Advancing Diversity in Public Libraries
American Library Association Emerging Leaders - Group A (Antonio Apadoca, Christina Fuller-Gregory, Brian Hulsey, Petra Pendroff, and Bethany Wilson)

Summary
In 2016, the ALA Task Force on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion released a list of 58 recommendations to build more equity, diversity, and inclusion among ALA members, the field of librarianship, and our communities. Upon reading the report and examining current trends in public library staffing, The Public Library Association (PLA) determined a need for more information related to issues such as diversity among public library staff and related issues such as promotion and advancement. PLA identified entry into the profession, diversity of library staff at all levels, and advancement for individuals once they are working in the library as critical issues to be addressed. PLA tasked a team of five 2017 ALA Emerging Leaders with identifying public libraries with unique and forward thinking diversity initiatives related to recruitment, hiring, promotion, professional development, and other areas. Through conversations with libraries leading the way to a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive public library workplace, the team was able to identify several best practices for utilization in libraries wishing to make positive change in the areas of equitable treatment, inclusion, and respect for diversity.

Information Collection Process
The team began the data gathering process through the development and dissemination of a survey soliciting information about public libraries across the nation with developed initiatives in the areas of equity, diversity, and inclusion. The survey was released through several channels to include the ALA Emerging Leaders Class of 2017 and the PLA member newsletter. Group members also sent out personal emails to each of the fifty state library association presidents urging them to solicit their membership for nominations.

Based on the responses received from the survey the team identified thirty-one libraries they wished to interview about best practices in the areas of equity, diversity, and inclusion in staffing. Each team member was assigned libraries to interview, and requests for interviews were made. Of the thirty-one libraries identified, the team was able to schedule and interview staff from ten of them. The following library systems provided input:

1. Boerne-Patrick Heath Public Library (small/rural)
2. Bolivar County Library System (small/rural)
3. Camarena Memorial Library (small/rural)
4. Cuyahoga County Public Library (large/urban)
5. King County Library System (large/urban)
6. Pima County Public Library (large/urban)
7. Richland Library (large/urban)
8. Seattle Public Library (large/urban)
9. William F. Laman Public Library (small/rural)
10. Washington Parish Library (small/rural)

The libraries interviewed reflected a cross-section of library size, ranging from large/urban libraries to small/rural libraries. Regionally, the team was able to interview staff in libraries located in the Midwest, Pacific Northwest, South, and Southwest.

After conducting qualitative interviews with library directors and expert staff, the information gathered was evaluated for commonalities in approach when addressing EDI in staffing and
then synthesized into a set of best practices. Based on the outcome of the interviews, the team was able to synthesize findings into three categories: No Formal Initiatives, Formal Initiatives, and Informal or Grassroots Initiatives.

**No Formal Initiatives**

Three systems stated that they have “no formal initiatives” concerning the development of equity, diversity, and inclusion in staffing. However, those systems with no formal EDI initiative put forward an inclusion-based philosophy in which the community was reflected in its staff in terms of race/ethnic and economic demographics. The intent is to reinforce a workplace culture that actively engages with EDI principles and best practices. This philosophy also focuses on continuing education and ongoing professional development with the goal of empowering and supporting library staff to be effective decision-makers and agents of change for their local teams.

Al Barron, the Library Director for Washington Parish Library in rural Louisiana, mentioned that they had no formal system in place for developing EDI in staffing. As the conversation continued, common themes emerged indicating that while EDI needs were not formally addressed, they were making staffing choices based on community need and a desire to have a staff that reflects the diversity within their community. According to Barron, conversations with diverse populations in the community was the first step in identifying individuals who could be potential candidates for employment. He also inferred that these new hires could act as library ambassadors within their community, potentially attracting more diverse candidates. When dealing with restrictive hiring processes, the staff at the William F. Laman Public Library in Arkansas recommends keeping equity, diversity, and inclusion in mind when screening candidates as much as possible. As a system, they implemented hiring procedures to guide managers when reviewing applicants. This is not necessarily information gathered from a resume, but rather, information the applicant shares about themselves in cover letters. When going through the steps of the hiring process, they make a concerted effort to consider all of the information they can gather about the individual.

Fortunately, there is quite a bit of crossover between library systems in North Little Rock, so additional information about a candidate can travel through word of mouth or a shared acquaintance. Often, someone at the library knows someone who knows the applicant, which helps them get a sense of who the person is, what their personality is and how they handle situations.

Richland Library in South Carolina is a large, urban library with 12 locations. Like William F. Laman Public Library, Richland Library has also developed intentional hiring processes at the Human Resources level. While no formalized EDI initiatives are in place, they have taken steps to ensure that their staff is reflective of the community and customers that they serve. One of their initiatives includes the awarding of the Ethel Bolden Minority Scholarship, an annual scholarship that is awarded to a minority student matriculating through the Library and Information Science program at the University of South Carolina. This scholarship has facilitated opportunities for Richland Library to recruit and hire minority librarians.

**Formal Initiatives**

Cuyahoga County Public, a large/urban library in Ohio has developed a strategic plan for the implementation of EDI practices in staffing and has created a “talent manager” position to act as a liaison between the county human resources department and the library human resources
department. The goal of this initiative it to make the library system a workplace of choice for the community. The EDI strategic plan includes milestones and objectives concerning recruitment and metrics based on Equal Employment Opportunity Commission EEO-4 surveys. The plan outlines an intensive training campaign for hiring managers concerning recruitment, an internal audit of EDI in the library workplace, community engagement and educational outreach with local colleges and universities, as well as a mentoring program for young professionals. The training campaign focuses on the business case for diversity, diversity trends and awareness, managing a diverse workforce, and world-class, customer service to diverse populations.

The Seattle Public Library's "Our Way" Program was developed as a means to meet newly published organizational values requiring everyone to recognize, support, and value cultural differences. Clotia Robinson described the challenge like this, "Each culture has a different set of values, how do you navigate that and how do you tie that in with personal and organizational and customer values? What happens in that space where we all meet? What are best practices when we run into conflicts?" The program provides a forum for library employees to share information about their culture and perspectives when all are challenged with meeting a common goal or developing a new service for the community.

In addition to the "Our Way" Program, all Seattle Public Library employees are required to take Race and Social Justice (RSJ) Training through the City of Seattle. Some of the library staff has even become RSJ trainers prepared to give presentations on topics such as "Mitigating Implicit Bias" and "Interrupting Institutional Racism." The city also provides a racial equity toolkit that organizations can apply to new policies and procedures to see if they are perpetuating institutional racism.

Pima County Public Library (PCPL) has also recently rolled out mandatory Bias Awareness Training for all staff members that closely mirrors what is provided in the City of Seattle. PCPL Library Director, Amber Mathewson had this to say about the training, "The thing that's so interesting is you just don't know your own bias until you actually stop to think about it. We're all intelligent people, and we feel like we don't have bias, and yet there's still that piece of just looking at what are the assumptions you have in your mind about anybody the first time you see them." In addition to the Bias Awareness Training, PCPL is in the process of developing staff training that will improve access to services for persons with limited English proficiency. The training will teach ways in which languages are the same and provide tools, techniques, and attitudes that will help any person in a customer care situation respond in a productive manner even if they do not fully understand the language presented.

The Nuestras Raíces Committee (formerly known as Spanish Services) at the Pima County Public Library has made some excellent strides in developing ways to bring EDI into staffing. They provide programs and services reflective of the communities Latino population and have worked to improve hiring processes by including questions that reflect the needs of a particularly diverse community. They have also organized special recruitment events to help increase the diversity of the candidate pool at PCPL.

While all of these programs do not guarantee a more diverse candidate pool, the groundwork has been established, and there is a clear path to follow for those wishing to encourage diverse applicants. From the Our Way Program to the work of the Nuestras Raíces team, EDI initiatives are visible. The direct or even indirect training of current staff ensures that EDI needs are recognized and considered when future hiring committees are formed.
Informal or Grassroots Initiatives

Most prevalent among the libraries interviewed for this project were informal or grassroots initiatives developed by library staff who were in direct contact with the community. While many of these initiatives began as a means to meet a community need or to reach out to a previously untapped community group, the strong, supportive relationships created through these interactions resulted in a more diverse applicant pool. Once a person was comfortable, welcomed, and appreciated for their differences within the library, they felt encouraged to seek out employment. While EDI in staffing was not the goal when these initiatives were started, they did result in a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive staff environment.

Wayne Wheeler has been part of the LGBTQ Committee at the Pima County Public Library for several years. During that time, the committee has created in-roads into the thriving LGBTQ community in Tucson. Wheeler explained that most of the initiatives that the LGBTQ Committee championed were identified through meaningful conversations with members of the community. Through these interactions, relationships were formed, and the comfort level of the community with the library grew. Wheeler said he believes the LGBTQ community learns about what the library offers through friends or social gatherings. PCPL's reputation as a supportive organization welcoming of all communities has grown, and because of that, the pool of LGBTQ applicants has increased.

Pima County Public Library's "Welcome to America Committee" has not only provided programs and services for the diverse immigrant populations prevalent in Tucson, Arizona but has also helped staff by providing useful tools to assist with members of the community who speak different languages. These tools include multi-language videos describing library services for new patrons, telephonic translation for customer care, and written translation services for printed program materials. In addition, the committee helped to recruit program instructors with specific language skills to meet the needs of the increasingly diverse immigrant populations.

While many of Seattle Public Library's (SPL) initiatives seem intentionally aimed at developing equity, diversity, and inclusion in staffing, Clotila Robinson, Human Resources Business Partner responsible for recruitment and training within the Seattle Public Library explained that most initiatives were not begun in an effort to develop EDI at all. For instance, the Mentorship Program, which has had an extremely positive impact on bringing equity, diversity, and inclusion to staff at SPL, was begun by a student at the University of Washington who was interested in piloting the program for a class project. Once the program was embedded in organizational culture, it quickly became a vehicle for ensuring equity in staff development and advancement.

Seattle Public Libraries’ Student Assistance Program also provides an example of a program that has evolved into a gateway for EDI in staffing. The Student Assistance Program was initially developed as a way for low-income students to assist with family finances while gaining valuable experience in the workplace. The outcome of the program was the integration of diverse employees into the Seattle Public Library system. For some, this introduction to libraries led to further education in library services and employment. To support this development SPL has developed grants and scholarships to foster further development for these employees.

Best Practices

While each of these libraries approaches the need for EDI in different ways, there have been very similar thought processes associated with the creation of their EDI-related best practices.

1. Let Change Be Organic
A healthy organization will progress naturally and find its own sustainability along the way. Some organizations may adapt faster than others, but when it comes to changing workplace culture, progress can be slow, and that should be expected. According to Clotia Robinson, the process for embedding a practice into organizational culture can take several years and requires a supportive administration and perseverance on the part of the group leading the change. In order for an initiative to become a vital part of the organizational culture, it must be embraced from the top down with all stakeholders considering its importance when making decisions. Policies, mandates, or any new initiatives run the risk of burnout without supportive and consistent visioning and leadership. Clotia Robinson gave clear examples of this when she spoke about the development and embedding of the Seattle Public Library’s Mentorship Program into organizational culture. “You have to tweak along the way until you find the right structure and flexibility that works with the organization. Don’t let people change the intent or the focus blurs and support wanes. Keep the integrity of the program pure.”

2. Look Inward
Hold an internal audit of your current staff demographics as compared to the community served. Find your strengths and weaknesses as an organization and take action accordingly, whether that is improving staff training or revising hiring standards. Together, normalize and celebrate the power of an inclusive library team. Highlight the value of life experiences and invisible diversity, the diversity we usually do not see when interacting with others, by asking staff to create personal narratives along with their performance goals. Crystal Gates suggests that managers, “Take the time to speak with your staff and find out who they are. Recognize that they are individuals and not just a number.”

3. Look Outward
Don’t reinvent the wheel. Seek guidance from your professional networks because some of the difficult groundwork might already be laid. An external perspective will help administrators learn to contextualize the process of change. It will also help staff find common ground with tough topics. There are also existing professional development resources ready to shape your business case for EDI in the workplace.

4. Break Down Barriers
Evaluate your current hiring policies. Could your requirement for a Bachelor's Degree be rewritten to include words like ‘or applicable experience’? Removing hiring barriers can be a way of encouraging interested applicants to apply.

5. Start A Conversation
Much of what was gleaned about current EDI initiatives to develop staffing was begun with a conversation. Perhaps that conversation took place at the service desk between a library worker and a community member. Perhaps it happened during an outreach event. The underlying commonality is that a need was identified and a staff member took the initiative to try and meet that need. Maybe a team was developed to address a gap in service or a staff member began attending community events and striking up conversations with attendees. Regardless of how it happened, library staff made connections in the community that resulted in candid conversations about what the library could bring to that particular community group. Trust and friendship developed, and as a result, people within that previously under-served community felt empowered to seek opportunities at the library.

While some of the initiatives discussed were begun simply as a means to make community connections, they often unintentionally doubled as a recruitment tool. Encourage staff outreach
to underserved populations. If a staff member has an interest in developing a relationship with a new community group, give them the time and tools necessary to develop that relationship. Forging those relationships, telling people about the library mission and vision and having meaningful conversations can result in the development of trust and feelings of support that encourage someone to seek a career with the library.

Conclusion
The development of EDI-related initiatives and strategies is a continuous process that must be endeavored with both passion and purpose. Kimberly Moss, Talent Manager for the Cuyahoga County Public Library, demonstrates the importance of developing EDI-related initiatives when discussing their role in the community. According to Kimberly, EDI is important because our libraries are reflections of our community and our internal community should reflect our external community. She also believes that the library is a place where everyday people feel like they belong because they are genuinely respected in our conversations.

While the libraries we’ve interviewed have made substantial strides in the development of EDI-related strategies, our team recognizes that there is even more information to gather, conversations to begin, and initiatives to develop. Richard Brown, Personnel Administrator at Richland Library, raises a few questions to help start those conversations. He explains that libraries should always be aware of who is using the library, but, just as important, should take note of who is not using the library. If they are not using the library, why not? What can we do to change that? Much of the change begins with building and cultivating a staff that is reflective of the community.

Since there is still much work to be done in this area, our team recommends continuing the research through a project for the 2018 class of Emerging Leaders. We also invite you to add your voice to the conversation about Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at https://alaplaedi.wordpress.com