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Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

Federal and Illinois Legislative Updates

The FCC has officially published its new proposals for E-Rate in the Federal Register, opening the public comment period. These proposals include the possible elimination of this crucial program. ALA is encouraging libraries to use [their template](#) to submit formal comments by Tuesday, October 13, to remind the agency how heavily our communities rely on E-Rate discounts.

The American Library Association has announced National Library Legislative Day in Washington DC will take place February 24-25. This year's program is a collaboration between COSLA (Chief Officers of State Library Agencies) and the American Library Association. [Registration](#) is now open and attendance is limited.

There was a meeting of the Illinois Library Association's (ILA) Public Policy Committee on August 24. The meeting included a federal and state update, and a lengthy discussion of 11 submissions to be considered by PPC as potential legislative priorities of ILA. The ILA Executive Board has approved the following legislative priorities for FY2027, as shared by Paul Mills, Chair of the ILA PPC Committee, at the President's Program during ILA Annual on Wednesday, October 7 :

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

Paul Mills will also join us at our November 12 RAILS Member Update to share the updated legislative priorities with the RAILS membership. The next meeting of ILA PPC is scheduled for November 9.

Illinois Library Association Annual Conference in Peoria

I'd like to express my sincere appreciation to the RAILS Board members who volunteered their time to staff the RAILS booth during the Illinois Library Association (ILA) Conference in Peoria from October 6-8. This annual event is a critical opportunity for RAILS member engagement, and seeing so many RAILS members, staff, and Board members in one central location was a significant highlight. Our Communications team deserves special recognition for designing an engaging and highly visible booth that facilitated numerous meaningful interactions. It was very exciting to see former RAILS Board member Dianne Hollister honored as Illinois Library Association Trustee of the Year. Thanks is also due to Rob Parks and the whole staff and Board of the Peoria Public Library for hosting a wonderful reception in their beautiful space.

RAILS had a strong and collaborative presence at the conference, starting with RAILS Member Engagement Specialist Jessica Silva serving as Co-Chair of this year's conference. Many RAILS staff and Board members participated by leading

Illinois Library Association Annual Conference in Peoria (cont.)

sessions, lightning talks, and poster sessions. I personally had the pleasure of facilitating the "Fired Up and Focused: Intentional Leadership for Today's Library Director" panel, alongside several exceptional public library directors from across the state. My deep thanks to Taliah Abdullah, Betsy Adamowski, Chris Brown, Amy Byers, and Richard Kong for agreeing to participate in a frank conversation about leadership.



Thank you to all of you who participated this year! As a member-focused organization, direct member feedback is invaluable. I am eager to hear your insights and key takeaways from the conference. Please feel free to share your most impactful moments and observations from your direct conversations with members at ILA during our upcoming October meeting.

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

CCDNN Update

In late September, we launched applications for the next Cook County Digital Navigator Network Guiding Team members. Guiding Team members help make decisions about training, resources, communications, and other network supports. This is one-year term beginning in November 2026. Applications are due Friday, October 23 at 5 p.m.

RAILS assists member libraries in preparing for the future

Marengo CUSD 159 Meeting

On Monday, October 5, Dan Bostrom and I met with David Engelbrecht, Superintendent at Marengo CUSD 159. We discussed the rules regarding system eligibility. We also did a tour of the library and discussed their library procedures. From our meeting, we have a better understanding of why Superintendent Engelbrecht made the decision not to replace his retiring librarian. We understand the barriers that small school districts face. We also discussed ways that we can get more information out to school districts who might be in similar positions. Superintendent Engelbrecht informed us that he plans to file an appeal of the suspension decision. It was a good meeting and nice to speak face-to-face.

School Library Advocacy Toolkit

The Illinois Partnership for School Libraries – a group of statewide library partners including AISLE, IHLS, ILA, RAILS, and others – is excited to announce the launch of the [all-new School Library Advocacy Toolkit](#). The toolkit offers useful information and resources for school librarians. Each item was chosen for its broad impact and application for library advocacy, all conveniently located in one place for easy access.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

E-Book Advocacy Update

In our continuing advocacy for libraries in support of eBook reform, I had the opportunity to share with some media outlets about the efforts happening in Illinois. On October 1, the [Daily Herald](#) published a story about what libraries are paying for eBooks and the state lawmakers trying to change that. Then on October 7, I had the opportunity to do a live interview with [Fox32](#) about eBooks and some of the wonderful work that libraries are doing.



E- Book Advocacy Update (cont.)

Members of the ILA Subcommittee on eBook Advocacy and I will be working with another representative from Minnesota to present on our statewide advocacy efforts at the upcoming Wisconsin Library Association and Michigan Library Association conferences in late October. I'm looking forward to sharing more about the Wisconsin presentation at our Board Meeting next week.

RSA Day Presentation on September 30

Joe Filapek and I co-presented at RSA's inaugural Director's Day at the Galesburg Public Library on September 30. With approximately fifty public library directors in attendance, we had the opportunity to provide an overview of RAILS services and share some relevant updates from 2026.

Discussion of Suspension Process with IHLS

On Monday, October 5, we met with staff from the Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS). We discussed the Marengo CUSD 159 situation. We also talked about how each system approaches suspension. IHLS also shared a few situations where they felt that libraries were not meeting system requirements. We discussed potential solutions moving forward. Ultimately, we need something that will be sustainable in the long term while ensuring that our member libraries are complying with all requirements. Our next step will be to connect with the Illinois State Library.

Looking Ahead to November

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



This Month at RAILS – October 2026

THE TOP THREE

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

Registration Now Open for RAILS Virtual Vendor Fair

Register now for the [Virtual Vendor Fair](#) on January 28—a full-day online event that allows attendees to explore products, resources, and exclusive discounts for RAILS members from over 20 vendor partners. The event will feature live sessions throughout the day. Attendees can drop in for a few sessions or stay for the whole day. The first 250 registrants will receive a free swag bag featuring branded items from participating vendors.



Thanks to our sponsors, who are helping to support a successful and fun event for our members! Elite Sponsor: LOTE4Kids by Storytime PODs; Premier Sponsors: Quill and Lyrasis; General Sponsors: WhoFi, EBSCO Information Services, and Brainfuse.

2026-2027 SLATE Census Now Open

RAILS is excited to announce the launch of the 2026-2027 SLATE Census. The census is open through February 28, 2027 giving library staff five full months to participate when it's most convenient.

Every Illinois school is invited to participate - even if it doesn't have an active library program - to share information about their own library. The census is our best way to learn about the status of school libraries, including their staff, collections, and financial support.

Over 300 Attendees Participate in 2026 ISLWS

RAILS Member Engagement Specialist Jessica Silva chaired the 2026 Illinois School Library Workers Symposium (ISLWS) Planning Committee. The event was held on Wednesday, September 16, 2026. We had over 300 attendees! Officially, 410 registered. We had over 35 presenters and 19 sessions including Kelsey Bogan, Kelly Jensen, Pernille Ripp, and author Lucy Knisley. The feedback from participants was great. Here are a few quotes:

- *As this was my first time attending, I was very impressed with how smoothly everything went. The sessions and presenters were very knowledgeable!*
- *I thought it was great, and the Sched & Zooms were very easy to use!*
- *I liked it a lot. It was easy to follow and good topics.*

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Enhance sharing of knowledge and best practices

Crete-Monee Unit School District #201-U Readmitted

Crete-Monee Unit School District #201-U was readmitted as a RAILS member in August under the advisement of the Illinois State Library, after being withdrawn during the certification process in April 2026 due to communication issues at the district. We spoke with staff at the school district and they are in compliance with system requirements.

Jessica Silva Hosts Virtual Library Visits

RAILS Member Engagement Manager held a series of virtual visits in September. In these visits, Jessica discussed RAILS benefits and services such as RAILS Academy, deals & discounts, grants, and upcoming RAILS events:

- Toluca Public Library, September 8
- Mason Memorial Public Library (Buda, IL), September 8
- Mills & Petrie Memorial Library and Gymnasium (Ashton, IL), September 9
- Truman College (Chicago), September 10
- Annawan Alba Public Library, September 22
- Mount Carroll Public Library, September 23
- East Dubuque Public Library, September 24
- Tinley Park Public Library, September

RAILS Hosts Virtual Member Meetup at York Township Public Library

On September 24, RAILS Member Engagement Manager Jessica Silva virtually hosted a Member Meetup event in conjunction with the York Township Public Library in Thomson, IL. There were three attendees. The group discussed digital accessibility and RAILS resources.

Can't Shelve This 3.2: "Practical (RA) Magic"

It's not magic, it's research. RAILS Data Analyst Janette Derucki and IHLS Director of Membership & Outreach Leah Gregory sit down with RA for All's Becky Spratford to explore the art of connecting readers with the right books. From practical tips and resources to building a culture of book discovery, Becky shares why Readers' Advisory is all about conversations and curiosity. Listen now on [Apple Podcasts](#), [Spotify](#), [YouTube](#), or wherever you get your podcasts.

RAILS Releases "Get to Know SLATE" Video

RAILS's [latest video](#) shows how the [School Library Advocacy Through Education \(SLATE\) project](#) is using data to ensure that every Illinois student has access to a strong school library. The video features RAILS Data Analyst Janette Derucki detailing the history of the project, with interview clips from AISLE Executive Secretary Carolyn Kinsella, Vernon Hills High School Librarian Monica Caldicott, Dupon CUSD 196 Director of Curriculum & Library Media Services Mike Treece, and Joliet West High School Librarian Amy Walsh.

Watch to learn how SLATE is helping shine a light on the resources students deserve—then share it with your administrators, community members, and legislators so they can, too.

RAILS Social Media Engagement

See the report at the end for info on our September social media engagement efforts.

Leverage economies of scale to provide greater purchasing power

RAILS members can find information, trial access and pricing on all deals and discounts by logging into the [RAILS Deals & Discounts page](#).

New Discounts on Policy Map

RAILS public libraries are now eligible to receive discounts on PolicyMap, an online mapping and data analysis platform that provides access to demographic, housing, health, workforce, and other community data from across the United States. PolicyMap offers mapping, reporting, and data visualization tools that can support community needs assessments, strategic planning, outreach initiatives, and resource allocation. The platform is designed to be user-friendly and does not require specialized training.

Libraries have the option to subscribe to the Staff Enterprise License or Enterprise + Patron Access License. This subscription model allows libraries to choose between either a custom site with staff-only access, or to include a patron facing data and mapping platform.

RAILS will also host a webinar in November where PolicyMap representatives will answer questions and demo their platform.

New Discounts on Playaway

The RAILS Deals & Discounts team has recently partnered with Playaway to bring discounts on their audiovisual products to RAILS public, school, and special libraries. Playaway's pre-loaded edutainment devices give libraries and classrooms everything they need to promote literacy, bridge the digital divide, and make technology accessible to everyone. Products include preloaded audiobooks, print books with ready-to-play audiobooks inside, and pre-loaded tablets meant for circulation. Services available to RAILS members include standard MARC records, cataloging and processing, EDI and Grid ordering, standing order plans, and bulk ordering options.

Infobase Resources

We're highlighting discount offers on three resources from Infobase for RAILS public libraries, with up to two free months of early access leading up to a new January subscription.

Access Video on Demand offers unlimited, always available streaming video at a flat annual price, with a focus on high-quality, hard-to-find documentaries and educational titles from PBS, BBC, HBO, A&E, and National Geographic.

Just for Kids Streaming Video is a children's streaming video collection with unlimited, always available content at a flat annual price, including *Sesame Street*, *The Berenstain Bears*, *Franklin*, *Arthur*, plus songs, games, and interactables.

Ferguson's Career Center supports job searchers at all stages, from assessing interests to pursuing education to applying for jobs and interviewing through 1200+ professional and 150+ industry articles.

Vendor Webinars

Agenda item 7.3.1

Title	Date	Registered	Live Attendees	
LingQ & ParentTV: Empowering Patrons through Language Learning and Parenting Support	9/2/2026	16	6	
EBSCO for RAILS K-12 Libraries: Making the Most of Your Resources	9/23/2026	20	2	
Swank Streaming for Education: Helping Educators Seamlessly Incorporate Video Into Instruction	9/24/2026	5	0	
Blinkist - Help Your Communities Learn Something New Every Day	9/29/2026	7	3	9
Total		48	11	

Online High School Programs

RAILS offers two online high school programs for libraries: Career Online High School (implemented Spring 2016) and Gale Excel (implemented Spring 2024).

On August 10, Director of Library Resources & Programs Leila Heath and RAILS Special Projects Librarian Gates Marquez followed up with Cabell King, Special Projects Administrator for the State of Illinois and Illinois Literacy Foundation Manager, about the state's upcoming Alternative Methods of Credentialing (AMOC) pilot with a group of select public libraries. The pilot libraries have completed their training, and the state is reviewing pilot messaging ahead of the launch. Formal announcement of the pilot program is still anticipated before the end of the year.

Stats for both programs are listed below:

Career Online High School Stats as of October 1, 2026

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
537	321	31	64%/53%

Gale Excel Stats as of October 1, 2026

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
115	60	52	95%/53%

Seek greater efficiencies, innovations, and enhancements to delivery services



Reflective Tape Added to Delivery Vehicles

In response to an increase in rear-end collisions involving our delivery vehicles over the past one to two years, we are adding reflective tape to improve their visibility to other motorists. This safety measure is intended to make our vehicles more noticeable and help reduce the risk of future accidents.

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

Find More Illinois Update

RAILS Consortial Services Supervisor Barb Miller presented information about FMI to the RAILS Resource Sharing Committee on September 14.



On September 23, Barb Miller presented information about resource sharing options for school libraries as part of Illinois Heartland Library System's "Extra Credit! Interlibrary Loan for Schools" with IHLS's Leah Gregory.

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

Academic	Public	School	Special	Total
14	72	12	1	99

Find More Illinois total transactions (loans and borrows)

Agenda item 7.3.1

Time Period	Number of transactions
September 2026	1,743
Fiscal Year to Date	5,077

Find More Illinois catalog

Time Period	Number of items in shared catalog
September 2026	9,569,667

E-Content Programs

RAILS Director of Library Resources and Programs

Leila Heath and RAILS E-Content Specialist Anna Behm met regularly with the team from Palace Project to discuss progress with onboarding libraries and transferring the eRead Illinois collection to the Palace Project. The Palace Project team has made significant progress onboarding eRead Illinois K-12 libraries to the Palace Project platform. As of October 2, 90% of K-12 libraries are either completely onboarded to The Palace Project (428 school libraries) or in final stages of testing before being completely onboarded (61 school libraries). Most school libraries have provided the necessary onboarding information, and nearly all have been contacted by The Palace Project and RAILS teams about onboarding.



The Palace Project team hosted two webinars for RAILS K-12 eRead Illinois member libraries about the Palace Project platform. 14 people attended the 9/22 webinar, and 18 people attended the 9/23 session. A recording of the webinar was sent to everyone who registered. In both sessions, attendees asked excellent questions and provided valuable insights and feedback to the Palace team.

E-Content Checkouts September 2026

Collection	Distributor	Platform	E-Book Checkouts	Audiobook Checkouts	Total Checkouts	Total FY Checkouts
eRead Illinois	Palace	Palace Project	12,328	19,002	31,330	85,893
Palace Bookshelf	Palace	Palace Project	140	0	140	423
Multiple	OverDrive	Palace Project	22	49	71	229
Multiple	CloudLibrary	Palace Project	7	1	8	54
Inkie.org Library	BiblioBoard	Palace Project	370	0	370	796
Inkie.org Library	BiblioBoard	BiblioBoard	2,631	0	2,631	5,832
Total Collections			15,498	19,502	34,550	93,227

Explore More Illinois Update

RAILS Special Projects Librarian Gates Marquez met with staff from two individual libraries on September 8 and 11 to provide a demo of the Explore More Illinois platform and answer questions ahead of library enrollment in November.

**Most Popular Attractions – Downstate & Suburban Cardholders in September 2026**

Attraction	Location	Reservations Made
The Morton Arboretum	Lisle	369
Cantigny	Wheaton	185
Chicago Botanic Garden	Glencoe	137
Griffin Museum of Science and Industry	Chicago	72
DuPage Children's Museum	Naperville	63

Most Popular Attractions – Chicago Cardholders in September 2026

Attraction	Location	Reservations Made
Art Institute of Chicago	Chicago	584
Brookfield Zoo Chicago	Brookfield	581
Field Museum	Chicago	465
Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum	Chicago	223
Morton Arboretum	Lisle	202

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

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

Attractions in Explore More Illinois as of October 1, 2026

Attractions	75
Total Attractions in FY27	83

Reservations Made in Explore More Illinois in September 2026

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

Assist member libraries in preparing for the future

Future-focused professional development and member engagement efforts

RAILS Academy



Top 5 Most Viewed in September	Views	% of Total
Where’s My Book? Navigating the Dewey Decimal System	1249	16.5%
Reading Call Numbers	575	7.6%
RAILS Webinar: How AI Works & What Library Staff Need to Know	421	5.6%
Collection Development	213	2.8%
Shelf Reading	203	2.7%

Planning for 2027 RAILS In-Service Day Under Way

The next RAILS all-staff In-Service Day will take place in May at Starved Rock Lodge & Conference Center. A committee made up of RAILS staff from across departments is planning a day of learning and fun, with a focus on fostering staff connection and belonging.



Multiple in-person continuing education events in September were great opportunities for library staff from across the region to come together, learn, and network. The events included the RAILS Session & Social: Outdoor Library Spaces as Community Infrastructure at the Lake Villa Public Library on Monday, September 28 (pictured, previous page, left) and the Book Repair Workshop at the Woodridge Public Library on Wednesday, September 23 (pictured, previous page, right).

Recent CE Events

- **The Next Year of Library Marketing: Trends You Can Actually Use**, webinar, September 18
- **Book Repair Workshops**, Bourbonnais Public Library District, September 21; Woodridge Public Library, September 23
- **Session & Social: Outdoor Library Spaces as Community Infrastructure**, Lake Villa Public Library District, September 28

Upcoming CE Events

- **De-Escalation and Crisis Response Tools with PAVE Prevention**, webinar, October 20
Get practical, library-specific tools for de-escalation and crisis response, helping frontline staff manage tension and conflict safely while preserving a welcoming atmosphere. Learn to recognize early signs of escalation, set healthy boundaries, and use calming communication techniques, while building supportive staff cultures so they're equipped to handle challenges together. Leave with practical skills to respond with empathy, prevent escalation, and support colleagues.
- **Thinking Through AI Policy For Your Library**, webinar, October 21
Get a practical, library-focused framework for developing an AI policy that balances innovation with privacy, ethics, transparency, and professional judgment. Explore a customizable AI policy template, learn how to implement a Human–AI–Human workflow model, and discover strategies for educating staff, patrons, and boards about responsible AI use.
- **When the Storm Comes: Preparing Communities with Ready NOW**, webinar, October 28
Explore how to apply the Ready NOW framework to tornado preparedness. Through practical tools and examples, attendees will consider how to identify and engage community partners; better understand local needs and assets; and co-create preparedness information, programs, and services that reflect the needs of your community.
- **Strengthening Your Professional Influence and Impact**, online meeting, October 30
This interactive workshop will start with a self-assessment of your influencing skills. Then presenter Kathleen Sexton of Kairos Learning will demonstrate how you can increase your influence through communication and intentional relationship building. You'll also learn how to frame ideas more effectively, understand what drives buy-in, and navigate organizational levers to boost your influencing skills.
- **Finding the Spark: How to Create Highly Engaged Student Learning**, webinar, November 2
Explore ways to create highly engaged learning experiences through interactivity, student choice, and different pathways to learning. Leave with ideas and resources for developing interactive lessons, including self-paced learning, gamification, role-playing, passion-focused projects, and student-created experiences.
- **Project Management for the Rest of Us**, webinar, November 3
Get a practical look at the basics of project management, with examples drawn from projects common in libraries. We'll cover the project lifecycle, from defining scope and budget, through planning and execution, to closure and the transition to ongoing operations. We'll also explore stakeholder management and communication throughout a project.

Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community

Strengthen collaborative relationships with partner library organizations

October Partnership Meeting

RAILS has monthly meetings with representatives from the Association of Illinois School Library Educators (AISLE), Chicago Public Schools (CPS), Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS), Illinois Library Association (ILA), and the Illinois State Library (ISL) to discuss ways we can work collaboratively to support school libraries.

In October, the group discussed:

- The launch of the 2026 SLATE Census
- The release of the school library advocacy toolkit
- Suspension procedures and how the systems can align these to fit the
- School library Statements of Support from IHLS and RAILS
- The upcoming AISLE Annual Conference in Lombard, IL

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

RAILS Staff & Service Center News

RAILS Staff Participate in the 2026 ILA Annual Conference in Peoria

Many individual staff members participated in the 2026 ILA Annual Conference in Peoria. In late September, we published [a full list of RAILS staff who presented](#). We will report more about the conference in the November 2026 This Month at RAILS board report including pictures!

Joe Filapek Named to ILA Governance Review Committee

RAILS Associate Executive Director Joe Filapek has been named to the inaugural Governance Review Committee for the Illinois Library Association. This committee is charged with purpose is to review and recommend improvements that help ensure the Association's governance remains effective, transparent, and responsive to its members.

RAILS IT Update

In September, the RAILS IT Team completed installation of a new keyless entry system at the RAILS Coal Valley Service Center, including cabling, door hardware, controller installation, system configuration, and staff training. This finishes the installation of Keyless entry at all RAILS facilities. The IT Team also purchased and started deployment of new iPads for delivery. The current iPads had reached their end of life and would no longer be receiving OS updates after December 2026. Finally, the team also started deployment of Mimecast Security-awareness training for staff.

Burr Ridge Service Center Update

As part of our ongoing HVAC maintenance work, PremiStar is performing an inspection of the RAILS Burr Ridge facility's more than 40 variable air volume (VAV) boxes to assess their condition and operation. This work will help identify any issues and support the efficiency and reliability of our HVAC system.

SEPTEMBER 2026

RAILS
DIGITAL MARKETING
BOARD REPORT



FOLLOWERS

total subscribers

Facebook +17

3,408

Instagram +1

5,743

LinkedIn +27

2,695

REACH

accounts shown our content

Facebook -4,589

7,165

Instagram -108,793

5,667

LinkedIn -1,562

2,243

VIEWS

times our content was seen

Facebook -10,048

24,435

Instagram -157,654

24,254

LinkedIn -3,503

4,416

ENGAGEMENT

reactions, comments, and shares

Facebook -199

494

Instagram -22,309

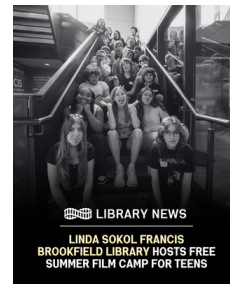
848

LinkedIn -265

124

TOP POST

received the most engagement



RAILS Online Store

● August 2026 ● September 2026



RAILS Minute Views: 661



Can't Shelve This Listens: 2,198