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May 19, 2025

TO: RAILS Board of Directors

FROM: Monica Harris, Executive Director

SUBJECT: Draft FY2026 Operational Plan

OVERVIEW:

As operational planning for FY2026 is underway, we are pleased to present this draft operational plan. This document outlines the strategic direction of RAILS for the coming year, and is organized according to the current strategic plan goals and objectives. Developed through a collaborative effort, it reflects the expertise of Director of Marketing and Communications Dan Bostrom, and valuable input from the Executive Team and staff. The Illinois State Library has instructed us to submit an operational plan and budget based on annual revenue of approximately \$11,870,000, which is funding from the Area and Per Capita Grant.

NEW SERVICES:

Through the FY2026 Draft Operational Plan, you'll see several examples of new or expanded initiatives in response to member needs, in addition to ongoing efforts. These initiatives come straight from our strategic plan, as well as our purpose as described in the Illinois Library System Act. Our goal, as always, is exemplary resource sharing, future ready libraries, inclusive best practice, and growing partnership opportunities.

Several examples of these expanded services are highlighted below:

Advocacy:

Partner with other library organizations to continue dialogue with publishers on need for better e-book access/pricing for libraries/consortia.

Utilize the new Numbers that Count campaign and the Illinois Libraries: Agencies of Impact report to promote the value of libraries and continued support of the library ecosystem in Illinois.

Broadband:

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

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

Data Driven Analysis and Evaluation:

Develop standards and evaluation metrics to gauge the effectiveness of the deals & discounts program.

Continue with new *Chicago Tribune* Digital Access pilot program. Analyze the results to determine whether it is appropriate to expand to a larger audience.

Launch Libraries Count: A RAILS Conference in conjunction with the 2025 ILA Annual Conference in Rosemont, IL. This event will be an opportunity for libraries to learn how to use their data effectively.

Research developing a centralized RAILS data hub to coordinate and manage data sources used to support services for RAILS members and staff

- Determine core data sources used by RAILS staff and create documentation for requirements, maintenance, governance, and access
- Develop method for training staff on proper data usage and create data request ticket system

Update the RAILS resource sharing map in ArcGIS software to include new data layers and make it more accessible for members.

Delivery:

Conduct a delivery satisfaction survey during the upcoming year.

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

Purchase two new additional delivery vehicles to replace the aging fleet.

Continue expansion of the Bolingbrook facility to perform in-house sorting. Focus on fine tuning the operation for greater efficiency.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI):

Under the leadership of the RAILS Digital Accessibility team, develop best practices to ensure that RAILS digital content will adhere to the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines v2.1 at Level AA.

Continue conducting a thorough analysis/evaluation of RAILS Employee Handbook to ensure that all language and policies meet our EDI goals

Develop internal documentation in conjunction with new ethical AI policy

Find More Illinois (FMI):

Continue working on a lender-only program for academic libraries that would allow them to join at a reduced rate. This will expand the collection. This program may also be expanded to other library types based upon further analysis and consideration.

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

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

Member Engagement:

Offer new opportunities for member learning, such as Learning Labs, which are participatory and interactive sessions for staff.

With the help of the Library Leadership Training Design team, offer a new professional development cohort that will help expand leadership training in Illinois.

Online High School Programs:

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

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

Partnership:

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

RAILS Infrastructure:

Update and expand disaster recovery plan and staff cybersecurity training.

In conjunction with RAILS IT, create new performance management platform to assist with automation of performance discussions

Audit and improve security practices across wide area network and IT systems.

Replace laptops for RAILS staff and printers at all RAILS facilities.

Replace aging climate control systems in Burr Ridge datacenter.

RSA Independence:

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

CONCLUSION:

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

RAILS FY 2026 System Area and Per Capita Grant Application

3.0 System Operational Plan

This document presents the Reaching Across Illinois Library System's (RAILS) operational plan for FY 2026. This operational plan offers a strategic and sustainable approach to empowering our libraries to better serve their communities.

You will find that the FY 2026 System Operational Plan has a wide range of activities. At RAILS, we continue to offer the same high-level services that our members have come to expect, including interlibrary delivery, continuing education and consulting resources to library employees and trustees, shared catalog and cataloging support, e-content services, museum and attractions pass program, group purchases and vendor discounts, networking opportunities for library employees, and targeted grant funding to member libraries and much more.

But we are also aware that our libraries need more than just the tangible things that we can offer them. They also need partners who are willing to listen and engage with them about their challenges. By being willing to talk directly to our members via activities like our conference participation, site visits, and online events, RAILS gains valuable insights into what the future holds for our libraries.

The key is resource sharing. When libraries can work together to offer more, the biggest beneficiaries are the people we serve. Alongside the continuing support that we receive from our statewide partners, we look forward to another great year for Illinois libraries.

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

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
Enhance the sharing of knowledge and best practices through member networking and communications between all types of libraries	<p>Plan/schedule virtual and in-person networking opportunities for staff at all levels at all sizes and types of libraries (academic, public, school, and specialized) to share best practices on a variety of topics.</p> <p>Work with statewide partners, including the Association of Illinois School Library Educators (AISLE), Illinois Association of College & Research Libraries (IACRL), Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS), Illinois Library Association (ILA), and others to plan networking opportunities for staff at different levels from different types of libraries and for public library trustees.</p> <p>Publicize existing RAILS networking groups and the benefits of belonging to a networking group to all levels of staff at all types and sizes of libraries.</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>Assist in the formation of new RAILS networking groups as needed.</p> <p>Continue to build and strengthen relationships and engagement with RAILS networking groups. Attend networking group meetings as appropriate to share the latest RAILS news and gather feedback on RAILS programs/services.</p> <p>Continue with plans to offer member groups the opportunity to meet in person at RAILS service centers as possible.</p> <p>Continue providing subsidized Zoom and conference calling accounts to qualified RAILS networking groups.</p> <p>Encourage use of RAILS mailing lists, including lists geared toward different library types and sizes, and staff at all levels.</p> <p>Establish new mailing lists as needed. Sunset lists that aren't being used.</p>	
<p>Leverage economies of scale to provide greater purchasing power for member libraries so they can offer more resources to their users than libraries would be able to afford on their own</p>	<p>Continue to expand the RAILS discount and group purchase program by offering new deals for member libraries of all sizes and types. Target publicity to help ensure that members know about specific offers available to their library type.</p> <p>Gather input from members at all types and sizes of libraries on desired discounts/group purchases. Implement new offerings in response to this feedback.</p> <p>Work with statewide partners – including those at the Secretary of State's Office/Illinois State Library - to promote availability of the statewide database package. Along with internal and external partners consider new avenues for outreach and engagement around this resource, for all library types.</p> <p>Continue the development of the comprehensive Consortia Manager platform to manage RAILS group purchases and discounts.</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>Develop standards and evaluation metrics to gauge the effectiveness of the deals & discounts program.</p> <p>Widely publicize member savings to demonstrate the program's impact.</p> <p>Continue with new <i>Chicago Tribune</i> Digital Access pilot program. Analyze the results to determine whether it is appropriate to expand to a larger audience.</p> <p>Develop new methods for promoting deals & discounts.</p> <p>Network with group purchasing managers in Illinois and nationwide to explore new opportunities and develop best practices.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Online High School Programs</p> <p>Continue to subsidize the management of the Career Online High School (COHS) and Gale: Excel Adult High School platforms to enable libraries to offer adult learners accredited high school diplomas and career certificates.</p> <p>Explore additional ways to expand and promote the COHS and Gale: Excel Adult High School programs, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeting libraries not yet participating in the program with large populations of adults who have not received a high school diploma • Targeting youth services library staff to help them promote the program to young parents without a high school diploma 	
<p>RAILS will continue to seek greater efficiencies, innovations, and enhancements to delivery services.</p>	<p>Work with RAILS members of all sizes and types to determine the most appropriate delivery method to meet their needs.</p> <p>Purchase two new additional delivery vehicles to replace the aging fleet.</p> <p>Consult with members on delivery issues/concerns on an ongoing basis. Widely promote the use of the delivery help desk.</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>Conduct a delivery satisfaction survey during the upcoming year.</p> <p>Promote the need for RAILS members to complete quarterly delivery volume counts. Consult with libraries individually as needed.</p> <p>Continue discussions with RAILS Consortia Committee about finding new ways to utilize data to get an accurate count for delivery.</p> <p>Develop strategies to improve and achieve total compliance with quarterly delivery counts to get more accurate information on delivery volume. Examine count data to determine potential changes to existing delivery routes and best practices.</p> <p>Continue to utilize the updated delivery video series to help train staff from member libraries. Provide one-on-one assistance with libraries as necessary.</p> <p>Continue expansion of the Bolingbrook facility to perform in-house sorting. Focus on fine tuning the operation for greater efficiency.</p> <p>Continue providing high-quality statewide delivery services to CARLI (Consortium of Academic & Research Libraries in Illinois) members via ILDS (Illinois Library Delivery Service).</p> <p>Continue working with GeoMARC (formerly Laboratory for Applied Spatial Analysis) on potential future improvements to RAILS delivery service, including delivery route efficiencies.</p>	
Work collaboratively with members, the Illinois Heartland Library System, and the Illinois State Library to identify and support appropriate and affordable shared catalog solutions and expand	<p style="text-align: center;">General</p> <p>Work with the RAILS Resource Sharing Committee to ensure sustainable, equitable resource sharing to help meet the first goal of the RAILS strategic plan. Promote/encourage the use of Find More Illinois statewide to help achieve this goal.</p> <p>Collaborate with the Illinois State Library (ISL), IHLS, Chicago Public Library System (CPLS), AISLE, CARLI,</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
resource sharing to all libraries and residents	<p>IACRL, ILA, and other stakeholders to expand resource sharing in Illinois</p> <p>Collaborate with and support the work of the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC)</p> <p>Promote/Support LLSAP Membership</p> <p>Continue to support six LLSAPs (CCS, Pinnacle, PrairieCat, Rock River Library Consortium, RSA, and SWAN) financially via the LLSAP Support Grant, as well as offering the use of RAILS meeting spaces and other services.</p> <p>Continue to support RSA's efforts toward operational independence from RAILS with a target date of January 1, 2026 to fully transition staff.</p> <p>Continue to offer the Catalog Membership Grant to fund one-time costs for libraries wishing to join an LLSAP, with ongoing evaluation and adjustment of the grant process framework to maximize support to nonautomated libraries.</p> <p>Continue progress on RAILCAR, a data collection and analysis initiative designed to supplement existing data related to LLSAPs and library automation. This tool is integrated into the processes for both the LLSAP Support and Catalog Membership Grants.</p> <p>Promote the value of consortium membership to all types and sizes of RAILS libraries via RAILS communication tools, committee work, and member encounters.</p> <p>Continue to work with RAILS Consortia Committee to investigate and recommend ways to improve and increase consortial services in Illinois.</p> <p>Expand and Promote Find More Illinois (FMI)</p> <p>Recruit libraries to join FMI</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target promotions at libraries that would grow and enhance resources available through FMI • Promote FMI benefits to nonautomated libraries <p>Target academic libraries to join the program.</p> <p>Continue working on a lender-only program for academic libraries that would allow them to join at a reduced rate. This will expand the collection. This program may also be expanded to other library types based upon further analysis and consideration.</p> <p>Continue to promote the growth of FMI, including developing new recruitment strategies and collaborating with CARLI to add I-Share members who wish to participate.</p> <p>Enhance the FMI program with add-on services as appropriate. Implement operational efficiencies as the program grows.</p> <p>Provide training, consulting, and technical support to FMI libraries.</p> <p>Evaluate and revise the FMI participation fee structure to ensure ongoing value to members of all types and sizes.</p> <p>Establish an FMI user group and/or committee working group to incorporate member feedback into the fee structure, as well as to assist with providing insights into recruitment, program enhancements, and best practices for participants.</p> <p>Continue to offer IHLS the opportunity to participate in FMI.</p> <p>Support High-Quality Cataloging</p> <p>Continue to develop and deliver cataloging training in response to member feedback, including recurring opportunities and one-time workshops. Continue to adapt course materials and provide</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>them to members for self-guided use and maximize the Moodle platform for recurring courses.</p> <p>Continue support and consulting in cataloging-related activities for eRead Illinois and Find More Illinois.</p> <p>Ensure collaboration and administration of the iCAMP mentorship program, participating in the evaluation and operationalization of the program activities. Work with IHLS to achieve the program's goals and ensure alignment with RAILS priorities.</p> <p>Support and contribute to the work of the South Asia Funnel as part of the Subject Authority Cooperative Program (SACO).</p> <p>Oversee the administration, growth, and cataloging activities of the World Language Cataloging Program and its grant funding. Develop the FY2026 plan, marketing plan, and funding request, with contingencies for the Cataloging Services Assistant role.</p> <p>eRead Illinois Boundless</p> <p>Recruit RAILS libraries and IHLS non-SHARE libraries to join eRead Illinois.</p> <p>Support the training and marketing needs of eRead Illinois participants.</p> <p>Evaluate eRead content to ensure that it continues to meet member needs (see also EDI section below)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to enhance and develop additional content for K-12 students • Regularly seek input from eRead participants on the collection and implement member suggestions as possible <p>Network with e-content managers in Illinois and nationwide to share and stay abreast of new developments and initiatives.</p> <p>Inkie.org Library</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>Continue to develop and promote the Inkie.org Library program to support self-publishing, Illinois authors, and Illinois e-content statewide.</p> <p>Continue offering group purchase pricing on BiblioBoard products for self-published authors.</p> <p>Publicize Inkie.org Library resources as being free (courtesy of RAILS) to all Illinois libraries and to all Illinois residents, including those not served by a public library.</p> <p>Provide current information on available resources for IHLS to share with their member libraries.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Explore More Illinois (EMI)</p> <p>Continue working with CPLS and IHLS to ensure that the new logos and branding guidelines are followed.</p> <p>Collaborate with CPLS and IHLS to publicize EMI to all Illinois public libraries and community colleges and to encourage them to participate.</p> <p>Continue to grow/expand the number and types of participating attractions. Collaborate with CPLS and IHLS to recruit attractions.</p> <p>Network with ePass (EMI's software) administrators nationwide to explore new opportunities and solutions and to share best practices.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Other E-Resources Initiatives</p> <p>Continue to develop RAILS Vendor Privacy Policies and VPAT (Vendor Product Accessibility Template) web pages with links to policies and VPATs for third-party vendors providing e-resources to public libraries. Based on member feedback and participation, determine whether to expand the project to include academic, school, and specialized libraries.</p> <p>Continue to stay abreast of e-content initiatives, such as the Palace Project, Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) and Illinois Digital Heritage Hub.</p>	

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

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

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

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>Promote the online high school programs (see above) as addressing the needs of a culturally, economically, and ethnically diverse audience.</p> <p>Offer RAILS Member Updates featuring topics and ideas that connect to RAILS EDI efforts.</p> <p>Provide/promote opportunities for members from all types and sizes of libraries to share best practices and collaborate on EDI-related challenges through the RAILS EDI mailing list, EDI Pulse Page, and other activities.</p> <p>Promote and provide administrative support as applicable for RAILS EDI-related networking groups.</p> <p>Continue to offer the Social Justice for Libraries Course from Freedom Lifted for member libraries.</p> <p>Include EDI elements in RAILS grants for members (CE Event grants, My Library Is... grants, etc.) when possible, to encourage applicants to provide equitable, diverse, inclusive, and accessible programs/services and to publicize these offerings to their communities.</p> <p>Under the leadership of the RAILS Digital Accessibility team, develop best practices to ensure that RAILS digital content will adhere to the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines v2.1 at Level AA.</p> <p>Continue to incorporate the new Climate Team video as part of the onboarding process for all new RAILS staff to help familiarize them with our organizational culture and values</p>	
<p>Examine all aspects of RAILS policies, procedures, and core services through an equity lens and make needed improvements</p>	<p>Continue to grow and develop RAILS' external and internal EDI strategies and initiatives</p> <p>Continue conducting a thorough analysis/evaluation of RAILS Employee Handbook to ensure that all language and policies meet our EDI goals</p> <p>Continue the work of the RAILS Climate Team to identify and implement internal best practices and initiatives for RAILS staff</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>Develop internal documentation in conjunction with new ethical AI policy</p> <p>Continue holding regular EDI training sessions for RAILS staff</p>	
Work with RAILS members of all types to identify and implement ways to diversify library governing bodies and staff to increase representation and better reflect the communities they serve	<p>Continue to work with the RAILS Board Nominating Committee and others to attract diverse candidates to run for the RAILS Board. Promote RAILS' goal to develop a more diverse board in election publicity.</p> <p>Provide training/consulting/guidance for member libraries of all types to help them develop a more diverse and representative board.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for libraries of all types to share best practices and strategies they have used to diversify their governing boards, including via the RAILS EDI Pulse Page and mailing list.</p> <p>Provide training for RAILS members to help them diversify their hiring and recruitment practices.</p> <p>Provide opportunities/tools for members to share strategies they have used to recruit a more diverse staff, including the EDI mailing list and the EDI Pulse Page.</p>	

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

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
Leveraging RAILS' power and influence in the Illinois library community, work collaboratively for additional funding for all types of libraries to ensure that libraries have the staffing, technology, and infrastructure needed to offer essential and cutting-	<p>Provide CE/consulting/tools to help libraries with different aspects of fundraising, including how to advocate for additional/continued funding from library administrators, funders, etc.</p> <p>Continue to schedule regular meetings with AISLE, Chicago Public Schools (CPS), IHLS, ILA, and ISL to discuss collaborative projects to help school libraries deal with funding challenges,</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
<p>edge services to their communities</p>	<p>understand legal/policy changes, and create new resources to help address issues.</p> <p>Participate in a wide variety of efforts to help advocate for continued/increased funding for all types of libraries, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ILA Legislative Meetups • Responding to American Library Association (ALA) calls to actions • Continuing to work with the ILA Public Policy Committee to discuss legislation of importance to libraries <p>Keep RAILS libraries informed of important legislative developments affecting libraries.</p> <p>Publicize opportunities for staff from member libraries to advocate for continued/increased funding for libraries as appropriate, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging members to attend ILA Legislative Meetups • Encouraging members to respond to ALA calls to action • Encouraging library staff to use talking points and other resources on the My Library Is... website • Encouraging members to contact their elected officials as appropriate and providing talking points on specific issues and programs as possible <p>Utilize the new Numbers that Count campaign and the Illinois Libraries: Agencies of Impact report to promote the value of libraries and continued support of the library ecosystem in Illinois.</p> <p>Support AISLE's statewide efforts to increase the number of certified school librarians.</p> <p>Work with the RAILS Board Advocacy Committee to educate the board about issues affecting RAILS and libraries that may require their advocacy efforts locally, regionally, or nationally.</p>	

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

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>Provide CE/consulting to help libraries meet per capita grant requirements and standards for their type of library.</p> <p>Offer CE/consulting assistance and other resources to help libraries of all types and sizes to develop/maintain a current strategic plan.</p> <p>Identify/monitor issues, trends, and challenges affecting libraries of all types and sizes and provide CE/consulting to help libraries respond to these issues and challenges.</p> <p>Offer new opportunities for member learning, such as Learning Labs, which are participatory and interactive sessions for staff.</p> <p>Continue to gather member input on CE needs from all sizes and types of RAILS libraries and implement training to meet those needs.</p> <p>Based on member input, continue to offer CE Event Grants to help libraries, networking groups, and library consortia plan/offer training events of interest to library staff. Continue prioritizing EDI-related topics for the grants as referenced above.</p> <p>Continue to partner with AISLE to identify training needs for school library staff and to offer joint CE opportunities based on that feedback</p> <p>Continue offering sessions with PDH credits.</p> <p>Continue offering Directors University in-person event as well as DU On Demand recordings, which allow all directors to access essential information year-round.</p> <p>Work with statewide stakeholders to plan and offer Directors 2.0 to offer intermediate-level training for library directors. Publicize widely.</p> <p>With the help of the Library Leadership Training Design team, offer a new professional</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>development cohort that will help expand leadership training in Illinois.</p> <p>Continue partnership with United for Libraries to provide statewide, online, on-demand trustee training. Publicize training widely.</p> <p>Continue to support the iLEAD Trustee Learning Portal.</p> <p>Consult with/attend library board meetings as appropriate to help boards meet legal requirements and to develop leadership skills.</p> <p>Continue partnership with HR Source to provide CE and discounted membership. Publicize widely.</p> <p>Continue partnership with Ancel Glink to offer statewide FOIA/OMA hotline. Publicize widely.</p>	

Strategic Plan Goal Four: RAILS leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen the Illinois library community and expand services to all.

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
RAILS will continue to strengthen collaborative relationships with partner library organizations, including the Association of Illinois School Library Educators, the Chicago Public Library, the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois, the Illinois Association of College & Research Libraries, the Illinois Heartland Library System, the Illinois Library Association, the Illinois State Library, and the Special Libraries	<p>Service Standards</p> <p>Continue conversations with ISL, IHLS, and other partners to explore possibility of revising system membership standards to help libraries of all types provide better service to their communities</p> <p>L2 (Library Directory and Learning Calendar)</p> <p>Ask ISL to continue to provide additional grant funding to support L2</p> <p>Continue to provide statewide leadership for L2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host, maintain, and develop additional features • Provide ongoing user help and support to library staff, networking groups, and sponsor organizations (LLSAPs, ISL, library systems) 	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
<p>Association – Illinois Community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update and maintain externally sourced directory data and ensure adherence to formatting standards • Provide technical support, ongoing reporting, and any necessary development for annual library certification • Facilitate the statewide advisory group (L2G2) and participation in the Intercept open source community <p>Continue to contract with Aten Design Group for L2 support and development.</p> <p>Continue to create, maintain, and update technical and procedural documentation and how-to materials for all types of users in various formats. Promote and provide guidance to library administrators on updating their resource sharing policies, non-resident program participation, and other self-reported directory information.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Certification</p> <p>Work with ISL, IHLS, and other partners to improve and enhance the annual certification process.</p> <p>Work with RAILS members to ensure that they complete the certification process.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Other Collaborative Initiatives</p> <p>RAILS Executive Director continues to serve on Illinois State Library Advisory Committee.</p> <p>Continue to schedule regular meetings with AISLE, CPS, IHLS, ILA, ISL, and others as appropriate to discuss collaborative projects to benefit school libraries as referenced above.</p> <p>Collaborate with AISLE, IHLS, ILA, and ISL to plan Illinois School Library Workers Symposium, supporting individuals working in school libraries with no formal library education.</p> <p>Collaborate with AISLE, IHLS, CARLI, ILA, and others to form volunteer regional response teams to help libraries facing materials challenges</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>Continue providing leadership and support to special libraries. Including helping to determine next steps after the dissolution of the Special Libraries Association (SLA).</p> <p>Continue regular meetings with the Commissioner of the Chicago Public Library to discuss collaboration possibilities</p> <p>Broadband</p> <p>Continue to engage in statewide efforts focused on broadband expansion, technology adoption, and digital equity issues, including continued leadership of the Illinois Department of Economic Opportunity's Broadband Advisory Council.</p> <p>Continue to work with CARLI and IHLS to raise awareness among library staff, advocate for the importance of library services in expanding digital literacy and technology adoption, and cultivate additional partnership opportunities.</p> <p>Partner on grant initiatives with library-related organizations to improve digital literacy in the state of Illinois.</p> <p>Engage with and support member libraries in their own digital equity efforts through continued support for the Digital Equity Networking Group, promoting opportunities for funding and/or collaboration, and sharing resources to support robust digital literacy services.</p>	
RAILS will continually seek to understand member perceptions of inequities in system services to better support academic, school, and specialized	<p>Develop new targeted email communications for specific library types.</p> <p>Promote the member centers for different types of libraries on the redesigned RAILS website</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
libraries, as well as public libraries of all sizes.	<p>Mail promotional pieces to libraries not receiving RAILS delivery as appropriate to ensure they are aware of the programs/services available to them</p> <p>Continue to meet with AISLE, CPS, IHLS, ILA, and ISL to address the needs of school libraries as referenced above.</p> <p>Continue to work with other stakeholders statewide and beyond on school library data project (see next section).</p> <p>(See also Communications section below)</p>	
Continuously evaluate RAILS programs and services to ensure that they are having an impact and are helping to create the best possible future for all member libraries	<p>Continue to work with AISLE, CPS, IHLS, ILA, ISL, and other stakeholders statewide on the SLATE project including library staff, administrators, boards, and other about the importance of school libraries and the need to support and fund them.</p> <p>Continue to promote the SLATE data dashboard widely including via email, social media campaigns, conferences, and networking opportunities.</p> <p>Continue to improve and expand the SLATE data dashboard through the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to collect school data through School Library Census program • Continued development of expanded features and functions • Identification and inclusion of additional tools and resources for school library advocacy <p>Launch Libraries Count: A RAILS Conference in conjunction with the 2025 ILA Annual Conference in Rosemont, IL. This event will be an opportunity for libraries to learn how to use their data effectively.</p> <p>Research developing a centralized RAILS data hub to coordinate and manage data sources used to support services for RAILS members and staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine core data sources used by RAILS staff and create documentation for requirements, maintenance, governance, and access 	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop method for training staff on proper data usage and create data request ticket system <p>Continue developing RAILCAR (as referenced above), which contains information from core data sources for LLSAPs and member libraries to inform their decisions on consortium membership and compare LLSAP operations.</p> <p>Update the RAILS resource sharing map in ArcGIS software to include new data layers and make it more accessible for members.</p> <p>Develop new data-related website and SharePoint site to improve data accessibility for staff, members, and other stakeholders.</p> <p>Develop a data ticketing system to help keep track of project requests.</p> <p>Investigate feasibility of supplementing the quarterly delivery counts with ILS data to reduce staff labor and improve accuracy.</p> <p>Continue to work with RAILS Communications on a member-facing, data-inclusive annual report that showcases the work of the system.</p> <p>Continue to solicit member feedback via RAILS communication tools, surveys, and member encounters. Implement changes/additions to RAILS programs/services based on member input as appropriate. Ensure that we are getting feedback from libraries of all types and sizes in all geographic areas of the system.</p> <p>Continue the Data Internship program to provide opportunities for library students to gain practical library data and systems experience through contributing to RAILS data projects.</p>	

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

Other Administrative Activities

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

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
Engage and communicate with members and potential members from all types of libraries throughout the RAILS area to ensure they are aware of system programs/ services of benefit to them and to better understand, anticipate, and meet their needs	<p>Member Recruitment</p> <p>Engage with libraries of all types that express an interest in RAILS membership.</p> <p>Visit potential members to ensure they meet membership criteria.</p> <p>Work with RAILS Board on new member recommendations for approval by ISL.</p> <p>General Member Communication/Engagement</p> <p>Promote available programs/services via RAILS communication tools and member visits, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAILS website • Weekly <i>RAILS E-News</i> • Social media channels • <i>Can't Shelve This</i> podcast • RAILS Online Store • Visiting as many members as possible, either virtually or in person, concentrating on libraries that RAILS has not visited or had any correspondence with in the past two years • Offering online site visits to any interested library to remind them of system benefits • Offering to attend a meeting of all RAILS networking groups as specified above • Scheduling regular member updates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using available type of library mailing lists and lists for different levels of staff to communicate about specific programs/ services of interest • Offering "New Director Welcome" online discussions • Sending all new RAILS library directors a welcome communication to acquaint them with system programs/services • Continuing to feature "RAILS Minute" videos with the RAILS Executive Director highlighting the latest system news 	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exhibiting at library conferences, including conferences for different types of libraries and different levels of staff Presenting programs at library-related conferences as appropriate to promote RAILS programs/services <p>Contract for continued support for new RAILS website, to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Custom development of Gutenberg editor Miscellaneous design tweaks, feature development, and software and server updates <p>Develop new Data website to house data-related projects including the SLATE data dashboard.</p> <p>Gather feedback from different levels of staff (including non-librarians) on how RAILS can communicate with them more effectively. Develop strategies to respond to this feedback.</p>	
Engage and communicate with the RAILS Board of Directors to ensure that they are aware of RAILS programs and services, that they can serve as ambassadors for RAILS, and that their service on the board is as rewarding as possible	<p>Communicate regularly with the board through the RAILS board mailing list and other means.</p> <p>Ensure that the board is aware of RAILS' progress in meeting the goals and objectives of our new strategic plan.</p> <p>Keep board informed about important issues for RAILS and for libraries of all types. Provide talking points for communicating with members about RAILS programs/services.</p> <p>Plan/implement orientation session at Burr Ridge service center for all new RAILS Board members. Invite existing board members to attend for a refresher.</p> <p>Schedule board meetings in different parts of the RAILS area as possible so the board can learn about different areas of the system and meet members from different areas.</p> <p>Continue to promote and encourage diversity on the RAILS Board as referenced above.</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>Support board conference/meeting attendance as appropriate.</p> <p>Work with RAILS Board Policy Committee to establish schedule for regular review of RAILS policies.</p>	
<p>Recruit RAILS staff as needed to meet roles specified in administrative rules and to support strategic plan goals and objectives. Actively seek a diverse staff in terms of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other factors.</p>	<p>Encourage/support professional development for staff.</p> <p>Continue to hold regular staff meetings to keep all staff informed of the latest RAILS developments and to help staff at different service centers engage with each other.</p> <p>Continue work of RAILS Employee Committees to develop collaborative activities for all staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan in-person staff in-service day in FY 2026 • Offer regular staff engagement activities at service centers throughout the year <p>Continue discussions with new staff who have worked at RAILS for at least 90 days to gather input on their onboarding and orientation experiences. Make changes to RAILS' onboarding process as appropriate in response to this feedback.</p> <p>Update internal safety procedures and continue discussions about disaster planning</p> <p>In conjunction with RAILS IT, create new performance management platform to assist with automation of performance discussions</p> <p>Expand the new RAILS staff onboarding process to ensure that RAILS' values, mission, and organizational culture are emphasized throughout the entire onboarding experience.</p> <p>Continue to communicate via new HR Insights email initiative to give staff more information about key HR activities</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	Continue to prioritize EDI-related staff activities and initiatives as referenced above	
Maintain robust technology infrastructure needed to carry out all RAILS programs/services	<p>Replace laptops for RAILS staff and printers at all RAILS facilities.</p> <p>Replace aging climate control systems in Burr Ridge datacenter.</p> <p>Audit and improve security practices across wide area network and IT systems.</p> <p>Investigate and begin implementation of a new virtualization platform for cost-saving purposes.</p> <p>Continue to utilize project request process for staff to inform and request input on IT-related projects they are planning.</p> <p>Continue to develop, implement, and maintain in-house software, including apps for contract tracking, delivery routing, HR hiring and performance management.</p> <p>Update and expand disaster recovery plan and staff cybersecurity training.</p> <p>Expand cloud hosting for stability, cost savings and disaster readiness.</p>	