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April 19, 2024

**TO: RAILS Board of Directors**

**FROM: Monica Harris, Executive Director**

**SUBJECT: Draft FY2025 Operational Plan**

**OVERVIEW:**

As budgetary and operational planning for FY2025 is underway, we are pleased to present this draft operational plan. This document outlines the strategic direction of RAILS for the coming year, and is organized according to the current strategic plan goals and objectives. Developed through a collaborative effort, it reflects the expertise of Finance Manager Sharon Swanson, Director of Marketing and Communications Dan Bostrom, and valuable input from the Executive Team and staff.

The Illinois State Library has instructed us to submit an operational plan and budget based on annual revenue of approximately \$11,870,000, which is funding from the Area and Per Capita Grant. This does not include additional projected revenue of approximately \$4.5 million, consisting chiefly of reimbursement revenue, fees from services and materials (including eRead Illinois and the ILDS contract) and investment income of approximately \$1 million.

In keeping with our process in previous years, what you see here is not a final budget. We will present a final proposed detailed budget at our May board meeting. We are still finalizing the anticipated costs of inflation, vehicles and fuel, salary increases including addressing benchmarking recommendations in our pay grades, as well as details for potential expanded services. What you will see below are some compiled highlights and considerations as we currently understand them. We look forward to discussing these with the Board at the April meeting.

**INCREASED EXPENSES:**

Healthcare costs continue to increase, with an overall increase of roughly 9% for this year. We also expect increases in property and casualty insurance premiums for FY2025.

We worked with HR Source, a 3<sup>rd</sup> party HR solution, to conduct a full benchmarking of all positions at RAILS for the first time since 2020. Their findings showed that overall, RAILS has excellent pay equity towards the midpoint across all grades, but we do need to make some limited adjustments to the organizational structure to remain competitive. We are also fielding requests for additional staffing support in multiple areas and expect to make decisions about these requests as the budget moves into its final draft.

Replacement vehicles remain a top priority for FY25, after years of no vehicle purchase availability. We are working with Central Management Services (CMS) approved dealerships on the ability to place these requests, but pricing on these vehicles has increased significantly in recent years. At least \$460,000 will be budgeted for vehicle replacement. In consideration of the needs identified by the capital assessment at our Burr Ridge property as well as needs at other RAILS locations, some facilities upgrades are also needed. These include new carpeting in East Peoria and office renovations in Coal Valley. In Burr Ridge we are budgeting for asphalt and concrete curb replacement, tuck pointing and stucco repair, and a generator replacement.

Additional IT infrastructure changes are also needed, with replacement switches, a new Cisco router, and headsets scheduled for replacement. We also must invest \$25,000 in additional hardware to migrate away from VMware, which quoted a 1700% increase for the coming year. Libraries are also no longer offered school pricing through Microsoft, so despite seeking the 'charity' designation available to us now, we will expect to see our Microsoft related expenses increase.

**NEW SERVICES:**

Through the FY2025 Draft Operational Plan, you'll see several examples of new or expanded initiatives in response to member needs, in addition to ongoing efforts. These initiatives come straight from our strategic plan, as well as our purpose as described in the Illinois Library System Act. Our goal, as always, is exemplary resource sharing, future ready libraries, inclusive best practice, and growing partnership opportunities.

Several examples of these expanded services are highlighted below:

**Advocacy:**

Supporting volunteer regional response teams to help libraries facing materials challenges.

**Broadband:**

Partner on grant initiatives with library-related organizations to improve broadband and digital equity in the state of Illinois.

Develop new offerings in the area of digital equity to engage with and support member libraries in their own efforts.

**Data Driven Analysis and Evaluation:**

Redesigning the RAILS resource sharing map in ArcGIS to include new data layers, allow the map to update in a timely way, and make it more accessible to RAILS members.

Continue developing RAILCAR which contains information from core data sources for LLSAPs and member libraries to inform decisions on consortium membership and compare LLSAP operations.

Find new ways of promoting/utilizing the Illinois Library Agencies of Impact report through print and digital publication, using both online and in-person distribution channels.

In connection with the RAILS Communications team, develop a member-facing, data-inclusive annual report that showcases the work of the system.

**Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI):**

Offer EDI training specifically for RAILS hiring managers that focuses on best practices in recruitment, evaluation, and staff retention.

Evaluate the Social Justice for Libraries course from Freedom Lifted for potential renewal.

Provide/promote 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.

**Find More Illinois (FMI):**

Evaluate and revise the FMI participation fee structure to ensure ongoing value to members of all types and sizes.

Establish a FMI user group and/or committee working group to incorporate member feedback into the fee structure, as well as to assist with providing insights into recruitment, program enhancements, and best practices for participants

**Member Engagement:**

Identify key member engagement metrics and create a new member engagement measurement tool for determining system effectiveness.

Develop new targeted email communications for specific library types.

Mail promotional pieces to libraries not receiving RAILS delivery as appropriate to ensure they are aware of the programs/services available to them.

**Online High School Programs:**

Explore additional ways to expand and promote the COHS and Gale: Excel Adult High School programs, including:

- Targeting libraries not yet participating in the program with large populations of adults who have not received a high school diploma
- Targeting youth services library staff to help them promote the program to young parents without a high school diploma

**Partnership:**

Work with statewide partners – including those at the Secretary of State’s Office/Illinois State Library - to promote availability of the statewide electronic resources package. Along with internal and external partners consider new avenues for outreach and engagement around this resource, for all library types.

Rebrand of Explore More Illinois in partnership with the Chicago Public Library and the Illinois Heartland Library System to address relevant issues with the marketing of the program, as well as using the opportunity to further its identity as a statewide program.

Joint Board Meeting of RAILS and IHLS Boards targeted for Fall 2024.

**RAILS Infrastructure:**

Development of a Succession Plan for RAILS in conjunction with the RAILS Board Policy Committee.

Continue discussions with RAILS Consortia Committee about finding new ways to utilize data to get an accurate count for delivery.

Planning of an in-person staff day for FY 2025.

**RSA Independence:**

Continue to support RSA’s efforts toward greater operational independence from RAILS, including their transition to an Illinois intergovernmental instrumentality and the process of beginning to employ their own staff.

**CONCLUSION:**

We look forward to a productive discussion at the April Board meeting to delve deeper into these highlights and address any questions you may have. We are confident that this plan will position RAILS to deliver exceptional value to our members and support the success of libraries throughout the RAILS service area and beyond.

# RAILS FY 2025 System Area and Per Capita Grant Application

## 3.0 System Operational Plan

This document presents the Reaching Across Illinois Library System’s (RAILS) operational plan for FY 2025. All of the activities that occur at RAILS tie directly to our vision statement:

*Thriving libraries are essential to all who learn, live, work in Illinois.*

And our mission statement:

*We Connect Libraries*

RAILS is committed to providing the best possible service to all levels of library staff at RAILS member libraries of all types and sizes across our 27,000 square mile area and to helping them to provide the best possible service to their customers.

RAILS strives to operate effectively and efficiently by working collaboratively with partners across the state. We seek to better understand the ecosystem in which we work, and this requires being a good partner when the need arises.

This plan was developed with a great deal of input from RAILS members as is required by the administrative rules for library systems, including feedback received at RAILS Member Update sessions; at the Meet and Greet sessions held throughout our area to welcome RAILS’ new Executive Director; at visits to member libraries, both in-person and virtual; via various surveys conducted of our membership as described throughout this document; and other means.

The following document includes the continuation of activities from previous years’ plans as well as new activities that fall within our strategic plan. This document follows the arrangement of the RAILS strategic plan approved by the RAILS Board on January 28, 2022. All activities included in this plan are aligned with and support statutory priorities for Illinois library systems as noted.

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

| Objectives   | Planned Activities  | System Standard |
|--|---|-----------------|
| Enhance the sharing of knowledge and best practices through member networking and communications between all types of libraries. | Plan/schedule virtual and in-person networking opportunities for staff at all levels at all sizes and types of libraries (academic, public, school, and specialized) to share best practices on a variety of topics.<br><br>Work with statewide partners, including the Association of Illinois School Library Educators (AISLE), Illinois Association of College & Research Libraries (IACRL), Illinois Heartland Library System |                 |

| Objectives   | Planned Activities  | System Standard |
|--|---|-----------------|
|  | <p>(IHLS), Illinois Library Association (ILA), Special Libraries Association-Illinois Community (SLA-IL), and others to plan networking opportunities for staff at different levels from different types of libraries and for public library trustees.</p> <p>Publicize 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>Assist in the formation of new RAILS networking groups as needed.</p> <p>Continue to build and strengthen relationships and engagement with RAILS networking groups. Attend networking group meetings as appropriate to share the latest RAILS news and gather feedback on RAILS programs/services.</p> <p>Continue with plans to offer member groups the opportunity to meet in person at RAILS service centers as possible.</p> <p>Continue providing subsidized Zoom and conference calling accounts to qualified RAILS networking groups.</p> <p>Encourage use of RAILS mailing lists, including lists geared toward different library types and sizes, and staff at all levels.</p> <p>Establish new mailing lists as needed. Sunset lists that aren't being used.</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>Continue to expand the RAILS discount and group purchase program by offering new deals for member libraries of all sizes and types as possible. Target publicity to help ensure that members know about specific offers available to their library type.</p> <p>Gather input from members at all types and sizes of libraries on desired discounts/group purchases. Implement new offerings in response to this feedback as possible.</p>  |                 |

| Objectives   | Planned Activities  | System Standard |
|--|---|-----------------|
|  | <p>Work with statewide partners – including those at the Secretary of State’s Office/Illinois State Library - to promote availability of the statewide electronic resources package. Along with internal and external partners consider new avenues for outreach and engagement around this resource, for all library types.</p> <p>Continue the development of the comprehensive Consortia Manager platform to manage RAILS group purchases and discounts.</p> <p>Develop standards and evaluation metrics to gauge the effectiveness of the deals &amp; discounts program. Widely publicize member savings to demonstrate the program’s impact.</p> <p>Network with group purchasing managers in Illinois and nationwide to explore new opportunities and develop best practices.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Online High School Programs</b></p> <p>Continue to subsidize the management of the COHS and Gale: Excel Adult High School platforms to enable libraries to offer adult learners accredited high school diplomas and career certificates.</p> <p>Explore additional ways to expand and promote the COHS and Gale: Excel Adult High School programs, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeting libraries not yet participating in the program with large populations of adults who have not received a high school diploma</li> <li>• Targeting youth services library staff to help them promote the program to young parents without a high school diploma</li> </ul> |                 |
| <p>RAILS will continue to seek greater efficiencies, innovations, and enhancements to delivery services.</p> | <p>Work with RAILS members of all sizes and types to determine the most appropriate delivery method to meet their needs.</p> <p>Purchase 8 additional delivery vehicles to replace the aging fleet.</p> <p>Consult with members on delivery issues/concerns</p>   |                 |

| Objectives  | Planned Activities   | System Standard |
|---|--|-----------------|
|   | <p>on an ongoing basis. Widely promote the use of the delivery help desk.</p> <p>Promote the need for RAILS members to complete quarterly delivery volume counts. Consult with libraries individually as needed.</p> <p>Continue discussions with RAILS Consortia Committee about finding new ways to utilize data to get an accurate count for delivery.</p> <p>Develop strategies to improve and achieve total compliance with quarterly delivery counts to get more accurate information on delivery volume. Examine count data to determine potential changes to existing delivery routes and best practices.</p> <p>Continue to explore additional opportunities to automate delivery processes to streamline services and improve efficiency.</p> <p>Continue providing high-quality statewide delivery services to CARLI (Consortium of Academic &amp; Research Libraries in Illinois) members via ILDS (Illinois Library Delivery Service).</p> <p>Continue working with GeoMARC (formerly Laboratory for Applied Spatial Analysis) on potential future improvements to RAILS delivery service, including delivery route efficiencies.</p> |                 |
| <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;"><b>General</b></p> <p>Work with the RAILS Resource Sharing Committee to ensure sustainable, equitable resource sharing to help meet the first goal of the RAILS strategic plan. Promote/encourage the use of Find More Illinois statewide to help achieve this goal.</p> <p>Collaborate with the Illinois State Library (ISL), IHLS, Chicago Public Library System (CPLS), AISLE, CARLI, IACRL, ILA, SLA Illinois, and other stakeholders to expand resource sharing in Illinois.</p> <p>Collaborate with and support the work of the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC).</p>   |                 |



| Objectives | Planned Activities   | System Standard |
|------------|--|-----------------|
|            | <p>Review and revise the RAILS Resource Sharing Plan to reflect new legislation and updated areas of focus.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Promote/Support LLSAP Membership</b></p> <p>Continue to support six LLSAPs (CCS, Pinnacle, PrairieCat, Rock River Library Consortium, RSA, and SWAN) financially via the LLSAP Support Grant, as well as offering the use of RAILS meeting spaces and other services.</p> <p>Continue to support RSA’s efforts toward greater operational independence from RAILS, including their transition to an Illinois intergovernmental instrumentality and the process of beginning to employ their own staff.</p> <p>Continue to offer the Catalog Membership Grant to fund one-time costs for libraries wishing to join an LLSAP, with ongoing evaluation and adjustment of the grant process framework to maximize support to nonautomated libraries.</p> <p>Continue progress on the development of RAILCAR, a data collection and analysis initiative designed to supplement existing data related to LLSAPs and library automation. Develop specific criteria for LLSAPs and libraries to evaluate affordability. This tool is integrated into the processes for both the LLSAP Support and Catalog Membership Grants.</p> <p>Promote the value of consortium membership to all types and sizes of RAILS libraries via RAILS communication tools, committee work, and member encounters.</p> <p>Continue 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;"><b>Expand and Promote Find More Illinois (FMI)</b></p> <p>Recruit libraries to join FMI.</p> |                 |

| Objectives | Planned Activities   | System Standard |
|------------|--|-----------------|
|            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Target promotions at libraries that would grow and enhance resources available through FMI.</li> <li>• Promote FMI benefits to nonautomated libraries.</li> </ul> <p>Continue to promote the growth of FMI, including developing new recruitment strategies and collaborating with CARLI to add I-Share members who wish to participate.</p> <p>Continue onboarding CCS libraries into the FMI program.</p> <p>Enhance the FMI program with add-on services as appropriate. Implement operational efficiencies as the program grows.</p> <p>Provide training, consulting, and technical support to FMI libraries.</p> <p>Evaluate and revise the FMI participation fee structure to ensure ongoing value to members of all types and sizes.</p> <p>Establish a FMI user group and/or committee working group to incorporate member feedback into the fee structure, as well as to assist with providing insights into recruitment, program enhancements, and best practices for participants</p> <p>Continue to offer IHLS the opportunity to participate in FMI.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Support High-Quality Cataloging</b></p> <p>Continue to develop/deliver cataloging training in response to member feedback, including recurring opportunities and one-time workshops.</p> <p>Formally evaluate the effectiveness of RAILS cataloging training and cataloging services</p> <p>Continue support and consulting in cataloging-related activities for eRead Illinois and Find More Illinois.</p> |                 |

| Objectives | Planned Activities  | System Standard |
|------------|---|-----------------|
|            | <p>Via partnership with IHLS' Cataloging Maintenance Center (CMC), support new catalog mentoring program to help libraries develop new skills and best practices.</p> <p>Explore the possibility of becoming a member of the Library of Congress' Program for Cooperative Cataloging/Name Authority Cooperative Program.</p> <p>If the RAILS budget allows, establish a cataloging internship plan.</p> <p>Continue offering World Language Cataloging Services Program as detailed below.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>eRead Illinois Boundless</b></p> <p>Recruit RAILS libraries and IHLS non-SHARE libraries to join eRead Illinois.</p> <p>Support the training and marketing needs of eRead Illinois participants.</p> <p>Evaluate eRead content to ensure that it continues to meet member needs. (See also EDI section below.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to enhance and develop additional content for K-12 students.</li> <li>• Regularly seek input from eRead participants on the collection and implement member suggestions as possible.</li> </ul> <p>Network with e-content managers in Illinois and nationwide to share and stay abreast of new developments and initiatives.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Inkie.org Library</b></p> <p>Continue to develop and promote the Inkie.org Library program to support self-publishing, Illinois authors, and Illinois e-content statewide.</p> <p>Continue offering group purchase pricing on BiblioBoard products for self-published authors.</p> |                 |

| Objectives | Planned Activities   | System Standard |
|------------|--|-----------------|
|            | <p>Publicize Inkie.org Library resources as being free (courtesy of RAILS) to all Illinois libraries and to all Illinois residents, including those not served by a public library.</p> <p>Provide current information on available resources for IHLS to share with their member libraries.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Explore More Illinois (EMI)</b></p> <p>Work with CPLS and IHLS to rebrand the program to reflect participation of libraries statewide. Publicize rebranding efforts widely.</p> <p>Collaborate with CPLS and IHLS to publicize EMI to all Illinois public libraries and community colleges and to encourage them to participate.</p> <p>Continue to grow/expand the number and types of participating attractions. Collaborate with CPLS and IHLS to recruit attractions.</p> <p>Network with ePass (EMI’s software) administrators nationwide to explore new opportunities and solutions and to share best practices.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Other E-Resources Initiatives</b></p> <p>Continue 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> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on member feedback and participation, determine whether to expand the project to include academic, school, and specialized libraries.</li> </ul> <p>Continue to stay abreast of E-Content initiatives, such as the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) and Illinois Digital Heritage Hub.</p> <p>Support progress related to the License to Read Act, making it possible for the Secretary of State to negotiate favorable pricing for e-books and e-audiobooks for libraries.</p> |                 |

| Objectives | Planned Activities  | System Standard |
|------------|---|-----------------|
|            | Partner with other library organizations to continue dialogue with publishers on need for better e-book access/pricing for libraries/consortia. |                 |

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

| Objectives   | Planned Activities   | System Standard |
|--|--|-----------------|
| RAILS will provide leadership in developing and providing resources that will support member libraries' efforts to provide equitable, diverse, and inclusive services. | <p>Continue offering regular EDI training opportunities for all RAILS members. Collaborate with other Illinois stakeholders offering EDI-related continuing education (CE) to avoid duplication of effort. Continue offering World Language Cataloging Services grant program statewide.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue seeking grant funds from ISL to fund the statewide program.</li> <li>• Continue publicizing the program to libraries of all types statewide.</li> <li>• Continue to promote the benefits of IHLS' Cataloging Maintenance Center program and how that program differs from and works in conjunction with the RAILS program.</li> </ul> <p>Continue to develop/promote an eRead Illinois collection and Inkie.org Library resources that address the needs of an ethnically and culturally diverse audience. Regularly evaluate the collection using industry respected tools to identify potential gaps.</p> <p>Recruit attractions for Explore More Illinois of interest to an ethnically and culturally diverse audience.</p> <p>Promote the online high school programs (see above) as addressing the needs of a culturally, economically, and ethnically diverse audience.</p> |                 |

| Objectives   | Planned Activities   | System Standard |
|--|--|-----------------|
|  | <p>Offer RAILS Member Updates featuring topics and ideas that connect to RAILS EDI efforts.</p> <p>Provide/promote 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>Promote and provide administrative support as applicable for RAILS EDI-related networking groups.</p> <p>Evaluate the Social Justice for Libraries Course from Freedom Lifted for potential renewal.</p> <p>Include EDI elements in RAILS grants for members (CE Event grants, My Library Is... grants, etc.) when possible, to encourage applicants to provide equitable, diverse, inclusive, and accessible programs/services and to publicize these offerings to their communities.</p> |                 |
| <p>Examine all aspects of RAILS policies, procedures, and core services through an equity lens and make needed improvements.</p> | <p>Continue to grow and develop RAILS' external and internal EDI strategies and initiatives.</p> <p>Continue conducting a thorough analysis/evaluation of RAILS Employee Handbook to ensure that all language and policies meet our EDI goals.</p> <p>Continue the work of the RAILS Climate Team to identify and implement internal best practices and initiatives for RAILS staff.</p> <p>Continue holding regular EDI training sessions for RAILS staff.<br/>Develop EDI Training specifically for Delivery staff that can be recorded and incorporated into onboarding for new staff.</p> <p>Offer EDI training specifically for RAILS hiring managers that focuses on best practices in recruitment, evaluation, and staff retention.</p>   |                 |
| <p>Work with RAILS members of all types to identify and implement</p>  | <p>Continue to work with the RAILS Board Nominating Committee and others to attract diverse candidates</p>   |                 |

| Objectives   | Planned Activities   | System Standard |
|--|--|-----------------|
| ways to diversify library governing bodies and staff to increase representation and better reflect the communities they serve. | <p>to run for the RAILS Board. Promote RAILS' goal to develop a more diverse board in election publicity.</p> <p>Provide training/consulting/guidance for member libraries of all types to help them develop a more diverse and representative board.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for libraries of all types to share best practices and strategies they have used to diversify their governing boards, including via the RAILS EDI Pulse Page and email list.</p> <p>Provide training for RAILS members to help them diversify their hiring and recruitment practices.</p> <p>Provide opportunities/tools for members to share strategies they have used to recruit a more diverse staff, including the EDI mailing list and the EDI Pulse Page.</p> |                 |

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

| Objectives  | Planned Activities  | System Standard |
|---|---|-----------------|
| 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>Provide CE/consulting/tools to help libraries with different aspects of fundraising, including how to advocate for additional/continued funding from library administrators, funders, etc.</p> <p>Continue to schedule regular meetings with AISLE, Chicago Public Schools (CPS), IHLS, ILA, and ISL to discuss collaborative projects to help school libraries deal with funding challenges, understand legal/policy changes, and create new resources to help address issues.</p> <p>Participate 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"> <li>• ILA Legislative Meetups</li> <li>• Responding to American Library Association (ALA) calls to actions</li> </ul> |                 |

| Objectives   | Planned Activities   | System Standard |
|--|--|-----------------|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuing to work with the ILA Public Policy Committee to discuss legislation of importance to libraries</li> </ul> <p>Keep RAILS libraries informed of important legislative developments affecting libraries.</p> <p>Publicize opportunities for staff from member libraries to advocate for continued/increased funding for libraries as appropriate, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging members to attend ILA Legislative Meetups</li> <li>• Encouraging members to respond to ALA calls to action</li> <li>• Encouraging library staff to use talking points and other resources on the My Library Is... website</li> <li>• Encouraging members to contact their elected officials as appropriate and providing talking points on specific issues and programs as possible</li> </ul> <p>Support AISLE’s statewide efforts to increase the number of certified school librarians through the development of advocacy tools and continued development of the SLATE project.</p> <p>Assist with libraries in emergency preparedness and addressing crisis situations such as bomb threats and active shooter situations.</p> <p>Work with the RAILS Board Advocacy Committee to educate the board about issues affecting RAILS and libraries that may require their advocacy efforts locally, regionally, or nationally.</p> |                 |
| <p>Help member libraries of all types and sizes demonstrate their value to their different stakeholders.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>My Library Is... (MLI) Initiative</b></p> <p>Continue to promote My Library Is... website resources via the <i>RAILS E-News</i> and other publicity channels.</p>  |                 |



| Objectives  | Planned Activities   | System Standard |
|---|--|-----------------|
|   | <p>Continue to encourage staff at all levels from all types and sizes of libraries to contribute posts to the My Library Is... blog to share best practices in telling the library story.</p> <p>Continue offering MLI grants to help libraries with limited resources to tell their stories more effectively.</p> <p>Examine talking points available on MLI website and revise/expand them as necessary to make sure they help staff at all sizes and types of libraries to demonstrate their value to different stakeholders.</p> <p>Continue to work with IHLS to further expand and publicize the initiative to staff at all types and sizes of libraries statewide.</p> <p>Continue to work with AISLE, IACRL, ILA, SLA-IL, and other stakeholders on common goals/ activities re to the MLI initiative to avoid duplication of efforts.</p> <p>Engage with marketing/communications staff from member libraries to ensure that they have access to My Library Is... materials and know about the campaign.</p> <p>(See additional campaign 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>Provide CE/consulting on general resource sharing issues identified in the administrative rules, including interlibrary loan, the ILLINET Interlibrary Loan Code, nonresident services, the RAILS Resource Sharing Policy, etc.</p> <p>Provide CE/consulting on library advocacy, management and practice, and other core service areas identified in the administrative rules.</p> <p>Provide CE/consulting to help libraries meet per capita grant requirements and standards for their type of library.</p>  |                 |

| Objectives | Planned Activities  | System Standard |
|------------|---|-----------------|
|            | <p>Offer CE/consulting assistance and other resources to help libraries of all types and sizes to develop/maintain a current strategic plan.</p> <p>Identify/monitor issues, trends, and challenges affecting libraries of all types and sizes and provide CE/consulting to help libraries respond to these issues and challenges.</p> <p>Continue to develop Library Pulse pages on the RAILS website to help members respond to current issues, challenges, and trends.</p> <p>Continue to gather member input on CE needs from all sizes and types of RAILS libraries and implement training to meet those needs.</p> <p>Based on member input, continue to offer CE Event Grants to help libraries, networking groups, and library consortia plan/offer training events of interest to library staff. Continue prioritizing EDI-related topics for the grants as referenced above.</p> <p>Continue to partner with AISLE to identify training needs for school library staff and to offer joint CE opportunities based on that feedback.</p> <p>Pursue the opportunity for RAILS to become an authorized provider of PDH credits.</p> <p>Work with statewide stakeholders to plan and offer Directors University, the statewide training initiative for new public library directors. Publicize widely.</p> <p>Work with statewide stakeholders to plan and offer Directors 2.0 to offer intermediate-level training for library directors. Publicize widely.</p> <p>Work with statewide stakeholders to offer programming for future Illinois library leaders.</p> |                 |

| Objectives | Planned Activities   | System Standard |
|------------|--|-----------------|
|            | <p>Continue partnership with United for Libraries to provide statewide, online, on-demand trustee training. Publicize training widely.</p> <p>Continue to support the iLEAD Trustee Learning Portal.</p> <p>Consult with/attend library board meetings as appropriate to help boards meet legal requirements and to develop leadership skills.</p> <p>Continue partnership with HR Source to provide CE and discounted membership. Publicize widely.</p> <p>Continue partnership with Ancel Glink to offer statewide FOIA/OMA hotline. Publicize widely.</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  | System Standard |
|--|---|-----------------|
| <p>RAILS will continue to strengthen collaborative relationships with partner library organizations, including the Association of Illinois School Library Educators, the Chicago Public Library, the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois, the Illinois Association of College &amp; Research Libraries, the Illinois Heartland Library System, the Illinois Library Association, the Illinois State Library, and the Special Libraries Association – Illinois Community.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Service Standards</b></p> <p>Continue conversations with ISL, IHLS, and other partners to explore the possibility of revising system membership standards to help libraries of all types provide better service to their communities.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>L2 (Library Directory and Learning Calendar)</b></p> <p>Ask ISL to continue to provide additional grant funding to support L2.</p> <p>Continue to provide statewide leadership for L2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Host, maintain, and develop additional features.</li> <li>• Provide ongoing user help and support to library staff, networking groups, and sponsor organizations (LLSAPs, ISL, library systems).</li> <li>• Update and maintain externally sourced directory data.</li> </ul> |                 |

| Objectives | Planned Activities  | System Standard |
|------------|---|-----------------|
|            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide technical support, ongoing reporting, and any necessary development for annual library certification.</li> <li>• Facilitate the statewide advisory group (L2G2) and participation in the Intercept open source community.</li> </ul> <p>Continue to contract with Aten Design Group for L2 support and development.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Certification</b></p> <p>Work with ISL, IHLS, and other partners to improve and enhance the annual certification process.</p> <p>Work with RAILS members to ensure that they complete the certification process.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Other Collaborative Initiatives</b></p> <p>RAILS Executive Director continues to serve on Illinois State Library Advisory Committee.</p> <p>Work with CPLS and IHLS to schedule meetings and other get-togethers for system staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schedule regular meetings to discuss statewide services and ideas for collaborating to promote those services.</li> <li>• Plan a joint board meeting for IHLS and RAILS systems for fall 2024.</li> </ul> <p>Continue to schedule regular meetings with AISLE, CPS, IHLS, ILA, ISL, and others as appropriate to discuss collaborative projects to benefit school libraries as referenced above.</p> <p>Collaborate with AISLE, IHLS, ILA, and ISL to plan Illinois School Library Workers Symposium, supporting individuals working in school libraries with no formal library education.</p> <p>Collaborate with AISLE, IHLS, CARLI, ILA, and others to form volunteer regional response teams to help libraries facing materials challenges.</p> |                 |

| Objectives  | Planned Activities  | System Standard |
|---|---|-----------------|
|   | <p>Continue providing leadership and support to SLA Illinois community. The Director of Marketing &amp; Communications will be serving on the national board.</p> <p>Continue regular meetings with the Commissioner of the Chicago Public Library to discuss collaboration possibilities.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Broadband</b></p> <p>Continue to engage in statewide efforts focused on broadband expansion, technology adoption, and digital equity issues as significant federal and state funding is distributed, including continued service on the Illinois Department of Economic Opportunity’s Broadband Advisory Council.</p> <p>Continue to work with CARLI and IHLS to update library staff on statewide efforts including funding opportunities and ways for libraries to provide feedback on broadband initiatives. Produce content which demonstrates the importance of the issue to libraries.</p> <p>Partner on grant initiatives with library-related organizations to improve broadband and digital equity in the state of Illinois.</p> <p>Develop new offerings in the area of digital equity to engage with and support member libraries in their own efforts.</p> |                 |
| <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>Develop new targeted email communications for specific library types.</p> <p>Promote the member centers for different types of libraries on the redesigned RAILS website.</p> <p>Mail promotional pieces to libraries not receiving RAILS delivery as appropriate to ensure they are aware of the programs/services available to them.</p>   |                 |

| Objectives  | Planned Activities   | System Standard  |
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|   | <p>Continue to meet with AISLE, CPS, IHLS, ILA, and ISL to address the needs of school libraries as referenced above.</p> <p>Continue to work with other stakeholders statewide and beyond on school library data project. (See next section.)</p> <p>(See also Communications section below.)</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>Continue to work with AISLE, CPS, IHLS, ILA, ISL, and other stakeholders statewide on the SLATE project including library staff, administrators, boards, and other about the importance of school libraries and the need to support and fund them.</p> <p>Continue to promote the SLATE data dashboard widely including via email, social media campaigns, conferences, and networking opportunities.</p> <p>Continue to improve and expand the SLATE data dashboard through the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A new school library data collection process</li> <li>• Direct member feedback</li> <li>• Continued development of expanded features and functions</li> <li>• Identification and inclusion of additional tools and resources for school library advocacy</li> </ul> <p>Research developing a centralized RAILS data hub to coordinate and manage data sources used to support services for RAILS members and staff.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine core data sources used by RAILS staff and create documentation for requirements, maintenance, governance, and access.</li> <li>• Develop method for training staff on proper data usage and create data request ticket system.</li> </ul> <p>Continue developing RAILCAR (as referenced above), which contain information from core data sources for LLSAPs and member libraries to inform their decisions on consortium membership and compare LLSAP operations.</p> | <p>23 ILAC 3030.215 b) 1)<br/>23 ILAC 3030.215 d) 2)</p> |

| Objectives  | Planned Activities   | System Standard |
|---|--|-----------------|
|   | <p>Update the RAILS resource sharing map in ArcGIS software to include new data layers and make it more accessible for members.</p> <p>Develop new data-related website connected to the main RAILS website. (See below in General Member Communication/Engagement.)</p> <p>Develop a data ticketing system to help keep track of project requests.</p> <p>Identify key member engagement metrics and create a new member engagement measurement tool for determining system effectiveness.</p> <p>In connection with the RAILS Communications team, develop a member-facing, data-inclusive annual report that showcases the work of the system.</p> <p>Find new ways of promoting/utilizing the Illinois Library Agencies of Impact report through print and digital publication, using both online and in-person distribution channels.</p> <p>Continue to assist the Resource Sharing team with analyzing the performance of the eRead service.</p> <p>Continue to solicit member feedback via RAILS communication tools, surveys, and member encounters. Implement changes/additions to RAILS programs/services based on member input as appropriate. Ensure that we are getting feedback from libraries of all types and sizes in all geographic areas of the system.</p> <p>(See other sections of this document for plans to gather and respond to member feedback on specific RAILS programs/services.)</p> |                 |
| <p>Collaborate with the Illinois State Library, the Illinois Heartland Library System, and other partners to develop a plan</p> | <p>Continue to work with the RAILS Board Universal Service Committee to find and implement solutions to challenges related to the unserved in Illinois.</p>  |                 |

| Objectives                                    | Planned Activities   | System Standard |
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| and timeline for achieving universal service. | <p>Continue to work with members to identify obstacles to libraries adopting the expanded Cards for Kids Act legislation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage all libraries to extend service to all children in unserved areas.</li> <li>• Promote RAILS talking points designed to help library staff demonstrate the benefits of adopting this legislation to their boards and other stakeholders.</li> <li>• Explore utilizing L2 to gather data on libraries participating in the expanded Cards for Kids legislation.</li> </ul> <p>Continue to work with statewide partners to seek legislative support for statewide access to electronic resources for all Illinois residents, including the unserved. (See further details above.)</p> <p>Publicize requirement for library boards to vote annually on participation in the nonresident program and for members to update their participation information via L2. Publicize the names of participating/nonparticipating libraries and share with ISL per statutory requirements.</p> <p>Identify member libraries who have not updated their L2 non-resident info in over 18 months. Coordinate outreach to those libraries to receive updated information.</p> |                 |

**Other Administrative Activities**

The following section details RAILS’ planned FY 2024 activities to meet statutory priorities for Illinois library systems not included in the sections above.

| Objectives  | Planned Activities   | System Standard |
|---|--|-----------------|
| Engage and communicate with members and potential members from all types of libraries throughout the RAILS area to ensure they are aware of system programs/ services of benefit to | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Member Recruitment</b></p> <p>Engage with libraries of all types that express an interest in RAILS membership.</p> <p>Visit potential members to ensure they meet membership criteria.</p> |                 |



| Objectives  | Planned Activities   | System Standard |
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| <p>them and to better understand, anticipate, and meet their needs.</p> | <p>Work with RAILS Board on new member recommendations for approval by ISL.</p> <p><b>General Member Communication/Engagement</b></p> <p>Promote available programs/services via RAILS communication tools and member visits, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RAILS website</li> <li>• Weekly <i>RAILS E-News</i></li> <li>• Social media channels</li> <li>• Visiting as many members as possible, either virtually or in person, concentrating on libraries that RAILS has not visited or had any correspondence with in the past two years</li> <li>• Offering online site visits to any interested library to remind them of system benefits</li> <li>• Offering to attend a meeting of all RAILS networking groups as specified above</li> <li>• Scheduling regular member updates</li> <li>• Using available type of library mailing lists and lists for different levels of staff to communicate about specific programs/ services of interest</li> <li>• Offering “New Director Welcome” online discussions</li> <li>• Offering Library Marketing/Communications online discussions</li> <li>• Sending all new RAILS library directors a welcome communication to acquaint them with system programs/services</li> <li>• Continuing to feature “RAILS Minute” videos with the RAILS Executive Director highlighting the latest system news</li> <li>• Exhibiting at library conferences, including conferences for different types of libraries and different levels of staff</li> <li>• Presenting programs at library-related conferences as appropriate to promote RAILS programs/services</li> </ul> <p>Contract for continued support for new RAILS website, to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Custom development of Gutenberg editor</li> </ul> |                 |

| Objectives   | Planned Activities   | System Standard |
|--|--|-----------------|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miscellaneous design tweaks, feature development, and software and server updates</li> </ul> <p>Develop new in-house marketing plan to help prioritize marketing efforts.</p> <p>In collaboration with Resource Sharing team, develop new member benefit letter/ROI statement for member libraries.</p> <p>Continue to gather feedback on the redesigned RAILS website and make improvements/enhancements to the site based on that feedback.</p> <p>Complete a redesign and software upgrade for the My Library Is ... website.</p> <p>Develop new Data website to house data-related projects including the SLATE data dashboard.</p> <p>Continue to make improvements to the weekly <i>RAILS E-News</i>.</p> <p>Gather feedback from different levels of staff (including non-librarians) on how RAILS can communicate with them more effectively. Develop strategies to respond to this feedback.</p> |                 |
| <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 board is as rewarding as possible.</p> | <p>Communicate regularly with the board through the RAILS board mailing list and other means.</p> <p>Ensure that the board is aware of RAILS' progress in meeting the goals and objectives of our new strategic plan.</p> <p>Keep board informed about important issues for RAILS and for libraries of all types. Provide talking points for communicating with members about RAILS programs/services.</p> <p>Plan/implement orientation session at Burr Ridge service center for all new RAILS Board members. Invite existing board members to attend for a refresher.</p>  |                 |

| Objectives  | Planned Activities  | System Standard |
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|   | <p>Schedule board meetings in different parts of the RAILS area as possible so the board can learn about different areas of the system and meet members from different areas.</p> <p>Continue to promote and encourage diversity on the RAILS Board as referenced above.</p> <p>Support board conference/meeting attendance as appropriate.</p> <p>Work with RAILS Board Policy Committee to establish schedule for regular review of RAILS policies.</p>   |                 |
| <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> | <p>Encourage/support professional development for staff.</p> <p>Continue to hold regular 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> <p>Continue work of RAILS Employee Committees to develop collaborative activities for all staff.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan in-person staff in-service day in FY 2025.</li> <li>• Offer regular staff engagement activities at service centers throughout the year.</li> </ul> <p>Develop a succession plan for RAILS in conjunction with the RAILS Board Policy Committee.</p> <p>Continue discussions with new staff who have worked at RAILS for at least 90 days to gather input on their onboarding and orientation experiences. Make changes to RAILS' onboarding process as appropriate in response to this feedback.</p> <p>Continue to communicate with staff about relevant legal/policy changes including new procedures for independent contractors and the Paid Leave for All Workers Act.</p> |                 |

| Objectives  | Planned Activities  | System Standard |
|---|---|-----------------|
|   | <p>Update safety internal safety procedures and continue staff discussions about emergency preparedness.</p> <p>Continue to prioritize EDI-related staff activities and initiatives as referenced above.</p>  |                 |
| <p>Maintain robust technology infrastructure needed to carry out all RAILS programs/services.</p> | <p>Replace switching hardware at all RAILS service centers.</p> <p>Replace aging climate control systems in Burr Ridge datacenter.</p> <p>Audit and improve security practices across wide area network and IT systems.</p> <p>Investigate new virtualization platforms for cost-saving purposes.</p> <p>Continue to utilize project request process for staff to inform and request input on IT-related projects they are planning.</p> <p>Implement contract tracking software.</p> <p>Update and expand disaster recovery plan and staff cybersecurity training.</p> |                 |