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Executive Director Report, November 2025

Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

Federal Funding and IMLS Update

The American Library Association's Public Policy and Advocacy staff sent out an update on Thursday, November 14 detailing what the end of the 43-day federal government shutdown means for libraries. Here is some of what they detailed in that communication:

- Funding for libraries, including programs administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), will restart in the coming days as employees return to work.
- IMLS will resume administering state library grants that support interlibrary lending, shared digital resources, and other vital services through state library agencies.
- Congress did not agree on a new budget for FY 2026: they agreed to continue temporarily funding some programs at last year's funding levels.
- Libraries aren't losing IMLS funds. When the government reopens, IMLS funding will continue at Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 levels.
- The CR funds only three of 12 appropriations bills for FY 2026, which means Congress will need to pass nine spending bills or face yet another shutdown on February 1, 2026, for most government programs, including library programs.

We want to extend our thanks to the ALA Public Policy and Advocacy staff for these vital updates.

Illinois Legislative Updates

I attended the Illinois Library Association (ILA) Public Policy Committee (PPC) meeting as Ex Officio on Monday, November 3. As you know, the ILA Executive Board has approved the following legislative priorities for this year:

- Increase Library System Area & Per Capita Grants and Public Per Capita & School District Grants by 20%
- Require Public Library Trustee Training
- Open Educational Resources funding grant
- Making eBooks Equitable and Accessible

In addition to the legislative agenda, PPC is working on the following proposals and recommendations:

- Form a study group on Personal Property Replacement Tax disbursements
- Form a study group on FOIA
- Look at potential revisions to the Library Records and Confidentiality Act

RAILS' Anna Behm, Leila Heath, and Ola Gronski have also been very involved in the creation of a special section in the ILA Legislative meetup handout highlighting Illinois libraries' challenges related to eBook and audiobook pricing and terms. The committee meets next on Monday, December 1.

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

CCDNN Update

To help shape the grant program we are developing as part of the Cook County Digital Navigator Network collaboration, we posted a call for 12-15 representatives from public libraries across Cook County to serve on a Guiding Team. We received 24 applications and selected 15 individuals. This team will spend several months engaging in a human-centered design process alongside the RAILS and Cook County teams in order to advise on the priorities and components of the program. The team began its work together with a successful kickoff meeting on November 5.

RAILS assists member libraries in preparing for the future

RAILS Member Update

We held a RAILS Member Update on Wednesday, November 12. Topics included an overview of the Illinois Library Association's legislative priorities, an eRead Illinois update, and an overview of the Find More Illinois program. A recording of the [Member Update](#) can be viewed on the RAILS YouTube channel.

Libraries and Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Our legal partners at Ancel Glink recently updated their memo on Libraries and Immigration and Customs Enforcement. This updated version contains expansions on previous the previous memo as well as additional guidance based on more recent questions that have been received. This was distributed to the RAILS Directors List on Tuesday, November 11. In addition, RAILS will host a webinar, [Libraries & Immigration Enforcement](#), on Monday November 17.

FY2027 LLSAP Support Grants Announced

LLSAP Support Grant awards for FY2027 were determined and announced to each of the six LLSAPs on October 31. This grant uses a formula to distribute a total of \$2.25M across all six LLSAP organizations (CCS, Pinnacle, PrairieCat, RRLC, RSA, and SWAN), which will be disbursed in quarterly payments beginning on July 1, 2026.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

ILA Library Legislative Meetups

ILA has announced the dates for their upcoming series of [legislative meetings](#). This is a great opportunity to meet directly with legislators and advocate for the issues important to Illinois libraries. The meetings covering RAILS areas of

ILA Library Legislative Meetups (cont.)

service are: Central Illinois - Bloomington (Nov 19), Northwest Illinois - DeKalb (Nov 19), South Suburban and Chicago - Alsip (Dec 2), West Suburban and Chicago – Oak Brook (Dec 2), and North Suburban and Chicago - Northbrook (Dec 3).

New Library Equalization Aid Grant Formula Announced

On November 5, Joe Filapek participated in a press conference at the North Chicago Public Library with Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias to celebrate a new funding formula for Library Equalization Aid grants. These grants are designed to support libraries that do not meet adequate funding thresholds due to low local tax bases, resulting in fewer available tax dollars. The new formula will significantly expand the program's reach, making ten times more libraries eligible for funding, including many across the RAILS service area. Other participants included ILA Executive Director Cyndi

New Library Equalization Aid Grant Formula Announced (cont.)

Robinson, IHLS Executive Director Leslie Bednar, and Park Forest Public Library Director Mary VanSwol. Thanks to Joe for representing us so well!



CCS Governing Board Meeting on November 12

Leila Heath, Joe Filapek, and myself had the opportunity to attend the CCS (Cooperative Computer Services) Governing Board meeting on Wednesday, November 12 to answer questions related to their participation in Find More Illinois. I was to extend my thanks to the CCS staff and Governing Board for having us there and giving us the opportunity to answer their excellent questions and hear their insights about the program.

Public Library Association’s Leadership Academy

On November 5, I had the opportunity to speak on a panel about the importance of Resiliency in Leadership to the Public Library Association’s Leadership Academy in Chicago. It was a wonderful experience and such a great opportunity to be reminded of the incredible talent we have working in libraries. Joining me on the panel were RAILS Board member and Evanston Public Library Executive Director Yolande Wilburn, Skokie Public Library Deputy Director Laura McGrath, and Naperville Public Library Executive Director David Della Terza.



Looking Ahead to November

- **January Service of the Month and Board Development topics – LLSAP Services from Anne Slaughter and Overview of Special Libraries with Heather Kotula**



This Month at RAILS – November 2025

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 Staff Participate in the 2025 AISLE and ILA Annual Conference

RAILS was excited to participate in two major library conferences in October. The 2025 AISLE Annual Conference took place in Champaign, IL on October 6-8. RAILS was a Platinum Sponsor of the conference. This included sponsoring the AISLE Luncheon and Annual Membership Meeting with Dr. April Dawkins. Around 100 people stopped by the RAILS booth.



RAILS presentations at AISLE included:

- *Can't Shelve This!* Live with RAILS Data Analyst Janette Derucki & RAILS Digital Marketing & Communications Specialist Ola Gronski
- Building Connections Through Databases with RAILS Library Resource Specialist Maggie Thomann



The 2025 ILA Annual Conference took place in Rosemont, IL on October 14-16. RAILS was a Platinum Sponsor of the conference. This included sponsoring the ILA President's Program with Shermann "Dilla" Thomas. Around 600 people stopped by the RAILS booth.

The 2025 ILA Annual Conference included a brand-new Libraries Count: RAILS Data Conference event. This event was a full day of hands-on data workshops that cover analysis, visualization, storytelling, and more—all tailored specifically for libraries.

On Thursday, October 16, RAILS also hosted a Catalyst Kick-off event. This half-day event included introductions, networking, and a chance for Catalyst participants to discuss leadership topics.

You can find a list of [RAILS presentations at the 2025 ILA Annual Conference](#) from the RAILS website.

Thank you to all of the board members who helped out and stopped by the RAILS booth. It was great to connect with you!

Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

Enhance sharing of knowledge and best practices

2026 My Library Is... Grants Application Open

On November 1, RAILS announced the opening of the 2026 My Library Is... Grant. These grants are designed to help libraries tell their story. These grants are open to all types of libraries, including – academic, public, school, and special libraries. All RAILS libraries are invited to apply. Libraries can apply for up to \$5,000. The deadline to apply is Friday, January 30, 5:00 p.m. Central.

Civic Empowerment Networking Group Kickoff

On Wednesday, October 29, RAILS Member Engagement Specialist Jessica Silva helped facilitate a kickoff meeting for the new Civic Empowerment Networking Group. This networking group is for library programmers looking to create stronger civic engagement in their communities. 42 people attended the event.

RAILS Online Roundtable: Libraries Supporting Reentry

On Thursday, October 29, RAILS Member Engagement Specialist Jessica Silva hosted a new online roundtable about how libraries can support reentry. The event included a presentation by Chad Rand, Outreach and Distributor Coordinator for the Education Justice Project’s Reentry Resource Program. 21 people attended this event.

Live from AISLE: It’s Can’t Shelve This!

The Can’t Shelve This Team (RAILS Data Analyst Janette Derucki, IHLS School Library Membership Coordinator Leah Gregory, and RAILS Digital Marketing & Communications Specialist Ola Gronski) held a live podcast on October 6 at the 2025 AISLE Conference in Champaign, IL. Our hosts asked the audience “what is one thing your school library has or does that you wish every school library could have?” 15 participants shared their answers in front of the group and received limited-edition Can’t Shelve This baseball caps. The episode will be released on December 9, 2025.

RAILS Social Media Engagement

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

Group Purchases

The Deals & Discounts team has been actively reaching out to print vendors after the abrupt closure of Baker & Taylor to gather information about services and availability to accept new customers, as well as to negotiate potential discounts for RAILS member libraries. The team is in contact with several vendors, and discounts for RAILS members are being publicized as they are finalized. Several vendors have also agreed to participate in webinars to answer questions and demo collection development and ordering platforms and services.

- Active RAILS Discounts: Brodart Library Services, Ingram Content Group
- In Progress: Barnes & Noble Classwork, Follett Content Solutions, Libraria, Bound to Stay Bound Books, Amazon Business Library Hub
- Contacted, waiting for response: Midwest Library Service, EBSCO Mosaic by GOBI Library Solutions, Thorndike Press from Gale, Center Point Large Print, Penworthy Books

Fall and January sign-ups and renewals are underway for resources including JSTOR, BookBrowse, Gale Presents: Udemy, Swank movie licensing and streaming for public and K-12 libraries, Lote4Kids, Comics Plus and Blinkist.

Vendor Webinars

Webinar Title	Registered	Attended
Gale Presents: Udemy	14	14
Comics Plus for Public Libraries: Curate, Circulate, Captivate	11	2
Scale Up Your Small Business with Gale: Udemy Courses to Support Small Business Success*	47	34
Blinkist: Powerful Ideas 15 Minutes at a Time	21	11
Swank K-12: New RAILS Partnership for Licensing and Curriculum Streaming Resources	6	1
Using Ingram for Collection Development	98	62
Total	197	124

* Public-facing webinar for patrons of RAILS member libraries. Several libraries also screened webinar at in-person events.

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 October 31, 2025

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
516	274	71	62%/53%

Gale Excel Stats as of October 31, 2025

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
65	24	39	92%/53%

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

Find More Illinois Update

RAILS Director of Library Resources and Programs Leila Heath and RAILS Consortial Services Supervisor Barb Miller met with PrairieCat on October 9 to discuss their options for participating in Find More Illinois.



RAILS Consortial Services Supervisor Barb Miller met with multiple FMI libraries to discuss changes to the pricing structure. These meetings took place October 21-29.

Libraries Participating in Find More Illinois as of October 31, 2025

Academic	Public	School	Special	Total
4	71	11	1	87

Find More Illinois total transactions (loans and borrows)

Time Period	Number of transactions
October 2025	1,348
Fiscal Year to Date	5,827

Find More Illinois catalog

Time Period	Number of items in shared catalog
October 2025	8,606,853

Find More Illinois Demos/Reviews

Date of Training	Library	Number of Participants
October 8	Bradley University	3
October 24	South Suburban College	3

eRead Illinois & Inkie.org Update

On Monday, October 6, Baker & Taylor announced they were effectively going out of business and winding down operations by the end of the year. This directly impacts the eRead Illinois program which is accessed via Baker & Taylor’s Boundless platform. RAILS Director of Library Resources and Programs Leila Heath and RAILS E-Content Specialist Anna Behm met with several e-content vendors and determined the Palace Project by Lyris would be the best option for eRead Illinois moving forward.



Leila Heath and Anna Behm hosted a meeting between the Palace team and administrators of several OverDrive consortiums. Tara Carpenter from Lyris described the process of aggregating OverDrive collections into the Palace Project app and answered questions from the group.

Leila Heath and 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.

On October 27, RAILS announced that the eRead Illinois program would transition to the Palace Project by the end of the year. Since then, Anna Behm has fielded several questions from member libraries about the change. Many libraries expressed appreciation for all of the RAILS team’s hard work.

eRead Illinois Boundless Checkouts

Time Period	E-Books	Audiobooks	Total
October 2025	24,251	21,935	46,186
Fiscal Year to Date	82,918	84,884	167,802

Inkie.org Library Views

Time Period	Number of Views
October 2025	2,153
Fiscal Year to Date	7,402

Explore More Illinois Update

In October 2025, 3,392 reservations were made in Explore More Illinois. The most popular downstate and suburban attractions in October 2025 were:

- Morton Arboretum in Lisle (375)
- Cantigny in Wheaton (153)
- Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe (199)
- Anderson Japanese Gardens in Rockford (48)
- Griffin Museum of Science and Industry (45)



The most popular Chicago attractions in October 2025 were:

- Art Institute of Chicago (583)
- Brookfield Zoom Chicago (500)
- Field Museum (266)
- Griffin Museum of Science and Industry (209)
- Chicago Academy of Sciences Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum (190)

In October, Explore More Illinois welcomed the Bloomington Bison Ice Hockey Team for their 2025-2026 season, and is in the process of onboarding Aikman Wildlife Adventures in Arcola, Illinois.

Libraries Enrolled in Explore More Illinois as of October 31, 2025

System	Publics	Community Colleges	Total
RAILS	350	3	353
IHLS	109	1	110
CPL	1	n/a	1
Totals	460	4	464

Attractions in Explore More Illinois as of October 31, 2025

Attractions	66
Total Attractions in 2025	78

Reservations Made in Explore More Illinois in October 2025

Organization	October 2025
RAILS/IHLS	1,013
CPL	2,379
Total	3,392

RAILS Catalog Membership Grant Update

Two applications for Catalog Membership Grants were received as of the November 1 deadline. Review is underway, with awards to be announced in late November.

Assist member libraries in preparing for the future

Future-focused professional development and member engagement efforts

October CE Highlight

The info shared in the Effectively Evaluating and Sharing Library Accessibility webinar on October 21 really made an impact on participants. Here are some of their comments they left in the post-event survey:

- “This was such a great webinar - so, so, so helpful - tons of great info AND actionable steps - great presenter, too!”
- “It was informative and interesting and gave me things to consider about how my library is set up to be accessible, especially in regard to things that I had not considered.”
- “Something I can actually use to demonstrate a need at my library!”

RAILS Awards Continuing Education Grants

The RAILS Consulting and Continuing Education Department has awarded three Continuing Education Event Grants to support professional development opportunities for library staff. The following grants were awarded:

- **Oak Lawn Public Library: Library Administrators Seminar 2025**
November 14, 2025 at Moraine Valley Community College, Palos Hills
A full-day seminar designed for library directors, managers, and HR professionals, focusing on management and personnel issues in public libraries.
- **ATLAS: Critical Conversations & Emotional Intelligence for Libraries**
December 5, 2025 at Moraine Valley Community College, Palos Hills
An interactive session on fostering emotional intelligence and productive conversations within library workplaces.
- **Washington District Library: Improv for Customer Service**
April 25, 2026 at Five Points, Washington, IL
A workshop demonstrating how improvisational techniques can enhance communication and customer service skills in libraries.

PD+ Streamlines Credit Claims for Librarians and Boosts Staff Efficiency

The Consulting & Continuing Education Team received ISBE training on the use of their new tool, PD+, which simplifies the process of awarding professional development hours to school librarians by reducing the number of forms that need to be completed and centralizing data collection in one platform. Credit hours are automatically added to school librarians' online ISBE accounts so they no longer need to upload their certificates. Consulting & CE Specialist Diana Rusch also started regularly meeting with IHLS school library liaison Leah Gregory to help RAILS and IHLS stay consistent with processes and procedures.

CPR Training for RAILS Staff

On Thursday, November 6, we held our biannual CPR/AED training at the Burr Ridge location. A certified instructor from the American Red Cross guided 9 employees from both the Burr Ridge and Bolingbrook Service Centers through the two-hour, 15-minute session. Upon completion, participants earned certification, which is valid for two years.

Recent CE Events

- **"Effectively Evaluating and Sharing Library Accessibility,"** webinar, October 21
- **"Calling It Quits: How to Evaluate Library Services and Decide What to Stop Doing,"** webinar, November 5
- **RAILS Catalyst Online Session #1,** online meeting, November 11

Upcoming CE Events

- **"Narcans Administration: Spotting the Signs and Responding with Confidence,"** webinar, November 13
Beginning January 2026, Public Act 104-0056 requires local public libraries to maintain a supply of approved opioid antagonists for use in assisting individuals experiencing an opioid overdose. In this workshop, Live4Lali will provide training to help you recognize the signs of an opioid overdose and confidently administer Narcan (naloxone) to reverse it.
- **"Libraries & Immigration Enforcement,"** webinar, November 17
Ancel Glink Associate Katie Nagy will equip libraries with the knowledge to respond to immigration enforcement actions in a legal and responsible way. Participants will hear about their rights, obligations, and best practices when enforcement officers are on-site, including handling warrants, I-

9s, and records confidentiality. Additionally, Vernon Area Public Library District Director Anne Rasmussen and Head of Human Resources Mikki Johnson will share how they developed safety protocols and guidelines to protect staff while fostering a supportive, unified workplace culture.

- **“Introduction to Modern Book Mending”**, webinar, November 20
Learn what is possible to repair and how much time and money it might take. See several examples of book mending and the tools and materials used. This webinar will inspire book menders to try their hand at some new ways to mend books that can save libraries time and money.
- **“Social Media and Your Job: Rights, Risks, and Responsibilities”**, webinar, November 25
Richard Bruen, Senior Counsel at Ancel Glink, will break down what library staff should know about posting political or sensitive content on social media. He’ll talk about how your posts might connect to your job, what your rights are, and what your employer can and can’t do in response. He’ll also share what library leaders should consider when it comes to supporting staff, protecting the library’s reputation, and handling community concerns.
- **“Authorities & Authority Control”**, webinar, December 2
This session will cover what authority control is, why it’s important, and how it works; understanding different types of authority records and how to use them for consistency; options for automated authority control processing; distinguishing between similar personal and corporate names; handling vernacular or non-Roman scripts; understanding how local or temporary headings interact with established LC authorities; and automated authority checking using MARCEdit and other AI-assisted approaches.
- **“RAILS Learning Lab: Business Reference: How to Collaborate and Assist Your Local Business Community”**, online meeting, December 4
RAILS Learning Labs are an informal, online space for interactive, hands-on learning and collaboration. This session will give participants confidence and knowledge around business reference topics such as company and industry research, consumer and market analysis, entrepreneurship, and more.
- **RAILS Catalyst Online Session #2**, online meeting, December 9
In this session, the Catalyst cohort will continue exploring the topic of self-leadership and emotional intelligence with coach Becky Thalmann and spend time in their smaller teams discussing and practicing the new ideas and skills.
- **“Generative AI and the Library Collection”**, webinar, December 10
Generative AI is reshaping the publishing industry, from an upsurge in “AI slop” to the rise of AI-narrated, human-authored materials. Internationally recognized technology consultant Nick Tanzi will help us identify generative AI’s impact on the publishing industry and library collections, and examine collection development policies implemented by other libraries.
- **“Developing AI Policies & Principles for Libraries with Dr. Brandy McNeil”**, webinar, January 9
Dr. Brandy McNeil, President of PLA and Deputy Director of Branch Programs and Services at NYPL, will help us consider how to develop thoughtful policies and guiding principles around artificial intelligence. Library leaders and staff will understand how to create frameworks that support innovation while protecting privacy, equity, and public trust.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Strengthen collaborative relationships with partner library organizations

L2G2 November Meeting

L2G2, the statewide advisory group for the L2 library directory and event calendar platform, met on November 4 to discuss feature development progress and priorities, user documentation, and other aspects of the roadmap for this shared platform. L2's development and maintenance is overseen by RAILS on behalf of the statewide community of stakeholders and funded by a special grant from the Illinois State Library. This fall was the fifth anniversary of the launch of the current platform, which was a complete redevelopment of the original platform established in 2008.

November 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.

October meeting topics included:

- School Library Advocacy Through Education (SLATE) update
- AISLE & ILA Annual Conference updates
- Illinois School Library Workers Symposium (ISLWS) update
- Collaboration at the 2025 Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB) conference
- ILA Legislative Meetups

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

RAILS Staff & Service Center News

Anne Slaughter Attends 2025 Core Forum

RAILS Director of Technology Services Anne Slaughter attend the 2025 Core Forum conference in Denver, November 12-14. Anne is a member of both the conference planning committee and Core's strategic planning task force.

Jessica Silva Attends 2025 AASL Conference


RAILS Member Engagement Specialist Jessica Silva attended the 2025 American Association of School Librarians (AASL) Conference in Saint Louis, MO on October 16-18. While there, Jessica co-hosted a meetup for Illinois school librarians (pictured, right). Around 25 school librarians attended.

RAILS IT Update

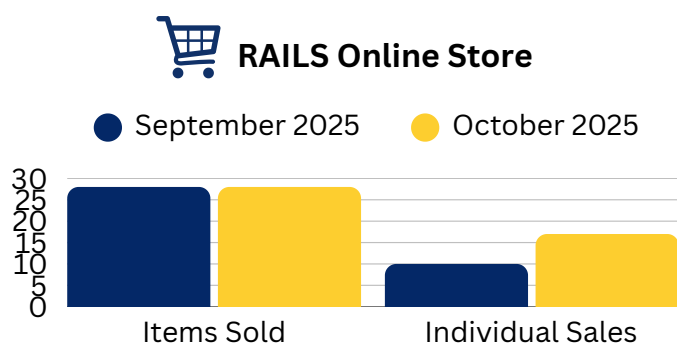
In October, the RAILS IT Team received new staff laptops. The team started the process to image all of the laptops. IT also tested migration to a new server environment. The migration will happen gradually. There should be no downtime. IT is also working with the Continuing Education team to help with Niche Academy authentication.



OCTOBER 2025

			
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TOP POST			
<i>received the most engagement</i>			



 **RAILS Minute Views: 465**

 **Can't Shelve This Listens: 899**