers



	March 2023	April 2023
	2,244	2,271
	1,223	1,247
	1,409	1,412
	947	962

reach



	March 2023	April 2023
	6,487	9,807
	2,141	1,641
	N/A	N/A
	N/A	N/A

impressions



	March 2023	April 2023
	N/A	N/A
	9,205	7,826
	4,919	3,392
	4,432	2,158

engagement



	March 2023	April 2023
	2,377	2,281
	571	537
	N/A	N/A
	170	69

APRIL 2023: top posts



Top Tweet earned 466 impressions
 Join our Board! The deadline for nominations is tomorrow, April 12 at 5 p.m.

→ Complete an application at railslibraries.org/board/election....
pic.twitter.com/Kc5BNG2gG5

“
 I have been able to share what works in my community and learn from others, all while giving back to the organization that helps connect us all—RAILS.
BECKY SPRATFORD
 PUBLIC LIBRARY TRUSTEE SEAT




Reaching Across Illinois Library System (RAILS)
 362 followers
 3w •

Thank you Fondulac District Library for hosting our East Peoria stop on the Monica Harris Meet & Greet Tour this past Wednesday!

Our next stop is in Coal Valley on Thursday, April 27 from 2-3:30 p.m. We'd love to get a chance to talk to our western Illinois librarians! Register at <https://lnkd.in/gjbgNQL>.

