



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

Executive Director Report, January 2026

Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

RAILS 2025 Year in Review

As we do every year, we put together [a year in review video](#) to reflect on the progress we've made collectively this year. A huge thank you is due to the staff and board members who contributed to all our achievements in 2025! It was a productive year and I'm looking forward to our continued work together in 2026.

Federal Funding and IMLS Update

On [November 21](#), a federal judge in Rhode Island held that the Trump Administration's efforts to dismantle the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and several other federal agencies via Executive Order was both illegal and unconstitutional. This decision resulted from a lawsuit filed by the Attorney Generals of 21 states, including Illinois' Kwame Raoul. The judge also denied the government's motion for summary judgement and a motion for the judge to reconsider his prior preliminary injunction in the case.

On December 3, the IMLS announced that it was [restoring all federal grants](#) that had been terminated in the wake of the March 14 Trump executive order.

As a reminder, the end of the 43-day government shutdown in November was the result of Congress agreeing to continue temporarily funding some programs at last year's levels. That continuation funds only three of twelve for FY2026, which means that Congress will need to pass nine spending bills or face another shutdown on February 1, 2026 for most government programs, including library programs.

On January 13, IMLS opened its FY2026 grant funding cycle. Institutions across the United States are encouraged to apply to the agency's programs by March 13, 2026.

ALA National Library Legislative Day, Feb 25-26

I will be attending the American Library Association's National Library Legislative Day in Washington DC on February 25-26 as part of the Illinois contingent. RAILS Board member Emily Porter will also attend. More information is expected in the coming days about other attendees from Illinois. I am thrilled to share the successes and concerns of Illinois libraries with our federal lawmakers.

Illinois Legislative Updates

I attended the Illinois Library Association (ILA) Public Policy Committee (PPC) meeting as Ex Officio on Monday, December 1. As you know, the ILA Executive Board has approved the following legislative priorities for this year:

- Increase Library System Area & Per Capita Grants and Public Per Capita & School District Grants by 20%
- Require Public Library Trustee Training
- Open Educational Resources funding grant
- Making eBooks Equitable and Accessible

With the new legislative session beginning this month, we expect to see many of these priorities in Illinois bills which we will continue to highlight for you through May.

New Resource to Help Libraries Promote L2

In November, RAILS launched a new [L2 Signup Poster](#) that's designed to help spread the word about Library Directory & Learning Calendar (L2). The poster highlights things like:

- Who can have an L2 account
- What you can do with an L2 account
- How to sign up
- Where to find help and support

We're encouraging library directors and administrators to print and/or share the poster with staff and trustees.

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

Cook County Digital Navigator Network Launches Mini Pilot

As part of RAILS' partnership with the Cook County Office of the President, work is moving forward on a new digital funding opportunity. You may remember that in May 2025, RAILS was awarded \$850k as part of our work to help assist public libraries in suburban Cook County. With the help of volunteer-led Cook County Digital Navigator Network Guiding Team, RAILS identified 31 public libraries areas that are under-resourced with respect to various library equity measures related to funding and technology availability and are comprised of key covered populations as defined in the Digital Equity Act of 2021.

Libraries are eligible to apply for \$2,000 each. This funding is intended to be used to help expand the library's ability to assist patrons with accessing and using technology. This mini pilot program will help inform the design of a larger grant program to be piloted later in the year.

A big thank you to RAILS Director of Technology Services Anne Slaughter who is leading this program. We're thrilled about this partnership with Cook County and we're excited for how this project has the capacity to expand the work libraries do in the digital equity space.

US Government Accountability Office (GAO) Releases Study on Library Facilities

On December 18, the Government Accountability Office released a [major study](#) on the condition of public library buildings. Many were found to be in "poor condition, with increasing deferred maintenance."

Findings included:

- 38% (approx. 6,000 libraries) of the nation's public libraries have at least one building system, such as heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC), in poor condition
- 61% (9,800 libraries) have at least one building system or feature that poses a potential health or safety concern
- 70% (11,200 libraries) have a backlog of deferred maintenance and repair
- 71% cited construction costs and limited funding as primary obstacles

RAILS assists member libraries in preparing for the future

RAILS Member Update on February 11

I want to invite all of you to the upcoming [RAILS Member Update](#) on Wednesday, February 11, 3-4 p.m. This event will feature a presentation from Dan Montgomery, the new Executive Director of the American Library Association. Dan will present on the future of ALA. We'll also hear from Jennifer Drinka, Executive Director, and Jennifer Norris, Assistant Director of Operations, from Antioch Public Library District. They'll present on American with Disabilities Act (ADA) Title II web accessibility and what libraries need to know about the upcoming April 2026 deadline. The final presentation will be from Bree Kirsch, Head of Learning and Engagement, Associate Librarian, at Miami (OH) University. Bree will present on the Illinois Libraries AI Ambassador Program. All levels of staff from RAILS member libraries are invited to join us for this event on Zoom. After the event, a recording will be available on the RAILS YouTube page.

RAILS Universal Service Committee Surveys Community College Libraries

At the direction of the RAILS Universal Service Committee, RAILS is surveying community college library members to better understand how they serve non-student residents within their districts, particularly those living in areas unserved by a public library. This survey updates a similar effort conducted by the RAILS Resource Sharing Committee in 2018. Responses will be collected through the end of January, with results reported at the March Universal Service Committee meeting.

FY2027 LLSAP Support Grants Announced

LLSAP Support Grant awards for FY2027 were determined and announced to each of the six LLSAPs on October 31. This grant uses a formula to distribute a total of \$2.25M across all six LLSAP organizations (CCS, Pinnacle, PrairieCat, RRLC, RSA, and SWAN), which will be disbursed in quarterly payments beginning on July 1, 2026.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

RSA Independence Project: Final Phase

As a final step in the RSA Independence Project, all nine staff members supporting RSA transitioned from RAILS employment to direct employment with RSA effective January 1, 2026. This transition followed 18 months of preparation addressing payroll, benefits, policies, and operational systems. During the first half of 2026, work will proceed to fully migrate staff to RSA-owned technology and infrastructure, including email, phones, software, and support systems, while maintaining continuity of their help desk services and updating all RSA contact information accordingly. We will discuss the potential approval of an MOU with RSA at our January meeting.

ILA Legislative Meetups

In November and December, RAILS staff and Board participated in all five of the ILA Legislative Meetups that were hosted in RAILS territory. This includes meetups hosted in Bloomington, DeKalb, Alsip, Oak Brook, and Northbrook. The staff reported very positive conversations. Legislators showed significant concern regarding e-book pricing and interest in increasing per capita funding.

SWAN Quarterly on December 4

I attended the SWAN quarterly meeting in Oak Brook on December 4th to share information about the Illinois State Library Advisory Committee, eRead Illinois transition, and Illinois legislative updates with the group. I appreciated the opportunity to meet with so many of our members in person and enjoyed my panel conversation with SWAN Executive Director Aaron Skog and Thomas Ford Memorial Library Director and ISLAC Committee member Ted Bodewes.

eBook Advocacy

As a result of collaboration with the eBook subcommittee of the ILA Public Policy committee, RAILS Digital Marketing & Communications Specialist Ola Gronski and RAILS E-Content Specialist Anna Behm collaborated to create a two-page spread about e-content pricing challenges in the 2025 ILA Legislative Meetup Booklet. The spread highlights the lending limits on e-content, the cost difference of popular titles for libraries versus consumers, and e-content circulation rates in libraries. The topic was well-discussed at the meetups. RAILS plans to publish the handout digitally with a marketing kit for libraries to share the information with their communities. We've included a version of that document at the end of the RAILS Report for your review.

Anna Behm, Leila Heath, and myself continue to meet with this subcommittee monthly to pursue avenues for potential legislation that reflects what has passed in Connecticut. I attended a meeting on December 22 between members of the subcommittee, the Illinois State Library, and eBook Study Group founder Kyle Courtney to discuss the possibility of future legislation.

CARLI Leadership Transition

I had the opportunity (along with RAILS' Anne Slaughter) to attend the retirement celebration of Anne Craig, longtime Executive Director of CARLI (Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois). With her retirement on December 31, Anne has left a truly remarkable legacy at CARLI and for Illinois libraries. We wish her all the best in her retirement.

Laurie Blandino has been named the new CARLI Director and began serving in her new role on December 31. Laurie previously served as Executive Director and Associate Commissioner of LOUIS: The Louisiana Library Network. I met with Laurie, Anne Craig, and Heartland Executive Director Leslie Bednar to discuss the transition on December 11. I look forward to working closely with Laurie in her new role.

Catalog Membership Grant Recipients

RAILS is excited to announce the selection of two libraries to receive RAILS Cataloging Membership Grants. Congratulations to this year's recipients:

- Rolling Meadows Library (CCS) - \$53,050.00
- Wauconda Area Public Library District (CCS) - \$53,050.00

This grant aims to support resource sharing by making a library management system affordable for any library. These funds will cover the startup costs for these libraries to join a RAILS Local Library System Automation Program (LLSAP) consortium and expand the resources available to their communities.

A big thank you to RAILS Director of Technology Services Anne Slaughter who helps drive this grant program. Anne works very closely with our LLSAP partners to make sure that we are promoting resource sharing and making it easier for our libraries to join shared catalogs.

Looking Ahead to February

- **February Service of the Month and Board Development topics – Find More Illinois with Barb Miller and library advocacy at the state and local level with Amelia Aldred from ALA**



This Month at RAILS – January 2026

THE TOP THREE

In response to board member feedback, each month we provide brief talking points to help you spread the word about specific RAILS programs/services. Here are this month's top three:

2026 ISL Annual Certification Kicks Off

In compliance with Illinois statutes and administrative rules, annual certification is required of ALL library system members to retain system membership and eligibility for grants administered by the Illinois State Library. Every year, RAILS staff help member libraries complete this required process. In early December, [RAILS launched a news article](#) with instructions, links to help, and an updated screen-cast. The certification period runs from January 2 to March 31. A big thank you to the RAILS Administrative Team who work hand-in-hand with member libraries to make sure that 100% of them are in compliance.

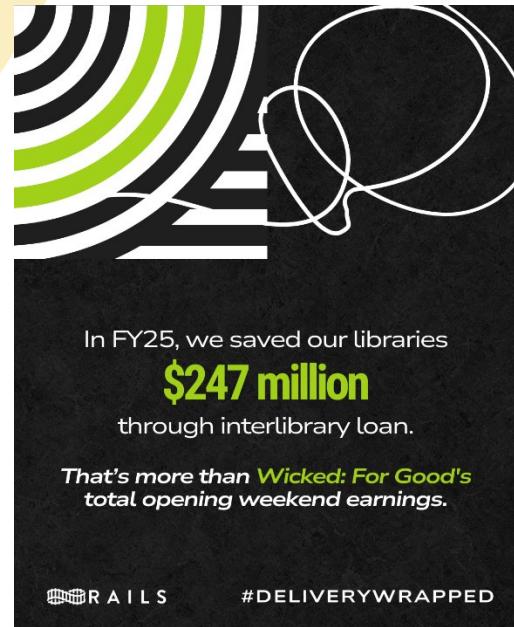
Can't Shelve This Receives Best of Marketing Honorable Mention from Library Marketing & Communications Group (LMCG)

RAILS Digital Marketing & Communications Specialist Ola Gronski attended the 2025 Library Marketing & Communications Conference in St. Louis, MO to receive a Best of Marketing Honorable Mention for the *Can't Shelve This* podcast. This is the first year that LMCG has offered this award, sponsored by Hoopla.

RAILS 2025 #DeliveryWrapped

RAILS staff worked together to compile FY25 delivery data for the annual [#DeliveryWrapped social media post](#). Here's what was highlighted:

- In FY 2025, we saved our libraries \$247 million through interlibrary loan. That's more than *Wicked: For Good*'s total opening weekend earnings.
- Our team delivered 1 dog. (IYKYK—and if you don't, check out Tyler's Delivery Diary.)
- In FY 2025, our drivers traveled 1,076,230 miles. That's Katy Perry traveling to space 8,679 times.
- Our busiest hub was Wheeling (XWH). They processed 25% of our total materials in FY 2025. That's over 2 million titles just for our north and northwest suburbs.



Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

Enhance sharing of knowledge and best practices

November/December RAILS Site Visits

RAILS Member Engagement Manager Jessica Silva conducted two site visits at RAILS member libraries in November and December. She visited:

- Evergreen Park High School Library (pictured, right)
- Johnsburg Public Library

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



RAILS Hosts MLI Grant Information Session and Cowork Events

On Monday, November 3, RAILS Member Engagement Manager Jessica Silva hosted a My Library Is... Grant Information session online. This event was attended by 37 people. The discussion included potential project ideas and the grant process. Some past recipients attended and shared best practices. Attendees were able to chat with each other and ask questions.

On Tuesday, December 9, Jessica held a My Library Is... Grant Virtual Cowork Session. 5 people attended this event. The focus was on allowing attendees to share their project ideas, connect, and ask questions. Jessica demonstrated how to search for past project ideas that might provide inspiration.

RAILS Online Roundtable: Makerspaces & Digital Scholarship, 11/20

On Thursday, November 20, RAILS hosted an online roundtable on makerspaces and digital scholarship. Heejoung Shin, Clinical Assistant Professor and Digital Scholarship Librarian, University of Chicago Illinois (UIC) presented on what libraries should be thinking about when creating and fostering digital scholarship and the fab lab makerspace. Attendees discussed digital scholarship and shared ideas for training. 26 people attended live.

RAILS Participates in High School Librarians Networking Group, 11/5

RAILS Member Engagement Manager Jessica Silva presented virtually to the High School Librarians Networking Group on Wednesday, November 5. About 20 area high school librarians attended. The group discussed the eRead Illinois transition to The Palace Project and RAILS resources. Jessica also discussed the school librarian representative on the RAILS board experience and leadership opportunities for school librarians in Illinois.

Jessica Silva Presents at IHLS Extra Credit, 11/19

On Wednesday, November 19, RAILS Member Engagement Manager Jessica Silva presented at the Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS) Extra Credit event. Extra Credit is a monthly virtual session consisting of a 30-minute continuing education session, followed by a 30-minute networking and system update session, where

participants discuss all things related to school libraries. 17 people attended. Jessica's presentation included information about the statewide database program, state library contacts, and best practices for teaching databases.

***Can't Shelve This* Podcast Hits 10,000 Downloads**

On December 10, 2025, the *Can't Shelve This* podcast hit 10,000 downloads after publishing 14 episodes. While most of the downloads are from Illinois, the podcast also has a large listenership in California and Iowa. Data shows an increase in the number of downloads for each episode the longer it's out. This signals that, regardless of when listeners discover the podcast, they're going back to download earlier episodes.

RAILS Social Media Engagement

See the report at the end for info on our November and December social media engagement efforts.

Leverage economies of scale to provide greater purchasing power

RAILS members can find information, trial access and pricing on all deals and discounts by logging into the [RAILS Deals & Discounts page](#).

Group Purchases

Fall and January sign-ups and renewals concluded in December for resources including JSTOR, BookBrowse, Gale Presents: Udemy, Swank movie licensing and streaming for public and K-12 libraries, Comics Plus, BiblioBoard Creator, Communico and Creativebug. Over 400 subscriptions were processed totaling over \$630K.

Print Materials Vendor Discounts Added in Response to Baker & Taylor Closure

The Deals & Discounts team has continued to actively explore and pursue vendor discounts for materials and collection services in response to library needs after the abrupt closure of Baker & Taylor. To make discovery and comparison between vendors easier, a [print materials vendor comparison chart](#) has been posted on the Deals & Discount website.

- Active RAILS Discounts: Barnes & Noble Classwork, Brodart Library Services, Bound to Stay Bound Books, Center Print Large Print, Ingram Content Group, Libraria, MicroMarketing, Midwest Tape
- In Progress: Amazon Business Library Hub, Follett Content Solutions, Mackin, Midwest Library Service, Penworthy Books
- Contacted, waiting for response: EBSCO Mosaic by GOBI Library Solutions, Thorndike Press from Gale
- The team highlighted the print material vendor deals at the RAILS Resource Sharing Committee on December 8.

Growth of the Swank Movie License Group Purchase

The end of the calendar year brings several large-scale Deals & Discounts renewals, including the Swank movie license group purchase. This year, participation grew, with 262 public libraries now participating, including signups for a new public library streaming service. This was also the first year of the RAILS Swank K-12 group purchase, with 18 schools and 11 districts joining as of early December.

Vendor Webinars

Webinar Title	Date	Registered	Attended
LJ & SLJ Professional Development: Advance Your Skills, Empower Your Library	11/6/2025	18	9

Ask Bound to Stay Bound: A Demo & Q&A	11/13/2025	21	13
Ask Barnes & Noble: A Demo & Q&A	11/19/2025	29	19
Gale Presents: Udemy	11/20/2025	3	12
Ask Libraria: A Demo & Q&A	12/3/2025	44	29
Ask MicroMarketing: A Demo & Q&A	12/10/2025	16	8
Ask Mackin: A Demo & Q&A	12/17/2025	10	10
Totals		141	100

Online High School Programs

RAILS offers two online high school programs for libraries: Career Online High School (implemented Spring 2016) and Gale Excel (implemented Spring 2024). Stats for both programs are listed below:

Career Online High School Stats as of December 31, 2025

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
521	282	66	63%/53%

Gale Excel Stats as of December 31, 2025

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
72	30	39	91%/53%

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

Find More Illinois Update

RAILS Director of Library Resources and Programs Leila Heath, RAILS Consortial Services Supervisor Barb Miller and the RAILS Data Team met with CCS to discuss FMI statistics on November 20. RAILS is developing an updated Dashboard to better track FMI statistics and trends.



RAILS Consortial Services Supervisor Barb Miller met with multiple FMI libraries to discuss FMI developments and changes to the pricing structure. These meetings took place November 5 - 11.

On December 11, Leila Heath, RAILS Associate Executive Director Joe Filipek, and Barb Miller met with Northeastern Illinois University, Moraine Valley Community College, Millikin University, and Illinois State University to discuss Find More Illinois, the growth of the Academic Lender Only Pilot and their potential participation in the pilot program.

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

Academic	Public	School	Special	Total
8	71	11	1	91

Find More Illinois total transactions (loans and borrows)

Time Period	Number of transactions
November 2025	1,290
December 2025	1,275
Fiscal Year to Date	8,465

Find More Illinois catalog

Time Period	Number of items in shared catalog
November 2025	9,011,278

Find More Illinois Demos/Reviews

Date of Training	Library	Number of Participants
November 4 Training	North central College	3
December 4 Demo	Elmhurst College	1
December 4 Training	Knox College	2
December 12 Training	Illinois College	2
December 15 Demo	National Louis University	3

eRead Illinois & Inkie.org Update

RAILS Director of Library Resources and Programs Leila Heath and RAILS E-Content Specialist Anna Behm met regularly with the team from Palace Project to discuss progress with onboarding libraries and transferring the eRead Illinois collection to the Palace Project.



RAILS E-Content Specialist Anna Behm gave an update on eRead Illinois transition from Boundless to the Palace Project at the PC Delegates Assembly on October 29, the RAILS Member Update on November 12, the Resource Sharing Committee Meeting on December 8, and a CCS member meeting on December 11.

Anna Behm and Leila Heath met with staff from IHLS on November 13 and again on December 17 to talk about opportunities to deploy Palace to IHLS libraries in 2026.

Palace Project app went live for public, academic, and special eRead Illinois member libraries the second week of December. Since the launch over 14,000 items have been checked out.

eRead Illinois Checkouts

Time Period	E-Books	Audiobooks	Total
November 2025	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 2025	7,292	7,083	14,375
Fiscal Year to Date	82,918	84,884	167,802

The Palace Project Training Webinars

Webinar	Date	Number of attendees
Intro to the Palace Project 1	11/10/25	200
Intro to the Palace Project 2	11/13/25	114
Q&A for School Libraries 1	12/4/25	60
The Palace Project App Overview	12/5/25	79
Q&A for School Libraries 2	12/8/25	50
Collection Manager Overview 1	12/9/25	44
Collection Manager Overview 2	12/10/25	32
Marketing the Palace Project App	12/15/25	36

Inkie.org Library Views

Time Period	Number of Views
November 2025	1,513
December 2025	1,190
Fiscal Year to Date	10,105

Explore More Illinois Update

In November 2025, 3,733 reservations were made in Explore More Illinois. The most popular downstate and suburban attractions in November 2025 were:

- Morton Arboretum in Lisle (313)
- Griffin Museum of Science and Industry (104)
- Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe (99)
- Chicago Children's Museum (88)
- Cantigny in Wheaton (60)



The most popular Chicago attractions in November 2025 were:

- Art Institute of Chicago (600)
- Griffin Museum of Science and Industry (548)
- Field Museum (343)
- Chicago Academy of Sciences Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum (339)
- Morton Arboretum in Lisle (179)

In December 2025, 3,430 reservations were made in Explore More Illinois. The most popular downstate and suburban attractions in December 2025 were:

- Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe (102)

- Morton Arboretum in Lisle (87)
- Griffin Museum of Science and Industry (89)
- Chicago Academy of Sciences Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum (66)
- Chicago Children's Museum (54)

The most popular Chicago attractions in December 2025 were:

- Art Institute of Chicago (547)
- Chicago Academy of Sciences Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum (410)
- Griffin Museum of Science and Industry (377)
- Field Museum (301)
- Chicago Botanic Garden (179)

In November, Explore More Illinois welcomed Aidman Wildlife Adventures in Arcola, IL. Explore More Illinois welcomed Eldorado Memorial Library in November and North Chicago Public Library in December.

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

System	Publics	Community Colleges	Total
RAILS	351	3	354
IHLS	110	1	111
CPL	1	n/a	1
Totals	462	4	466

Attractions in Explore More Illinois as of December 31, 2025

Attractions	62
Total Attractions in 2025	82

Reservations Made in Explore More Illinois in November 2025

Organization	November 2025
RAILS/IHLS	960
CPL	2,773
Total	3,733

Reservations Made in Explore More Illinois in December 2025

Organization	December 2025
RAILS/IHLS	711
CPL	2,719
Total	3,430

Assist member libraries in preparing for the future

Future-focused professional development and member engagement efforts

RAILS Catalyst Online Sessions Begin

RAILS Catalyst participants have begun their monthly online sessions with facilitator and executive coach Becky Thalmann. November and December's sessions were focused on Self-Leadership. Members of the Catalyst Design Committee are being included as spotlight presenters at each online session, to share short stories from their own leadership journeys, in conjunction with that session's theme. In a poll from the beginning of the December 9 session, 77% of Catalyst participants reported that in the past month they were able to directly apply or "think differently about" what they had learned about in the previous session.

RAILS Continuing Education Grant Proposals Being Accepted

Proposals are being accepted for the next RAILS Continuing Education Event Grants. Library workers can apply to receive funding for educational events on topics they, their libraries, or their networking groups want to learn about. Applications are welcome from networking groups, consortia, and individual libraries, provided that the event remains open and accessible to all RAILS members. The deadline to apply is February 9, 2026.

DU Advanced Applications Open in January 2026

Directors University (DU) Advanced (formerly DU 2.0) applications will open this month. DU Advanced is a continuation of Directors University and goes beyond the basics to bring the next level of education and knowledge to participants so they can continue to grow as strong Illinois library directors. Priority will be given to directors who attended DU in 2024 or before and have not already attended DU 2.0. This year DU Advanced will take place April 27 – 30 in Grafton, IL.

November/December CE Highlights

At the end of 2025, the Continuing Education team responded to a number of urgent legal situations that commanded libraries' attention. 375 library staff members registered for Narcan Administration in time to comply with the opioid overdose prevention law going into effect in 2026. 404 library staff members registered for Libraries & Immigration Enforcement to hear a legal perspective in response to the increased presence of immigration enforcement officers. 264 registered for Social Media and Your Job in response to increased community concern about public workers' private social media posts.

Recent CE Events

- **"Narcan Administration: Spotting the Signs and Responding with Confidence,"** webinar, November 13
- **"Libraries & Immigration Enforcement,"** webinar, November 17
- **"Introduction to Modern Book Mending,"** webinar, November 20
- **"Social Media and Your Job: Rights, Risks, and Responsibilities,"** webinar, November 25
- **"Authorities & Authority Control,"** webinar, December 2
- **"RAILS Learning Lab: Business Reference: How to Collaborate and Assist Your Local Business Community,"** online meeting, December 4
- **"RAILS Catalyst Online Session #2,"** online meeting, December 9
- **"Generative AI and the Library Collection,"** webinar, December 10

- “Developing AI Policies & Principles for Libraries with Dr. Brandy McNeil”, webinar, January 9
- “Neurodivergence & Customer Service,” webinar, January 12

Upcoming CE Events

- “Catalyst Session #3”, online meeting, January 13
Participants will begin to start learning about Leading Others.
- “2026 IPLAR Updates and Reporting Guidance,” webinar, January 27, and at RAILS Burr Ridge, February 9
Laura Keyes, Library Program Specialist at the Illinois State Library, will give an update on recent changes to IPLAR.
- “Path to Leadership: Detaching from Approval Seeking & Criticism”, webinar, January 28
When we focus on seeking approval or avoiding criticism, it can limit effective leadership and decision-making. In this presentation, Mazi Robinson, a licensed counselor and experienced speaker, will share practical strategies for handling criticism, reducing reliance on external validation, and refocusing energy on meaningful professional and personal goals.
- “Building a Strong Library Volunteer Program,” webinar, January 30
Carla Lehn, author of *From Library Volunteer to Library Advocate*, will cover the key benefits of engaging volunteers and the needs and interests of today’s volunteer workforce. Learn how to create effective volunteer job descriptions, develop targeted recruitment plans, and clarify staff roles to support successful volunteer engagement.
- “Document Accessibility Essentials,” webinar, February 3
A practical, follow-along session that introduces some key fundamentals of digital accessibility and demonstrates select techniques for creating more accessible documents. Participants will work directly with a provided Word document as we walk through hands-on remediation examples and commonly used tools.
- “Catalyst Session #4”, online meeting, February 10
Participants will continue to learn about Leading Others.
- “Getting the Most Out of Canva Pro,” webinar, February 11
Learn how to customize your brand kit and create custom templates to save time and keep your designs on-brand with a case study from Oak Park Public Library’s poster display process. You’ll learn how to set up documents, choose the right file formats, and get tips on finding and editing images without running into copyright issues.
- “Best Children’s Books of 2025,” webinar, February 19
Author, librarian, reviewer of children’s literature, public speaker, and podcaster Betsy Bird is back with another year of great children’s books. Details and registration coming to L2 soon.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Strengthen collaborative relationships with partner library organizations

December and January Partnership Meetings

RAILS has monthly meetings with representatives from the Association of Illinois School Library Educators (AISLE), Chicago Public Schools (CPS), Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS), Illinois Library Association (ILA), and the Illinois State Library (ISL) to discuss ways we can work collaboratively to support school libraries.

In December, the group discussed:

- School Library Advocacy Through Education (SLATE) update
- Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB) conference
- ILA Legislative Meetups

In January, the group discussed:

- School Library Advocacy Through Education (SLATE) update
- Legislative Updates
- Working with ISBE

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

RAILS Staff & Service Center News

Jessica Silva and Ola Gronski Attend Zion-Benton Township HS Library Ribbon Cutting

On Tuesday, November 18, RAILS Member Engagement Specialist Jessica Silva and RAILS Digital Marketing & Communications Specialist Ola Gronski attended the ribbon cutting at the new Zion-Benton Township High School library. As part of the event, they received a tour and networked with other attendees from local public and school libraries. Congratulations to ZBHS Librarian Deb Will on her new library!

Leah Heath Attends 2025 Charleston Conference

In early November, RAILS Director of Library Resources and Programs Leila Heath attended the Charleston Conference in Charleston, SC. This conference focuses on collection development issues, vendor product development and academic library issues. Leila networked with other consortia purchasing managers, including Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA), Midwest Collaborative for Library Services (MCLS) and Florida Virtual Campus (FLVC) to discuss issues related to group purchasing in a consortial environment. She also met with the ConsortiaManager team, as well as library resource vendors and librarians from the US and other countries.

RAILS IT Update

In November and December, the RAILS IT Team successfully helped RSA migrate their data to a new Microsoft account over the course of a week during the holidays. They also received delivery of new multifunction copiers/printers/scanners. The installation of these machines will take place at RAILS service centers over the next month. Finally, the team also started a review of the new Microsoft CoPilot licences for staff use.

RAILS Coal Valley Service Center Property Condition Report

RAILS received a property condition report from Terracon Consulting Engineers for our Coal Valley Service Center. While no major short-term capital projects were identified, the consultants recommended additional investigative work related to the building foundation and an Asbestos Containing Materials (ACM) survey. RAILS will consider these recommended evaluations in 2026.

NOVEMBER 2025

 **RAILS**
DIGITAL MARKETING
BOARD REPORT



FOLLOWERS

total subscribers

Facebook +17

2,880

Instagram +41

1,770

LinkedIn +44

2,271

REACH

accounts shown our content

Facebook -5,875

11,030

Instagram -1,649

1,591

LinkedIn -466

3,688

VIEWS

times our content was seen

Facebook -12,674

37,743

Instagram -8,029

10,383

LinkedIn -2,171

7,503

ENGAGEMENT

reactions, comments, and shares

Facebook -627

776

Instagram -241

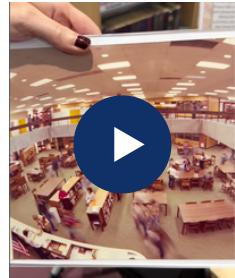
275

LinkedIn -71

248

TOP POST

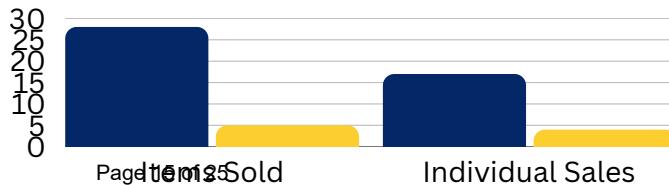
received the most engagement



RAILS Online Store

● October 2025

● November 2025



RAILS Minute Views: 57*

*no new episode this month



Can't Shelf This Listens: 738

DECEMBER 2025

 **RAILS**
DIGITAL MARKETING
BOARD REPORT



FOLLOWERS

total subscribers

Facebook +33

2,913

Instagram +14

1,784

LinkedIn +32

2,303

REACH

accounts shown our content

Facebook +1,408

12,438

Instagram -69

1,522

LinkedIn -1,648

2,040

VIEWS

times our content was seen

Facebook +5,529

43,272

Instagram -1,414

8,969

LinkedIn -3,367

4,136

ENGAGEMENT

reactions, comments, and shares

Facebook +475

1,251

Instagram +88

363

LinkedIn -87

161

TOP POST

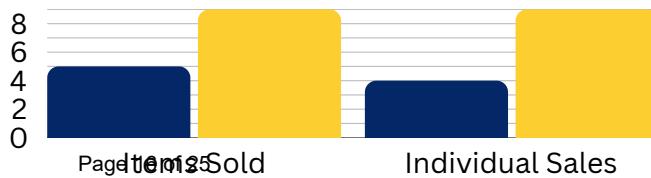
received the most engagement



RAILS Online Store

● November 2025

● December 2025



RAILS Minute Views: 12*

*no new episode this month



Can't Shelve This Listens: 697

Why can't my library buy more e-books and audiobooks?

Publishers put limits on library e-books & e-audiobooks



Print books are owned by the library and can be used for decades until they're worn out.

e-Books and digital audiobooks are licensed—libraries don't own them.

Plus, publishers put limits on how long the content can be used:

1 or 2 years or 26 or 52 checkouts

Once that limit is reached, libraries need to re-purchase the license at the same inflated price if they want to keep offering it to their community.

e-Content usage is increasing

In 2024, a mid-size, suburban public library saw:

25%

increase in e-book circulation

15%

increase in audiobook circulation

e-book and digital audiobook costs are too high for libraries, and access is limited.

It's unsustainable for libraries to continue to purchase digital content this way.

They're free for patrons to use, but not free for libraries to offer.

An average e-book costs a library **3.9x more** than what you would pay to buy it on your Kindle.

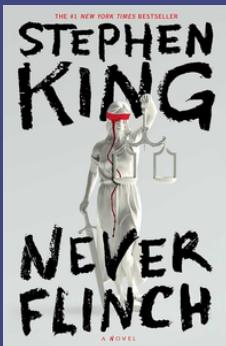


The cost per circulation of an electronic title is **3.7x higher** than a physical title.



Let's see some real-time examples:

*library costs reflect single user, 2-year limit agreement

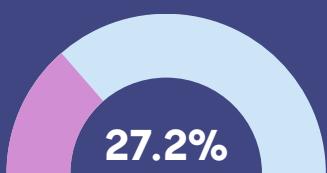


Format	Consumer Cost	Library Cost
Book	\$32.00	\$32.00
Phone	\$16.99	\$67.99
Headphones	\$19.99	\$84.99



Format	Consumer Cost	Library Cost
Book	\$32.00	\$29.00
Phone	\$14.99	\$55.00
Headphones	\$14.99	\$95.00

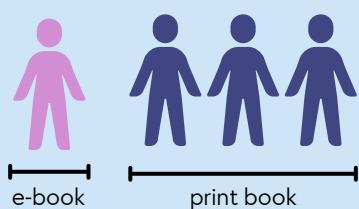
Sources: TS360, The Palace Marketplace, Amazon, and Apple Books



Source: LibraryJournal

Libraries spend nearly **one-third of their budget** on digital content so their patrons can enjoy these popular titles.

Three people could check out the same print book for **less than the cost of a single e-book checkout.**



How does this affect my community?



Hold wait lists will get even longer

Your wait times will increase



You'll have limited options

Libraries can't afford to buy the content your community wants



Libraries will reach their budget breaking point

Providing you with less for your tax dollars



Illinois is known for its leadership in support of libraries, but...

if publishers continue to control the terms of digital content for libraries, we'll see an erosion of resource sharing across the state. **We will lose one of the best things that makes Illinois stand out in the national library landscape.**

How you can help



Support future legislative efforts from the Illinois Library Association (ILA) to address the cost and limited terms of e-content.

www.ila.org/advocacy/legislative-issues/illinois-legislative-issues

Consortial Reports

January 26, 2026

Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI)

Staff

- Laurie Blandino has been named CARLI Director.

I-Share

- CARLI has been working with RAILS staff to assist as needed to implement Find More Illinois for additional I-Share members. As of December, there were eight I-Share libraries that have signed up for this program. *Editor's Note: As of January 16, nine I-Share libraries have signed up for the lender-only program.*
- The [CARLI I-Share Annual Statistics webpage](#) has been updated so that I-Share members may easily complete the Association for College and Research Libraries (ACRL) annual statistics as the Academic Library Survey is no longer part of IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System) data collection.

Other

- Trinity Christian College and Trinity International University have both announced that they will close by June 2026.
- CARLI continues its plan to implement TeamDynamix (TDX) for its email support ticketing system. This transition will happen in February 2026.

Cooperative Computer Services (CCS)

Rolling Meadows and Wauconda

The incoming libraries, CCS staff, and Innovative have agreed on Tuesday, October 20 as our target go live date. CCS received feedback that, while reducing time offline during a long weekend is beneficial, promoting library card signup month and then starting September in offline mode was challenging.

This schedule would tentatively put CCS libraries offline beginning October 16 (to be finalized in late August/early September).

Administrative onboarding is largely complete. Project team kick off will be February 5.

Rolling Meadows and Wauconda were both awarded Catalog Membership Grants from RAILS. These funds are instrumental in making consortium membership accessible to libraries given the high cost of vendor migration services.

Find More Illinois Analysis

Monica Harris, Joe Filapek, and Leila Heath attended the November Governing Board meeting to speak with CCS directors about Find More Illinois. Following the November Governing Board meeting, CCS is compiling additional information related to Find More Illinois. This work includes:

- Updating the existing Tableau dashboard with activity data from July–November 2025.
- Analyzing OCLC data to identify which libraries and types of materials are being borrowed and lent through that platform.
- Reviewing time tracking data to compare the time spent processing Find More Illinois requests versus OCLC requests.
- Compiling a brief FAQ based on questions raised during the November Governing Board meeting. CCS will request written responses from RAILS where needed.

This work will be completed in January and shared with both RAILS and Governing Board ahead of the February 2026 Governing Board vote.

OrangeBoy Savannah Implementation

Initial training for member library staff will begin in February. Configuration of additional data sources will continue through July, with updated training offered between April and July.

Bibliocommons Implementation

Database Management discussed and voted on a number of system configuration elements for BiblioCore. BiblioCommons is building individual CCS sites. Installation continues through February 13.

Polaris Contract Renewal

With the new discovery layer selected, CCS can now continue with contract negotiations with Innovative for our Polaris renewal. Our existing contract expires at the end of April 2026.

Polaris 8.0 Release

The CCS training server was upgraded to Polaris 8.0 on Tuesday, January 6. CCS staff will complete in-depth QA testing during January and February. We anticipate upgrading our production server to version 8.0 in March, pending successful QA testing.

New features available to CCS with the coming upgrade will include those available in both Polaris 7.8 and 8.0:

- Ability to import student records in Leap
- Receipt printing improvements in Leap
- Improved process for display item handling
- Support for patron code aging process
- Marc export in Leap

Prior to the production upgrade, CCS staff will work to identify which new settings and features require documentation or Advisory and Technical Group decisions.

Member Engagement Analysis

Debra Wischmeyer is leading an analysis of member engagement within CCS. The analysis will bring together data on:

- Meeting attendance
- Training attendance
- Training evaluations and quizzes
- Library visits

- Newsletter engagement
- Help desk tickets
- Listserv use

and more to create an engagement score for each member. The findings from her analysis will inform a long-term engagement strategy.

Technology Infrastructure Changes In Process

CCS will be transitioning from our physical phone server and analog phone lines for patron notices to a cloud-based service. Once the transition is complete, we will decommission that server and our dedicated fiber circuit in favor of shared business fiber for our main office. This will result in a significant cost savings that reflects our reduced need based our remaining local server and hybrid workplace. This work should be complete by early Spring 2026.

Enhanced Notice Options Coming

CCS will begin implementation of LX Starter, an email notice service included with our Polaris subscription. These enhanced notices allow more customization to the look and feel of notices which will be more reflective of patron expectations regarding email communication. CCS has partnered with five beta libraries to test these new options.

Website Accessibility Audit

Website accessibility remediation continues. CCS is working with our web site consultants to identify what tasks need to be outsourced and what can be completed internally.

Pinnacle Library Cooperative (PLC)

Innovative Director's Day Summit

Along with other LLSAP Directors, Matt attended Innovative's Director's Day Summit in Rosemont in December. The meeting brought together consortia directors and public library directors using iii products to discuss Clarivate's strategic vision for the future. Topics included navigating changes in Acquisitions and the use of AI in ILS products.

LX Starter

In January, the Lemont Library went live with LX Starter - the replacement product for email notices. At this time, we only have two libraries still using the ILS' default notices. We will be working with them in 2026 to transition to LX Starter.

Strategic Plan Meeting

In mid-January, Pinnacle will hold its annual strategic plan meeting. Every January, this meeting brings together key staff from member libraries, as well as committee chairs, to discuss Pinnacle's goals for the coming year. As we are nearing the end of our current strategic plan, we will also begin making plans for the next iteration.

PrairieCat

PrairieCat has been busy with many activities over the course of the last few months. Please see below for some highlights.

Member Services and UX

- PrairieCat's new mobile app, Vega Mobile, was brought live in October for 71 member libraries who opted in to join the project.
- PrairieCat welcomed 11 new directors this quarter and hosted a new director welcome meeting as well as providing direct outreach.
- PrairieCat hosted a virtual member update with more than 50 attendees to provide end-of-year project updates and to connect with members.
- User Experience staff created short video tutorials for the PrairieCat Libraries Mobile app.
- PrairieCat surveyed the mobile app libraries about the implementation and received very positive feedback when asked about communication, training, resources, and responsiveness during the implementation phase.
- PrairieCat began preparing for upcoming changes to Vega Discover including Account Portal and Account Linking.

Library Services

- Library services team has conducted multiple training sessions, including one-on-one sessions via Zoom.
- Multiple courses delivered through TalentLMS are undergoing revisions to improve content accuracy and relevance.
- Our team has processed numerous original cataloging requests, merged duplicate records, overlaid records, created volume entries, and linked items to their corresponding volume records. We have also managed the submission of records from various libraries through the PrairieCat bib-loading process, ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the database.
- John Slanicky, Jason Jensen, and Deborah Shippy worked collaboratively to address and resolve record duplication (fields: 019/001) resulting from the overlay of OCLC Connexion records into the database.
- We are approaching a final determination regarding the adoption of Mitinet as a replacement for MARCive, in order to strengthen database record maintenance and support ongoing standardization efforts.

Systems

- Staff solved problems with redundant backups failing. Principal backups are backed up a second time on another remote hosted location. These backups were failing, but this issue has been resolved.
- Finalized requirements for Net Support Notify iOS rollout.
- Worked with member libraries to upgrade three self check machines and add access to two new databases.
- Worked on improving skills with custom Sierra templates.
- Finalized and submitted the final set of instructions for the IP cleanup project
- Investigated ways to make distributing Net Support Notify (our remote emergency notification system) simpler for members and to have automated confirmation of installation.

Rock River Library Consortium (RRLC)

Grants to Consortia (Thank You)

Thank you to the RAILS staff and Board for approving grants to the consortia. RRLC greatly appreciates these funds, which help offset the costs of essential resources such as databases (including NoveList, Gale databases for schools, and the MyLibro app) and assist with paying annual ILS fees.

This fiscal year, RRLC allocated a portion of the grant to hire Mitinet for a comprehensive database cleanup. Our database has needed attention since RRLC's inception, when records from three public libraries were combined—some of which contained brief or inaccurate information. Because the consortium does not have a full-time cataloger, these issues have persisted. Mitinet will help correct these records and enhance them by adding missing series names and volume details. The first upload of updated records is scheduled in the coming weeks.

Chadwick Library

Chadwick Library continues its work to integrate its collection into the consortium. They have completed the juvenile collection, adult inspiration titles, and the 800–900 section, and are actively adding new books as they arrive. Patrons have been added to the system and are beginning to learn how to search the catalog and request materials from other consortium libraries.

Resource Sharing Alliance (RSA)

RSA Activity Report October - December 2025 or 'Let Chaos Reign'

RSA's Staff Independence Project (RIP) from RAILS "Complete"

RSA has done everything required, as far as we know, to employ, pay, and cover with appropriate benefits the staff transitioning from RAILS to RSA employment on 1 January 2026. We also completed the process to fill our 3 open positions, all of whom will start on 5 January 2026. Special note, as of this writing, we've paid various healthcare expenses, made our first payroll, and started training our 3 new employees.

In addition to staffing-related changes, we also purchased and set up 12 new laptops in late December, transitioned from Zoom to Teams, setup a new phone system, and setup a new Office 365 system and migrated our data off the RAILS O365 system into RSA's O365 system. RAILS IT was a HUGE help in the O365 setup/transition. We're still tracking new additional software and hardware solutions to completely move off everything RAILS owned by the end of June.

We're at the point where we expect to start finding the 'Unknown Unknowns' of employing staff. We'll deal with those as they come along.

RSA's new email domain is first.last@librariesofrsa.org. I'm now kendal.orrison@librariesofrsa.org.

In late November the Cisco router zero-day flaw hit us hard, with our firewall going down sometimes minutes after we got it back online. After a couple weeks of work, we finally nailed down the correct system settings to stop all the attacks that were triggering the firewall to go offline. We're in the process of building a new pfSense firewall which we'll deploy soon to get out of Cisco world.

Staff not involved in the big push to transition to direct RSA employment continued to support our member libraries in all the various ways they do so. They've all been troopers to put up with the chaotic

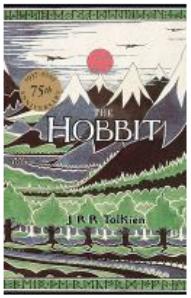
nature of a transition like this. I think we'll all be happy when we finally get to our new normal in a month or two.

System Wide Automated Network (SWAN)

Aspen Format Display

The 25.09 release introduced a new, optional change to the format display in the catalog. SWAN conducted testing with patrons from the Oak Park Public Library to investigate using the new display. Formats for titles display left to right instead of listed top to bottom. SWAN is conducting usability testing of the display to assess its readiness.

This new display in Aspen was sponsored software development by Gail Borden Public Library District.



1) The hobbit, or, There and back again

Author	Tolkien, J. R. R. (John Ronald Reuel), 1892-1973
Series	The Lord of the Rings Middle-Earth Universe Lord of the rings More Series...
Language	English
Appears on these lists	Staff Picks January 2021 Staff Picks July 2021 2023 Read Widely: Off the Map More Lists...

★★★★★

Book
ON SHELF
Large Print
AVAILABLE FROM ANOTHER LIBRARY
eBook
AVAILABLE ONLINE
AVAIL >

This Book is currently on shelf
2012. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt First Mariner Books edition, 75th anniversary edition. 300 pages : illustrations, maps ; 21 cm

Place Hold

Downers Grove Public Library - 2nd Floor - Adult SF/F TOLKIEN, J.R.R. 1 of 1 available	View All Locations
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Aspen keyword search filters

The 25.11 release included work that SWAN sponsored, based on work with the SWAN Discovery and User Experience Working Group to evaluate areas where keyword searching could be improved.

Aspen now has the ability to automatically apply filters based on keyword searches; for example a search for “pride and prejudice dvd” would strip the term “dvd” from the keywords and apply a format filter for DVD. This feature is very configurable, and SWAN can decide which keywords and filters to apply (or intentionally exclude).

Palace Project & Symphony authentication created

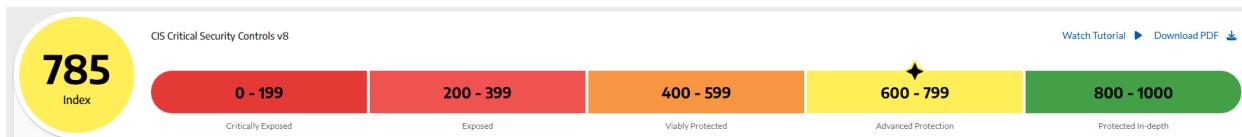
All SWAN eRead libraries are now live on the Palace Project app! The Boundless platform was officially retired on November 17th, and during the final two weeks of the November, the eRead collection was

migrated to the Palace Project app. SWAN eResources Consultant Olivia Montolin worked closely with SWAN IT & System Support and Lyrasis to ensure our preferred Web Services authentication method functioned correctly and helped to troubleshoot test barcodes for app access and checkout. The Web Services authentication method for Symphony and The Palace Project did not exist prior so congratulations to SWAN staff involved in creating this authentication method. Now other libraries using Symphony can connect securely to The Palace Project.

Arctic Wolf & Cybersecurity Assessment

A year ago, SWAN created a baseline assessment of our cybersecurity using preparedness using a tracking tool provided by Arctic Wolf, our security and managed awareness vendor. The Cyber Resilience Assessment measures security against Center for Internet Security (CIS) Critical Security Controls version 8's security categories and provides a score. Since establishing the baseline, our Network Security Administrator and IT & System Support Manager have been working to shore up our security according to the recommendations of the assessment.

Since starting this project, we have significantly increased our cybersecurity preparedness. Our score as of December 2024 was 468, putting us in the Viable Protected category. As of December 2025, we are at a score of 785, towards the top end of the "Advanced Protection" range.



Besides the security monitoring and the assessment tool, Arctic Wolf provides a service called Managed Security Awareness that provides security training to SWAN staff on a bi-weekly basis and phishing simulations. Response to these trainings have been positive, and staff are largely up to date on the program. We hope that this level of knowledge further protects SWAN's and our members' sensitive information.