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Executive Director Report, February 2025

Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

RAILS Funding Update

As many of you are aware, in late January freezes to federal funding were ordered through the Trump Administration's Executive Orders. Several court challenges have been made to these orders, and the ultimate fate of federal funding through many agencies remains unclear. RAILS has received many questions about the impacts of federal funding on RAILS and our library partners. In response to these questions, we have shared relevant information during the February RAILS Minute, the Member Update on February 11, Board committee meetings, and our staff meeting on February 18. The RAILS Communication Team has also developed a new informational campaign, *RAILS: Numbers That Count*, that is intended to address the value that RAILS brings to Illinois through delivery, grants, continuing education, deals & discounts, and much more. We remain in contact with the Illinois State Library about these issues, and we expect to hear more at the March ISLAC meeting about the Illinois State Library budget priorities.

In good news, you will see in the RAILS financial report that this week we received the LSTA (federal) payment for RAILS's Area and Per Capita grant totaling $1,936,143.79. With the receipt of these funds, RAILS has received the full amount of our FY2025 grant. We want to express our sincere thanks to the Illinois Secretary of State and the Illinois State Library for their efforts and support.

Illinois Legislative Updates

I attended the most recent Illinois Library Association's Public Policy Committee (PPC) meeting on February 3rd. Lobbyist Derek Blaida highlighted important deadlines for the state legislature and Governor Pritzker's address to introduce his proposed budget for fiscal year 2026 on Wednesday, February 19. The Illinois Library Association provided a list of bills that they are watching closely as the legislative season continues. There will be more detail shared at the next PPC meeting on Monday, March 3.

Governor Pritzker presented a proposed budget this week that included no new taxes. The projected deficit that had originally come in around $3.2 billion was adjusted due to an additional $1.5 billion in revenue that is expected to come in next fiscal year. There were no new programs introduced that could be costly for Illinois.

In addition to what has been highlighted by ILA, RAILS has learned of several legislative items that we are watching closely, including:

SB1741: Amends the School Code. Requires the State Board of Education to establish and convene the Licensed School Librarian Task Force, which shall meet a minimum of 4 times and submit, no later than 12 months after the first convening of the Task Force, a report to the Governor and the General Assembly containing recommendations, including, but not limited to, recommendations on how to ensure public elementary and secondary schools consider, budget appropriate resources for, and employ licensed school librarians in future school years from available State and local resources.

[SB2124: Let America Read Act](#): Provides that the State Board of Education with oversight over the instructional materials used in public schools shall create a grievance procedure for challenges to instructional materials.

[Illinois Senate Joint Resolution 13](#): Creates the University Library & Professional Librarian Access & Transparency Task Force to examine the current state of libraries and professional librarianship on Illinois public university campuses and present a recommendation to the General Assembly to ensure that public academic libraries and the educational services provided by professional librarian faculty remains a viable and healthy benefit to Illinois students.

[SR0104](#): Urges all public library trustees to participate in ongoing training programs provided by the Illinois Secretary of State to strengthen their ability to effectively oversee library operations and services. Encourages the Illinois Secretary of State to expand and enhance library trustee training opportunities, ensuring that all library board members have access to comprehensive education on governance, ethics, and policy matters.

Related to the last item, Joe Filapek and I met with representatives from IHLS, ILA and Niles-Maine Public Library District on February 10 to discuss the topic of public library trustee training. State Senator Laura Murphy (D – Des Plaines) has expressed interest in exploring legislation focused on trustee training. This preliminary discussion focused on considerations for required trustee training and how the regional library systems and other partner agencies could provide support. Senator Murphy has filed a Senate Resolution urging public library trustees to pursue relevant training opportunities.

RAILS Minute
This month's RAILS Minute focused on an explanation of how RAILS is funded, recent legal questions about immigration enforcement and public library meeting rooms & First Amendment rights, and the World Language Cataloging Services program.

Statement of Economic Interests Form Coming Soon
All RAILS Board members should expect to see something in mid-March from the State of Illinois related to completing your annual Statement of Economic Interest. The Illinois Governmental Ethics Act requires certain employees, state public officials, and appointees to state boards and commissions to file a Statement of Economic Interests form annual on or before May 1.

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

Digital Accessibility Team Update
The RAILS Digital Accessibility Committee has now met three times since being formed in December 2024. This internal staff committee is charged with establishing and maintaining a comprehensive web accessibility strategy that ensures RAILS' digital content and platforms are inclusive and accessible to all users. The committee is currently working on creating a digital accessibility statement as well as establishing working groups. Brian Smith will also present on this topic to the RAILS Board at our March meeting.

Assist member libraries in preparing for the future

Meeting Room FAQ from Ancel Glink

Recently, RAILS has received questions about public library meeting room policies and the First Amendment. We compiled those questions and had our partners at Ancel Glink produce an FAQ document. This information was also shared at the RAILS Member Update on February 11.

Immigration Enforcement Memo from Ancel Glink

Our partners at Ancel Glink updated the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) guidance that RAILS originally provided back in 2017 to be relevant to changes in 2025. It is important to note that due to potential changes in the coming months, whether by law or executive order, this guidance may continue to change. Public libraries may want to share this document with your boards as you evaluate the best course of action for your library. It is our recommendation that you also review this with your library's attorney before taking any action.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Illinois Libraries Present Moving to Illinois Library Association

The Illinois Library Association announced in January that they have acquired Illinois Libraries Present, a high quality online events provider for participating member libraries of all sizes and budgets. In the past, RAILS has provided accounting services to the ILP program. We will be meeting soon with ILA to discuss the transition of these services for the program.

IHLS Member Day Presentation

I had the opportunity to present on the history of the Partnership for School Libraries and the importance of collaboration, along with RAILS Data Analyst Janette Derucki, at the Illinois Heartland Library System's Annual Member Day on February 12. Deep thanks to the IHLS team for having us!

Looking Ahead to March

- **March Service of the Month and Board Development Topics: Marketing and Communications Team update with Dan Bostrom and Digital Accessibility with Brian Smith**

This Month at RAILS – February 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 Moves Forward with Broadband & Digital Equity Plans

Following the release of the Notice of Funding Opportunity for the DCEO Office of Broadband's State Digital Equity Capacity Grant, RAILS is taking the lead on a grant application in collaboration with IHLS and CARLI. If funded, the project would support capacity-building efforts for technology and digital inclusion services in under-resourced public libraries across Illinois.

Chicago Tribune Digital & E-Edition Pilot Project

RAILS Deals & Discounts secured a deal to bring *Chicago Tribune* Digital and E-Edition access to RAILS member libraries at a discounted price. RAILS is partnering with *Chicago Tribune* parent company MediaNews Group to provide an initial pilot program from March – June 2025. The pilot will include a small subset of RAILS members prior to the general rollout for this offering who were selected to include representation for each LLSAP within RAILS and a variety of sizes, regions, catalog, and authentication methods. The goal of the pilot program is to test and collect feedback in preparation for a larger-scale rollout later this year. There has been strong positive interest in this initiative so far, and the Deals & Discount team is excited to bring this opportunity to RAILS members.

Planning Begins for Inaugural RAILS Data Conference

Planning for the inaugural RAILS Data Conference has begun! The RAILS Data Team is collaborating with eight data-minded library professionals from across the state to plan a one-day learning and networking event taking place on Monday, October 13, 2025 in Rosemont, Illinois.

Enhance sharing of knowledge and best practices

January RAILS Site Visits
RAILS Member Engagement Specialist Jessica Silva conducted one site visit at member libraries in January. She visited:

- Serena CUSD #2

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

RAILS Member Meetup at Paw Paw Public Library
On January 23, RAILS hosted a Member Meetup at the Paw Paw Public Library. There were 12 people in attendance. This event was open to all staff from RAILS member libraries. Discussion topics included RAILS resources and how staff from member libraries can become more engaged with RAILS.

Can't Shelve This Episode Four Premieres January 14
In "A Good Librarian's Guide to Getting Along (with Administration)," RAILS Data Analyst Janette Derucki and IHLS School Library Membership Coordinator Leah Gregory are joined by school librarian and principal duo, Beth Kovacic and Akemi Sessler from Dryden Elementary School in Arlington Heights. Together, they discuss how to foster a positive relationship and help improve student, teacher, and community success. This episode set the *Can't Shelve This* record for most listens in a single month.

RAILS Social Media Engagement
See the report at the end for info on our January 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.

ReadSquared Renewal Process
The RAILS ReadSquared Deal is up for renewal in April 2025. Deals & Discount staff have been working through the renewal process and contacting libraries to ensure seamless continued access.

Vendor	Webinar Title	Date	Registered	Attended
Library Ideas	Fiero Code: Coding Education for Public Libraries	1/14/2025	13	10

ReadSquared	ReadSquared Reading Programs for Public Libraries	1/30/2025	N/A	2
Swank	Swank Movie Licensing and K–12 Streaming	2/5/2025	13	2

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 January 31, 2025

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
481	211	80	63%/53%

Gale Excel Stats as of January 31, 2025

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
9	4	5	100%/53%

Seek greater efficiencies, innovations, and enhancements to delivery services

Update on Sorting Transition

With the acquisition of Suite D at our Bolingbrook facility finalized at the end of January, we are pleased to report that much of the preparation to begin sorting work has been completed. This includes painting, carpet replacement, the creation of an access entryway from Suite C to Suite D, the installation of our sorting racks, and other peripheral items such as security cameras, electronic lock system and computer workstations. We are currently working with CTL to finalize our revised contract, and we anticipate the sorting work to be fully transitioned by the end of March.

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

Find More Illinois Update

On January 15, RAILS Technology Special Projects Coordinator Eric Bain and RAILS Consortial Services Supervisor Barb Miller met with Auto-Graphics customer support to resolve software support tickets and discuss the coordination of onboarding groups of lender only academic libraries.

Eric Bain provided remote training for FMI's newest school library on January 27.

Libraries Participating in Find More Illinois as of January 31, 2025

Academic	Public	School	Special	Total

1	73	12	1	87

Find More Illinois total transactions (loans and borrows)

Time Period	Number of transactions
January 2025	1,427
Fiscal Year to Date	9,038

Find More Illinois catalog

Time Period	Number of items in shared catalog
January 2025	7,590,758

eRead Illinois & Inkie.org Update

The 2026 Rebecca Caudill Award list was released at the beginning of February. Both the e-book and audiobook version of any titles that weren't already in it were added to the eRead Illinois collection.

eRead Illinois Boundless Checkouts

Time Period	E-Books	Audiobooks	Total
January 2025	25,443	21,504	46,947
Fiscal Year to Date	156,363	140,594	296,957

Inkie.org Library Views

Time Period	Number of Views
January 2025	2,856
Fiscal Year to Date	12,190

Explore More Illinois Update

In January 2025, 2,588 reservations were made in Explore More Illinois. The most popular downstate and suburban attractions in January were:

- DuPage Children's Museum in Naperville (80)
- Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe (37)
- Brookfield Zoo (29)
- Peoria Riverfront Museum (28)
- Volo Museum (26)

The most popular Chicago attractions in January 2025 were:

- Field Museum (531)
- Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum (503)
- Griffin Museum of Science and Industry (455)
- Art Institute of Chicago (405)
- Chicago Children's Museum (170)

In January, Explore More Illinois added Chicago Hounds Professional Rugby and the Evanston History Museum as attractions.

Libraries Enrolled in Explore More Illinois as of January 31, 2025

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

Attractions in Explore More Illinois as of January 31, 2025

Attractions	60
Total Attractions in 2024	60

Reservations Made in Explore More Illinois in January 2025

Organization	January 2025
RAILS/IHLS	366
CPL	2,222
Total	2,588

Assist member libraries in preparing for the future

Future-focused professional development and member engagement efforts

Recent CE Events
- **"Science of Reading"**, webinar, January 28
  Dr. Joanna Christodoulou, developmental cognitive neuroscientist and educator, reviewed the framework termed "Science of Reading" as it relates to reading development and difficulties in school-age children.
- **"Social Media 101: A Crash Course for Library Marketers"**, webinar, January 29
  Ola Gronski, RAILS Digital Marketing & Communications Specialist, covered popular social media platforms and their purposes, best practices surrounding accessibility, and the latest trends circulating the internet. 100 people attended the live presentation.

- **"Top 10 Tips for Library Grant Success"**, webinar, January 30
  Attendees learned the top ten tips for streamlining the grant-writing process, crafting standout proposals, and increasing their chances of grant success.
- **"Who Dunnit? DIY Murder Mystery in the Library,"** webinar, February 4
  Staff from the Addison Public Library taught 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
  Attorney Julie Tappendorf provided best practices on avoiding Open Meetings Act violations and illustrated how the First Amendment can apply to trustee social media activities, even on their personal social media accounts.
- **"Inclusive Classroom Libraries"**, webinar, February 18
  This webinar discussed the importance of representation in literature for youth, explored curated book lists filled with culturally relevant texts, and uncovered practical resources for finding books that celebrate diverse voices, backgrounds, and experiences.
- **"Supporting Neurodivergent Staff and Patrons"**, webinar, February 20
  Led by Bailey Hoffner, an adult-diagnosed autistic librarian, the session covered basic concepts, history, and core principles of neurodiversity-affirming practice. Attendess learned actionable steps from more inclusive ways to engage with patrons to better policies to support all workers, regardless of neuro-identities. More than 300 registered.

Upcoming CE Events
- **"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. Alternative text or "Alt Text" is a crucial component of web accessibility that ensures users with visual differences and disabilities can effectively navigate your online content. In this interactive virtual workshop, learn about Alt Text, study standards and guidelines, and get hands-on experience and practice writing your own.
- **"Top of the Pops: Some of the Best Children's Books of 2024"**, webinar, March 5
  Looking to learn about what the best books for kids (ages 0-14) were in 2024? Presenter Betsy Bird will cover everything from board books to upper elementary nonfiction. It's a rousing round-up of some of the true gems of last year.
- **"RAILS Learning Lab: Grant Writing"**, online meeting, March 14
  RAILS Learning Labs are an informal, online space for interactive, hands-on learning and collaboration. Join in to have fun and connect with other library staff while building new skills. Learn how to create compelling grant proposals that resonate with funders. Key topics include crafting impactful problem statements, using storytelling techniques, developing SMART objectives, and designing realistic budgets. With practical exercises and group discussions, this session will equip you with the skills and confidence needed to secure funding for your projects.
- **"Managing Patron Challenges from a Trauma-Informed Lens"**, in-person at Indian Prairie Public Library District, March 19
  This interactive workshop focused on developing and practicing skills for working through patron challenges and setting boundaries/enforcing policies from a trauma-informed librarianship lens. Most of this training focuses on self-reflection and skill development for managing patron challenges in a way that often prevents escalation. In addition, staff will learn five strategies for managing patron behavioral challenges and practice applying those skills to common library scenarios.

- **"Reference Basics"**, webinar, March 20
  Are your reference skills ready for a refresh? Join us for a practical and engaging webinar designed for librarians and library staff who want to sharpen their foundational reference abilities. This session will cover effective reference interview techniques, top reliable sources, and specialized resources.
- Webinar on **media and information literacy** presented by the News Literacy Project. Program information forthcoming.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Strengthen collaborative relationships with partner library organizations

February L2G2 Meeting
The statewide Library Learning Governance Group (L2G2) advisory group met on Tuesday, February 4 to discuss a range of topics including FY2026 feature development priorities and current development activities. The highlight of the meeting was Mary Kate Murray's update on the documentation revision and creation effort she has spearheaded. Newly created user support documentation can be found in a new more accessible format at https://librarylearning.org/help. This documentation will support future promotional efforts and communications with library administrators to ensure they are equipped to update their libraries' directory records in L2, including legal requirements to provide annual updates to their non-resident card program participation and their current resource sharing policies.

February 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.

February meeting topics included:

- A discussion of the federal funding situation
- An update on the 2025 Illinois School Library Workers Symposium planning
- A discussion of academic and school partnerships

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

RAILS Staff & Service Center News

Anne Slaughter Presents at PrairieCat Event
RAILS Director of Technology Services Anne Slaughter attended the PrairieCat Delegates Assembly meeting at the North Suburban Library District on Wednesday, January 29 to present and update on broadband expansion and digital equity. Her presentation covered a range of topics similar to the written report from that week's Consortia Committee meeting.

Dan Bostrom Participates in GLAM Panel
On Friday, February 10, RAILS Director of Marketing & Communications Dan Bostrom paricipated in a panel presentation at the Government organizations, Libraries, Archives, and Museums (GLAM) event hosted by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. This annual event is intended to connect library students with professional organizations. The panel was on Alternative Career Paths. More than 150 students attended.

RAILS Staff Present at Plainfield Community Consolidated School District 202
RAILS Data Analyst Janette Derucki and Digital Marketing & Communications Specialist Ola Gronski, along with Leah Gregory from Illinois Heartland Library System, were invited to speak to school librarians in Plainfield Community Consolidated School District 202 on Friday, January 31 about advocacy and outreach. The trio shared information about RAILS and how the SLATE project and the *Can't Shelve This* podcast are changing these efforts.

Ola Gronski Presents Social Media 101 Webinar
RAILS Digital Marketing & Communications Specialist Ola Gronski presented "Social Media 101: A Crash Course for Library Marketers" to 100 RAILS members on Wednesday, January 29. There were a lot of great questions submitted at the end—this is clearly a topic of interest to our members.

RAILS IT Update
RAILS IT had another busy month in January. They completed network upgrades to several service centers including Coal Valley, East Peoria, and Rockford. They also built and installed a new iPad charging wall for Bolingbrook Service Center Suite D. The team also worked with the Delivery department to transition them to SharePoint.

RAILS Burr Ridge Service Center Update
The RAILS Burr Ridge facility has experienced some ceiling leaks in recent weeks. These leaks have been primarily caused by two broken drain rings. We continue to work with our plumbing and roofing contractors to have this issue resolved.

JANUARY 2025

	Facebook	Instagram	LinkedIn
FOLLOWERS *total subscribers*	Facebook +6 **2,580**	Instagram +11 **1,518**	LinkedIn +12 **1,785**
REACH *accounts shown our content*	Facebook +1287 **6,072**	Instagram +189 **1,593**	LinkedIn +121 **1,790**
VIEWS *times our content was seen*	Facebook +7173 **21,808**	Instagram +448 **5,654**	LinkedIn +196 **3,426**
ENGAGEMENT *reactions, comments, and shares*	Facebook -49 **688**	Instagram +58 **328**	LinkedIn -9 **110**

TOP POST
received the most engagement

DANIELA MARTINEZ
MAYWOOD PUBLIC LIBRARY DISTRICT

DANIELA MARTINEZ
MAYWOOD PUBLIC LIBRARY DISTRICT

RAILS DID YOU KNOW? ILLINOIS LIBRARIES Agencies of Impact A Data Study — If libraries had purchased the 11.5 million items delivered by RAILS and iHLS in 2021, they would have paid **more than $200 million**.

🛒 RAILS Online Store

■ December 2024 ■ January 2025

(bar chart: Items Sold, Individual Sales)
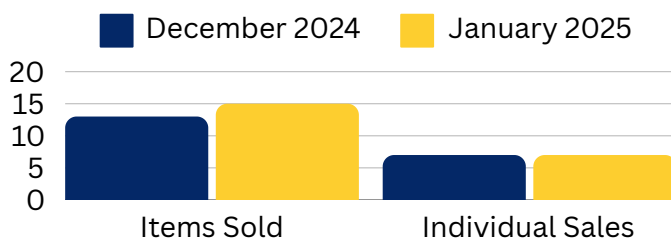
🎥 **RAILS Minute** Views: **2***
*no new RAILS Minute in January

🎧 ***Can't Shelve This*** Listens: **924**

Consortial Reports

January 27, 2025

Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI)

CARLI celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2025.

I-Share

CARLI is working on its renewal with Clarivate/Ex Libris for Alma and Primo VE.

CARLI will share information with non-I-Share members about the opportunity to join I-Share with a go live date in 2026.

Continuing Education

CARLI is working on an agreement with the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) to host the ACRL Roadshow: Assessment in Action, on June 5, 2025. The event will be held at Illinois State University.

Cooperative Computer Services (CCS)

Staffing

Molly Mansfield started on December 9 as CCS's new Member Services Associate. Molly brings a wealth of experience from a diverse background in academic, public, and library vendor settings. This includes years of expertise in delivering both in-person and virtual training sessions for libraries and their users at organizations such as Dominican University and LibraryIQ. In her new role, she will collaborate closely with the Member Services team to offer support and training to all our members.

Polaris 7.7 Upgrade

The training database was upgraded to 7.7 on December 11. CCS staff started QA on the training database and Member Services staff are evaluating related training and documentation needs. We anticipate upgrading to 7.7 in February.

Once our production upgrade is scheduled, development will implement a "hypercare" situation. A development team member will be assigned to watch our servers for the first days we are on the new version to monitor for any potential system issues. Development will have specific time set aside for this monitoring and any needed troubleshooting or patch development.

Discovery Interface Comparison Project

Our user experience testing of discovery layers is the second of multiple phases that will lead us to Governing Board selecting a discovery layer in May 2025.

- Phase One: User Experience Testing
- *Phase Two: Scoring and Data Synthesis*
- Phase Three: Vendor Demos/Presentation
- Phase Four: Governing Board Decision
- Phase Five: Negotiation and Implementation

The report will be available within the month.

Find More Illinois- Northbrook and Highland Park

CCS and RAILS are working with Highland Park and Northbrook to prepare for their January 27 launch. K. Lyons has completed training sessions and is finalizing SHAREit settings for both libraries.

Strategic Planning

- After February's Governing Board business meeting, we will conduct a strategic planning retreat. The focus will be on service design, further exploring member interest and expectations around the top priorities identified in the survey.
- Governing Board will review and approve the new strategic plan at the May 2025 meeting.

Polaris Satisfaction Survey

Over 300 library staff completed our Polaris satisfaction survey--thank you! The survey asked members to share their satisfaction and feedback on each Polaris interface:
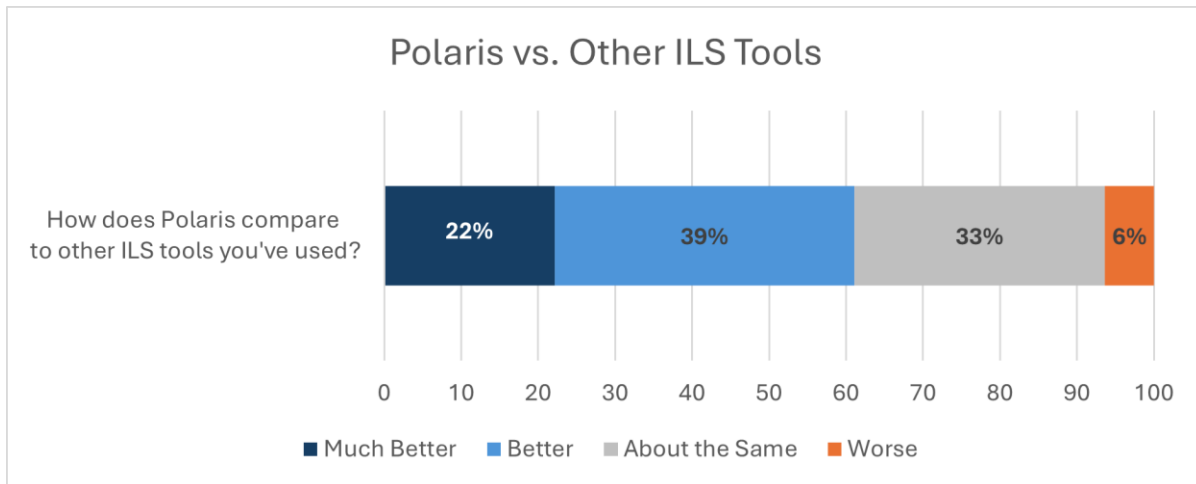
- Leap
- Staff Client
- Simply Reports
- PowerPAC

Debra has compiled and analyzed the results. You can access the full report on our **website (login required)**, or available by request to rmalinowski@ccslib.org.

Survey respondents showed the highest satisfaction with Leap, with 78% of respondents being satisfied or very satisfied with that tool. The ACSI (American Customer Satisfaction Index) customer satisfaction benchmark rating for computer software is 78, putting satisfaction with Leap on par with the industry average/target benchmark.
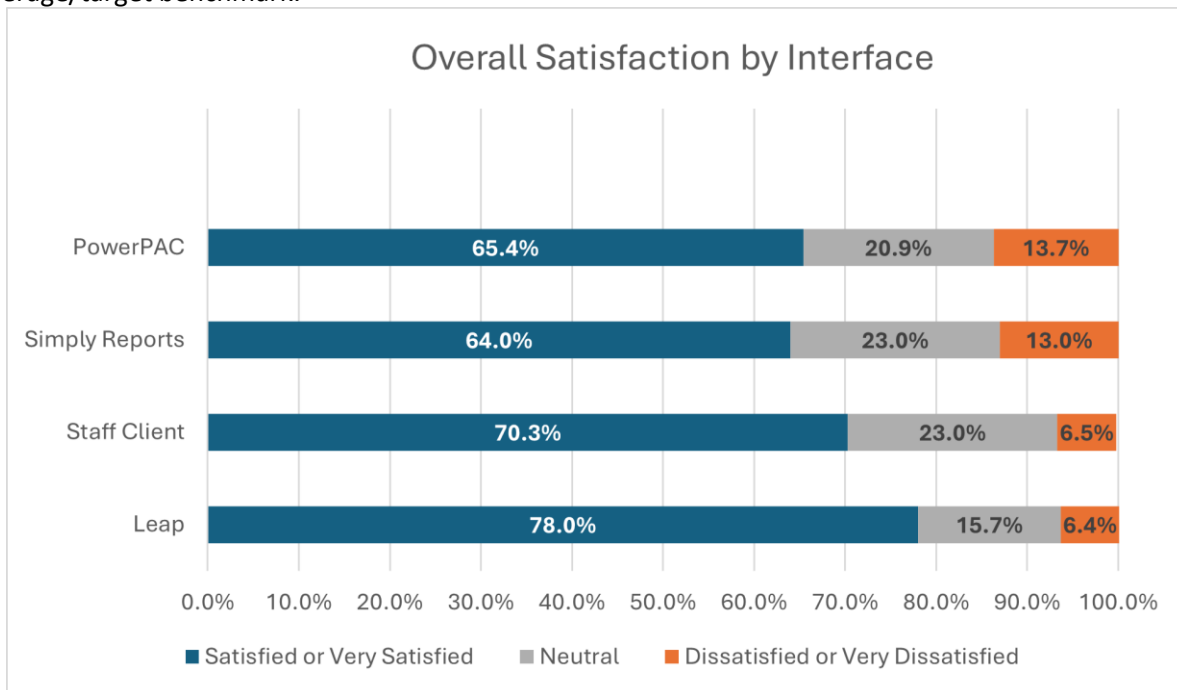
221 respondents reported using another ILS at some point in their careers and, of those users, 94% said that Polaris was on par with or better than the other tool(s) they've used.

Polaris vs. Other ILS Tools

How does Polaris compare to other ILS tools you've used?

22%	39%	33%	6%

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

■ Much Better   ■ Better   ■ About the Same   ■ Worse

CCS will use the data collected in this survey, as well as staff experience, tickets, and other data sources to help determine priorities for our upcoming contract renewal. The full report is available to member library staff at on our **website (login required)**.

Pinnacle Library Cooperative

New Staff Training Platform - Coassemble

Pinnacle staff are in the process of moving our ILS training content to our new learning platform from Coassemble. Like many of the platforms available, Coassemble focuses on using interactive micro-learning in short, easily digestible segments. We plan to launch the platform in the Spring, replacing our existing training options.

Once on Coassemble, staff will be able to create their own accounts to track progress and share completion with their supervisors. Libraries will also have the option to create library-specific or department-specific content and assign it to specific staff.

Census Geographic Data

As part of our NCOA cleanup last year, Unique Management provided us with geographic data for most of the patrons in our database. Combining that information with publicly available census data, we created an interactive tool in Google Data Studio which maps library patrons by Census Tract and Block Group. Available maps include registered patrons by Block Group, checkouts by transacting branch, checkouts by patron age/item type, and reciprocal borrowers visiting Pinnacle libraries.

Polaris 7.7

On January 26, we will be upgrading to the newest version of Polaris. The new version includes additional functionality for the web-based components, including a split-screen MARC editor and the early stages of System Administration settings. Polaris' native self-check software is also getting a much needed overhaul, which should give libraries the option to deploy self-checks on their own equipment without the need for expensive maintenance contracts.

LX Starter

Pinnacle staff are in the process of testing LX Starter - Innovative's replacement product for email notices. We've successfully connected it to the ILS and have sent test notices. Once we complete testing

the functionality, we'll begin onboarding member libraries who are still using the standard ILS notices. We hope to launch this Spring.

PrairieCat

PrairieCat has been busy over the last few months. Below is a summary of some of the work we are doing:

- We are finished with vendor demonstrations and are currently evaluating our options for a mobile app, as our contract with Capira/OCLC expires in October of this year. We have had vendor demonstrations from Innovative, Capira/OCLC, Bibliocommons, and Communico. Our UX committee will shortly be making a recommendation for the Administrative Council and Delegates Assembly to consider.
- Our strategic planning process continues. We have performed surveys of our general membership as well as more targeted surveys of our committees and will shortly be writing a new activity plan for the coming 3 years.
- Our previously mentioned website Forums will be launching soon. We envision this as a member to member sharing tool for topics related to library services. The hope is that this will foster less reliance on listservs and email and promote more member engagement.
- We recently implemented the Vega Guide, a help tour enabled on all our Vega Discover sites.
- We recently published new online courses on Showcase creation for Vega Discovery and are implementing "online office hours" for Showcase support.
- We have completed beta testing of Vega user roles and permissions / homepage builder, and plan to launch this to membership in early Spring.
- We continue to promote the PrairieCat Passport program. The program, held on quarterly FY25 Delegates Assembly meetings, encourages visits to member libraries in the area.
- We recently completed a website accessibility audit performed by our website hosting service, Cherry Hill. We are currently working on rectifying issues found in the audit. In general, our website is in good shape regarding accessibility.
- Our systems staff are excited about having moved to using Microsoft Intune for pc deployment. PrairieCat has shifted to a mostly work from home environment, which brings about its own unique challenges. One of those challenges is managing our laptops. To solve this, we utilize Microsoft Intune. This solution allows us to unify our remote machines without having them in one location. This is an imageless solution, so in addition to remote management, there is no storage overhead or image maintenance. Intune allows us to install software, manage updates, assign policies, and more. Once Intune is configured, setting up a laptop in our environment is as easy as enrolling the device to Intune, and signing into a Microsoft Entra account. Intune has allowed PrairieCat to thrive while navigating a changing workplace landscape.
- We have another library adding Smiota automatic pickup lockers to their new branch. This will be our first multi-site Smiota installation. We currently have four libraries using Smiota pickup lockers and one using Demco lockers.
- Database Maintenance and Cleanup: We are actively addressing the outcomes of previous system migrations by merging duplicate records, updating incomplete catalog entries with more comprehensive data, and enhancing minimal-level records in OCLC Connexion prior to their export to Sierra.

- Batch Record Uploads: We are facilitating the batch uploading of records from OCLC Connexion to Sierra, ensuring a streamlined process and accurate data integration.
- Vega Discovery Support: We are working diligently to resolve display issues within the Vega Discovery system to improve user experience and functionality.
- Training and Support: We are delivering training and monitoring courses through the Talent LMS platform to ensure continuous professional development and effective system usage.
- Original Cataloging: We provide original cataloging services to our members, ensuring accurate and comprehensive bibliographic records.
- Vendor Evaluation: We are actively exploring new vendors to replace MARCive, with the goal of enhancing service offerings and system compatibility.
- Collaboration with CMC: We are collaborating with CMC on various cleanup projects, including local history and local author original cataloging, to ensure accurate and complete collections.

Rock River Library Consortium (RRLC)

No report is available at this time.

Resource Sharing Alliance (RSA)

Administratively, almost all our time is being spent on the process of directly hiring staff. We've contracted with an outside HR firm to help us work through the process of everything that needs to be done. There appears to be an endless supply of new things cropping up.

In addition, we're rewriting a staff handbook, policies, procedures, etc. required to have direct employees. And we're working through our job descriptions and added two new levels of positions in each department so that each has three levels of positions. That will allow us to hire staff with less skills and also have a viable place to promote employees in the future. We also need to create an office manager type position to do all the new tasks that come with employing people. Our target is to begin a hiring process in last March.

We continue to visit each of our members to do a Parameters Party. We've done all our public libraries, and we'll spend the next several months touching all the school, special, and academic members. This process typically results in 10 to 20 cases per visit and requires a lot of staff time. On the upside, we're able to setup the system to better work for our Members.

The Cataloging Department has also started visiting libraries in person to help members with whatever is going on in their library. We hear many more things in person than on a Zoom or phone call. Our new, shortened, 1-day Basic Cataloging Workshop has been a huge hit with full classes since implementing the update from the old 3-day workshop. Two of our Catalogers, Jennifer Choate and Erin Roberts, are working as cataloging mentors for iCamp which they report to be very interesting. That program runs through this summer.

RSA made 63 member visits in the last quarter of the year. The majority of those were in library visits as we've found those to be the most effective. We asked our members if they would like to host in person training events in their library and we were inundated with volunteers.

System Wide Automated Network (SWAN)

Headquarters move

SWAN signed a new seven-year lease for a small office located in Oak Brook and moved in December. We no longer utilize RAILS Delivery at the new location. The new address is 915 Harger Road, Suite 260, Oak Brook, Illinois 60523.

Payments to SWAN will continue with the P.O. Box 6286 Carol Stream, IL 60197-6286 which deposits automatically with our bank.

International Coalition of Library Consortia annual conference of the Americas May 4-7, 2025

The annual ICOLC meeting will be held in Chicago from May 4th through May 7th. CARLI, IHLS, RAILS, SWAN and other groups have volunteered to help with conference planning. The conference registration fee and location have not been announced yet, but signing up for ICOLC is free which will allow library consortia staff to join the ICOLC email list.

New ticketing platform go-live

SWAN selected HaloITSM as our next ticketing system. Training with SWAN staff is currently underway, with membership training sessions listed in L2. We are expecting to go-live with our member libraries on March 3, 2025.

Project planning for 2025

The SWAN management team is refining its plans for a number of projects for 2025. Listed below are project identified for 2025.

- Disaster Recovery Plan
- EBSCO Statewide Package sideloads
- HaloITSM Launch
- Novelist Select sunsetting (review for timing)
- Cybersecurity assessment and hand-off
- Environmental Scan Task Force
- Website redesign
- Training strategy
- LiDA Self-check pilot & launch
- Single Sign-on phase 1 (SWAN Forums, HaloITSM)
- Aspen Series Development with Grove
- Microsoft Entra Policies
- ICOLC Planning
- Bibliographic deduplication
- Evaluation of MARC 590 decommissioning in Aspen
- EBSCO database renewal
- Aspen Governance Task Force
- Online Patron Registration (March or July)
- SWAN Expo planning
- AspenCon planning
- Palace Project Research
- Hoopla Flex research

- Learning track development
- Library of Things in Aspen
- MessageBee Training Update
- Infographic on Value of SWAN Membership
- SWAN staff development (Clifton Strengths, etc.)
- School Partnerships Phase 2
- Backstage Library Works crossover
- HaloITSM Phase 2
- Strategic Planning
- SharePoint/File management overhaul
- Holds Working Group (Re-evaluation per Platform Survey Response)