

DATE: April 17, 2026
TO: RAILS Board of Directors
FROM: Monica Harris, Executive Director
SUBJECT: Draft FY2027 Operational Plan

OVERVIEW:

As operational planning for FY2027 is underway, we are pleased to present this draft operational plan. This document outlines the strategic direction of RAILS for the coming year and is organized according to the last strategic plan goals and objectives. Developed through a collaborative effort, it reflects the expertise of Director of Marketing and Communications Dan Bostrom, and valuable input from the Executive Team and staff.

The Illinois State Library has instructed us to submit an operational plan and budget based on annual revenue of approximately \$11,871,713, which is funding from the Area and Per Capita Grant. This does not include additional projected revenue of just under \$4.5 million, consisting chiefly of reimbursement revenue, fees from services and materials (including eRead Illinois and the ILDS contract), and investment income of approximately \$815,000.

In keeping with our process in previous years, what you see here is not a final budget. We will present a final proposed detailed budget at our May board meeting. We are still finalizing the anticipated costs of inflation, vehicles, and fuel, and salary increases, as well as details for potential expanded services. What you will see below are some compiled highlights and considerations as we currently understand them. We look forward to discussing these with the Board at the April meeting.

INCREASED EXPENSES:

Healthcare costs continue to increase, with an overall increase of roughly 13% for this year. We also expect increases in property and casualty insurance premiums for FY2027.

Replacement vehicles remain a priority for FY27 with the purchase of 8 Ford Transits and 2 Box Trucks to replace end-of-life vehicles in our fleet. We are working with Central Management Services (CMS) approved dealerships on the ability to place these requests, but pricing on these vehicles has increased significantly in recent years. At least \$630,000 will be budgeted for vehicle replacement. In consideration of the needs identified by the capital assessment at our Burr Ridge and Coal Valley properties as well as needs at other RAILS locations, some facilities upgrades are also needed. These include new carpeting in East Peoria and a new septic tank in Coal Valley. In Burr Ridge we are budgeting for continued work on the server room reconfiguration.

We also expect to see increases in utilities, fuel costs, vehicle insurance, and contractual services.

NEW SERVICES:

Through the FY2027 Draft Operational Plan, you'll see several examples of new or expanded initiatives in response to member needs, in addition to ongoing efforts. These initiatives come straight from our strategic plan, as well as our purpose as described in the Illinois Library System Act. Our goal, as always, is exemplary resource sharing, future ready libraries, inclusive best practice, and growing partnership opportunities.

Several examples of these expanded services are highlighted below:

Advocacy and Leadership:

Development of a new 2027-2029 strategic plan with expansive feedback from the RAILS membership.

Publicize the requirement for library boards to vote annually on participation in the nonresident program and for members to update their participation information via L2. Publicize the names of participating/nonparticipating libraries and share with ISL per statutory requirements.

Broadband:

Continue to partner with Cook County Digital Equity to support suburban Cook County libraries' digital navigation services and projects. Ensure that materials and models are adaptable and reusable for non-Cook County libraries.

Collaborate with the Illinois Heartland Library System to facilitate RAILS member libraries' access to their laptop lending program.

Continue to partner with the Digital Equity Action Research Lab at University of Illinois' iSchool to investigate libraries' capacity to provide digital inclusion services.

Data Driven Analysis and Evaluation:

Host the second Libraries Count: RAILS Data Conference event. This event will include hands-on data workshops to help libraries become more familiar with their data.

Implement a data request ticket system to better track, triage, and support data projects, tasks, and collaborations across RAILS' departments and strategic initiatives.

Continue progress on RAILCAR, a data collection and analysis tool designed to supplement existing data related to LLSAPs and library automation. This tool is integrated into the processes for both the LLSAP Support and Catalog Membership Grants.

Continue development of the *Anatomy of a Public Library* demographic profile project

Continue to refine the RAILS Resource Sharing Map and add new features for member libraries.

Delivery:

Add new vehicle trackers to delivery trucks to help monitor vehicles.

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

Purchase ten (10) new additional delivery vehicles to replace the aging fleet.

eRead Illinois: The Palace Project

Publicize The Palace Project as being free (courtesy of RAILS) to all Illinois libraries.

Develop onboarding procedures and recruit non-eRead Illinois libraries into The Palace Project app.

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility:

Continue to develop RAILS Vendor Privacy Policies and VPAT (Vendor Product Accessibility Template) web pages with links to policies and VPATs for third-party vendors providing e-resources to public libraries.

Develop internal documentation in conjunction with new ethical AI policy

Find More Illinois (FMI):

Work with out-of-state library serving organizations to expand FMI.

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

Create and implement a new FMI dashboard to help member libraries gather and analyze data.

Member Engagement:

Continue to work with statewide stakeholders to evaluate feedback from the first RAILS Catalyst cohort, to refine and plan for the second iteration of this leadership development program.

Work with statewide stakeholders to plan and offer the Directors University Advanced to offer intermediate-level training for library directors.

RAILS Infrastructure:

Replace aging climate control systems in the Burr Ridge datacenter.

Complete keyless entry security upgrades for all RAILS Service centers.

CONCLUSION:

In anticipation of our April meeting, we look forward to delving into the draft Operational Plan with the Board. This plan reinforces our continuing commitment to fiscal responsibility and service excellence for member libraries. By aligning our goals with the evolving needs of our libraries, we are positioned to strengthen the RAILS network and uphold our mandate to the libraries we serve.

RAILS FY 2027 System Area and Per Capita Grant Application

3.0 System Operational Plan

The Reaching Across Illinois Library System’s (RAILS) operational plan for FY 2027 is rooted in the assumption that all libraries will continue to benefit from our collective strength.

When we say “thriving libraries are essential to all who learn, live, or work in Illinois,” we mean that libraries find meaningful connections to people’s lives. The primary way that we can accomplish this is by making libraries more connected to their communities.

In the plan below, you will find many examples of RAILS staff going above and beyond to bring libraries together. Some notable examples:

- Finding new ways to expand usage and integrate libraries into The Palace Project program after the transition from Baker & Taylor’s Boundless product
- The continuation of a partnership with Cook County that will bring \$850k to public libraries for digital equity
- Working directly with members to expand deals & discount offerings
- Growing the Find More Illinois program which makes interlibrary loan faster and easier
- Creating new advocacy efforts to help libraries tell their story
- Continuing to build new ways for libraries to learn and grow as leaders
- Expanding libraries’ comfort with data and providing leadership around data storytelling

Member libraries require us to lead regional coordination and facilitate collaboration. We drive progress by bringing members together, while ensuring our work stays aligned with their local priorities through consistent feedback.

One important note about FY2027: we are currently under way with a strategic plan revision. Although we will likely keep the same strategic goals in place, we will be seeking member input into new objectives. Our goal is to have a new plan approved by the RAILS Board in November 2026 for calendar years 2027-2029.

With a new plan in place and the momentum we already have, we are confident that RAILS will continue to help libraries to thrive.

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

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
Enhance the sharing of knowledge and best practices through member networking and	Plan/schedule virtual and in-person networking opportunities for staff at all levels at all sizes and types of libraries (academic, public, school, and specialized) to share best practices on a variety of topics.	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
<p>communications between all types of libraries.</p>	<p>Work with statewide partners, including the Association of Illinois School Library Educators (AISLE), Illinois Association of College & Research Libraries (IACRL), Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS), Illinois Library Association (ILA), Association for Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T) Midwest Chapter and others to plan networking opportunities for staff at different levels from different types of libraries and for public library trustees.</p> <p>Publicize existing RAILS networking groups and the benefits of belonging to a networking group to all levels of staff at all types and sizes of libraries.</p> <p>Assist in the formation of new RAILS networking groups as needed.</p> <p>Continue to build and strengthen relationships and engagement with RAILS networking groups. Attend networking group meetings as appropriate to share the latest RAILS news and gather feedback on RAILS programs/services.</p> <p>Continue to offer to academic & school mixer program to encourage cross-library collaboration.</p> <p>Continue with plans to offer member groups the opportunity to meet in person at RAILS service centers as possible.</p> <p>Encourage use of RAILS mailing lists, including lists geared toward different library types and sizes, and staff at all levels.</p> <p>Establish new mailing lists as needed. Sunset lists that aren't being used.</p>	
<p>Leverage economies of scale to provide greater purchasing power for member libraries so they can offer more resources to their users than libraries would be able to afford on their own.</p>	<p>Continue to expand the RAILS discount and group purchase program by offering new deals for member libraries of all sizes and types as possible. Target publicity and continue to develop new channels to help ensure that members know about specific, relevant offers available.</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>Gather input from members at all types and sizes of libraries on desired discounts/group purchases. Implement new offerings in response to this feedback as possible.</p> <p>Work with statewide partners – including those at the Secretary of State’s Office/Illinois State Library - to promote availability of the statewide electronic resources package.</p> <p>Continue to streamline and develop processes, including the comprehensive Consortia Manager platform, to manage RAILS group purchases and discounts.</p> <p>Develop standards and metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of the Deals & Discounts program. Widely publicize member savings to demonstrate the program’s impact.</p> <p>Continue to negotiate, explore and build partnership approaches to maximize savings for members.</p> <p>Network with group purchasing managers in Illinois and nationwide to share knowledge, explore new opportunities and develop best practices.</p> <p>Continue to engage and inform members about deals & discounts through new email lists created specifically for staff from libraries that handle purchasing.</p> <p>Continue to work with member advisory groups to explore, assess and inform potential new deals & discounts</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Online High School Programs</p> <p>Continue to subsidize the management of the COHS and Gale: Excel Adult High School platforms to enable libraries to offer adult learners accredited high school diplomas and career certificates.</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>Explore additional ways to expand and promote the COHS and Gale: Excel Adult High School programs, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeting libraries not yet participating in the program with large populations of adults who have not received a high school diploma • Targeting youth services library staff to help them promote the program to young parents without a high school diploma 	
<p>RAILS will continue to seek greater efficiencies, innovations, and enhancements to delivery services.</p>	<p>Work with RAILS members of all sizes and types to determine the most appropriate delivery method to meet their needs.</p> <p>Purchase 10 additional delivery vehicles to replace the aging fleet.</p> <p>Consult with members on delivery issues/concerns on an ongoing basis. Widely promote the use of the delivery help desk.</p> <p>Promote the need for RAILS members to complete quarterly delivery volume counts. Consult with libraries individually as needed.</p> <p>Add new vehicle trackers to delivery trucks to help monitor vehicles.</p> <p>Continue discussions with RAILS Consortia Committee about finding new ways to utilize data to get an accurate count for delivery.</p> <p>Develop strategies to improve and achieve total compliance with quarterly delivery counts to get more accurate information on delivery volume. Examine count data to determine potential changes to existing delivery routes and best practices.</p> <p>Continue to explore additional opportunities to automate delivery processes to streamline services and improve efficiency.</p> <p>Continue providing high-quality statewide delivery services to CARLI (Consortium of Academic & Research Libraries in Illinois) members via ILDS (Illinois Library Delivery Service).</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>Continue working with GeoMARC (formerly Laboratory for Applied Spatial Analysis) on potential future improvements to RAILS delivery service, including delivery route efficiencies.</p>	
<p>Work collaboratively with members, the Illinois Heartland Library System, and the Illinois State Library to identify and support appropriate and affordable shared catalog solutions and expand resource sharing to all libraries and residents.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">General</p> <p>Work with the RAILS Resource Sharing Committee to ensure sustainable, equitable resource sharing to help meet the first goal of the RAILS strategic plan. Promote/encourage the use of Find More Illinois statewide to help achieve this goal.</p> <p>Collaborate with the Illinois State Library (ISL), IHLS, Chicago Public Library System (CPLS), AISLE, CARLI, IACRL, ILA, SLA Illinois, and other stakeholders to expand resource sharing in Illinois.</p> <p>Collaborate with and support the work of the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC).</p> <p>Continue to review the RAILS Resource Sharing Plan to reflect new legislation and updated areas of focus.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Promote/Support LLSAP Membership</p> <p>Continue to support six LLSAPs (CCS, Pinnacle, PrairieCat, Rock River Library Consortium, RSA, and SWAN) financially via the LLSAP Support Grant, as well as offering the use of RAILS meeting spaces and other services. Continue to maintain open lines of communication and leverage organizational partnerships with LLSAPs to collectively enhance services to libraries.</p> <p>Continue to offer the Catalog Membership Grant to fund one-time costs for libraries wishing to join an LLSAP, with ongoing evaluation and adjustment of the grant process framework to maximize support to nonautomated libraries.</p> <p>Promote the value of consortium membership to all types and sizes of RAILS libraries via RAILS</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>communication tools, committee work, and member encounters.</p> <p>Continue to work with RAILS Consortia Committee to investigate and recommend ways to improve and grow consortial services in Illinois.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Expand and Promote Find More Illinois (FMI)</p> <p>Recruit libraries to join FMI.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target promotions at libraries that would grow and enhance resources available through FMI. <p>Continue to promote the growth of FMI, including developing new recruitment strategies.</p> <p>Continue onboarding CCS libraries into the FMI program.</p> <p>Continue expanding the Academic Library Lender Only Pilot Program.</p> <p>Enhance the FMI program with add-on services as appropriate. Implement operational efficiencies as the program grows.</p> <p>Provide training, consulting, and technical support to FMI libraries.</p> <p>Work with out-of-state library serving organizations to expand FMI.</p> <p>Evaluate and revise the FMI participation fee structure to ensure ongoing value to members of all types and sizes.</p> <p>Promote FMI through new branding and materials to help member libraries market the service.</p> <p>Create and implement new FMI dashboard to help member libraries gather and analyze data.</p> <p>Establish a FMI user group and/or committee working group to incorporate member feedback to</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>assist with providing insights into recruitment, program enhancements, and best practices for participants.</p> <p>Continue in communication with the Systems (CPLS and IHLS) about the benefits of participation in FMI.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Support High-Quality Cataloging</p> <p>Continue to develop, update, and deliver training courses and presentations on cataloging, classification, and metadata topics to RAILS members via Zoom webinars, Niche Academy, and the Moodle platform.</p> <p>Work with IHLS, SHARE, and the Cataloging Maintenance Center to cross-promote cataloging training and ensure complementary offerings and schedules.</p> <p>Continue support and consulting in cataloging-related activities for eRead Illinois and Find More Illinois.</p> <p>Continue creating and maintaining cataloging guidance for members, including the Best Practices for Consortial Cataloging and Cataloging Staff Competencies documents.</p> <p>Collaborate with IHLS and the iCamp committee to coordinate and manage the mentorship program, expanding participation and enhancing program resources. Implement quarterly feedback surveys to continuously improve the support provided to mentors and mentees.</p> <p>Continue to explore participation in the Library of Congress' Program for Cooperative Cataloging and its Name Authority Cooperative Program for South Asian materials.</p> <p>Continue offering World Language Cataloging Service as detailed below and evaluate its impact to identify opportunities for improvement.</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p style="text-align: center;">eRead Illinois The Palace Project</p> <p>Recruit RAILS libraries and IHLS non-SHARE libraries to join eRead Illinois.</p> <p>Support the training and marketing needs of eRead Illinois participants.</p> <p>Publicize The Palace Project as being free (courtesy of RAILS) to all Illinois libraries.</p> <p>Provide current information on The Palace Project for IHLS to share with their member libraries.</p> <p>Continue to onboard K-12 libraries to The Palace Project.</p> <p>Develop onboarding procedures and recruit non-eRead Illinois libraries into The Palace Project app.</p> <p>Continue to work with vendor to improve The Palace Project platform/app in response to member feedback.</p> <p>Evaluate eRead Illinois content to ensure that it continues to meet member needs. (See also EDI section below.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly seek input from eRead participants on the collection and implement member suggestions as possible. <p>Network with e-content managers in Illinois and nationwide to share and stay abreast of new developments and initiatives.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Inkie.org Library</p> <p>Continue to develop and promote the Inkie.org Library program to support self-publishing, Illinois authors, and Illinois e-content statewide.</p> <p>Continue offering group purchase pricing on BiblioBoard products for self-published authors.</p> <p>Publicize Inkie.org Library resources as being free (courtesy of RAILS) to all Illinois libraries and to all</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>Illinois residents, including those not served by a public library.</p> <p>Provide current information on available resources for IHLS to share with their member libraries.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Explore More Illinois (EMI)</p> <p>Continue to grow/expand the number and types of participating attractions. Collaborate with CPLS and IHLS to recruit attractions.</p> <p>Collaborate with CPLS and IHLS to publicize EMI to all Illinois public libraries and to encourage them to participate.</p> <p>Network with ePass (EMI’s software) administrators nationwide to explore new opportunities and solutions and to share best practices.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Other E-Resources Initiatives</p> <p>Continue to develop RAILS Vendor Privacy Policies and VPAT (Vendor Product Accessibility Template) web pages with links to policies and VPATs for third-party vendors providing e-resources to public libraries.</p> <p>Compile and share information to support member libraries in meeting e-resource accessibility standards.</p> <p>Continue to stay abreast of statewide and national E-Content initiatives.</p> <p>Support statewide efforts and legislation related to favorable pricing for e-books and e-audiobooks for libraries.</p> <p>Partner with other library organizations nationwide to continue dialogue with publishers on need for better e-book access/pricing for libraries/consortia.</p>	

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

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

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>Include EDI elements in RAILS grants for members (CE Event grants, My Library Is... grants, etc.) when possible, to encourage applicants to provide equitable, diverse, inclusive, and accessible programs/services and to publicize these offerings to their communities.</p>	
<p>Examine all aspects of RAILS policies, procedures, and core services through an equity lens and make needed improvements.</p>	<p>Continue to grow and develop RAILS' external and internal EDI strategies and initiatives.</p> <p>Continue conducting a thorough analysis/evaluation of RAILS Employee Handbook to ensure that all language and policies meet our EDI goals.</p> <p>Continue the work of the RAILS Climate Team to identify and implement internal best practices and initiatives for RAILS staff.</p> <p>Continue holding regular EDI training sessions for RAILS staff.</p> <p>Continue EDI training specifically for Delivery staff that can be recorded and incorporated into onboarding for new staff.</p> <p>Develop EDI training specifically for RAILS hiring managers that focuses on best practices in recruitment, evaluation, and staff retention.</p>	
<p>Work with RAILS members of all types to identify and implement ways to diversify library governing bodies and staff to increase representation and better reflect the communities they serve.</p>	<p>Continue to work with the RAILS Board Nominating Committee and others to attract diverse candidates to run for the RAILS Board. Promote RAILS' goal to develop a more diverse board in election publicity.</p> <p>Provide training/consulting/guidance for member libraries of all types to help them develop a more diverse and representative board.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for libraries of all types to share best practices and strategies they have used to diversify their governing boards, including via the RAILS EDI Pulse Page and email list.</p> <p>Provide training for RAILS members to help them diversify their hiring and recruitment practices.</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	Provide opportunities/tools for members to share strategies they have used to recruit a more diverse staff, including the EDI mailing list and the EDI Pulse Page.	

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

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
Leveraging RAILS' power and influence in the Illinois library community, work collaboratively for additional funding for all types of libraries to ensure that libraries have the staffing, technology, and infrastructure needed to offer essential and cutting-edge services to their communities	<p>Provide CE/consulting/tools to help libraries with different aspects of fundraising, including how to advocate for additional/continued funding from library administrators, funders, etc.</p> <p>Continue to schedule regular meetings with AISLE, Chicago Public Schools (CPS), IHLS, ILA, and ISL to discuss collaborative projects to help school libraries deal with funding challenges, understand legal/policy changes, and create new resources to help address issues.</p> <p>Participate in a wide variety of efforts to help advocate for continued/increased funding for all types of libraries, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ILA Legislative Meetups • Responding to American Library Association (ALA) calls to actions • Continuing to work with the ILA Public Policy and Advocacy Committees to discuss legislation of importance to libraries <p>Keep RAILS libraries informed of important legislative developments affecting libraries.</p> <p>Publicize opportunities for staff from member libraries to advocate for continued/increased funding for libraries as appropriate, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging members to attend ILA Legislative Meetups • Encouraging members to respond to ALA calls to action • Encouraging members to contact their elected officials as appropriate and 	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>providing talking points on specific issues and programs as possible</p> <p>Support AISLE’s statewide efforts to increase the number of certified school librarians through the development of advocacy tools and continued development of the SLATE project.</p> <p>Continue to advocate for a trustee training requirement for public library boards.</p> <p>Assist with libraries in disaster preparedness and addressing crisis situations.</p> <p>Work with the RAILS Board Advocacy Committee to educate the board about issues affecting RAILS and libraries that may require their advocacy efforts locally, regionally, or nationally.</p>	
<p>Help member libraries of all types and sizes demonstrate their value to their different stakeholders.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Advocacy Efforts</p> <p>Bring the My Library Is... campaign to a close. Move My Library Is... blog materials to a new RAILS-branded blog. Move other My Library Is... materials to new advocacy section of RAILS website.</p> <p>Continue to encourage staff at all levels from all types and sizes of libraries to contribute posts to the RAILS blog to share best practices in telling the library story.</p> <p>Continue offering grants to help libraries with limited resources to tell their stories more effectively.</p> <p>Continue to work with IHLS to further expand and publicize advocacy efforts to staff at all types and sizes of libraries statewide.</p> <p>Continue to work with AISLE, CARLI, IACRL, ILA, SLA-IL, and other stakeholders on common goals/ activities to avoid duplication of efforts.</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>Engage with marketing/communications staff from member libraries to ensure that they have access to advocacy materials.</p> <p>(See additional campaign activities in previous section.)</p>	
<p>Professional development and member engagement efforts are future-focused, crossing library types and specific to individual library type needs.</p>	<p>Provide CE/consulting on general resource sharing issues identified in the administrative rules, including interlibrary loan, the ILLINET Interlibrary Loan Code, nonresident services, the RAILS Resource Sharing Policy, etc.</p> <p>Provide CE/consulting on library advocacy, management and practice, and other core service areas identified in the administrative rules.</p> <p>Provide CE/consulting to help libraries meet per capita grant requirements and standards for their type of library.</p> <p>Offer CE/consulting assistance and other resources to help libraries of all types and sizes to develop/maintain a current strategic plan.</p> <p>Identify/monitor issues, trends, and challenges affecting libraries of all types and sizes and provide CE/consulting to help libraries respond to these issues and challenges.</p> <p>Continue to develop Library Pulse pages on the RAILS website to help members respond to current issues, challenges, and trends.</p> <p>Continue to gather member input on CE needs from all sizes and types of RAILS libraries and implement training to meet those needs.</p> <p>Continue to partner with AISLE to identify training needs for school library staff and to offer joint CE opportunities based on that feedback.</p> <p>Continue offering PHD credits for school librarians using PD+.</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>Work with statewide stakeholders to plan and offer Directors University, the statewide training initiative for new public library directors. Publicize widely.</p> <p>Work with statewide stakeholders to plan and offer Directors University Advanced to offer intermediate-level training for library directors. Publicize widely.</p> <p>Work with statewide stakeholders to plan and offer Directors University on Demand to offer online, asynchronous training for library directors. Publicize widely.</p> <p>Continue to work with statewide stakeholders to evaluate feedback from the first RAILS Catalyst cohort, to refine and plan for the second iteration of this leadership development program.</p> <p>Continue partnership with United for Libraries to provide statewide, online, on-demand trustee training. Publicize training widely.</p> <p>Continue to transition library staff to using RAILS Academy for trainings and webinars. Consistently and routinely update RAILS Academy to offer a wide variety of asynchronous, on-demand training in core library functions for staff at all levels.</p> <p>Continue to support the iLEAD Trustee Learning Portal.</p> <p>Consult with/attend library board meetings as appropriate to help boards meet legal requirements and to develop leadership skills.</p> <p>Continue partnership with HR Source to provide CE and discounted membership. Publicize widely.</p> <p>Continue partnership with Ancel Glink to offer statewide FOIA/OMA hotline. Publicize widely.</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard

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

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
<p>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.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Service Standards</p> <p>Continue conversations with ISL, IHLS, ILA and other partners to explore possibility of revising system membership standards to help libraries of all types provide better service to their communities.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">L2 (Library Directory and Learning Calendar)</p> <p>Ask ISL to continue to provide continued grant funding to support L2.</p> <p>Continue to provide statewide leadership for L2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host, maintain, and develop additional features. • Provide ongoing user support and documentation to library staff, networking groups, and sponsor organizations (LLSAPs, ISL, library systems). • Ensure compliance with web accessibility requirements and implement enhancements as needed • Update and maintain externally sourced directory data. • Provide technical support, ongoing reporting, and any necessary development for annual library certification • Facilitate the statewide advisory group (L2G2) and participation in the Intercept open-source community. <p>Continue to contract with Aten Design Group for L2 support and development.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Certification</p> <p>Work with ISL, IHLS, and other partners to improve and enhance the annual certification process.</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>Work with RAILS members to ensure that they complete the certification process.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Other Collaborative Initiatives</p> <p>RAILS Executive Director continues to serve on Illinois State Library Advisory Committee.</p> <p>Work with CPLS and IHLS to schedule meetings and other get-togethers for system staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule regular meetings to discuss statewide services and ideas for collaborating to promote those services. <p>Continue to schedule regular meetings with AISLE, CPS, IHLS, ILA, ISL, CARLI and others as appropriate to discuss collaborative projects to benefit school libraries as referenced above.</p> <p>Collaborate with AISLE, IHLS, ILA, and ISL to plan Illinois School Library Workers Symposium, supporting individuals working in school libraries with no formal library education.</p> <p>Collaborate with AISLE, IHLS, CARLI, ILA, and others to continue volunteer regional response teams to help libraries facing materials challenges.</p> <p>Continue providing leadership and support to Illinois special libraries community, including the potential creation of an ILA special librarians forum.</p> <p>Continue regular meetings with the Commissioner of the Chicago Public Library to discuss collaboration possibilities.</p> <p>Continue regular meetings with the Executive Director of CARLI to discuss collaboration possibilities.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Broadband & Digital Equity</p> <p>Continue to engage and provide leadership in statewide efforts focused on broadband expansion, technology adoption, and digital equity issues,</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>including continued service representing libraries on the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity’s Broadband Advisory Council.</p> <p>Continue to partner with Cook County Digital Equity to support suburban Cook County libraries’ digital navigation services and projects. Ensure that materials and models are adaptable and reusable for non-Cook County libraries.</p> <p>Continue to update library staff on statewide projects including funding opportunities, legislative efforts, and ways for libraries to provide feedback on and participate in broadband and digital equity initiatives. Produce content which demonstrates the importance of the issue to libraries.</p> <p>Collaborate with Illinois Heartland Library System to facilitate RAILS member libraries’ access to their laptop lending program.</p> <p>Partner on grant initiatives, presentations, and other projects with library-related organizations to improve broadband and digital equity in the state of Illinois.</p> <p>Continue to partner with the Digital Equity Action Research Lab at University of Illinois’ iSchool to investigate libraries’ capacity to provide digital inclusion services.</p> <p>Provide as-needed consultation and develop new offerings that support libraries’ digital inclusion services, staff competencies, partnerships, and participation in E-Rate.</p>	
<p>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.</p>	<p>Develop new targeted email communications for specific library types.</p> <p>Mail promotional pieces to libraries not receiving RAILS delivery as appropriate to ensure they are aware of the programs/services available to them.</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>Continue to meet with AISLE, CPS, IHLS, ILA, and ISL to address the needs of school libraries as referenced above.</p> <p>Continue to work with other stakeholders statewide and beyond on school library data project. (See next section.)</p> <p>(See also Communications section below.)</p>	
<p>Continuously evaluate RAILS programs and services to ensure that they are having an impact and are helping to create the best possible future for all member libraries</p>	<p>Continue to work with AISLE, CPS, IHLS, ILA, ISL, and other stakeholders statewide on the SLATE project including library staff, administrators, boards, and other about the importance of school libraries and the need to support and fund them.</p> <p>Continue to improve and expand the SLATE data dashboard through the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Census data collection project • Direct member feedback • Continued development of expanded features and functions <p>Continue developing a roadmap for a centralized data hub to coordinate and manage data sources used to support RAILS’ services to members and staff.</p> <p>Create documentation of requirements, maintenance, governance, and access to core data sources used by RAILS staff.</p> <p>Enhance and expand staff training on data literacy and proper data usage.</p> <p>Implement a data request ticket system to better track, triage, and support data projects, tasks, and collaborations across RAILS’ departments and strategic initiatives.</p> <p>Continue progress on RAILCAR, a data collection and analysis tool designed to supplement existing data related to LLSAPs and library automation. This tool is integrated into the processes for both the LLSAP Support and Catalog Membership Grants.</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>Continue to refine the RAILS Resource Sharing Map and add new features for member libraries.</p> <p>Continue to develop content and plan for the release of a new data-related website connected to the main RAILS website.</p> <p>Continue development of the <i>Anatomy of a Public Library</i> demographic profile project</p> <p>Work with Delivery to modernize route maps and analysis</p> <p>Support the Palace Project with various data analysis projects to assess performance and ordering trends</p> <p>Host the second Libraries Count: RAILS Data Conference event. This event will include hands-on data workshops to help libraries become more familiar with their data.</p> <p>Continue to refine the Find More Illinois and Explore More Illinois data dashboards. Develop and maintain dashboards for other RAILS services and projects as appropriate.</p> <p>Continue to solicit member feedback via RAILS communication tools, surveys, and member encounters. Implement changes/additions to RAILS programs/services based on member input as appropriate. Ensure that we are getting feedback from libraries of all types and sizes in all geographic areas of the system.</p> <p>(See other sections of this document for plans to gather and respond to member feedback on specific RAILS programs/services.)</p>	
<p>Collaborate with the Illinois State Library, the Illinois Heartland Library System, and other partners to develop a plan and timeline for achieving universal service.</p>	<p>Continue to work with the RAILS Board Universal Service Committee to find and implement solutions to challenges related to the unserved in Illinois.</p> <p>Explore the role of community college libraries in meeting the needs of the unserved</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>Review previous legislative attempts towards universal service and consider legislative proposals to PPC during FY27.</p> <p>Continue to work with statewide partners to seek legislative support for statewide access to electronic resources for all Illinois residents, including the unserved.</p> <p>Publicize requirement for library boards to vote annually on participation in the nonresident program and for members to update their participation information via L2. Publicize the names of participating/nonparticipating libraries and share with ISL per statutory requirements.</p> <p>Identify member libraries who have not updated their L2 non-resident info in over 18 months. Coordinate outreach to those libraries to receive updated information.</p>	

Other Administrative Activities

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

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
<p>Engage and communicate with members and potential members from all types of libraries throughout the RAILS area to ensure they are aware of system programs/ services of benefit to them and to better understand, anticipate, and meet their needs.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Member Recruitment</p> <p>Engage with libraries of all types that express an interest in RAILS membership.</p> <p>Visit potential members to ensure they meet membership criteria.</p> <p>Work with RAILS Board on new member recommendations for approval by ISL.</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p data-bbox="565 235 1133 266">General Member Communication/Engagement</p> <p data-bbox="548 306 1105 405">Promote available programs/services via RAILS communication tools and member visits, including:</p> <ul data-bbox="565 415 1149 1493" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="565 415 781 443">• RAILS website <li data-bbox="565 453 873 480">• Weekly <i>RAILS E-News</i> <li data-bbox="565 491 878 518">• Social media channels <li data-bbox="565 529 1149 663">• Visiting as many members as possible, either virtually or in person, concentrating on libraries that RAILS has not visited or had any correspondence with in the past two years <li data-bbox="565 674 1117 732">• Offering online site visits to any interested library to remind them of system benefits <li data-bbox="565 743 1094 802">• Offering to attend a meeting of all RAILS networking groups as specified above <li data-bbox="565 812 1045 840">• Scheduling regular member updates <li data-bbox="565 850 1114 987">• Using available type of library mailing lists and lists for different levels of staff to communicate about specific programs/ services of interest <li data-bbox="565 997 1101 1056">• Offering “New Director Welcome” online discussions <li data-bbox="565 1066 1127 1165">• Sending all new RAILS library directors a welcome communication to acquaint them with system programs/services <li data-bbox="565 1176 1146 1274">• Continuing to feature “RAILS Minute” videos with the RAILS Executive Director highlighting the latest system news <li data-bbox="565 1285 1118 1383">• Exhibiting at library conferences, including conferences for different types of libraries and different levels of staff <li data-bbox="565 1394 1081 1493">• Presenting programs at library-related conferences as appropriate to promote RAILS programs/services <p data-bbox="548 1535 1089 1596">Contract for continued support for new RAILS website, to include:</p> <ul data-bbox="565 1606 1117 1743" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="565 1606 1117 1633">• Custom development of Gutenberg editor <li data-bbox="565 1644 1078 1743">• Miscellaneous design tweaks, feature development, and software and server updates <p data-bbox="548 1785 1089 1845">Develop new in-house marketing plan to help prioritize marketing efforts.</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>In collaboration with Resource Sharing team, develop new member benefit letter/ROI statement for member libraries.</p> <p>Continue to make improvements to the weekly <i>RAILS E-News</i>.</p> <p>Gather feedback from different levels of staff (including non-librarians) on how RAILS can communicate with them more effectively. Develop strategies to respond to this feedback.</p>	
<p>Engage and communicate with the RAILS Board of Directors to ensure that they are aware of RAILS programs and services, that they can serve as ambassadors for RAILS, and that their service on the board is as rewarding as possible.</p>	<p>Communicate regularly with the board through the RAILS board mailing list and other means.</p> <p>Ensure that the board is aware of RAILS' progress in meeting the goals and objectives of our new strategic plan.</p> <p>Keep board informed about important issues for RAILS and for libraries of all types. Provide talking points for communicating with members about RAILS programs/services.</p> <p>Plan/implement orientation session at Burr Ridge service center for all new RAILS Board members. Invite existing board members to attend for a refresher.</p> <p>Schedule board meetings in different parts of the RAILS area as possible so the board can learn about different areas of the system and meet members from different areas.</p> <p>Continue to promote and encourage diversity on the RAILS Board as referenced above.</p> <p>Support board conference/meeting attendance as appropriate.</p> <p>Work with RAILS Board Policy Committee to establish schedule for regular review of RAILS policies.</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
<p>Recruit RAILS staff as needed to meet roles specified in administrative rules and to support strategic plan goals and objectives. Actively seek a diverse staff in terms of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identify, and other factors.</p>	<p>Development of a new 2027-2029 strategic plan with expansive feedback from the RAILS membership. Include data driven evaluative tools for measuring success.</p> <p>Encourage/support professional development for staff.</p> <p>Continue to hold regular staff meetings to keep all staff informed of the latest RAILS developments and to help staff at different service centers engage with each other.</p> <p>Continue work of RAILS Employee Committees to develop collaborative activities for all staff.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan in-person staff in-service day in FY 2027. • Offer regular staff engagement activities at service centers throughout the year. <p>Continue discussions with new staff who have worked at RAILS for at least 90 days to gather input on their onboarding and orientation experiences. Make changes to RAILS' onboarding process as appropriate in response to this feedback.</p> <p>Continue having pre-employment physical examinations for delivery staff.</p> <p>Update safety internal safety procedures and continue staff discussions about emergency preparedness.</p> <p>Continue to prioritize EDI-related staff activities and initiatives as referenced above.</p>	
<p>Maintain robust technology infrastructure needed to carry out all RAILS programs/services.</p>	<p>Replace aging climate control systems in Burr Ridge datacenter.</p> <p>Continue to improve security practices across wide area networks and IT systems.</p> <p>Complete keyless entry security upgrades for all RAILS Service centers.</p>	

Objectives	Planned Activities	System Standard
	<p>Continue to maintain and enhance the Delivery mobile app and associated local web app for data collection and analysis. Maintain iPads and provide user support for apps and equipment.</p> <p>Continue to maintain and enhance internal apps for HR and contract tracking.</p> <p>Support RAILS staff in ongoing identification and adoption of software tools in place to support their work as technology and needs evolve, including scheduling solutions, increased use of cloud-based file sharing and collaboration, security features, and others.</p> <p>Investigate assistive technology in RAILS meeting rooms to accommodate persons with hearing impairment.</p> <p>Continue to utilize and refine our project request process for staff to inform and request input on IT-related projects they are planning.</p> <p>Investigate a potential transition to a cloud hosting service for RAILS websites. Evaluate sites and begin implementation for those that are identified as good candidates.</p> <p>Investigate upgrades to the video conferencing equipment in the Deirdre Brennan Meeting Room to allow for smoother video tracking.</p> <p>Lead and support the continued investigation and implementation of AI tools and related procedures for RAILS staff use as appropriate.</p> <p>Update and expand disaster recovery plan and staff cybersecurity training.</p>	