

LIBRARY BOARD OF RHODE ISLAND
A regular meeting of the Library Board of Rhode Island was held
October 27, 2025
at William Hall Library
Lower-level Program Room
1825 Broad Street, Cranston, RI 02905

Members Attending: John Bucci, Melody Drnach (Chair), Laura Kohl, Christopher La Roux, Leslie Page, Cheryl Space, Karisa Tashjian, Tien Tran

Members Absent: Aaron Coutu (Vice Chair), Jessica David, Kenneth Findlay, Phyllis Lynch (ex officio), Michelle Steever, Kate Wodehouse

Present from the Office of Library and Information Services (OLIS): Nicolette Baffoni, Karen Mellor

Guests: None

Materials Distributed:

- Proposed Revised 2025-2026 LBRI Meeting Schedule REV02
- Library Trustees Manual Draft

I. WELCOME

Ms. Drnach called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES from the September 15, 2025, meeting

Moved By: Mr. La Roux

Seconded By: Ms. Page

The minutes were approved as presented.

III. REPORT OF THE CHAIR

Ms. Drnach welcomed members.

IV. CHIEF OF LIBRARY SERVICES REPORT

A. OLIS Updates

- i. Ms. Mellor noted the recent passing of Library Board member Doug Norris, who had served on the Board since 2015. A memorial event is scheduled for Mr. Norris at the Providence Public Library, where he worked as an adult education instructor, on November 17. Board members expressed interest in attending this event in honor of Mr. Norris. Ms. Mellor will inquire with the library as to whether the event is open and will investigate holding the next board meeting in conjunction with the gathering, which is at 3 pm.

ii. Budget Process

OLIS funding is proposed at the current service level for 2027. Considerable time has been spent learning the new state financial system since its implementation on July 1, 2025. Ms. Mellor and Ms. Baffoni are monitoring the system to ensure OLIS' federal grants accurately transitioned to the system and expenditures are correctly allocated to project categories. The new system will provide more granularity with respect to fund utilization and federal reporting.

iii. Grant In Aid

Approximately 2/3 of state grant-in-aid (GIA) application submissions have been approved. Minimal waivers were submitted.

B. Federal Budget Updates

The federal government's current shutdown prevents OLIS from drawing down 2025 award funds. OLIS' remaining \$500,000 from the 2024 federal award was requested and approved by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) prior to the shutdown, closing out that grant.

Emergency federal award drawdown requests by other state library agencies have been rejected because there is no imminent danger to life and safety, the criteria for approving an emergency drawdown. IMLS staff is down by 50% and more staff have left the agency. The House and Senate have recommended near level-funding for 2026 with about \$3 million less than 2024-2025 but with additional funding for the Grants to States program. OLIS will not receive much additional funding if this proposal is passed, but level funding is a win in the current political environment. Substantial cuts have been made to the museum side of the IMLS.

C. Chief Officers of State Library Agencies and New England Library Association Reports

i. Chief Officers of State Library Agencies

Ms. Mellor attended the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA) annual meeting last week in Wilmington, DE, and discussed challenges at state library agencies and opportunities for collaborative efforts. Representatives from 42 states and 2 territories attended, and various speakers addressed the gathering.

The IMLS celebrates its 30th anniversary in 2026 and is planning late winter and early spring 2026 in-person convenings for state data coordinators and LSTA Coordinators. The Acting IMLS Director who also serves as the Deputy Secretary of Labor, has attended several library events and appears open to learning more about the role of libraries in the community.

EBSCO, a major database provider, is convening a group of library organizations including COSLA, the Association of Rural and Small Libraries, the Association of Research Libraries, and other library-centered organizations, to strategize and advocate for IMLS and federal funding support. EBSCO employs a Washington, DC, lobbyist and works with other library vendors to

advance federal support for libraries. In addition, EBSCO is tracking state legislation around the country that may impact libraries.

The New Jersey State Library will host an upcoming information literacy summit for libraries nationwide. The Georgia Public Library System offers annual awards to librarians and libraries to recognize service excellence and promote libraries. The LBRI bylaws include the provision that the board can present awards, and the board may want to consider presenting awards again to promote libraries and recognize library excellence. The RI Library Association (RILA) presents annual awards to RILA members, so any new award program would need to be complementary to RILA's program.

ii. New England Library Association

Mr. Coutu is attending the New England Library Association (NELA) annual conference underway in Newport. Yesterday, Ms. Mellor presented at the State of the States, an annual conference session in which the library chiefs from the New England state share updates. Attendee questions were generally related to the Executive Order eliminating IMLS and the ongoing court cases, the Federal government shutdown, and other activities affecting federal funding to libraries and the resulting situations experienced by states because of the funding pause. Connecticut temporarily lost full funding that was later restored, Maine laid off staff, and Massachusetts cut databases and other services. Ms. Mellor also attended a session on how Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be used for advocacy. Senator Jack Reed presented the keynote address Monday morning and received a standing ovation from an appreciative audience. The conference was well attended.

D. Digital Library of RI

OLIS has partnered with the Brown University Library and the Providence Public Library to create the Digital Library of RI (D-LORI). OLIS, using content from partner libraries and the State Archives, will demonstrate a 'proof of concept' of D-LORI on November 4. Session details are on the OLIS website. This project was initially intended to serve as the Rhode Island hub of the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA), but due to the uncertain future of DPLA, it will be independent for now. Should DPLA move forward at a new host institution, the platform being built could be integrated into that national initiative.

E. Freedom to Read Policies

OLIS is working with a small group of librarians including Ms. Space and Ed Garcia, Director, Cranston Public Library, to create sample collection development and reconsideration policies for public libraries, as outlined in the Freedom to Read Act that was signed into law in 2025. These policies will then be used to create sample school library policies and will be incorporated into the public library standards.

F. Middletown Library Construction Project

Ms. Mellor attended a wall breaking event to kick off the Middletown construction project. OLIS has not committed to the project because a construction application has not yet been received. Ms. Mellor advised the Town of Middletown about the steps required to secure

construction reimbursement and advised that construction work cannot commence prior to the State entering an agreement to reimburse the project. Library construction reimbursement rates, as outlined in the Public Library Construction Regulations, have not increased since the last revision in 2018. Reimbursement rates are based on in-place regulations when a reimbursement agreement is signed. Middletown indicated they would like to begin construction in November.

G. Library Trustees Manual

Ms. Baffoni reviewed draft Public Library Manual sections and provided an example of the manual layout which will be designed for easy information access. Members were requested to review the drafts and provide feedback to Ms. Baffoni before she continues with further section edits. A director assessment checklist was recommended as a resource, and Ms. Mellor noted the manual will include resource links. Ms. Mellor said the manual is being created as a digital online LibGuide to more selectively curate resources and for ease of future updates. The LBRI manual may also provide resources for inclusion in the Trustees manual. Ms. Kohl recommended a potential audio version of the manual. A review group will be convened once a full draft is available. The board will be provided a digital version of the draft. A training on Public Library Trustee Basics is scheduled for next Thursday, November 6 for which 81 people have registered. Ms. Mellor and Ms. Baffoni will conduct the training and take note of topics that may need additional emphasis or resources in the manual.

V. COMMITTEE REPORTS

Federal & State Legislative Updates (OLIS website [updates](#)).

A. American Library Association (ALA) Committee on Legislation

Ms. Mellor serves as the COSLA liaison for the ALA Committee on Legislation. It was announced at the last meeting that ALA will have a second reduction in force, laying off about 8% of their staff. ALA has faced financial challenges recently, leading to staff reduction and the elimination of the annual mid-winter conference. Two positions in the Public Policy and Advocacy Office, and the position of Director of the Office of Intellectual Freedom, were eliminated.

Previously, COSLA partnered with ALA on an advocacy event in Washington known as 'Voices for Libraries' (VFL); last year ALA held their own separate fly-in event a month after the VFL event. COSLA is planning its 2026 VFL event for March 3-5. ALA was invited to participate in the event but did not respond prior to the deadline to secure event hotel arrangements, potentially due to a vacancy in the directorship of the Public Policy and Advocacy Office.

ALA has since hired Lisa Varga as Director for the Public Policy and Advocacy Office; Ms. Varga was formerly with the Virginia Library Association. ALA will resume National Library Legislative Day (NLLD) and has scheduled its event for the last week of February 2026. COSLA's VFL event is limited to 150 participants, 3 per state. The NLLD event is limited to 250 participants and is open to attendees from all states. Board members may contact Ms. Mellor if interested in attending the VFL event. As COSLA's liaison to ALA's Committee on Legislation, Ms. Mellor will work with COSLA and ALA to develop alignment of messaging and approach. COSLA and ALA

will continue discussions to bring the advocacy efforts back together as a single event in the future.

Library advocacy events showcase library stories, advocate for federal library funding, support the power of reading, and promote libraries as community centers.

B. State Legislation

No updates on state legislation.

C. Federal Legislation

No movement on the Museum and Library Services Act (MSLA).

VI. BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

A. Ms. Kohl

The New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) is proposing new standards for college and university accreditation. The new standard proposal does not include the terms 'library' or 'librarians.' Keywords specific to other academic departments were noted to have been eliminated too. Ms. Kohl and other academic librarians signed a letter from the Higher Education Library Information Network (HELIN) to NECHE expressing concern about the omission of library terms and requirements for libraries in higher education. Other New England libraries are also submitting letters of concern, and a virtual call session is planned for New England librarians to discuss the issue. The Council of Higher Education wrote the proposed draft and NECHE is accepting public comment on the proposed draft. Ms. Mellor inquired if a LBRI letter of support would be helpful and will inquire of her NE colleagues about actions they may take. Ms. Kohl will update Ms. Mellor about the proposed draft when new information is available.

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Board Activities 2025-2026

Ms. Mellor requested recommendations for board focus in the 2025-2026 session. Ms. Space discussed finding a solution for a statewide catalog for school libraries because the school integrated library system does not meet the needs of school libraries. Ms. Mellor noted that Brown University has worked with the Providence school libraries to provide library support.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

No new business.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENT

No comment.

X. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next LBRI meeting is scheduled for November 17, 2025, 4-5:30pm, at William Hall Library, 1825 Broad Street, Cranston, RI 02905. Members will be notified of a venue change in the event

the meeting is moved to Providence Public Library in conjunction with the memorial event for Mr. Norris.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Moved By: Ms. Page

Seconded By: Mr. Tran

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m.