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Executive Director Report, May 2026

Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

Federal Funding and IMLS Update

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) voted at the end of April to establish a new competitive bidding portal for the federal E-Rate program, which helps to provide affordable broadband and communication services to schools and libraries nationally. The American Library Association and Schools, Health & Libraries (SHLB) Broadband Coalition, who had opposed the decision in the weeks leading up to the vote, [expressed disappointment](#) in the decision. There is a [webinar on June 3 at 1pm](#) CT to discuss the FCC's decision, what it means for E-Rate applicants and service providers, and next steps.

The American Library Association continues to denounce federal book banning legislation [HR 7661](#), which "threatens funding promised by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 from any school that develops, implements, facilitates, hosts or promotes any program or activity for, or provides or promotes literature or other materials to, children under the age of 18 that include "sexually oriented material" More on this, including a statement from American Library Association President Sam Helmick, can be found on the [ALA website](#).

Illinois Legislative Updates

Joe Filapek attended the Illinois Library Association (ILA) Public Policy Committee (PPC) meeting as my designee for Ex Officio on Monday, May 4. The in person meeting in Bloomington was a joint meeting of the ILA Public Policy and Advocacy committees.

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

The following bills have made the move to be considered by the Senate:

[HB4261](#) would increase annual grants for public libraries in the state, school library grants, and the library system grants in order to reflect inflationary pressures since the last time the grant amount was raised. The library system grant is what funds operations at RAILS and the other two systems in Illinois. The bill, which was filed by Rep. Martha Deuter, has bipartisan support with nineteen additional cosponsors as of the time of this writing. If passed, this bill would be effective immediately. This bill passed the House 107-0 and now is in the Senate Appropriations committee.

[HB5236](#) (filed by Rep. Tracy Katz Muhl) would amend the Digital Library Protection Act to include more reasonable terms for libraries as it relates to eBook licenses. These provisions closely reflect those made in the [2025 legislation](#) passed in Connecticut. The bill passed the House on April 17, 99-0. This bill is now under legal review in the Senate.

ILA has published a [list of the bills](#) they are supporting, opposing, and monitoring on their website.

RAILS Staff In-Service on May 7

I want to thank the Board for the opportunity to focus on staff learning during our In-Service Day at Joliet Junior College on Thursday, May 7. This is the one day a year that all RAILS staff have a chance to be together, in person, to learn and come together. Our Staff In-Service team did a truly exceptional job planning a terrific day for staff and I was so grateful for the chance to connect to our team.

RAILS Minute in May

This month's RAILS Minute will focus on legislative updates, the RAILS Board election, and the Reaching Forward conference in Rosemont. Thanks to Associate Executive Director Joe Filapek for stepping in for Dan this month, and as always thanks to Ola Gronski for producing!

RAILS assists member libraries in preparing for the future

Directors University Advanced

I was pleased to have the opportunity to attend Directors University Advanced in Grafton, Illinois on April 27 and 28. It was a welcome experience to connect with seasoned and mid-career Illinois library directors, and I was so impressed with the great passion and ideas coming from this group. Kudos to RAILS director of Consulting and Continuing Education Kate Niehoff for her part in moving this successful training forward, and to our partners from ILA, IHLS, and ISL for their work in this successful program.

Arlington Heights Memorial Library Staff Day on May 1

I had the opportunity to present about RAILS to the team at the Arlington Heights Memorial Library on Friday, May 1 at Harper College. The AHML team was welcoming and thoughtful, and it was great to share all that RAILS does with them.

RAILS Wins AMA Chicago Palmer Marketing Award

I want to congratulate our Marketing and Communications team for winning the prestigious American Marketing Association Chicago's Palmer Marketing Award for their work on last year's IMLS advocacy campaign. Ola Gronski, Dan Bostrom, Gwen Gemmell, Janette Derucki, and Grant Halter all contributed mightily to work on this campaign and I'm so thrilled to see their accomplishments recognized. The ceremony will be in Chicago on June 16th.

Catalyst End-Cap Event on May 12

Kate Niehoff and the RAILS Catalyst Steering Committee planned a wonderful final event and ceremony for the graduates of RAILS Catalyst, our inaugural leadership development cohort. The mentors and leadership put together a comprehensive learning opportunity that created real connection and learning. It's been very moving to see participant's reflection as they graduated from the program. It was a great day and I was so thrilled to be a part of it. I want to offer special thanks to Becky Thalmann for her expertise in developing the program and to Dr. Jade Castel, Deputy Director at the Illinois State Library for attending the end cap event.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Urban Libraries Council CEO Roundtable Conference in Chicago – May 4-5

I was honored to attend the Urban Libraries Council CEO Roundtable in Chicago on May 4 and 5. This small conference provides opportunities for valuable learning and networking with leadership from urban communities across the US. Programming included a conversation on intellectual freedom with Illinois Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias, discussions around improving literacy outcomes, conversations on building and sustaining public trust, development of the Obama Presidential Center's branch of the Chicago Public Library, and more. It was nice to connect with leadership from near and far at this event.

E-Book Advocacy Update

I had the opportunity to share what libraries are experiencing related to eBook and digital audiobook pricing and access on Fox32 on Monday, April 27. The live broadcast was a first for me, and it was great to have the chance to share what libraries are experiencing in this format. The interview can be viewed through the [RAILS website](#) if you're interested in seeing more.

In addition to this, we will be presenting on Illinois' experience with the Palace Project conversation and advocacy efforts at the American Library Association annual conference in Chicago in June and have submitted program proposals with representatives in Minnesota to the Wisconsin and Michigan Library Association Annual Conferences in October. We have also spoken with representatives in Colorado, Connecticut, and New Jersey about these shared efforts.

Kyle Courtney of the eBook Study Group shared a [fact checking document](#) related to a press release from the CEOs of the Association of American Publishers and the Authors Guild on May 7. On May 12, the Authors Alliance and eBook Study Group released a [joint statement](#) in support of HB5236.

Lyrasis Board Appointment 2026-2028

I am pleased to share that I have been appointed to the Lyrasis Board of Directors for a term from FY 2026-2028. The appointment begins in July 2026 and meets quarterly. I am honored to share the opportunity to help support the operations and strategic direction of the Lyrasis team.

Looking Ahead to June

- **June Service of the Month and Board Development topics – Explore More Illinois update with Gates Marquez**



This Month at RAILS – May 2026

THE TOP THREE

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

RAILS Staff In-Service Day on May 7

Our recent staff in-service day was dedicated to building connections and strengthening bonds between coworkers. The day included a staff-led trivia game, breakout sessions on improv, body language, chair yoga, home repair, travel, and a creative art project for a good cause. It also included a presentation on recognizing our blind spots and a full in-person meeting of the Delivery Department. A book swap and donations for PCs for People rounded out the day. This event is the culmination of a six-month planning process by RAILS staff from multiple departments. A great time was had by all!



Public Web Browser Annual Registration Key Available for RAILS Libraries

As a benefit of RAILS membership, all RAILS libraries have access to Team Software Solutions' Public Web Browser (PWB) free of charge for in-library use only. PWB allows libraries to lock down the web browser on computers and customize workstations for specific uses (e.g., a dedicated catalog computer). The RAILS annual subscription has been renewed through June 10, 2027.

The new annual registration key must be entered by June 8, 2026. Libraries can enter this number at any time - no need to wait until the 2025 key expires. For further information, including installation instructions and registration key, log in to the RAILS Deals and Discounts web page.

RAILS Academy

Within one month, RAILS Academy has gained over 750 users who are actively using the new online learning platform. The most-viewed content includes tutorials on Readers' Advisory, AI Safety, Summer Programming, Canva Pro training, and Palace Project training.

Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

Enhance sharing of knowledge and best practices

April RAILS Site Visits

RAILS Member Engagement Specialist Jessica conducted four site visits at a RAILS member library in April.

She visited:

- Virginia Memorial Library in Virginia, IL on 04/09/26
- Summit Public Library on 04/14/26
- Japanese American Service Center on 04/16/26
- Helen Peirce School of International Studies on 04/22/26 (picture on right)



Jessica Silva and Kate Kite (IHLS) Present at Reaching Forward South

On April 10, 2026, RAILS and the Illinois Heartland Library System collaborated on a presentation at the Reaching Forward South conference in O'Fallon, IL. Thirty-five people attended to learn about how to use and leverage L2.

New *Can't Shelve This*: "Get Your Head in the Game"

RAILS Data Analyst Janette Derucki and IHLS Director of Membership & Outreach Leah Gregory are joined by Plainfield Central High School Librarian Lisa Marcum to unpack what gamified reading looks like: what works, what flops, and how competition can build connection. Plus, Lisa shares step-by-step how she created a thriving district-wide Book Battle that gets teens (and teachers!) excited to read and talk about books together. The podcast is available on [Apple Podcasts](#), [Spotify](#), [YouTube](#), and more.

Can't Shelve This Films First On-Site Episode

RAILS Data Analyst Janette Derucki, IHLS Director of Membership & Outreach Leah Gregory, and RAILS Digital Marketing & Communications Specialist Ola Gronski visited University High School in Normal, Illinois, to record the season two finale of *Can't Shelve This*. The crew filmed in the school library and interviewed U-High School Librarian Amy Brokaw and two of her students. The episode will be published on June 9, 2026.

2026 RAILS Board Candidate Videos

RAILS Digital Marketing & Communications Specialist Ola Gronski worked with all 16 RAILS Board candidates to film short campaign videos. Candidates had the option to submit their own video or schedule a virtual session. These videos are available to watch on the [RAILS YouTube channel](#).

Soon to Be Famous Illinois Author Project Gets a New Home

After a dozen years, the Soon to Be Famous Illinois Author Project is announcing a major evolution. Leadership of the Project will move to its next chapter under the guidance of Jennifer Lizak, Coordinator of Special Projects at the Chicago Public Library. [Read more about this change](#) in the press release on our website.

RAILS Social Media Engagement

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

WhoFi

The Deals & Discount team launched a new group purchase opportunity for WhoFi in April. WhoFi is a simple platform for libraries that replaces standalone calendar and booking systems and automatically generates the reports leadership needs, acting as a streamlined community hub for libraries. The Core Suite includes a centralized community calendar, room reservation system, and a State Annual Survey Reporting solution to track any metric or KPI that is needed over time to answer board and state reporting. Libraries can also subscribe to the Wi-Fi Analytics add-on to automatically and anonymously capture crucial data—like visit counts, dwell times, peak hours, and Library Wireless Sessions.

Libraries have the option to subscribe to the Starter or Standard Core, plus an optional Wi-Fi Analytics add-on. The Starter Core provides the same functionality as the Standard version but is designed for smaller libraries that require no more than 25 events per month, 2 rooms, and 2 staff users.

July Renewals

Renewals and signups continued in April for the July 1 deals, including the EBSCO Supplemental Resources, PressReader, Chicago Tribune, RDA Toolkit, and HR Source. The Deals & Discounts team also actively promoted and consulted with members about the available resource options for EBSCO subscriptions.

2027 Virtual Vendor Fair Planning

The Deals & Discount team met with RAILS staff and other consortia to explore platform hosting requirements and experiences for the inaugural 2027 Virtual Vendor Fair. By bringing RAILS vendor partners and members together for a comprehensive event, the team hopes to drive discovery, connection, and excitement about all that Deals & Discounts offers. Maggie Thomann, Kortni Springer, and Gwen Gemmell held a kick-off planning meeting on May 1 to begin discussing event details and logistics.

Vendor Webinars:

Webinar Title	Date	Registered	Live Attendees	Recording Views
Storykin Demo for Trial Participants	4/15/2026	5	3	11
EBSCO Supplemental Resource Discounts for RAILS Public Libraries	4/15/2026	22	11	7
Midwest Tape: Overview for RAILS Libraries	4/22/2026	15	7	11
Ask Penworthy: A Demo + Q&A	4/23/2026	30	13	13
EBSCO NoveList Resources for RAILS Libraries	4/30/2026	41	16	5
Total		113	50	47

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 May 1, 2026

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
529	299	50	63%/53%

Gale Excel Stats as of May 1, 2026 (Program implemented Spring 2024)

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
81	45	33	94%/53%

Seek greater efficiencies, innovations, and enhancements to delivery services

RAILS Executed East Peoria Lease Extension

RAILS completed execution of the lease extension for our East Peoria facility on May 13. Our lease will continue through Spring 2028 with multiple extension options after 2028.

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

Find More Illinois Update



Libraries Participating in Find More Illinois as of May 1, 2026

Academic	Public	School	Special	Total
10	71	12	1	94

Find More Illinois total transactions (loans and borrows)

Time Period	Number of transactions
April 2026	1,423
Fiscal Year to Date	14,490

Find More Illinois catalog

Time Period	Number of items in shared catalog
April 2026	9,217,209

Find More Illinois Demos/Reviews

Date of Training	Library	Number of Participants
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On April 8, Eric Bain and Barb Miller met with Auto-Graphics to discuss connectivity with the WISCAT catalog and outstanding help desk tickets.

eRead Illinois & Inkie.org Update

Leila Heath and Anna Behm met regularly with the team from Palace Project to discuss progress with platform/app development, onboarding individual instances of K-12 libraries, and eRead Illinois collection development on the Palace Project.



eRead Illinois renewals and new signups began on April 8 and will run through the end of May. As of May 4, 293 public, academic, and special libraries have renewed their participation. The 550 school library memberships were automatically renewed for one year at no cost while The Palace Project team continues development and testing of web-based access and school library authentication.



The Soon to Be Illinois Author Project is currently accepting submissions for their annual contest. As a result, we have seen a surge of self-published e-books submitted to the Indie Author Project via inkie.org. There were 66 self-published e-books submitted to the Indie Author Project from April 1 – May 5, with 44 of those also being submitted to the Soon to Be Famous Illinois Author Project.

eRead Illinois Checkouts

Time Period	E-Books	Audiobooks	Total
April 2026	8,833	12,052	20,885
Fiscal Year to Date	123,075	131,782	254,857
Since Palace Project Migration	42,330	48,535	91,835

Inkie.org Library Views

Time Period	Number of Views
April 2026	546
Fiscal Year to Date	14,790

Explore More Illinois Update

In April 2026, 4,107 reservations were made in Explore More Illinois. The most popular downstate and suburban attractions in April 2026 were:

- Morton Arboretum in Lisle (255)
- Cantigny in Wheaton (133)



- Griffin Museum of Science and Industry (113)
- Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe (94)
- DuPage Children’s Museum in Naperville (85)

The most popular Chicago attractions in April 2026 were:

- Art Institute of Chicago in Chicago (600)
- Griffin Museum of Science and Industry, in Chicago (133)
- Field Museum in Chicago (113)
- Brookfield Zoo Chicago in Brookfield (94)
- Chicago Academy of Sciences Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum in Chicago (85)

On April 22, Gates Marquez partnered with IHLS to provide a Heartland-focused Explore More Illinois Refresher and Q&A webinar with 36 registered attendees and 21 attending live.

Gates Marquez also met with the Iowa Adventure Pass and Michigan Adventure Pass program managers in April to learn more about their programs, successes, and challenges. Gates, Mary Kate Murray, and Leila Heath met with two pass platform vendors to learn more about their software and to stay abreast of the current culture pass program environment.

On April 23, Gates attended the first national ePASS Users Group meeting this year. Group members discussed web accessibility, strategies for managing attractions with discount codes, and shared recent successes from their respective programs.

Libraries Enrolled in Explore More Illinois as of May 1, 2026

System	Publics	Community Colleges	Total
RAILS	351	3	354
IHLS	112	1	113
CPL	1	n/a	1
Totals	464	4	468

Attractions in Explore More Illinois as of May 1, 2026

Attractions	63
Total Attractions in 2026	83

Reservations Made in Explore More Illinois in April 2026

Organization	April 2026
RAILS/IHLS	1,014
CPL	2,702
Total	3,716

Future-focused professional development and member engagement efforts

RAILS Academy

Within one month, RAILS Academy has gained over 750 users who are actively using the new online learning platform. The most-viewed content includes tutorials on Readers' Advisory, AI Safety, Summer Programming, Canva Pro training, and Palace Project training.

2026 Directors University Advanced

26 RAILS member library directors participated in Directors University Advanced, the next level of learning for directors. Directors University Advanced is a collaboration between RAILS, IHLS, ILA, and ILS.

CE Highlight of the Month

150 RAILS library staff members registered for the May 6 webinar, “Understanding Personal Property Replacement Tax (PPRT),” which was developed in response to conversations within ILA’s Public Policy Committee, after recognizing that many libraries weren’t receiving the funds they’re rightfully owed. Attorneys from Ancel Glink and two library directors who went through the process of securing PPRT funds spoke about libraries' rights under the law, how to negotiate with municipalities, and concrete steps libraries can take to secure the funding.

Recent CE Events

- **“Can a Leader Be a Friend?”**, webinar, April 20
- **“Practical Tips for Improved Digital Accessibility”**, webinar, April 22
- **“Partnerships for the People and Their Libraries”**, webinar, April 23
- **“Understanding Personal Property Replacement Tax (PPRT)”**, webinar, May 6
- **RAILS Catalyst end-cap event**, Waubensee Community College, May 12
- **“Top Ten Genealogy Resources for Library Staff”**, webinar, May 12
- **“Community as Resistance: Building Courage in Uncertain Times”**, Elmhurst Library, May 13

Upcoming CE Events

- **“Leading with Purpose: The Coaching Approach”**, webinar, May 18
HR Source will explore how adopting a coaching mindset can transform the way leaders engage with their teams. They will address practical strategies to shift from a directive style to a questioning and developmental approach
- **“ADA Title II Compliance for Digital Resources”**, webinar, May 20
Ancel Glink will cover what the law requires, how it applies to third-party digital content, and what your library can do to move toward compliance, including how to talk with vendors about accessibility and what to look for in contracts and licensing agreements. Mike Campagna, Digital Services Manager at the Barrington Area Library, will also share how the BAL has put these principles into practice and what that process has looked like from the start. The presentation will conclude with a brief overview of the RAILS VPAT repository and how libraries can use its resources.
- **“Real-World Resilience: Tools for Navigating Stress, Conflict, and Emotional Labor in the Library”**, Glenview Public Library, June 2
Participants will explore how stress impacts the nervous system, develop tools to regulate responses during stressful moments and reduce the personal impact of workplace stress, and strengthen skills for navigating difficult interpersonal interactions with patrons and/or colleagues. The session integrates reflection and self-awareness with practical strategies for boundary-setting and coping to support sustainable, day-to-day resilience in library work.

- **“Managing Your eBook Collection”**, webinar, June 4
Details and registration will be available in L2 soon. Agenda item 7.3.1
- **“Book Doctor Workshops with Demco”**, Peoria Public Library, June 9; Moline Public Library, June 10; and Rockford Public Library, June 11.
These two-part workshops focus on hands-on book care, protection, and repair techniques to keep collections circulating, and strategies to boost engagement and accessibility.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Strengthen collaborative relationships with partner library organizations

May Partnership Meeting

RAILS has monthly meetings with representatives from the Association of Illinois School Library Educators (AISLE), Chicago Public Schools (CPS), Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS), Illinois Library Association (ILA), and the Illinois State Library (ISL) to discuss ways we can work collaboratively to support school libraries. In May, the group received updates and discussed a variety of topics, including:

- 2026-27 School Library Census revisions, including changes to financial and staff reporting methods
- IHLS Director of Membership and Outreach, Leah Gregory & RAILS Data Analyst, Janette Derucki, will be meeting with Dr. Kelly West from St. Clair County ROE 50 on Friday, May 8th, regarding the pilot of a 1/2-day training and information program for school administrators and curriculum directors about school libraries.
- The group discussed the establishment of a working group to guide the creation of an Illinois School Library Standards Toolkit.
- Illinois School Library Workers Symposium (ISLWS) update

RAILS Staff & Service Center News

RAILS Staff Participate in 2026 RSA Day

Several RAILS staff members attended the 2026 RSA Day in Macomb, IL, on April 8, 2026. They presented sessions and networked with RSA members.

Anne Slaughter Presented on MLIS Student Panel

On April 16, 2026, RAILS Director of Technology Services Anne Slaughter is participating in a “Day in the Life of a MLIS Professional” virtual panel hosted by the ALA Student Chapter at St. Catherine University (St. Paul, MN), aimed at helping students in their Library and Information Science program learn about various MLIS career paths.

Photo of Illinois Library Staff at the Public Library Association Conference, April 1-3, 2026

Jessica Silva attended the Public Library Association Annual Conference in Minneapolis and organized a group photo and meet-up for Illinois library staff in attendance.

RAILS IT Update

In April, the RAILS IT Team updated the delivery app to help better track sorting workflow. The team also researched assistive technology for meeting room updates and finished rehabbing old staff laptops; they have been reimaged and replaced the older lab computers.

Makerspace Tour

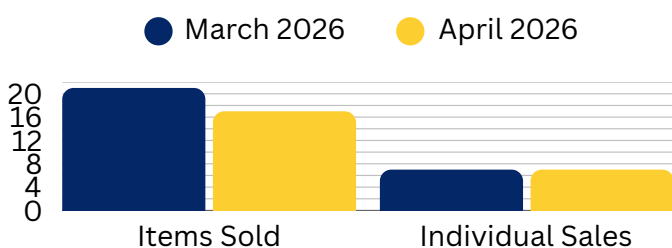
Jessica Silva assisted the Makerspace Networking Group in hosting a tour of the Ela Area Public Library's makerspace on April 27, 2026. There were 25 librarians in attendance. Photo below.



APRIL 2026

			
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VIEWS <i>times our content was seen</i>	Facebook +1,812 65,688	Instagram -3,350 7,462	LinkedIn -2,370 6,805
ENGAGEMENT <i>reactions, comments, and shares</i>	Facebook +219 2,138	Instagram -183 321	LinkedIn -105 224
TOP POST <i>received the most engagement</i>			

 **RAILS Online Store**



 **RAILS Minute Views: 369**

 **Can't Shelve This Listens: 1,272**