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Agenda item 7.3.1

Executive Director Report, August 2026

Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

Federal Legislative Updates

The FCC has officially published its new proposals for E-Rate in the Federal Register, opening the public comment period. These proposals include the possible elimination of this crucial program. ALA is encouraging libraries to use [their template](#) to submit formal comments by Tuesday, October 13, to remind the agency how heavily our communities rely on E-Rate discounts. To help keep our membership informed and engaged, we are hosting SHLB Executive Director Joseph Wender at our [RAILS Member Update on September 9](#).

Federal book banning bills continue to circulate in the Senate, with the American Library Association calling special attention to [S. 4925](#). They describe the bill as “dangerously broad, withholding critical school funding for the mere mention of transgender people or nudity.” More can be found at the American Library Association’s [Show Up for Our Libraries](#) page.

Illinois Legislative Updates

There was a meeting of the Illinois Library Association’s (ILA) Public Policy Committee on August 3. The meeting included a federal and state update, discussion of the questionnaire for potential Illinois Secretary of State candidates, initial review of the legislative proposals received by ILA, and a discussion of the agenda for the upcoming August 24 meeting.

The PPC will finalize its recommendations to the Executive Board regarding the at its August 24 meeting. The ILA Executive Board will then consider the PPC legislative agenda at its September 17 Board Meeting. Paul Mills, Chair of the ILA PPC Committee, will also join us at our November 12 RAILS Member Update to share the updated legislative priorities with the RAILS membership.

Two bills directly impacting Illinois libraries were signed into law by Governor JB Pritzker this month:

[Public Act 104-0683](#): Amends the Jury Act and Jury Commission Act to require employers with more than 25 employees to compensate staff at their regular rate of pay during jury service.

[Public Act 104-0808](#): Requires public institutions, including libraries, to prominently display contact information for the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in patron-accessible spaces

Both statutory requirements take effect on January 1, 2027. To assist member libraries with compliance and operational readiness, RAILS partnered with legal counsel at Ancel Glink to develop comprehensive guidance memos, which have been distributed via the RAILS Directors listserv. Erin Monforti of Ancel Glink will also join us for our September 9 Member Update to share these changes with the RAILS membership. As the Illinois Library Association (ILA) Public Policy Committee continues to track post-session legislative developments, RAILS will maintain a proactive approach by issuing additional legal guidance as needed.

RAILS assists member libraries in preparing for the future

CCDNN Update

This summer, the Cook County Digital Navigator Network planning team is putting together a roadmap for the next year. So far, the accomplishments of the team include:

- Formed a 15-member Guiding Team of enthusiastic, engaged peer leaders
- Designed and completed a \$62,000 Mini-Pilot grant program, supporting 23 under-resourced libraries
- Held 4 listening sessions with 70 library workers from 49 libraries
- Captured and synthesized a treasure trove of information, feedback, and ideas from our libraries
- Confirmed that we are breaking ground on critical, industry-wide challenges facing public libraries

This is only after one year of working together. The next steps include continuing to work toward the vision of strengthening the digital equity ecosystem by supporting the capacity of library professionals and library institutions to meet their communities' digital navigation needs. Activities will include:

- Finalize program element selection & resource allocation decisions
- Priority level, appropriate scale, budget & funding, timeline, personnel solutions
- Broaden communications
 - Establish Countywide interactive communication channel
 - Share progress, stories, and Mini-Pilot accomplishments
- Work with UIUC iSchool on research that will inform careful planning for direct funding programs
- Engage with partner(s) to develop training curriculum Evolve the Guiding Team as a foundation for the Communications

Thank you to RAILS Director of Technology Services Anne Slaughter for her continued leadership on this project.

Directors University in Bloomington

On August 12, I had the privilege of co-presenting at Directors University in Bloomington alongside Leslie Bednar, Executive Director of the Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS). Our presentation highlighted the essential strategic partnership and resources that library systems provide to public libraries across Illinois.

Directors University serves as a cornerstone leadership initiative, equipping newly appointed library directors with the tools, governance knowledge, and professional network necessary to lead their organizations effectively. We extend our warmest congratulations to this year's graduating cohort as they embark on their leadership journeys.

This impactful program is made possible through a collaborative partnership among the Illinois State Library, the Illinois Library Association, IHLS, and RAILS.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community**Illinois State Library Advisory Committee (ISLAC) Meeting**

The ISLAC meeting originally scheduled for July 23 was cancelled. The next meeting is scheduled for September 24. Discussion at that meeting will include a focus on OCLC and I will present an overview of Find More Illinois to the committee. The Illinois State Library has also asked for discussion on what issues that we would like to see ISLAC or the State Library to address on behalf of libraries. If you have thoughts that you would like me to share, I'd love to hear from you.

RAILS 15th Anniversary VIP Lunch

In celebration of RAILS's 15th Anniversary, RAILS invited several former and current board and staff members to attend a VIP Lunch at the Burr Ridge office on July 18, 2026. These "VIPs" were all involved during the creation of RAILS 15 years ago. Betsy Adamowski, Bill Coffee, Brian Smith, Catherine Yanikoski, Eric Bain, Jane Plass, and Wes Smith all participated in filmed interviews reflecting on their experience during the library systems merger. It was such a pleasure to host this group as they shared their memories with us.



We later conducted additional interviews with Alan Schnelle, Kathy Parker, Mary Witt, and Deirdre Brennan. Clips from these interviews will be shared on RAILS social media throughout the year as part of our 15th anniversary celebration.

RAILS 15th Anniversary Padlet

RAILS created a [15th Anniversary Padlet](#) to gather thoughts and stories from library workers across the state. We're asking what people were doing in 2011, how RAILS impacts them today, and what they hope to see from RAILS in the next 15 years. This Padlet will be open throughout the entire anniversary year.

E-Book Advocacy Update

At the August 19 meeting of the Illinois Library Association Public Policy Committee eBook Subcommittee, RAILS staff members Janette Derucki and Anna Behm presented preliminary findings from our comprehensive Illinois eBook Data Study. This research directly supports our ongoing advocacy surrounding [HB 5236](#) by capturing eContent spending across the state. Thanks to the extraordinary efforts of Janette, Anna, and Ola Gronski, the study achieved a 93.6% response rate, representing data from 601 of Illinois' 642 public libraries. The findings—which detail total, average, and median eContent expenditures alongside collection allocation percentages—will be published in the coming months via targeted infographics developed by the RAILS Communications team. I look forward to sharing the full report with the Board as those visual assets are finalized.

Expanding our advocacy reach regionally, I also presented on Illinois' eBook legislative initiatives during a Michigan Library Association (MLA) Connect Advocacy Hour webinar on August 19 with other members of the eBook Advocacy subcommittee: Aaron Skog, Cassandra Thompson, and Samantha Ralston. The session provided a valuable platform to highlight the progress of our legislative strategy over the past year and share insights with peer state leaders facing similar eContent challenges. Building on this engagement, our subcommittee group will present an in-person session on our state advocacy model at the MLA Annual Conference this coming October.



Visits to Midlothian Public Library and Addison Public Library

On July 29 I had the opportunity to visit Midlothian Public Library and Library Director Jennifer Cottrill for a tour of her building and an overview of their local services. I was particularly impressed by their newly renovated spaces, including Studio 147, their new community makerspace. Special thanks to Jennifer for hosting during a challenging week, as her library and community were actively navigating the impact of severe local weather.

On August 7, I joined Library Director Mary Medjo Me Zengue, Assistant Director Brooke Sievers, and their team for their Staff Institute Day in their beautifully renovated facility. I presented on RAILS resources, highlighting the key services, tools, and collaborative opportunities available to support their staff and community.

Connecting directly with library leadership and staff reinforces our understanding of local needs across the system. I look forward to continuing these site visits alongside our new RAILS Board members in the coming months.

Looking Ahead to September

- **September Service of the Month topics – RAILS Delivery Update with Mark Hatch and CARLI overview with Laurie Blandino**
- **Reminder: September meeting will be off-site in Coal Valley with a tour of the Moline Public Library in the morning before the meeting. More details will be shared with you via email soon.**



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:



Directors University 2026

28 new RAILS member library directors attended the 2026 Directors University Core conference in Bloomington, IL, August 10-13 (pictured, above). They received training on HR and personnel, legal issues in libraries, budgeting and finance, and more. Kate Niehoff presented on compliance with IHLS Public Library Liaison Kate Kite, and Monica Harris presented on Library Systems with IHLS Executive Director Leslie Bednar.

Pillar Booth In Person event at Warren-Newport Library

On July 29, RAILS vendor partner Pillar Booth hosted an in-person product demonstration at Warren-Newport Public Library. This drop-in event showcased the library's recent renovation that included several Pillar Privacy Booths and gave attendees the opportunity to speak to Pillar Booth representatives about their own library's needs and RAILS member discounts on the product. Staff from six libraries attended this event, including Crystal Lake Public Library, Grayslake Public Library, North Chicago Public Library, Park Ridge Public Library, St. Charles Public Library, and Waukegan Public Library.

RAILS Member Meetup: Dunlap Public Library, July 28

RAILS Member Engagement Specialist Jessica Silva hosted a RAILS Member Meetup at the Dunlap Public Library on July 28 (pictured, above). Six people attended this event. The group discussed The Palace Project, RAILS delivery, and the current state of e-book legislation.

Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

Enhance sharing of knowledge and best practices

July RAILS Site Visits

RAILS Member Engagement Manager Jessica Silva conducted six site visits at RAILS member libraries in July. She visited:

- Carlock Public Library
- Danvers Public Library
- Moraine Valley Community College, Palos Hills, IL
- Oakton Community College, Des Plaines, IL
- Thornton Public Library
- Waynesville Township 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 Online Roundtable: eSports on July 28

Jessica Silva hosted a RAILS Online Roundtable on July 28 about eSports in libraries. The presenter was Taylor Bayless from the Chicago Public Library (CPL). This event was attended by six participants. The discussion centered around gaming in libraries, CPL's eSports program, and how other libraries could replicate this program.

ASLA Includes *Can't Shelve This* on Library Podcast List

Alabama School Library Association (ASLA) shared a [list of library-related podcast recommendations](#) on their Instagram. *Can't Shelve This* was featured under their "profession" category for podcasts featuring stories, strategies, and ideas for school library people.

RAILS Social Media Engagement

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

EBSCO: Make the Most of Your Resources Webinars

To support member libraries in making the most of their EBSCO resources, the Deals team is partnering with EBSCO to host webinars for public and K-12 libraries on August 20 and September 23. Participants will learn about updates to the EBSCO user interface, using EBSCOadmin and Experience Manager customization tools to manage their accounts, and strategies for promoting their EBSCO resources to their patrons. These sessions

will help libraries get the most value from the resources they subscribed to as part of the RAILS EBSCO Supplemental Resources group purchase.

July Invoicing Process

The Deals & Discounts, Library Resources team, and RAILS Finance team work together to invoice participating libraries throughout the year. This includes resources member libraries purchase through RAILS group purchases, such as EBSCO and PressReader, and statewide programs including Find More and eRead Illinois. The July renewal cycle is the busiest period for invoicing. This year, more than 1,500 invoices will be processed for July subscriptions with total dollars billed over \$2.4 million. Careful attention to detail and ongoing communication ensures that the process is accurate and efficient.

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 August 1, 2026

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
535	313	38	64%/53%

Gale Excel Stats as of August 1, 2026

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
100	53	44	95%/53%

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

Find More Illinois Update

On July 13, RAILS Director of Library Resources and Programs Leila Heath, RAILS Technology Special Projects Coordinator Eric Bain, and RAILS Consortial Services Supervisor Barb Miller met with Auto-Graphics to discuss a resolution to the MARC records update issues and determine a timeline for the solution, which has been successfully implemented.



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

Academic	Public	School	Special	Total
14	70	12	1	97

Find More Illinois total transactions (loans and borrows)

Time Period	Number of transactions
July 2026	1,452
Fiscal Year to Date	1,452

Find More Illinois catalog

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Time Period	Number of items in shared catalog
July 2026	9,348,314

Find More Illinois Demos/Reviews

Date of Training	Library	Number of Participants
July 27 Demo	VanderCook College of Music	1
July 30 Training	UIC Health Sciences Libraries	5

E-Content Programs

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. The Palace Project team transferred all of the perpetual and 26-checkout titles in libraries' individual Unbound collections to the Palace Project in July. The team is working on transferring libraries' time metered titles. The team has also made great progress onboarding eRead Illinois K-12 libraries to the Palace Project platform. As of August 8, a quarter of the 550+ school libraries are completely onboarded to The Palace Project, over half have provided their onboarding information, and nearly all have been contacted by The Palace Project team.



E-Content Checkouts July 2026

Collection	Distributor	Platform	E-Book Checkouts	Audiobook Checkouts	Total Checkouts
eRead Illinois	Palace	Palace Project	7,126	15,530	22,656
Palace Bookshelf	Palace	Palace Project	149	0	149
Multiple	OverDrive	Palace Project	25	52	77
Multiple	CloudLibrary	Palace Project	21	21	42
Inkie.org Library	BiblioBoard	Palace Project	201	0	201
Inkie.org Library	BiblioBoard	BiblioBoard	1,280	0	1,280
Total Month			8,802	15,603	24,405
Fiscal Year to Date			8,802	15,603	24,405

Explore More Illinois Update

In July, new enhancements were added to the ePASS software that allow users to filter offers and attractions by type and to sort search results alphabetically in ascending/descending order. The updates also improved the search bar and optimized the interface for mobile devices. These changes give RAILS greater flexibility to grow the list of attractions and create more offers of every type without hindering the searchability of the overall collection.



Most Popular Attractions – Downstate & Suburban Cardholders in July 2026

Attraction	Location	Reservations Made
The Morton Arboretum	Lisle	472
Griffin Museum of Science and Industry	Chicago	208
Winnetka Park District Swimming Beaches	Winnetka	193
Cantigny	Wheaton	183
DuPage Children’s Museum	Naperville	170

Most Popular Attractions – Chicago Cardholders in July 2026

Attraction	Location	Reservations Made
Field Museum	Chicago	700
Art Institute of Chicago	Chicago	600
Griffin Museum of Science and Industry	Chicago	508
Brookfield Zoo Chicago	Brookfield	500
Chicago Academy of Science Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum	Chicago	393

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

System	Publics	Community Colleges	Total
RAILS	351	4	355
IHLS	114	1	115
CPL	1	n/a	1
Totals	466	5	471

Attractions in Explore More Illinois as of August 1, 2026

Attractions	75
Total Attractions in FY26	83

Reservations Made in Explore More Illinois in July 2026

Organization	July 2026
RAILS/IHLS	2,401
CPL	3,811
Total	6,212

Assist member libraries in preparing for the future

Future-focused professional development and member engagement efforts

TOTAL VIEWS IN JULY

7,764

views

Recent CE Events

Top 5 Most Viewed	Views	% of Total
How to Handle Angry Customers	623	8.0%
Where's My Book? Navigating the Dewey Decimal System	618	8.0%
Reading Call Numbers	370	4.8%
Collection Development Basics – Weeding	342	4.4%
Basic Spanish for Library Staff	233	3.0%

CE Event Grant Applications Open

Applications are open for RAILS CE Event Grants of up to \$2000. Networking groups, consortia, and individual libraries are encouraged to apply, as long as the event is open and accessible to all RAILS members. You don't need to be a director or manager to apply; library staff at all levels are welcome to submit a proposal. Special consideration will be given to applications that focus on innovative topics relevant to libraries or introduce new and emerging approaches to library services. The deadline to apply is Monday, October 5.

Recent CE Events

- **Cataloging Streaming Videos, Blu-rays and DVDs with RDA and MARC21**, webinar series, August 20 & 27
- **Library Building Basics & Facility Management Full-Day Workshop**, Orland Park Public Library, July 21
- **Managing Digital Collections**, webinar, July 28
- **Sustainable Libraries**, webinar, July 29
- **Directors University Core**, Bloomington, IL, August 11 – 13
- **From Invisible Labor to Line Items: Budgeting for the Library Work That's Actually Happening**, webinar, August 18

Upcoming CE Events

- **Grant Writing with AI: A Practical Guide for Libraries**, webinar, August 25
This session covers the full grant writing process, from finding funding opportunities to submitting polished proposals using artificial intelligence tools.
- **Accessibility at Work: From Word to PDF**, RAILS Burr Ridge, August 31
In this hands-on workshop, participants will learn about digital compliance and the step-by-step methods needed to create compliant PDF documents from Microsoft Word.

- **Starting a Library Staff Green Team**, webinar, September 17 Agenda item 7.3.1
The Carol Stream Public Library started a staff Green Team that has been able to make impactful reductions in waste, raise awareness through an Eco Expo open house, highlight their relevant collection materials through genre stickers, and develop partnerships with local nonprofits. They'll share how their team started and what they've been able to achieve.
- **The Next Year of Library Marketing: Trends You Can Actually Use**, webinar, September 18
Angela Hursh will separate the hype from the lasting shifts shaping library marketing and promotion. You'll learn which changes deserve your attention, which trends you can safely ignore, and how successful libraries are adapting their marketing strategies.
- **Book Repair Workshops**, Bourbonnais Public Library District, September 21; Joliet Public Library, September 22; Woodridge Public Library, September 23
Join this hands-on workshop to explore book repair techniques, exchange ideas, and work with damaged materials.
injustice. Learn what it means to practice "community courage," how love and solidarity fuel resistance, and what it looks like to build and protect community in our everyday lives.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Strengthen collaborative relationships with partner library organizations

August 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 August the group discussed:

- A new SLATE video nearing completion
- Discussion of the federal funding of E-Rate
- The continued work of the Library Advocacy Toolkit Subcommittee
- Upcoming conferences
- The premier of the *Can't Shelve This* podcast season three

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

RAILS Staff & Service Center News

Jessica Silva and Kortni Springer Present at 2026 PinCon

RAILS Member Engagement Manager and RAILS Library Resource Specialist Kortni Springer participated in the 2026 Pinnacle Library Cooperative conference in Joliet, IL. This is the first time that Pinnacle has held a conference like this. The two co-presented on RAILS and RAILS services including the Deals & Discounts program. The presentation was given twice to separate groups of attendees.

RAILS IT Update

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In July, the RAILS IT team renewed services with multiple vendors (DUO, UPS Maintenance). This was done to avoid yearly contractual increases. The IT team also performed some security maintenance, patching flaws in our remote management system. The IT team began assisting with the audit process for RAILS, RSA, and PrairieCat. That included updating auditors on the procedures for backup, security auditing, and finance system updates. The IT team also began the migration away from Mimecast to Checkpoint for email security. This migration is necessary due to continued Mimecast prices increases. The move should lower RAILS costs by 30%, with a savings of over \$5,000.

RAILS Burr Ridge Update

Following the recent storms, the RAILS Burr Ridge Service center sustained extensive damage to multiple trees on our property. One tree (pictured, below), situated directly in front of the building suffered a direct lightning strike and lost several large branches. Due to the severity of the structural damage, our vendor required the full removal of the tree to ensure the safety of the building.



JULY 2026

RAILS
DIGITAL MARKETING
BOARD REPORT



FOLLOWERS

total subscribers

Facebook +19

3,373

Instagram +720

5,611

LinkedIn +55

2,611

REACH

accounts shown our content

Facebook -12,149

12,396

Instagram -164,310

179,916

LinkedIn +734

4,231

VIEWS

times our content was seen

Facebook -29,938

42,273

Instagram -242,053

288,025

LinkedIn +1,314

8,611

ENGAGEMENT

reactions, comments, and shares

Facebook -3,971

1,150

Instagram -32,967

34,722

LinkedIn +77

386

TOP POST

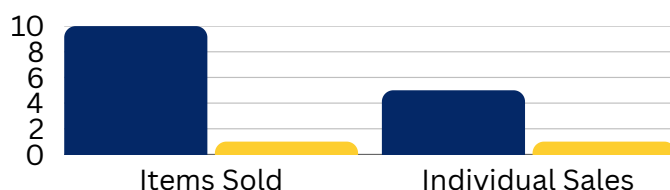
received the most engagement



RAILS Online Store

● June 2026

● July 2026



RAILS Minute Views: 516



Can't Shelve This Listens: 959