



DATE: September 18, 2026
TO: RAILS Board of Directors
FROM: Monica Harris, Executive Director
SUBJECT: 9.1 Annual Report: Narrative Report

As a requirement of our Area System and Per Capita grant, RAILS submits an Annual Report to the Illinois State Library each year detailing the system's work during the previous fiscal year. In accordance with the Illinois Library System Administrative Rules, the completed report is due to the State Library by September 30, 2026, and must be approved by the RAILS Board.

Attached for your review is the Narrative Report component of the submission, which offers the most comprehensive overview of the work completed by RAILS over the past year. Due to the overall length of the full submission, only the Narrative Report is included in your meeting packet. If you would like to review the complete draft Annual Report, please contact Stacy Palmisano, and we will gladly provide it.

We will ask the Board to approve the Annual Report at our upcoming September meeting. I'm looking forward to sharing this overview of the incredible work completed by the RAILS team over the last year.

Narrative Report

Introduction

The narrative report below is the summary of all of the activities RAILS accomplished in FY 2026. It is organized in accordance with our 2022-2025 Strategic Plan.

As a library system, RAILS's highest commitment is to our member libraries and resource sharing. We seek to ensure that each library has the resources it needs to serve its users. We do that via interlibrary loan delivery, professional development, cost sharing programs, grants, connections & networking, and much more.

Some of the FY 2026 report highlights include:

- **Ensured Uninterrupted Digital Access:** Swiftly migrated the eRead Illinois program to the open-source Palace Project app following the sudden closure of primary vendor Baker & Taylor, ensuring continuous library access for residents across the state.
- **Expanded Digital Literacy in Cook County:** Launched the Cook County Digital Navigator Network program, leveraging grant funding from the Cook County Equity Fund to help bridge the digital divide in suburban Cook County libraries.
- **Supported Library System Independence:** Successfully assisted with the completion of the Resource Sharing Alliance (RSA) Independence Project in January 2026, strengthening operational self-sufficiency within the regional system.
- **Invested in Library Leadership:** Launched *RAILS Catalyst*, a high-impact leadership development program designed to build core management and strategic capabilities among library leaders across RAILS's service area.
- **Advanced Data-Driven Advocacy:** Hosted the inaugural *Libraries Count* pre-conference event, training library staff and trustees on data collection methods to better demonstrate local ROI to community stakeholders.
- **Championed Equitable E-Content Access:** Partnered with statewide allies to produce and distribute advocacy materials highlighting the critical role and current challenges of eBooks and eAudiobooks in modern public library service.
- **Earned Statewide Recognition for Advocacy:** Awarded the 2026 American Marketing Association (Chicago Chapter) Palmer Marketing Award for an advocacy campaign that helped local libraries advocate for Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) funding.
- **Enhanced Resource Sharing Visibility:** Launched the updated interactive RAILS Resource Sharing Map, providing member libraries and stakeholders real-time visibility into library resource sharing across the state.

Although our work often takes place behind the scenes, everything we do is designed to elevate the visibility and value of local libraries. As libraries navigate unprecedented funding and operational challenges, RAILS provides the strategic support necessary to safeguard and strengthen library services across Illinois.

Over the past two fiscal years, RAILS has taken a lead role in addressing the core funding challenges facing our libraries. In FY 2025, RAILS focused heavily on helping our libraries demonstrate the essential value of federal Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) funding.

In FY 2026, we equipped member libraries with the tools and data needed to explain the soaring market costs of e-book and digital audiobook access to their communities.

As these signature issues impact library operations statewide, RAILS continues to step forward in direct response to member needs—providing proactive leadership today and in the years ahead.

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

Objectives	Planned Activities
Enhance the sharing of knowledge and best practices through member networking and communications between all types of libraries	Planned/scheduled virtual and in-person networking opportunities for staff at all levels at all sizes and types of libraries, including: • Illinois College, RAILS Member Meetup • Churchill Elementary School in Homewood, IL, RAILS Member Meetup • Black Hawk College, RAILS Member Meetup • Fountaindale Public Library, RAILS Member Meetup • Ela Area Public Library, RAILS Member Meetup • “Resource Sharing Map,” RAILS Showcase • “Makerspaces and Digital Scholarship,” RAILS Online Roundtable • “Libraries Supporting Reentry,” RAILS Online Roundtable • “Human Library,” RAILS Online Roundtable • “Library Demographics,” RAILS Online Roundtable Worked with statewide partners, including AISLE, IACRL, IHLS, ILA, and others to plan additional networking opportunities for staff from different types of libraries and for trustees from public libraries. (See examples throughout this document.) Regularly publicized networking opportunities offered by these organizations Continued updating site visit map to help member libraries visualize the connections that RAILS creates through one-on-one meetings Continued offering online networking event to encourage academic and school library workers to meet and exchange ideas Continued coordinating RAILS Convenors Club, which brings together networking group organizers to discuss best practices

Objectives	Planned Activities
	Publicized 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 Assisted in the creation of new RAILS networking groups, including: • Queer Librarians Networking Group • Civic Empowerment Networking Group Continued to build and strengthen relationships and engagement with RAILS networking groups. Visited networking group meetings to share the latest RAILS news and gather feedback on RAILS programs/services Provided subsidized Zoom licenses to 26 networking groups Encouraged use of RAILS mailing lists, including lists geared toward different library types and sizes, and staff at all levels. Established new lists as needed
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	Continued to expand the RAILS discount and group purchase program. Gathered input from members at all types and sizes of libraries on desired discounts/group purchases and acted on input as possible. RAILS members saved over \$2 million through the program in FY 2026 Offers in FY 2026 included: • Auto-Graphics MONTAGE, digital collections storage • Auto-Graphics VERSO, integrated library system • BiblioBoard Creator • Blinkist, key insights from popular books • BookBrowse for Libraries, readers' advisory resource • Brainfuse CollegeNow, college application process tools • Brainfuse HelpNow, tutoring and study suite • Brainfuse JobNow, job search services and tools • Brainfuse VetNow, benefits, career and academic assistance • <i>Chicago Tribune</i> Digital Access • Comics Plus, digital comics, graphic novels, manga collection • Communico events planning and room booking tools • Creativebug, craft education hub • Credo Reference, online reference service • EBSCO K-12 resources • EBSCO public library resources • Era Books Online, phonics, readers, picture books, activities • Fiero Code, coding education • Gale Early Literacy database package • Gale Presents: Udemy, online adult learning tool • Hiveclass, digital youth sports training encyclopedia

Objectives	Planned Activities
	• InfoBase databases • InfoBase streaming collections for all ages • JSTOR/ARTSTOR, Full-text articles and image collections • Library Journal Professional Development Courses • LOTE4Kids, digital picture books in world languages • Playgarden, interactive online preschool • PressReader for Libraries, newspaper/magazine access • ProQuest O'Reilly, online learning, e-books and videos • Public Web Browser • RDA Toolkit group purchase • READsquared, online tool for managing reading programs • SizeUp, Inc., small business advisor • Storykin, creative writing education • Swank annual public performance license • Tumblebooks, e-books and audiobooks • WhoFi, calendar and data analytics platform Continued expansion of Consortia Manager platform to manage and optimize RAILS group purchases & discounts and streamline work processes Networked with group purchasing managers statewide and nationwide to explore new opportunities and discuss challenges related to consortial group purchasing Created new public and K-12 deals-specific email lists to help communicate to libraries about the availability of deals and upcoming vendor demos Online High School Diploma Programs Continued partnership with the Career Online High School (COHS) and Gale Excel Adult High School platforms to enable libraries to offer adult learners accredited high school diplomas and career certificates Continued to meet with COHS/Excel library staff participants to develop and promote the program Partnered with the Illinois Literacy Foundation in support of the Alternative Methods of Credentialing (AMOC) Program for adult learners to secure a high school diploma. The AMOC pilot program launch is planned for Fall 2026
RAILS will continue to seek greater efficiencies, innovations, and	Worked with RAILS members of all sizes and types to determine the most appropriate delivery method to meet their needs

Objectives	Planned Activities
enhancements to delivery services.	Consulted with members on delivery issues/concerns on an ongoing basis. Widely promoted the use of the delivery help desk ticketing system Promoted the need to complete quarterly delivery volume counts to RAILS members. Consulted with libraries on an individual basis as needed. Examined count data to help inform potential changes to existing delivery routes and necessary frequency changes Continued utilizing and adding features to the iPad app for delivery drivers' data collection. This makes aggregation and real-time data more manageable Worked closely with IHLS and CARLI to announce a change in the evening delivery shuttle from evening to morning Continued providing high-quality statewide delivery services to CARLI via ILDS (Illinois Library Delivery Service) Continue to meet quarterly with IHLS, ISL, and CARLI, where we share ideas, brainstorm issues and provide updates on completed projects. CPL has recently joined the group
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	General Continued to work with the RAILS Resource Sharing Committee to investigate and recommend ways to improve and increase resource sharing in Illinois Co-presented "A Million Illinoisans Without Libraries? Let's Change That!" with member library representatives at the 2025 ILA Annual Conference, highlighting collaborative efforts to eliminate service gaps and extend library access statewide Collaborated with AISLE, CARLI, CPLS, IACRL, IHLS, ILA, ISL, and other stakeholders to expand resource sharing as referenced throughout this document Collaborated with and supported the work of the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC), including attendance at the annual conference in Orlando and co-presenting with a panel: "Stronger Together: Designing Professional Development That Crosses Consortial Boundaries"

Objectives	Planned Activities
	Continued gathering data for the RAILCAR project, which aggregates an expanded dataset related to LLSAP services and activities across RAILS. Maintained two publicly available dashboards, and began expanded analysis after completing three full years of data collection Promote/Support LLSAP Membership Helped with the transition of RSA staff from RAILS employment to direct employment by the RSA organization effective January 1, 2026, and from RAILS IT services and support effective July 1, 2026. RAILS assisted with areas such as payroll, benefits, policies, staff IT equipment and services, and other operational systems. The RAILS Board of Directors also approved a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with RSA at the January 2026 board meeting for the transfer of two passenger vehicles Continued to provide financial support to six RAILS LLSAPs: CCS, Pinnacle, PrairieCat, Rock River Library Consortium, RSA, and SWAN via the annual LLSAP Support Grant process. As components of their respective grant awards, RSA received financial services and the use of RAILS' East Peoria facility, and PrairieCat received financial services Offered Catalog Membership Grants to encourage libraries to join a RAILS LLSAP and to make LLSAP membership more affordable. Awarded \$106,940 in grants to three libraries: • Wauconda Area Public Library (CCS) • Rolling Meadows Library (CCS) • Spoon River Valley CUSD #4 (RSA) Launched a new spreadsheet-based budget template to improve the Catalog Membership Grant application and review processes Provided consultation to applicants and grantees throughout the process and monitored quarterly reporting for eight awardees whose 18-month grant terms were active during FY2026 Promoted the value of consortium membership to all types and sizes of RAILS libraries via RAILS communication tools, committee work, and member encounters Consulted with individual RAILS member libraries on LLSAP membership, Catalog Membership Grants, and automation-related tasks and responsibilities Continued to work with RAILS Consortia Committee to investigate and recommend ways to improve and increase consortial services in Illinois,

Objectives	Planned Activities
	including the potential use of ILS data as a component of the periodic manual delivery count Expand and Promote Find More Illinois (FMI) Widely promoted benefits of joining FMI: • Featured regular articles about FMI in the weekly <i>RAILS E-News</i> • Worked with RAILS Communications and vendor on producing a new logo which will launch in September 2026 • Targeted academic libraries with lender-only program that allows libraries to share their collections with a wider community • Met individually with interested libraries for customized demos and discussions • Direct outreach to libraries that had previously requested quotes Onboarded 10 new libraries to FMI in FY 2026, including • 1 public library • 1 school library • 8 academic libraries Onboarding includes technical setup, workflow consulting, and library staff training. There were 95 FMI participating libraries by the end of FY 2026 Added Northern Illinois University as a new member which brought more than 2 million items to the FMI collection Provided ongoing training, consulting, and technical support to FMI libraries and worked with vendor to resolve support issues and advocate for software enhancements Continued to offer IHLS the opportunity to participate in FMI Support High-Quality Cataloging Continued offering iCAMP mentoring program in collaboration with IHLS/CMC. In FY 2026, there were 63 total participants including 24 mentors and 39 mentees Four cataloging training sessions were conducted, totaling 37 hours of instruction, on the following topics: • Authorities & Authority Control • The New RDA: What's New? What's Different?

Objectives	Planned Activities
	• Cataloging Monographs Using RDA • MARC 21 Standard: An Introduction Offered RDA Toolkit group purchase and WebDewey purchase as referenced above Continued offering World Language Cataloging Service as detailed below Provided expert consulting to RAILS member library staff on cataloging matters Publicized IHLS Cataloging Maintenance Center (CMC) programs via regular articles in the <i>RAILS E-News</i> Cataloging Services Manager served as chair of the ALA Core Cataloging Norms Interest Group and co-chair of ALA Core Cataloging Competencies and Education Cataloging Services Manager contributed as a member of the Board of Reviewers for Open Rules of Cataloging Cataloging Services Manager was a member of South Asia SACO Funnel Continued to serve on the Accessibility and Disability Working Group of the DEI in Metadata networking group, and maintain a presence in many networking groups and LLSAP committees eRead Illinois/The Palace Project Due to the abrupt closure of Baker & Taylor transitioned all eRead Illinois libraries from the Boundless app to The Palace Project app, managed by Lyrasis. This transition included: • Working directly with staff at Lyrasis to safely manage data and transition to new platform • Offering regular The Palace Project training sessions for eRead Illinois members • Communicating directly with IHLS, CARLI, LLSAP partners, and other stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition • Communicating directly with member libraries to ensure that they were abreast of developments and had everything they needed • Developing brand-new marketing materials for libraries including posters, social media graphics, sample messaging, and image captions

Objectives	Planned Activities
	• Worked extensively with the Palace team on platform development, including web-based access and K-12 requirements for scoping, authentication, and student data privacy for the 550 eRead Illinois school library buildings Announced a \$150k content boost for eRead Illinois in August 2025. These funds were used to purchase additional e-books and audiobooks Recruited RAILS libraries and IHLS non-SHARE libraries to join eRead Illinois and The Palace Project. Supported training and marketing needs of participants Updated the eRead Illinois membership dashboard to improve efficiency and record keeping during the sign up, renewal, and onboarding processes Evaluated eRead Illinois content to ensure that it continued to meet member needs: • Continued to add additional content for K-12 students • Continued to seek input from eRead participants on the collection and implemented suggestions as possible • Explored and purchased new and favorable licensing models offered through the Palace Marketplace Evaluated e-content ordering procedures with the Palace Marketplace team to improve efficiency and available content Networked with e-content managers statewide and nationwide to stay abreast of new developments and initiatives Inkie.org & Inkie.org Library Continued to partner with BiblioLabs to offer the Inkie.org Library to support self-publishing, Illinois authors, and Illinois e-content Publicized Inkie.org Library resources as being free (courtesy of RAILS) to all Illinois libraries and all Illinois residents, including those not served by a public library Integrated all of Inkie.org Library resources into The Palace Project, which resulted in checkouts of more than 2,000 titles via The Palace Project platform Purchased perpetual licenses for over 300 Arcadia Publishing & The History Press e-book titles highlighting Illinois history

Objectives	Planned Activities
	Continued offering group purchase pricing on BiblioBoard products for self-published authors Explore More Illinois (EMI) 471 libraries and 75 attractions participated in Explore More Illinois Continued to seek new ways to promote and expand the program Continued to work with IHLS to recruit IHLS libraries and set them up in the program Offered new America250 marketing materials for member libraries Continued to expand the number and types of participating attractions, and added 10 new attractions in FY26 Worked with vendor to develop platform enhancements and networked with ePass (EMI's software) administrators nationwide to explore new opportunities and solutions Other E-Resources Initiatives Supported the ISL and RAILS members with messaging about Illinois Reliable Information Sources (IRIS) database program Continued 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 Supported additional efforts related to web accessibility including the development of a Digital Accessibility pulse page for the RAILS website, provided guidance from legal regarding discrimination complaints related to web accessibility, and the availability of several CE events focused on best practices in accessibility

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

Objectives	Planned Activities
RAILS will provide leadership in developing and providing resources that will support member libraries' efforts to provide	Continued offering "Social Justice for Libraries" asynchronous course available through Freedom Lifted to deliver EDIA training to member libraries

Objectives	Planned Activities
equitable, diverse, and inclusive services.	Offered EDIA-related CE, including: • "Building Stronger Multi-Generational Teams in Your Library" • "Effectively Evaluating and Sharing Library Accessibility" • "Document Accessibility Essentials: A Step-by-Step Guide from Word to PDF" • "LGBTQ+ Inclusive Schools & Libraries" • "Practical Tips for Improved Digital Accessibility" • "Community as Resistance: Building Courage in Uncertain Times" • "ADA Title II Compliance for Digital Resources" Continued offering and publicizing the World Language Cataloging Service statewide. Continued seeking grant funds from ISL to fund the program. In FY 2026, 1,120 total catalog records were created. The program was used by 62 multitype libraries. There were 18 languages represented Diversity was one of several criteria weighted in the evaluation process of applicants for RAILS Catalyst to ensure a cohort that represents a broad range of backgrounds and perspectives within RAILS member libraries Recruited attractions for Explore More Illinois of interest to an ethnically, geographically, and culturally diverse audience Included an EDIA category in RAILS Academy with access to 46 tutorials on EDIA topics such as accessibility, inclusive cataloging, neurodivergence, curating diverse voices in collections, supporting transgender patrons and staff, and serving LGBTQIA+ youth Offered discounts to help libraries with EDIA efforts as noted above, including: • LOTE Online for Kids, digital picture books in world languages • EBSCO Core Collection en Espanol collection development resource • Infobase World Cinema Collection • PressReader for Libraries, access to newspapers/magazines from over 120 countries Provided/promoted opportunities for members from all types and sizes of libraries to share best practices and collaborate on EDIA-related challenges through the RAILS EDI mailing list, EDIA Pulse Page, and other activities

Objectives	Planned Activities
	Continued the RAILS Digital Accessibility team to help educate staff on the ways to make content more digitally accessible and to create a framework for creating accessibility expectations Promoted and provided administrative support as applicable for RAILS EDIA-related networking groups, including the Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color Group and their mentor program; the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Metadata Group; and the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Team in Youth Services Included EDI elements in RAILS' My Library Is... grant to encourage applicants to provide equitable, diverse, inclusive, and accessibility programs/services for their community of users Continued membership in the Black Metropolis Research Consortium, a Chicago-based membership association whose mission is to connect all who seek to document, share, understand, and preserve Black experiences Continued supporting publicly available dashboards to share useful library data from IPLAR and other sources to support library decision makers and their advocacy efforts
Examine all aspects of RAILS policies, procedures, and core services through an equity lens and make needed improvements	Continued work of the RAILS Climate Team to identify and implement internal best practices and initiatives for staff Continued to provide editing tools on the RAILS website to monitor compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Followed Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) when designing, formatting, and posting content to RAILS social media platforms. Paid careful attention to color contrast; avoided excessive flashings, strobing, and decorative fonts; used shortened URLs and CamelCase hashtags; included alternative text on all graphics and accurately captioned all videos with high-contrast text
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	Continued to work with RAILS Board Policy Committee to examine RAILS Board election policies and procedures to attract a more diverse board • Further enhanced board candidate application form to encourage diverse applicants • Continued offering video candidate statements so that candidates could have the opportunity to share more about their experience and perspective

Objectives	Planned Activities
	- Created RAILS election guide which helps explain the process of running and voting in the RAILS election - Encouraged members to vote with EDIA principles in mind. Sent information on board election to all RAILS library agency directors via delivery service or U.S. mail to encourage more multitype library voting

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

Objectives	Planned Activities
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	Published member-facing annual report. This document gave a high-level overview of RAILS' 2025 accomplishments. It was distributed virtually to all libraries Provided CE/consulting to help libraries with fundraising, advocacy, and preparing for the future, including: "Using Storytelling for Advocacy: A Guide for School Librarians" "Understanding Personal Property Replacement Tax" "LACONI Recharge and RAILS Presents: I Found a Grant. Now What?" "From Startups to Libraries: Experimentation as a Catalyst for Change" "Reimagining Library Spaces on a Budget" "Social Media and Your Job: Rights, Risks, and Responsibilities" "Developing AI Policies & Principles with Dr. Brandy McNeil" Continued to schedule regular meetings with AISLE, Chicago Public Schools (CPS), IHLS, ILA, and ISBE reps to discuss collaborative projects to help school libraries deal with funding challenges. (See also information about RAILS' SLATE project below) Publicized FY 2026 ISL grant opportunities, including the Live and Learn Construction Grant, Public Library Per Capita & Equalization Grant, and the School District Library Grant Program. Encouraged members to apply RAILS Executive Director participated in the 2026 American Library Association (ALA) National Library Legislative Day in Washington, D.C. Publicized a wide variety of additional grant and scholarship opportunities from AISLE, ALA, ILA, and other library-related organizations

Objectives	Planned Activities
	Participated in a wide variety of efforts to help advocate for continued/increased funding for all types of libraries, including: • ILA Legislative Meetups, both attending and collating/contributing stories from the My Library Is... website blog demonstrating the value of libraries • Responding to ALA calls to actions • Continuing to work with ILA Public Policy Committee, ILA Advocacy Committee, and ISLAC to discuss and promote legislation of importance to libraries Publicized opportunities for staff from member libraries to advocate for continued/increased funding for libraries as appropriate, including: • Encouraging members to attend ILA Legislative Meetups • Encouraging members to respond to ALA calls to action • Encouraging library staff to use talking points and other resources on the My Library Is... website Worked with AISLE, CARLI, IHLS, and ILA to develop joint statement on changes to federal funding for libraries Awarded 2026 American Marketing Association Chicago Chapter Palmer Marketing Award for work on helping libraries advocate for IMLS funding Kept RAILS members informed of other important legislative developments affecting libraries via regular articles in the <i>RAILS E-News</i> and other communications Worked with RAILS Board Advocacy Committee to educate the board about issues affecting RAILS and libraries that required their advocacy efforts
Help member libraries of all types and sizes demonstrate their value to their different stakeholders	My Library Is... (MLI) Initiative Offered My Library Is... Grants to all types of libraries. These grants give libraries a chance to receiving funding for projects that help the library tell its story. Awarded \$104,874.34 in grants to 26 projects Offered CE to help members promote their value, including: • "Getting the Most out of Canva Pro" • "Building a Strong Library Volunteer Program" • "Partnerships for the People and Their Libraries" • "Meeting People Where They Are: Human-Centered Service In Today's Libraries"

Objectives	Planned Activities
	Developed new series of blog posts on how libraries developed their logos called Library Logo Breakdown Developed new series of blog posts on stories related to RAILS delivery drivers called Delivery Diaries Continued to offer IHLS the opportunity to participate in the MLI initiative Began to make plans to wind down the MLI initiative. RAILS remains committed to the MLI initiative theme of helping libraries tell their story
Professional development and member engagement efforts are future-focused, crossing library types and specific to individual library type needs	Provided CE/consulting on general resource sharing issues identified in the administrative rules, including interlibrary loan, the ILLNET Interlibrary Loan Code, nonresident service, the RAILS Resource Sharing Policy, etc. Provided information and training resources related to these topics on the RAILS website Provided CE/consulting on library advocacy, management and practice, and other core service areas identified in the administrative rules as referenced in this document Provided CE/consulting to help libraries meet per capita grant requirements and standards for their type of library Continued to gather member input on CE needs from all sizes and types of RAILS libraries and implemented training to meet those needs Identified/monitored issues, trends, and challenges affecting libraries of all types and sizes and provided CE/consulting opportunities to help libraries respond to these issues and challenges, including: • Continued working with AISLE, CARLI, IHLS, and ILA on the Unite Against Book Bans Regional Response Team to help libraries dealing with materials challenges In 2025, the Unite Against Book Bans Regional Response Team was awarded the ILA Intellectual Freedom Award for their work to connect, equip, and mobilize the public to advocate for the right to read Offered tech related webinars including: • "Teaching Tech Skills Without a Computer Lab" • "Generative AI in Libraries: Ethical Dilemmas and Opportunities" • "RAILS Learning Lab: Training Patrons to Be Digitally Resilient" • "Generative AI and the Library Collection"

Objectives	Planned Activities
	• "Developing AI Policies & Principles with Dr. Brandy McNeil" • "Medium- & Long-Term Risks of AI" • "High-Risk AI: AGI, Extreme-Risk Communication & Workshop Delivery" • "Creating a Learning Culture Around Technology in Libraries" • "Teaching Patrons Digital Resilience" Continued to develop Library Pulse pages on the RAILS website to help members respond to current issues, challenges, and trends Worked with legal partners at Ancel Glink to provide guidance and support for libraries receiving large-scale FOIA requests Continued to offer CE Event Grants to help libraries, networking groups, and library consortia plan/offer training events of interest to library staff. Awarded total of 12 grants with a total funded of \$21,150 in FY 2026 Continued to offer professional development hours via the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Worked with statewide partners to further develop Directors University, the statewide training initiative for new public library directors. Publicized widely Launched DU on Demand. These are on-demand videos that teach foundational skills for Illinois public library directors. These videos can be accessed at any time and include a wide variety of topics such as facilities, succession planning, safety & security, and creating stronger relationships with your board Launched RAILS Catalyst, a modern leadership development program that helps libraries' current and future leaders to drive progress, manage change with empathy, and solve problems that move their communities forward. 48 people participated in the program which spanned eight months In partnership with IHLS and ILA, once again offered Directors University Advanced (formerly Directors University 2.0). This is the continuation of the successful Directors University wherein directors dive deeper into topics. 26 RAILS library directors participated Launched RAILS Academy, a new online learning platform designed to support the professional development of staff at RAILS member libraries. Powered by Niche Academy, RAILS Academy provides free, on-demand access to hundreds of tutorials on topics ranging from the

Objectives	Planned Activities
	ethics of artificial intelligence to youth readers' advisory, customer service, intellectual freedom, and technology Continued partnership with HR Source to provide CE and discounted membership. Publicized widely Continued partnership with Ancel Glink to offer statewide FOIA/OMA hotline. Publicized widely Trustee Training Continued partnership with United for Libraries to provide statewide, online, on-demand trustee training through their "Short Takes for Trustee" series. Publicized training widely Offered "Trustee Training: Robert's Rules of Order" Consulted with/attended library board meetings as appropriate to help boards meet legal requirements and to develop leadership skills Continued to promote the iLead trustee learning portal that is available statewide. Promoted training events connected to this platform

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
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, and the Illinois State Library.	L2 (Library Directory and Learning Calendar) Continued to provide statewide leadership for L2 • Hosted, maintained, and routinely updated the L2 software • Developed additional features and improvements in response to user feedback, including refinements to administrative functions, improvements to the calendar and directory, automated email reminders, and preparatory work required for a major version update to the Drupal software • Provided ongoing user help and support, including hosting and maintaining a support ticket system used by RAILS and IHLS • Continued to contract with Aten Design Group for L2 support and development • Asked ISL to continue to provide additional grant funding to support L2 • Provided a robust API and custom Drupal modules that allow IHLS and LLSAPs to pull library and event data from L2 into their own websites

Objectives	Planned Activities
	- Continued to support annual certification for all member agencies of Illinois library systems through L2 (see also next section) - Continued to ensure the accuracy and currency of directory data from external sources such as IPLAR and ISBE - Launched new initiative to help remind library staff to update their L2 information. The initiative included a contest, downloadable documents such as handouts and posters Continued working with statewide L2 Governing Group (L2G2) on development priorities, long-term goals for L2, implementation of major new projects, and quality assurance testing for new features. Continued to implement a structured process for the ongoing creation, review, and maintenance of L2 user documentation, in collaboration with L2G2 members and additional staff from RAILS and IHLS Continued to participate in the Intercept open source software (which the L2 platform uses) community, including contributing our customizations back to the source software for broader use whenever possible Certification Worked with ISL, IHLS, and other partners to improve and enhance the annual certification process Worked with RAILS members to ensure that they completed the certification process Other Collaborative Initiatives RAILS' Executive Director is a voting member the Illinois State Library Advisory Committee (ISLAC) RAILS' Executive Director meets regularly with ISL Director to discuss ongoing and upcoming issues for RAILS and RAILS member libraries RAILS' Executive Director continued regular meetings with the Commissioner of the Chicago Public Library to discuss collaboration possibilities The RAILS Board of Directors voted to adopt Free Speech Needs Free Libraries: A Joint Statement of CARLI, Orbis Cascade Alliance, and PALCI RAILS' Executive Director met regularly with IHLS Executive Director and CARLI Senior Director to discuss statewide electronic resources

Objectives	Planned Activities
	project, ILDS contract, ICOLC conference collaborations, and other possibilities for collaboration RAILS' Executive Director serves on the Advisory Board for Dominican University's School of Information Studies Worked together with the Illinois Heartland Library System to host Libraries + Education: Creating Community Through Collaboration. Two online sessions were held where superintendents, district administrators, and school board members could learn more about partnering with the state's regional library systems to foster education and impact student achievement Additional continuing education collaborations with the Illinois Heartland Library System included workshops on Document Accessibility Essentials, Narcan Administration, and a three-part leadership series Collaborated with the Library Administrators Council of Northern Illinois (LACONI) included continuing education events on grant management and using AI. CE & Consulting Specialist Margae Schmidt is the LACONI Technology Section Chair and LACONI Governing Board Secretary Continued to schedule regular meetings with AISLE, CPS, IHLS, ILA, and ISL to discuss collaborative projects related to school libraries as referenced above Director of Consulting & Continuing Education Kate Niehoff attends monthly COSLA CE meetings to discuss library professional development initiatives with state library continuing education coordinators from across the country With AISLE, IHLS, ILA, and ISL hosted the 2025 Illinois School Library Workers Symposium, a one-day online event for school library workers with no formal library education. This event continues to grow and attract more participation from libraries. In FY 2026, over 190 attendees participated in 15 sessions RAILS' Director of Marketing & Communications served on the Special Libraries Association (SLA) national board. Although SLA is in the process of merging with the Association for Information Science & Technology (ASIS&T), the board continued to meet in FY 2026 CE & Consulting Specialist Diana Rusch is Chair of ALA's Online Learning Roundtable, and a member of the ILA Reporter Committee

Objectives	Planned Activities
	Continued to serve as sponsor for library-related conferences as possible, including conferences aimed at libraries of all types and different staff levels Collaborated with AISLE, IHLS, and ILA to host an exhibit booth at the 2025 Illinois Association of School Boards conference in Chicago. This offers RAILS an opportunity to talk to school superintendents, administrators, and trustees Hosted Libraries Count data pre-conference as a part of ILA 2025 in collaboration with ILA. The event offered hands-on workshop style sessions for participants to gain in-depth knowledge of data best practices in a variety of areas including data management, artificial intelligence, data cleaning, analysis, and visualization In collaboration with the Illinois State Library, Illinois Library Association, and Illinois Heartland Library System, coordinated and delivered Directors University and Directors University Advanced. RAILS Executive Director serves as Ex Officio on the Illinois Library Association's Public Policy Committee RAILS Executive Director serves as treasurer for the Libraries of Illinois Risk Agency (LIRA) RAILS joined the Urban Libraries Council (ULC) as an affiliate member RAILS joined the Schools, Health, and Libraries Broadband (SHLB) coalition, and subsequently worked with the Oak Park Public Library to arrange a visit and tour for SHLB and RAILS staff RAILS Executive Director served as an advisor for the Libraries as Partners IMLS grant for Emergency Management in libraries (University of Illinois Fire Service Institute) RAILS Director of Technology Services served on Public Library Association's Digital Literacy Advisory Group as well as several units of ALA's Core division (Strategic Plan Task Force member, Core Forum Conference Planning Committee member, and Technology Section Past-Chair) RAILS Director of Technology Services continued to lead our collaboration with University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's (UIUC) iSchool and its Digital Equity Action Research (DEAR) Lab, investigating the digital navigator capacity of Illinois libraries. Co-presented about

Objectives	Planned Activities
	our collaboration at UIUC's Public Engagement Summit with Dr. Colin Rhinesmith and iSchool graduate students In collaboration with Cook County Digital Equity, launched the Cook County Digital Navigator Network program with funding from the Cook County Equity Fund. The program intends to create stronger connections among public libraries and County government and support libraries' capacity to meet their communities' needs for equitable access to technology equipment, internet, digital skills, and one-on-one assistance. Led by RAILS Director of Technology Services, we established a Guiding Team of library staff, held four listening sessions across Cook County, designed branded materials for program communications, and developed and launched a mini-pilot grant offering that distributed \$62,000 to 24 libraries. The project team is currently planning for expanded activities in FY 2027 RAILS Director of Technology Services serves as Chair of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's Broadband Advisory Council, in the seat representing Illinois libraries RAILS joined GMIS Illinois, an association of local government information technology professionals dedicated to sharing and learning from each other
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.	School Library Data Project Continued to work with statewide partners to gather data on Illinois school libraries to get a better picture of school library needs in Illinois and how we might collaboratively address those needs Began working with library partners outside of Illinois to share and discuss SLATE and school library data collection efforts in other states Continued to develop the SLATE School Library Census to gather data about library staff, library collections, and library finances and encourage participation from more libraries Conducted a survey of RAILS community college members to better understand their needs, outreach, and service model
Continuously evaluate RAILS programs and services to ensure that they are having an impact and are helping to create the	Continued to maintain the RAILS Resource Sharing Map, a powerful tool designed to help libraries explore, analyze, and advocate for libraries across Illinois. Built on the advanced ArcGIS software platform, this updated map is now publicly available and offers more features and flexibility than ever before

Objectives	Planned Activities
best possible future for all member libraries	Launched a popular new “Anatomy of a Public Library” demographic data analysis and peer library comparison dashboard developed by the RAILS Data Intern Continued to solicit member feedback via RAILS communication tools, surveys, and member encounters. Implemented changes/additions to RAILS programs/services based on member input as appropriate Monitor usage data in dashboards to assess performance of programs and services such as Continuing Education, Explore More Illinois, eRead, and the RAILS website among others Updated RAILS grant rubrics as necessary to ensure goals are being met related to performance, and diversity and equity measures (See other sections of this document for plans to gather and respond to member feedback on specific RAILS programs/services)
Collaborate with the Illinois State Library, the Illinois Heartland Library System, and other partners to develop a plan and timeline for achieving universal service	Continued to work with the RAILS Board Universal Service Committee to find and implement solutions to challenges related to the unserved in Illinois Worked with Resource Sharing Committee to increase awareness within the library community of the significant number of unserved residents in Illinois. The group worked on advocacy and support for shared electronic resources and development of Find More Illinois Publicized requirement for library boards to vote annually on participation in the nonresident program and for members to update their participation information via L2. Publicized the names of participating/nonparticipating libraries and share with the Illinois State Library per our statutory requirement

Other Administrative Activities

The following section details FY 2025 activities to meet statutory priorities for Illinois library systems not included in the sections above.

Objectives	Planned Activities
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	Member Recruitment Engaged with libraries of all types that expressed an interest in RAILS membership Visited potential members to ensure they meet membership criteria Worked with RAILS Board on new member recommendations for approval by ISL General Member Communication/Engagement Promoted available programs/services via RAILS communication tools and member encounters, including: • RAILS website • Weekly <i>RAILS E-News</i> • Visiting as many members as possible, either virtually or in person • Producing new RAILS services/program brochure to distribute to all interested member library staff and public library trustees • Scheduling RAILS member updates • Using available type of library mailing lists and lists for different types of libraries and different levels of staff to communicate about specific programs/services of interest • Attending RAILS networking group meetings as appropriate • Sending all new RAILS library directors a welcome communication to acquaint them with system programs/services, and offering to schedule “New Director Welcome” online discussions to provide more in-depth information • Continuing to feature “RAILS Minute” videos with the RAILS Executive Director highlighting the latest system news • Offering one-on-one online meetings for school library staff who were new to their district, new to RAILS, or for anyone who wanted a refresher on system services • Giving an update on RAILS programs/services at Health Science Librarians of Illinois Conference (HSLI) • Continued hosting <i>Can’t Shelve This</i> podcast to help support school libraries and talk about the opportunities and challenges they face • Continued to offer the RAILS online store to engage staff from member libraries in a fun way

Objectives	Planned Activities
	In 2025, RAILS Digital Marketing & Communications Specialist received a Best of Marketing Honorable Mention from the Library Marketing & Communications Group for work on the <i>Can't Shelve This</i> podcast Exhibited at library conferences geared at different types of libraries and different levels of staff • Approximately 620 visitors to RAILS exhibit booth at October ILA conference • Approximately 99 visitors to RAILS exhibit booth at October AISLE conference • Approximately 626 visitors to RAILS exhibit table at May Reaching Forward North conference • Approximately 961 visitors to the RAILS exhibit booth at the June ALA Annual Conference
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	Communicated regularly with the board through board mailing list and other means Kept board informed about important issues for RAILS and for libraries of all types. Provided monthly talking points for communicating with members about select RAILS programs/services Planned/implemented orientation session at Burr Ridge service center for all new RAILS Board members. Invited existing board members to attend for a refresher Scheduled board meetings in different parts of the RAILS area as possible so the board could learn about different areas of the system Visited newly seated Board members at their home libraries, offering the chance to view unique aspects of their spaces in person and meet local library staff. Continued to promote and encourage diversity on the RAILS Board as referenced above Supported board conference/meeting attendance as appropriate
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	Encouraged/supported professional development for staff, including: • Provided all staff with access to Udemy for online courses on a wide range of topics • Created and delivered monthly safety training sessions for all RAILS staff during regular staff meetings • Held CPR/AED training for staff across service centers

Objectives	Planned Activities
orientation, gender identify, and other factors.	Encouraged RAILS staff to attend conferences and participate in RAILS continuing education events Continued to hold monthly staff meetings to keep all staff informed of the latest RAILS developments and to help staff at different service centers engage with each other Continued work of RAILS Staff Engagement committee to develop collaborative activities for all staff Designed and held a full-day, all-staff In-Service Day that contained department meetings, learning workshops, and team-building activities Continued to prioritize EDIA-related staff activities and initiatives as referenced above
Maintain robust technology infrastructure needed to carry out all RAILS programs/services	Replaced multifunction copiers and printers in RAILS facilities Replaced laptops for RAILS staff. Refurbished the decommissioned laptops in best condition and deployed them to the mobile computer lab carts in RAILS facilities, which are used regularly by LLSAP staff for member training sessions Purchased new storage servers, implemented new virtualization software, and performed migration to new servers Following successful submission of the year's bid for E-Rate services, performed migration of internet services and IP addresses for the Burr Ridge Service Center Reviewed and reduced other telecommunications costs by auditing Verizon accounts, correcting cost centers, cancelling unused lines and services Installed a new keyless entry system at the Rockford Service Center Identified training and procedural needs for RAILS-wide implementation of our Ethical AI Policy and adoption of Microsoft's Copilot AI product. Completed initial testing and rollout of Microsoft Copilot licenses for staff, and developed a plan for expanded rollout in FY2027 Planned and implemented expanded use of a password management platform for IT and Finance staff

Objectives	Planned Activities
	Implemented a free open-source software option for creating organization charts and building layout diagrams, reducing costs by \$750 a year Worked with colleagues at Northern Illinois University to test and deploy the Zoom video conference unit in their space for the April board meeting Researched and procured a hearing loop system for the Deirdre Brennan Meeting Room, to allow attendees with hearing aids or cochlear implants to hear presentations wirelessly through their devices Continued to maintain and develop features for the RAILS HR and Delivery web apps. Rewrote much of the Delivery iPad app's code to accommodate changes required by Apple's operating system updates