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**DATE:** March 23, 2026  
**TO:** RAILS Board of Directors  
**FROM:** Monica Harris, Executive Director  
**SUBJECT:** Succession Plan Update

On Thursday, March 5, the RAILS Board Executive Committee met and reviewed the Succession Plan as part of a planned annual review.

The following changes were made as a result of their review:

1. Instead of an annual review by the Executive Committee, the Succession Plan will be reviewed by the full board triennially, with the Executive Director reviewing annually.
2. **Communications Plan:** In the event of an unplanned absence, immediately upon transferring the responsibilities to the Acting Executive Director, the President will notify staff members, members of the Board of Directors, and the Illinois State Library.
3. **Checklist for Acceptance/Succession plan approval.** This succession plan will be approved by the Executive Committee and forwarded to the full Board for its review. This plan should be reviewed triennially by the full RAILS Board, and annually by the Executive Director.
4. Signature lines were removed. Instead a separate “receipt of acknowledgment” page for the board President and any new staff, listing their current titles, will be created.

The Executive Committee recommends that these changes to the Succession Plan be approved by the full Board at our March meeting. We look forward to further discussion on Friday.

# Executive Director Succession Plan for Reaching Across Illinois Library System (RAILS)

## Introduction

The RAILS Board of Directors recognizes the importance of a robust succession plan to ensure the continued effective operation of the organization in the event of an unforeseen vacancy in the Executive Director position.

This plan outlines the procedures for a smooth transition to both interim and long-term leadership. The Board has carefully reviewed the Executive Director's job description, which outlines the full scope of responsibilities, including:

- **Organizational Leadership:** Guiding the strategic direction and overall operations of RAILS.
- **Program Development & Administration:** Overseeing the development, implementation, and evaluation of RAILS services and programs.
- **Board Relations:** Fostering effective communication and collaboration with the Board of Directors.
- **Financial Oversight:** Ensuring the sound financial management of the organization.
- **Advocacy:** Working with state partners to ensure that members are aware of important issues related library funding and relevant legislation affecting libraries
- **Community Engagement:** Representing RAILS within the broader library community and fostering key partnerships.

This comprehensive understanding of the Executive Director's role informs the development and implementation of this succession plan.

## Succession Plan in Event of a Temporary, Planned Absence: Short Term

A temporary absence is one of three months or less, unless otherwise authorized by the RAILS Executive Committee, in which it is expected that the Executive Director will return to their position once the events precipitating the absence are resolved. The Executive Director will be responsible for the following prior to going on leave:

- Distribution of duties
- Governance representation and committee work
- Strategic plan objectives
- Administration responsibilities
- Accounting and Payroll approval responsibilities
- Temporary assignment of Acting Director current duties
- Communicate the temporary leadership structure to the Board President, RAILS staff, and key external supporters of RAILS.

The Executive Director will develop a separate detailed operational plan prior to their absence for Executive Committee review.

### Succession Plan in Event of a Temporary, Unplanned Absence: Short Term

A temporary absence is one of less than three months, in which it is expected that the Executive Director will return to their position once the events precipitating the absence are resolved. If the temporary absence of the Executive Director is unplanned, the Executive Committee of RAILS is authorized to implement the terms of this succession plan.

In the event of an unplanned absence of the Executive Director, the Associate Executive Director (or other highest ranking staff member) is to immediately inform the Board President (or Vice President if the President is unreachable) of the absence. As soon as it is feasible, the President should convene a meeting of the Executive Committee to affirm the procedures prescribed in this plan or to make modifications as the Committee deems appropriate.

In the event of a planned or unplanned temporary absence, the position of Acting Executive Director would be the **Associate Executive Director**. Should the standing appointee to the position of Acting Executive Director be unable to serve, the first and second back-up appointees for the position of Acting Executive Director will be:

- Director of Technology Services
- Finance Director

The Acting Executive Director should expect to receive direct support and regular communication from the RAILS Board President. If the Acting Executive Director is new to either their position or the organization, the Executive Committee may decide to appoint one of the back-up appointees to the Acting Executive position. The Executive Committee may also consider the option of splitting executive duties among the designated appointees.

### Authority and Compensation of the Acting Executive Director

The person appointed as Acting Executive Director shall have the same authority for decision-making and independent action as the regular Executive Director.

The Acting Executive Director may be offered:

- A temporary salary increase to the entry-level salary of the Executive Director position or a temporary salary increase of 20%, whichever is greater.

If the Executive Committee elects to split executive duties among the designated appointees, the Acting Executive Directors may be offered:

- A temporary salary increase to the entry-level salary of the Executive Director position (divided

between the candidates) or a temporary salary increase of 10% for each candidate, whichever is greater.

## Board Oversight

The board member responsible for monitoring the work of the Acting Executive Director shall be the President. The President will be sensitive to the special support needs of the Acting Executive Director in this temporary leadership role.

## Communications Plan

In the event of an unplanned absence, immediately upon transferring the responsibilities to the Acting Executive Director, the President will notify staff members, members of the Board of Directors, and the Illinois State Library.

As soon as possible after the Acting Executive Director has begun covering the unplanned absence, Board members and the Acting Executive Director shall communicate the temporary leadership structure to the following key external supports of RAILS, including but not limited to: attorney, accountant, auditor, bank, insurance provider, Illinois Library Association, AISLE, CARLI, Illinois Heartland Library System, and LLSAPs.

## Completion of Short-Term Emergency Succession Period

The decision about when the absent Executive Director returns to lead RAILS should be determined by the Executive Director and the Board President. They will decide upon a mutually agreed upon schedule and start date. A reduced schedule for a set period of time can be allowed, by approval of the Board President, with the intention of working their way back up to a full-time commitment.

## Succession Plan in Event of a Temporary Absence: Long Term

A long-term planned or unplanned absence is one that is expected to last more than three months. The procedures and conditions to be followed should be the same as for a short-term absence, with one addition:

The Executive Committee will give immediate consideration, in consultation with the Acting Executive Director, to temporarily filling the management position left by the Acting Executive Director. This is in recognition of the fact that, for a term of more than three months, it may not be reasonable to expect the Acting Executive Director to carry the duties of both positions. The position description of a temporary manager would focus on covering the priority areas in which the Acting Executive Director needs assistance.

If a planned short-term leave turns into a long-term leave, the Executive Committee will discuss the need for an Interim Director as soon as they are made aware that the amount of leave needed has changed.

## Determination if an Interim Executive Director is Needed

The criteria that the Board and Acting Executive Director should consider when determining whether to hire an Interim Executive Director (or consultant to the Acting Executive Director) are as follows:

1. Time of year
2. Required fiscal responsibilities
3. Special projects currently in progress or upcoming

## Completion of Long-Term Emergency Succession Period

The decision about when the absent Executive Director returns to lead RAILS should be determined by the Executive Director and the Board President. They will decide upon a mutually agreed upon schedule and start date. Before confirming the return to work, it is important that the Board President work with the Human Resources department to set a schedule, responsibilities transition, and a plan for communication to the RAILS staff.

A temporary reduced schedule may be approved at the discretion of the Board President, provided it is properly documented with Human Resources. The goal of a reduced schedule is to allow the Executive Director to gradually resume full-time responsibilities while maintaining organizational stability. Determining whether a reduced schedule will be permitted depends on several factors, including the amount of time off taken and the type of leave the Executive Director is on. Any decision regarding a phased return must align with organizational needs while ensuring a smooth leadership transition. Human Resources must be involved in evaluating the feasibility of a reduced schedule and ensuring compliance with relevant policies.

## Succession Plan in Event of a Permanent Change in Executive Director

A permanent change is one in which it is firmly determined that the Executive Director will not be returning to the position. The procedures and conditions should be the same as for a long-term temporary absence, with one addition:

The Executive Committee will operate as a Transition and Search Committee within 180 days to plan and carry out a transition to a new permanent Executive Director. The Committee will also consider outside consulting assistance depending on the circumstances of the transition and the board's capacity to plan and manage the transition and search. The Executive Committee will also determine the need for an Acting Executive Director, and plan for the selection of an Acting Executive Director and/or the recruitment and selection of a permanent Executive Director.

## Checklist for Acceptance of All Types of Succession Plans

- **Succession plan approval.** This succession plan will be approved by the Executive Committee and forwarded to the full Board for its review. This plan should be reviewed triennially by the full RAILS Board, and annually by the Executive Director
- **Signatories.** The Board President, the Executive Director, and appointees designated in this Approved by RAILS Board on 3/28/2025. Revisions by RAILS Executive Committee on 3/5/2026

plan shall sign this plan.

- **Organizational Charts.** Two organizational charts need to be prepared and attached to this plan. Prepare and attach an organizational chart reflecting staffing positions and lines of authority/reporting throughout the organization. Prepare and attach a second organizational chart that reflects how that structure will change within the context of an absence of the Executive Director.
- **Copies.** Copies of this Emergency Succession Plan, along with the corresponding documentation, shall be maintained by the Board President, the Executive Director, the Acting Executive Director appointee, the Human Resources department, and the organization's attorney.