



1. Narrative Report

A Word from the Executive Director

In FY2025, our libraries continued to help their communities steer through a flood of disinformation from high levels of government and support communities during a worsening financial crisis. Our libraries offer unmatched value to their patrons. At IHLS, we are dedicated to enhancing our members' capacity to provide such high levels of service.

This commitment guided us in a year of long-term planning, project implementation, and responsive advocacy. We worked with our staff and listened to our members to create a new, impact-driven strategic plan. We kept promises as we proceeded with the automated material handling system (AMHS) implementation at our hubs. We offered financial value to our libraries with two IHLS-sponsored grants: the HR Source Grant and the Marketing Microgrant. And we jumped into action when funding for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) came under extreme threat, supporting and guiding our members in IMLS advocacy efforts.

In short, the entire IHLS team remained dedicated, nimble, and hopeful in FY2025, and I'm proud to show you how we did it.

Sincerely,

Leslie M. Bednar, Executive Director

Illinois Heartland Library System



Marketing & Communications

The IHLS Marketing and Communications team is a vital part of supporting the organization's membership. We focus on consistent and engaging communications with a website and email-first strategy (reaching members via their preferred channels), which is essential for the utilization of IHLS services, event success, and informed membership and staff. Thus, from day to day, staff keep members informed via regular newsletters, emails, web articles, social media, intranet articles, and more. In addition to these crucial regular communications, we also strive to expand and improve our impact each year.

In FY2025, we kept members and stakeholders informed while entering new levels of member support, even as we lost half our capacity due to a team member's resignation. The Marketing and Communications team held strong through several significant projects: supporting the AMHS barcode duplication project, revamping our board nominations marketing strategy, suddenly taking on emergency IMLS advocacy, and launching the inaugural IHLS Marketing Microgrant.

AMHS Support

Throughout FY2025, IHLS Marketing and Communications collaborated closely with Delivery to support the AMHS project, ensuring members remained informed throughout this complex and costly initiative. Our focus was on providing transparent and timely updates, communicating the value of the project, and engaging members in the process to foster excitement.

Knowing that clear communication was essential for member satisfaction, we worked on multiple updates via the website, newsletters, and Members Matter meetings. For instance, we quickly addressed unexpected issues related to the sensitive barcode duplication project, balancing member concerns with system realities in frequent updates.

In addition to transparent communications, this project also requires some marketing to ensure member buy-in. In the first half of the year, our marketing efforts focused on demonstrating the value of the machine, as seen in a social media video that contrasted the gentleness of machine-sorting with hand-sorting. As installations began, we launched the AMHS Naming Contest to engage members in the naming process, with three rounds of surveys determining the winning names. Members proposed names in Round 1, which staff narrowed down in Round 2, with the final voting (Round 3) concluding April 25. The winners will be announced at the ribbon-cutting event, initially set for July but rescheduled to October 2025. Therefore, we cannot disclose the winning names in this report, but we invite readers to attend the reveal at our 2025 annual meeting.

Board Nominations Promotion Refresh

Each year, board nominations and elections require significant promotion to ensure a qualified ballot and strong voter participation. This year was particularly challenging due to four openings for trustee representatives, a category we've struggled to fill in the past. To address this, the Marketing and



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Communications team collaborated with our Executive Assistant and Executive Director to implement a targeted approach for trustees, recognizing that many are older and may not engage with social media or even emails with as much frequency or fluency as the rest of our membership.

To this end, we distributed promotional packets via delivery bins for inclusion in board materials and designed an attractive, text-light flyer to capture trustees' attention. On the back of the flyer, we added our traditional letter from our board president to appeal to more traditional audiences. Additionally, we highlighted the significant impact of serving one of Illinois's two multitype library systems, continuing to target our outreach with emails and an engaging social media video for tech-savvy trustees.

This refresh appears to have been successful: there were more nominees this year than our bylaws would even allow on the ballot, giving our members greater choice for their trustee representatives and enhancing their voice in leadership.

Advocacy Efforts

At IHLS, we consider advocacy one of our most important activities. Steering clear of all prohibited political activities, we focus our advocacy efforts on activities like educating our members about relevant state bills, demonstrating the value of libraries to the public, and persuading the state to include libraries in planning for endeavors like broadband expansion. This year, we focused largely on helping libraries advocate for themselves and championing the continuance and funding of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

Helping Libraries Advocate for Themselves

Our chief advocacy focus is helping libraries advocate for themselves. Last fall, we created an

infographic flyer and template highlighting public libraries' return on investment. Using IPLAR data, average book costs, and IMLS information, the infographic illustrates the per-capita cost of libraries compared to other goods and services. We provide both a ready-to-share version with data from all IHLS public libraries and a customizable template for individual libraries.

In winter, we developed a similar infographic template for SHARE-member school libraries, using the SHARE Polaris Dashboard. Although due to the nature of the document and SHARE dashboards, we do not have a ready-to-share version for school data, the template allows fast and easy population of fields using the dashboard, making it user-friendly for schools and even adaptable for public libraries.

Both infographic documents are valuable tools for libraries to advocate for themselves and are available on our website.

IMLS advocacy

This spring, an urgent advocacy need arose when President Trump announced plans to downsize federal agencies, including the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), which provides essential grants to libraries. We promptly initiated crisis communications and advocacy planning.

We first informed our members via email about the situation and shared updates on our website, encouraging sign-ups for our Official Business email list, where we would continue to share updates. Then, we collaborated within IHLS and with members to reach out to legislators and patrons. Utilizing data and feedback, we created three infographic flyers advocating for IMLS—two highlighting its impact in central and southern Illinois and one showcasing statewide benefits. We sought feedback from our RAILS colleagues on the



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statewide flyer and provided feedback on their statewide materials.

Additionally, we promoted a meeting with national and state legislators at Edwardsville Public Library, organized by our members. There, we spoke with State Sen. Erica Harriss and staff from Rep. Nikki Budzinski's and State Rep. Katie Stuart's offices. We presented our flyers and thanked the legislators for their support.

Finally, the Marketing and Communications team developed an issue guide for IMLS advocacy, including resources for members to voice their concerns, the infographic flyers, and social media content. This guide featured downloadable items to aid in advocacy efforts.

Marketing Microgrant

In 2023, the Marketing and Communications team had the idea of creating a microgrant to assist member libraries with limited budgets in funding promotional projects. Smaller libraries often struggle with costs that larger organizations can more easily manage, such as \$200 for branded items. To support this microgrant, we launched an online print-on-demand store featuring pro-library designs. This fundraiser, active since 2022, had raised about \$1,200 by mid-2025.

In the fall of FY2025, we officially launched the IHLS Marketing Microgrant program, offering up to \$600 in funds, with the remaining \$600 for FY2026 already raised. The application period ran through December, attracting five applicants. We selected two winners announced at IHLS Member Day 2025, awarding \$200 to fully fund a project at Fairview Heights Public Library and \$400 to partially fund a project at the Mississippi Valley Public Library District's Fairmont City Library Center. (See figure 1.)

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Figure 1. Save IMLS statewide infographic flyer.

Winning Microgrant Projects

Fairview Heights Public Library has received \$200 in funding for its Community Partnership Initiative, aimed at building collaborations with local businesses and organizations. They face the challenge of creating outreach programs that cater to both small businesses and larger corporate entities. The funding will be used to acquire branded gift bags for 30 businesses during their Community Partnership Initiative Tour, which includes face-to-face visits and an online survey to gather data. This initiative is designed to foster stronger relationships with potential partners.

The Mississippi Valley Library District – Fairmont City Library Center received \$400 in partial funding for a Ready-to-Go Kit aimed at reaching the predominantly Spanish-speaking community of Fairmont City. The library uses the kit to enhance its presence at local outreach events through bilingual promotional materials and word-of-mouth strategies. The Ready-to-Go Kit includes engaging items like a Plinko-style prize drop board, a Wi-Fi hotspot, a tablet for demonstrating digital resources, and a branded tablecloth, all designed to attract and inform residents about the library's services and foster community connections.

Figure 2. Details about the winning projects for the IHLS Marketing Microgrant.



After Member Day, our focus shifted to raising additional funds for FY2027 through the IHLS Store by expanding our design offerings. With federal funding sources like IMLS in peril, we're proud to

have created a self-sustaining microgrant program that will help our members connect with their communities despite funding challenges.

DRAFT



Human Resources

Human Resources (HR) plays a multi-faceted role in our organization, serving as a vital connection between our employees, business needs, and the well-being of our members. We take a comprehensive approach to HR practices, ensuring all stakeholders are informed, empowered, and compliant. In essence, HR is the bridge connecting our employees, business objectives, and member needs. Through strategic initiatives and open communication, we create a win-win situation for all. **This fiscal year, the philosophy has been to leverage our resources to automate processes by “doing more with less”.** We've strategically leveraged technology to streamline previously manual processes, boosting efficiency and empowering our existing talent. This proactive approach has not only ensured we meet our goals but also positioned us for future growth with a more scalable foundation.

Streamlining Our Processes

Enhancing Our Human Resources Information System (Paylocity)

In FY2024, the HR team worked with our Finance Department to implement Paylocity, an improved human resources information system. Since then, Paylocity has offered several benefits to HR staff and our other employees. In FY2025, HR staff worked on improvements to the system.

Applicant Tracking System

HR staff worked to further enhance Paylocity's feature for tracking applicants applying for positions, which offers easy access to the stages of recruitment for Human Resources and managers and allows for automatic email responses to applicants. We instituted measures to better

protect the candidate's personal data, as this information is available online. We also worked towards better tracking of the interview process by having questions online for the entire interview process.

New Hire Packet Enhancements

To continue improving the experience of our new recruits, the HR team also implemented enhancements to our new hire onboarding process via Paylocity. Now, new employees can complete their new hire paperwork online before their start date. This process saves approximately 40 minutes during their first-day orientation and enhances data security by eliminating the need to physically deliver sensitive documents.

Paylocity Performance Module

Finally, we continued our performance review system for all IHLS employees this year. We began the process of switching our performance review platform from Teamflect to Paylocity, resulting in cost savings for our next fiscal year.

Rollout of the Employee Handbook

Another important element of our efforts to streamline our process was the rollout of our annually updated Employee Handbook for legal compliance. We announced the rollout through a post on the IHLS staff Intranet and an email to all staff, enabling employees to easily access the handbook when questions arise. We also trained staff in our policies to ensure understanding and address questions. Both the handbook rollout and the policy training also included Paylocity components, enabling HR staff and managers to verify that employees had read and completed them.



All these initiatives work toward the goal of doing more with less by giving employees access to their data, the ability to make changes, and access to forms and policies. This directly relates to streamlining our processes and utilizing a single system approach.

Assisting the Members Doing HR Work

As usual, the HR team also focused on serving our members by empowering their workforce and helping them navigate the ever-changing landscape of human resources. We provide assistance via consultations, training, and a grant to assist with the cost of an HR Source membership.

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HR Consultations

We provide our library members with access to a wealth of resources, including expert HR consultations! HR consultants convert complex legal language into straightforward, practical advice for members who find employment contracts, benefits packages, or workplace policies confusing. We also provide recommendations on effective strategies for recruitment, performance management, and resolving conflicts. Furthermore, our consultations help members stay up to date with the latest employment laws and regulations, ensuring compliance and allowing them to focus on serving their clients. This year, we provided seven consultations!

Human Resource Training

We have trained over 300 library staff, providing them with complimentary access to annual Sexual Harassment Prevention training mandated by the state. The benefits of this training extend beyond staying compliant with state law. This impactful asynchronous online training not only cultivates a safer environment for libraries but also empowers staff, significantly mitigating risks. By actively addressing and discouraging harassment, we foster a welcoming atmosphere for all patrons.



Figure 3. A screenshot of the IHLS bookings page for consultations.

Moreover, as staff members become adept at recognizing and reporting incidents of harassment, their confidence and morale soar. This training equips employees to help avert potential lawsuits, ultimately contributing to a more productive and positive workplace culture. Together, we are building a stronger, safer community where everyone can thrive.

HR Source Grant Program: Year Three

In FY2025, we proudly offered our HR Source Grant program for a third year, paying the bulk of 17 member libraries' HR Source annual membership fees. As a result, these libraries can address all their

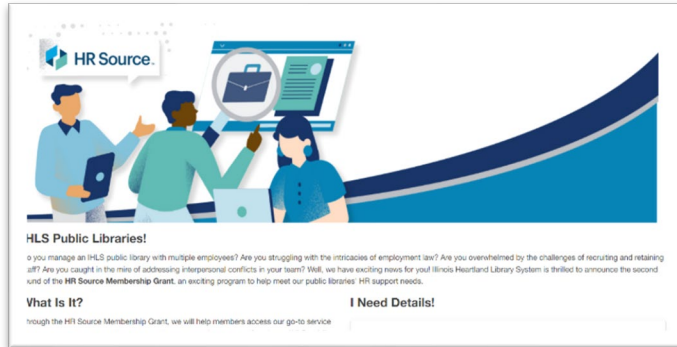


Figure 4. The HR Source Grant as presented on the IHLS Website.

HR needs at an affordable price point that fits in their budget—no matter the library’s size. For instance, HR Source provides access to legal resources, hotlines for quick questions, and training programs to ensure libraries stay up-to-date and compliant.

Additionally, this resource allows HR professionals in libraries to connect with colleagues through online forums and roundtables offered by HR Source. This facilitates sharing best practices, problem-solving, and staying informed about current HR trends. Especially with this grant, membership fees can be more affordable than hiring a dedicated HR professional, especially for smaller libraries. HR Source provides access to a wealth of resources at a fraction of the cost.

Representing IHLS statewide

LIMRiCC

The HR team empowers our members by serving with the Library Insurance Management and Risk Control Combination (LIMRiCC), an intergovernmental organization that offers affordable insurance, risk management services, and compliance support for Illinois libraries. LIMRiCC also helps libraries remain compliant with regulations relevant to unemployment claims. This includes unemployment compensation group accounts and access to unemployment claim

consultants. In FY2025, IHLS HR Director Jill Trevino continued her term as the LIMRiCC Board’s Vice Chairperson. Trevino is still the sole board member representing libraries in central and southern Illinois. Her role allows her to advocate for the benefit needs of our libraries within LIMRiCC.

ILA Participation

Our HR Director was instrumental in creating the ILA Human Resources Administration Forum (HRAF), which assists libraries across the state in tackling human resources issues and exchanging experiences that they would not have been able to access otherwise. Members of the HRAF collaborate to design and present conference programs and informational materials, among various other activities. In FY2025, Trevino continued to serve as a leadership mentor in the forum.

In the interest of educating IHLS members and other Illinois library workers, our HR Director gave three presentations at the 2024 ILA Annual Conference. She gave one presentation called “Hiring in the Rising Tide of Book Bans,” and she participated in the HRAF Unconference session. In collaboration with SHARE Director Cassandra Thompson, Trevino also gave a presentation titled “Shining a Light on Managing Employees.” Both RAILS and IHLS members were in attendance.

Providing Staff with Professional Development Support

In connection with our focus on “doing more with less,” we have continued our focus on creating a culture of learning. IHLS recognizes that knowledge is power. We embrace a philosophy that encourages employees at all levels to seek continuous learning and skill development. We value curiosity, innovation, and understanding that



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a dynamic workforce can adapt to change more effectively.

In FY2025, we continued to implement a variety of learning methods. Staff completed training through our Gallagher Step 360 programs, which not only focus on professional development but also support employees in achieving their personal goals. Additionally, we maintained our use of LinkedIn Learning accounts for employees, providing them with convenient access to training on their phones or other personal devices. This year, our employees explored over 200 courses. Each course helps employees acquire marketable skills and stay updated with industry standards, ultimately enabling them to serve member libraries more effectively.

Human Resources Training

In addition to offering subject-area professional development opportunities, we also provided staff with training on subjects relevant to IHLS employment in general. We held an IMRF training to help our employees better understand the pension benefits of IMRF. We also held reasonable suspicion training to help employees recognize signs of someone under the influence. Additionally, we communicated IHLS policies to employees and supervisors regarding their responsibilities if they witness someone under the influence. The learning here at IHLS is inclusive, providing opportunities for everyone, regardless of their position or tenure within the organization. From entry-level employees to directors, everyone is encouraged to engage in learning experiences tailored to their individual needs.

Recruiting & Retention

Recruiting excellent team members is vital to providing excellent service to our members. While the HR Department focuses on this goal, we also

continue to keep our costs low by using free resources to post our open positions. We now have a fully functioning Applicant Tracking System through Paylocity, which aligns with our theme of maximizing efficiency by leveraging our available resources and technology. In FY2025, we also saw more candidates coming directly to our job listings on the IHLS Website.

Additionally, we have increased our knowledge of equal treatment by attending webinars and keeping current with ways to include such initiatives in our hiring processes. One such initiative involves attending job fairs, where we promote not only IHLS job openings but also jobs posted on our website for libraries throughout the state of Illinois. This year, we attended job fairs in East St Louis, McKendree College (Lebanon), and Effingham IDES (Illinois Department of Security).

As we continue our focus on recruiting top talent, turnover remains a challenge. We hired 12 employees this fiscal year (FT=6, PT=6) and 20 employees resigned (FT=10, PT=10). With an overall average of 92 employees in any given month, that gives us an annual 21.7% turnover rate. The top three reasons for this turnover are retirements, people leaving the workforce, and those moving for better pay than a quasigovernmental nonprofit can offer. As we continue our focus on recruiting top talent, turnover remains a challenge. We hired 12 employees this fiscal year (FT=6, PT=6) and 20 employees resigned (FT=10, PT=10). With an overall average of 92 employees in any given month, that gives us an annual 21.7% turnover rate. The top three reasons for this turnover are retirements, people leaving the workforce, and those moving for better pay than a quasigovernmental nonprofit can offer.



Accounting

The Finance Department upholds the organization's financial integrity by managing its funds, maintaining accurate records, and supporting sound fiscal practices. Its core functions include transaction recording, financial reporting, budgeting, and forecasting, regulatory compliance, audit coordination, payroll administration, accounts payable and receivable, cash flow oversight, tax filing, and financial analysis. These responsibilities ensure the organization adheres to established accounting standards and mitigates financial risk.

During FY2025, the department upheld its commitment to transparency and accuracy by maintaining precise financial records and delivering timely reports to both the Board of Directors and the Illinois State Library via grant documentation. The annual budget was prepared and presented to the board, and the department successfully completed an external audit, receiving an unmodified opinion. These financial milestones are essential to our grant applications and annual reporting, offering stakeholders a clear view of our fiscal planning and performance.

Additionally, the department continued to provide consulting hours for member libraries, offering guidance on accounting matters. This service strengthens the financial stewardship of our members and contributes to their long-term sustainability.

In summary, the Finance Department is instrumental in ensuring financial accountability, enabling strategic decision-making, and supporting the organization's continued growth and resilience.

FY2024 Audit

Finance staff prepared for and worked with Scheffel Boyle auditors to complete the FY2024 audit. The audit was presented to the board at the September meeting and submitted with the FY2024 Annual Report. The audit resulted in an unmodified or clean opinion demonstrating our dedication to responsibility and careful management as stewards of public funds. The audit is a requirement of the IHLS Annual Report that is due each year to the Illinois State Library on September 30. Meeting these requirements and receiving an unmodified opinion on our audits lowers the risk of losing funding, enabling us to continue serving our membership effectively.

FY2026 Budget and Narrative

As we do every year, the Finance staff met with management and staff to forecast and create the FY2026 budget for six funds. The draft was presented in April to the IHLS Board of Directors and was then posted for member comments. The final versions were presented at the May board meeting for approval and will be included in the FY2026 SAPG grant application. The budget not only allows us to outline our stewardship of public funds but is a requirement for the grant applications that are submitted each year to the Illinois State Library. Using the OpenGov platform allows IHLS to display the budget and narratives, which allows for more transparency for our membership to view these documents and leave comments. Developing a budget centered on support for our membership enables IHLS to effectively plan for serving them in the upcoming fiscal year.



Grant Reporting

The Finance Department also assisted with the financial sections of the CMC and iLEAD Trustee Learning Portal grant applications and quarterly reports. Additionally, we processed the narrative and financial section of the OCLC grant. Finance staff are responsible for multiple components and any financial-related sections of the State Area and Per Capita Grant application and the annual report. Providing the required information for these grants enables IHLS to continue its work under the Cataloging Maintenance Center, the iLEAD Library Trustee Training, and the OCLC Billing, benefiting not only our membership but all Illinois libraries through this grant work.

Consulting Hours

To support our member libraries, the Finance Department continued to offer consulting hours for accounting-related inquiries. Although only one formal session was scheduled, focusing on budgeting, other members reached out via email with a range of financial questions. By sharing our knowledge in these exchanges, we helped meet IHLS's goal of providing members with continuing education. Additionally, these interactions reflect our ongoing commitment to providing accessible financial guidance and strengthening the fiscal stewardship of our member libraries.

Record Accurate Financial Transactions

Daily, the finance staff records financial data accurately. The level of accuracy is extremely important since we are audited on the work. These transactions are what build the data for financial reporting to our stakeholders. Finance staff are responsible not only for financial transactions under IHLS obligations but also for financial

activities related to the OCLC Billing Grant. The OCLC membership extends to all libraries in Illinois, so there are numerous accounts to manage. The finance team provides support for account management and customer service to all IHLS, SHARE, and OCLC members. This ensures that invoices are paid in a timely manner, allowing the programs to continue with the necessary financial resources.

Renewals of Insurance Policies

The Finance team collaborated with the Human Resources department to successfully renew the organization's 2025 employee benefit insurance. In addition, we completed the renewal of liability insurance for FY2026. Throughout the process, we worked closely with our insurance brokers to secure high-quality coverage options at the most competitive rates, ensuring both staff and organizational needs were met effectively.



Facilities

Maintaining our facilities is essential to ensuring safe, functional, and efficient work environments that support our staff, visitors, and the communities we serve. Regular upkeep, timely repairs, and strategic improvements extend the life of our buildings, reduce long-term operating costs, and help avoid costly emergency repairs. By prioritizing proactive maintenance and investing in targeted upgrades, we demonstrate our commitment to being responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars—maximizing the value of public resources while preserving the integrity and performance of our facilities for years to come. In addition to ongoing maintenance at our buildings, several targeted projects were completed to improve infrastructure, enhance energy efficiency, and optimize space usage:

Champaign LED Lighting Update

This year, we began work in Champaign, upgrading the remaining lighting at the office to

high-efficiency LED fixtures. This project improves lighting quality while decreasing energy use and long-term utility costs.

Carbondale Server Room Relocation & Space Optimization

Facilities successfully relocated the server room and equipment from Suite 107 in Carbondale to save money. This move allowed us to consolidate operations and free up leased space. It reduced leasing expenses and made better use of the available space.

Edwardsville Tuckpointing Project

Late in the fiscal year, we finished a major tuckpointing project at the Edwardsville facility to fix masonry deterioration. This effort enhanced the building's structural strength, weather resistance, and overall appearance.



Information Technology

The Information Technology (IT) department at IHLS continues to be a cornerstone of nearly every aspect of our organization's work. Every day, IHLS staff and member libraries rely on the technology tools and systems we maintain, from Microsoft Teams, Outlook, and Zoom for communication, to custom applications used by our drivers, catalogers, and operations staff. The increasing reliance on technology creates a steady demand for IT support, requiring our team to balance a wide range of requests with the upkeep of complex infrastructure.

Although we remain a relatively small department, we take pride in our ability to do more than most would expect, thanks to careful documentation, continuous learning, and collaboration across the organization. Our efforts reflect our ongoing commitment to being good stewards of taxpayer dollars while supporting both our staff and libraries at the highest level. In FY2025, we focused particularly on staff and organizational support projects, enhancements to our member support, and providing continuing education to Illinois libraries.

Staff Support: Infrastructure & Facilities

Cataloging Statistics Program

For the past several years, our catalogers have stored the cataloging statistics in an old FileMaker database that is no longer supported or maintained. Bringing the database up to a modern platform on FileMaker would cost at least \$250,000. In the face of such an exorbitant cost, the IT Department chose a different path. The development team built a new web-based program to help catalogers track their statistics, including those used for billing libraries

that utilize the Express Cataloging option. After user testing, the program is nearly complete and is expected to launch in the first quarter of FY2026.

Delivery iPad Application Rebuild

The Delivery iPad application, first launched in 2018, has been collecting essential data for years and reached a point where a major rebuild of the backend software was needed. That work is nearly complete, with a rollout planned for the first quarter of FY2026. This upgrade will ensure the application remains reliable and continues to provide the high-quality data our delivery services depend on.

Carbondale Computer Room Relocation:

IHLS is always looking for effective and reasonable ways to save money and ensure IHLS continues to be a true steward of taxpayer funds. To this end, our Leadership Team decided to downsize the Carbondale Office from three suites to two, thereby reducing the cost of rent. Thus, the computer room was relocated from Suite 107 to Suite 106. The IT Department coordinated this complex project with SIUC staff to ensure uninterrupted access to power and fiber optics. This made the move much smoother for the staff.

Later, the new room began experiencing overheating issues. When IHLS IT staff reported the problem, SIU promptly provided additional ductwork, resolving the issue and ensuring a stable environment for our equipment. Now, the computer room at the Carbondale office is well air-conditioned and supports work at IHLS effectively.

Broadband Opportunities and Digital Equity Advocacy

With many of our libraries located in remote, rural areas serving small communities, digital equity and



broadband expansion are major priorities at IHLS. Much of our service area falls short of the FCC's standard for high-speed internet, and libraries are often the first places residents turn to for computers and reliable internet access. Recognizing this, the IT Department works diligently to ensure our libraries not only have the necessary technology and internet connectivity but also have a voice in the decision-making process regarding statewide broadband expansion.

Broadband Expansion for Our Libraries

To help our libraries get dependable internet access, the IT team actively promotes statewide broadband opportunities and grants to member libraries. As grant opportunities arise, IHLS IT staff consult with libraries to match the right technology solutions to their needs.

We also continued working closely with RAILS and CARLI on large-scale digital equity projects. Although a highly anticipated grant opportunity did not materialize this year—disappointing as it was—we remain ready for future opportunities as additional federal and state funds become available. When we secure grant funds, we will make sure every library in Illinois has at least one gigabit per second (Gbps) internet access. This is the minimum speed needed for libraries to provide adequate broadband service to their communities, as outlined in the Connect Illinois Five-Year Action Plan developed by the Illinois Broadband Lab.

Library Connectivity Initiative

While we help libraries close the digital divide, the IT Department has also focused on ensuring libraries have affordable internet. This year, we advanced a major broadband procurement project with the Illinois Century Network (ICN) for Illinois libraries, including development of a consortium model for better pricing and state appropriation

coverage. The procurement is set for July 2026 with six-year service terms, offering libraries potentially more stability and cost efficiency in their broadband services.

Member Services & Support

In addition to helping our libraries obtain quality internet access and supporting our staff as they support members, the IHLS IT Department also directly serves our members. Sometimes, they help members connect to engagement opportunities. IT staff continue to support IHLS's monthly Members' Matter events, ensuring members have the technical support they need to participate fully. Other times, our member support comes in the form of ongoing, enhanced, or new technology-based services like implementing MessageBee and building data dashboards.

MessageBee Implementation

IT staff helped fully implement SMS alerts to library patrons, which, this year, gave SHARE admin staff a clearer view of message delivery and made it easier to track communication failures.

Data Dashboards

In the first part of the year, IHLS Data Analyst Stephanie Hunt created new dashboards that help libraries complete their annual reports and support their applications for grant funding. A major presentation of this work was delivered at the January board meeting. The feedback from member libraries has been overwhelmingly positive, with many noting that the dashboards save them time and provide clarity when completing reports or grant applications.

Hunt also designed a new dashboard to support the Illinois Public Library Annual Report (IPLAR). Pulling real-time data from the SHARE consortium database, the dashboard provides member



libraries with accurate answers to IPLAR questions, eliminating the need for multiple reports and manual calculations.

Professional Development & Conferences

Providing and obtaining professional development opportunities are very important to the IT team, as with every other IHLS department.

To further our own professional development, select IT staff attended this year's conference. For some, it was their first time attending, while others presented on behalf of IHLS and SHARE. This

annual opportunity continues to provide valuable training and networking. IT staff also invested 194 hours in Pluralsight online courses this year, strengthening technical skills and expanding knowledge to better serve IHLS and its member libraries.

The IT team also pulled double duty, giving and attending presentations at the ILA Annual Conference. We also met face-to-face with members at the IHLS booth, strengthening our support and outreach.



Delivery

Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS) Delivery service plays a vital role in supporting resource sharing across over 500 member libraries throughout central and southern Illinois. By transporting materials loaned from one library to another, IHLS helps members significantly reduce costs by eliminating the need for each library to purchase every new book or media item. Instead, libraries can borrow materials from one another, allowing their budgets to stretch further while still providing robust collections to their patrons.

Interlibrary loan remains a core pillar of IHLS's mission, and delivery is the engine that makes this possible. In FY2025, IHLS Delivery continued to focus on timely, efficient service while expanding efforts to improve operations through innovation and technology. The most significant project this year was the development and phased implementation of automated sorting machines at all three IHLS delivery hubs. This major undertaking will improve turnaround times and provide a range of internal operational benefits.

Equitable Access in Functional Five-Day Delivery

IHLS guarantees that all member libraries—regardless of size—receive functional five-day-a-week delivery, eliminating access barriers that often exist in volume-based delivery models. This approach ensures fast, reliable, and cost-free delivery of library materials system-wide, thereby enhancing access for residents across the region. With a library card from any IHLS-member library, Illinois residents can easily borrow materials from any other member library in the system. Delivery was provided Monday through Friday, excluding major holidays and emergency closures. IHLS

maintained 20 daily delivery routes with over 1 million miles driven, ensuring comprehensive coverage across our 28,000-square-mile service area in central and southern Illinois.

During FY2025, IHLS sorted and delivered approximately 2.7 million items for IHLS delivery service and over 32,000 items for ILDS (Illinois Library Delivery Service) academic libraries. Additionally, nearly 600,000 items required dual sorting—meaning they were transferred between two IHLS hubs before reaching their final destination, highlighting the complexity and coordination of system-wide logistics.

In addition to promoting equity, we are deeply committed to ensuring expedited delivery wherever feasible. Our IHLS Delivery On the Go service facilitates the arrival of qualifying items at the receiving library on the very same day they are requested. Through this efficient same-route, same-day service, patrons have benefited from an estimated savings of \$1.1 million. This has allowed library patrons to receive their materials free of charge and in a timelier manner compared to making online purchases. Over 44,000 items were delivered using this service during FY2025.

Items Delivered on the Go	44,000+
Average Value Per Book	\$25**
Estimated Patron Savings	\$1,100,000+

Table 1. Calculates the estimated patron savings on items delivered the same day via Delivery On the Go.

***The \$25 is an average of all the totals from the School Library Journal's Average Book Prices 2023 list—rounded up to account for tax and shipping.*



Enhancing Efficiency and Reducing Turnaround Time

The largest project of the fiscal year was the planning and implementation of automated materials handling systems (AMHS) at all three IHLS delivery hubs: Edwardsville, Champaign, and Carbondale. These machines are designed to streamline the sorting process, significantly reduce manual handling, and improve overall delivery turnaround times for member libraries. One of the key drivers for this initiative was feedback from our annual delivery survey, where the top complaint from members had consistently been inaccurate sorting. Previously, sorting has been a manual process, using printed receipts, which are prone to human error—especially when item statuses are not updated in real time. Due to human nature, even the most careful staff can misread or sort

incorrectly when relying on outdated or unclear information.

The new automated system changes that by sorting items based on their current item status at the exact time of scanning, ensuring higher accuracy and fewer delivery errors. In preparation for this transition, we worked closely with libraries to ensure system compatibility. While many members already used external barcodes suitable for automated scanning, IHLS provided hands-on assistance to those who did not, helping them acquire and apply external barcodes to their circulating materials. This proactive support ensures that all libraries—regardless of size or prior technology adoption—can fully benefit from the increased efficiency and accuracy the sorting machines are designed to deliver.



Figure 5. Sorters in Edwardsville use the new AMHS.



Figure 6. Sorters in Champaign use the new AMHS.



Resource Sharing via SHARE

SHARE was in the process of transition in FY2025 after several years of planning for membership fee scale changes and a major implementation of the Aspen catalog. The core of SHARE membership, outside of technology, is training and member support. In addition to bibliographic services training, SHARE provided members with 54 training sessions to 104 participants, for a total of 288 continuing education hours. We also provided support with 5,477 help desk tickets and 14,273 emails. Throughout the year, there were both successes and challenges, but the team was extremely successful in navigating special projects while keeping focused on our core values of member service and support.

Accessible Data

There was a renewed focus on data in FY2025, specifically data between departments, data for return on investment, and data for membership. We began utilizing the Pipedrive system to facilitate cross-departmental communication and reduce data silos. We began tracking the member support that we provide, which led to a better return on investment report that we were able to share with members. For instance, we found that our team is more likely to communicate with members via email, and we are now able to include those metrics to show our support for members! We also collaborated with the IHLS Data Analyst to develop data dashboards, which make Polaris data easier to access for SHARE members completing the IPLAR and Traffic Survey. Both efforts make internal

workflows easier and advocacy more accessible for members.

Fee Scales

This was our first year with the new, inclusive fee scale! Creating and establishing the new scale was a long effort and still required additional communication to address questions and concerns. It has been beneficial to demonstrate that our financial practices align with our organizational values, ensuring everyone has equal access to high-quality infrastructure, regardless of size or budget.

Engagement

This year, SHARE participated in conferences, including sponsorships, for the Illinois Library Association (ILA), the Association of Illinois School Library Educators (AISLE), Reaching Forward South (RFS), and the Illinois Digital Educator Alliance's IDEAcon. This conference participation allowed us

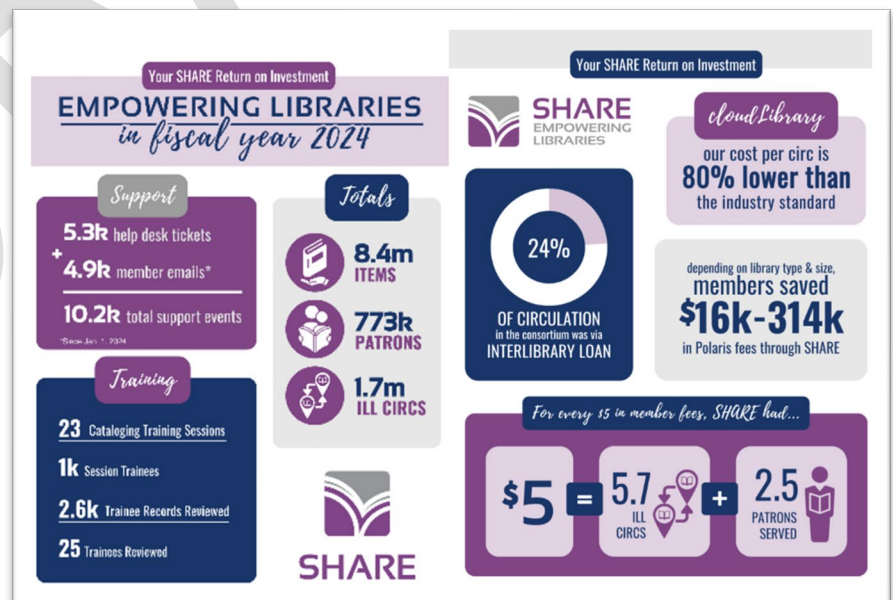


Figure 7. 2024 SHARE ROI report front and back.



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to further network with our members and colleagues, promote SHARE membership, and share our knowledge during conference presentations. We were also active within the broader library community, with presentations on e-resources with the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI), presentations at the Innovative User Group (IUG) conference, and conference planning and presentations at the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) conference. We have also been very active in member engagement via networking group meetups, IHLS Member Day events, and the annual Library Crawl. We love serving our members! When we are very visible, members know what resources are available and look to SHARE for solutions.

Policies & Procedures

SHARE committees are very active in shaping the culture of the consortia via an active review of policies and procedures. There was an internal focus on enhancing database security, with smart changes to database access, updates to the Permissions policy, and revisions to the Data Privacy and Protection policy to support the MessageBee notification service.

Group Purchases

This year, we continued partnerships with several vendors. SHARE members were offered McNaughton book leasing options through Brodart. IHLS members had access to group purchases through Gale (databases), LibraryIQ (collection analysis), and Swank Movie Licensing, LLC (public performance licenses). Swank offered additional selections this year, with a new streaming option for

public libraries and a site license and streaming option for K-12 schools. We also promoted several IHLS discounts (Biblio+, Learnics, and Magic Desktop) as well as free or low-cost services for our “Resources for Libraries” page, including EPIC, Learning Ally, ABC Mouse, and BallotReady.org. These discounts and group purchases are an important service provided to our members, and their promotion ensures members can take advantage of them.

Aspen

The most significant project for SHARE this year was the Aspen implementation. We were thrilled to complete all the member integrations on schedule in FY2025! There were some unexpected challenges, like difficulties with payment integrations between Polaris and NCR, the state's ePay vendor. Thankfully, that problem is now fully resolved. We have been able to add such additional benefits to members via the Aspen catalog. There are better search results, increased readers' advisory opportunities, as well as branding, marketing, and communication opportunities. Aspen benefits also include real-time e-resources integration with Overdrive and hoopla, additional integrations with vendors that have MARC records, via a process called side loading, optional integrations with the Illinois Digital Archives, and the addition of the statewide EBSCO database package. We are excited to have such a huge project completed, but always with a focus on the future. We are exploring how we might continue to fine-tune the service and integrate Aspen with the SHARE Mobile Library app in the coming months.



Bibliographic Services

Bibliographic services are integral to how IHLS facilitates resource sharing among member libraries in Illinois. Cataloging support allows our interlibrary loan (ILL) delivery service and integrated library service platform to run properly. Additionally, effective cataloging maintains order and consistency in the description of library items, ensuring patrons can readily locate the library items they need in the public access catalog.

To maintain peak accessibility at SHARE libraries and statewide, the IHLS Bibliographic Services team offers various services, including cataloging, database maintenance, and cataloging training, all at no extra cost. This team comprises two divisions: the Cataloging Maintenance Center (CMC) and SHARE Bibliographic Services. While SHARE catalogers focus on supporting the SHARE database and training SHARE members, CMC catalogers facilitate access to resources and special collections throughout the state, including digitized collections at Illinois Digital Archives (IDA).

With their responsibility to train other catalogers, the SHARE and CMC staff recognize continuing education and training as essential. IHLS's catalogers have extensive library cataloging experience, but they continue to seek opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills by participating in conferences and training sessions. This commitment ensures our members receive top-quality education, cataloging, and database support.

SHARE Bibliographic Services

During FY2025, SHARE Bibliographic Services continued to provide high-quality cataloging services to our members, while also making

ongoing improvements to our database through item, bibliographic, and authority record cleanup projects. Additionally, we provided educational opportunities for our member libraries. To ensure continued database integrity, we focused on updating and correcting subject headings, merging duplicate and short bibliographic records, identifying item records with potential errors, and updating both internal and external policies and procedures to reflect current best practices in cataloging. SHARE Bib Services staff provided barcoding, barcoding recertification, and cataloging training both online and in-person, including at several member libraries throughout our service area. We have continued building our new cataloging training course, with a tentative launch planned for the first quarter of FY2026. The NACO SHARE Consortium Funnel was established with two member libraries in the training and review process.

Maintaining Exceptional Database Integrity

To ensure the SHARE catalog remains useful, SHARE Bibliographic Services staff must maintain the database's integrity through ongoing cleanup projects, thereby allowing patrons to continue to easily access the materials they are seeking. Pursuant to this, we cataloged over 10,000 items for member libraries during FY2025. SHARE catalogers also merged and improved over 700 duplicate and substandard bibliographic records, ensuring that the records in our database are accurate and complete, thereby reducing confusion for libraries and patrons about what an item may or may not be. Additionally, we identified and corrected over 5000 subject headings in bibliographic records, making these records easier to find during subject and keyword searches. Meanwhile, our team also



identified and made corrections to over 3500 item records, allowing member libraries to more seamlessly place holds on items.

Comprehensive Cataloging Training for Member Library Staff

As part of IHLS's commitment to continuing education, SHARE Bibliographic Services provides comprehensive training to our member libraries through monthly Cataloger's Training Sessions, SHARE Your Cataloging Questions, and individual review periods with catalogers-in-training at member libraries. These training opportunities ensure catalogers remain up to date with cataloging best practices and procedures, both internationally and locally.

Training Session	Sessions	Trainees
SHARE Cataloger's Training	9	886
SHARE Your Cataloging Questions	14	228
Training Activity	Libraries	Records
Record Review	33	2,280

Table 2: Cataloging training, trainees, and records offered in FY2024. SHARE staff worked with staff members at 33 member libraries – reviewed 577 files containing 2,280 records and imported 1,111 records.

Providing Comprehensive Barcoding Training for Member Library Staff

Continued to provide comprehensive barcoding training for member libraries for both first-time barcoders as well as individuals needing to complete recertification. Full barcoding training was provided in live in-person sessions, via Zoom, or through the Moodle platform. Barcoding recertification training was provided solely through the Moodle platform. The recertification process, in addition to ensuring that member library staff are kept up to date with changes to barcoding

standards, has allowed SHARE staff to identify staff members who are no longer at member libraries and can have their usernames deactivated to help maintain database security.

- Full Barcoding Training – 191 participants across all three delivery methods
- Barcoding Recertification Training – 242 individuals recertified during FY25

Conducting Comprehensive Review and Updates to SHARE Bibliographic Services Policies and Procedures

Another element of maintaining the strength of the SHARE catalog is member library compliance with bibliographic services best practices and procedures. Therefore, we must occasionally review our policies and procedures to ensure clarity and accuracy, which helps our member libraries remain compliant. SHARE Bibliographic Services staff reviewed all SHARE Bibliographic Services policies and procedures for accuracy and clarity. Our team reviewed all policies and took any resulting modifications and recommendations for removal to the SHARE Bibliographic and Cataloging Standards Committee for approval and adoption. Updated policies are now available on the SHARE website, and the finalization of a handful of procedures is being completed in the first quarter of FY2026.

Launching the NACO SHARE Consortium Funnel

In FY2025, SHARE created the NACO SHARE Consortium Funnel. NACO, or the Name Authority Cooperative Program, is part of the international Program for Cooperative Cataloging. In NACO, participating institutions, both consortia and special interest groups contribute RDA authority records for the LC/NACO Name Authority File through their established funnels.



The SHARE NACO Funnel officially launched in July 2024. Two fully certified catalogers from two SHARE member libraries joined the funnel in September 2024 and underwent training, subsequently entering their review period. These catalogers reviewed and submitted a total of 62 name authority records for inclusion in the Name Authority File. By coordinating a NACO Funnel for SHARE member libraries, we are allowing members additional opportunities to contribute to the cataloging community at large, as well as providing additional continuing educational opportunities for themselves.

Cataloging Maintenance Center

The Cataloging Maintenance Center (CMC) catalogers are supported by a grant from the Illinois State Library (ISL) to provide services that enhance access to resources in Illinois libraries. Their offerings include free cataloging of eligible special collections, consultation on metadata projects, database cleanup for LLSAPs, cataloging training, merging duplicate records in OCLC Connexion, and more. In FY2025, CMC staff carried out several projects, with their most significant efforts focused on database cleanup for PrairieCat, RSA, and the Consortia of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI). A new database cleanup project began in May 2025 for the Indian Prairie Community Unit School District #204, where brief records were enhanced to full bibliographic records. Other efforts include original cataloging and enhancements to existing records; the creation of authority records and training for this work; the cataloging and addition of metadata items, including the continuation of the Mobile Memory Lab; and several continuing education endeavors, including offering asynchronous online cataloging-related courses and attending and presenting at conferences.

Database Cleanup

The CMC staff spent a significant amount of time on database cleanup: enhancing, originally cataloging, or identifying as merges 2,249 bibliographic records for the PrairieCat Cleanup Project, merging, deleting, and editing 7,045 bibliographic records in the Alma database for the CARLI Cleanup Project, enhancing or originally cataloging and merging or importing into WorkFlows 1,469 bibliographic records for the RSA Backlog Cleanup Project, which began in October 2023 and concluded in April 2025, and enhancing 206 brief to full bibliographic records for the Indian Prairie Community Unit School District #204 (see Figure 8). Database cleanup improves the search results when patrons search online catalogs.

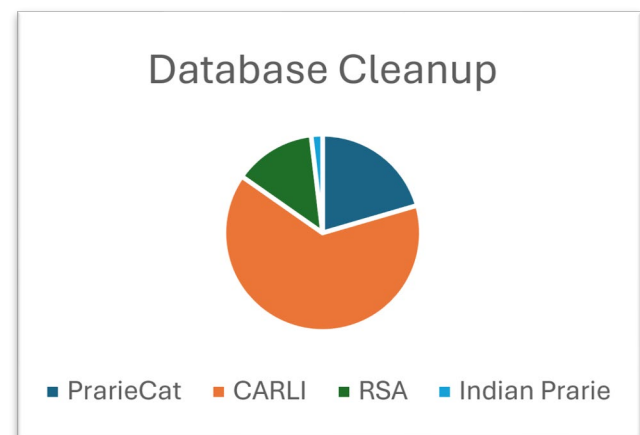


Figure 8. CMC staff provided database cleanup, and during FY2025, 2,249 records were enhanced and identified as merges for PrairieCat, 1,469 records were enhanced or originally cataloged and merged in WorkFlows for RSA, 7,045 records were edited, deleted, or merged for CARLI, and 206 brief records were enhanced to full bibliographic records for Indian Prairie Community Unit School District #204. A total of 10,969 bibliographic records were enhanced, originally cataloged, merged, or deleted.



Original Cataloging & Enhancing Records

The CMC staff focused on both established and new tasks and projects. They originally cataloged 3,136 and enhanced 3,247 bibliographic records. CMC staff cataloged many items in English. They also cataloged items in 27 different world languages: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Gujarati, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Kannada, Korean, Latin, Marathi, Oriya, Polish, Quechua, Russian, Scottish Gaelic, Spanish, Swedish, Tamil, Telugu, Turkish,

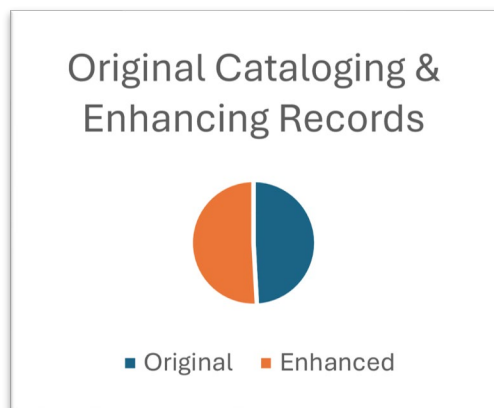


Figure 9. During FY2025, CMC staff originally cataloged 3,136 items and enhanced 3,247 records.

Ukrainian, and Urdu. Materials were cataloged for 158 individual libraries (excluding the consortial libraries helped through database cleanup). (see Figure 9).

Through original cataloging and enhancing of less-than-full or transforming AACR2 to Resource Description and Access (RDA) records, over 6,000 items are now available or more findable.

Authority Record Creation

This year, the CMC created 118 name, series, subject, and title authority records. Authority records link names, series, subjects, and titles in a bibliographic record, allowing patrons to access all the works of an author or all the titles in a series.

Metadata Cataloging for Illinois Digital Archives (IDA)

The CMC Metadata Cataloger, Kat Anderberg, kept busy transcribing 103 handwritten and typed documents and two audio recordings, uploading 203 simple objects and 169 compound objects to the IDA website using CONTENTdm. She made four site visits as part of the Mobile Memory Lab, where Digitization Days were held at Williamsville Public Library & Museum, Galesburg Public Library, Dupo School, and New Lenox Public Library. When Kat finished cataloging and uploading all items for the Mobile Memory Lab, she had edited and digitized 630 images (see Figure 10). People can access the IDA website worldwide, so anyone can find documents, photos, and realia as part of the

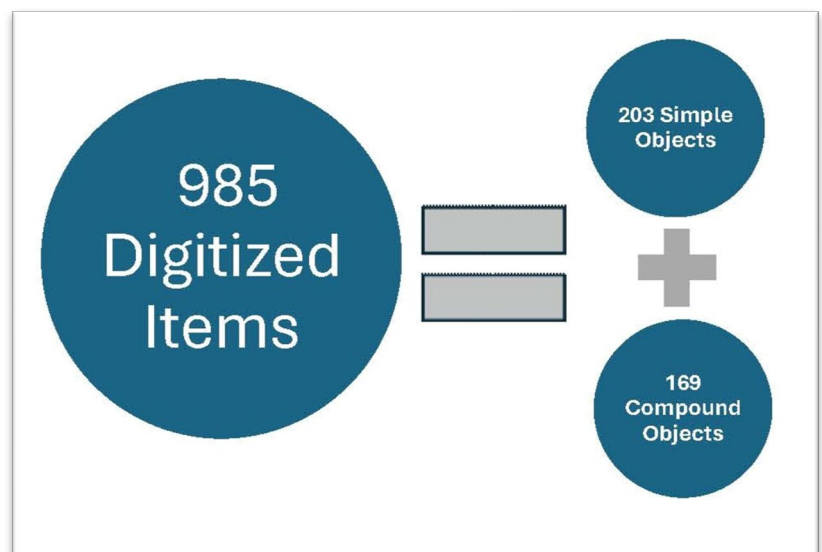


Figure 10. Metadata Cataloger Kat Anderberg digitized 630 items for the Mobile Memory Lab and cataloged and digitized 355 items for other libraries, resulting in the creation and upload of 203 simple objects and 169 compound objects.



Digitization Days or other metadata projects, including digitized oral histories.

Continuing Education Offered & Obtained

Training was another area where CMC staff focused their time and attention. They created and presented ten webinars for the Online with the CMC webinar series, with 355 live attendees and 355 total contact hours. The CMC offered eight online asynchronous cataloging courses with 164 successful completers, totaling 1,746 contact hours (see Figure 11). Staff completed 16 courses for a total of 16.5 CEUs. By providing cataloging training, Illinois library staff are creating quality bibliographic records and are more skilled at cataloging. Continuing education courses allow CMC staff to acquire new skills.



Figure 11. During FY2025, CMC staff presented 10 webinars with 355 live attendees, offered eight courses with 164 successful completers, and presented at 10 conferences with 244 attendees for 276 contact hours. Overall, there were 763 total attendees/completers of courses and 2,377 contact hours from the webinars, courses, and presentations.

Outreach & Promotion of CMC Services

This year, CMC staff also created presentations and staffed booths at various conferences, yet another way they provide cataloging education to Illinois library workers. CMC Grant Manager Dr. Pamela Thomas presented “CMC Information” at the IHLS

Extra Credit! Special Edition meeting for 19 attendees. Additionally, she and CMC Cataloging Trainer Eric McKinney presented “Connecting Your Community to Your Collection” at the annual PrairieCat Users Group (PUG Day) to 24 attendees. Thomas presented “Cataloging Best Practices” at RSA Day to 16 attendees. Dr. Thomas and Eric McKinney presented on best cataloging practices to the Indian Prairie Community Unit School District #204. Additionally, Dr. Thomas presented “What Can the CMC Do for You?” to 28 CARLI members. Finally, Kat Anderberg presented “Meet the Mobile Memory Lab” at the Reaching Forward South (RFS) Conference, which had 24 attendees. In these presentations, CMC staff provided a total of 111 contact hours.

CMC staff also partnered with catalogers at RAILS to share their knowledge at the ILA Annual Conference. Dr. Thomas joined SHARE Bibliographic Services Manager Jennifer Baugh to present “Fields of Change: New MARC Fields” to 38 attendees. Thomas, Baugh, SHARE, and RAILS Cataloging Services Manager Nincy George presented “Calling All Catalogers: Mentorship is for You” to 30 attendees. Also, CMC Cataloger Mary Cornell co-presented “Time for a Change! Updating Access Points for Inclusivity” with RAILS Cataloging & Database Coordinator Lisa Schemensky, Lucas McKeever of Downers Grove Public Library, RK Knauer of Champaign Public Library, Sara Scodius of

Northbrook Public Library, to 25 attendees. Then, Thomas, Baugh, and George presented the “iCAMP Meetup: Meet Your Match Around the Campfire” to 10 attendees. Altogether, the CMC provided 103 contact hours via joint ILA presentations.



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The CMC also helped promote their services in more casual settings. They staffed conference booths. Dr. Thomas staffed a virtual booth at IHLS Member Day. Eric McKinney staffed a CMC booth at Reaching Forward South. They also attended other events. Throughout the year, staff attended monthly SHARE Cataloging Training sessions and quarterly Local History and Genealogy Forums (RAILS and IHLS).

Altogether, CMC staff offered 2,377 contact hours for FY2025 through online courses, presentations, and webinars. (see Figure 11). By presenting at state-wide and regional conferences and staffing booths, the CMC can network and explain the free services provided to Illinois libraries.

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Membership

In FY2025, the IHLS membership department continued to support our 520 library agencies as they worked to provide excellent service to the library users of central and southern Illinois. Work in the department ranged from one-on-one interactions with library workers and trustees as they sought information or faced challenges with their specific agencies, to planning instruction and events that would benefit a particular library type or the entire system membership. Highlights from the Membership Department's work this year include the growth of our robust continuing education program, increased member engagement, expanded representation for our libraries, growth of the iLEAD Trustee Learning Portal, and participation in the *Can't Shelve This* school librarian podcast.

Development of a Robust Continuing Education Program

Continuing education for IHLS library workers and trustees is a significant priority for this department and the system itself. In addition to being a multitype library system, we also serve a diverse group of library stakeholders. Our membership includes public libraries that are small and rural, and those that are larger and more urban; individual school libraries with certified staff and entire school districts served by library aides; and special and academic libraries of all kinds. Developing education opportunities that meet such a broad range of needs is an annual challenge.

The bedrock of our continuing education program is our monthly Members Matter/Third Thursday event. The Third Thursday Continuing Education portion of the event ensures our members have access to a different learning opportunity each month, and the Members Matter portion allows us to update our

system members on IHLS activities and seek feedback from membership as needed. Most of these presentations are recorded for later viewing, making them accessible to all members. Topics in FY2025 ranged from basic library skills, such as filling out an Illinois Public Library Annual Report (IPLAR), to what library workers need to know about how to best serve neurodivergent coworkers and patrons.

In addition to our recurring Third Thursday webinars, we also provide an array of other continuing education opportunities to meet various arising member needs. Response to need is a goal of the IHLS continuing education program, resulting in events like our Weeding with Friends training and a very popular series of in-person book repair workshops. Thanks to collaboration from our HR department, we continue to provide professional development with HR Source. We also collaborate often with our sister system, RAILS, to provide cooperative continuing education programs throughout the year. Our most successful cooperative effort with RAILS is the Illinois School Library Workers Symposium, which was held for the second time in FY2025.

Confident in the diversity and quality of our offerings, we have worked with the Marketing and Communications team to strengthen the promotion and accessibility of continuing education programs. A regular continuing education spot appears in our semi-monthly newsletter in addition to our Library Learning Roundup, which provides links to numerous free and inexpensive third-party webinars. The continuing education section of our website also includes a Learning Center, Upcoming Events, Resource Directory, and an Issues Guide.



Last, but never least, our annual Member Day conference provided 370 participants with a full day of professional development and virtual networking. IHLS staff from every department are committed to making this virtual conference meaningful for attendees, and the effort is always apparent. In FY2025, our project manager discovered and implemented a new project planning tool, which significantly improved the clarity of diverse tasks and timelines. So successful was the planning that even with staff running the event from home due to a snowy building closure, Member Day 2025 was a success.

Amid these successes, we continue to face two challenges in providing continuing education. The first is encouraging people to participate in person and in real time. Most of our FY2025 Members Matter events were held at various libraries throughout the system map to encourage local participation, but the turnout was consistently low. Due to the number of staff hours required for travel to these locations, the events have been relocated to Zoom for FY2026. The second challenge is ongoing, and that is to continue promoting participation among those who do not often engage. With our members participating during the busy workday, it can be challenging to engage in active participation in a webinar or class. Nonetheless, attendees will benefit most if they ask questions and contribute to discussions. To encourage participation in our events, staff have begun integrating fun activities like slideshow games into Members Matter and Member Day.

Increased Member Engagement

The Membership Department is driven by a commitment to establish relationships with our members and to assist our members in establishing relationships within the library community. This creates a very interactive team that spends time

connecting and communicating on topics that range from regular compliance issues to providing meaningful support when a library or library worker is facing serious challenges. Such relationship building is most evident in the work that is done, not in one of our hubs, but out in the field.

Membership staff have a distinct commitment to planning site visits with new public library directors. New directors always appreciate the effort, which gives the system a “face.” Questions and concerns tend to arise naturally when a director hosts a staff member at their workplace, benefiting all parties involved. In addition, the Continuing Education Coordinator made a concerted effort to meet all the prospective DU attendees before the August 2025 event.

Staff also made a special effort in FY2025 to participate in networking groups when feasible. Typically, a member of the membership team and a member of the SHARE staff attended these events together. This representation ensured that accurate and timely information was shared with the attendees. These networking groups provide us with a reliable source for member input and opportunities to inform members about our services. We also took time to promote the iLEAD Trustee Learning Portal at networking meetings, introducing more directors to this valuable resource.

With Membership Department support, our members also formed new networking groups in FY2025. One group is designed for “Micro-Libraries,” and the second is designed to connect people from south central Illinois. We are confident that these two groups will be successful with our continued support.

Of course, networking does not have to be in-person; the long-standing virtual Directors Chat



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and Extra Credit!, our monthly live networking event for our school libraries, both still occur regularly.

Additionally, the Membership Department frequently engages with members on a one-on-one basis. We have provided support and service to library workers who often face a broad range of serious challenges. If IHLS can provide solutions to these issues, that is all for the good. If a solution cannot be easily accessible, we can provide resources, connections, and supportive colleagues.

Expanded Representation for Central & Southern Illinois Libraries

We at IHLS feel strongly that libraries in central and southern Illinois should always have a seat at the table wherever library-relevant planning is being done and decisions are being made. However, limited staff and budgets often make it difficult for many of our libraries to participate at that level, so Membership staff are poised to represent our libraries in any initiatives in which we can be effective.

Our staff represent our members at a variety of events:

- Association of Illinois School Library Educators (AISLE) Board of Directors
- Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA) Continuing Education Committee
- Directors University
- Illinois Youth Services Institute (IYSI)
- Illinois Library Association (ILA) Intellectual Freedom Committee
- ILA Reporter
- Library Learning (L2) Governance Group
- Illinois Library Association Public Policy Committee (PPC)
- School Library Workers Symposium
- United Against Book Bans

All IHLS staff members who participate in these groups make meaningful contributions. Our involvement also helps build connections and share information that benefits IHLS membership.

Growth of the iLEAD Trustee Learning Portal

FY2025 saw ongoing growth of the iLEAD Trustee Learning Portal, with expanded content and increased recognition as an essential resource for the Illinois library community. Our iLEAD Project Manager, Dr. Leanne Furby, expanded the policy section of the portal and launched modules on community engagement, strategic planning, succession planning, and building and maintenance. Mid-year additions included a trustee orientation, days and dates, and a revision of the annual library requirements.

Additionally, we continued to focus efforts on promoting the portal. Overall, Dr. Furby delivered twenty-six presentations both virtually and in person for library boards and administrators via demos, workshops, networking meetings, and half-day orientations. She also gave additional presentations during the PrairieCat Users Group (PUG) Day and the Illinois Library Association's Annual Conference. Additionally, iLEAD participated as an exhibitor at the Reaching Forward North and South Conferences, as well as the ILA Annual Conference. All told, during FY2025, iLEAD reached four hundred users.

The use of the iLEAD Portal as a resource is continuing to grow. Users soon realize that if they want a "one-stop shop" for information and documentation regarding trustees and many aspects of library governance, which is available twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week, then the portal is the place to go. We are glad to see



more libraries and library boards buying into this valuable resource.

For Your Edification & Entertainment: Participation in *Can't Shelve This*

It is fitting to conclude this section and our entire annual report narrative by highlighting an initiative that has provided both education and entertainment to several thousand listeners nationwide.

On September 10, 2024, the *Can't Shelve This* podcast debuted. Developed as a production of RAILS in collaboration with IHLS, this conversation is led by IHLS School Library Liaison Leah Gregory and RAILS Data Analyst Janette Derucki. The program is produced by RAILS Digital Marketing and Communications Specialist Ola Gronski.

Nine episodes aired throughout the school year, including:

- You Can Totally Sit with Me
- Advocacy 101: Help Me Help You
- The Library's Got Rizz
- A Good Librarian's Guide to Getting Along (with Administration)
- A Love Letter to Libraries
- Let's Get Certified
- E is for Everyone
- An Airing of Grievances
- Thanks for the Memories

The information provided in these episodes is solid, and quality presenters have been involved throughout. What makes these offerings particularly appealing is the joyful relationship between the two hosts and the producer. *Can't Shelve This* promotes a positive image of library colleagues, especially those who work in schools. To date, the podcast has had 6,251 listens in fourteen countries and forty-eight states. The IHLS Membership Department is proud to have one of our own participating in such an important and influential project.