

LIBRARY BOARD OF RHODE ISLAND
A regular meeting of the Library Board of Rhode Island was held
February 09, 2026
at William Hall Library, Lower-level Program Room
1825 Broad Street, Cranston, RI 02905

Members Attending: John Bucci, Aaron Coutu (Vice Chair), Jessica David, Laura Kohl, Phyllis Lynch (ex officio), Leslie Page, Cheryl Space, Michelle Steever, Kate Wodehouse

Members Absent: Melody Drnach (Chair), Kenneth Findlay, Christopher La Roux, Karisa Tashjian, Tien Tran

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

Guests: None

Materials Distributed:

- RI Library Association 2026 Legislative Agenda
- LBRI Legislation Committee Report February 2026
- State Program Report 2025

I. WELCOME

Mr. Coutu called the meeting to order at 4:08 pm.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES of the January 12, 2026, meeting

Moved By: Ms. Page

Seconded By: Ms. Steever

The minutes were approved as presented.

III. REPORT OF THE VICE CHAIR

Mr. Coutu welcomed members.

IV. CHIEF OF LIBRARY SERVICES REPORT

A. OLIS Updates

1. Federal Budget

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) was funded with the recent passage of the partial federal budget. OLIS was informed of its allotment of Library Service and Technology Act (LSTA) funds for federal fiscal year 2026; the allotment may be expended through September 2027. OLIS will utilize the 2026 award in state fiscal year 2027. IMLS staffing is substantially reduced, from approximately 85 staff to around 35 through layoffs, retirements, and resignations.

2. Library Advocacy Events

Ms. Mellor, Ms. Space, and Ed Garcia, Director, Cranston Public Library, will be in Washington on March 4-5 to attend the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA) Voices for Libraries event; Ms. Mellor is the event Co-Chair. While in Washington, they will meet with RI congressional delegation members and discuss federal support for libraries and library legislation. The American Library Association (ALA) will hold a similar advocacy event at the end of February.

B. Grant Programs

1. Learn365RI Grants

OLIS has been working with the Pandemic Recovery Office (PRO) to facilitate distribution of Learn365RI grants to municipalities for the benefit of libraries. Learn365RI is an initiative of the Governor to create community learning centers that support workforce development, health, and education. While approximately half of the state's municipalities have already received such grants and are therefore ineligible for this phase of the program, the PRO sought OLIS' assistance to distribute the remaining funds to libraries for capital improvements that support the objectives of the program. The grants are funded through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and must be expended by October 2026; application to the program must be made by the municipality, though some municipalities are designating this work to the library as a municipal agency. Mr. Coutu noted that completing grant applications is time-consuming because libraries with multiple facilities must submit individual applications for each process.

2. Library of RI (LORI) Grants

OLIS is designating up to \$160,000 for competitive LORI grants, including mini grants for small library projects and larger project grants. Public, academic, school, and special libraries are eligible to apply. The grants will be awarded for projects focused on community connection, digitization (with a priority on supporting contributions to D-LORI), collections that reflect communities, and other projects that serve the objectives of OLIS' strategic plan. The grant announcement will be posted February 13, applications are due by March 9, and an information session is scheduled for February 23. The goal is for grants to be awarded by April 1, so libraries have 5 months to complete projects.

Ms. Mellor requested LORI grant reviewers, noting that applications will be reviewed through the grant management system (GMS) and work can be completed remotely. Ms. Space and Mr. Bucci volunteered to review grant applications.

3. Summer Reading Program (SRP) and Pilot Program Grants

Grants to support summer reading program activities will be available in the same format as in prior years. This year's theme is 'Plant A Seed, Read'. OLIS is also offering a pilot program for up to 10 libraries in lieu of the traditional program. For the pilot program, OLIS will contract Ocean State Media and the Providence Children's Museum to each develop two intergenerational programs. Participating libraries will receive four complete

programs, two led by external providers contracted by OLIS and two kits for programs to be led by library staff, with training provided to enable staff to deliver these programs.

The goal of the pilot program is to provide high quality SRP programming for libraries and eliminate the need for libraries to develop their own programming and apply for small grants to support that programming. Pilot program libraries may apply for both grants but will be awarded only one. The pilot program will be announced before the opening of the SRP grant process, and both programs will each be federally funded with approximately \$30,000.

The OLIS SRP is supported through a partnership with the collaborative iRead program developed by the Illinois Library Association; iRead provides the SRP theme and materials. Last year, a very successful SRP scavenger hunt was spearheaded by the West Warwick Public Library and involved approximately one dozen libraries. OLIS is sponsoring the scavenger hunt this year, opening it up to public libraries statewide.

Ms. David inquired if local celebrities could be encouraged to partner with and promote the SRP. Massachusetts promotes summer reading with the Bruins hockey team. Ms. Space is investigating a potential SRP promoter and Ms. Mellor welcomes promotional ideas. Public libraries are currently promoting the Winter Reading Challenge that Mr. Coutu said could be held annually. The program's goal is to encourage daily reading. OLIS provides staff time and a reading tracker for the program.

C. 2025 Year in Review: State Program Report

Ms. Mellor reported findings from the State Program Report submitted January 28 to the Institute of Museum and Library Services for the expenditure of Library Service and Technology Act (LSTA) funds. The report covers the period of October 2024 to September 2025. LSTA funds for the period were \$1,413,623, \$4,068 less than the prior year, and \$1,877,482 state funds, \$21,073 more than the prior year.

Grant-in-aid (GIA) was funded at 25% in 2025. There was a slight increase in funding for the Statewide Reference Resource Center and institutional libraries. Construction reimbursement is tied to how much libraries receive for reimbursement of completed construction projects, and was about \$300,000 more than the prior year, due to the addition of reimbursement for the Jamestown and Narragansett projects.

Reporting categories are based on OLIS' 2023-2027 strategic plan. No expenditures were made on Community Outreach & Engagement or Community Connectors as these program activities are largely driven by OLIS' discretionary grant programs; OLIS did not offer LORI grants in 2025 due to uncertainty around federal funding. OLIS expenditures reflect 13 full-time employees; personnel costs for program activities were reviewed.

OLIS' largest expenditures are interlibrary delivery services and library development which includes general support for youth and adult services, library consultant services, the grant-in-aid program, and data and statistics. The Talking Books Library (TBL), program administration, and reading programs are other major expenditure areas. Ms. Mellor detailed the distribution of federal and state funds for each of the expenditure categories.

OLIS staff spent the most amount of time working on library development followed by LORI, TBL, and digitization and preservation, largely driven by the work leading up to the launch of the Digital Library of RI (D-LORI). The non-LSTA category grew substantially over previous years (to 5.4%) as some staff were involved in supporting the state's new enterprise resource planning (ERP) system launched in 2025; the system brings financial, purchasing, and personnel systems into a single system. Emily Goodman was a system trainer, and Ms. Baffoni was a change ambassador, aiding other agencies in adoption of the system. Construction support and Ms. Mellor's Enterprise Technology Strategy & Services (ETSS) support time are also included in the non-LSTA expenditure category.

2025 highlights include the continuing education program with 39 programs, nearly 700 staff trained. While staff program training decreased, online and asynchronous training showed a large increase, with 481 users attending nearly 1,400 sessions from about 170 courses, including conflict management and trustee programs. The courses are offered through OLIS' online training center that includes OLIS-created, paid and sponsored programs from providers such as Library Journal and WebJunction. Other highlights include Summer Reading Program in-person program attendance, which increased from 48,000 to 78,000 from 2024. The TBL circulation increased substantially because multiple books are now included on a single digital cartridge. The D-LORI platform, with an anticipated full release in May 2026, also accounts for a substantial investment in time with the prototype released last fall. OLIS worked with Middletown and Foster on construction projects.

D. Public Library Minimum Standards, Staffing Requirement

Ms. Mellor met with the Pontiac Free Library today about the Public Library Minimum Standards staffing requirement. Their concern is that the requirement is not attainable and could result in the library's closure. Ms. Mellor recommends discussing staff minimum requirement options at the next board meeting to address this issue affecting small libraries.

V. COMMITTEE REPORTS

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

A. State Legislation

The School Libraries Act (H7417 and S2018) requires school staffing on a rolling 3-year cycle. Ms. Steever is in a small working group investigating the staffing of school libraries. Many positions no longer exist or have been repurposed into other positions. The requirement for a school librarian was formerly defined in the RI Basic Education Program (BEP) but was removed.

S2435 and H2485 are parents' rights bills and passage currently seem unlikely. The eBooks bill is moving ahead at the state level with language modeled after the Connecticut eBook bill passed in 2025.

B. Federal Legislation

Federal legislation was not discussed.

VI. BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

A. Ms. Kohl

Bryant University's annual Women's Summit will be held March 19, 2026. The keynote speaker is Elin Hilderbrand.

B. Ms. Steever

Ms. Steever attended a library advocacy event in Salt Lake City where Utah's library challenges and book bans were discussed. Ms. Steever gave RI library advocacy contact information to event attendees.

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. School Library Support

MS. Mellor will meet with RI Library Information Network for Kids (RILINK) representatives tomorrow to discuss the school library catalog and RILINK's future.

Ms. Space, Mr. Coutu, and Ms. Steever will serve on the school library subcommittee. The inclusion of Ocean State Libraries (OSL) will first require a conversation with the OSL Executive Committee.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

No new business.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

X. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next LBRI meeting is scheduled for March 16, 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: Mr. Bucci

Seconded By: Ms. Page

The meeting adjourned at 5:21 pm.