



1. Narrative Report

A Word from the Executive Director

Amid the rise of misinformation campaigns, a cost-of-living crisis, and the rise of censorship, we at IHLS recognize that the need for libraries of all types is as great as ever. That's why we are proud to enhance our members' ability to give Illinoisans the accurate information, economic value, and intellectual freedom they deserve. In FY2024, those needs were a guiding principle for our planned and responsive activities.

This was a year of continuing toward our established goals while constantly adapting to new laws and developments in the field. Our FY2024 Operational Plan outlined significant enhancements like SHARE's implementation of the Aspen Discovery Layer, the iLEAD Trustee Learning Portal launch, and IHLS's exploration of an automated material handling system purchase. Thanks to our staff's hard work, we followed through on each of those plans even as we met an array of surprises and continuously developing challenges, rising to each occasion. We guided our members through PLAW and PA 103-0100 compliance. We helped our libraries navigate their surprise Library Technology Grants. We took advantage of a watershed moment in digital equity advocacy.

I'm pleased to show you how the entire IHLS team collaborated across departments and hubs to maximize our taxpayer funds in service to central and southern Illinois libraries and their patrons.

Sincerely,

Leslie M. Bednar, Executive Director

Illinois Heartland Library System



The Organization-wide Automate Material Handling System Project

Over the past few years, IHLS has considered the advantages and disadvantages of purchasing automated material handling systems (AMHS). We saw this innovative step as a potential solution to developing delivery capacity issues. In FY2022, we formed a working group to explore an AMHS's feasibility and potential impact. Following the working group's recommendation, we started FY2024 by preparing a request for proposals for the IHLS Board of Directors. This process involved extensive data collection, investigation, and communication. The entire organization collaborated on planning for a potential AMHS in each hub, which included committees, surveys, data analysis, member communications, and board support.

In November, we held a special membership meeting on Zoom to inform our libraries about the project's progress and provide opportunities for feedback. The Delivery & Facilities Director began presenting the project to the IHLS Board of Directors for their consideration.

In late February, the capacity issues in Delivery became dire: the volume of items passing through our hubs increased to the point that sorting staff couldn't keep up, resulting in longer patron wait times for ILL materials. While Delivery and Finance worked on a solution, the Marketing and Communications team worked on an updated communications plan to address frequent route closures and longer patron wait times in two of our hubs.

To better understand this capacity problem, IHLS Delivery and Finance staff conducted a historical analysis and 11-year projection of Delivery Service volumes. This led to the realization that the need for an AMHS was more urgent than initially thought. To this end, we held another special membership meeting on Zoom, where we explained the problem and how we expected the AMHS project would help solve it.

As we progressed into spring, our IT department played a more prominent role, dedicating significant time to collecting and cross-referencing data from the Driver iPad program and the Polaris database. This effort would be crucial for the leadership and board's decision-making processes.

In May, misconceptions about the operational plan surfaced in our listserv and feedback. To address this, we worked with the Delivery Director to clear up confusion, including developing a Top 10 Facts article, updating FAQs, and holding an additional special meeting with a clear and direct informational presentation and Q&A. Given the complexity and cost of the project, member concerns were expected, especially at understaffed and underfunded libraries. Clear and strategic communication was crucial for reducing anxiety and maintaining transparency, and our Marketing and Communications staff successfully modeled these principles.

Later that month, our leadership obtained approval for the project after conducting site visits to libraries with similar systems, numerous meetings, a competitive bid for cost details, and a detailed return on investment analysis. Automated sorting systems can reduce labor costs associated with manual sorting processes and create a safer working environment for staff. This technology will allow IHLS to reallocate saved personnel resources to enhance member services.



Marketing & Communications

The importance of marketing and communications at IHLS cannot be understated. We share critical information during website downtime and promote the launch of new system brands. We strategize on the best ways to inform members about free IHLS services and advocate for state broadband initiatives that include libraries. We make board nominations and elections run smoothly, and we lead survey-based research projects. The IHLS Communications team, in short, connects the system to its members and the world around them.

This year, the Communications team focused on enhancing and optimizing our existing projects and services rather than initiating new ones. Despite the IHLS brand portfolio more than doubling and an increase in projects requiring communications support, the team has remained small. To manage this growth, the team worked on improving workflows, email practices, brand support, website features, and advocacy efforts, aiming for better functionality and sustainability.

Practicable & Streamlined Workflows

We optimized our time and energy by prioritizing impactful, sustainable projects, enhancing our workflows. From March through June, we worked with the IHLS Project Coordinator and revamped our internal processes for staff submissions, planning, and time management by introducing an automated request form and training on new procedures. These adjustments have helped us improve internal communications and ensure timely updates to internal stakeholders.

Reusable Research Tools for Benchmarking

In FY2024, we overhauled our periodic member satisfaction and needs survey to align with industry best practices and enhance data quality. We also implemented a three-year schedule to ensure regular feedback using this particular tool. We secured 409 responses, developed a report, and shared findings at Board and membership meetings. This robust data has strongly influenced our upcoming operational and strategic planning processes, particularly in shaping the direction of our marketing, communications, and advocacy efforts.

Sustainable, Effective Email Practices

With our members and stakeholders scattered across 28,368 square miles, digital marketing is a substantial and crucial part reaching our members. This year, we took special care to ensure our email tactics were as efficient and effective as possible.

Newsletters & Newsletter Supplementing

In July, we developed and published new upcoming events newsletter supplement with the intent to turn it into a monthly publication, allowing us to communicate effectively and efficiently with members, and premiered with an exceptionally high 41.3% open rate. We reduced the frequency of the Member Connection newsletter to allow for this supplement, which spotlights events that often receive only a couple of lines in our regular newsletter. We also examined the effectiveness of other emails and replaced a thrice-monthly campaign for Directors' Chats, which was found ineffective as event promotion, and replaced it with detailed monthly email spotlighting our monthly Members Matter membership meetings and Third



Thursday CE seminars. This reallocation of enables us to communicate more effectively, increase registrations for targeted events, enable more members access to information they need to serve their publics.

A/B Email Testing

We endeavored to continually improve our effectiveness, and one way we do this is through A/B testing. A/B testing of emails is a research tactic that involves comparing the performance of multiple versions of one email or survey question to determine the impact of the variable.

For example, we knew that emojis in subject lines generally improve open rates, but we wanted to know if that held for IHLS email contacts. It took roughly a year of A/B tests to accumulate a sizable sample to achieve statistical significance. Conclusion: when used selectively, emojis in subject lines improve open rates among IHLS subscribers without increasing unsubscribe or spam-reporting rates. This insight is now implemented with confidence when drafting campaigns.

A similar test was completed examining Cataloging Maintenance Center subject lines, and the remaining emails in the multi-month campaign were changed to return the highest open rates. As a result, more Illinois libraries learned about the CMC's free cataloging services and training, empowering libraries statewide to reduce resources spent on cataloging and making items more discoverable and accessible to patrons.

Calibrated Audience Targeting

We continued honing our email communications tactics by calibrating our audience targeting during the board elections process using newly gleaned insights. Earlier in the year, we sent a survey to the directors, associate directors, and certification

contacts listed for our members in L2. The responses to that survey revealed that the directors and associate directors listed were not always up to date. Several directors were not listed there. Our survey showed us that the certification contacts are up to date far more often.

With this knowledge, we changed our approach to sending board election emails. Rather than sending the ballot to our entire business email list, we sent it only to the directors and certification contacts listed in L2. This was after we announced that we would use those contacts, encouraging members to update them. As a result, our responses were more than double last year's, showing a marked improvement in quantity and quality. That means we helped over twice as many members use their voices to select their new IHLS Board of Directors representatives!

Email Hygiene

To enhance the effectiveness of our email communications, we continued work to maintain up-to-date contacts and preferences in our mailing lists, a practice known as email hygiene. For example, in the spring, we sent an email reactivation campaign to identify/remove inactive subscribers. We also used L2 reports to update our school library contacts. This means more school library members received our back-to-school communications, including school-focused event promotions and announcements (such as delivery information). Thanks to these email hygiene efforts, these members could bring more value to their libraries by utilizing the services IHLS offers at no cost, and we could control the cost of our email marketing platform—ensuring more responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars.



Website Improvements

In February, we worked with IT staff to make enhancements to three of our online tools. We introduced filters, search boxes, and sort options for the grants, discounts, and library resources databases. Since the website's launch, these databases have had limited functionality, serving largely as simple lists. These updates make it easy for users to find relevant resources. We presented the database updates to our members at our annual Member Day virtual conference, increasing awareness of the tools and their improved functionality. This means more members have easier access to information about grants, member discounts, and library resources that will help them save money and better serve their patrons.

Enhanced Advocacy Efforts

Library advocacy has long been a part of the Marketing and Communications department's work but was not a central responsibility. This year, that changed when our Communications and Advocacy Administrator (formerly the Communications Administrator) stepped into her new role, and library advocacy became a major responsibility in the department. This, therefore, was the only area where our department chose to begin new projects. While we continued advocating for school libraries, intellectual freedom, and public libraries, we also adopted new initiatives, namely digital equity and affordable careers in public librarianship.

Digital Equity

Starting in the summer, we created and promoted an information page to help small and rural libraries apply for digital equity grants, and we collaborated with the IT Director on an information page to help members fill out the Illinois Public Library Internet Survey from the Illinois Secretary of State's Office. Shortly after we promoted the page in the newsletter, we received feedback from one of our small libraries: "The Digital Equity Grant info page is SO HELPFUL!! Thank you to everyone working on this" After the surprise Secretary of State announcement of Library Technology grants, we expanded the info page into a complete digital equity resource guide, including information on creating an ADA-compliant website. The "Digital Equit" resource guide is now available in our online Issues in Librarianship collection.

Affordable Careers in Public Librarianship

We also adopted a new advocacy initiative in the late summer and fall. The cost of MLS student loan payments is incompatible with the salaries many of our member libraries can afford. So, we began advocating for forgivable loans, loan repayment assistance, or similar assistance with a service commitment at a small or rural Illinois library.

In September, we completed research on potential library-school funding options for rural Illinois librarians, providing our research findings to the ILSOS Office.



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.

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, we've embraced a "work smarter, not harder" philosophy to tackle the rising workload without expanding our HR team. We've strategically leveraged technology to streamline previously manual processes, boosting efficiency and empowering our existing talent. This proactive approach has ensured we meet our goals and positioned us for future growth with a more scalable foundation.

Modernizing HR Operations

Paylocity Implementation

This year, we streamlined processes by implementing a new human resources information system (Paylocity). This allowed us to implement electronic systems to improve efficiency and protect employee data (e.g., timesheets, onboarding documents, training, and signed acknowledgments). Paylocity offered several benefits to HR staff and our other employees:

Employee Access

The Paylocity portal provided a central location for employees to submit documents, including payroll timecard submissions, access training, and view information such as their paycheck and time off.

Applicant Tracking

Paylocity provides Human Resources and managers with a more efficient way to track applicants applying for positions and easy access to the applicant's stage in the recruitment process (e.g., not qualified, phone screen, Teams interview, in-person interview, offer of employment). It also allows for automatic email responses to applicants.

Paperless Filing

Employees and managers can access non-confidential documents through the Paylocity system instead of calling Human Resources, saving everyone time.

Simplified Staff Training

Thanks to Paylocity's workflow assignments, we completed staff safety training through Paylocity, and all signed acknowledgments were signed via DocuSign using the Paylocity system. By simplifying this required training process, we ensured greater and faster compliance, again saving time and, thus, money.

Teamflect

This year, we continually improved and enhanced our performance review system for all IHLS employees, including incorporating the Executive Director.

All of these initiatives work toward giving employees access to their data, the ability to make changes, and access to forms and policies. This work is directly related to our "work smarter, not harder" philosophy.

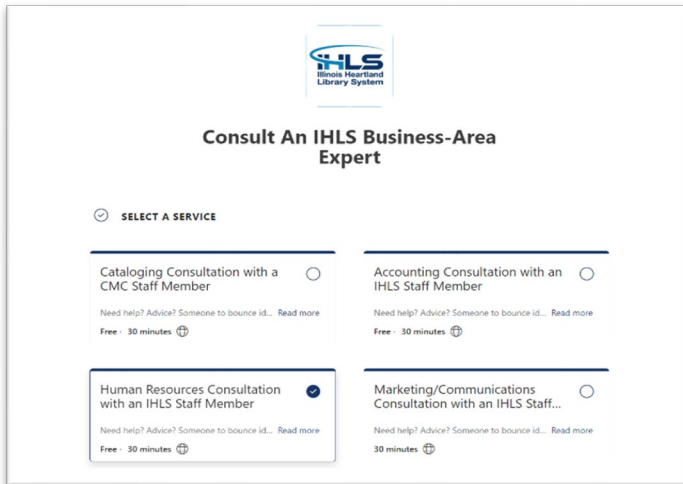


Empowering Member Workforces

Library members have access to a wealth of resources, including expert HR consultations!

HR Consultations

Our HR consultants translated legalese into clear, actionable information for members confused by employment contracts, benefits packages, or workplace policies. We also offer guidance on best practices in recruitment, performance



The IHL S consultation bookings page.

management, and conflict resolution. Additionally, our consultations helped members stay informed about the latest employment laws and regulations, keeping them compliant so they can focus on serving their patrons.

Paid Leave for All Workers Act Resources

In FY2024, the Paid Leave for All Workers Act took effect and gained new rules. In response, we worked with the communications department to update a link on the website with resources for Paid Leave for All Workers Act compliance. The new act became effective on Jan. 1, 2024, and updates followed in April, both of which are covered on our IHL S website.

We also informed members of the webinars on the Illinois Department of Labor website to understand the upcoming changes, and we presented changes through Third Thursday meetings. It's unrealistic to assume all member libraries can keep track of every HR update. By providing easy access to HR information, we empower libraries to stay legally compliant.

Human Resources Trainings

We have trained over 300 library staff, giving them free access to the state-required Sexual Harassment Prevention training. This online training gave libraries a safer environment, empowered staff, and reduced risk. After all, by discouraging harassment by staff, this training creates a welcoming space for patrons. Additionally, as staff learn to recognize and report harassment, their confidence and morale improve. Employees receiving this training can help prevent lawsuits and foster a more productive and positive workplace culture.

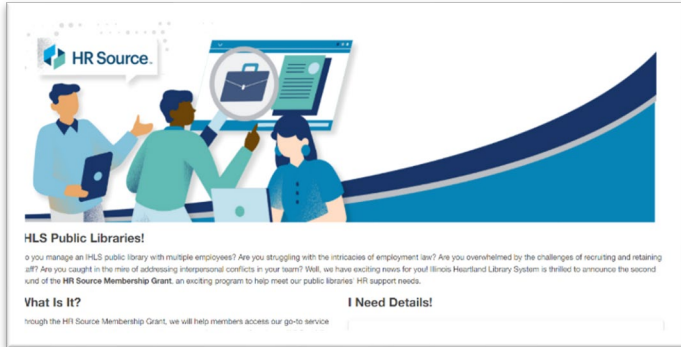
We also rolled out our Bloodborne Pathogens training in the last quarter of the fiscal year. Bloodborne pathogen training fosters a safe work environment and protects employees and patrons from serious health risks.

HR Source Grant Pilot Program

Libraries navigate complex HR regulations. HR Source provides access to legal resources, hotlines for quick questions, and training programs to ensure libraries stay up-to-date and compliant. That's why we started our HR Source Grant Pilot Program. This meant we could grant seven member libraries money for an HR Source



membership, which helps the libraries address all of their human resources needs at a reduced cost.



The HR Source Grant as presented on the IHLS Website.

With their memberships, HR professionals in these libraries can 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.

Plus, the winners' portions of their membership costs are 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

Another creative way the HR team has worked to empower members is by participating in the Library Insurance Management and Risk Control Combination (LIMRiCC). This intergovernmental entity provides cost-effective insurance and risk management solutions for its member libraries in Illinois. LIMRiCC offers resources and guidance to help libraries manage risks associated with unemployment claims and helps libraries stay compliant with relevant regulations. In FY2024, our HR Director took office as the Vice Chairperson on the LIMERiCC Board, serving as the only board member representing the central and Southern Illinois libraries. Her position means that she can

ensure that LIMERiCC addresses the benefit needs of our libraries.

ILA Human Resources Administration Forum

Our HR department also serves as a leadership member of the Human Resources Administration Forum through the Illinois Library Association and was instrumental in creating the forum to help libraries across the state. Forums allow members to connect on various specialized topics and interests. The HRA forum members collaborate to develop and present conference programs and informational literature, among other activities.

Employee Development & Training

In connection with our focus on working smarter and not harder, we have continued to create a culture of learning in which IHLS recognizes that knowledge is power. We embrace a philosophy that encourages employees at all levels to seek continuous learning and skill development. It values curiosity, innovation, and understanding that a dynamic workforce can adapt to change more effectively.

In FY2024, we have continued using many ways of learning through our Gallagher Step 360 programs that focus on professional employment and help employees achieve personal goals.

Employees can use LinkedIn Learning accounts as another form of learning that can be done on their phones or personal devices. In Fiscal Year 2024, our employees have explored over 248 courses. Each course helps our employees gain marketable skills and stay current with industry standards, training that helps them better serve member libraries.

Staff and leadership attended meetings through Fliament, a free training that allows us to think better about how best to conduct meetings and make them impactful and focused on our needs as an organization.



The learning here at IHLS is inclusive, providing opportunities for everyone, regardless of their position or tenure within the organization. Everyone is encouraged to engage in learning experiences tailored to their individual needs, from entry-level employees to directors.

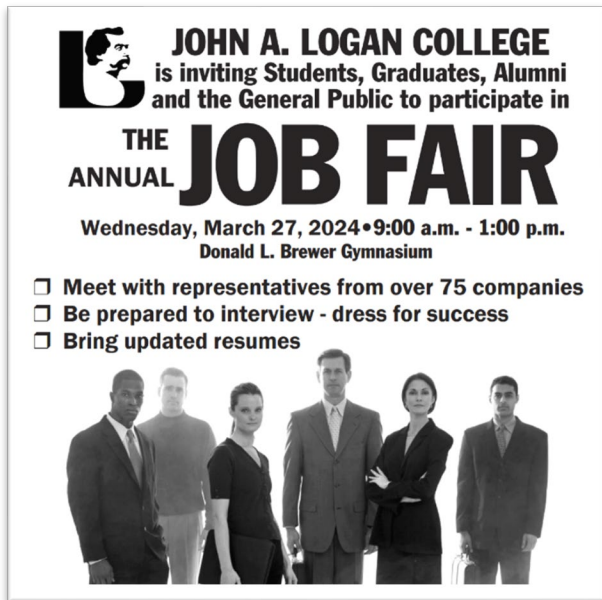
Recruiting Top Talent

We keep our costs low by using free resources to post our open positions. We now have a fully functioning Applicant Tracking System through Paylocity that uses available resources and technology. More candidates are coming directly to our job listings on the IHLS Website. We have increased our knowledge of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) by attending webinars and keeping current with ways to include

job fairs in East St Louis, Champaign Public Library, and John A Logan College in the Carbondale area. Also, we participated in an online job fair within the Handshake platform that connects all colleges throughout the United States.

We have seen an increase in recruiting top talent. We hired 26 employees this fiscal year (12 full-time, 14 part-time), and 23 resigned (eight full-time, 15 part-time). An overall average of 93 employees in any given month gives us an annual 24.7% turnover rate. The top three reasons we see this turnover are retirements, folks leaving the workforce, and people leaving us for higher-paying jobs. As we expected, we have seen an increase in attrition due to employees fully retiring and leaving the workforce. Secondly, we have seen our largest turnover in the Delivery Area with Sorter and Driver positions. Sorters left for higher pay or full-time status elsewhere, and some had college schedules change to the point where they could no longer meet the work hours needed to serve our member delivery needs. We're proud that we have filled most of the openings left behind, each new employee bringing a wealth of talent and passion for serving our members.

Key positions hired this year include a Delivery and Facilities Director to lead the operations team, as well as a Data Analyst and a Lead Stack Developer in our IT Department. Growing the IT department allows us to focus on meeting our number one priority in serving the needs of our members. It allows us to focus on creating better data sets and visual data graphics to help staff, members, and board members see the results of projects, survey data, delivery data sets, etc.



Promotional graphic for the John A. Logan College job fair we attended this year.

such initiatives in our hiring processes. One such initiative is attending job fairs where we promote IHLS job openings and jobs posted on our website for libraries throughout Illinois. We have attended



Accounting

The Finance department manages all financial activities and records of the organization's funds. Key responsibilities include recording financial transactions, preparing financial reports, budgeting, forecasting, ensuring compliance with financial regulations, coordinating external audits, managing payroll, handling accounts payable and receivable, overseeing cash management, filing taxes, and conducting financial analysis. These duties ensure adherence to accounting standards and regulations, minimizing organizational risk. In these and other efforts, the Finance department maintains the organization's financial health and integrity, supports informed decision-making, and promotes strategic growth.

In FY2024, the finance department consistently maintained accurate financial records and provided regular financial reports to the Board of Directors and the Illinois State Library through grant reports. We developed the budget and presented it to the Board. Later, we passed our audit. We also collaborated with the Human Resources department to implement and update the Paylocity system for paperless management and communication of staff HR records and payroll processing. Additionally, we introduced consulting hours within our department, enabling our member libraries to meet with us to enhance their stewardship of public funds and sustainability. It was certainly a busy year for the IHLS Finance Department.

Audit Preparation & Support

The finance staff prepared for and worked with Scheffel Boyle auditors to complete the FY2023 audit. We received an unmodified or clean opinion on our audit, demonstrating our dedication to responsible and careful financial management as

stewards of public funds. The audit was presented to the Board at the September meeting and submitted with the FY2023 Annual Report. An annual audit is a required component of the IHLS annual report, due each year to the Illinois State Library on September 30. With only two months between a fiscal year's close and the annual report deadline, the preparation, experience, and presentation of the audit make for a hectic season. Nonetheless, we are glad to do it. 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.

Budget & Narrative Creation

The budget serves two purposes. First, it allows us to outline and guide our stewardship of public funds for the fiscal year. Then, as a required component for the grant applications submitted each year to the Illinois State Library, the budget helps us seek the funds that allow us to continue serving our members.

For the first purpose (planning), the Finance staff met with management and staff to forecast and create the FY2025 budgets for our six funds. Developing a budget centered on the work we do for our membership enables IHLS to plan to serve them effectively in the upcoming fiscal year.

That plan undergoes a rigorous review process before we have the final version of the budget. We presented the draft in April to the IHLS Board of Directors and then posted it for member comment on OpenGov. Using the OpenGov platform allows IHLS to display the budget and narratives, which allows for more transparency for our membership in viewing these documents and leaving



comments. After the comment period ended, we presented the final versions for Board approval at their May meeting. The approved documents were part of the FY2025 System Area & Per Capita Grant application. Thus, we completed the budget creation, approval, and submission process, ensuring another year of providing excellent service to libraries across southern and central Illinois while making the most of our funding.

Financial Record-Keeping

Daily, the finance staff records financial data accurately. The level of accuracy is critical since we are audited on this work. These transactions build the data for the financial reporting to our stakeholders. The finance staff is not only responsible for financial transactions under the obligations of IHLS 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. These efforts ensure the prompt payment of invoices, giving the programs the financial resources to continue.

Grant Reporting

In addition to record-keeping for our grant funds, the Finance staff also assisted with the financial sections of the CMC and iLEAD Library Learning Portal grant applications and quarterly reports. The staff also processed the narrative and financial section of our OCLC grant. Finance staff are responsible for multiple components and any financial-related sections of the System Area and Per Capita Grant application and the annual

report. Providing the required information for these grants allows IHLS to continue the work under the Cataloging Maintenance Center, the iLEAD Library Trustee Learning Portal, and the OCLC Billing, which benefit our membership and all other Illinois libraries with this grant work.

Consulting Hours

The Finance department implemented consulting hours to support member libraries with accounting-related questions. In FY2024, we held three consultations and answered two emails from member libraries seeking advice. We covered topics like financial software, investments, wage increase letters, and procurement of vehicles. With time and continued promotion, we expect the number of consultation requests to grow so we can help even more members strengthen their stewardship of public funds and ensure their sustainability.

Paylocity Implementation & Use

The finance staff assisted in implementing a new payroll software through Paylocity. This system enables staff to access their records, update their profiles, and retrieve paystubs and tax documents. It also gives IHLS staff access to a self-service portal with easier access to their profile data, time off balances, and historical pay information with digital access to save staff time. We are continuing to improve the system to ensure savings in staff time and document our new payroll processes. In so doing, we help improve the experience of working for IHLS, boosting the retainment of top talent and thus saving the organization money in turnover costs.



Facilities

Maintaining and updating IHLS facilities is crucial to ensure our responsible use of taxpayer dollars. A comfortable and safe environment promotes staff productivity and equipment reliability and ensures uninterrupted operations of the core services we provide to our members.

Facilities Maintenance

Our Facilities staff completed a significant project, in addition to their ongoing maintenance efforts, to ensure a safe environment for IHLS staff, tenants, and guests. Facilities maintenance is crucial in our commitment to safety, cost-effectiveness, productivity, and organizational efficiency. It is a cornerstone of our operation's success. By proactively addressing potential hazards and upkeeping equipment, we prioritize the well-being of our employees and minimize the risk of accidents. The additional maintenance included a parking lot mill, overlay, and restriping at the Edwardsville location.

Improvements to Ergonomics

We purchased new office chairs for our staff at the Carbondale and Champaign locations. Investing in a high-quality office chair is crucial for maintaining proper health, maximizing comfort, and increasing productivity. We believe that

happy and comfortable employees are more productive and engaged. By investing in their well-being, we are also investing in the success of our organization. Ultimately, this initiative will contribute to a more positive work culture and better serve our members.

Up-to-Date Safety Training

With the safety of IHLS facilities as our top priority, we have adopted several internal procedures to enhance the reporting and identification of safety issues. We designed these measures to create a safer and more secure work environment for all of us. IHLS staff met with our insurance risk assessment manager to identify areas of concern and develop solutions. The annual safety training and manual were updated to incorporate a fleet safety policy, a change that will positively impact our daily work.

Focus on Energy Efficiency

IHLS staff met with an energy advisor to expertly implement energy-saving techniques at our Edwardsville location. This initiative solidifies our commitment to responsible use of taxpayer dollars through efficient energy use in our buildings. **Implementing these techniques will lower our energy usage by approximately 15%.**



Information Technology

The Information Technology (IT) department at IHLS is crucial for nearly every aspect of our organization's work. The staff at IHLS depend on technology daily to perform their tasks. From using Microsoft Teams and Outlook for communication to the custom applications we've created for our drivers to keep track of deliveries, every position relies more on computer technology daily. This growing reliance leads to an accordingly increasing need for information technology support.

Despite expanding our department to meet this increasing need, our staff still struggles to keep up with outsized workloads. From day to day, our tasks vary significantly, requiring that we transition from talking with libraries struggling with the most basic requests to running the sophisticated hyperconverged server environment in any library system in the state. Balancing the many requests of our users at IHLS and libraries and continually changing software are challenging on the slowest days. Then, when people take time off, we struggle to bring ourselves up to speed on issues they would typically cover. To help us keep up, we have worked to improve our documentation over the last year and continue to do so. Thanks to efforts like these, we continue to do more for more staff and libraries than we should be able to do with such a small team—an accomplishment that demonstrates our dedication to careful stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

In addition to growing our department this year, much of our department's work involved responding quickly to new projects, unforeseen industry issues, and sudden legislative developments. As new projects like SHARE's Aspen-layer implementation rolled out, we invested a great deal of time and attention to minimizing interruptions to user workflows while maintaining a high standard of

security. Meanwhile, we stayed on top of exciting developments in digital equity, collaborating with other departments to advocate for and support our members' efforts to close the digital divide.

Upgrades to the SHARE Core Server Environment

We started the fiscal year by purchasing the new servers for SHARE. The network infrastructure of SHARE is critical to the successful operation of Polaris, our integrated library system. IHLS hosts not only the servers that run Polaris but also all the individual virtual machines that the libraries use to connect to the servers. The decision to host all these virtual machines was made at the very beginning when we designed SHARE, and it has been very successful. However, it requires more robust hardware. We essentially run **1,200 computers on our servers** to support the libraries that use Polaris each day. Accordingly, we occasionally require new machines because of the load on this impressive and essential part of our infrastructure.

Thanks to our buying power with Dell, we could secure hardware that far surpasses our initial performance specifications. The ability to upgrade the storage speeds and total memory in the servers will help us for years into the future! Having a stable and reliable server environment is crucial to the success of our libraries and their service to their patrons.

Promoting Broadband Initiatives in the State

In FY2024, we entered a pivotal moment in state and federal broadband expansion efforts. The recent infusion of money from the federal



government for broadband expansion has helped us boost awareness of the unserved and underserved populations in our service area. **While our libraries serve only about 17% of the state residents, these individuals represent about 60% of the Illinois population unserved or underserved by the current broadband infrastructure.**

Libraries are key partners in educating and training the public. While the rollout of these funds has been slow in developing, there is massive potential for increased access among libraries and their patrons. As broadband becomes more available, libraries can offer more than just public internet access. They could provide better access to a wide range of technology like e-learning services, content streaming, telehealth resources, and more!

Growing the Department to Meet Growing Needs

The Information Technology department made significant strides in expanding our internal team this year, ensuring we have the talent needed to support the incredible advancements at IHLS. We added two new positions to help keep up with the ever-changing landscape.

The first of those positions is the addition of a data analyst to the staff. With the addition of the AMHS discovery and preparation, having a person to analyze the vast amount of information from Polaris and the drivers' iPad delivery app was immensely important to justifying and showing the member libraries the need and potential outcomes. We could make our points using actual data. Using this data has given our Operations department a much more realistic vision of what an AMHS system requires. In fact, some of the initial number of items that we thought would be handled by the AMHS are much higher than reality. We've captured not only

the total number of items but also the number of unique items that travel through a hub multiple times a year. This new staff member has helped IHLS make better-informed decisions for our members and stakeholders, ensuring we choose the best path forward.

We also enhanced our service to members by adding another developer to our staff. The new full-stack developer will be responsible for maintaining existing projects and starting new ones. The IHLS website, for example, goes through waves of minor and major development. The new developer is responsible for the day-to-day development needs of all the IHLS and SHARE websites. This allows us more time to discover new areas that could use further development—that means improved IT support for our members and staff.

Support Internal IHLS Initiatives

This year, the whole organization significantly focused on planning for a potential automated material handling system. Before we could even decide if it was the best decision for IHLS, we had to get pricing and design documents in place so vendors could offer the service to us. And we didn't know if we could move forward on the project until we had all the data to release an RFP and discover pricing.

It was necessary that we dedicated many hours to collecting data, ensuring the data was as accurate as possible, and cross-referencing data from the Driver iPad program and the Polaris database. Using data from Polaris, we learned new and exciting ways of tracking individual items through delivery. For example, we obtained an accurate count of how many unique items go through delivery and how many times they repeat their journey across our delivery area. These efforts were vital to making the informed decision to proceed



with an AMHS purchase, which will benefit IHLS and its members for years to come!



Delivery

Delivery is a vital service IHLS offers and is highly visible to all 520 IHLS member libraries. This was evident in FY2024, as IHLS delivery services provided libraries of all sizes with access to five-day-a-week delivery, resulting in over 69,000 stops and 1.1 million miles driven. This service not only saved libraries and their patrons money by facilitating the sharing of library materials at no additional cost but also emphasized the importance of providing top-notch delivery with minimal disruptions. Our focus this year has been on maintaining a high standard of service, such as maintaining infrastructure with van replacements and investing in durable delivery tubs. We are also exploring potential innovations of the Automated Material Handling System (AMHS) to further enhance our delivery service with automated sorting.

Maintaining a High Standard of Service

Equitable Access in Functional Five-Day Delivery

IHLS ensures all its member libraries, regardless of size, have access to five-day-a-week delivery, removing barriers that volume-based services create. This ensures quick, cost-free delivery for all, enhancing access for central and southern Illinois residents. With a library card from any system-member library, Illinois residents can borrow from any other member library. During FY2024, IHLS successfully **sorted and delivered over 2.7 million items** to Illinois libraries for IHLS delivery service and over 34,000 items for ILDS service, enhancing resource sharing across the state.* This effort guarantees that all Illinois residents, including those in remote southern and central communities, have equal access to a wealth of information and entertainment, just like their metropolitan counterparts.

*Over 700,000 items were sorted twice, as they moved through two hubs.

Fast Access with Delivery On the Go Service

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 1.2 million dollars. This has allowed library patrons to receive their materials free of charge and in a more timely manner compared to making online purchases.

Items Delivered On the Go	48,019
Average Value Per Book	\$25**
Estimated Patron Savings	\$1,200,475

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

Infrastructure Maintenance with Replacement Vans

With our couriers driving over a million miles in FY2024, many of our cargo vans exceeded 200,000 miles, and replacing vehicles in our fleet was necessary. Replacing older vans with newer models can lead to substantial long-term savings due to reduced maintenance costs. Recognizing this need, the IHLS Board approved vehicle purchases allowing IHLS to purchase nine delivery vans via the state joint purchasing contract. These purchases allowed staff to continue safely providing our members with five-day-a-week delivery to libraries of all sizes. By making informed decisions about vehicle replacement, IHLS can demonstrate responsible stewardship of funds while enhancing member library services.



Fund Stewardship Cargo Van Resales

We needed to resell the replacement surplus vans to offset the increased costs of investing over \$400,000 in replacement delivery vans. IHLS staff sought approval from our Board to surplus these replacement vans and successfully applied over \$70,000 from the surplus sales to purchase our vans.

Innovation with an Automated Material Handling System (AMHS)

Our Delivery team has been diligently exploring innovative solutions, such as implementing a new style of delivery tubs and expanding the Delivery On

the Go Service. Collaborating with other IHLS departments, Delivery staff continued evaluating the potential adoption of an automated material handling system. Our leadership presented this project and obtained approval after conducting site visits to libraries with similar systems, numerous meetings to evaluate the costs and benefits, competitive bid for cost details, and a detailed return on investment analysis. Automated sorting systems can significantly reduce labor costs associated with manual sorting processes while creating a safer working environment for staff. By investing in this technology, IHLS can reallocate the saved personnel resources toward enhancing member services.



Resource Sharing via SHARE

While all IHLS members have access to our free and equitable delivery services, we also provide a more advanced multi-format resource-sharing platform in our fee-based SHARE (SharingHeartland’s Available Resources Equally) division. SHARE’s membership comprises 339 IHLS libraries, over 65% of the system’s members. These libraries collectively split the costs of the integrated library system (ILS) Polaris, enabling their patrons to access over 8.4 million items. With such a large membership, SHARE is NorthAmerica’s largest library resource-sharing group, providing greater access to resources for more Illinoisans. Our 336 member agencies represent:

- 473 Member service locations
- 772,540 Member patrons
- 2,912 Member library staff
- 16 IHLS staff supporting SHARE

This year, as part of our mission to provide member libraries with effective, innovative, and user-friendly library technology to all of our member library communities, the SHARE team has been focused

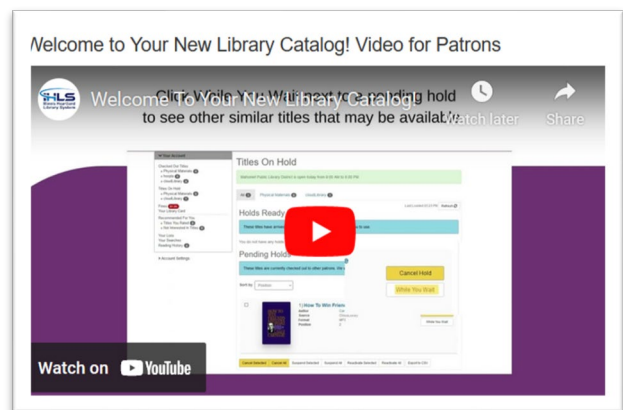
on two major projects, Aspen and the new, inclusive fee scale. The Aspen project significantly shaped the direction of the SHARE fee scale project, making the final product better and more in line with our current values and organization. The SHARE team members and committee volunteers take a lot of pride in the fact that we can offer costly tools to members at a price they can afford, with each library getting equivalent services, no matter the size of their community or their budget.

Aspen Discovery Implementation

We began the Aspen project with the initial setup and completed the project’s first phase with three cohort groups. Those groups totaled 94 libraries; each had project orientation and training and then launched their new catalog. In addition, the team prepared patron-facing content, like bookmarks, flyers, and even a video. The team also generated a dedicated Aspen page with FAQs and updates. The project was not without challenges, but so far has been a very successful transition. With the first phase of this project, there are now 94 communities that have better access to their physical and digital resources, opportunities to promote their services, and flexibility to use their catalog to enhance their marketing and advocacy efforts.

Aspen Discovery Goals

- 1 Create a unified experience through deep integration with ALL library technologies
- 2 Maximize User Engagement with the Library
- 3 Connect every user with a personalized and accessible library homebase
- 4 Empower library administrators to customize and expand Aspen



Examples of prepared Aspen materials for members.



Meet your library's new catalog.

- View, manage, and check out ebooks all in one place
- Virtually browse and see titles by format
- Discover new titles through recommendations
- Manage your account
- Create and view lists

... and more!

SHARE Fee scales. After a review of the existing scales and forecast, we identified the need for a significant increase. The committee met over several months to review suggested proposals. One that began as a “pie-in-the-sk” idea quickly began to gain appeal: an all-inclusive fee for members that includes Polaris modules, cloudLibrary, and Aspen. Those of us working within SHARE, including SHARE staff members, IHLs support staff, and committee volunteers, have always believed that SHARE brings the same level of service to all of our member library communities, regardless of their size or revenues. This year of reflection enabled us to shape our program by that value.

SHARE Fee Scale Updates

This year, the SHARE Finance & Policy Committee, SHARE leadership, and the IHLs Finance Department embarked on a planned review of the

During this project, SHARE’s commitment to transparency and inclusivity was apparent in the extensive feedback from members, including two Director surveys, a member comment period, and three Town Hall meetings. We shared information via email, newsletter, board reports, articles on the SHARE website, committee meeting updates, and

Consortia
COMPARISON CHART

CONSORTIUM	MEMBERS	FTE	FEE MIN.	FEE MAX.	AVERAGE
SWAN	100	19	\$11,000	\$104,951	
RSA NEP <small>Resource Sharing Alliance NFP</small>	142	12	\$1,500	\$88,605	
VALE <small>New Jersey</small>	52	1	\$21,420	\$50,500	
PALS Plus	22	5			\$34,187
EVERGREEN INDIANA	130	3.5	\$0	\$45,000	\$12,401
SHARE	330	16	\$1,521	\$58,238	\$6,153

*All available information present in chart

Fisual representation of how SHARE’s budget compares to other library consortia.

Fee Comparison: SHARE vs. Standalone

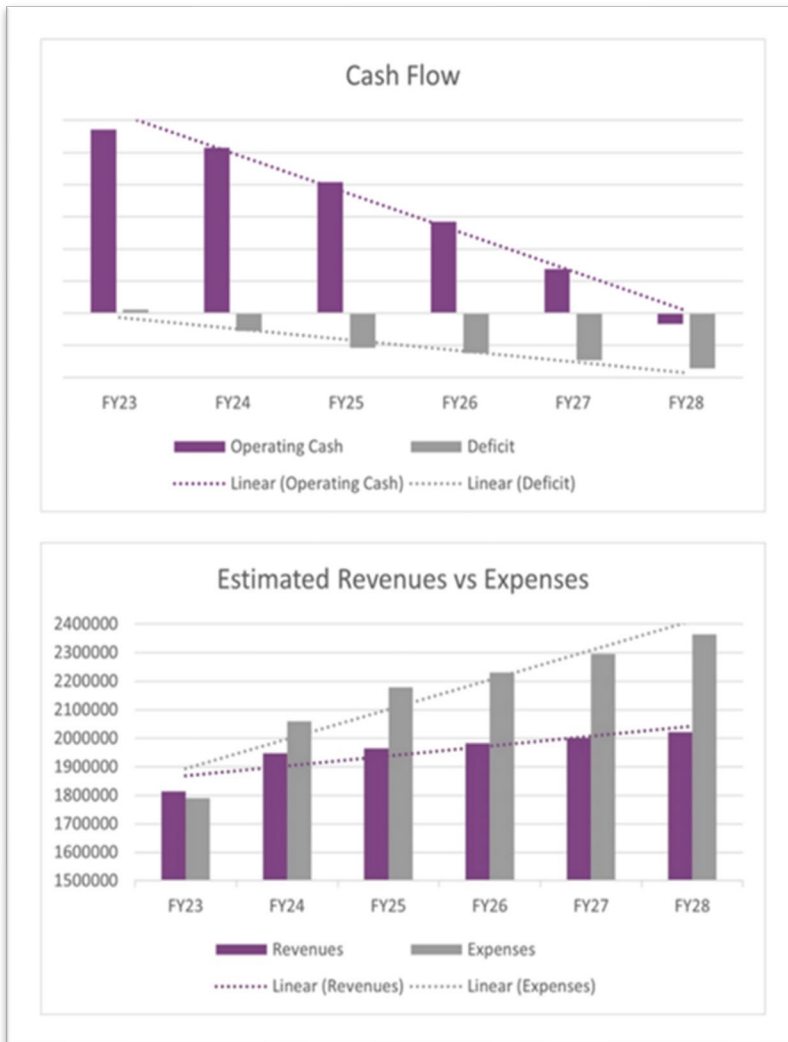
Categories	Large School	Small School	Large Public	Medium Public	Small Public	Academic
Population	7,164	691	35,897	13,315	3,337	152
Revenue	N/A	N/A	\$2,094,671	\$429,743	\$169,446	N/A
SHARE Fee	\$22,450	\$1,900	\$36,460	\$10,252	\$4,346	\$2,400
Polaris Standalone Fee	\$336,400	\$24,800	\$91,300	\$26,400	\$28,800	\$23,600
Polaris Migration Fee	\$420,000	\$30,000	\$90,000	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000

Being a SHARE member has its benefits - \$10M in savings for taxpayers in southern and central Illinois!*

SHARE Total: \$1,298,226
Standalone Total: \$11,501,701

*Does not include migration fees. Totals are calculated using proposed FY2025 SHARE member fees and pricing provided by Polaris.

Comparison of SHARE member fee versus standalone Polaris fee.



Visual representations to communicate the need for a membership fee

various networking events. We sent the final proposal to members during our AnnualMembers’ Group Meeting and put it out for vote. Members approved the proposal 151-Yes to 15-No. SHARE committee volunteers worked incredibly hard on this project and were happy to see their vision of equity and value realized with member support.

TrySHARE

We also launched TrySHARE in FY2024 as a new way to recruit school members. TrySHARE is a pilot program where schools can utilize the SHARE database for interlibrary loan as a pathway to eventual membership. School administrators have

the opportunity to review the return on investment of membership. We did a soft launch with one school participating. During the program’s first year, the **school borrowed 558 items, saving \$10,596.42** by borrowing rather than purchasing all of the titles requested through the program. Based on that data and how much their students and teachers enjoyed the membership, they will be one of our newest members in FY2025—ensuring continued access for their students and faculty.

Database Security

SHARE focused again on database security this year. One significant change was the amount of access allowed by our member libraries, with school librarians only able to access data for their students. This project will continue in FY2025 when public libraries will have access to other public libraries for reciprocal borrowing but will not have access to data for K-12 students. SHARE members also adopted a new policy for staff permissions to help ensure database security and patron confidentiality. This measure will ensure that patron data is protected and that we continue to take responsibility for our part in protecting the confidentiality of member data.

Member Engagement

SHARE brainstormed ways to connect to members, including the addition of sponsorships at conferences like the ILA Annual Conference, Reaching Forward South, the AISLE Annual Conference, and IDEACon. The team also adopted some new procedures to better utilize our



Customer Relationship Manager (CRM) for better data retention, potential return on investment efforts, advocacy work, and engagement tracking. SHARE also reclassified a position to create a new SHARE Member Engagement Specialist to communicate with members, especially keeping members abreast of the new programs and improved processes. We want to represent SHARE in the wider library community and be very visible to our members, and the SHARE Member Engagement Specialist has helped with that.



A word cloud from member responses at the SHARE Annual Members' Group



Bibliographic Services

Alongside delivery and our integrated library service platform, bibliographic services are one of the three interlocking core services IHLS provides to facilitate resource sharing among member libraries in Illinois. Bibliographic services (or cataloging support) enable resource sharing and use. 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 FY2024, SHARE Bibliographic Services continued to provide exceptional cataloging services for our members, improve our database

through item and bibliographic record cleanup, and provide high-quality educational opportunities for our member libraries. To ensure continued exceptional database integrity, we focused on merging duplicate and brief bibliographic records, identifying item records with errors that will impact patron and staff usability in both the original Online Public Access Cataloging (OPAC) and in ASPEN, our new discovery layer, and updating and correcting subject headings to improve findability. SHARE Bibliographic Services staff provided online and in-person barcoding and cataloging training, including at several member libraries throughout our service area, resulting in **over 2,634 contact hours**. We also developed and published our new, shortened, but more thorough **Barcoder Certification Training for New Barcoders, which 141 library staff members completed**, and we updated our Barcoding Refresher Training for the new fiscal year.

Comprehensive Barcoding Training for Members & Staff

SHARE Bibliographic Services staff developed and published our new **Barcoding Certification Course** this year on the SHARE Training site. This new course will ensure that library staff can complete the Barcoding Certification process more quickly, typically **in less than three hours**, compared to prior training lasting over six hours. Even with this shorter course, trainees can rest assured that they still are receiving all the necessary information, such as how to correctly match their items to correct records, which fields to use or avoid in an item record, and how to continue to maintain or remove individual item records, to help maintain exceptional database integrity.



SHARE Bibliographic Services staff also updated the Barcoding Refresher Training course in preparation for FY2025. All barcoders will continue to be required to take this course every two years to maintain their certification. With continued training through this certification process, member library staff can help maintain a catalog, allowing patrons across the IHLS service area to quickly identify, request, and receive the items they want.

Cataloging Training for Members

SHARE Bibliographic Services staff continues to provide comprehensive training to our member libraries through monthly Cataloger’s Training Sessions, our SHARE Your Cataloging Questions webinars, and our review of records for library staff working through our Cataloging Certification process.

SHARE catalogers are required to obtain 15 hours of continuing education each fiscal year. These hours help SHARE maintain a world-class catalog that allows our libraries, staff, and patrons to find what they need when needed.

Training Session	Sessions	Trainees
SHARE Cataloger’s Training	9	871
SHARE Your Cataloging Questions	14	138
Training Activity	Trainees	Records
Record Review	25	2,550

Cataloging training, trainees, and records offered in FY2024.

Cataloging Maintenance Center

The Cataloging Maintenance Center (CMC) catalogers are supported by a grant from the Illinois State Library to provide services that help improve access to Illinois library resources. Their offerings

include free cataloging of eligible special collections, consultation on metadata projects, database cleanup for LLSAPs, cataloging training, and more. Several staff members are responsible for merging duplicate records in OCLC. The CMC’s directive is to support Illinois libraries of all types in providing quality library services.

The CMC provides various free services to Illinois libraries that increase the usability of databases, catalogs, and digital archives, improving access to resources and special collections across Illinois. The benefits of this work are many. Our world language cataloging service enhances access to world-language materials. This improved access helps English language learners check out materials in their primary language and helps world-language learners find materials in their new language, supporting learning and a sense of community. Meanwhile, CMC training offers an additional cost-effective means for Illinois libraries to stay abreast of new cataloging standards and best practices. This service is a boon to many Illinois libraries whose staff struggle with cataloging challenging items, such as kits, world language materials, realia, or local genealogy items. With the CMC’s help, more Illinoisans have easy access to more of these unusual—and exciting—library materials!

This work continued in FY2024. CMC staff carried out many projects this year, but some of their most significant efforts involved database cleanup, original cataloging and enhancements, authority record creation, metadata cataloging, continuing education, the Mobile Memory Lab project, and a new online cataloging request form.

PrarieCat & CARLI Database Cleanup.

The CMC staff spent a large portion of their time on database cleanup: enhancing, originally cataloging, or identifying as record merges **2,394 bibliographic**

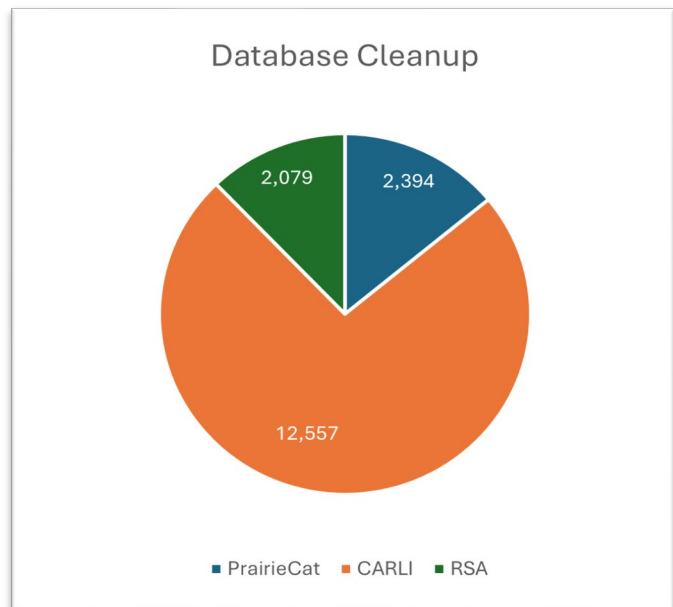


records for the PrairieCat Cleanup Project; merging, deleting, and editing 12,557 bibliographic records in the Alma database for the CARLI Cleanup Project; and enhancing or originally cataloging and merging or importing into WorkFlows 2,079 bibliographic records for the RSA Backlog Cleanup Project, which began in October 2023. Database cleanup improves patrons' online catalog search results and involves editing substandard bibliographic records into quality, full-level records.

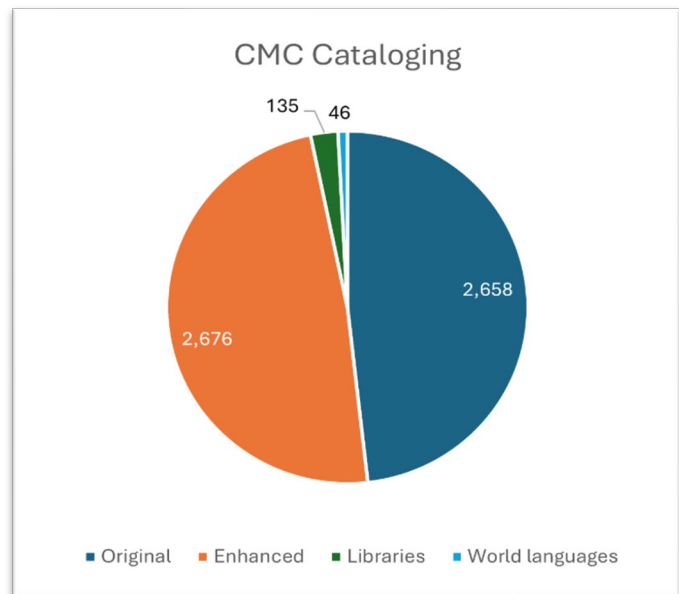
For the PrairieCat cleanup project, the bibliographic records do not have an OCLC number, which is a critical identifier in matching existing records in Encore, the discovery platform used by PrairieCat. Updating the records in OCLC benefits not only PrairieCat members but also global users of WorldCat, allowing patrons to find the precise item they are looking for. The CARLI Cleanup Project is crucial in improving the search and filtering in their online public catalog, I-Share.

Original Cataloging & Enhancements

The CMC staff kept busy originally cataloging 2,658 items and enhancing 2,676 bibliographic records. CMC staff cataloged many items in English, but they also cataloged items in 46 different world languages. We cataloged materials for 135 individual libraries (this does not include the consortial libraries helped through database cleanup). See Figure 2. Through original cataloging and enhancing of less-than-full or transforming AACR2 to Resource Description and Access (RDA) records, over 5,000 items are now available or more findable. Again, this helps ensure patrons will be able to find the exact item they are looking for.



The CMC provided database cleanup and during FY2024, 2,079 records were enhanced and identified as merges for PrairieCat, 2,394 records were enhanced or originally cataloged and merged in WorkFlows for RSA, and 12,557 records were edited, deleted, or merged for CARLI.



During FY2024, CMC staff originally cataloged 2,658 items, enhanced 2,676 records, and cataloged materials in 46 different world languages for 135 individual libraries.

Authority Record Creation

We also created 114 name, series, and title authority records. Authority records link names,



series, and titles in a bibliographic record, allowing patrons to access an author’s entire corpus or all the titles in a series. Creating authority records is another way the CMC has improved access for Illinois library patrons.

Metadata Cataloging for Illinois Digital Archives

The CMC Metadata Cataloger, Kat Anderberg, was busy transcribing **102 handwritten and typed documents** and one audio recording, **uploading 375 simple objects and 304 compound objects to the Illinois Digital Archives (IDA)** website with CONTENTdm. She also made three site visits as part of the Mobile MemoryLab’s Digitization Days at Marshall, Alton, and Sparta public libraries. As part of this project, Kat **digitized and edited 1,348 images**, and she finished cataloging and uploading all items for the Mobile Memory Lab. **See Figure 3.** Anyone worldwide can access the IDA website to find the documents, photos, and realia digitized as part of the Digitization Days or other

metadata projects, including digitized oral histories. People searching for family documents can now access digitized copies of photographs, letters, and realia, bringing their family history to life for generations.

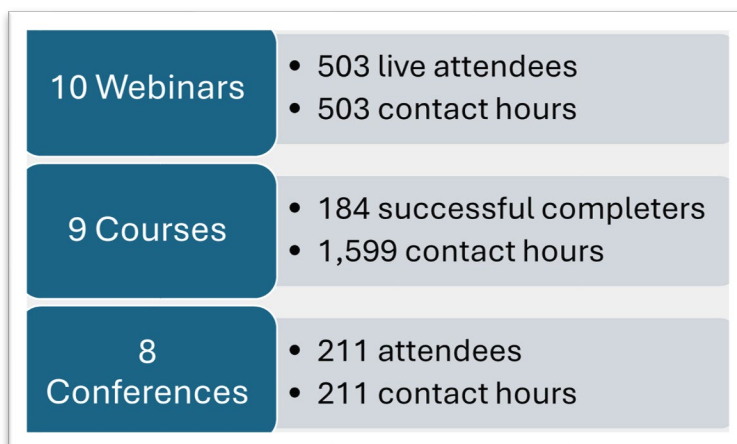
Continuing Education Offered & Obtained

Training was another area where CMC staff focused their time and attention. They created and presented ten webinars for the Online with the CMC series with **503 live attendees**. We offered **nine cataloging courses**, including a new series of Focus on Cataloging classes: Serials Cataloging, Deriving a Record, Cataloging Binge Boxes, Cataloging DVDs, World Language Cataloging, and Cataloging CDs, in Moodle with **184 successful completers**.*

Illinois library staff create quality bibliographic records in our cataloging training offerings, improving their catalogs and developing new cataloging skills. More detailed cataloging records mean more information that is searchable in a



Our Metadata Cataloger digitized 1,348 items for the Mobile Memory Lab and cataloged digitized items for other libraries, resulting in 375 simple objects and 304 compound objects.



During FY2024, CMC staff presented 10 webinars with 503 live attendees, offered nine courses with 184 successful completers, and presented at eight conferences with 211 attendees for a total of 2,313 contact hours provided.

*Successful completion is marked by a grade of 70% or higher.



bibliographic record, such as full content notes for a music CD with titles and artists or listing the contents of a kit. All this information is, then, searchable, giving patrons multiple access points to find resources in their local library's catalog.

In addition to offering cataloging courses and webinars, our staff completed six courses for **13 Continuing Education Units**. These courses enable CMC staff to sharpen their existing skills and develop new ones. In our ever-growing catalog of courses and webinars, our staff pass on their improved mastery to Illinois library staff at varying skill levels. As a result, new and seasoned catalogers at any Illinois library can always find a CMC course or webinar to continue their professional development and make their catalog more accessible to patrons.

Outreach & Promotion of CMC Services

With so many helpful free services on offer, CMC staff must also engage in outreach to promote and explain our free services provided to Illinois libraries. While the Marketing and Communications team coordinates promotional materials and messaging, CMC outreach generally includes conference presentations and participation at exhibit hall booths. By presenting at statewide and regional conferences and staffing booths, the CMC can network and explain the free services provided to Illinois libraries. The more Illinois libraries that know about the CMC can take advantage of the free services, creating more time for catalogers in these libraries to work on other projects. To this end, staff from the CMC presented at various conferences, including PUG Day (the PrairieCat Users Group's annual one-day virtual conference), the AISLE Conference, the ILA Annual Conference, ILA's Reaching Forward South Conference, and IHLS Member Day.

CMC staff also provided cataloging training sessions at the ILA Annual Conference and RSA Day (the Resource Sharing Alliance's annual one-day conference). In addition, the CMC staff attended monthly SHARE Cataloging Training sessions and quarterly Local History and Genealogy Forums. Also, partly in the interest of outreach, the CMC offered **2,313 contact hours in FY2024** through Moodle courses, presentations, and webinars. The success of these myriad activities is apparent in the growth in CMC course completion. Thanks to our staff's tireless efforts, more and more library catalogers are using the CMC's free services—enhancing their catalogs and saving taxpayer dollars for other library services.



Membership

The Membership Team exists to provide support to our 520 Member Libraries, regardless of type, size, or location—whether it is a bread-and-butter issue like cleaning up a listing in Library Learning (L2) or a major happening like assisting a library facing serious Intellectual Freedom challenges. Activities during any day can range from helping someone register for a continuing education event to walking a trustee through the “next step” when they need to replace a director unexpectedly. Our team’s priority is always to provide support services to our libraries at their point of need.

In many ways, the Membership Team is the system’s “boots on the ground” That can mean participating in a networking group, doing a routine site visit, presenting to a board, or helping new directors adjust to their roles. Spending time with our members where they are and encouraging them to take the lead in the interaction is crucial to building strong working relationships.

It is also incumbent on this department to engage in the larger library community—to be a voice at the table for all libraries in southern and central Illinois, particularly those in underresourced areas of the state. This means attending meetings, serving on committees, and following library law as it impacts our libraries and trends on the horizon. This year, the Membership Team focused on assisting members navigate new laws and intellectual freedom challenges, expanding and improving our continuing education offerings for all members (including trustees), and fostering ongoing member engagement.

Intellectual Freedom & IHLS Libraries

With the passage of PA 103–100, the Membership Team mobilized along with colleagues throughout

the system. The first rush of activity surrounded the need for compliance when public libraries submitted their per capita grants in early 2024. We collaborated with MarCom to create a new page for our website with a video tutorial and an FAQ section. Our school library members will deal with this as a group when they apply for their per capita grants this fall. Accordingly, we worked to help update the webpage to provide school-specific information.

In addition to this work in response to new legislation, the Metropolis Public Library gained singular focus when members of the board and the library director pushed back against compliance with PA 103–0100. Our response was another example of several system departments coming together to ensure this library received the support it needed. For some time, staff followed library board and city council meetings and many media sources to gather all the pertinent information in this story. As a result of this experience, the Metropolis board is now very committed to supporting the whole community.

Training for Public Library Trustees

After a year of development, during which the team created ten modules, the iLEAD Trustee Learning Portal premiered throughout the conference season in the Fall of 2023. The project formally launched in February 2024 and had **288 users by the end of the fiscal year.**

As more trustees take advantage of the convenient and easily accessible learning opportunities in the iLEAD portal and apply that knowledge locally, more Illinois libraries will benefit from informed and collaborative leadership.



Continuing Education

At the end of FY2023, after a Continuing Education Coordinator joined the IHLS Membership Team, this new employee plunged into planning with both feet for FY2024.

Having dedicated staff focusing on this essential service significantly improved the system's delivery of continuing education opportunities. Planning happened in a timely fashion, and communication was consistent. In addition, very few administrative tasks fell through the cracks. For example, with the approval of the Illinois State Library, IHLS also participates in the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies' (COSLA) Continuing Education Group.

One particular success was revitalizing our Third Thursday Continuing Education and Members Matter events. During the COVID lockdown, this regular in-person event became sporadic and restricted to Zoom, and it never got back on track. Our new CE Coordinator recognized the importance of this joint event and started working on returning to a monthly schedule and a hybrid meeting style. Now, we offer a professional development presentation on the third Thursday of every month, with a follow-up hour available for system updates. The event also provides a built-in opportunity for input from membership when needed. Thanks to this CE improvement, we are more connected to members than we have been in years!

Professional development for our school members was also a focal point with the development of the Symposium for School Library Workers, a virtual online opportunity for school library workers throughout Illinois. This event deserves particular notice because it was a cooperative effort by IHLS, the Illinois Library Association, the Illinois State

Library, and Reaching Across Illinois Library System. As a result of our collaboration, school library educators—a group that has historically had minimal library education—can access vital training to make their libraries more effective for their students and faculty.

Tenth Annual IHLS Member Day

We were proud to offer our annual IHLS Member Day virtual conference again this year. What began as an in-person, grassroots effort in 2014 is now a virtual event drawing more than 400 people. There were 393 attendees, 28 speakers, and 27 Exhibitors. The program included 14 sessions—12 breakout sessions and two keynote sessions.

There can be no better example of IHLS staff working as a team than Member Day. When the event moved to a virtual platform in 2020, a whole new implementation structure emerged that drew in every department within IHLS and tapped into staff members' skill sets throughout the organization. The virtual aspect of this event has encouraged higher attendance and allowed IHLS to recruit speakers without concern for their location. Adding an effective Project Manager for the event has made this growth and collaboration possible.

Member Support and Outreach

Providing support to IHLS member libraries at their point of need will always be a priority for the Membership Services Team. This work is not something one can plan for; it starts when an email arrives or a telephone rings. The fact that the Membership Team has grown in number makes us better able to be responsive and effective in our support for our membership. A department that is even slightly larger can also become involved in regional and statewide groups that allow IHLS to be a voice at the table for libraries in central and southern Illinois.



Recommended motion to approve the Narrative Report.