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Executive Director Report, January 2024

Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

Welcome Kate Niehoff

We are pleased to have welcomed Kate Niehoff, our new Director of Consulting and Continuing Education, to RAILS on January 8th. Kate has worked in public libraries for 18 years, most recently as the Director of Community Engagement & Partnerships at the Schaumburg Township District Library. Kate has also worked at the Arlington Heights Memorial Library, the Forest Park Public Library, and the Melrose Park Public Library. She has served on many committees including her work on the steering committee of Illinois Libraries Present, LACONI POP, and the RLA-CE Committee (now ReCharge). We are so pleased to have Kate here at RAILS and I know she will bring great things to our organization and our member libraries.

Visit to the Villa Park Public Library

Thank you to Villa Park Public Library Director Sandra Hill and RAILS Board and VPPL Trustee Jennifer Hovanec for inviting me to their December Board Meeting. It was a lovely opportunity to meet the staff and see their beautiful building. If I have not yet visited you or your library, we will be in contact to set up a one-on-one meeting or visit to the library you represent on the RAILS Board.

Public Act 103-0100 and Public Act 103-0343

[Public Act 103-0100](#) became effective on January 1. There has been a great deal of discussion on this new law in the press, both locally and nationally. Chicago public television affiliate WTTW also posted an investigation on the potential effect [in regards to prison libraries](#) on January 10. Member libraries seem to be navigating the new law smoothly. We expect to hear more about the impact to member libraries following the completion of the certification period on March 31, 2024.

[Public Act 103-0343](#) also became effective on January 1. This law, which was signed by Governor Pritzker last summer, modifies the definition of a newly hired employee to include independent contractors. This change involves the requirement to report business with an independent contractor to IDES within 20 days of hire. After receiving questions from a member, we've asked Ancel Glink to create a memo with guidance on this new law and we plan to share with the Directors List and share the memo via the RAILS website. We have also been in communication with ILA around this Public Act.

RAILS Minute

In December, the [RAILS Minute](#) highlighted the Paid Leave for All Workers Act, the future of broadband connectivity in Illinois, and upcoming deadlines for the Public Library per capita and Equalization Aid Grant.

The most recent RAILS Minute focused on several current topics, including the hire of Kate Niehoff as Director of Consulting and Continuing Education, the launch of the SLATE project dashboard, our upcoming RAILS Member Update on February 14, and deadlines for the annual certification process and delivery count .

Thanks to Digital Marketing and Communications Specialist Ola Gronski and Marketing and Communications Director Dan Bostrom for all their continued work on this offering. This episode will debut on Tuesday, January 23.

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

RAILS Climate Team Update

Our RAILS Climate Team continues to meet regularly with facilitator Biz Lindsay-Ryan to discuss issues of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion as it relates to the RAILS staff experience. Some RAILS staff are currently working through the [Freedom Lifted Justice at Work Course](#) and regularly meeting to discuss their learning. At the most recent meeting of the Climate Team on January 17, the group discussed potential projects for 2024 including additional training for staff, targeted training by job type, and additions to the onboarding process that relate to our strategic goals around equity, diversity, accessibility, and inclusion.

Assist member libraries in preparing for the future

Save the Date: RAILS Member Update on February 14

We are looking forward to another virtual RAILS Member Update this February. Topics will include a spotlight on libraries serving migrants, the School Library Advocacy through Education (SLATE) project, and more. A full agenda is coming but [registration](#) is available now.

Broadband and Digital Equity

I've had several meetings over the last two months around developments with broadband, digital equity, and funding in Illinois. Anne Slaughter has led many efforts for RAILS around this work, and we are grateful for the partnership we have with CARLI and IHLS as we continue to pursue the support of libraries as part of this important conversation. We continue to encourage libraries to actively participate in the BEAD Map Challenge Process. The data collected through this process will determine which locations are eligible for funding through the federal Broadband Equity and Deployment (BEAD) program.

You can learn more about how to act by participating in the BEAD map challenge process and commenting on the Illinois Digital Equity Plan by visiting <https://broadbandforlibraries.com/>

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Joint Board meeting with Illinois Heartland Library System

Emily Fister and I have begun meeting with Leslie Bednar and Stacie Bushong at the Illinois Heartland Library System to begin planning for the Joint System Board Meeting, tentatively scheduled for April 30 at the Bloomington Public Library in Bloomington, Illinois. Thank you to the Board for responding to the survey about topics of interest for the group. We hope to have more to share about the agenda soon.

Illinois State Library Advisory Committee (ISLAC)

The next meeting of the ISLAC group is scheduled for Thursday, January 25 in Springfield. I should be able to share more at the Board Meeting.

Illinois Library Association Public Policy Committee (PPC)

The ILA PPC committee last met on Monday, January 8. Some updates to the current [legislative priorities](#) were discussed. RAILS is assisting PPC through the development of a survey around newspaper bid posting requirements. Thanks to Grant Halter for his help in the development of the survey. The attendance of the recent Legislative Meetups was shared, with attendance from both legislators and attendees approaching or just under 2020 levels in most locations. There was some discussion of upcoming bills to be watched, but not much action is expected until the Spring.

Illinois Library Association Legislative Meetups

RAILS staff attended ILA Legislative Meetups in five locations (Central, Northwestern, North Suburban, South Suburban, and West Suburban Chicago) in November and December. I was able to attend three of the events, and it was great to interact with legislators and members alike. I think we all appreciated the opportunities for connection at these in person meetups. Thanks to the Illinois Library Association for hosting!

ILDS Meeting

I had two meetings in January focused on the upcoming Illinois Library Delivery Service (ILDS) contract renewal. These meetings with CARLI, the Illinois State Library, and the Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS) have been a good opportunity to discuss terms for a contract renewal that take into account all of the changes in delivery since it was last renewed in 2018. The group agreed to take the next year to discuss these issues and come to agreement on the next contract terms. Next I expect to meet with Anne Craig of CARLI and Leslie Bednar of IHLS to discuss further.

Looking Ahead to February

- **February Service of the Month and Board Development topics – Dan Bostrom will present an overview of Marketing and Communications activities and we will provide an update on capital assessment activities for RAILS facilities**



This Month at RAILS – December 2023/January 2024

THE TOP THREE

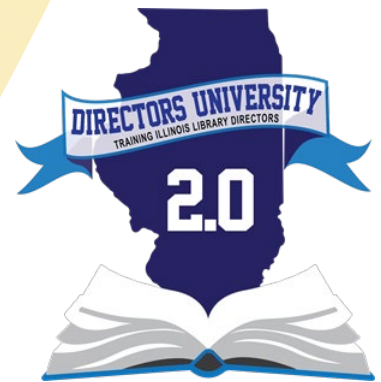
In response to board member feedback, each month we provide brief talking points to help you spread the word about specific RAILS programs/services. Here are this month's top three:

2024 Illinois State Library Annual Certification Opens

RAILS is pleased to announce that the 2024 Illinois State Library Annual Certification process is now open. In compliance with Illinois statutes and administrative rules [[23 Ill. Adm. Code 3030.200](#)], annual certification is required of ALL library system members to retain system membership and eligibility for grants administered by the Illinois State Library. The Illinois State Library Annual Certification form has been streamlined and moved to the Library Directory and Learning Calendar (L2) <https://librarylearning.org/>. The certification period runs from January 2 to March 31, 2024. Check out the [RAILS website for more information](#) on how to certify your library.

Applications Now Open for Directors University 2.0

[Directors University 2.0](#) will be held April 9-11 at the Starved Rock Lodge and Conference Center in Oglesby, IL. This learning event is for public library directors who previously attended Directors University or SPLMI (Statewide Public Library Management Institute) prior to 2020. Building upon the success of Directors University, DU 2.0 will explore topics including building board relationships, capital improvement plans, leadership development, and self-care. Like Directors University, DU 2.0 is a joint project of RAILS, IHLS, ILA and the Illinois State Library. RAILS Associate Executive Director Joe Filapek and Director of Consulting and Continuing Education Kate Niehoff serve on the DU 2.0 planning committee. Applications for DU 2.0 will be accepted through February 12, 2024.



RAILS Libraries Encouraged to Participate in Broadband Efforts

RAILS is encouraging public libraries to help identify unserved and underserved broadband areas of Illinois by actively participating in the [BEAD Map Challenge Process](#) and commenting on the [Illinois State Digital Equity Plan](#). January 2024 is a critical time for public participation related to broadband funding. RAILS will continue to share relevant information as it comes. All libraries are encouraged to visit BroadbandforLibraries.com for more information.

Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

Enhance sharing of knowledge and best practices

Non-Resident Fee Card Program Data Cleanup Project

[Section 3050.20\(b\)](#) in the Illinois Administrative Code requires public libraries to notify their regional library system of their participation status in the non-resident fee card program each year. This information is gathered in L2 and supplied to the Illinois State Library as part of our annual report. In reviewing non-resident records in L2, we have found a number of libraries who have not updated their information in several years. After the completion of our annual certification project, RAILS will be working to contact libraries whose information is outdated or absent. In addition to being a membership requirement, the availability of updated non-resident information can be important for future projects related to universal service in Illinois.

RAILS Social Media Engagement

See the report at the end for info on our November and December social media engagement efforts.

Leverage economies of scale to provide greater purchasing power

RAILS members can find information, trial access and pricing on all deals and discounts by logging into the [RAILS Deals & Discounts page](#).

Movie License Group Purchase Sign-Up Results

The movie license group purchase sign-up/renewal was completed in December. The total purchase of netted a savings of over \$36,000 for the 179 participating public libraries, which include 27 new sign-ups. The annual license allows unlimited showings of thousands of movies, from classics to new releases. The license is valid from January 1 - December 31, 2024.

Readers' Advisory Electronic Resource Group Purchase Sign-Up Results

The sign-up/renewal for the RAILS readers' advisory electronic resource group purchase was completed in December. The total purchase netted a savings of over \$4,600 for the 21 participating public libraries. 5 new libraries joined this year. The subscription runs from January 1 - December 31, 2024.

Deals & Discounts Webinars/Demos

In November, RAILS Library Resource Specialist Jody Rubel coordinated a webinar for an electronic world languages resource for children. The webinar attracted 14 registrants which resulted in four new sign ups and saving libraries \$560.

During November, Jody Rubel met with vendors to plan 2024 webinars and resource promotions along with planning for the spring renewals.

On December 6, Jody Rubel attended a demo on Baker & Taylor's cataloging resource, BT Cat, and an OCLC webinar highlighting cataloging and resource sharing tools for library staff.

ConsortiaManager & Data Management

Leila Heath and Jenny Taylor, Associate Director of E-Resources at CARLI, met on December 6 to discuss issues and procedures pertaining to consortial group purchasing.

Leila Heath, Anna Behm, Jody Rubel, Karen Goyer, and Wayne Dixon continue work on the new eRead dashboard that would manage the join and renewal processes. The team met on November 29 and December 6 to discuss details and progress. During December, staff tested functionality, assessed design layout, and reviewed communication templates for changes.

Jody Rubel continues her participation on the L2 Governance Group to provide input.

Career Online High School Update

[Career Online High School](#) is an 18-credit, vocation-based high school completion program.

Jessica Barnes organized and hosted an ePass Networking Group meeting on December 5, with nine attendees on the Zoom call.

Jessica Barnes traveled to Dunlap Public Library on November 28 and Quincy Public Library on November 29 to discuss Explore More Illinois with member libraries and potential attractions. There were four attendees at Dunlap and 13 attendees at Quincy. Both libraries expressed appreciation that RAILS traveled to their areas to discuss the program.

COHS Stats as of December 31, 2023

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
413	184	108	60%/53%

Continue to seek greater efficiencies, innovations, and enhancements to delivery services

RAILS #DeliveryWrapped

You've heard of #SpotifyWrapped, now get ready for RAILS #DeliveryWrapped. We rely on our delivery staff to provide one of the most vital resources to our members. The stats speak for themselves—our sorters and drivers work hard every day to help you serve your community! [More information can be found on the RAILS Facebook page.](#)

The public libraries that received the most deliveries per capita in 2023:

- McCook Public Library District
- Bedford Park Public Library District
- Franklin Grove Public Library
- Cordova District Library
- Hodgkins Public Library District
- Milledgeville Public Library
- Forreston Public Library
- Neponset Public Library

The longest distance that our delivery drivers traveled was

151 miles

from East Peoria to Pleasant Hill CUSD #3.

Thanks, Michael and Rick!

RAILS #DELIVERYWRAPPED

The graphic features a purple and blue gradient background. It includes two small headshots of men, Michael and Rick, and the RAILS logo at the bottom.

In FY 2023, our delivery drivers traveled 1,173,510 miles. That's the equivalent of traveling around the world 47 times.

In FY 2023, we delivered 7,673,127 items. That's \$135,584,154 worth of materials.

The longest distance that our delivery drivers traveled between hub and library was 151 miles from East Peoria Service Center to Pleasant Hill CUSD #3 in Pleasant Hill, IL.

RAILS Requests Libraries Review Their System Delivery Contact List

All libraries receiving direct van delivery are required to complete a quarterly delivery count. To ensure that the count is performed and the data is entered on time, we ask all library directors to review the list of library staff designated as a System Delivery Contact to receive notices and reminders for each delivery count. [For more information and next steps please see the RAILS website.](#)

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

Find More Illinois Update

2023 was the last year of an incentive program for Find More Illinois. During the past calendar year, seven libraries joined FMI. This brings the number of libraries that participate in FMI to 58. Within the last two months of the incentive program, an additional 34 libraries signed participation agreements and are now in various stages of the onboarding process to becoming participating members of Find More Illinois.



eRead Illinois Update

Leila Heath and Anna Behm met with Curt Leppert, Jack Darden, Jesse Wilson, and Anna Curtis from Baker & Taylor on December 6. Jesse is RAILS's new Customer Success Manager. They discussed current projects and initiatives.

Anna Behm met with Grant Halter and Data Analysis Intern Quinn McKissock to discuss some possible projects related to eRead Illinois circulation, usage, and purchasing data. Anna, Quinn, and Grant also met with Jesse Wilson and Hunter Weaver at Baker & Taylor to talk about how B&T can support RAILS in this endeavor, including sending regular reports and information.

Use of RAILS E-Resources

eRead Illinois Boundless Checkouts

Time Period	E-Books	Audiobooks	Total
November 2023	20,010	15,766	35,867
December 2023	19,040	15,290	34,330
FY 2024 To Date	114,353	95,812	210,165

Time Period	Number of Views
November 2023	1,481
December 2023	1,771
FY 2024	9,457

Explore More Illinois Update

In November 2023, 2,420 reservations were made in Explore More Illinois. The most popular downstate and suburban attractions in September were Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe (199), Brookfield Zoo (152), DuPage Children's Museum in Naperville (43), Illinois Holocaust Museum in Skokie (17), DuPage Children's Museum in Naperville (43), and Discovery Center Museum in Rockford (14). The most popular Chicago attractions in November were the Museum of Science and Industry (451), Art Institute of Chicago (404), Field Museum (331), Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum (283), and Chicago Children's Museum (223).



In December 2023, 2,574 reservations were made in Explore More Illinois. The most popular downstate and suburban attractions in December were Brookfield Zoo (220), Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe (131), DuPage Children's Museum in Naperville (63), Illinois Holocaust Museum in Skokie (33), and Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield (9). The most popular Chicago attractions in November were the Art Institute of Chicago (459), Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum (419), Museum of Science and Industry (401), Field Museum (231), and Chicago Children's Museum (175).

The Lyric Opera of Chicago joined Explore More Illinois in November. The Volo Museum in Volo and the McAnnich Arts Center at the College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn joined in December.

Libraries Enrolled in Explore More Illinois as of December 31, 2023

RAILS Libraries	IHLS Libraries	Chicago Public Library	Community Colleges	Total
337	90	1	4	432

Attractions in Explore More Illinois as of December 31, 2023

Attractions	65
Total Attractions in 2023	78

Reservations Made in Explore More Illinois November/December 2023

Organization	November 2023	December 2023
RAILS/IHLS	243	369
CPL	2,177	2,205
Total	2,420	2,574

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

Freedom Lifted

RAILS continues to promote the availability of "[Social Justice for Libraries](#)", the asynchronous course accessible by all RAILS members through our subscription with Freedom Lifted. As of January 1, a total of 125 member library staff across 35 organizations have begun the course. We will continue to promote this resource regularly, and will also be exploring a possible supplementary webinar with Freedom Lifted founder Mia Henry during the first half of 2024.

Assist member libraries in preparing for the future

Future-focused professional development and member engagement efforts

Two Broadband Grant Opportunities for Public Libraries in Western Illinois

RAILS and Western Illinois University are excited to announce the launch of two grant opportunities for public libraries in specific Illinois counties:

- [2024 Western Illinois Digital Access Mini-Grant Program](#) - allows libraries to apply for \$500 in support for digital literacy and economic development projects in their communities.
- [2024 Western Illinois Chromebook Lending Grants](#) - allows libraries to apply to receive up to 4 (four) LTE-enabled Chromebooks.



These grants are only open to public libraries in the following counties: Adams, Brown, Hancock, Henderson, Knox, McDonough, Pike, Schuyler, and Warren. This grant is part of the [Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity's Broadband READY initiative](#) to increase broadband usage in underserved communities across Illinois.

RAILS Employees Participate in Presentations and Meetings

RAILS E-Content Specialist Anna Behm gave a virtual presentation for the Morton Grove Public Library about Inkie.org, the [Inkie.org Library](#), Pressbooks, and the Indie Author Project on November 9. About four people attended the live presentation, which was recorded to be posted to the library's YouTube page.

On December 4, Anna Behm participated in a panel discussion about the Indie Author Project and RAILS's decision to add Indie Author Project Select titles to the eRead Illinois collection in 2020. About 75 people attended the webinar.

RAILS Special Projects Librarian Jessica Barnes is beta testing the IHLS Illinois Public Library Trustee online training. She began the course in December.

On January 3, Anna Behm, Joe Filapek, Monica Harris and Leila Heath attended a statewide system meeting to discuss the License to Read Act and the complexities of purchasing e-books for libraries.

Upcoming RAILS Webinars

RAILS has two upcoming webinars that are open for registration:

- [“Safety and Security Debrief Strategies for Supporting Library Staff”](#)
January 31 from 1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.
- ["Making Technology Accessible: Creative and Assistive Tools Kit"](#)
February 13 from 10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Strengthen collaborative relationships with partner library organizations

December 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.

December meeting topics included:

- Updates on the SLATE project and the upcoming release of the data dashboard
- A discussion of the Unite Against Books Bans Illinois program
- A legislative update from ILA
- A discussion of a newly-formed AISLE task force to get certified school librarians in every school

And much more! The group will continue monthly meetings in 2024.

Statewide Regional Response Team Update

The [Statewide Regional Response Team Initiative](#) that was created last year through conversations during our monthly partnership meeting is set to launch in early 2024. A total of 133 library advocates from across the state have volunteered to serve on a regional response team who would be available as a resource for libraries experiencing a challenge to library materials. An initial volunteer meeting has been scheduled for Monday, January 29. RAILS Associate Executive Director Joe Filapek and Data Research Specialist Janette Derucki serve on the RRT planning committee.

RAILS Staff & Service Center News

Welcome Kate Niehoff!

RAILS is pleased to welcome Kate Niehoff as RAILS Director of Consulting and Continuing Education effective January 8, 2024. [A press release was shared on the RAILS website](#). Kate will be based out of our Burr Ridge office and will report to Associate Executive Director Joe Filapek.

RAILS Director of Library Resources and Programs Participates in 2023 Charleston Conference

November 6-10, 2023 RAILS Director of Library Resources and Programs Leila Heath attended the Charleston Conference in Charleston, SC. This conference focuses on collection development issues, vendor product development and academic library issues. Interesting session topics included a keynote from the Barnes &

Noble CEO, vendor cooperation, handling college closures and artificial intelligence. Leila networked with other consortia purchasing managers, including Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA), Midwest Collaborative for Library Services (MCLS), Florida Virtual Campus (FLVC) and CARLI. She also met with Nels Rune Jensen from ConsortiaManager to discuss progress and issues related to the platform and group purchasing.

Burr Ridge Re-Cabling Project

Starting Tuesday, January 30, 2024 RAILS will be working on [a project to replace all network cables in the Burr Ridge Service Center](#). This project is expected to take 2-3 weeks to complete. The timeline is as follows:

- Start date: Tuesday, January 30
- End date: Tuesday, February 20 (tentative, could be sooner)

During the project duration, RAILS staff will work from home as much as possible and the building will be closed to all outside groups. Due to Open Meetings Act restrictions, we may need to open the facility for RAILS Board Committee meetings.

New Desktop Monitors for RAILS Staff

RAILS IT finished its bid process for replacement computer monitors for staff and they have been delivered.

DECEMBER 2023: analytics

● Facebook ● Instagram ● Twitter ● LinkedIn

followers



November 2023	December 2023
2,382	2,393
1,341	1,342
1,416	1,415
1,194	1,257

reach



November 2023	December 2023
2,925	6,164
921	1,148
N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A

impressions



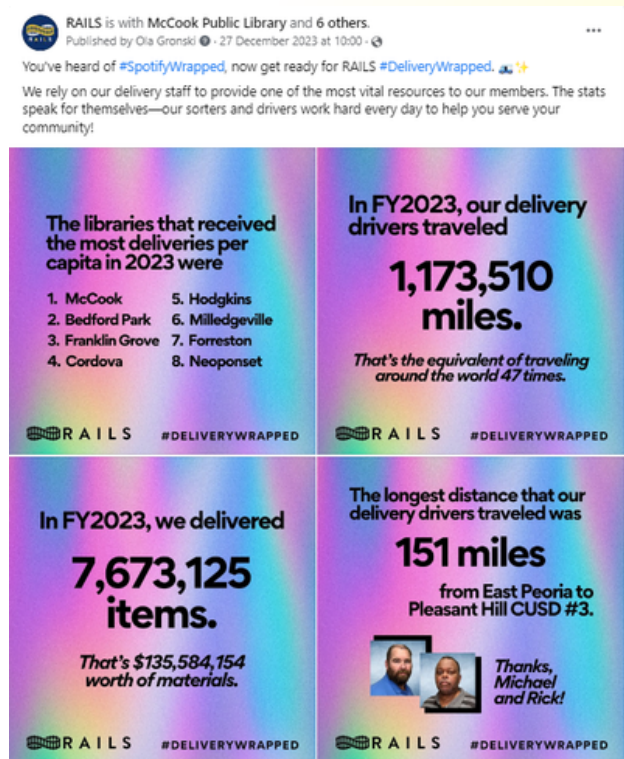
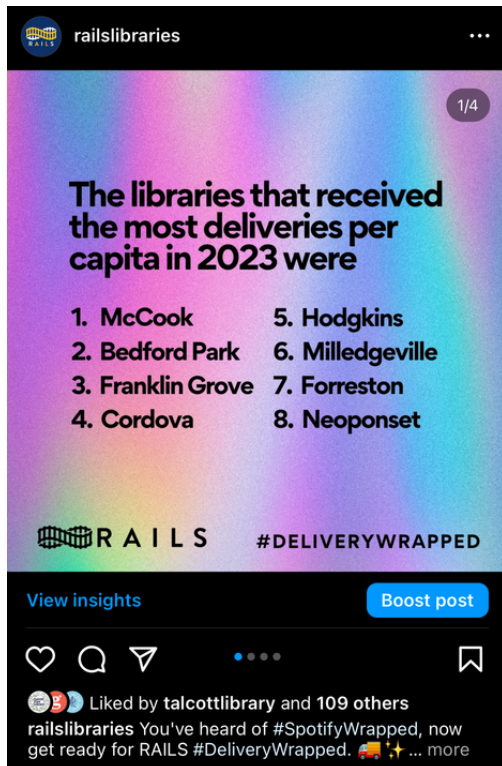
November 2023	December 2023
N/A	N/A
4,341	5,133
3,203	1,973
6,276	5,388

engagement



November 2023	December 2023
792	1,766
199	355
N/A	N/A
217	219

DECEMBER 2023: top posts



NOVEMBER 2023: analytics

● Facebook

● Instagram

● Twitter

● LinkedIn

followers



October 2023

November 2023

2,381

2,382

1,336

1,341

1,419

1,416

1,136

1,194

reach



October 2023

November 2023

5,430

2,925

1,442

921

N/A

N/A

N/A

N/A

impressions



October 2023

November 2023

N/A

N/A

8,060

4,341

3,310

3,203

3,659

6,276

engagement



October 2023

November 2023

2,235

792

521

199

N/A

N/A

116

217

NOVEMBER 2023: top posts

