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Agenda item 8.3.1

Executive Director Report, September 2026

Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

Federal and Illinois 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.

There was a meeting of the Illinois Library Association's (ILA) Public Policy Committee on August 24. The meeting included a federal and state update, and a lengthy discussion of 11 submissions to be considered by PPC as potential legislative priorities of ILA. The ILA Executive Board is considering the following priorities as voted on by PPC:

- City Library Board Size Reduction
- Records Retention Reform
- Bidding Threshold Increase
- PPRT (Personal Property Replacement Tax) Amendment

Additionally, the committee recommended continuing work on the in-progress eBook legislation and legislation to increase grant funding for public libraries, school libraries, and library systems. The group also decided to form working groups on harassment protection for library staff, residential development impact fee programs, and trustee training in the Illinois Public Library Standards. An internal group will also be formed to review the legislative proposal process and submit recommendations to the full committee.

The ILA Executive Board considered 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.

RAILS models best practices in equity, diversity, accessibility, and inclusion

Racial Equity Week: The Fight Against Book Bans and the Power of Libraries

On September 16, I attended a program for Cook County staff in celebration of Racial Equity Week. Moderated by Cook County Director of Digital Equity Kyla Williams Tate and featuring Kim Harris of Harris K Solutions, the panel discussion featured a clip from the Emmy Award-winning documentary *The Librarians*. The conversation covered a wide range of topics, including intellectual freedom, the history of racial segregation in libraries, and strategies for recruiting diverse staff. It was a fantastic opportunity to engage with public servants about the essential mission of modern Illinois libraries.

RAILS assists member libraries in preparing for the future

RAILS Minute for September

This month's [RAILS Minute](#) featured discussion around the new promotional video for the SLATE (School Library Advocacy Through Education) project, branding updates for Find More Illinois, RAILS Continuing Education grants, and our participation at the ILA Conference. Thanks, as always to Ola Gronski for producing and to Dan Bostrom for hosting!

The Librarian Linkover podcast

Lorene Kennard invited me to appear on [The Librarian Linkover](#), her podcast about leadership in libraries. The episode focused on the value of resource sharing and the role of the library systems in Illinois, and I also had the opportunity to speak about my own journey in librarianship. Thanks to Lorene for having me on the show!

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Illinois State Library Advisory Committee (ISLAC) Meeting

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. I look forward to sharing more at our meeting.

Ribbon Cutting at Wheaton Public Library

On September 8, I had the privilege of attending the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Wheaton Public Library's new West Plaza space. Executive Director Betsy Adamowski also invited me for a tour of the library prior to her meeting with Congressman Sean Casten and Representative Delia Ramirez. I was so impressed by their thoughtful use of space and how effectively they are connecting with their community.



E-Book Advocacy Update

In response to a study commissioned by the Association of American Publishers and the Authors Guild, the eBook Study Group issued a [joint statement](#) regarding the Publishers E-Lending Report. The response emphasizes that the study represents a continued escalation by the publishing industry to shift blame onto libraries for financial losses, disregarding centuries of sustainable lending practices.

Our group participates in the ILA Subcommittee on eBook Advocacy, and I will be working with other Illinois representatives to present on our statewide advocacy efforts at the upcoming Wisconsin Library Association and Michigan Library Association conferences in October.

Visits to LaGrange South School District and Prairie Creek Public Library

On September 11, Ola Gronski and I joined Library Media Specialist Joanna Marek and her team for a visit to LaGrange South School District. We were thrilled to meet with students and tour the fantastic spaces designed to foster student learning. Later that afternoon, I visited Prairie Creek Public Library District in Dwight to meet with Board President Victoria Ferguson and Director Kim Frauli. Seeing the facility updates and enhancements since my last visit was wonderful. Special thanks to these RAILS Board members and their dedicated staff for welcoming us and sharing their valuable perspectives.

School Library Innovation: District 159 in Matteson

On September 17, Ola Gronski and I visited six newly renovated school libraries across District 159 in Matteson. The district's transformation of these facilities into bright, purposeful learning commons centered on literacy and hands-on discovery is truly inspiring. The district administration's strong commitment to prioritizing libraries as an essential community and student investment serves as an exemplary model for schools across Illinois. Thank you to Rose Gilman and Scherrie Davis for providing a tour of these dynamic new spaces.

Looking Ahead to September

- **October Service of the Month topics – eRead Illinois & Inkie.org with Anna Behm and Small & Rural Libraries with Jaclyn Trujillo**



This Month at RAILS – September 2026

THE TOP THREE

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

RAILS Announces New Branding for Find More Illinois

RAILS is excited to announce the rebranding of the Find More Illinois program. The new brand expresses the idea of connections between libraries. Vibrant colors and a series of rings represent the participating libraries, and exemplifies the program's emphasis on collaboration and resource sharing across Illinois.



Find More Illinois is an interlibrary loan service that connects users with a growing number of library holdings on one platform. Currently, more than 90 libraries participate in Find More Illinois, giving them access to more than 9 million items in the collection.

New Products: LingQ & ParentTV

Deals & Discounts recently launched two new group purchases for RAILS public libraries: LingQ and ParentTV from Learners Engaged.

LingQ is a language-learning platform that helps patrons develop practical language skills through immersive, real-world content. The platform provides access to more than 50 languages, including ESL/ELL learning support, and features real-world media such as news articles, podcasts, YouTube videos, books, and music. Browser extensions allow users to import webpages and other digital text to convert into an interactive lesson.

ParentTV is an on-demand streaming platform that offers evidence-based parenting resources through more than 2,200 expert-led videos and courses. The platform provides multilingual content for parents and caregivers that addresses topics from pregnancy through the teenage years.

Libraries may subscribe to either or both resources. Libraries serving populations under 7,000 are eligible for Learners Engaged's equitable access program, which offers reduced pricing, ZIP code authentication, and shared community onboarding support.

***Can't Shelve This* Podcast Hits 20K Downloads**

Can't Shelve This surpassed 20,000 total downloads on August 21, 2026. The podcast's listenership has doubled in just over eight months—we hit 10,000 downloads in December 2025. This number has continued to grow as we returned from a brief summer hiatus for season three.

Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

Enhance sharing of knowledge and best practices

RAILS Hosts Virtual Presentations for Cook Memorial and Park Forest PL

In August, RAILS Member Engagement Specialist Jessica Silva gave presentations to the staff at the Cook Memorial Public Library and the Park Forest Public Library. The presentations included information on RAILS services such as continuing education, deals & discounts, grants, eRead Illinois, Explore More Illinois, and more.

Jessica Silva Presents at PrairieCat Back to School Session

On August 26, RAILS Member Engagement Specialist Jessica Silva presented at the online PrairieCat Back to School event. This event was intended for all staff working in PrairieCat school libraries. Jessica presented on RAILS services and included information about the upcoming Illinois School Library Workers Symposium. 16 people participated.

Jessica Silva Hosts Cook County Community Benefits Hub Information Session

On August 27, RAILS Member Engagement Specialist Jessica Silva hosted a Cook County Community Benefits Hub information session. This event was presented by the Cook County staff for Cook County public library staff. The discussion included topics like benefits screening, enrollment assistance, case management, and referral services available to Cook County residents. There were 25 participants.

Joe Filapek Presents at Rolling Meadows Library

RAILS Associate Executive Director Joe Filapek presented to the Rolling Meadows Public Library Board of Directors on September 9. The presentation highlighted core RAILS services and provided insights into how RAILS specifically supports resource sharing.

New Can't Shelve This: "Call Me Maybe (After School)"

Season three of *Can't Shelve This* premiered on August 11, 2026. RAILS Data Analyst Janette Derucki and IHLS Director of Membership & Outreach Leah Gregory welcome Texas library media specialist Nina Canales to share her firsthand experience navigating a districtwide cell phone ban and the surprising effects it had on students, teachers, and the library itself. The podcast is available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, YouTube, and more.

RAILS Social Media Engagement

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

New Deeper Discounts for Blinkist

The RAILS Deals & Discounts team has negotiated deeper discounts on annual subscriptions to Blinkist for RAILS public libraries. Blinkist offers brief, digestible main ideas of popular nonfiction books that can be read or listened to in about 15 minutes. Covering over 9,000 titles and hundreds of topics, the platform offers users

the big ideas from top authors while commuting, exercising, or taking a break. Over 20 million consumers already use Blinkist every day, the resource is now available to libraries to offer to their users.

Vendor Webinars

Title	Date	Registered	Live Attendees
Storykin: Creative Writing for Public Libraries	8/11	31	16
WhoFi for Public Libraries: Data-Driven Advocacy & Proving Your Library’s Worth	8/12	17	9
EBSCO for RAILS Public Libraries: Making the Most of Your Resources	8/20	61	25
Total		109	50

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).

On August 10, Director of Library Resources & Programs Leila Heath and RAILS Special Projects Librarian Gates Marquez followed up with Cabell King, Special Projects Administrator for the State of Illinois and Illinois Literacy Foundation Manager, about the state’s upcoming Alternative Methods of Credentialing (AMOC) pilot with a group of select public libraries. The pilot libraries and the state are in the process of finalizing workflows, messaging, and other program details prior to launch. Formal announcement of the pilot program is still anticipated before the end of the year. Leila and Gates will continue coordinating with Cabell and communicating with libraries to support this effort as the pilot launch approaches.

Stats for both programs are listed below:

Career Online High School Stats as of September 1, 2026

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
536	315	36	64%/53%

Gale Excel Stats as of September 1, 2026

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
110	55	52	95%/53%

Seek greater efficiencies, innovations, and enhancements to delivery services

New Delivery Vehicles Ordered

RAILS has ordered twelve delivery vehicles for its delivery operation, which will be deployed across multiple service hubs. These vehicles are planned and budgeted replacements for high-mileage vehicles in the existing fleet; while the delivery timeline remains uncertain, we currently anticipate receiving the vans sometime in early 2027.

Find More Illinois Update



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

Academic	Public	School	Special	Total
14	71	12	1	98

Find More Illinois total transactions (loans and borrows)

Time Period	Number of transactions
August 2026	1,82
Fiscal Year to Date	3,334

Find More Illinois catalog

Time Period	Number of items in shared catalog
August 2026	9,646,876

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 completed the transfer of available content from libraries' individual Unbound accounts. The team has also made progress onboarding eRead Illinois K-12 libraries to the Palace Project platform. As of September 2, 222 of the 550+ school libraries are completely onboarded to The Palace Project. 101 school libraries are in the final stages of testing before being completely onboarded. Most school libraries have provided their onboarding information, and nearly all have been contacted by The Palace Project team.



Collection	Distributor	Platform	E-Book Checkouts	Audiobook Checkouts	Total Checkouts
eRead Illinois	Palace	Palace Project	8,912	18,569	27,481
Palace Bookshelf	Palace	Palace Project	134	0	134
Multiple	OverDrive	Palace Project	31	50	81
Multiple	CloudLibrary	Palace Project	3	1	4
Inkie.org Library	BiblioBoard	Palace Project	225	0	225
Inkie.org Library	BiblioBoard	BiblioBoard	1,921	0	1,921
Total Month			11,226	18,620	29,846
Fiscal Year to Date			21,615	37,062	58,677

Explore More Illinois Update



Most Popular Attractions – Downstate & Suburban Cardholders in August 2026

Attraction	Location	Reservations Made
The Morton Arboretum	Lisle	553
Cantigny	Wheaton	211
Griffin Museum of Science and Industry	Chicago	205
DuPage Children's Museum	Naperville	174
Glencoe Beach	Glencoe	143

Most Popular Attractions – Chicago Cardholders in August 2026

Attraction	Location	Reservations Made
Field Museum	Chicago	643
Art Institute of Chicago	Chicago	600
Chicago Academy of Science Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum	Chicago	515
Brookfield Zoo Chicago	Brookfield	500
Griffin Museum of Science and Industry	Chicago	351

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

System	Publics	Community Colleges	Total
RAILS	351	4	355
IHLS	114	1	115

CPL	1	n/a	1	Agenda item 8.3.1
Totals	466	5	471	

Attractions in Explore More Illinois as of September 1, 2026

Attractions	75
Total Attractions in FY27	83

Reservations Made in Explore More Illinois in August 2026

Organization	August 2026
RAILS/IHLS	2,304
CPL	3,824
Total	6,218

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

Provide leadership in developing and providing resources that will support member libraries' efforts to provide equitable, diverse, and inclusive services

World Language Cataloging Service Continues to Grow

Over the past month, the World Language Cataloging Service (WLCS) successfully cataloged 155 diverse items from libraries across Illinois. Demand for this service remains strong, reflecting the continued need for accessible and high-quality world language cataloging support.

The Cataloging Services department recently filled the Cataloging Services Assistant position which will increase workflow capacity. We're pleased to welcome Sarah Krause, who recently joined RAILS! Thank you also to the RAILS Administrative staff who provided temporary support to help maintain operations in the interim.

Assist member libraries in preparing for the future

Future-focused professional development and member engagement efforts

RAILS Academy

TOTAL VIEWS IN AUGUST

10,328

views

Top 5 Most Viewed	Views	% of Total
Where's My Book? Navigating the Dewey Decimal System	1,578	15.3%
Reading Call Numbers	769	7.5%
How to Handle Angry Customers	458	4.4%
RAILS Webinar: How AI Works & What Library Staff Need to Know	435	4.2%
Shelf Reading	333	3.2%

Cataloging Guidance Documents

RAILS has updated two key cataloging guidance documents developed by the Cataloging Working Group in collaboration with cataloging staff from all Local Library System Automated Programs (LLSAPs). As part of the revision process, the RAILS Cataloging Services staff reviewed the existing documents, gathered feedback from LLSAP cataloging staff, and updated the recommendations to reflect current cataloging practices and community input.

2025-2026 iCAMP Gets High Marks

The 2025–2026 Illinois Cataloging Mentoring Program (iCAMP) concluded on July 31, 2026. Following the completion of the program year, a participant survey was distributed in August 2026 to gather feedback from mentors and mentees, identify program strengths and challenges, and collect recommendations for future iCAMP initiatives. Many participants highlighted the program's positive impact, with many noting the value of professional growth, expanded networks, collaboration opportunities, and the practical application of new knowledge in their daily work.

One participant, Alex Audziayuk, MS, MDiv, MSLIS, Assistant Archivist and Rare Books Curator at The Theosophical Society in America, shared:

"It was a great joy for me personally and a very valuable experience professionally. I truly appreciate your work and the opportunity. And I'm so glad to see the practical impact of the program in my daily work and a deeper understanding of various concepts, in so great new connections and collaborative opportunities, as well as in my very first contributions to LCNAF."

The iCAMP Mentoring Program is currently recruiting new mentors and mentees for the FY26–27 program year.

Recent CE Events

- **Grant Writing with AI: A Practical Guide for Libraries**, webinar, August 25
- **Accessibility at Work: From Word to PDF**, RAILS Burr Ridge, August 31
- **Starting a Library Staff Green Team**, webinar, September 17

Upcoming CE Events

- **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; Woodridge Public Library, September 23
Participants at these hands-on workshops will explore book repair techniques, exchange ideas, and work with damaged materials.
- **Session & Social: Outdoor Library Spaces as Community Infrastructure**, Lake Villa Public Library District, September 28

Learn how outdoor recreation is an essential community infrastructure, connecting wellness, education, and economic growth, and explore how libraries can serve as conveners and community partners in this work. This combined CE event and networking opportunity includes a tour of Lake Villa Library's Great Lawn, plus lots of time to talk and swap strategies with fellow librarians.

Agenda Item 8.3.1

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Strengthen collaborative relationships with partner library organizations

September 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 September the group discussed:

- A new SLATE video is ready!
- The discussion of staffing situations at several Illinois school libraries
- A preview of the school library advocacy toolkit
- Upcoming conferences

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

RAILS Staff & Service Center News

Anne Slaughter Guest Lectures at UIUC iSchool

RAILS Director of Technology Services Anne Slaughter will give a guest lecture at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's iSchool on September 21 for a course in Libraries, Information, and Society. This lecture will include an overview of her path to the library field, career arc, and current areas of focus, as well as the work of RAILS and library consortia.

Joe Filapek Participates in ARSL Conference

RAILS Associate Executive Director Joe Filapek attended the Association of Small and Rural Library (ARSL) Conference September 16-19 in Montgomery, AL. In addition to attending conference session and meeting with exhibiting vendors, RAILS and IHLS coordinated a gathering of Illinois conference attendees on the first night of the conference (see photo below).



RAILS IT Update

In August, the RAILS IT team replaced the batteries in the UPS (Uninterruptable Power Supply) in the RAILS Datacenter. They also replaced and tested the East Peoria videoconferencing equipment in advance of the August Board meeting. The team renegotiated a three-year contract with Mimecast, RAILS email security vendor. The contract includes advanced security training for staff. The new deal will save \$5,000 per year. Finally, the team purchased and replaced laptop docks.

AUGUST 2026

RAILS
DIGITAL MARKETING
BOARD REPORT



FOLLOWERS

total subscribers

Facebook +18

3,391

Instagram +131

5,742

LinkedIn +57

2,668

REACH

accounts shown our content

Facebook -642

11,754

Instagram -65,456

114,460

LinkedIn -426

3,805

VIEWS

times our content was seen

Facebook -7,790

34,483

Instagram -106,117

181,908

LinkedIn -692

7,919

ENGAGEMENT

reactions, comments, and shares

Facebook -457

693

Instagram -11,205

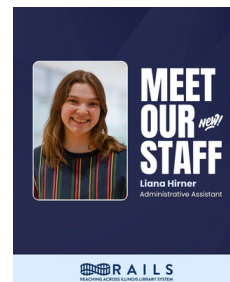
23,157

LinkedIn +3

389

TOP POST

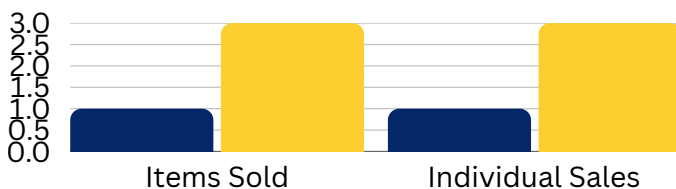
received the most engagement



RAILS Online Store

● July 2026

● August 2026



RAILS Minute Views: 554



Can't Shelve This Listens: 1,291