

LIBRARY BOARD OF RHODE ISLAND
A regular meeting of the Library Board of Rhode Island was held
January 12, 2026
at William Hall Library, Auditorium
1825 Broad Street, RI 02905

Members Attending: John Bucci, Aaron Coutu (Vice Chair), Jessica David, Christopher La Roux, Leslie Page, Cheryl Space, Michelle Steever, Tien Tran, Kate Wodehouse

Members Absent: Melody Drnach (Chair), Kenneth Findlay, Laura Kohl, Phyllis Lynch (ex officio), Karisa Tashjian

Present from the Office of Library and Information Services (OLIS): Karen Andrews, Nicolette Baffoni, Karen Mellor, Pablo Morales-Henry

Guests: None

Materials Distributed: None

I. WELCOME

Mr. Coutu called the meeting to order at 4:05 pm.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES of the December 15, 2025, meeting

Moved By: Ms. Steever

Seconded By: Mr. Tran

The minutes were approved as presented.

III. REPORT OF THE VICE CHAIR

Mr. Coutu welcomed members and requested a motion to move Agenda Item IIIIV Unfinished Business, School Library Support, to Agenda Item IV because the item is of special interest to Ms. Steever who must leave early.

Moved By: Ms. David

Seconded By: Ms. Space

IV. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. School Library Support

Ms. Mellor reported on the December board discussion about the future of the RI Library Information Network For Kids (RILINK) and school catalog challenges. After that meeting, Ms. Mellor and Ms. Steever were each contacted by RILINK's executive leadership to discuss the organization's future. A new school catalog that could be bridged to the public library catalog would facilitate statewide borrowing that is uncomplicated and efficient. The shortage of school librarians is another issue negatively impacting interlibrary loan by RI school libraries.

Ms. Steever reported on the results of the RILINK's member survey and provided a link to the January 2026 RILINK [newsletter](#) that contains survey results. Survey responses were mostly

about catalog challenges and the platform provider's slow response to requests for technical support.

RILINK has 208 members in 34 school districts including 124 elementary schools, 7 elementary/middle schools, 5 K-12 schools, 34 middle schools, 7 middle/high schools, and 34 high schools. Members pay a per-student fee for RILINK catalog access and support, and for LibGuides access.

Ms. Space works with Providence school librarians who are excited for a potential shared catalog because many schools have small library media budgets, limiting children's access to books. Providence public school libraries do not belong to RILINK. The Community Libraries of Providence and the Cranston Public Library are providing children with public library cards. Because school collections are organized around specific age groups, any new catalog must have policies in place to address that requirement.

OLIS could facilitate a new school library catalog discussion but noted that members would need to finance any such catalog. OLIS could potentially provide seed money to start the project but could not subsidize the catalog on an ongoing basis. Ms. Mellor recommended a working group, including RILINK and school librarians, to study the issue and develop solutions.

Mr. Tran inquired if RILINK were to share the Ocean State Libraries (OSL) catalog, would schools become Library of RI (LORI) members with access to the state delivery. Ms. Mellor noted that LORI membership is separate from OSL consortium membership and is free; currently 58 LORI school members belong to LORI and use the delivery system.

Ms. Mellor noted that based on preliminary discussions, it would be best for RILINK to maintain its own catalog to ensure there were collection guardrails for children. If schools were to choose Koha, the current public library catalog platform, as the new school catalog platform, it would be possible to bridge them to support more seamless interlibrary loan. Ms. Mellor will schedule a meeting with RILINK leadership and investigate potential working group members.

V. CHIEF OF LIBRARY SERVICES REPORT

A. OLIS Updates

1. Year End Review

OLIS will post the 2025 year-end review this week reflecting on the challenges and successes of the past year. In the face of changes at the federal level, OLIS pivoted well and much was accomplished. Ms. Mellor is grateful for the support of the library community and will notify the board when the review is posted.

2. Governor's Budget, State of the State of Rhode Island

The governor's budget will be released this week; the Governor's State of the State address is Tuesday. OLIS expects to be level-funded for grant-in-aid (GIA) at about 24% of local appropriations and expenditures. The efforts of the RI Library Association (RILA) have produced 25% GIA funding for the last 2 years, and GIA was funded at 25% for two years during the pandemic. OLIS is expected to be funded at the current service level.

3. Federal Budget

If the unpassed portions of the federal budget or a continuing resolution (CR) are not passed in the next 2 weeks, there will be a shutdown of unfunded government agencies that will include the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). It is currently unclear whether the budget will pass in time to prevent another shutdown. There is cautious optimism about IMLS funding because both the Senate and House recommended amounts for the IMLS appropriation matches.

4. Library Advocacy Events

Ms. Mellor, Ms. Space, and Ed Garcia, Director, Cranston Public Library will be in Washington on March 4-5 to meet with RI congressional delegation members and discuss federal support for libraries. The advocacy day is sponsored by the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA), and Ms. Mellor is the COSLA event Co-Chair. The American Library Association (ALA) will hold their advocacy event at the end of February.

5. State Program Report

Ms. Baffoni is completing the state program report that accounts for Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funding. It is due on January 28. Ms. Mellor will provide LSTA funding report information to the board in February or March.

6. Grant Program

OLIS has been able to access new reports in the state's new financial system to determine spending for the year-to-date. Following review, OLIS has determined that funds are available for a subaward program. LORI grants will be made available to fund projects that are focused on community connections with external partners and the advancement of community-oriented library services, including digitization projects. The funds are available because OLIS spent conservatively last year due to the uncertainty of federal funding, then spent down the award on operating expenses in the current fiscal year.

OLIS will make \$150,000 available in total for two programs: small grants and larger project grants. The board discussed various types of projects that OLIS could consider, and OLIS will solicit input for ideas at next week's public library directors' meeting. OLIS would welcome grant reviewers from the board.

B. Summer Reading Program

Ms. Baffoni reported on Summer Reading Program (SRP) activities; the 2026 SRP theme is 'Plant A Seed, Read'. Program manuals and materials from iRead have been ordered. The Beanstack reading tracker will be available again this summer for the SRP program; OLIS will assess whether to continue this service in the future based on utilization by libraries. OLIS will support a statewide scavenger hunt to encourage families to visit libraries statewide; the RI Center for the Book will provide raffle awards to those who visit a certain number of libraries during the statewide scavenger hunt. Ms. Mellor noted that attendance at SRP programs increased by 40% last year; some of that increase was likely due to the scavenger hunt

coordinated by the West Warwick Public Library that included a number of libraries across the state.

SRP mini grants will be offered again using the same process as last year. OLIS will also conduct a pilot program in lieu of the summer reading grant program for 10 libraries who opt in to the pilot. OLIS will contract with two providers who will each design two intergenerational programs. Participating libraries will receive four complete programs: two led by external providers contracted by OLIS and two program kits, with training provided for library staff to deliver the programs. The pilot program will be announced in February prior to the opening of the SRP grant process.

C. Digital Library of Rhode Island (D-LORI)

Mr. Morales Henry provided a history and overview of the progression of D-LORI and its partners, collections, infrastructure, and goals. The initiative began in 2018 but was derailed by the 2020 pandemic. In 2022, working with Brown University Library and Providence Public Library, a survey of collections was conducted. Ms. Mellor noted that a comprehensive survey was also conducted prior to the pandemic, which provided the basis for the second survey. By the end of 2023, the future of the Digital Library of American (DPLA) was becoming uncertain, and OLIS and its partners decided to move forward independent of DPLA, although the platform has been built to be compatible with DPLA should that project stabilize. In addition, the original harvesting tool proved unsuitable for the project because its security features did not meet requirements.

Mr. Morales Henry developed two applications, Red Maple, which harvests data from repositories, and Violet, which exposes data publicly, and will use those on an Omeka platform hosted by Brown University. OLIS has collected 50,000 digital objects and created a demonstration project. By the May 4 launch, it is anticipated that there will be over 140,000 objects in the collection. Brown University, Providence Public Library, the RI School of Design, the RI State Archives, and the University of RI have provided access to their collections. The current D-LORI site interfaces and navigational elements were demonstrated and discussed.

Mr. Morales Henry described media data specifications and interface requirements for Red Maple and Violet application performance and discussed testing methods performed to meet application requirements. Also discussed were various tools that could be implemented to facilitate a user- and support-friendly D-LORI environment. Goals for the upcoming month are committee formation, collection development, and user feedback. Committee charters must be well-defined, and committees should include varied RI organizations and institutions. OLIS has been actively seeking input and collections from many RI groups.

Ms. Mellor and the board congratulated Mr. Morales Henry for work done on the D-LORI project; it was noted that digitization grants for offline collections could be provided in a future project phase.

VI. COMMITTEE REPORTS

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

A. State Legislation

Ms. Space reported that work is proceeding on the grant-in-aid (GIA) bill, and an investigation is underway about possibly modeling the RI eBook bill on one from Connecticut. Data is being gathered to support school librarians and legislation in support of school libraries.

B. Federal Legislation

Federal legislation was not discussed.

VII. BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

A. Ms. David

1. Library Bonds

The US General Accountability Office (GAO) library report on facilities was released last month. RI ranked high in the report for the percentage of people who live within walking distance of a library. Ms. David asked if the report could be a launching point for RI to receive funding for a facilities study. Mr. Coutu noted that the Champlin Foundation might support the effort because last year they convened a library directors forum to gather information about library buildings. Ms. Mellor said the GAO study was performed at the request of Senator Reed to support possible federal funding for library construction. The museum portion of the GAO study will be released this month.

Ms. Mellor noted that OLIS conducted a facilities study in the 1990s based on library self-reports and a new RI study has been discussed, though at a level that would require state or private funding. Many states have commissioned their own library facilities studies.

2. Learn365RI Funding for Learning Centers

Ms. David noted that the Governor's Office's Learn365RI is developing learning centers that are described as places for people to learn and connect to work, health and play, objectives that libraries are already fulfilling. Although some libraries benefited from the funding, libraries are still underfunded and more could have benefitted from the program. Ms. Mellor noted that the Governor's out of school learning initiative funds, Learn365RI, went to cities and towns, and not directly to libraries; in turn, cities and towns determined the beneficiaries of the funding. Learn365RI funds are American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds that must be spent by December.

3. National Library Week

A small group is organizing a thank-you note campaign for RI libraries. Contact Ms. David to participate.

4. Mr. Norris Recognition

Ms. Mellor will make inquiries into potential ways to recognize and honor the late Mr. Norris.

B. Mr. Coutu

Warwick Public Library will be hosting a Performers' Vendor Fair for the 3rd year on February 26 from 4-6pm. Mr. Coutu will provide Ms. Baffoni information for the Continuing Education calendar.

C. Mr. Bucci

The RI Center for the Book's 2026 Read Across RI (RARI) selection is *Happy Land* by Dolen Perkins-Valdez. Copies may be requested from Mr. Bucci. The RARI kickoff is January 24 at the RI Statehouse. Information can be found at ribook.org.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

No new business.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

X. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next LBRI meeting is scheduled for February 09, 2026, from 4-5:30pm, at a library to be determined. Members will be notified of any date or venue changes.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Moved By: Ms. Page

Seconded By: Ms. David

The meeting adjourned at 5:41 pm.