

RAILS FY 2023 Annual Report

1.1 Narrative Report

Introduction

This narrative details RAILS activities and accomplishments in pursuit of the goals and activities listed in our FY 2023 Operational Plan. As always, our overarching goal throughout the year was to provide the highest quality service to RAILS member libraries of all sizes and types (academic, public, school, and specialized) and to help them provide the highest quality service possible to their customers.

RAILS hired a new Executive Director in FY 2023, who immediately set to work looking for ways to strengthen and expand existing partnerships with the Association of Illinois School Library Educators (AISLE), Chicago Public Library System (CPLS), Consortium of Academic & Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI), Illinois Association of College & Research Libraries (IACRL), Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS), Illinois Library Association (ILA), Illinois State Library (ISL), the Special Libraries Association-Illinois Community (SLA-IL), and other library-related organizations.

RAILS was also able to engage with more of our members in person as life returned to somewhat normal after the COVID-19 pandemic eased. Our new director launched a systemwide tour to discover our members’ greatest challenges and how RAILS might help them meet those challenges. We also began adding more in-person library visits, networking activities, and continuing education events, while still offering the virtual opportunities that have become so popular with so many of our members. We also greatly improved virtual communication with the redesign of the RAILS website.

The following narrative provides detailed information on these and many other FY 2023 activities. It follows the format of the 2022 – 2025 RAILS Strategic Plan, and all activities listed meet the requirements in the administrative rules for library systems.

Strategic Plan Goal One: RAILS provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing for all member libraries.

Objectives	Planned Activities
<p>Enhance the sharing of knowledge and best practices through member networking and communications between all types of libraries</p>	<p>Planned/scheduled virtual and in-person networking opportunities for staff at all levels at all sizes and types of libraries, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Milledgeville Public Library RAILS Member Meetup • Northern Illinois University RAILS Member Meetup • “E-Content Options for Schools” RAILS Online Roundtable • “Starting a Networking Group” RAILS Online Roundtable • Two online chat sessions to give attendees an opportunity to discuss experiences related to materials challenges <p>Worked with statewide partners, including AISLE, IACRL, IHLS, ILA, SLA-IL, and others to plan additional networking opportunities for staff from different types of libraries and for trustees from public libraries. (See examples throughout this document.) Regularly publicized networking opportunities offered by these organizations.</p>

Objectives	Planned Activities
	<p>Helped plan/organize SLA-IL Community events, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-person tour of Kane County Law Library & Self Help Legal Center • In-person tour of Shorefront Legacy Center in Evanston <p>Publicized existing RAILS networking groups and the benefits of belonging to a networking group to all levels of staff at all types and sizes of libraries</p> <p>Launched new networking groups and took an active role in strengthening existing groups, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing to provide support and guidance for the City Library Directors Group RAILS helped form in May 2022. Scheduled, helped plan, and attended group meetings. Developed survey to help the group clarify priorities. • Ideated and held first-ever meeting of Consortia/Systems Member Engagement Networking Group for RAILS, IHLS, ISL, and LLSAP staff with a job focus on member engagement • Launched and held regular meetings of the Data Networking in School Libraries Group to help school library workers share new ideas • Continued hosting and developing agendas for Data in Libraries Networking Group meetings <p>Assisted in the creation of new RAILS networking groups, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illinois Solo Librarians Networking Group • North Suburban Adult Programmers • RAILS Music Librarianship Group • Social Work in Libraries Networking Group <p>Continued to build and strengthen relationships and engagement with RAILS networking groups. Visited networking group meetings to share the latest RAILS news and gather feedback on RAILS programs/services.</p> <p>RAILS' Member Engagement Manager participated in a panel on "Getting to Know Networking" at Reaching Forward conference</p> <p>Provided subsidized Zoom licenses to 23 networking groups</p> <p>Began investigating reopening meeting rooms for member meetings at RAILS' Burr Ridge and Coal Valley service centers</p> <p>Transitioned to ListServ electronic mailing list platform to resolve problems with former Mailman platform. Helped troubleshoot issues with new platform. Developed an FAQ with answers to common member questions.</p>

Objectives	Planned Activities
	<p>Encouraged use of RAILS mailing lists, including lists geared toward different library types and sizes, and staff at all levels. Established new lists as needed.</p>
<p>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</p>	<p>Continued to expand the RAILS discount and group purchase program. Hired a Library Resource Specialist to focus on the data management and procedures related to this program. Gathered input from members at all types and sizes of libraries on desired discounts/group purchases and acted on input as possible. RAILS members saved over \$1 million through the program in FY 2023.</p> <p>Offers in FY 2023 included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BiblioBoard Creator • BookBrowse for Libraries, readers' advisory resource • Brainfuse HelpNow, tutoring and study suite • Brainfuse JobNow, job search services and tools • Communico events planning and room booking tools • Creativebug, craft education hub • EBSCO K-12 resources • EBSCO public library resources • Gale Business: Plan Builder • Gale Presents: Udemy, online adult learning tool • Hiveclass, digital youth sports training encyclopedia • InfoBase databases • InfoBase streaming collections for all ages • LOTE Online for Kids, digital picture books in world languages • PressReader for Libraries, newspaper/magazine access • Public Web Browser • RDA Toolkit group purchase • READSquared, online tool for managing reading programs • Swank annual public performance license <p>Continued set up of Consortia Manager platform to manage RAILS group purchases and discounts and streamline work processes</p> <p>Promoted ISL Try-It! Illinois program as a way for library staff and users to evaluate electronic resources before purchase</p> <p>Promoted Computers in Libraries conference discount offered through ISL</p> <p>Promoted Illinois Libraries Present, a collaborative consortia of Illinois public libraries providing online events for libraries of all sizes and</p>

Objectives	Planned Activities
	<p>budgets. Conducted <i>Sparks</i> podcast interview with steering committee members.</p> <p>Networked with group purchasing managers statewide and nationwide to explore new opportunities</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Career Online High School Program (COHS)</p> <p>Continued to subsidize the cost and management of the COHS platform to enable libraries to offer adult learners accredited high school diplomas and career certificates</p> <p>Heavily promoted program via <i>RAILS E-News</i> and other channels. Conducted podcast interview with staff from Rockford Public Library detailing how the program has benefitted patrons of that library.</p> <p>Continued to meet with networking group of COHS library staff participants to develop and promote the program</p>
<p>RAILS will continue to seek greater efficiencies, innovations, and enhancements to delivery services.</p>	<p>Worked with RAILS members of all sizes and types to determine the most appropriate delivery method to meet their needs</p> <p>Consulted with members on delivery issues/concerns on an ongoing basis. Widely promoted the use of the delivery help desk ticketing system.</p> <p>Created new RAILS delivery training video series for library staff. Topics covered included: preparing materials for delivery, finding library delivery info on L2, labeling, and how to get delivery support.</p> <p>Promoted the need to complete quarterly delivery volume counts to RAILS members. Consulted with libraries on an individual basis as needed. Examined count data to help inform potential changes to existing delivery routes.</p> <p>Completed development of iPad app for delivery drivers to replace handwritten documentation, making it possible to aggregate and analyze real-time maintenance and route data</p> <p>Continued providing high-quality statewide delivery services to CARLI via ILDS (Illinois Library Delivery Service). Evaluated ILDS data to analyze changes in volume and respond with appropriate service changes.</p> <p>Continued working with GeoMARC on improvements to RAILS delivery service, including delivery route efficiencies</p>

Objectives	Planned Activities
<p>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</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">General</p> <p>Continued to work with the RAILS Resource Sharing Committee to investigate and recommend ways to improve and increase resource sharing in Illinois</p> <p>Collaborated with AISLE, CARLI, CPLS, IACRL, IHLS, ILA, ISL, SLA-IL, and other stakeholders to expand resource sharing as referenced throughout this document</p> <p>Collaborated with and supported the work of the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC). Several RAILS staff members also attended the ICOLC annual conference in St. Louis.</p> <p>Developed the first phase of the RAILCAR data project, which will aggregate and expand the data we currently have related to LLSAP services and impacts across RAILS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Promote/Support LLSAP Membership</p> <p>Continued to provide a mix of financial support and services to six RAILS LLSAPs: CCS, Pinnacle, PrairieCat, Rock River Library Consortium, RSA-NFP, and SWAN via the annual LLSAP Support Grant and ongoing support and consultation. Provided direct personnel, technology infrastructure, facility, and other support services to RSA staff as a component of their grant award, including hiring a new Operations Manager</p> <p>Worked with RSA on their plan for operational and personnel independence from RAILS, including attending meetings with the RSA Board and Executive Committee, providing a facilitated meeting between PrairieCat and RSA leadership, and obtaining initial legal guidance related to IMRF participation</p> <p>Offered catalog membership grants to encourage libraries to join a RAILS LLSAP and to make LLSAP membership more affordable. Awarded \$86,187 in grants to two libraries. Continued the phased overhaul of the grant application and process, designed to provide more structured support for nonautomated libraries in their preparations for automation.</p>

Objectives	Planned Activities
	<p>Promoted the value of consortium membership to all types and sizes of RAILS libraries via RAILS communication tools, committee work, and member encounters</p> <p>Consulted with individual RAILS member libraries on LLSAP membership, Catalog Membership Grants, and automation-related tasks and responsibilities</p> <p>Continued to work with RAILS Consortia Committee to investigate and recommend ways to improve and increase consortial services in Illinois</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Expand and Promote Find More Illinois (FMI)</p> <p>Widely promoted benefits of joining FMI, including promoting the FY 2023-24 incentive offer from Auto-Graphics (FMI vendor):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Featured regular articles about FMI in the weekly <i>RAILS E-News</i> • Developed videos with testimonials from FMI library participants • Developed talking points for RAILS Board Advocacy Committee, RAILS Board Resource Sharing Committee, and others to use to promote FMI • Partnered with CARLI staff to develop a process and shared promotional plans to encourage academic libraries to join • Met individually with interested libraries for customized demos and discussions • Presented about FMI to the NILRC consortium of community college libraries • Direct outreach to libraries that had previously requested quotes <p>Added 19 libraries to FMI in FY 2023, including 14 public libraries, four school libraries, and one special library, including technical setup, workflow consulting, and library staff training. There were 55 FMI participating libraries by the end of FY 2023.</p> <p>Hired Consortial Services Supervisor to help grow and expand FMI</p> <p>Provided ongoing training, consulting, and technical support to FMI libraries and worked with Auto-Graphics to resolve support issues and advocate for software enhancements</p> <p>Provided Enhanced Borrowing service to interested FMI libraries to manage OCLC borrowing for unfilled requests</p> <p>Continued working with Auto-Graphics on enhancements and additional services, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verso ILS for nonautomated or under-automated libraries (at little to no cost to participating libraries)

Objectives	Planned Activities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interstate borrowing • Providing additional access to MARC records through FMI <p>Continued to offer IHLS the opportunity to participate in FMI</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Support High-Quality Cataloging</p> <p>Cataloging Services Manager developed and provided cataloging training, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Cataloging of Video Recordings Using RDA" three-part training series • "Classification Basics: Understanding Dewey Decimal Classification & Using WebDewey" four-week Moodle course • "Cataloging Indian language materials" webinar <p>Provided additional cataloging training with external presenters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Library of Congress Subject Headings – Beginner and Intermediate" • BIBFRAME three-part training series • "The End of MARC: Moving to BIBFRAME" webinar <p>Offered RDA Toolkit group purchase as referenced above</p> <p>Continued offering World Language Cataloging Services Program as detailed below</p> <p>Provided expert consulting to RAILS member library staff on cataloging matters</p> <p>Publicized IHLS Cataloging Maintenance Center (CMC) programs via regular articles in the <i>RAILS E-News</i></p> <p>Continued to participate in the development of Open Rules for Cataloging, a national initiative to create a freely available collaborative cataloging code, serve on the Accessibility and Disability Working Group of the DEI in Metadata networking group, and maintain a presence in many networking groups and LLSAP committees</p> <p style="text-align: center;">eRead Illinois Axis 360</p> <p>Recruited RAILS libraries and IHLS non-SHARE libraries to join eRead Illinois. Supported training and marketing needs of participants.</p> <p>Met with PrairieCat to discuss onboarding and outreach for PrairieCat libraries. (PrairieCat elected to join eRead Illinois as a complete consortium.)</p>

Objectives	Planned Activities
	<p>Changed eRead fee structure to establish equitable pricing and to enable RAILS to continue to improve the collection and meet user needs. Met with each of RAILS’ six shared catalog consortia to discuss the change. Met with libraries most impacted by the change.</p> <p>Evaluated eRead content to ensure that it continued to meet member needs (see also EDI section below):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued to add additional content for K-12 students • Purchased popular e-books and audiobooks in Spanish in response to member feedback • Regularly sought input from eRead participants on the collection and implemented suggestions as possible <p>Networked with e-content managers statewide and nationwide to stay abreast of new developments and initiatives</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Inkie.org & Inkie.org Library</p> <p>Continued to partner with BiblioLabs to offer the Inkie.org Library to support self-publishing, Illinois authors, and Illinois e-content</p> <p>Publicized Inkie.org Library resources as being free (courtesy of RAILS) to all Illinois libraries and all Illinois residents, including those not served by a public library. Provided information to IHLS to share with their member libraries.</p> <p>Added over 300 e-books from Arcadia Publishing focusing on Illinois history</p> <p>Continued offering group purchase pricing on BiblioBoard products for self-published authors</p> <p>Gave virtual presentations on inkie.org and the Inkie.org Library for interested member libraries</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Explore More Illinois (EMI)</p> <p>Publicized EMI to all Illinois public libraries and encouraged them to participate</p> <p>Continued to work with IHLS to recruit IHLS libraries and set them up in the program</p> <p>Expanded community college pilot program. By the end of FY 2023, three Illinois community colleges participated.</p>

Objectives	Planned Activities
	<p>Worked with Chicago Public Library (CPL) to help them join Explore More Illinois. Migrated appropriate attractions from CPL paper museum pass program. Co-led training for approximately 300 CPL staff.</p> <p>Continued to grow/expand the number and types of participating attractions, including attractions in other midwestern states</p> <p>Created a promotional video highlighting Explore More Illinois attractions in and near Rockford</p> <p>Established Explore More Illinois networking group and began holding quarterly meetings</p> <p>Met with IHLS and CPLS staff to discuss rebranding the program, including changing the name and logo. These discussions will continue in FY 2024.</p> <p>Networked with ePass (EMI's software) administrators nationwide to explore new opportunities and solutions</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Other E-Resources Initiatives</p> <p>Continued to work with statewide partners to advocate for additional funding for a statewide electronic resources package that would be available to all Illinois residents without charge. Updated the original RAILS proposal and talking points proponents could use to advocate for the proposal. Successfully encouraged the ILA Public Policy Committee to adopt the proposal as a legislative priority.</p> <p>Met with IHLS staff to discuss ways to promote statewide services, including Inkie.org, Explore More Illinois, and Career Online High School</p> <p>Continued to participate as a partner in the CARLI Open Textbook (SCOERs) grant. Served on advisory committee. Helped review grant applications. Publicized project.</p> <p>Continued to develop RAILS Vendor Privacy Policies and VPAT (Vendor Product Accessibility Template) web pages with links to policies and VPATs for third-party vendors providing e-resources to public libraries</p> <p>Provided ongoing support for the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) and Illinois Digital Heritage Hub</p>

Strategic Plan Goal Two: *RAILS models best practices in equity, diversity, accessibility, and inclusion.*

Objectives	Planned Activities
<p>RAILS will provide leadership in developing and providing resources that will support member libraries' efforts to provide equitable, diverse, and inclusive services.</p>	<p>Continued to work with RAILS Board EDI Committee to develop activities and programs to increase awareness about systemic racism and bias among member library staff and boards</p> <p>Launched EDI learning cohort to train members on EDI best practices. Held monthly Zoom sessions from October 2022 through May 2023. Gathered feedback from the 36 RAILS member participants.</p> <p>Offered EDI-related CE, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Facilitating Gender-Inclusive Librarianship through Centering Queer Communities” webinar • “Fostering Inclusion in the Workplace” webinar • "Cultural Humility for Libraries" online workshop • “Design for Access: Making Online Content Accessible” webinar <p>Continued offering/publicizing World Language Cataloging Services grant program statewide. Continued seeking grant funds from ISL to fund the program. The program was used by 27 public libraries, two academic libraries, and three school libraries in FY 2023, and 472 bibliographic records were created.</p> <p>Continued to develop/promote an eRead Illinois collection that addresses the needs of an ethnically and culturally diverse audience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly evaluated the collection using industry respected tools to identify potential gaps • Added e-books and audiobooks in Spanish to collection as referenced above • Continued to include curated list of racial justice titles with numerous anti-racism bestsellers <p>Recruited attractions for Explore More Illinois of interest to an ethnically and culturally diverse audience</p> <p>Offered discounts to help libraries with EDI efforts as noted above, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LOTE Online for Kids, digital picture books in world languages • EBSCO Core Collection en Espanol collection development resource, DEI package e-Book subscription • Infobase World Cinema Collection • PressReader for Libraries, access to newspapers/magazines from over 120 countries

Objectives	Planned Activities
	<p>Provided/promoted opportunities for members from all types and sizes of libraries to share best practices and collaborate on EDI-related challenges through the RAILS EDI mailing list, EDI Pulse Page, and other activities</p> <p>Promoted and provided administrative support as applicable for RAILS EDI-related networking groups, including the Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color Group; the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Metadata Group; and the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Team in Youth Services</p> <p>Included EDI elements in RAILS’ CE Event and My Library Is... grants to encourage applicants to provide equitable, diverse, and inclusive programs/services for their community of users</p> <p>Participated in Charrm’d Foundation diversity, equity, and inclusion peer advisory group. Reviewed EDI efforts from nonprofits and government organizations outside of libraries.</p> <p>Joined Black Metropolis Research Consortium, a Chicago-based membership association whose mission is to connect all who seek to document, share, understand, and preserve Black experiences</p> <p>Created publicly available dashboards to share useful library data from IPLAR and other sources to support library decision makers and their advocacy efforts</p>
<p>Examine all aspects of RAILS policies, procedures, and core services through an equity lens and make needed improvements</p>	<p>Continued work of the RAILS Climate Team to identify and implement internal best practices and initiatives for staff</p> <p>Established employee connection program for new hires to help build an inclusive culture and improve employee retention</p> <p>Continued holding regular EDI training sessions for all RAILS staff. Staff trainings offered in FY 2023 included sessions focused on skill building and an exploration of whiteness(history, impacts, etc.)</p> <p>Redesigned RAILS website with a focus on accessibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site complies with WCAG 2.1 AA accessibility guidelines (AAA compliance for color contrast) • An accessibility expert at our contractor Aten Design Group reviewed all design elements during development • Site takes advantage of accessibility features of the U.S. Web Design System • Body text uses Atkinson Hyperlegible font created by Braille Institute • Editoria11y accessibility checker automatically tags potential accessibility issues

Objectives	Planned Activities
	<p>Followed Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) when designing, formatting, and posting content to RAILS social media platforms. Paid careful attention to color contrast; avoided excessive flashings, strobing, and decorative fonts; used shortened URLs, and accurately captioned all videos with high-contrast text.</p>
<p>Work with RAILS members of all types to identify and implement ways to diversify library governing bodies and staff to increase representation and better reflect the communities they serve</p>	<p>Worked with RAILS Board Policy Committee to examine RAILS Board election policies and procedures to attract a more diverse board</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added a diversity statement to the RAILS Board Member Job Description • Further enhanced board candidate application form to encourage diverse applicants • Encouraged members to vote with EDI principles in mind. Sent information on board election to all RAILS library agency directors via delivery service or U.S. mail to encourage more multitype library voting.

Strategic Plan Goal Three: *RAILS assists member libraries in preparing for the future.*

Objectives	Planned Activities
<p>Leveraging RAILS' power and influence in the Illinois library community, work collaboratively for additional funding for all types of libraries to ensure that libraries have the staffing, technology, and infrastructure needed to offer essential and cutting-edge services to their communities</p>	<p>Provided CE/consulting to help libraries with fundraising, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Introduction to Grant Proposal Writing" webinar • "Grant Writing Tips for School Library Staff" webinar • Partnered with Library Book Selection Service (LBSS) Endowment Fund to offer "Grant Writing 101: Bringing Money to Your Library" for school and small public library staff <p>Continued to schedule regular meetings with AISLE, Chicago Public Schools (CPS), IHLS, ILA, and ISL reps to discuss collaborative projects to help school libraries deal with funding challenges. (See also information about RAILS' School Library Data project below.)</p> <p>Developed statement showing strong support for AISLE's efforts to encourage school districts to hire licensed school librarians and posted it to the RAILS website. As a follow up to an AISLE letter, emailed the statement to school districts with retiring school librarians and encouraged them to hire a licensed school librarian.</p> <p>Publicized FY 2023 ISL grant opportunities, including the Live and Learn Construction Grant, Public Library Per Capita & Equalization Grant, and</p>

Objectives	Planned Activities
	<p>the School District Library Grant Program. Encouraged members to apply.</p> <p>Publicized a wide variety of additional grant and scholarship opportunities from AISLE, ALA, ILA, and other library-related organizations</p> <p>Participated in a wide variety of efforts to help advocate for continued/increased funding for all types of libraries, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ILA Legislative Meetups, both attending and collating/contributing stories from the My Library Is... website blog demonstrating the value of libraries • Responding to ALA calls to actions • Continuing to work with ILA Public Policy Committee to discuss and promote legislation of importance to libraries <p>Publicized opportunities for staff from member libraries to advocate for continued/increased funding for libraries as appropriate, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging members to attend ILA Legislative Meetups • Encouraging members to respond to ALA calls to action • Encouraging library staff to use talking points and other resources on the My Library Is... website <p>Encouraged members to support anti-book banning legislation (HB 2789) championed by the Secretary of State. Kept members informed about the latest developments with the legislation.</p> <p>Kept RAILS members informed of other important legislative developments affecting libraries via regular articles in the <i>RAILS E-News</i> and other communications</p> <p>Worked with RAILS Board Advocacy Committee to educate the board about issues affecting RAILS and libraries that required their advocacy efforts</p>
<p>Help member libraries of all types and sizes demonstrate their value to their different stakeholders</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">My Library Is... (MLI) Initiative</p> <p>Planned strategies/activities to address needs identified on FY 2022 individualized MLI surveys of the four types of RAILS libraries (academic, public, school, and specialized)</p> <p>Continued to expand and promote blog section of My Library Is... site, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adding the capability for library staff across Illinois to call a number to record their blog post rather than having to write it

Objectives	Planned Activities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing a post on how easy and effective it can be to contact your elected officials. • Featuring “Specialized Library Spotlight’ video interviews with special library staff to highlight the value they bring to their community of users • Publicizing MLI blog posts and other campaign resources via weekly <i>RAILS E-News</i> <p>Continued targeting MLI grant program at school libraries to help with the growing and dire need for school libraries to tell their stories more effectively. Awarded \$58,346.09 in grants to 18 projects.</p> <p>Continued to work with MLI Advisory Group (consisting of staff from all types of libraries) to publicize the initiative and to develop additional activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planned/held "Ask Us Anything: Binge Boxes" networking event featuring short presentations by three library workers • Planned/held "Ask Us Anything: Public/School Library Partnerships" networking event <p>Offered CE to help members promote their value, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Academic Library Marketing: Reaching Your Audience in a Post-COVID Era” • “Leveraging TikTok for Libraries” • “TikTok Pro Tips” • “Next Level TikTok Skills” • “Consistent Content Marketing” two-part webinar <p>Continued to offer IHLS the opportunity to participate in the MLI campaign</p> <p>(See additional campaign-related activities in previous section)</p>
<p>Professional development and member engagement efforts are future-focused, crossing library types and specific to individual library type needs</p>	<p>Provided CE/consulting on general resource sharing issues identified in the administrative rules, including interlibrary loan, the ILLNET Interlibrary Loan Code, nonresident service, the RAILS Resource Sharing Policy, etc. Provided information and training resources related to these topics on the RAILS website.</p> <p>Provided CE/consulting on library advocacy, management and practice, and other core service areas identified in the administrative rules as referenced in this document</p> <p>Provided CE/consulting to help libraries meet per capita grant requirements and standards for their type of library</p>

Objectives	Planned Activities
	<p>Continued to gather member input on CE needs from all sizes and types of RAILS libraries and implemented training to meet those needs</p> <p>Identified/monitored issues, trends, and challenges affecting libraries of all types and sizes and provided CE/consulting opportunities to help libraries respond to these issues and challenges, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnered with AISLE, IHLS, and ILA to explore formation of a Regional Response Team to help libraries dealing with materials challenges • Offered webinar addressing first amendment audits • Worked with RAILS’ attorney to prepare FAQ and report template to help members meet <i>Decennial Committees on Local Government Efficiency Act</i> requirements. Held webinar. Developed talking points libraries could use to report on efficiencies/cost savings resulting from system membership. Discussed Act requirements at RAILS member update session. • Offered “Libraries Contribute to Resilient Communities” webinar on climate change • Offered “Emergency Preparedness” webinar <p>Helped libraries respond to remaining COVID-19 challenges by offering CE, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Packing for the Future: What to Take and What to Leave Behind” • “Academic Library Marketing: Reaching Your Audience in a Post-COVID Era” <p>Continued to develop Library Pulse pages on the RAILS website to help members respond to current issues, challenges, and trends</p> <p>Produced regular RAILS <i>Sparks</i> podcasts on current issues/trends affecting libraries of all types and sizes</p> <p>Continued to offer CE Event Grants to help libraries, networking groups, and library consortia plan/offer training events of interest to library staff. Awarded total of \$11,852.26 in grants in FY 2023.</p> <p>Continued to partner with AISLE to identify training needs for school library staff and to offer joint CE opportunities based on that feedback</p> <p>Continued to work jointly with the Illinois State Library and AISLE to offer school library staff PDH credit for RAILS-organized CE opportunities</p>

Objectives	Planned Activities
	<p>Worked with statewide partners to develop Directors University, the statewide training initiative for new public library directors. Publicized widely. Participants included 45 directors (33 from RAILS libraries).</p> <p>Worked with statewide partners to develop Directors 2.0 to offer intermediate-level training for library directors. Publicized widely. Participants included 40 Illinois public library directors (27 from RAILS libraries).</p> <p>Continued partnership with HR Source to provide CE and discounted membership. Publicized widely.</p> <p>Continued partnership with Ancel Glink to offer statewide FOIA/OMA hotline. Publicized widely.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Trustee Training</p> <p>Continued partnership with United for Libraries to provide statewide, online, on-demand trustee training. Publicized training widely.</p> <p>Offered "Keys to Being a Better Library Trustee" two-part webinar series with author and certified professional parliamentarian Nancy Sylvester</p> <p>Consulted with/attended library board meetings as appropriate to help boards meet legal requirements and to develop leadership skills</p> <p>RAILS Board members and RAILS' Director of Consulting and Continuing Education served on Illinois Library Association Trustee Forum and planned three spring trustee training events</p> <p>Collaborated with IHLS on their ISL grant to create an interactive trustee training portal that will be available statewide. This collaboration will continue in FY 2024.</p>

Strategic Plan Goal Four: *RAILS leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen the Illinois library community and expand services to all.*

Objectives	Planned Activities
<p>RAILS will continue to strengthen collaborative relationships with partner library organizations, including the Association of Illinois School Library</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">L2 (Library Directory and Learning Calendar)</p> <p>Continued to provide statewide leadership for L2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosted, maintained, and routinely updated the L2 software • Developed additional features in response to user feedback

Objectives	Planned Activities
<p>Educators, the Chicago Public Library, the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois, the Illinois Association of College & Research Libraries, the Illinois Heartland Library System, the Illinois Library Association, the Illinois State Library, and the Special Libraries Association – Illinois Community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided ongoing user help and support, including hosting and maintaining a support ticket system used by RAILS and IHLS • Continued to contract with Aten Design Group for L2 support and development • Asked ISL to continue to provide additional grant funding to support L2 • Provided a robust API and custom Drupal modules that allowed IHLS and LLSAPs to pull library and event data from L2 into their own websites • Continued to support annual certification for all member agencies of Illinois library systems through L2 (see also next section) • Continued to ensure the accuracy and currency of directory data from external sources such as IPLAR and ISBE <p>Continued working with statewide L2 Governing Group on long-term goals for L2, implementation of major new projects, and quality assurance</p> <p>Continued to participate in the Intercept open source software (which the L2 platform uses) community, including beginning the development work required to begin contributing our customizations back to the source software for broader use</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Certification</p> <p>Worked with ISL, IHLS, and other partners to improve and enhance the annual certification process</p> <p>Worked with RAILS members to ensure that they completed the certification process</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Other Collaborative Initiatives</p> <p>RAILS’ Executive Director attends the Illinois State Library Advisory Committee (ISLAC)</p> <p>RAILS’ Executive Director met monthly with ISL Director to discuss ongoing and upcoming issues for RAILS and RAILS member libraries</p> <p>RAILS’ Executive Director continued regular meetings with the Commissioner of the Chicago Public Library to discuss collaboration possibilities</p> <p>RAILS’ Executive Director met with IHLS Executive Director and CARLI Senior Director to discuss statewide electronic resources project and other possibilities for collaboration</p>

Objectives	Planned Activities
	<p>Continued to schedule regular meetings with AISLE, CPS, IHLS, ILA, and ISL to discuss collaborative projects related to school libraries as referenced above</p> <p>Began collaborating with AISLE, IHLS, ILA, and ISL to plan the September 2023 Illinois School Library Workers Symposium, a one-day online event for school library workers with no formal library education</p> <p>Had virtual booth at IHLS Member Day to provide information on RAILS programs available to libraries statewide</p> <p>Continued providing leadership and support to SLA-IL via RAILS' Member Engagement Manager serving as President of that group</p> <p>RAILS' Member Engagement Manager participated in 2022 SLA Annual Conference, and helped plan several sessions as President-Elect of the Leadership & Management Development (LMD) community</p> <p>Continued to serve as sponsor for library-related conferences as possible, including conferences aimed at libraries of all types and different staff levels</p> <p>Partnered on Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity Office of Broadband Project READY grant with Western Illinois University and IHLS. Three RAILS public libraries were chosen to participate in a Chromebook/hotspot lending program as part of the initiative. The program also gave libraries access to free online learning events tied to digital literacy.</p> <p>RAILS' Executive Director met with Metropolitan New York Library Council Executive Director to discuss potential areas of collaboration</p> <p>RAILS' Executive Director met with Connecticut Library Consortium Executive Director to learn about work to support libraries on the east coast</p> <p>Began collaborating with IHLS and CARLI to explore and promote library-related opportunities to engage with the current state and federal efforts to expand broadband access and advance digital equity, including future grant funding opportunities.</p> <p>RAILS Director of Technology Services represents Illinois libraries in the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's Broadband Advisory Council</p>

Objectives	Planned Activities
<p>RAILS will continually seek to understand member perceptions of inequities in system services to better support academic, school, and specialized libraries, as well as public libraries of all sizes.</p>	<p>Conducted Service Inequities Study to identify and examine perceptions of inequity as they exist within our system caused by factors such as library type, geography, service population, and material or financial resources. Additionally, explored how members perceive RAILS and our ability to meet their needs and support their work through our engagement and services. Gathered data and information internally about RAILS staff, programs, and services, conducted interviews, and invited all member library staff to participate in an online survey to identify areas of growth and opportunity.</p> <p>RAILS' Executive Director attended a meeting of the Tri-County Directors group to discuss the concerns of small and rural libraries in Central Illinois</p> <p>RAILS' Executive Director attended a meeting of the Association of Rural Community Directors Networking Group to gather feedback from the group and to discuss RAILS services of interest to them</p> <p>Included a "member center" for each type of library on the newly redesigned RAILS website to inform staff from each library type about the RAILS programs/services available to them. Sent promotional piece on member centers to directors at all RAILS library agencies, either by van delivery or mail.</p> <p>Presented program at 2022 ILA Annual Conference with a panel of speakers addressing the specialized library crisis</p> <p>RAILS' Member Engagement Manager wrote an article for the <i>ILA Reporter</i> about the Special Libraries Association and specialized librarians</p> <p>RAILS staff attended Association for Rural and Small Libraries (ARSL) conference to stay aware of issues and challenges facing small and/or rural libraries. Promoted other ARSL educational opportunities and other activities throughout the year.</p> <p>(See also Communications section below)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">School Library Data Project</p> <p>Continued to work with statewide partners to gather data on Illinois school libraries to get a better picture of school library needs in Illinois and how we might collaboratively address those needs</p> <p>Provided overview of project at August RAILS Back to School Fest</p>

Objectives	Planned Activities
	<p>Presented “By the Numbers: School Library Advocacy through Data” poster session at October ILA annual conference</p> <p>Presented program session “By the Numbers: School Library Advocacy through Data” at November AISLE conference</p> <p>Presented professional development session on school library data project at November 2022 IHLS Member Day</p> <p>Produced <i>Sparks</i> podcast about School Library Data Project and other efforts to support school libraries in Illinois</p> <p>Conducted survey to gather school library staff data for the 2022-23 school year to help us better advocate for and support school libraries</p> <p>Invited school librarian volunteers to help shape the design and features of a new online dashboard tool to share school library data</p> <p>Engaged in discussions to collaborate on reviving the Administrator Academy for school library staff, as well as other education for school librarians, administrators, and boards.</p> <p>Established a Data Networking Group specifically for school librarians.</p>
<p>Continuously evaluate RAILS programs and services to ensure that they are having an impact and are helping to create the best possible future for all member libraries</p>	<p>Conducted research on perceived service inequities between different types of libraries as noted in previous section. Solicited member input as to suggested methods of resolving system inequities.</p> <p>Conducted seven “Meet & Greets” throughout the RAILS area to introduce members to RAILS’ new Executive Director and to gather feedback on the challenges they face and how RAILS can meet their needs more effectively. These discussions led to many areas of shared interest and concern that informed our efforts in developing priorities for FY2024.</p> <p>Continued to solicit member feedback via RAILS communication tools, surveys, and member encounters. Implemented changes/additions to RAILS programs/services based on member input as appropriate.</p> <p>Monitor usage data in dashboards to assess performance of programs and services such as CE, Explore More, eRead, among others.</p> <p>Update RAILS grant rubrics as necessary to ensure goals are being met related to performance, and diversity and equity measures.</p>

Objectives	Planned Activities
	(See other sections of this document for plans to gather and respond to member feedback on specific RAILS programs/services)
Collaborate with the Illinois State Library, the Illinois Heartland Library System, and other partners to develop a plan and timeline for achieving universal service	<p>RAILS received the 2022 Robert R. McClarren Legislative Development Award in recognition of our advocacy for universal service and the expansion of the Cards for Kids Act</p> <p>Continued to work with the RAILS Board Universal Service Committee to find and implement solutions to challenges related to the unserved in Illinois</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued to work with members to identify obstacles to libraries adopting the extended Cards for Kids Act legislation. Encouraged all libraries to extend service to all children in unserved areas. • Developed and shared talking points and FAQ on expanded Cards for Kids Act with Universal Service Committee and Board Advocacy Committee • Continued to pursue efforts to change the real estate Multiple Listing Service information to include details about library service <p>Worked with Resource Sharing Committee to increase awareness within the library community of the significant number of unserved residents in Illinois. The group worked on advocacy and support for shared electronic resources and development of Find More Illinois.</p> <p>Continued to work with statewide partners to seek legislative support for a statewide electronic resources package for all Illinois residents, including the unserved (see further details above)</p> <p>Publicized requirement for library boards to vote annually on participation in the nonresident program and for members to update their participation information via L2. Publicized the names of participating/nonparticipating libraries and share with the Illinois State Library per our statutory requirement.</p>

Other Administrative Activities

The following section details FY 2023 activities to meet statutory priorities for Illinois library systems not included in the sections above.

Objectives	Planned Activities
Engage and communicate with members and	Member Recruitment

Objectives	Planned Activities
<p>potential members from all types of libraries throughout the RAILS area to ensure they are aware of system programs/ services of benefit to them and to better understand, anticipate, and meet their needs</p>	<p>Engaged with libraries of all types that expressed an interest in RAILS membership</p> <p>Visited potential members to ensure they meet membership criteria</p> <p>Worked with RAILS Board on new member recommendations for approval by ISL</p> <p style="text-align: center;">General Member Communication/Engagement</p> <p>Promoted available programs/services via RAILS communication tools and member encounters, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAILS website • Weekly <i>RAILS E-News</i> • Visiting as many members as possible, either virtually or in person • Producing new RAILS services/program brochure to distribute to all interested member library staff and public library trustees • Scheduling RAILS member updates • Using available type of library mailing lists and lists for different types of libraries and different levels of staff to communicate about specific programs/services of interest • Attending RAILS networking group meetings as appropriate • Sending all new RAILS library directors a welcome communication to acquaint them with system programs/services, and offering to schedule “New Director Welcome” online discussions to provide more in-depth information • Offering an online “RAILS Refresher” to any interested library • Continuing to feature “RAILS Minute” videos with the RAILS Executive Director highlighting the latest system news • Holding Back-to-School Fest online forum to help school library staff learn more about RAILS programs and services, and posting recordings of the different sessions on the RAILS website for future viewing • Offering one-on-one online meetings for school library staff who were new to their district, new to RAILS, or for anyone who wanted a refresher on system services • RAILS’ Member Engagement Manager speaking to PrairieCat school libraries as part of PrairieCat’s Back to School event • RAILS’ Member Engagement Manager speaking about RAILS support for school libraries at North Suburban High School Library Networking Group meeting • RAILS’ Member Engagement Manager speaking about RAILS’ services for schools at Iroquois-Kankakee Regional Office of Education event • Giving an update on RAILS programs/services at Health Science Librarians of Illinois Conference (HSLI)

Objectives	Planned Activities
	<p>Redesigned RAILS website to replace outdated version of Drupal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathered feedback from all types of libraries, including via usability testing and conducting an online study to get input on the site’s menu structure • Ensured that new website is fully accessible to those with disabilities as referenced above • Launched new website on railslibraries.org domain, communicated address change widely, and implemented appropriate redirects from other domains • Coordinated with RAILS IT to change RAILS email domain to @railslibraries.org to coincide with change in website address <p>Continued to make improvements to the weekly <i>RAILS E-News</i> based on the results of the FY 2022 <i>RAILS E-News</i> survey and other member feedback</p> <p>Hired Digital Marketing & Communications Specialist. Expanded use of digital communication strategies to promote RAILS programs/services, including video. Greatly expanded/enhanced RAILS’ social media efforts to engage and communicate with members.</p> <p>Exhibited at library conferences geared at different types of libraries and different levels of staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 691 visitors to RAILS exhibit booth at October ILA conference • Approximately 253 visitors to RAILS exhibit booth at November AISLE conference • Approximately 130 visitors to RAILS table at Illinois Youth Services Institute • Approximately 32 visitors to RAILS exhibit table at April Reaching Forward South conference • Approximately 290 visitors to RAILS exhibit table at May Reaching Forward conference • Approximately 754 visitors to RAILS exhibit booth at ALA conference in Chicago (approximately 300 of these visitors were RAILS members)
<p>Engage and communicate with the RAILS Board of Directors to ensure that they are aware of RAILS programs and services, that they can serve as ambassadors for RAILS, and that their service on the</p>	<p>Communicated regularly with the board through board mailing list and other means</p> <p>Kept board informed about important issues for RAILS and for libraries of all types. Provided monthly talking points for communicating with members about select RAILS programs/services.</p>

Objectives	Planned Activities
board is as rewarding as possible	<p>Planned/implemented orientation session at Burr Ridge service center for all new RAILS Board members. Invited existing board members to attend for a refresher.</p> <p>Scheduled board meetings in different parts of the RAILS area as possible so the board could learn about different areas of the system</p> <p>Continued to promote and encourage diversity on the RAILS Board as referenced above</p> <p>Supported board conference/meeting attendance as appropriate</p>
Recruit RAILS staff as needed to meet roles specified in administrative rules and to support strategic plan goals and objectives. Actively seek a diverse staff in terms of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identify, and other factors.	<p>Encouraged/supported professional development for staff</p> <p>Continued to hold monthly staff meetings to keep all staff informed of the latest RAILS developments and to help staff at different service centers engage with each other.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted survey to gather feedback on staff meetings and made changes to meetings as a result <p>Continued work of RAILS Employee Committee to develop collaborative activities for all staff</p> <p>Conducted interviews with staff hired in 2022 to gather feedback on staff culture, onboarding, and the hybrid work environment</p> <p>Continued to prioritize EDI-related staff activities and initiatives as referenced above</p>
Maintain robust technology infrastructure needed to carry out all RAILS programs/services	<p>Transitioned all staff email addresses and associated services to .org extension to match the new website domain</p> <p>Implemented the LISTSERV platform and began the migration of RAILS email lists from Mailman</p> <p>Replaced the storage area network appliance (SAN), core network switch, and the uninterruptible power supply (UPS) in the Burr Ridge datacenter</p> <p>Implemented OneDrive for selected staff as a pilot for broader staff implementation of SharePoint and OneDrive</p> <p>Implemented necessary changes to meet new cybersecurity requirements, such as multi-factor authentication for all RAILS employee email addresses</p>

Objectives	Planned Activities
	<p>Made critical updates to the ticket systems used for many RAILS services, as well as a few other affected services, in response to a major change in Microsoft's support for email interoperability</p> <p>Provided training for staff in cybersecurity awareness, multifactor authentication, newly updated ticket system platforms, and other new tools and services as needed</p> <p>Worked with PrairieCat staff in planning and executing their move out of RAILS technology infrastructure and facilities to their own self-hosted solutions and fully remote work</p> <p>Developed an integration between the RAILS-developed HR and IT equipment inventory apps to facilitate the tracking of information related to equipment damage and loss</p> <p>Continued to set up and support Zoom accounts for RAILS member networking groups</p> <p>Continued to support RAILS staff and Board members' use of their RAILS-provided technology software and equipment</p>