Illinois Heartland Library System

TO: IHLS Board of Directors
FROM: Leslie Bednar
DATE: May 22, 2025
RE: FY2026 Draft Operational Plan

Attached, please find our final proposed Operational Plan for your review and consideration. As a primary component of our FY2026 System Area and Per Capita Grant, the plan covers all departments of our organization. This year, the plan is arranged by our new Strategic Plan Goals with legal citations based on the Standards for Core Services to Members found at 23 ILAC 3030.215. We believe the order of information allows the focus to be as it should—on membership.

We have changed very little since this document was shared with committees and the board in April. You may notice some grammatical and clarification changes based on vigorous external review. No change was substantive.

Thank you for your consideration.

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Draft IHLS FY2026 Operational Plan

◎ Direct result of Strategic Planning process

Objective	Planned Activity		System Standard
Strategic Plan Goal 1: Engage Members			
Goal 1.1 Engage Members: Build strong relationships between and among IHLS and member libraries			
Engagement among IHLS staff and member libraries.	Host annual open houses at each location as resources allow.	◎	23 ILAC 3030.250 (o) (3) (Outside Core Standards)
	Offer an IHLS representative at member library board meetings as requested.	◎	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
	Increase support for affinity groups (these would include agencies sharing similar missions with shared stakeholders, such as museums and historical societies).	◎	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
Engagement among board members and with member libraries.	Pair learning opportunities and dinners with more in-person meetings.		23 ILAC 3030.250 (o) (3) (Outside Core Standards)
	Reintroduce board and member networking events.		23 ILAC 3030.250 (o) (3) (Outside Core Standards)
	Support the advising committee with board member recruitment (nominations & elections).		23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3) (D)
Internal management of member communications.	Create an internal content governance guide to maintain the high quality of print outreach.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) 3) (G)
Ongoing outreach to strengthen membership relations.	Continue holding Members Matter meetings in a virtual format throughout the system on a regular basis.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (d) (1)
	Consider opportunities to improve the Directors' Chat experience.	◎	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
	Support regular meetings for library workers.	◎	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
	Support any member-driven initiatives that promote networking and engagement.	◎	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3) (D)
	Continue providing support for networking groups and updating lists of groups to determine if additional groups should be formed.	◎	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
	Seek opportunities to mentor new public library directors.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
	Continue monitoring and following up with libraries experiencing membership challenges.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
	Engage member libraries in the planning process for the annual operational plan, incorporating feedback from members to align priorities with their needs.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (1)
	Continue site visits to our multitype membership and encourage invitations from libraries.	◎	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (4) (D)

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Objective	Planned Activity	System Standard
	Provide ongoing support for member libraries, including assistance with the library certification process and ensuring that all member libraries have the resources and support needed to comply with certification requirements.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (4)
Goal 1.2 Engage Members: Enhance internal and external communications to facilitate awareness and ensure member engagement		
Connect members with relevant information.	Continue collaborating with departmental leadership to strengthen communications and outreach with other stakeholders.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3) (G)
	Improve both internal and external communications with newsletters, website updates, social media, and email newsletters. Regularly inform members about available services, upcoming events, training opportunities, and system updates.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3) (G)
	Continue analyzing and optimizing website user experience, user interface, and content.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (5)
Continue response to members' expressed needs.	Continue development of the existing virtual networking group for school libraries.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
	Continue developing avenues through which libraries can access relevant data.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (5)
Improve member awareness of delivery services.	Continue the IHLS annual delivery stakeholder survey and evaluate the results.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (e) (4)
	Review and revise the delivery page(s) on the IHLS website.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3) (G)
Encourage awareness and engagement among the SHARE membership.	Develop a return on investment graphic for SHARE membership as a tool for library advocacy.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3) (G)
	Provide opportunities for members to be heard through committee involvement and participation.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (2)
Goal 1.3 Engage Members: Advocate on behalf of members with a variety of stakeholders to show how libraries create empowered communities		
Keep board members apprised of library news and legislation.	Continue advocacy by the IHLS Board on behalf of libraries.	23 ILAC 3030.250 (g) (Outside Core Standards)
	Revise the Advocacy Committee to include more direct member participation.	23 ILAC 3030.250 (g) (Outside Core Standards)
Continue efficient advocacy through IHLS communications.	Review and update the IHLS advocacy and marketing communications plans annually.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3) (G)

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Objective	Planned Activity		System Standard
	Utilize IHLS social media as a communication tool as staff capacity allows. Email remains the primary communication channel.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3) (G)
Help members advocate for their communities.	Promote state and federal broadband initiatives and how libraries can be leaders in their communities.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3) (G)
Support advocacy for multitype membership.	Provide one-on-one support for members interested in actively engaging in advocacy efforts.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3) (G)
	Promote continuing education opportunities that support library advocacy.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
	Support the proposed Administrator's Academy Illinois State Board of Education) course, Improve Student Literacy Through the Library.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
Ongoing development of resources for SHARE members.	Continue maintaining strong partnerships with vendors and other state agencies to provide members with the best possible service.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (b) (1)
	Provide patron-facing content to support libraries' advocacy efforts, such as readers' advisory content and training on including promotional materials via the Aspen catalog.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (b) (4)
Strategic Plan Goal 2: Support Library Services			
Goal 2.1 Support Library Services: Provide high-quality continuing education content both in-person and online			
Aid member libraries through a variety of professional development content.	Continue archiving permanently available training recordings in a way that is easily searchable.	◎	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
	Offer a question-and-answer session for new state legislation that affects libraries.	◎	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
	Highlight continuing education opportunities beyond IHLS.	◎	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
	Continue providing and promoting the organization-wide consulting program with IHLS professional staff.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
Support SHARE members with timely cataloging training.	Continue offering the very popular book repair class for member libraries.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (c) (6)
	Offer cataloging workdays either online or in person.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (c) (6)
	Develop and publish a training course for new and current catalogers that will fulfill the cataloging certification requirements set forth by the SHARE Bibliographic and Cataloging Standards Committee.		23 ILAC 3030.215 c) 5)

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	Keep abreast of changes in cataloging via staff continuing education opportunities to educate member library catalogers. This is a "training the trainers" opportunity.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (c) (6)
	Provide accurate and timely cataloging services for all SHARE member libraries, including the creation of bibliographic records and ongoing database cleanup and maintenance.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (c) (5)
Support libraries statewide with cataloging training	Develop cataloging and metadata presentations.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (c) (6)
	Offer cataloging training to Illinois library staff members.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (c) (6)
Support member libraries with human resources needs.	Provide access to sexual harassment prevention and bloodborne pathogen training to member libraries.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
	Educate libraries on new employment laws and how they impact libraries.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
Aid member libraries through a variety of professional development content.	Continue developing the iLEAD Trustee Learning Portal to inform and educate trustees of public libraries.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
	Explore the possibility of biannual programming virtual events to focus on Summer Reading and adult programming.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
	Continue developing our annual Member Day event.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
	Continue taking advantage of opportunities for shared services in consulting and continuing education.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
	Explore professional development opportunities regarding state, federal, and administrative laws for libraries.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
	Continue creating professional development opportunities for members, including PDH, that are specific to schools and meet Illinois State Board of Education requirements.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
	Continue revising and revamping the Administrator's Academy course "Facilitating Student Learning Through the Library" with RAILS partners	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
	Continue developing quality continuing education opportunities for member libraries, such as collection management and grant writing.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
Provide members an overview of delivery services and functionality.	Create a new member guide related to delivery policy and procedures in a virtual format.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3) (g)

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Objective	**Planned Activity**	**System Standard**
Support SHARE libraries through relevant training.	Evaluate existing training and communication methods to support member libraries' training needs and maintain a high-quality database for information accessibility.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (b) (4)
Goal 2.2 Support Library Services: Respond to evolving needs by providing robust services, shared resources, and innovative technologies		
Partner with peer organizations to provide new support for library cataloging staff.	Work with RAILS to provide continued support to the iCAMP Program.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (c) (3)
	Continue enhancing, merging, or deleting items in the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois database.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (c) (3)
	Provide metadata services for libraries statewide.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (c) (8)
Timely and accurate information for our membership.	Continue improvement of the website for a more effective end-user experience. ◎	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (G)
Connect members to accurate human resources information.	Seek opportunities to assist members with HR Source membership grant.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
Provide internal and external technology users safe and secure access.	Continue providing software and technical assistance for SHARE services.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3) (5)
	Maintain internal and external web services for IHLS, SHARE, iLEAD Trustee Training Portal, and the Cataloging Maintenance Center.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3) (5)
	Provide online and onsite opportunities to share information regarding technology issues.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3) (5)
	Help IHLS and member libraries visualize data applicable to their needs.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3) (5)
	Support member libraries with the purchase, renewal, and maintenance of Domain Name Services (DNS) with the Dreamhost account set up for non- profit libraries. This provides member service at more affordable pricing.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (6)
	Support all internal file servers, cloud services, and other IT services that are vital to IHLS.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (6)
	Explore additional state and national networking opportunities to expand resource-sharing.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (b) (1)
Support member libraries through external opportunities.	Continue participating, as appropriate, in committee work that benefits our stakeholders.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (b) (1)

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Objective	Planned Activity		System Standard
	Develop and submit grant opportunities that support the organization's goals and objectives.		Outside Core Standards
	Continue responding to member needs when scheduling training.	◉	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
	Explore opportunities to develop a repository of pertinent policies for public libraries.	◉	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
Provide delivery services to member libraries regardless of their zip code.	Maintain five-day-a-week delivery to ensure the equitable and consistent distribution of library materials to all full member libraries, efficiently meeting patron requests.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (e) (1)
	Implement Automated Material Handling Systems (AMHS) at Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS) hubs to streamline and expedite the processing and turnaround of inter-library loan materials.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (e) (4)
Continue the development and support of SHARE member services.	Continue supporting the Mobile Memory Lab project at IHLS member libraries.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (c) (4) 23 ILAC 3030.215 (c) (5)
	Provide top-of-the-line service and technology to members at an affordable price, ensuring that all communities, no matter their size or financial resources, have the tools to be successful.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (c) (2)
	Expand marketing on CloudLibrary and other shared resources/catalogs.	◉	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (6)
	Promote the SHARE program to potential members, while also assessing barriers to membership.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (c) (1)
Strategic Plan Goal 3: Organizational Development			
Goal 3.1 Organizational Development: Ensure transparency for member trust and staff knowledge			
Support transparency throughout the organization.	Engage in succession planning to prevent organizational information loss.	◉	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3)
	Prioritize cross-training or expand staff knowledge so that multiple people can assist members.	◉	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (1) (3)
	Use easy-to-understand language in communications and meetings.	◉	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (G)
Provide detailed financial analysis to support stakeholder awareness.	Facilitate the annual external audit by providing comprehensive documentation and financial records to ensure transparency, foster stakeholder confidence, and fulfill the annual report obligation.	◉	23 ILAC 3030.260 (a) (3) (Outside Core Standards)

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Objective	Planned Activity		System Standard
	Continue evaluation of industry forecasts to incorporate relevant projections into future fiscal year operating budgets as needed, ensuring transparency and informed financial planning.		23 ILAC 3030.260 (Outside Core Standards)
	Utilize OpenGov software to enhance reporting capabilities, promoting transparency and strengthening engagement with membership.		23 ILAC 3030.260 (Outside Core Standards)
	Provide financial and historical data to reinforce organizational directives and inform decision-making processes.		23 ILAC 3030.260 (Outside Core Standards)
	Maintain ongoing evaluation of insurance rates, coverage options, and investment opportunities to support the organization's financial stability and planning.		23 ILAC 3030.260 (Outside Core Standards)
	Report on new strategic plan progress by ensuring all libraries have a copy and providing updates in the newsletter.	⊙	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (2)
	Encourage libraries to raise concerns with IHLS.	⊙	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (2)
	Communicate openly about why certain strategic goals or activities might not be met.	⊙	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (2)
Maintain compliance with Illinois State Library directives.	Coordinate and submit the System Area and Per Capita Grant and the Annual Report.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (1)
Provide accurate information for member libraries.	Ensure accuracy in reporting to members.	⊙	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3) (G)
	Offer a separate communication channel or posting for critical updates.	⊙	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3) (G)
Provide professional development for IHLS staff.	Explore and support opportunities for individual staff professional development in their roles.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3)
	Ensure that IHLS maintains legal compliance in its operations.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (1)
	Continue providing remote support through applicable software to IHLS staff at IHLS offices and remote working locations.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (5)
	Optimize driver resources to ensure consistent expectations and quality of service.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (e) (5)
	Review and revise data to analyze start/stop route times.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (e) (4)
	Evaluate routes to increase efficiency.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (e) (4)
Administer the SHARE Consortium.	Review membership fees and financial health to ensure continued sustainability.		23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (2)

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Objective	**Planned Activity**	**System Standard**
	Review policies and procedures to ensure they comply with SHARE principles, Illinois Library Laws and Rules, and our commitment to multitype libraries with a variety of community needs.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (2)
	Provide an annual report for SHARE like the IHLS annual report. ◎	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3) (F)
Goal 3.2 Organizational Development: Aim for a flexible organizational structure to optimize leadership and respond to emerging needs		
Develop and Publish Annual Reports on System Performance.	Prepare and distribute an annual report to member libraries and the Illinois State Library, detailing system operations, service performance, delivery logistics, and financial data.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3) (F)
Implement succession planning and leadership development	Continue reviewing, revising, and updating standard operating procedures across the organization.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3)
Publish Reports and Performance Metrics Regularly.	Publish system-wide reports on activities, financial performance, and resource-sharing metrics regularly. Share these reports with members to promote transparency and ensure they are informed about IHLS's performance and the impact of services.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3) (G)
Provide support for the IHLS Board.	Offer training to the IHLS Board to better understand their roles. ◎	23 ILAC 3030.250 (Outside Core Standards)
Provide a future vision for IHLS.	Consider realigning IHLS staff to match strategic plan goals and utilize existing strengths. ◎	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3)
Professional development for IHLS leadership.	Research options for a variety of board training programs.	23 ILAC 3030.260 (Outside Core Standards)
Maintain nimbleness for the current library environment.	Offer flexible expert advice and answers when necessary. ◎	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
Efficient and effective internal reporting tools and analysis.	Continue developing the use of new systems to streamline processes and IHLS services.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3)
	Renew benefits.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3)
	Enhance human resources knowledge by providing opportunities for consulting.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
Maintain responsive technology support..	Develop in-house applications for IHLS and SHARE to meet staff and member needs.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (a) (3) (G)

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Objective	**Planned Activity**	**System Standard**
Notify school library staff of PDH availability.	Maintain the calendar of professional development opportunities that provide professional development hours for school librarians and promote opportunity.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (d) (1)
Retain staff knowledge.	Evaluate operations staffing patterns based on full time staffing positions to reduce turnover and improve retention.	23 ILAC 3030.215 (e) (4)