1.1 Narrative Report

Introduction

The narrative document below outlines RAILS' activities and accomplishments according to our FY 2025 Operational Plan.

As our mission statement expresses: We Connect Libraries. This statement reflects how we work together with our libraries to offer them the best support possible. Those connections continue to strengthen as we move forward towards a better future for libraries.

In this narrative report, you will find many individual activities from FY 2025, but we wanted to highlight a few below:

- The expansion of our RAILS Bolingbrook Service Center which includes bringing sorting in-house
- RAILS efforts to help keep members informed about changes to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)
- RAILS partnership with Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS) and the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI) around broadband and digital equity
- The release of our new report *Illinois Libraries: Agencies of Impact*
- The premiere of our new school library podcast, *Can't Shelve This*, which is the result of a collaboration with IHLS
- The creation of a new professional development format, RAILS Learning Labs
- The re-branding of the statewide Explore More Illinois program, in coordination with IHLS and the Chicago Public Library
- Acting as co-host to the 2025 International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) conference in Chicago
- A new member-facing RAILS Annual Report

Accomplishments like these require consensus building and the willingness to listen to our member libraries. Our commitment to our member libraries means that their needs come first. In our conversations with staff from member libraries, we've heard that they sincerely appreciate leadership on statewide efforts. During difficult times, they deeply value strong leadership and partnership, not just from RAILS, but from all library-serving organizations. You can see those efforts above and below.

In many ways, FY 2025 was a challenging year for libraries. There was significant concern over the long-term support for libraries, especially at the federal level. We see a direct connection between the desire for leadership from RAILS and other organizations, and this uncertainty. The more we can help our member libraries lead and speak with one voice, the more we can help address the overall health of Illinois libraries.

The following narrative provides detailed information on these and many other FY 2025 activities. It follows the format of the 2022 – 2025 RAILS Strategic Plan, and all activities listed meet the requirements in the administrative rules for library systems.

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

Objectives	Planned Activities
Enhance the sharing of knowledge and best practices through member networking and communications between all types of libraries	Planned/scheduled virtual and in-person networking opportunities for staff at all levels at all sizes and types of libraries, including: • Freeport Public Library, RAILS Member Meetup • Belvidere High School, RAILS Member Meetup • Paw Paw Public Library District, RAILS Member Meetup • Schaumburg Township District Library, RAILS Member Meetup • Bourbonnais Public Library District, RAILS Member Meetup • "Back to School" RAILS Online Roundtable • "Nature & Libraries" RAILS Online Roundtable • "Bookmobiles" RAILS Online Roundtable • "Special Events, Anniversaries, Celebrations, and Milestones" RAILS Online Roundtable Worked with statewide partners, including AISLE, IACRL, IHLS, ILA, SLA-IL, and others to plan additional networking opportunities for staff from different types of libraries and for trustees from public libraries. (See examples throughout this document.) Regularly publicized networking opportunities offered by these organizations Launched new site visit map to help member libraries visualize the connections that RAILS creates through one-on-one meetings Created new online networking event to encourage academic and school library workers to meet and exchange ideas Created new online event for networking group convenors to meet and exchange ideas Publicized 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 Assisted in the creation of new RAILS networking groups, including: • Nature & Libraries Networking Group • Author Events for Adults Networking Group • Affordable Programming Networking Group • Digital Equity Networking Group Continued to build and strengthen relationships and engagement with RAILS networking groups. Visited networking group meetings to share the latest RAILS news and gather feedback on RAILS programs/services

Objectives	Planned Activities
	Provided subsidized Zoom licenses to 23 networking groups Encouraged use of RAILS mailing lists, including lists geared toward different library types and sizes, and staff at all levels. Established new lists as needed
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	Continued to expand the RAILS discount and group purchase program. Gathered input from members at all types and sizes of libraries on desired discounts/group purchases and acted on input as possible. RAILS members saved over $2 million through the program in FY 2025 Offers in FY 2025 included: • BiblioBoard Creator • BookBrowse for Libraries, readers' advisory resource • Brainfuse CollegeNow, college application process tools • Brainfuse HelpNow, tutoring and study suite • Brainfuse JobNow, job search services and tools • Brainfuse VetNow, benefits, career and academic assistance • *Chicago Tribune* Digital Access • Comics Plus, digital comics, graphic novels, manga collection • Communico events planning and room booking tools • Creativebug, craft education hub • EBSCO K-12 resources • EBSCO public library resources • Era Books Online, phonics, readers, picture books, activities • Fiero Code, coding education • Gale Early Literacy database package • Gale Presents: Udemy, online adult learning tool • Hiveclass, digital youth sports training encyclopedia • InfoBase databases • InfoBase streaming collections for all ages • JSTOR/ARTSTOR, Full-text articles and image collections • Library Journal Professional Development Courses • LOTE4Kids, digital picture books in world languages • PressReader for Libraries, newspaper/magazine access • Public Web Browser • RDA Toolkit group purchase • READsquared, online tool for managing reading programs • SizeUp, Inc., small business advisor • Swank annual public performance license Continued expansion of Consortia Manager platform to manage and optimize RAILS group purchases & discounts and streamline work processes

Objectives	Planned Activities
	Networked with group purchasing managers statewide and nationwide to explore new opportunities and discuss challenges related to consortial group purchasing
	Online High School Diploma Programs
	Continued to subsidize the cost and 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
	Promoted programs via *RAILS E-News* and other channels
	Continued to meet with networking group of COHS/Excel library staff participants to develop and promote the program
	Partnered with the Illinois Literacy Foundation on a digital equity competitive grant that highlighted access to Illinois high school education platforms. While funding for this project was eliminated from the NTIA, we are hopeful for more opportunities to expand this process in the future.
RAILS will continue to seek greater efficiencies, innovations, and enhancements to delivery services.	Worked with RAILS members of all sizes and types to determine the most appropriate delivery method to meet their needs
	Consulted with members on delivery issues/concerns on an ongoing basis. Widely promoted the use of the delivery help desk ticketing system
	Brought more sorting capabilities in-house at the RAILS Bolingbrook Service Center. These were originally handled by the CTL vendor. Expanded the Bolingbrook facility
	Promoted the need to complete quarterly delivery volume counts to RAILS members. Consulted with libraries on an individual basis as needed. Examined count data to help inform potential changes to existing delivery routes
	Completed development of iPad app for delivery drivers to replace handwritten documentation, making it possible to aggregate and analyze real-time maintenance and route data
	Continued providing high-quality statewide delivery services to CARLI via ILDS (Illinois Library Delivery Service). Evaluated ILDS data to analyze changes in volume and respond with appropriate service model changes

Objectives	Planned Activities
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 resource sharing to all libraries and residents	**General** Continued to work with the RAILS Resource Sharing Committee to investigate and recommend ways to improve and increase resource sharing in Illinois Collaborated with AISLE, CARLI, CPLS, IACRL, IHLS, ILA, ISL, SLA-IL, and other stakeholders to expand resource sharing as referenced throughout this document Collaborated with and supported the work of the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC). RAILS Executive Director helped planned and host the 2025 ICOLC Conference in Chicago. Many RAILS staff members attended and helped manage events Continued gathering data for the RAILCAR project, which will aggregate and expand the data we currently have related to LLSAP services and impacts across RAILS. Maintain two dashboards with expanded analysis coming soon after three years of data collection is completed **Promote/Support LLSAP Membership** Continued to provide a mix of financial support and services to six RAILS LLSAPs: CCS, Pinnacle, PrairieCat, Rock River Library Consortium, RSA, and SWAN via the annual LLSAP Support Grant and ongoing support and consultation. Provided direct personnel, technology infrastructure, facility, and other support services to RSA staff as a component of their grant award Continued support for RSA on their plan for operational and personnel independence from RAILS. Provided guidance on the development of an employee handbook, support for participation in IMRF, and HR consulting support on a staffing benchmarking study Offered Catalog Membership Grants to encourage libraries to join a RAILS LLSAP and to make LLSAP membership more affordable. Awarded $114,690 in grants to five libraries. Provided consultation to applicants and grantees throughout the process and monitored quarterly reporting for nine awardees whose 18-month grant terms were active Promoted the value of consortium membership to all types and sizes of RAILS libraries via RAILS communication tools, committee work, and member encounters

Objectives	Planned Activities
	Consulted with individual RAILS member libraries on LLSAP membership, Catalog Membership Grants, and automation-related tasks and responsibilities Continued to work with RAILS Consortia Committee to investigate and recommend ways to improve and increase consortial services in Illinois, including the potential use of ILS data as a component of the delivery count **Expand and Promote Find More Illinois (FMI)** Widely promoted benefits of joining FMI: • Featured regular articles about FMI in the weekly *RAILS E-News* • Developed new promotional video with testimonials from FMI library participants • Developed talking points for RAILS Board Advocacy Committee, RAILS Board Resource Sharing Committee, and others to use to promote FMI • Partnered with CARLI staff to develop a process and shared promotional plans to encourage academic libraries to join • Met individually with interested libraries for customized demos and discussions • Direct outreach to libraries that had previously requested quotes Onboarded 22 libraries to FMI in FY 2025, including 21 public libraries and one school library, including technical setup, workflow consulting, and library staff training. There were 87 FMI participating libraries by the end of FY 2025 Continued onboarding CCS members into FMI Provided ongoing training, consulting, and technical support to FMI libraries and worked with Auto-Graphics to resolve support issues and advocate for software enhancements Continued to offer IHLS the opportunity to participate in FMI **Support High-Quality Cataloging** Launched iCAMP mentoring program in collaboration with IHLS/CMC Cataloging Services Manager developed a six-week training courses via Moodle: "Cataloging for Non-Catalogers"

Objectives	Planned Activities
	Five cataloging training sessions were conducted, totaling 22.5 hours of instruction, covering topics such as: • Classification Basics: Understanding DDC and Using WebDewey • Cataloging Children's Materials • Resource Identification • Serials Cataloging, and Cataloging Graphic Novels Offered RDA Toolkit group purchase and WebDewey purchase as referenced above Continued offering World Language Cataloging Services Program as detailed below Provided expert consulting to RAILS member library staff on cataloging matters Publicized IHLS Cataloging Maintenance Center (CMC) programs via regular articles in the *RAILS E-News* Cataloging Services Manager served as co-chair of the ALA Core Cataloging Norms Interest Group Cataloging Services Manager served as a member in South Asia SACO Funnel Continued to participate in the development of Open Rules for Cataloging, a national initiative to create a freely available collaborative cataloging code, serve on the Accessibility and Disability Working Group of the DEI in Metadata networking group, BIPOC Mentorship program committee, and maintain a presence in many networking groups and LLSAP committees **eRead Illinois Boundless** Recruited RAILS libraries and IHLS non-SHARE libraries to join eRead Illinois. Supported training and marketing needs of participants Updated the eRead Illinois membership dashboard to improve efficiency and record keeping during the sign up, renewal, and onboarding processes Evaluated eRead content to ensure that it continued to meet member needs (see also EDI section below): • Continued to add additional content for K-12 students • Continued to purchase popular e-books and audiobooks in Spanish in response to member feedback

Objectives	Planned Activities
	• Continued to seek input from eRead participants on the collection and implemented suggestions as possible Evaluated e-content ordering procedures to ensure maximum efficiency. Met with specialists at Baker & Taylor to refine ordering procedures and criteria Networked with e-content managers statewide and nationwide to stay abreast of new developments and initiatives **Inkie.org & Inkie.org Library** Continued to partner with BiblioLabs to offer the Inkie.org Library to support self-publishing, Illinois authors, and Illinois e-content Publicized Inkie.org Library resources as being free (courtesy of RAILS) to all Illinois libraries and all Illinois residents, including those not served by a public library. Provided information to IHLS to share with their member libraries Continued offering group purchase pricing on BiblioBoard products for self-published authors Gave virtual presentations on inkie.org and the Inkie.org Library for interested member libraries **Explore More Illinois (EMI)** Launched new EMI branding which included sending branded materials to more than 700 participating libraries. Materials included posters, bookmarks, and window clings Continued to work with IHLS to recruit IHLS libraries and set them up in the program Continued to expand the number and types of participating attractions, including attractions in other midwestern states Established two enrollment periods per year for public libraries to join Held targeted webinars for libraries to explain how they can participate in the program Networked with ePass (EMI's software) administrators nationwide to explore new opportunities and solutions

Objectives	Planned Activities
	Other E-Resources Initiatives Supported the ISL with messaging about the statewide database package. Promoted information sessions via RAILS communication channels. Helped promote the availability of these resources to members Continued 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 Supported additional efforts related to web accessibility including the development of a Digital Accessibility pulse page for the RAILS website, provided guidance from legal regarding discrimination complaints related to web accessibility, and the availability of several CE events focused on best practice in accessibility

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

Objectives	Planned Activities
RAILS will provide leadership in developing and providing resources that will support member libraries' efforts to provide equitable, diverse, and inclusive services.	Continued to work with RAILS Board EDI Committee to develop activities and programs to increase awareness about systemic racism and bias among member library staff and boards Continued offering "Social Justice for Libraries" asynchronous course available through Freedom Lifted to deliver EDIA training to member libraries. At the end of FY 2025, 91 member library staff had participated Offered EDIA-related CE, including: • "eAccessibility Without Recreating Your Website" • "Increasing Digital & Health Equity Through Telehealth Services" • "Creating Accessible PDFs" webinar • "Advancing Accessibility in Your Library" webinar • "Ask the Web Accessibility Expert" webinar • "Neurodiversity-Affirming Practices for Library Workers and Patrons" webinar • "Stories for All: Curating Diverse Voices in Your Classroom Library" webinar • "Learning Lab: Writing Alt Text" • "Quiet Gaps: Understanding & Addressing Self-Censorship in School Library Collections" webinar

Objectives	Planned Activities
	"Fat Liberation in Libraries: Imagining a More Equitable and Accessible Future" webinar "Making DEI FAIR: Lily Zheng in Conversation with RAILS Executive Director Monica Harris" webinar Continued offering and publicizing the World Language Cataloging Service statewide. Continued seeking grant funds from ISL to fund the program. The program was used by 39 multitype libraries and 1049 bibliographic records were created Successfully recruited, interviewed, selected, and trained the Cataloging Services Assistant, a key addition that has greatly enhanced the efficiency of World Language Cataloging Serivices. Continued to develop/promote an eRead Illinois collection that addresses the needs of an ethnically and culturally diverse audience - Added e-books and audiobooks in Spanish to collection as referenced above - Continued to include curated lists of titles related to racial justice and marginalized groups - Continued to purchase simultaneous use, perpetual license titles from Paw Prints Publishing, which features diverse authors and perspectives in both English and Spanish versions Recruited attractions for Explore More Illinois of interest to an ethnically, geographically, and culturally diverse audience Offered discounts to help libraries with EDIA efforts as noted above, including: - LOTE Online for Kids, digital picture books in world languages - EBSCO Core Collection en Espanol collection development resource, DEI package e-Book subscription - Infobase World Cinema Collection - PressReader for Libraries, access to newspapers/magazines from over 120 countries Provided/promoted opportunities for members from all types and sizes of libraries to share best practices and collaborate on EDIA-related challenges through the RAILS EDI mailing list, EDIA Pulse Page, and other activities Created new RAILS Digital Accessibility team to help educate staff on the ways to make content more digitally accessible Developed new Digital Accessibility Pulse Page with more information on how libraries can make their website and materials more digitally accessible

Objectives	Planned Activities
	Promoted and provided administrative support as applicable for RAILS EDIA-related networking groups, including the Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color Group; the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Metadata Group; and the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Team in Youth Services Included EDI elements in RAILS' CE Event and My Library Is… grants to encourage applicants to provide equitable, diverse, inclusive, and accessibility programs/services for their community of users Continued membership in the Black Metropolis Research Consortium, a Chicago-based membership association whose mission is to connect all who seek to document, share, understand, and preserve Black experiences Continued supporting publicly available dashboards to share useful library data from IPLAR and other sources to support library decision makers and their advocacy efforts
Examine all aspects of RAILS policies, procedures, and core services through an equity lens and make needed improvements	Continued work of the RAILS Climate Team to identify and implement internal best practices and initiatives for staff Continued holding regular EDIA training sessions for all RAILS staff. Staff trainings offered in FY 2025 included sessions specific diversity training for delivery staff Continued to provide editing tools on the RAILS website to monitor compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Followed Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) when designing, formatting, and posting content to RAILS social media platforms. Paid careful attention to color contrast; avoided excessive flashings, strobing, and decorative fonts; used shortened URLs and CamelCase hashtags; included alternative text on all graphics and accurately captioned all videos with high-contrast text
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	Continued to work with RAILS Board Policy Committee to examine RAILS Board election policies and procedures to attract a more diverse board • Further enhanced board candidate application form to encourage diverse applicants • Continued offering video candidate statements so that candidates could have the opportunity to share more about their experience and perspective

Objectives	Planned Activities
	• Created new RAILS election guide which helps explain the process of running and voting in the RAILS election • Updated board appointment procedures to ensure equitable practice year over year • Encouraged members to vote with EDIA principles in mind. Sent information on board election to all RAILS library agency directors via delivery service or U.S. mail to encourage more multitype library voting

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

Objectives	Planned Activities
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-edge services to their communities	Published new *Illinois Libraries: Agencies of Impact* report and distributed copies to all member libraries. Included a media kit that will allow libraries to promote this to their own patrons Launched new member-facing annual report. This document gave a high-level overview of RAILS' 2024 accomplishments. It was distributed virtually to libraries Launched new Numbers That Count campaign so libraries understand all of the programs and services that RAILS offers and to give them a better understanding of their value Provided CE/consulting to help libraries with fundraising, advocacy, and preparing for the future, including: • "Digital Equity Grant Co-Design for Libraries" • "Top 10 Tips for Library Grant Success" • "Navigating Friends of the Library Groups" • "Budgeting in Tough Times for Small Libraries" • "Learning Lab: Writing Grant Proposals" • "Transforming Libraries for a Sustainable Future" • "Amanda Jones, 'That Librarian' and a Journey to Protect Intellectual Freedom" • "Disaster Preparedness & Response Planning" • "Tools for Defending Intellectual Freedom" • "Understanding the Levy Process" Continued to schedule regular meetings with AISLE, Chicago Public Schools (CPS), IHLS, ILA, and ISBE reps to discuss collaborative projects to help school libraries deal with funding challenges. (See also information about RAILS' SLATE project below)

Objectives	Planned Activities
	Publicized FY 2025 ISL grant opportunities, including the Live and Learn Construction Grant, Public Library Per Capita & Equalization Grant, and the School District Library Grant Program. Encouraged members to apply Publicized a wide variety of additional grant and scholarship opportunities from AISLE, ALA, ILA, and other library-related organizations Participated in a wide variety of efforts to help advocate for continued/increased funding for all types of libraries, including: • ILA Legislative Meetups, both attending and collating/contributing stories from the My Library Is… website blog demonstrating the value of libraries • Responding to ALA calls to actions • Continuing to work with ILA Public Policy Committee, ILA Advocacy Committee, and ISLAC to discuss and promote legislation of importance to libraries Publicized opportunities for staff from member libraries to advocate for continued/increased funding for libraries as appropriate, including: • 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 Worked with AISLE, CARLI, IHLS, and ILA to develop joint statement on changes to federal funding for libraries Offered a RAILS Online Event: Advocating for Libraries which included presentations by libraries, discussing ways that libraries are defining their value in the community Created an IMLS Advocacy Pulse Page to help libraries learn more threats to federal funding and how they can advocate for themselves. In collaboration with IHLS, developed resources that libraries can use to explain library funding Worked with legal partners at Ancel Glink to provide guidance and support for immigration enforcement in libraries Worked with legal partners at Ancel Glink to provide guidance and support for public library meeting rooms Worked with legal partners at Ancel Glink to provide guidance and support for intergovernmental agreements

Objectives	Planned Activities
	Kept RAILS members informed of other important legislative developments affecting libraries via regular articles in the *RAILS E-News* and other communications Worked with RAILS Board Advocacy Committee to educate the board about issues affecting RAILS and libraries that required their advocacy efforts
Help member libraries of all types and sizes demonstrate their value to their different stakeholders	**My Library Is… (MLI) Initiative** Offered My Library Is... Grants to all types of libraries. These grants give libraries a chance to receiving funding for projects that help the library tell its story. Awarded $98,957.35 in grants to 24 projects Offered CE to help members promote their value, including: • "Social Media 101: A Crash Course for Library Marketers" • "Crisis Communications for Trustees" & "Crisis Communications for Library Staff" • "Generative AI Tools for Generating Multimedia" • "Learning Lab: Canva for Libraries: Designing Made Simple" Developed new series of blog posts to help tell the story of libraries funded through IMLS programs Continued to offer IHLS the opportunity to participate in the MLI campaign
Professional development and member engagement efforts are future-focused, crossing library types and specific to individual library type needs	Provided CE/consulting on general resource sharing issues identified in the administrative rules, including interlibrary loan, the ILLNET Interlibrary Loan Code, nonresident service, the RAILS Resource Sharing Policy, etc. Provided information and training resources related to these topics on the RAILS website Provided CE/consulting on library advocacy, management and practice, and other core service areas identified in the administrative rules as referenced in this document Provided CE/consulting to help libraries meet per capita grant requirements and standards for their type of library Continued to gather member input on CE needs from all sizes and types of RAILS libraries and implemented training to meet those needs

Objectives	Planned Activities
	Identified/monitored issues, trends, and challenges affecting libraries of all types and sizes and provided CE/consulting opportunities to help libraries respond to these issues and challenges, including: • Continued working with AISLE, CARLI, IHLS, and ILA on the Unite Against Book Bans Regional Response Team to help libraries dealing with materials challenges Offered tech related webinars including: • "Copyright, Text Mining, and AI" • "Deepfakes: How Computers See and Mimic Us" • "Learning Lab: Using AI for Better Workflows" • "Prompt like a Pro: Getting the Most Out of AI Tools" • "Assessing Your Technology Environment Without IT Staff" Continued to develop Library Pulse pages on the RAILS website to help members respond to current issues, challenges, and trends Continued to offer CE Event Grants to help libraries, networking groups, and library consortia plan/offer training events of interest to library staff. Awarded total of five grants with a total funded of $8,800 in FY 2025 Became certified with the Illinois State Board of Education to offer professional development hours to Illinois licensed educators for license renewal purposes through continuing education opportunities Worked with statewide partners to further develop Directors University, the statewide training initiative for new public library directors. Publicized widely. Participants included 28 RAILS member library directors Began creation of a leadership training development program. Tested the format and content with a Pilot program to get feedback for a FY 2026 launch Continued partnership with HR Source to provide CE and discounted membership. Publicized widely Continued partnership with Ancel Glink to offer statewide FOIA/OMA hotline. Publicized widely **Trustee Training** Continued partnership with United for Libraries to provide statewide, online, on-demand trustee training through their "Short Takes for Trustee" series. Publicized training widely

Objectives	Planned Activities
	Offered "Crisis Communications for Elected Officials," "Social Media Best Practices for Library Trustees", and "Library Director & Board Evaluations" webinars Consulted with/attended library board meetings as appropriate to help boards meet legal requirements and to develop leadership skills Continued to promote the iLead trustee learning portal that is available statewide. Promoted training events connected to this platform

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
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 Association – Illinois Community.	**L2 (Library Directory and Learning Calendar)** Continued to provide statewide leadership for L2 - Hosted, maintained, and routinely updated the L2 software - Developed additional features and improvements in response to user feedback, including significant improvements to the calendar display, and a major version update to the Drupal software - Provided ongoing user help and support, including hosting and maintaining a support ticket system used by RAILS and IHLS - Continued to contract with Aten Design Group for L2 support and development - Asked ISL to continue to provide additional grant funding to support L2 - Provided a robust API and custom Drupal modules that allowed IHLS and LLSAPs to pull library and event data from L2 into their own websites - Continued to support annual certification for all member agencies of Illinois library systems through L2 (see also next section) - Continued to ensure the accuracy and currency of directory data from external sources such as IPLAR and ISBE - Led an effort to review, update, and transfer existing user documentation to a more accessible format; identify and prioritize new documentation needs; and began to build a plan for sustainable ongoing maintenance of documentation. Created an Annual Review Checklist to support library administrators in updating their self-reported agency directory information

Objectives	Planned Activities
	Continued working with statewide L2 Governing Group on development priorities, long-term goals for L2, implementation of major new projects, documentation, and quality assurance testing Continued to participate in the Intercept open source software (which the L2 platform uses) community, including continuing the development work required to begin contributing our customizations back to the source software for broader use **Certification** Worked with ISL, IHLS, and other partners to improve and enhance the annual certification process Worked with RAILS members to ensure that they completed the certification process **Other Collaborative Initiatives** RAILS' Executive Director is a voting member the Illinois State Library Advisory Committee (ISLAC) RAILS' Executive Director meets regularly with ISL Director to discuss ongoing and upcoming issues for RAILS and RAILS member libraries RAILS' Executive Director continued regular meetings with the Commissioner of the Chicago Public Library to discuss collaboration possibilities In collaboration with CPL, supported the iLead Initiative for Library Leaders, a grant project aimed at creating a library leadership program RAILS' Executive Director met regularly with IHLS Executive Director and CARLI Senior Director to discuss statewide electronic resources project, ILDS contract, ICOLC conference collaborations, and other possibilities for collaboration RAILS' Executive Director serves on the Advisory Board for Dominican University's School of Information Studies Continued to schedule regular meetings with AISLE, CPS, IHLS, ILA, and ISL to discuss collaborative projects related to school libraries as referenced above With AISLE, IHLS, ILA, and ISL hosted the 2024 Illinois School Library Workers Symposium, a one-day online event for school library workers with no formal library education. This event continues to grow and attract more participation from libraries

Objectives	Planned Activities
	AISLE, IHLS, ILA, ISL, and RAILS were awarded the 2024 Hugh C. Atkinson Memorial Award for Interlibrary Cooperation for the work done on the Illinois School Library Workers Symposium
	RAILS' Director of Marketing & Communications served on the Special Libraries Association (SLA) national board
	Continued to serve as sponsor for library-related conferences as possible, including conferences aimed at libraries of all types and different staff levels
	Collaborated with AISLE, IHLS, and ILA to host an exhibit booth at the 2024 Illinois Association of School Boards conference in Chicago. This offers RAILS an opportunity to talk to school superintendents, administrators, and trustees
	The RAILS Board of Directors endorsed statement of support for academic libraries that was originally created by CARLI
	Planned Libraries Count data pre-conference as a part of ILA 2025 in collaboration with ILA. The event will offer hands-on workshop style sessions for participants to gain in-depth knowledge of data best practices
	RAILS staff participated in the Free People Read Freely Symposium hosted by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
	RAILS Executive Director serves as Ex Officio on the Illinois Library Association's Public Policy Committee
	RAILS Executive Director served as part of a focus group to update the Public Library Association's Leadership Academy
	RAILS Executive Director serves as treasurer for the Libraries of Illinois Risk Agency (LIRA)
	RAILS Executive Director served as an advisor for the Libraries as Partners IMLS grant for Emergency Management in libraries (University of Illinois Fire Service Institute)
	Continued collaborating with IHLS and CARLI to engage libraries in efforts to expand broadband access and advance digital equity. On behalf of this group, RAILS' Director of Technology Services led the planning and submission of an application for funding to support libraries

Objectives	Planned Activities
	RAILS' Director of Technology Services represents Illinois libraries on the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's Broadband Advisory Council and was appointed Chair in 2024 RAILS' Director of Technology Services worked with the Digital Equity team at the Cook County Office of the President on a new project aimed at supporting libraries' digital equity services. Cook County Board of Commissioners approved $850,000 toward the design and implementation of a Digital Navigator Network for suburban Cook County public libraries RAILS collaborated with IHLS and Illinois Century Network (ICN) to offer a webinar for libraries interested in receiving broadband service from ICN at reduced rates
RAILS will continually seek to understand member perceptions of inequities in system services to better support academic, school, and specialized libraries, as well as public libraries of all sizes.	RAILS Member Engagement Specialist attended several networking groups meetings to get-to-know libraries and listen to their concerns RAILS staff attended Association for Rural and Small Libraries (ARSL) conference to stay aware of issues and challenges facing small and/or rural libraries. Promoted other ARSL educational opportunities and other activities throughout the year (See also Communications section below) **School Library Data Project** Continued to work with statewide partners to gather data on Illinois school libraries to get a better picture of school library needs in Illinois and how we might collaboratively address those needs Began working with library partners outside of Illinois to share and discuss SLATE and school library data collection efforts in other states Collaborated with Leah Gregory from the Illinois Heartland Library System to develop a one-page advocacy tool "The Importance of School Librarians" Planned and launched the 2024-2025 SLATE School Library Census to gather data about library staff, library collections, and library finances Co-presented three 3-hour professional development sessions on using data for library and collection management and library advocacy with Leah Gregory, IHLS, at the 2024 AISLE Annual Conference as well as for

Objectives	Planned Activities
	school librarians at Indian Prairie School District 204 and East Aurora School District 131 Co-presented professional development session on system support, services, and outreach for school librarians at Plainfield Community Consolidated School District 202 with Leah Gregory, IHLS, and Ola Gronski, RAILS
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	Continued to solicit member feedback via RAILS communication tools, surveys, and member encounters. Implemented changes/additions to RAILS programs/services based on member input as appropriate Monitor usage data in dashboards to assess performance of programs and services such as CE, Explore More, eRead, and the RAILS website among others Update RAILS grant rubrics as necessary to ensure goals are being met related to performance, and diversity and equity measures (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	Continued to work with the RAILS Board Universal Service Committee to find and implement solutions to challenges related to the unserved in Illinois Worked with Resource Sharing Committee to increase awareness within the library community of the significant number of unserved residents in Illinois. The group worked on advocacy and support for shared electronic resources and development of Find More Illinois Publicized requirement for library boards to vote annually on participation in the nonresident program and for members to update their participation information via L2. Publicized the names of participating/nonparticipating libraries and share with the Illinois State Library per our statutory requirement

Other Administrative Activities

The following section details FY 2025 activities to meet statutory priorities for Illinois library systems not included in the sections above.

Objectives	Planned Activities
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	**Member Recruitment** Engaged with libraries of all types that expressed an interest in RAILS membership Visited potential members to ensure they meet membership criteria Worked with RAILS Board on new member recommendations for approval by ISL **General Member Communication/Engagement** Promoted available programs/services via RAILS communication tools and member encounters, including: - RAILS website - Weekly *RAILS E-News* - Visiting as many members as possible, either virtually or in person - Producing new RAILS services/program brochure to distribute to all interested member library staff and public library trustees - Scheduling RAILS member updates - Using available type of library mailing lists and lists for different types of libraries and different levels of staff to communicate about specific programs/services of interest - Attending RAILS networking group meetings as appropriate - Sending all new RAILS library directors a welcome communication to acquaint them with system programs/services, and offering to schedule "New Director Welcome" online discussions to provide more in-depth information - Continuing to feature "RAILS Minute" videos with the RAILS Executive Director highlighting the latest system news - Offering one-on-one online meetings for school library staff who were new to their district, new to RAILS, or for anyone who wanted a refresher on system services - Giving an update on RAILS programs/services at Health Science Librarians of Illinois Conference (HSLI) - Launched *Can't Shelve This* podcast to help support school libraries and talk about the opportunities and challenges they face

Objectives	Planned Activities
	• Launched a new RAILS online store to engage staff from member libraries in a new and fun way Exhibited at library conferences geared at different types of libraries and different levels of staff • Approximately 430 visitors to RAILS exhibit booth at October ILA conference • Approximately 220 visitors to RAILS exhibit booth at November AISLE conference • Approximately 88 visitors to the RAILS booth at the February Illinois Youth Services Institute conference • Approximately 116 visitors to RAILS exhibit table at April Reaching Forward South conference • Approximately 569 visitors to RAILS exhibit table at May Reaching Forward North conference
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	Communicated regularly with the board through board mailing list and other means Kept board informed about important issues for RAILS and for libraries of all types. Provided monthly talking points for communicating with members about select RAILS programs/services Planned/implemented orientation session at Burr Ridge service center for all new RAILS Board members. Invited existing board members to attend for a refresher Wrote, filmed, and edited new board expectation video to help board members understand their role Scheduled board meetings in different parts of the RAILS area as possible so the board could learn about different areas of the system Continued to promote and encourage diversity on the RAILS Board as referenced above Supported board conference/meeting attendance as appropriate
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	Encouraged/supported professional development for staff, including: • Provided all staff with access to Udemy for online courses on a wide range of topics • Created and delivered monthly safety training sessions for all RAILS staff during regular staff meetings • Encouraged RAILS staff to attend conferences and participate in RAILS continuing education events

Objectives	Planned Activities
orientation, gender identify, and other factors.	Continued to hold monthly staff meetings to keep all staff informed of the latest RAILS developments and to help staff at different service centers engage with each other Continued work of RAILS Staff Engagement committee to develop collaborative activities for all staff Continued to prioritize EDIA-related staff activities and initiatives as referenced above
Maintain robust technology infrastructure needed to carry out all RAILS programs/services	Purchased and implemented new VPN software for staff Continued migration away from local storage for staff files, moving all staff to OneDrive and continued implementing the use of SharePoint by specific departments Purchased and installed new network switches for RAILS service centers Completed a project to install custom charging boards for delivery iPads Continued supporting and updating the delivery iPads and custom app for drivers Updated Burr Ridge meeting room with new video equipment Helped conduct the necessary tech work in the added Bolingbrook Service Center space. That includes installing network cabling, internet service, door controls, security, and cameras. Provided regular cybersecurity training to staff and Board, showing real world examples of how an attacker might try to gain access to RAILS or any organization Created new web-based employee performance evaluation system Created an RFP to replace current copiers/printers Created an RPF to replace current servers Purchased and rolled out replacement headsets for staff Continued to set up and support Zoom accounts for RAILS member networking groups

Objectives	Planned Activities
	Continued to support RAILS staff and Board members' use of their RAILS-provided technology software and equipment