
RAILS Report

RAILS Strategic Plan: Strategic Goal 1

RAILS provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing for all member libraries.

Objective 1: Enhance the sharing of knowledge and best practices through member networking and communications between all types of libraries.

Meet and Greets and Networking events with RAILS Executive Director

RAILS has scheduled a series of in-person meetings intended to introduce the new RAILS Executive Director, Monica Harris, to the membership. It is an opportunity to share the general vision and future of RAILS as well as opportunities for questions and feedback. These meetings are targeted in the areas of: Bourbonnais, Burr Ridge, Coal Valley, Algonquin, Peoria, Quincy, and Rockford.

In addition to our Meet and Greet events, Monica Harris has also been attending networking group meetings, delivery hub meetings with staff, and site visits with RAILS Board members.

Here is an overview of those in-person visits since our update last May:

May 3: Meet & Greet at Rockford Public Library

May 10: Meet & Greet at Algonquin Area Public Library

May 11: Richton Park Public Library Site Visit

May 11: Antioch Public Library Site Visit

May 16: Meeting with La Grange Public Library and La Grange Park Public Library directors

May 18: ISLAC Meeting in Springfield

May 25: Meet & Greet at Quincy Public Library

June 12: Bill Signing for HB2789 at Harold Washington Library Center (Chicago Public Library)

June 15: Rockford Delivery Visit

June 23-26: American Library Association Annual Conference in Chicago

June 28: Illinois Public Media event in Rock Island

August 2: Directors University in Springfield

August 3: Downers Grove Public Library Site Visit

August 17: Northern Illinois University Site Visit in DeKalb

RAILS at American Library Association Conference in Chicago

RAILS was thrilled to get to engage with so many RAILS members at the ALA Annual Conference in Chicago, June 23 – 26. Thanks to the many RAILS staff and Board members who manned the booth and engaged with our many visitors. This is always a great opportunity to hear directly from members in an informal setting, and we heard many compliments about RAILS staff as well as pointed conversations about what they are thinking about in Illinois libraries today.

The Opening Session was especially exciting with an address from Chicago Public Library Commissioner Chris Brown, then ILA President Heather Jagman, and Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias. Secretary Giannoulias spoke about his work on the HB2789 legislation and the announcement of their new website, banbookbans.com. FCC Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel also [announced](#) proposed changes to the E-Rate program that would allow for the purchase of wifi hotspots under the program.

Executive Director Monica Harris completed her last Annual conference as a Councilor at Large on ALA Council. For more of an overview of Council activities, be sure to check out the [report to ILA](#) from Paul Mills, ILA Chapter Councilor.

RAILS counted [15 sessions](#) presented by RAILS member libraries at the Annual conference. Kudos to those that are showing off their experience and innovation for a national audience!

SPARKS Podcast about Open Educational Resources (OER)

Episode 44 of the [RAILS Sparks Podcast](#) (released June 6) is all about Open Educational Resources (OER). I had the opportunity to interview Dan Matthews, the Cataloging and Digital Services Librarian at Moraine Valley Community College about the value and benefit of the important resources for academic libraries, faculty, and students. Dan has a refreshing excitement about the future of academic libraries and it's a great primer for anyone wanting to learn more about the value of investing in OER.

Decennial Committees on Local Government Efficiency Talking Points

As a result of requests by RAILS member libraries, RAILS compiled and released a series of talking points for libraries that may be helpful as they create their Decennial Committees on Local Government Efficiency. These talking points provide general information about the benefits of different RAILS programs/services, followed by a statement that libraries can fill in with their library name and information on their participation in those programs/services. These talking points, as well as additional information on the Act, are available in the [Policy & Human Resources Guidance for Libraries section](#) of the RAILS website, including an FAQ and a sample library report template, both prepared by the Ancel Glink law firm.

May ISLAC Meeting

The Illinois State Library Advisory Committee (ISLAC) met on May 18 in Springfield and Executive Director Monica Harris 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 September and we will discuss the statewide electronic resources program.

SLA Illinois Tour at the Lenhardt Library at the Chicago Botanic Garden

On Wednesday, June 7, SLA Illinois held a tour of the Lenhardt Library at the Chicago Botanic Garden. Twelve people attended the event live. The event was hosted by SLA Illinois member Leora Siegel. The tour included a viewing of the rare book room. Attendees were also given the opportunity to stick around and explore the gardens.

Objective 2: Leverage economies of scale to provide greater purchasing power for member libraries so they can offer more resources to their users than libraries would be able to afford on their own.

Statewide Access to Electronic Resources Funded

As you have likely seen by now, RAILS is thrilled that the Illinois Secretary of State's FY2024 budget has passed, and it includes \$5 million for statewide access to online resources. Under this proposal selected databases will be available without charge to everyone in the state of Illinois, including the one million residents who do not currently receive library service. We are so grateful to Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias and the Illinois State Library for their support in moving this process forward, as well as to the Illinois Library Association's Public Policy Committee for maintaining this as a legislative priority for FY2023.

RAILS will continue to update members on next steps through this process. Greg McCormick has informed us that he will be in contact with the systems and CARLI to discuss next steps, and that this will be a topic of some discussion at the September ISLAC meeting in Springfield.

Boundless Transition Resources for Users and Members

All eRead Illinois Axis 360 member libraries will transition to Boundless during the last week of September. Users will begin seeing **in-app and web notifications** in the Axis 360 app in the coming days. The Learn More section in the app takes patrons to [FAQs](#) created specifically for them.

Members can get information and resources through the [Boundless Resource Center](#) and these upcoming Boundless Training Webinars:

- [September 12 at 2 p.m.](#) (for public, academic, and specialized libraries)
- [September 6 at 3:30 p.m.](#) (for schools)
- [September 14 at 3:30 p.m.](#) (for schools)
- Subscribe to the [eRead Illinois email list](#) for additional information and updates.

RAILS Discount for Gale Early Literacy Database Package, Webinar, September 19

RAILS public libraries are now eligible for advantageous pricing for a database package focused on early literacy. **Gale In Context: Elementary** provides young learners with one place to search for answers and explore their interests—inside and outside of the classroom. **Gale Presents: National Geographic Kids** takes them on amazing adventures in science, nature, wildlife, culture, geography, archaeology, and space. Designed for children ages 3 to 6, **Miss Humblebee’s Academy** is an easy-to-use, interactive online solution for kindergarten readiness.

Members can [register for the “Gale: Empowering Young Minds: PK-5 Learning Solutions for a Bright Future” information webinar](#) on Tuesday, September 19 at 11 a.m.

For more information, pricing or to schedule a demo, [visit the Gale Early Literacy Database Package Deals & Discounts page](#).

Applications Now Being Accepted for RAILS Continuing Education Event Grants

RAILS again invites member networking groups, consortia, and libraries to apply for a [RAILS Continuing Education Event Grant](#). This grant supports CE events for RAILS member libraries towards the development of library staff and trustees. To qualify, CE events must be made available to all RAILS member library staff. RAILS will prioritize events focused on equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility, but will consider applications for all other CE topics of broad interest. The maximum grant award is \$2,000.

There will be two application deadlines during the current fiscal year:

- October 23, 2023
- February 2, 2024

[Learn more about this grant application and apply online](#)

Explore More Illinois Update

[Explore More Illinois](#) is RAILS’ statewide online cultural and recreational pass program. As of June 30, 425 Illinois libraries participate: 333 RAILS public libraries and three community colleges, 88 Illinois Heartland Library System public libraries and Chicago Public Library. There are 74 attractions.

In June 2023, 2,710 reservations were made in Explore More Illinois. The large increase was due to Chicago Public Library joining on June 5. The most popular attractions in June in Chicago were the Field Museum in Chicago (400), Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago (387), Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum in Chicago (309), the Chicago Children’s Museum (287), and the Chicago History Museum (64). The most popular downstate and suburban attractions in June were Brookfield Zoo (500), the Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe (200), the Peoria Riverfront Museum (127), the DuPage Children’s Museum in Naperville (38), and Anderson Japanese Gardens in Rockford (35).

On June 5, Chicago Public Library joined Explore More Illinois. The launch date went smoothly, with no technical issues. CPL is continuing to work with their staff and patrons to communicate the benefits of Explore More Illinois and how it will help create a more equitable and sustainable museum pass program for the library.

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 July 1:

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
394	169	95	60%/53%

eRead Illinois Update

The [eRead Illinois Axis 360](#) renewal period concluded at the end of June. Karen Goyer and Anna Behm did one last follow up with libraries that have not renewed, most of which are schools. As of July 11, 905 libraries have renewed their eRead Illinois subscription, including 585 school libraries. Libraries that have cancelled or not renewed their subscription will have their Axis 360 sites disabled by the end of July.

Baker & Taylor announced that they will be sunsetting the Axis 360 app and transitioning users to the new Boundless app later this year. eRead Illinois libraries will make the switch to Boundless on September 26.

Anna Behm and Leila Heath met with staff from PrairieCat, SWAN, CCS, RSA, and Pinnacle to discuss the transition from Axis 360 to Boundless. Anna set up additional meetings with consortia staff and the team from Baker & Taylor to discuss the technical specifics of the transition.

Use of RAILS E-Resources

eRead Illinois Axis 360 Checkouts

eRead Illinois Axis 360 Checkouts Time Period	E-Books	Audiobooks	Total
June 2023	14,644	14,986	29,630
FY 2023 (July 2022 – June 2023)	246,985	192,594	439,579

Inkie.org Library Views Time Period	Number of Views
June 2023	2,256
FY 2023	20,705

Objective 3: RAILS will continue to seek greater efficiencies, innovations, and enhancements to delivery services

RAILS Delivery Video Training Series

Have questions about RAILS delivery? Check out the new [RAILS Delivery Training Series](#). The five videos are short and address the delivery topics members ask about most. There's even a video on how to get further support from RAILS Delivery.

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 have now expanded the program to all RAILS delivery hubs.

Objective 4: Work collaboratively with members, the Illinois Heartland Library System, and the Illinois State Library to identify and support appropriate and affordable shared catalog solutions and expand resource sharing to all libraries and residents.

Find More Illinois Update

[Find More Illinois](#) (FMI) connects participating libraries' standalone and shared online catalogs. All Illinois libraries are eligible to participate, regardless of their size, type, or library software. As an incentive to participation, all setup fees are waived for libraries that join before January 2024.

FMI is growing quickly, which makes it a better resource for all participating libraries. Our newest additions to Find More Illinois are the Marseilles Public Library and the Schaumburg Township District Library. As of the most recent catalog updates provided by participating libraries, the number of items available through Find More Illinois is now 2.3 million.

At the end of June, the Find More Illinois team presented a webinar hosted by CARLI and attended by staff at academic libraries. RAILS staff provided a demonstration of how FMI can be integrated into their ILL workflows, and CARLI staff expressed their enthusiasm for providing the necessary technical support for any of their I-Share members that wish to join. We will continue our collaboration with CARLI to facilitate academic libraries' participation in Find More Illinois.

Directors University 2023

A total of thirty new public library directors from RAILS member libraries successfully completed Directors University on August 3 in Springfield. After participating in several virtual sessions during the summer months, participants from RAILS and IHLS came together in Springfield August 1-3 for three full days featuring sessions on library law, HR, finances, Illinois State Library services, and more. In addition to learning, Directors University provides an excellent opportunity for networking between participants as well as with library leaders from across the state. Congratulations to all our 2023 Directors University graduates!

May, June, July, and August 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.

Meeting topics included an update on RAILS' school library data project, materials challenges, updates on library legislation from the Illinois Library Association and AISLE, and the formation of [Unite Against Book Bans](#) in Illinois to help libraries facing challenges. The group has also been working on the planning of the [Illinois School Library Workers Symposium](#), a fall online training event for those working in school libraries with no formal library education, scheduled for September 20. The next meeting of the group is September 5.

Joint Staff Meeting with Illinois Heartland Library System

Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS) and the Reaching Across Illinois Library System (RAILS) will meet for a one-day collaboration event on April 29 at the Illinois State Library in Springfield. The leadership teams of both organizations will collaborate on partnership opportunities and brainstorm on potential areas for future collaboration.