



125 Tower Drive
Burr Ridge, IL 60527
630.734.5000
railslibraries.org

Executive Director Report, March 2025

Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Updates

We have received many inquiries from members and staff related to changes at IMLS. As you are aware, late on March 14 President Trump issued an [Executive Order](#) that continues the reduction in staff for federal agencies. One of the seven agencies named in the order is the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the largest source of federal funding for libraries. The IMLS delivers essential financial support, investigative research, and strategic policy guidance to enhance the work of libraries nationwide.

Among many other projects, IMLS grants funding to the Illinois State Library and those grant funds make up about 10% of the Illinois State Library's total budget, or about \$5,736,000 from IMLS in FY2024. As you all are aware, the Illinois State Library funds our operations at RAILS. As a reminder, RAILS has already received our LSTA payment for the Area and Per Capita Grant for FY25.

We recently received news from IMLS through the Illinois State Library regarding the FY2025 awards under the Grants to States Program. The federal budget that was just passed includes this funding. The funding is intended to go through September 2025. The Illinois State Library anticipates receipt of \$5.7 million – the same as last fiscal year – later this spring. I expect to discuss the impacts of IMLS funding on the Illinois State Library's budget at the March 27 ISLAC meeting, and we will share more about that meeting at our March 28 meeting of the RAILS Board.

At this time, it is unclear how the Executive Order may impact current funds beyond the Grants to States program or future grant rounds. Congress will need to reauthorize the [Museum and Library Services Act](#) because of its expiration in September 2025.

For those wishing to stay engaged with this issue, RAILS has a [compiled information](#) on a number of agencies that present opportunities to advocate for the important work done by IMLS. In your packet, you received a handout from the Illinois Library Association detailing how IMLS funding in FY2024 was used. We continue to be in contact with the Illinois State Library (ISL) on this issue, and a representative from the ISL will join us for our discussion on IMLS on March 28. I encourage you to bring your questions and thoughts to this discussion.

Illinois Legislative Updates

The Illinois Library Association's Public Policy Committee (PPC) had two meetings in the first week of March to review bills of interest to the Illinois library community. Lobbyist Derek Blaida highlighted important deadlines for the state legislature and current impacts to the state's budget. The Illinois Library Association provided a list of bills that they are watching closely as the legislative season continues. The Illinois Library Association has made their [bill monitoring list](#) and positions available on their website, and that is the best place to check for updates and developments. The next meeting of PPC is scheduled for April 7.

I am including for your review some bills that generated discussion from the most recent Public Policy Committee meetings:

[HB1064](#): Amends the Community Mental Health Act. Authorizes any public library district to construct, repair, operate, maintain, and regulate community mental health facilities. Provides that a public library district authorized to levy an annual tax under the Act shall establish a community mental health board whose members are appointed by the president of the public library district's board of trustees. This bill is supported by the ILA and has been re-referred to the rules committee.

[HB1595](#): Amends the Open Meetings Act. Provides that, within 6 business days after an employer participating in the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund approves a budget, that employer must post on its website the total compensation package for each employee having a total compensation package that exceeds \$125,000 (rather than \$75,000) per year. Provides that, at least 6 days before an employer participating in the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund approves an employee's total compensation package that is equal to or in excess of \$200,000 (rather than \$150,000) per year, the employer must post on its website the total compensation package for that employee. This bill is supported by ILA and has been re-referred to the rules committee.

[HB2914](#): Amends the Notice By Publication Act. Provides that in counties with a population of less than 3,000,000, if a unit of local government, community college, or school district is required to provide notice in a newspaper by law, order of court, or contract, those entities may publish the notice on its official government website instead of in a newspaper. This bill is supported by the ILA and has been re-referred to the rules committee.

[SB0043](#): Amends the Illinois Century Network Act. Specifies that the Illinois Century Network shall be a service creating and maintaining high speed telecommunications networks that provide reliable communication throughout Illinois (rather than a service creating and maintaining high speed telecommunications networks that provide reliable communication links for wholesale connections with other registered or certified providers and the direct communication needs of various anchor institutions throughout Illinois). Authorizes the Illinois Century Network to develop an end-to-end broadband network that may include, but may not be limited to, middle-mile and last-mile infrastructure. Deletes provisions requiring the Network to avoid duplication of existing communication networks if those networks are capable of maintaining sufficient capacity to meet the requirement of anchor institutions. This bill is supported by the ILA and committee deadline is established for April 4.

RAILS Minute

This month's [RAILS Minute](#) focused on the impacts of changes to the IMLS, Illinois legislative updates, the upcoming RAILS Board election, and a highlight of the Boundless eRead program.

Statement of Economic Interests

If you received an email from Emily noting that you should be receiving a Statement of Economic Interest soon and you have NOT received one, please let her know asap. 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 annually on or before May 1.

Assist member libraries in preparing for the future

RSA Independence Project

RSA is currently in phase 2 of their [Independence Project](#), which is the direct employment of RSA staff. While July 1, 2025 had previously been a target date for this transition to occur, RSA will be adjusting their timeline to a January 1, 2026 cutover date. This modified date is due to circumstances largely beyond RSA's control and involves the issuance of an Employee Identification Number (EIN) by the IRS. The RSA Board was notified of this change on March 6 and all RAILS staff were informed shortly thereafter. RSA remains on track to complete this independence project by July 2026, and RAILS will continue to support RSA staff through the remainder of this laborious project.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

SOIS Advisory Board

I continue to serve on Dominican University's School of Information Studies (SOIS) Advisory Board. The March meeting included the status of academic restructuring at Dominican and discussion of their Experts in Residence program.

Gaps in Effective Library-Community Partnerships

On March 4, I had the opportunity to participate in a community roundtable and speak on a panel focused on the Gaps in Effective Library-Community Partnerships for Emergency Response. This discussion was a result of the IMLS grant funded program *Libraries as Partners for Emergency Preparedness and Response in Times of Crisis*, organized by the Illinois Fire Services Institute and for which RAILS serves as an advisor and partnering organization. The final advisor meeting is scheduled for April 28.

ICOLC in Chicago May 4 - 7

RAILS is partnering with CARLI, ATLA, and IHLS to sponsor the upcoming International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) meeting in Chicago on May 4 – 7. RAILS Delivery and Facilities Director Mark Hatch will help to host a breakout on physical materials delivery, and I will cohost a breakout for Executive Directors with SWAN Executive Director Aaron Skog.

LACONI Annual Trustee Banquet

LACONI will host their [Annual Trustee Banquet](#) in Oak Park on the evening of May 30. I am pleased to have been asked to host a conversation at the banquet with acclaimed author Christina Henriquez.

Looking Ahead to April

- **April Service of the Month and Board Development Topics: eRead Illinois update with Anna Behm and Human Resources update with Sam Daly**



This Month at RAILS – March 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 Launches *Numbers That Count* Marketing Campaign

The RAILS Communications team launched the *Numbers That Count* marketing campaign to promote an understanding of how RAILS functions and what services we provide. Every 2-3 weeks through August 2025, RAILS will share a number or statistic that highlights the work that we do. This information will be promoted via the RAILS website, *RAILS E-News*, social media, and email lists.



RAILS Receives 69 My Library Is... Grant Applications

RAILS received 69 total My Library Is... grant applications in February:

- 37 from public libraries
- 21 from schools
- 7 from academic libraries
- 4 from specialized libraries

Applicants requested a total of \$263,865.62. With significant help from RAILS Administrative Assistants Renya Kreml and Mary Kate Murray, RAILS Member Engagement Specialist Jessica Silva anonymized applications and assigned reviewers. These grants are currently under review by the grant review team. Final decisions are expected in April 2025.

Continuing Education Event Grants Awarded

Funds for the following upcoming events were awarded through Continuing Education Grants in February 2025. Look for dates and details on the L2 calendar!

- Illinois Information Literacy Summit, awarded to College of DuPage Library and DePaul University Library
- Illinois Libraries AI Ambassadors Program, awarded to Dominican University's Rebecca Crown Library and Illinois College's Schewe Library
- Mother Goose on the Loose interactive storytime training, awarded to Dolton Public Library
- RSA Day 2025, awarded to Resource Sharing Alliance (RSA)
- What's Available in the World of Technology, awarded to Geneseo Public Library District

Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

Enhance sharing of knowledge and best practices

February RAILS Site Visits

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

- DePaul University, Chicago, IL (pictured, right)
- Latin School of Chicago
- Mannheim School District #83, Melrose Park, IL
- Roosevelt University, Chicago, IL
- University of St. Mary of the Lake, Mundelein, IL

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 Hosts Online Roundtable About Bookmobiles

On February 13, RAILS Member Engagement Specialist Jessica Silva held a RAILS Online Roundtable: Bookmobiles. This event featured a presentation by Fountaindale Public Library District Outreach Services Librarian Tana Petrov. 31 people attended live. All RAILS Online Roundtable events are recorded and archived on the RAILS YouTube page.

Author Events for Adults Networking Group Kickoffs Off February 4

Jessica Silva helped coordinate the first-event [Author Events for Adults networking group](#) event on Tuesday, February 4 via Zoom. 61 people attended. The group created a spreadsheet to track author events for adults that are happening at Illinois libraries. The networking group will meet again soon.

Mychal Threats Appears as Guest on *Can't Shelve This*

In "A Love Letter to Libraries," RAILS Data Analyst Janette Derucki and IHLS School Library Membership Coordinator Leah Gregory sat down with the internet's favorite librarian, Mychal Threats. Together, they talked about how even the smallest moments of library joy help us persist—both in librarianship and in life. They also read and reacted to listener-submitted library joy stories.

RAILS Social Media Engagement

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

Chicago Tribune Pilot Project

RAILS and MediaNews Group are in the process of onboarding 17 libraries that have agreed to participate in a pilot program for *Chicago Tribune* Digital access. The participating libraries represent each LLSAP within RAILS

and a variety of sizes, regions, catalog, and authentication methods. Pilot libraries will test and collect feedback in preparation for a larger-scale rollout later this year. On February 12, RAILS held an informational meeting for the pilot libraries. The focus of the meeting was to outline and answer questions regarding the pilot period, expectations, and processes. Maggie Thomann has been leading the ongoing behind-the-scenes work, communication, and troubleshooting for the *Chicago Tribune* digital pilot.

July Deal Renewals

The RAILS EBSCO Supplemental Resources, PressReader, and RDA Toolkit deals are up for sign-up/renewal in July 2025. Deals & Discount staff have been working through the sign-up/renewal processes and contacting libraries to ensure seamless continued access to these popular resources.

Udemy Training for Library Patrons

RAILS has partnered with member libraries and Gale to provide a live, virtual Udemy training targeted at the small business community for RAILS subscribing libraries. Gale has agreed to host the program for no cost in Fall 2025. The training will provide a demonstration of the Gale Presents: Udemy product, focusing on how small business professionals can leverage Udemy for upskilling and building their businesses, followed by a Q&A. Participating libraries can promote the event to patrons, host a live event in conjunction with the virtual training, and access the training recording for a period of time after the event. Twenty libraries have expressed interest so far.

Recent Vendor Demo Stats

Vendor	Webinar Title	Date	Registered	Attended
EBSCO	EBSCO RAILS School K-12 Libraries: Benefits of Adding Supplemental Resources to Complement Statewide E-Resource Package	2/19	3	2
EBSCO	EBSCO for RAILS Public Libraries: Benefits of Adding Supplemental Resources to Statewide E-Resource Package	2/20	24	15
PressReader	PressReader for Public Libraries	3/4	7	6
EBSCO	EBSCO for RAILS School K-12 Libraries: Benefits of Leveling Up to "Ultimate" Databases	3/5	5	1
EBSCO	EBSCO for RAILS Public Libraries: BlueCareer & Financial Fit for Your Patrons	3/6	N/A	2
Hiveclass	Hiveclass: Boost Community Health & Wellness for All Ages	3/6	28	14

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 February 28, 2025

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
489	247	84	62%/53%

Gale Excel Stats as of February 28, 2025

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
22	4	18	100%/53%

Seek greater efficiencies, innovations, and enhancements to delivery services

Sorting Transition Continues

The transition of sorting work from our outsourced delivery vendor CTL to RAILS began on March 10 at our Bolingbrook Service Center. This reassignment shifts sorting work for items from member libraries located primarily in Cook, DuPage and Lake counties to delivery staff in Bolingbrook. RAILS Delivery and Facilities Director Mark Hatch and Delivery Services Manager Demond Warfield continue to meet weekly with CTL to work through transition details, and our delivery team is currently examining and modifying workflows and staging to account for the increased volume of sorting.

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

Find More Illinois Update

RAILS Consortial Services Supervisor Barb Miller and RAILS Technology Special Projects Coordinator Eric Bain performed one training in February for staff at the Three Rivers Public Library District.



Libraries Participating in Find More Illinois as of February 28, 2025

Academic	Public	School	Special	Total
1	73	12	1	87

Find More Illinois total transactions (loans and borrows)

Time Period	Number of transactions
February 2025	1262
Fiscal Year to Date	10,465

Find More Illinois catalog

Time Period	Number of items in shared catalog
February 2025	7,550,640

eRead Illinois & Inkie.org Update

The 2026 Monarch, Bluestem, Lincoln lists were announced on Friday, February 28. Any titles not already in the eRead Illinois collection were added along with this year's Illinois Reads titles.



eRead Illinois renewals and new signups will start on March 10.

RAILS E-Content Specialist Anna Behm presented "All About eRead Illinois Boundless" at SD U-46 Parapalooza on February 28. She presented three 70 minute sessions, which were attended by approximately 50 people total. Attendees were engaged during the presentation and had great questions and feedback.

eRead Illinois Boundless Checkouts

Time Period	E-Books	Audiobooks	Total
February 2025	21,018	17,547	38,565
Fiscal Year to Date	177,381	158,141	335,522

Inkie.org Library Views

Time Period	Number of Views
February 2025	1,572
Fiscal Year to Date	13,762

Explore More Illinois Update

In February 2025, 1,973 reservations were made in Explore More Illinois. The most popular downstate and suburban attractions in February were:



- Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe (93)
- DuPage Children's Museum in Naperville (86)
- Volo Museum (17)
- Peoria Riverfront Museum (12)
- Illinois Holocaust Museum in Skokie (10)

The most popular Chicago attractions in February 2025 were:

- Field Museum (429)
- Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum (411)
- Art Institute of Chicago (294)
- Chicago Children's Museum (129)
- Griffin Museum of Science and Industry (292)

In February, Explore More Illinois added the Oakton College Performing Arts Center in Des Plaines and the Durant-Peterson House Museum in Saint Charles.

Libraries Enrolled in Explore More Illinois as of February 28, 2025

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

Attractions in Explore More Illinois as of February 28, 2025

Attractions	62
Total Attractions in 2025	62

Reservations Made in Explore More Illinois in February 2025

Organization	February 2025
RAILS/IHLS	364
CPL	1,609
Total	1,973

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

Provide leadership in developing and providing resources that will support member libraries' efforts to provide equitable, diverse, and inclusive services

RAILS Digital Accessibility Team to Draft Statement

The RAILS Digital Accessibility Team is currently drafting a digital accessibility statement for the RAILS website. This statement will demonstrate RAILS' commitment to making our digital content accessible to all users, an acknowledgement that work is ongoing, and a mechanism for users to report any accessibility issues they encounter. We hope to finalize this statement and include on the RAILS website in the weeks ahead.

Assist member libraries in preparing for the future

Future-focused professional development and member engagement efforts

Classification Basics Course Fills Up

RAILS Cataloging Services Manager Nincy George recently hosted a 4-week asynchronous course on Classification Basics: Understanding DDC and Using WebDewey. All 55 spots for the course were filled, including waitlist positions. The course received excellent feedback and was deemed highly beneficial.

DU on Demand

In collaboration with the Directors University Committee, RAILS' CE Team, along with ILA and IHLS, are recording presentations on essential topics for new directors. These recordings will be freely available in the RAILS CE Archives, with no requirement to attend the in-person Directors University event (though attendance at the in-person event is still encouraged). New content will be added regularly.

Guidance on Intergovernmental Agreements Updated

To support member libraries in creating intergovernmental agreements for library card issuance, RAILS worked with Ancel Glink to update their memo on calculating non-resident student card fees and develop two revised IGA templates. These updates will be reviewed by the Universal Service Committee before being published on the RAILS website.

Recent 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. At this session, attendees learned about alt text, studied standards and guidelines, and got hands-on experience and practice writing their own alt text.
- **“Top of the Pops: Some of the Best Children's Books of 2024”**, webinar, March 5
Attendees learned about what the best books for kids ages 0-14 from 2024.
- **“RAILS Learning Lab: Grant Writing”**, online meeting, March 14
RAILS Learning Labs are an informal, online space for interactive, hands-on learning and collaboration. At this session, attendees used practical exercises and group discussions to get equipped with the skills and confidence needed to secure funding for their projects.
- **“Managing Patron Challenges from a Trauma-Informed Lens”**, Indian Prairie Public Library, March 19
Dr. Beth Wahler helped attendees develop and practice skills for working through patron challenges, setting boundaries, and enforcing policies from a trauma-informed librarianship lens.
- **“Reference Basics”**, webinar, March 20
Library staff sharpened their foundational reference abilities.

Upcoming CE Events

- **“Teaching News Literacy: Where Do I Start?”**, webinar, April 10
Presented by News Literacy Project (NLP), this session covers news literacy education aligned with NLP's five standards, focusing on skills needed to navigate information responsibly, such as identifying credible sources and avoiding misinformation. Participants will learn to evaluate bias, understand the role of a free press, and apply quick fact-checking and digital verification techniques.
- **“Managing Patron Challenges from a Trauma-Informed Lens”**, Peoria Public Library, April 15
Dr. Beth Wahler will help attendees develop and practice skills for working through patron challenges, setting boundaries, and enforcing policies from a trauma-informed librarianship lens.
- **“Disaster Preparedness and Response Planning for Libraries”**, webinar, April 17
This session will explore how libraries of all sizes can assess risks, create comprehensive disaster response plans, and ensure continuity of services during and after crises.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Strengthen collaborative relationships with partner library organizations

March 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.

March meeting topics included:

- The launch of the School Library Census Form
- A discussion of current Illinois legislation impacting libraries
- A discussion of the recent statement from AISLE on email lists

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

RAILS Staff & Service Center News

Jessica Silva and Janette Derucki Present at IYSI

RAILS Member Engagement Specialist Jessica Silva and RAILS Data Analyst Janette Derucki presented at the Illinois Youth Services Institute (IYSI) in Bloomington with AISLE Executive Secretary Carolyn Kinsella, Illinois Heartland Library System Membership Coordinator Schools Liaison Leah Gregory. Their presentation was entitled “Strengthening the Library Ecosystem.” The panel featured ideas for partnering with various library types and best practices for networking with library groups and organizations.

Maggie Thomann Presents at IYSI

RAILS Library Resource Specialist Maggie Thomann presented as part of a panel at the Illinois Youth Services Institute that included an Illinois State Library representative and public and school library staff. Titled “eResources for Everyone: Showcasing Library Digital Resources for Youth,” the panel outlined available library eResources for youth, shared experiences, and highlighted tips, ideas, and practical applications to get the most out of the library’s digital collections. Attended by 28 participants, there was positive feedback about the ideas and resources that were shared. The panel was also invited to submit a proposal for their program at the AISLE Conference in October.

Anna Behm Participates in E-Resources Panel at IHLS Member Day

RAILS E-Content Specialist Anna Behm was part of a panel about e-resources available at IHLS member Day on Wednesday, February 12. She gave a brief presentation about eRead Illinois Boundless and inkie.org. 55 people attended, and several people expressed enthusiasm about exploring inkie.org.

E-Rate Update

In February, RAILS IT staff helped complete selection of internet providers through the E-Rate program. Our internet service costs decreased by an additional \$1,500 per month and bandwidth in Burr Ridge increased from 250 Mbps to 1 Gbps. This will take effect in June. The new Burr Ridge contract also includes a router saving RAILS an additional \$10,000.

Public Wifi Signs

Visitors will now see new signs up at RAILS facilities about wifi access. The signs include instructions and passwords. This is to avoid unauthorized use of the RAILS network by persons outside the building.

FEBRUARY 2025



FOLLOWERS

total subscribers

Facebook -4

2,576

Instagram +19

1,537

LinkedIn +43

1,828

REACH

accounts shown our content

Facebook -2517

3,555

Instagram +14711

16,304

LinkedIn +1908

3,698

VIEWS

times our content was seen

Facebook -6237

15,571

Instagram +16525

22,179

LinkedIn +2829

6,302

ENGAGEMENT

reactions, comments, and shares

Facebook -241

447

Instagram -2

326

LinkedIn +151

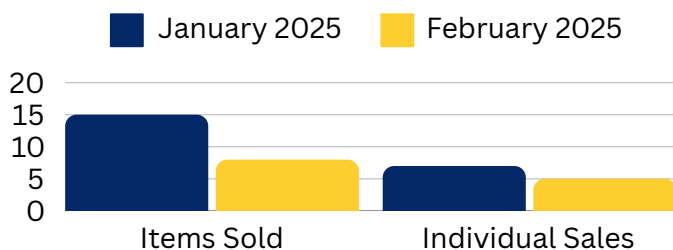
261

TOP POST

received the most engagement



RAILS Online Store



 **RAILS Minute Views: 969**

 **Can't Shelve This Listens: 697**