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Executive Director Report, January 2025

Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

RAILS 2024 Year in Review Video

Instead of doing a RAILS Minute in December, this year we decided to try a [video](#) recap of RAILS' work in 2024 for the membership. We highlighted several initiatives that moved forward in 2024, including the SLATE dashboard launch, support for broadband and digital equity efforts, updating our delivery fleet, legislative efforts for Illinois libraries including the Treasurer's bond bill and [PA 103-100](#), efforts to educate libraries on digital accessibility, much more. As always, our Communications Team did a great job encapsulating a great deal of work into an approachable format. I encourage you to take a look at the video if you haven't already. We'll be back to the RAILS Minute in January.

Broadband and Digital Equity Grant Update

As we await the Illinois Office of Broadband's announcement of the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant program, expected in early February, RAILS has continued to work with our organizational partners, Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS) and the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI) to make progress on outlining a potential grant proposal.

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

Climate Team

The Climate Team recently finished work on a short welcome video for all RAILS staff that outlines our values as an organization. It especially highlights that individuals' name, background, and where they come from shouldn't affect the way that they are treated at RAILS or their ability to succeed here. We plan to show the video at our January staff meeting and then incorporate it into onboarding for all new staff.

EDI Forum

On January 15 RAILS administered a survey to all former and current RAILS Board EDI Committee members. We are hoping to receive feedback that will help guide the transition of this committee from a board committee to a member-focused committee. It is also our intention to follow this survey with a small focus group of members who can provide additional perspective on how best a future iteration of this EDI committee can best support our membership.

Assist member libraries in preparing for the future

Save the Date: RAILS Member Update on February 11

We are looking forward to another RAILS Member Update this February. Topics will include an update of what's new at RAILS, a presentation from Ancel Glink on Meetings Room and First Amendment rights, and more.

Leadership Training in RAILS

Thank you again for your thoughtful and insightful conversation on leadership training for Illinois libraries at our November meeting. Your suggestions were very helpful to us as we thought carefully about how to move forward with our planning. Next we will host a series of facilitated conversations with members this Spring in order to design a pilot program of learning experiences for library leaders. We are hopeful that this pilot project will debut in the first half of FY2026. I will certainly share more as this develops.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Illinois Library Association Legislative Meetups

The annual series of ILA legislative meetups occurred across the state in early December 2024. 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.

RAILS staff and Board had representation at all five events in our service area. At the Public Policy Committee meeting in January 2025, it was reported that library attendee levels were back at pre-pandemic levels. Thank you to all of you who attended these meetings, as well as those of you who sent invites to legislators and led the efforts to organize the events in your area.

ILA Public Policy Committee Updates

The Illinois Library Association's Public Policy Committee met on January 6. ILA Executive Director Cyndi Robinson shared Federal updates, including those related to the Digital Equity Act, as well as upcoming national advocacy efforts in Washington DC: Voices for Libraries (COSLA) in March 2025 and the American Library Association's Fly In Days in April 2025.

ILA Lobbyist Derek Blaida shared Illinois updates, including general discussions dominating the end of the 103rd General Assembly. He warned that the budget deficit that is expected for FY26 will likely have a large effect on what will go to committee in the next session. At future Public Policy Committee meetings he will highlight 8-10 bills per meeting that will be of interest to the committee. There was an update from the subcommittee that is compiling relevant legislative changes from other types of Illinois local government, in hopes of identifying potential legislative opportunities for libraries in the future.

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 have registered to attend this event.

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 January 7 and a Logistics Committee meeting on January 14 and I look forward to future developments.

ISLAC

The Illinois State Library Advisory Committee (ISLAC) has cancelled the January meeting. The next meeting is likely to be scheduled for March.

Looking Ahead to February

- **February Service of the Month and Board Development Topics: Explore More Illinois Update with Jessica Barnes and Statewide E-Resource Package with Leila Heath**



This Month at RAILS – January 2025

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 #DeliveryWrapped

Following the style of 2024's #SpotifyWrapped, RAILS highlighted their 2024 delivery stats on social media.

Facts included:

- Our delivery drivers made 69,818 stops. That's 468x more than Taylor Swift's Era Tour.
- The libraries that received the most deliveries per type were Highland Community College, McCook Public Library District, United Township High School District #30, and Theosophical Society in America.
- Our delivery drivers traveled 1,111,594 miles. That's the equivalent of traveling to the moon and back 2.3 times.
- Rick and Michael from our East Peoria hub traveled the most miles. This route #6 covers 78,155 miles every year.



2025 Illinois State Library Annual Certification

In compliance with Illinois statutes and administrative rules, annual certification is required of ALL library system members to retain system membership and eligibility for grants administered by the Illinois State Library. Every year, RAILS staff help member libraries complete this required process.

The Illinois State Library Annual Certification form has been streamlined and moved to the Library Directory and Learning Calendar (L2). RAILS offers a step-by-step screencast. The certification period runs from January 2 to March 31, 2025. Libraries that need assistance can contact help@librarylearning.org.

Illinois Libraries: Agencies of Impact Media Kit Now Available

In [this kit](#) available on the [My Library Is.. website](#), libraries will find all the infographics included in the original report for use in their own presentations. There are also two 11x17 posters that members can print and display to demonstrate the thriving nature of libraries for their communities. We are sharing the statistics from the study throughout the next several months on our Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

Enhance sharing of knowledge and best practices

November & December RAILS Site Visits

RAILS Member Engagement Specialist Jessica Silva conducted three site visits at member libraries in November & December. She visited:

- Flanagan-Cornell District #74 (pictured, right)
- Forefront Library, Chicago, IL
- Yorkville Public Library

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 Attends Networking Group Meetings

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

- Circulation Roundtable Networking Group meeting at Villa Park Public Library
- Spanish Programming and Resources for Kids (SPARK) meeting at Gail Borden Public Library

Project to Update Non-Resident Card Information

RAILS staff are currently working on a project to update non-resident card information on member public libraries. The board of each public library in RAILS is required to decide annually whether they will participate in the state's non-resident fee program, and to inform RAILS by updating their non-resident information in L2. Since fall of 2024 when we began our outreach to libraries, nearly 150 libraries have provided their updated information to RAILS.

Can't Shelve This Episode Three

Episode three, "The Library's Got Rizz," featuring Nichole Folkman from Hartsburg-Emden CUSD #21 premiered on November 12, 2024. Podcast hosts Janette Derucki, RAILS Data Analyst and Leah Gregory, IHLS School Library Membership Coordinator led a discussion about the best way to get students interested in visiting the school library and read listener-submitted programming stories. The episode has gotten 300 podcast downloads and 120 YouTube views.

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](#).

Exciting New Discount for RAILS K-12 Schools

RAILS K–12 schools are now eligible for advantageous pricing on Swank movie licensing, with the option to purchase Movie Licensing or the Movie Licensing + Streaming Plus package. Swank movie licensing offers comprehensive copyright protection for your entire school or district for movie showings from all of the top Hollywood studios. Swank’s unique Streaming Plus platform also includes legal access to 40,000+ feature films, documentaries and foreign titles, available both in school and at home for teachers and students.

January Renewals Save Libraries Over \$25,000

The Deals & Discounts team completed the January 1 sign-up and renewal processes for Swank Public libraries and BookBrowse. Over 200 libraries participate in these deals and saved over \$25,000. RAILS contacted members through promotion channels, webinars, and individual reach-outs and worked with the vendors throughout the process.

20 People Attend Udemy Webinar

On November 6, 20 registrants attended the “Gale: Learn Something New with Udemy” webinar. This online learning platform provides video-based courses for adults who want to upskill for a new job, advance in their current profession, or deepen personal interests.

Attendees Learn More About Fiero Code

On December 4, RAILS hosted the Fiero Code: Coding Education for Public Libraries webinar, with 24 registrants and 8 attending the live event. Fiero Code is a fun and interactive coding education platform that includes more than 13 coding languages and devices and can be used for individual learning or in-person coding clubs at the library. The vendor agreed to two free months for new libraries that sign up by 1/31.

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 December 31, 2024

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
475	206	77	63%/53%

Gale Excel Stats as of December 31, 2024

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
18	3	15	100%/53%

Seek greater efficiencies, innovations, and enhancements to delivery services

Update on Bolingbrook Expansion

As we reported at the September 2024 board meeting, RAILS will be transitioning sorting responsibilities from our outsourced delivery vendor (CTL) to sorting staff at our Bolingbrook service hub. While initially planned for January 2025, the transition has been delayed due to the sale in late 2024 of our Bolingbrook facility. The change of ownership has delayed our ability to occupy the additional suite necessary for sorting as well as the scheduled buildout required for our revised workflow. RAILS staff are currently working with CTL on this transition which we now hope to complete by April 2025.

Work on Delivery App Continues

The RAILS Delivery app was recently updated. The updates include a link to the facilities checklist, overtime tracking, and additional features that will help support the sorting.

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

Find More Illinois Update

RAILS Technology Special Projects Coordinator Eric Bain provided FMI training to new FMI libraries on December 9 and 10.



RAILS Consortial Services Supervisor Barb Miller and Eric Bain booth attended on customer support meeting with Auto-Graphics on December 18 to discuss current software support tickets.

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

Academic	Public	School	Special	Total
1	72	12	1	86

Find More Illinois total transactions (loans and borrows)

Time Period	Number of transactions
November 2024	1,168
December 2024	1,129
Fiscal Year to Date	7,611

Find More Illinois catalog

Time Period	Number of items in shared catalog
December 2024	7,599,493

eRead Illinois & Inkie.org Update



eRead Illinois Boundless Checkouts

Time Period	E-Books	Audiobooks	Total
November 2024	21,801	19,021	40,822
December 2024	22,148	19,394	41,542
Fiscal Year to Date	130,943	119,106	250,049

Inkie.org Library Views

Time Period	Number of Views
November 2024	1,517
December 2024	1,439
Fiscal Year to Date	9,276

Explore More Illinois Update

In November 2024, 2,912 reservations were made in Explore More Illinois. The most popular downstate and suburban attractions in December were:

- Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe (199)
- Brookfield Zoo (141)
- DuPage Children's Museum in Naperville (57)
- Chicago Red Stars in Bridgeview (36)
- Volo Museum (33)



The most popular Chicago attractions in November 2024 were:

- Griffin Museum of Science and Industry (583)
- Art Institute of Chicago (493)
- Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum (410)
- Field Museum (346)
- Chicago Children's Museum (150)

In December 2024, 3,018 reservations were made in Explore More Illinois. The most popular downstate and suburban attractions in December were:

- Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe (200)
- DuPage Children's Museum in Naperville (76)
- Brookfield Zoo (52)
- Peoria Riverfront Museum (46)
- Volo Museum (33)

The most popular Chicago attractions in December 2024 were:

- Art Institute of Chicago (600)
- Griffin Museum of Science and Industry (533)
- Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum (476)
- Field Museum (233)
- Chicago Children’s Museum (196)

In December, Forest Park Nature Center in East Peoria joined Explore More Illinois.

Jessica Barnes presented an Explore More Illinois webinar on November 14 to three attendees. Six people signed up to receive a recording.

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

RAILS Libraries	IHLS Libraries	Chicago Public Library	Community Colleges	Total
349	93	1	4	447

Attractions in Explore More Illinois as of December 31, 2024

Attractions	68
Total Attractions in 2024	83

Reservations Made in Explore More Illinois in November 2024

Organization	November 2024
RAILS/IHLS	483
CPL	2,429
Total	2,912

Reservations Made in Explore More Illinois in December 2024

Organization	December 2024
RAILS/IHLS	659
CPL	2,359
Total	3,018

Assist member libraries in preparing for the future

Future-focused professional development and member engagement efforts

Classification Basics Course Reaches Capacity

The Classification Basics: Understanding Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) & Using WebDewey course will run from January 27 through February 24. Shortly after the course was announced, registration had reached the cap of 50 participants and five waiting list spots.

Active Shooter Training

On January 16, RAILS staff will take part in Active Shooter Training with Joseph Crimmins, the Founder and President of Serve and Protect. Crimmins is a retired Police Detective Sergeant with 30 years of experience in criminal investigations and emergency preparedness. With this training, staff can make better decisions in emergency situations, whether it's evacuating or seeking shelter in secure areas, so that everyone can respond appropriately to an imminent danger, enhancing overall safety in our buildings.

Recent CE Events

- **“Navigating Friends of the Library Groups”**, webinar, December 3
Public library staff interested in establishing or strengthening their partnership with Friends of the Library groups explored the important role Friends play in supporting libraries, as well as the challenges that can arise.
- **“Database Deep Dive: Using the Illinois State Library Database Package in School Libraries”**, webinar, December 11
This collaboration with IHLS covered accessing the state database package, marketing to teachers for collaborative lessons, and school-specific tools such as eBooks, college & career readiness options, subject area database options, and Novelist.
- **“Post Staff-Engagement Survey: Analyzing Data and Action Planning”**, webinar, December 16
Brooke Sievers, Assistant Director at Addison Public Library, shared best practices on how to sift through staff engagement data, communicate the results to staff and supervisors, and create an action plan that holds you accountable for change.
- **“Shining a Light on Managing Employees,”** webinar, January 13
In this collaboration with IHLS, HR Director Jill Trevino and SHARE Director Cassandra Thompson discussed the shoulds and should-nots of managing and having hard conversations with employees, and why this often-dreaded part of management is so important.
- **“RAILS Learning Lab: AI for Better Workflows,”** online meeting, January 21
RAILS Learning Labs are an informal, online space for interactive, hands-on learning and collaboration. Members join in to have fun and connect with other library staff while building new skills.
- **“25 Signs Anyone Can Do”**, webinar, January 23
This basic sign language workshop taught participants 25 easy-to-remember signs, simple phrases, and the manual alphabet to fingerspell their names.

Upcoming CE Events

- **“Science of Reading”**, webinar, January 28
Dr. Joanna Christodoulou, developmental cognitive neuroscientist and educator, will review the framework termed “Science of Reading” as it relates to reading development and difficulties in school-age children. She'll review current research on reading instruction, assessment, intervention, and experiences, with a focus on librarian roles. The discussion will also include cognitive neuroscience insights to complement our understanding of how children learn to read.
- **“Social Media 101: A Crash Course for Library Marketers”**, webinar, January 29

Ola Gronski, RAILS Digital Marketing & Communications Specialist, will discuss popular social media platforms and their purposes, best practices surrounding accessibility, and the latest trends circulating the internet.

- **“Top 10 Tips for Library Grant Success”**, webinar, January 30
Learn the top ten tips for streamlining the grant-writing process, crafting standout proposals, and increasing your chances of success.
- **“Who Dunit? DIY Murder Mystery in the Library,”** webinar, February 4
Staff from the Addison Public Library will teach us how to craft intricate and immersive storylines, designed to capture the attention of our patrons while also seamlessly blending important STEM concepts and literacy skills.
- **“Social Media Best Practices for Library Trustees,”** webinar, February 7
In this session, attorney Julie Tappendorf will provide best practices on avoiding Open Meetings Act violations and help you learn how the First Amendment can apply to trustee social media activities, even on their personal social media accounts. Julie will discuss recent U.S. Supreme Court cases on government officials and social media and provide the dos and don'ts for moderating comments on social media.
- **“Inclusive Classroom Libraries”**, webinar, February 18
Details and registration will be available on L2 soon.
- **“Supporting Neurodivergent Staff and Patrons”**, webinar, February 20
Details and registration will be available on L2 soon.
- **“RAILS Learning Lab: Creating Alt Text”**, online meeting, February 25
RAILS Learning Labs are an informal, online space for interactive, hands-on learning and collaboration. Members join in to have fun and connect with other library staff while building new skills.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Strengthen collaborative relationships with partner library organizations

Improvements to L2 Help Documentation

RAILS staff has completed revisions to existing Library Learning (L2) user documentation, created new documents, and planned a roadmap for ongoing documentation creation and maintenance. All documentation will soon be available to RAILS members in an easier-to-access web format, and will support an upcoming promotional campaign encouraging library administrators to review and update their libraries' directory data.

December & January Partnerships 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:

- A discussion of the new Value of School Librarians document
- A recap of Unite Against Book Bans in Illinois panel presentations at AISLE and ILA
- A preview of the ILA Legislative Meetups

- The disbanding of the AISLE Task Force for Certified School Librarians in Every School
- The upcoming Illinois Association of School Boards conference

December meeting topics included:

- An upcoming ILA Intellectual Freedom Committee discussion around soft censorship
- A discussion of ILA Legislative Meetups
- How public libraries can support school libraries
- A recap of the Illinois Association of School Boards conference
- A discussion of the LBSS Grant program

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

RAILS Staff & Service Center News

Welcome Sara Mecurio!

Sara Mercurio joined RAILS on November 19 as a temporary Cataloging Services Assistant (through June 30) funded by the grant from the Illinois State Library to increase staff capacity to handle the growing demand for our World Language Cataloging Service. Her capable work has proved to accelerate the pace at which RAILS can complete requests and to expand the time available to ensure effective service administration and grant reporting.

Diana Rusch Presents on ALA LRT Panel

On December 5, Diana Rusch, as committee member of ALA's Learning Round Table Online Learning Committee, took part in planning and presenting "Training Exploration: Year in Review". The ALA group shared their personal training recommendations from 2024 and took questions from a group of nearly 40 library training staff from across the country.

RAILS CE Team Presenting at Reaching Forward North Conference

Margae Schmidt and Diana Rusch will be presenting "Discovering Engaging Training Opportunities for Library Staff" at the Reaching Forward North Conference on May 1.

RSA Independence Update

RSA is in the final stages of planning and starting to move forward with all the tasks required to hire staff. They have contracted with a local HR firm to help us with the many, many steps that need to be completed. RSA intends to be ready to start the process of hiring staff in late March. The biggest step will be getting IMRF approval.

RAILS IT Update

In November and December, RAILS IT conducted the necessary work on prepare Suite D in the RAILS Bolingbrook Service Center. That includes installing network cabling, internet service, door controls, security and cameras. Also, new network switching hardware has been received for all RAILS service centers. Work will begin soon.

RAILS Online Store Update

After an exciting launch in October, the RAILS Online Store continued to see steady sales during the holiday months. In November, we received 17 sales for 32 items. In December, we received 7 sales for 13 items. So far, the most popular design is “Reading is Reading” in color.

NOVEMBER 2024: analytics



FOLLOWERS

October 2024

November 2024




 Facebook	2,565	2,577
 Instagram	1,485	1,501
 LinkedIn	1,732	1,756



REACH

October 2024

November 2024


 Facebook	6,221	4,235
 Instagram	2,202	1,414
 LinkedIn	N/A	N/A



IMPRESSIONS

October 2024

November 2024

 Facebook	N/A	N/A
 Instagram	7,100	4,087
 LinkedIn	6,510	4,925



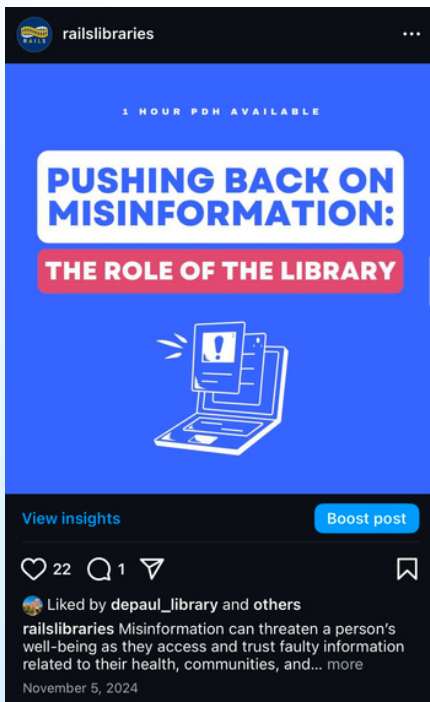
ENGAGEMENT

October 2024

November 2024

 Facebook	1,879	758
 Instagram	477	267
 LinkedIn	251	152

NOVEMBER 2024: top posts




DECEMBER 2024: analytics



FOLLOWERS

November 2024

December 2024




 Facebook	2,577	2,574
 Instagram	1,501	1,507
 LinkedIn	1,756	1,773



REACH

November 2024

December 2024

 Facebook	4,235	4,785
 Instagram	1,414	1,404
 LinkedIn	N/A	N/A



IMPRESSIONS

November 2024

December 2024

 Facebook	N/A	N/A
 Instagram	4,087	4,145
 LinkedIn	4,925	3,230



ENGAGEMENT

November 2024

December 2024

 Facebook	758	737
 Instagram	267	270
 LinkedIn	152	119

DECEMBER 2024: top posts

