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Executive Director Report, November 2024

Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

AISLE Annual Conference in Tinley Park

It was a pleasure to attend the AISLE Conference in Tinley Park on November 7-9 and connect with numerous RAILS school library members. Such opportunities to engage directly with our members are invaluable. I am honored to have received the Crystal Honor Award for my contributions to the school library profession in Illinois. It was inspiring to be recognized alongside so many dedicated school library workers. I extend my sincere gratitude to Rene Leyva, Monica Caldicott, and the RAILS staff for their support at the event.

Our staff members, Janette Derucki and Joe Filapek, presented insightful sessions on data storytelling and the Regional Response Team. Their engaging presentations showcased the depth of expertise within our organization. The Communications team once again exceeded expectations with a captivating booth design and engaging giveaways. The positive feedback from attendees highlights their commitment to innovative member engagement.

Executive Team Retreat

Our Executive Team participated in an offsite training on Wednesday, October 23rd. I want to offer our appreciation to Paul Mills and the Fountaindale Public Library for allowing us to use their space for our learning. The day, facilitated by the Charmm'd Foundation, was dedicated to understanding personal and team dynamics through DISC assessment, individual reflection, and team reflection. Since the meeting, all members of the Executive Team have completed a DISC behavioral profile, and we plan to use these profiles to further extend our communications with one another.

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

Climate Team Update

The RAILS Climate Team, a dedicated group of staff members facilitated by equity, diversity, and inclusion consultant Biz Lindsay Ryan, is committed to fostering a positive and inclusive work environment. Recent initiatives include the development of an orientation video reinforcing our organizational EDIA principles, a staff survey to assess current understanding of EDIA, and the transition to staff-led facilitation in FY2026. I am grateful for the team's thoughtful approach and invaluable insights into our work environment. Their monthly meetings provide essential feedback and inform our ongoing efforts to improve.

Assist member libraries in preparing for the future

Public Meeting Room Questions

After seeing increased discussion in email lists about security, First Amendment considerations, and policies related to library meeting rooms reservable to the public, RAILS has initiated a survey to gather member questions. We will share these questions with our legal counsel, Ancel Glink, to develop a comprehensive memo. The survey is currently open and will close on Wednesday, November 20th at 5 PM. We plan to forward the compiled questions to Ancel Glink shortly thereafter.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Illinois Legislative Updates

The Illinois Library Association's Public Policy Committee met on November 4. The ILA's FY2025 legislative priorities discussed included the Libraries Connected proposal (related to providing complimentary internet service to libraries in their role as community anchor institutions; RAILS co-sponsored this proposal) and Considering Equitable Compensation Reporting Requirements (related to the requirement for posting salary information for any employer of an IMRF participating organization for any employee making over \$75k). Also mentioned was the request to fund libraries appropriately, including support for the library systems, and support for the licensed school librarians task force. ILA Lobbyist Derek Blaida discussed potential strategies for moving these efforts forward in the new year.

Additional topics were also discussed. Comments received by committee members manning the booths at the ILA Annual Conference were shared. Suggestions included more legislative support for city libraries, potential legislation concerning consolidation of municipal libraries, and discussion of SB 3965, which is concerned with better funding for academic institutions. Subcommittees related to recommended revisions to the Open Meetings Act and a compiled statute review also shared reports. The Committee Chair shared that PPC will be discussing ways to continue to improve the PPC process, including more avenues for feedback from ILA members and a longer development tail for work on legislation.

Voices for Libraries 2025

The Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA) has announced "Voices for Libraries 2025". This event invites library advocates from every state to travel to Washington DC to talk with legislators about the importance of libraries and to advocate for support. Due to space limitations, state delegations must be limited. Our partner, the Illinois Library Association, has extended an invitation for representation from RAILS and IHLS at the event, which takes place March 5-6 2025. I plan to attend and look forward to hearing more when registration opens in 2025.

ICOLC Update

The International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) has announced that its 2025 conference will be held in Chicago, IL on May 4-7. This annual North American meeting is dedicated to keeping participating consortia informed about issues of importance to directors, governing board, and member libraries of consortia. Only consortial staff and members are permitted to attend the meeting and there is no vendor area. I attended an Agenda Planning Group meeting for the conference on November 1 and I look forward to future developments.

LIRA Renewal Update

The Libraries of Illinois Risk Agency (LIRA) held its annual renewal meeting on November 14th. LIRA is a unified insurance cooperative that provides comprehensive property, casualty, and workers' compensation insurance to Illinois libraries. RAILS has been a member of LIRA since its inception over a decade ago. The annual meeting included a 2025 renewal presentation, reviews of loss control visits, and property and casualty and workers' compensation reports. The 2025 renewal for RAILS came in below budget with a modest 9% increase. I am honored to serve on the LIRA Executive Committee as Treasurer, alongside RAILS Board member Julie Milavec, who serves as Vice Chair. I was recently re-elected to a three-year term on the committee, which will conclude in 2027.

ILA Library Legislative Meetups

ILA has announced the dates for their upcoming series of [legislative meetings](#). This is a great opportunity to meet directly with legislators and advocate for the issues important to Illinois libraries. The meetings covering RAILS areas of service are: Alsip (Dec 3), Oak Brook (Dec 3), Northbrook (Dec 4), Normal (Dec 10), and DeKalb (Dec 10). If you have an interest in attending on behalf of RAILS, please let Emily or myself know. Registration closes by November 21st for the earliest events.

ISLAC November 2024

The Illinois State Library Advisory Committee (ISLAC) is scheduled to meet in Springfield on Thursday, November 21. I plan to attend in person and will have more to report at the November meeting.

Looking Ahead to January

- **January Service of the Month and Board Development Topics: Find More Illinois Update with Barb Miller and EDIA (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility) Topics for Libraries with Biz Lindsay-Ryan**



This Month at RAILS – November 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:

RAILS Staff Participate in 2024 AISLE Annual Conference

RAILS was excited to participate in the 2024 AISLE Annual Conference in Tinley Park, IL on November 7-9. RAILS was a Platinum Sponsor of the conference, also sponsoring the AISLE Awards Celebration featuring author Megan E. Freeman on Friday night. Approximately, 220 attendees came by the RAILS booth.

Monica Harris received the 2024 AISLE Crystal Honor for her strong advocacy of AISLE and school libraries. Monica received her award at the Awards Celebration on Friday, November 8.

RAILS staff participated in the following AISLE programs:

- “Unlock the Power of Data for Collection Management”
- “What’s YOUR Story?”
- “Unite Against Book Bans: A New Regional Response Team”



Thank you to everyone who helped with the booth and made this a very special conference!

RAILS Deals & Discounts Announces Fiero Code for Public Libraries

Advantageous pricing is available for Fiero Code for public libraries. Fiero Code helps patrons ages 8 to 108 build valuable coding skills in a fun and motivating platform. Fiero Code can be utilized for in-person, virtual coding clubs or bootcamps, and no coding expertise is required by library staff.

RAILS Launches Online Store

Anyone can now purchase a RAILS-designed t-shirt, mug, tote, and more on our [Threadless store](#). Four designs are currently available but more will be added throughout the year. T-shirts are available in sizes up to 5XL in select styles. RAILS does not receive any profit or financial gain from the sales made through the store.

Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

Enhance sharing of knowledge and best practices

October RAILS Site Visits

RAILS Member Engagement Specialist Jessica Silva conducted 2 site visits at member libraries in October. She visited:

- Harvey Public Library
- Hometown Middle School, Oak Lawn, IL (pictured, right)

To learn more about these visits, see our site visit map, or to request a visit, please visit the [RAILS Library Site Visits page](#).



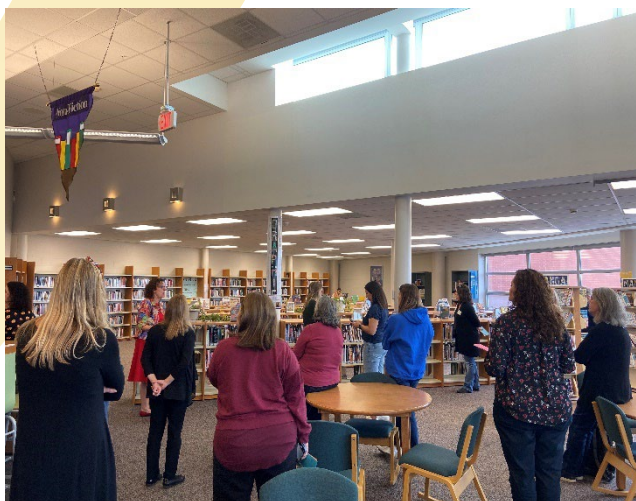
Jessica Silva Participates in the 2024 HSLI Annual Conference

Jessica Silva participated in the 2024 Health Science Librarians of Illinois (HSLI) Conference, October 23-25, 2024. This conference was held entirely via Zoom. Jessica delivered the RAILS Update on Thursday, October 24. RAILS was a conference sponsor of the 2024 HSLI Annual Conference.

Jessica Silva Attends Networking Group Meetings

In October, Jessica Silva attended three networking group meetings to discuss issues that matter to libraries and what RAILS can offer in terms of support. The three meetings were:

- Supporting Administrators in Libraries (SAIL) meeting at Fossil Ridge Public Library
- Genealogy and Local History (GLHL) networking group meeting (online)
- High School Librarians Networking Group at Vernon Hills High School (pictured, right)



RAILS Leaving Twitter/X in 2025

RAILS will cease publishing content on X in 2025 due to low engagement and user migration away from the social media platform. After reviewing metrics, RAILS will retain its account in the event that we choose to resume activity in the future.

RAILS Social Media Engagement

See the report at the end for info on our October 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](#).

RAILS Hosts Udemy Webinar

In October, 30 registrants attended the Gale: Learn Something New with Udemy webinar. This online learning platform provides instruction for adults who want to upskill for a new job, advance in their current profession, or deepen a personal interest.

Leila Heath and Maggie Thomann Present at PrairieCat Delegates Meeting

On October 30, RAILS Director of Library Resources & Programs Leila Heath and RAILS Library Resource Specialist Maggie Thomann presented at the PrairieCat Delegates Meeting. They highlighted new CE e-resource deals, including Gale Presents: Udemy, Library Journal Professional Courses, and Fiero Code.

Online High School Programs

RAILS offers two online high school programs for libraries: Career Online High School (implemented Spring 2016) and Gale Excel (implemented Spring 2024). Stats for both programs are listed below:

Career Online High School Stats as of October 31, 2024

| Scholarships Awarded | Total Graduates | Current Number of Students in Program | RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|--|--|
| 465 | 200 | 79 | 63%/53% |

Gale Excel Stats as of October 31, 2024

| Scholarships Awarded | Total Graduates | Current Number of Students in Program | RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|--|--|
| 13 | 3 | 10 | 100%/53% |

Seek greater efficiencies, innovations, and enhancements to delivery services

RAILS Auction Nets Over \$10,000

RAILS recently concluded our auction of surplus materials. The auction was held November 4-8. We're expecting to collect over \$10,000 once the winning bidders retrieve their items. Out of the 22 vehicles in the auction, 12 did not sell. We will work on disposing of those and other miscellaneous items over the next couple of weeks.

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

Find More Illinois Update

During the weeks of October 21 and October 28, RAILS Consortial Services Supervisor Barb Miller met with the top users of the Enhanced Borrowing Pilot to discuss the sunseting of the pilot and the option of taking part in the Inter-System Sharing Initiative (ISSI). This program is sponsored and supported by Auto-Graphics and would enable interested libraries to share materials with participating libraries in Wisconsin.



Invitations to the FMI focus group were sent to academic libraries across the state on October 24. The goal of the focus group is to find what type of initiative would be beneficial to academic libraries and would encourage them to take part in FMI. Nine libraries participated in the focus group sessions, which were held on November 5 and 6. Their helpful insights and questions contributed to our understanding as we continue to develop our framework for the initiative.

Libraries Participating in Find More Illinois as of October 31, 2024

| Academic | Public | School | Special | Total |
|----------|--------|--------|---------|-------|
| 1 | 71 | 9 | 1 | 82 |

Find More Illinois total transactions (loans and borrows)

| Time Period | Number of transactions |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| October 2024 | 1,386 |
| Fiscal Year to Date | 5,314 |

Find More Illinois catalog

| Time Period | Number of items in shared catalog |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| October 2024 | 7,281,100 |

eRead Illinois & Inkie.org Update



eRead Illinois Boundless Checkouts

| Time Period | E-Books | Audiobooks | Total |
|---------------------|---------|------------|---------|
| October 2024 | 25,307 | 20,911 | 46,218 |
| Fiscal Year to Date | 86,994 | 810,691 | 167,685 |

Inkie.org Library Views

| Time Period | Number of Views |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| October 2024 | 1,262 |
| Fiscal Year to Date | 6,320 |

Explore More Illinois Update

In October 2024, 2,195 reservations were made in Explore More Illinois. The most popular downstate and suburban attractions in October were:

- Brookfield Zoo (500)
- Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe (200)
- Cantigny in Wheaton (63)
- Anderson Japanese Gardens in Rockford (39)
- Chicago Red Stars in Bridgeview (27)

The most popular Chicago attractions in October 2024 were:

- Art Institute of Chicago (343)
- Field Museum (241)
- Museum of Science and Industry (233)
- Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum (179)
- Chicago Children’s Museum (69)

In early October, Harris Theater for Music and Dance joined Explore More Illinois.

Libraries Enrolled in Explore More Illinois as of October 31, 2024

| RAILS Libraries | IHLS Libraries | Chicago Public Library | Community Colleges | Total |
|-----------------|----------------|------------------------|--------------------|-------|
| 348 | 93 | 1 | 4 | 446 |

Attractions in Explore More Illinois as of October 31, 2024

| | |
|---------------------------|----|
| Attractions | 67 |
| Total Attractions in 2024 | 78 |

Reservations Made in Explore More Illinois in October 31

| Organization | October 2024 |
|--------------|--------------|
| RAILS/IHLS | 385 |
| CPL | 1,810 |
| Total | 2,195 |



Examine all aspects of RAILS policies, procedures, and core services through an equity lens

First Meeting of RAILS Digital Accessibility Team

The first meeting of the RAILS Digital Accessibility Team will be held on November 22. This staff-led team will help establish and maintain a web accessibility strategy that will help ensure our digital content and platforms are inclusive and accessible to all users, including individuals with disabilities.

Assist member libraries in preparing for the future

Future-focused professional development and member engagement efforts

DIY Strategic Planning Workshop Discount for RAILS Members

Due to our ongoing collaboration with Fast Forward Libraries, many RAILS member libraries are receiving a discount on their registration for their online, three-part “Chart Your Future” strategic planning series on November 6, 13, 20.

Recent CE Events

- **“Copyright, Text Mining, and AI,”** webinar, October 2
This workshop provided an overview of the legal considerations for researchers, creatives, and professionals navigating the rapidly evolving landscape of AI. Participants learned about ownership, fair use, and legal obligations when using copyrighted material to build AI tools and when incorporating AI into their work. The workshop also discussed how AI is shaping the academic publishing landscape, particularly its impact on text mining for research purposes.
- **“Deepfakes: How Computers See and Mimic Us,”** webinar, October 15
This workshop provided a beginner-friendly overview of how artificial intelligence tools interpret pictures and sound to generate new images, video, and voices. They discussed how these techniques are being used for research and in the film industry, and identified strategies for recognizing deep fakes and tools that you can use to protect your image and voice.
- **“Collection Management for Today’s School Library,”** webinar, October 22
Kelly Burns Davis taught the basics of how communities use collections and how to assess the collection to ensure it’s as effective as possible. Participants learned how to develop a diverse collection that stays on top of current trends and includes materials that will be in high demand among their students. They also gained ideas for making collections accessible and inviting to school communities.
- **“Mental Health First Aid Training,”** RAILS Burr Ridge, October 23
The National Alliance on Mental Health taught participants how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. The training taught the necessary skills to reach out and provide initial help and support to patrons who may be developing a mental health or substance use problem or experiencing a crisis.
- **“Amanda Jones, ‘That Librarian’ and a Journey to Protect Intellectual Freedom,”** webinar, October 28
Libraries are seeing an unprecedented number of book challenges and attacks on our nation's libraries. Amanda Jones – a school librarian from Louisiana and author of *That Librarian: The Fight Against Book Banning in America* – talked about her journey from being the target of a harassment campaign to finding the positives and deciding to fight back.

“Cataloging Children’s Materials: Tips and Best Practices”, webinar, November 12

This session will discuss types of children’s material with a focus on cataloging children’s literature and non-fiction. Tips for evaluating records, assigning Dewey and LC call numbers, and local fields of interest to children’s materials such as award winners will be discussed, as well as strategies for managing and organizing children’s collections to enhance accessibility and discoverability.

Upcoming CE Events

- **“Pushing Back on Misinformation: The Role of the Library,”** webinar, November 18
This session will provide a brief overview of the current landscape of mis/disinformation and of the human and tech-based options for combatting it. It will then take a deeper dive into the role libraries can play by highlighting those research-based skills and literacies and discussing how to develop and facilitate engaging and effective programming on the topic.
- **“Mental Health First Aid Training,”** Bloomington Public Library, November 19
Learn how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. The training gives you the skills you need to reach out and provide initial help and support to patrons who may be developing a mental health or substance use problem or experiencing a crisis.
- **“Ask the Web Accessibility Expert”,** webinar, November 21
Mark McCarthy, Lead Accessibility Engineer and IT Accessibility Liaison at the University of Illinois, will prioritize questions submitted during registration, allowing for in-depth exploration of the topics that matter most to RAILS members. A portion of the session will be dedicated to follow-up Q&A, giving the opportunity to get expert advice on specific challenges and concerns.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Strengthen collaborative relationships with partner library organizations

November Partnership Meeting

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.

November meeting topics included:

- Updates on AISLE’s task force on getting a certified school librarian in every school
- An AISLE Advocacy Committee effort to communicate with public libraries about job openings in local school districts
- The upcoming Illinois Association of School Boards conference

And much more! We will continue to keep the board updated on these meetings.

RSA Independence Update

RSA continues its work on Phase 2 of their independence project which focuses on their direct employment of RSA support staff. RSA has recently contracted with HR Fit, an HR consulting firm out of Peoria which specializes in support for small and medium-sized employers. In the months ahead HR Fit will work with RSA on HR-related deliverables including the development of a staff handbook, policy development, and job description review.

RAILS Films TikTok with Mychal Threets

RAILS Member Engagement Specialist Jessica Silva participated in [a TikTok video featuring Mychal Threets](#) at the 2024 ILA Conference in Peoria. In the video, Silva and Threets take on the viral Chappell Roan “I hope she plays Hot to Go” trend.

RAILS IT Update

In October and November, RAILS IT staff updated the Deirdre Brennan meeting room in Burr Ridge with new TV's and permanent equipment mounting. They also completed a staff VPN update, removing the old VPN client, and updating the current one.

Wifi in RAILS Buildings

RAILS IT recently disabled public wifi access due to unauthorized usage at the Coal Valley Service Center. RAILS will now require a password for wifi in all buildings. We will be working to update signage.





OCTOBER 2024: analytics



FOLLOWERS

September 2024

October 2024





| | | |
|---|-------|-------|
|  Facebook | 2,561 | 2,565 |
|  Instagram | 1,466 | 1,485 |
|  Twitter/X | 1,440 | 1,435 |
|  LinkedIn | 1,677 | 1,732 |



REACH

September 2024

October 2024





| | | |
|---|-------|-------|
|  Facebook | 7,189 | 6,221 |
|  Instagram | 1,143 | 2,202 |
|  Twitter/X | N/A | N/A |
|  LinkedIn | N/A | N/A |



IMPRESSIONS

September 2024

October 2024





| | | |
|---|-------|-------|
|  Facebook | N/A | N/A |
|  Instagram | 4,029 | 7,100 |
|  Twitter/X | N/A | N/A |
|  LinkedIn | 5,165 | 6,510 |



ENGAGEMENT

September 2024

October 2024

| | | |
|---|-------|-------|
|  Facebook | 2,002 | 1,879 |
|  Instagram | 259 | 477 |
|  Twitter/X | N/A | N/A |
|  LinkedIn | 178 | 251 |

OCTOBER 2024: top posts

