Equity of Access

"Libraries in America are cornerstones of the communities they serve. Free access to the books, ideas, resources and information in America's libraries is imperative for education, employment, enjoyment and self-government."
Libraries: An American Value,
American Library Association, 1999.

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Equity of Access is one of five key action areas adopted by the American Library Association to fulfill its mission of providing the highest quality library and information services for all people. Achieving equity is an overarching goal that touches on all of the association's key action areas. This brochure highlights ALA's activities and invites your support.

ALA Key Action Areas
Diversity
Education and Continuous Learning
Equity of Access
Intellectual Freedom
21st Century Literacy

Why **Equity**

"Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives."
President James Madison

There is no such thing as a free society without free and equal access to information.

Equity of access means that all people have the information they need—regardless of age, education, ethnicity, language, income, physical limitations or geographic barriers. It means they are able to obtain information in a variety of formats—electronic, as well as print. It also means they are free to exercise their right to know without fear of censorship or reprisal.

Achieving equity is more challenging than ever in the 21st century. The revolution in information technology, rising immigration and increased competition for tax dollars are among developments that raise critical issues.

While Internet use is now commonplace, we have not yet bridged the digital divide. The latest statistics show that African-Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans and older adults are least likely to use the Internet, as are people with incomes under $25,000 and those who live in rural areas. The barrier is not only access to computers. Many people lack the basic literacy and computer skills needed to navigate the Web.

The 2000 Census reports that 18 percent of the U.S. population speaks a language other than English in the home; 19 percent have a disability of some type; and 12 percent live below the poverty level. About 21 percent of the population cannot read a food label or a story to their child, according to the National Institute for Literacy. For many people, lack of awareness about available opportunities is an obstacle itself.

Across the nation, libraries of all types—public, school and academic—struggle to provide needed resources in the wake of tax cuts. The federal government, which authorized Universal Service funds to help schools and public libraries connect to the Internet, now requires that they use filters in order to receive those funds.

As a society, we are challenged on many fronts to provide the free and equitable access to information that sustains a democracy.

Why**Libraries**

"At a time when our public is challenged on multiple fronts, we need to recommit ourselves to the ideal of providing equal access to everyone, anywhere, anytime and in any format...By finally embracing equity of access we will be affirming our core values, recognizing realities and assuring our future."
Carla D. Hayden, ALA President, 2003–2004

In a world full of economic and educational barriers, America's libraries have a unique role and responsibility. They are places where people of all ages and backgrounds come to learn, enjoy and better their lives. No charge. No questions asked.

In promoting equity for the people they serve, librarians face many challenges. Chief among these are:

Securing the funding needed to serve increasingly diverse and complex information needs.

Protecting the rights of library users to receive information without restricting access or violating privacy.

Recruiting and retaining a workforce that reflects the diversity of the people they serve.

Ensuring physical, social and economic access to library buildings, technologies and collections.

Underscoring the value of the library as a vital community resource.

As a profession, librarians share a commitment to equity of access. They have a long tradition of providing books and information to people who are geographically, physically or culturally isolated—in the earliest days, by foot and horseback.

Today, librarians use the Internet and other new technologies to make their services accessible to all. In public, school and academic libraries, they work to:

Design collections and services for people of multicultural backgrounds and language abilities.

Provide resources and technologies to make information accessible to people of varying physical and cognitive abilities.

Promote literacy with preschool story hours, summer reading programs for older children and special programs for adult learners.

Teach essential technology and information literacy skills.

Connect people in geographically remote and low income areas with the resources and training they need for their education, employment and enrichment.

Provide programs that promote understanding of our nation's diverse people and heritage.

Libraries have historically served as our nation's great equalizers of knowledge. In today's increasingly diverse and complex information environment, their services are needed more than ever.

Why**ALA**

"The Association advocates funding and policies that support libraries as great democratic institutions, serving people of every age, income level, location or ethnicity, and providing the full range of information resources needed to live, learn, govern and work."
ALAction 2005

Widely recognized as "The Voice of America's Libraries," the American Library Association is a leader in advocating equity of access.

The association's work focuses on three areas: advocating public and institutional policies that promote the highest quality library service and information access for all; providing leadership and continuing education for the profession; and promoting and recognizing excellence in the field.

ALA's efforts are supported by its membership divisions and units with awards, publications, programming and other activities that advance the profession's ability to serve people of diverse needs and interests.

Advocating equity

Founded in 1876, the association's early efforts focused on outreach to children, immigrants, rural communities, prison populations and people with visual disabilities. These efforts stemmed from the belief that the informed populace essential for democracy to succeed must have access to information.

In the 20th century, the association expanded its focus to include minorities, the poor and others discriminated against because of sexual orientation, age, language and social class. It also recognized that inequities of access often resulted from inequities in tax support and began seeking solutions.

The association established a Washington Office in 1945 to represent the interests of libraries and their users to national policy-makers. Major achievements include:

Passage of the Library Services Act (LSA) of 1956, landmark legislation that provided funding for library services to underserved areas.

The Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) of 1964, which funded services to people with disabilities, the elderly, home bound, poor and others with special needs.

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Passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Title I in 1965, which provided categorical funding for books and equipment in school libraries.

The Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) of 1996, which focused on expanding public access through technology and special services.

Funding for school library resources, authorized as part of the Reading First and Early Reading First Initiative in the "No Child Left Behind" educational reform legislation in 2001.

In addition to federal funding, the Washington Office monitors and advocates legislation and policies related to telecommunications and postal rates, copyright, access to government information and other issues related to libraries and information access.

Recognizing the revolutionary impact of new technology, ALA established an Office for Information Technology Policy (OITP) in 1995 to help the association and its members address issues related to electronic access to information and the impact on a free and open information society. Major areas of interest include equity of access, e-books and confidentiality policies and procedures.

The office maintains an Information Commons (http://www.info-commons.org) with commentary on issues that relate to libraries and information policy. It also provides online tutorials on topics such as accessibility for people with disabilities, privacy and copyright.

Providing leadership

First established as the Office for Library Service to the Disadvantaged (OLSD) in 1970, ALA's Office for Literacy and Outreach Services provides resources and assistance to support libraries and librarians in reaching out to traditionally underserved populations.

Its activities include the Diversity Fair held at the ALA Annual Conference to showcase best practices in serving people with physical or mental disabilities, the rural and urban poor, and others who face barriers. The office also offers extensive online resources.

The office's focus on adult literacy expanded significantly during the "Literacy in Libraries Across America" project funded by the Wallace Funds. The initiative helped library-literacy programs improve services for adult learners. Through www.BuildLiteracy.org, funded by Verizon, OLOS provides resources for libraries, literacy programs, and communities.

The office also serves as liaison to ALA's Social Responsiblities Round Table, the Gay, Lesiban, Bisexual and Transgendered Round Table, and the Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table. It also works with affiliate groups, including the the American Indian Library Association (AILA), Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA), Black Caucus of the ALA (BCALA), Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA) and REFORMA — the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking.

ALA's Office for Diversity focuses on recruitment and retention of a diverse work force, intercultural communication, leadership, advocacy, skill building and other issues that relate to the profession, workplace and the quality of service delivery.

The office provides counsel, training, grants and other resources to assist librarians in dealing with issues of diversity. Diversity Leadership Institutes provide hands-on techniques and resources to assist in developing diversity and diversity initiatives.

The Office for Diversity also publishes *Versed,* a bulletin to promote awareness of best practices in library-based diversity work.

ALA's Public Programs Office provides grants, resources and training to help libraries present book discussions, film series, traveling exhibitions and other cultural programs on topics ranging from Jewish literature to the African-American migration experience to the legacy of Queen Elizabeth I.

Promoting excellence

ALA and its member units provide wide-ranging opportunities for members to expand their knowledge and skills in dealing with equity issues via conferences, institutes, workshops and online tutorials.

ALA Editions, the association's publishing arm, provides titles on all aspects of equity from adaptive technologies to information literacy, to multicultural outreach and electronic access.

The Spectrum Initiative, administered by the Office for Diversity, provides $5,000 scholarships for students of color to attend graduate programs in library and information studies. The goal is to improve library service at the local level through development of a workforce that reflects the communities served. As part of the scholarship award, Spectrum Scholars receive mentoring and participate in a three-day leadership institute.

The association offers numerous other awards to reward and recognize excellence. These include the Excellence in Small and/or Rural Public Library Service Award and the Diversity Research Grant.

For information about these and other opportunities, see ALA Awards under *Resources.*

Looking Ahead

Libraries matter more than ever. In our communities, schools, colleges and universities, libraries preserve our past, inform our present and inspire the future. They provide people of all ages and backgrounds with the information they need to live, learn, work and govern in a democratic society.

Monitoring issues of equity and ensuring that libraries extend their resources and services to all people is an ongoing challenge. ALA will assess these issues and address new developments in the 2005-2010 ALA Strategic Plan titled *ALAhead to 2010.*

What **You** Can Do

Use this checklist as guide for assessing how your library is addressing equity and setting goals for improvement.

Our library. . .

Planning/Budget

☐ Has current demographics about our community/school/campus, including age, ethnicity, income and physical abilities.

☐ Has a strategic plan that addresses service for multicultural users and how to market those services to diverse groups.

☐ Has customer service and other policies that express its commitment to providing service and collections that are multicultural in all aspects— racial, linguistic, religious, gender, disability, political, geographic, age and socioeconomic.

☐ Has policies that protect the confidentiality of online users and their ability to obtain needed information.

☐ Allocates sufficient funds to serve all who could benefit from its services and plans for continual assessment and expansion of services.

Marketing/Outreach

☐ Incorporates multicultural outreach into established and emerging library services (e.g., instruction, reference, collection development, programming and digital library initiatives).

☐ Publishes an easy-to-use directory of public and private agencies, organizations and institutions that serve people with special needs and advocate on their behalf.

☐ Works in partnership with other agencies and organizations to develop and promote library resources to diverse groups such as seniors, English Language Learners and people with disabilities.

☐ Provides facilities and resources to groups that are addressing local equity issues such as racial equality, rights of persons with disabilities, pay equity and ending hunger in the community.

☐ Has established channels, such as an advisory committee, for collecting input and feedback from diverse groups.

☐ Assigns responsibility for outreach to people with special needs to specific staff members.

- [ ] Collaborates with teachers/faculty to develop projects and curricula that position the library as central to teaching and learning about diversity in all forms.
- [ ] Uses multicultural displays, programming and outreach to promote librarianship as a career.
- [ ] Reaches out to diverse groups by providing speakers and articles for newsletters about information literacy and library resources available to their members.
- [ ] Invites parents, religious leaders and representatives of diverse cultural groups to speak, perform or share their heritage.

Facilities/Equipment

- [ ] Is a welcoming place for all members of our community with signage and décor that reflects the multicultural makeup of our community.
- [ ] Has adequate computer terminals, high speed connections and other technology.
- [ ] Has adequate access and traffic patterns for wheel chairs and strollers.
- [ ] Has a Web page that is friendly to users of various physical and mental abilities. (You can gauge its accessibility at http://bobby.watchfire.com/bobby/html/en/index.jsp)
- [ ] Provides assistive and adaptive software and equipment and adds improvements as available.

Staff Development

- [ ] Has staff who are sensitive to cultural differences and skilled at communicating with library visitors in their native language.
- [ ] Educates staff in how best to serve people with deafness, blindness, mental illness, learning or other disabilities.
- [ ] Provides safe areas for internal and external assessment of library services and programs.
- [ ] Recruits, retains and develops a skilled and diverse workforce through professional development opportunities and continued learning.
- [ ] Recognizes and rewards staff efforts to provide exemplary service to diverse user groups.

Services

☐ Provides resources and serves as a referral source for adult learners and their families.

☐ Has collections and programming that promote understanding of people of varying abilities and cultures.

☐ Offers training for students, parents, seniors, faculty and others to help them develop technology/information literacy skills.

☐ Provides resource lists for children, teens and adults that educate about tolerance, equity, and the history and culture of all local populations.

Advocacy

☐ Maintains regular (not just at budget time) contact with key administrators, community leaders and funders to let them know about your library's services, successes and needs.

☐ Supports and prepares trustees, school board members, Friends and users in speaking out for funding, policies and legislation that protect public access to information at school, public and college and university libraries.

☐ Works to educate the public and policy makers about equity issues and the library's role.

☐ Promotes community dialog on ideas and issues related to equity by sponsoring bookclubs and other forums for discussion.

The above are some of the areas that your library should be addressing. For more ideas, see *Resources.*

A Sampling of ALA Resources

ALA and its divisions provide many tools and resources to use in promoting equity for your library and users. For more resources and information, see the ALA Web site at www.ala.org.

Adult Literacy @ your library
www.ala.org/olos
Click on Adult Literacy. A wealth of up-to-date resources, materials and information related to literacy at ALA, literacy in libraries and literacy in communities, real and virtual. Sections include Collection Development, Curriculum and Instruction, Technology, Assessment and Virtual Literacy.

Advocating for Better Pay and Equity in Librarians' Salaries Toolkit
www.ala.org/hrdr
Click on Library Employment Resources. The toolkit includes messages, strategies and success stories for achieving equity in the library.

ALA Awards & Scholarships
www.ala.org
Click on Awards & Scholarships for more than 100 awards and scholarships sponsored by ALA and its divisions, many of them recognizing excellence in service to diverse populations, advancing literacy and promoting public access to information.

ALA Editions
www.alastore.ala.org
Professional books dealing with all aspects of access to information, including service to people with disabilities, people of multicultural backgrounds, rural and underserved populations. Order online at the ALA Online Store or request a free catalog.

ALA Graphics
www.alastore.ala.org
Click on Diversity Images. Bill Gates, Yo-Yo Ma and Stephen Hawking are among those who appear on posters promoting literacy. Other promotional items feature Women's History Day, El día de los niños/El día de los libros (Children's Day/Book Day), Native American heritage and a rainbow of other peoples and cultures. Order online or request a free catalog.

ALAWON
A free, irregular e-mail publication of the ALA Washington Office that provides legislative alerts and current information about public access and related issues and legislation affecting libraries. To subscribe, send an email message to listproc@ala1.ala.org. Leave the subject blank. In the body of the message, type: subscribe ala-wo <YourFirstName and LastName>

www. BuildLiteracy.org
This interactive site provides answers to Frequently Asked Questions about libraries, adult literacy and partnerships, and a special section on building literacy @ your library. The project is funded by Verizon and administered through the Office for Literacy and Outreach Services (OLOS).

Campaign for America's Libraries
www.ala.org/@yourlibrary
Sample press materials, downloadable art, strategies and tools for marketing library services to diverse groups on campus, in schools, communities and other settings.

Every Child Ready to Read @your Library®
www.ala.org/pla
Sample workshop materials for parents and caregivers to help initiate new early literacy services or enhance existing ones. A joint project of the Public Library Association (PLA) and the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), the workshops incorporate the latest research on early literacy and brain development.

From Outreach to Equity: Innovative Models of Library Policy and Practice.
Office for Literacy and Outreach Services, Robin Osborne, editor, ALA Editions, 2004. A comprehensive and practical look at state-of-the-art library outreach services.

Guidelines for the Introduction of Electronic Information Resources to Users
www.ala.org/rusa
Click on Professional Tools for these guidelines to assist information services librarians in providing and publicizing new electronic information resources to users and potential users.

Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning
Published by the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) in 1998, this book includes the Information Literacy Standards for Student Learning, guidelines and principles to create a dynamic, student-centered program. Order from the ALA Online Store at alastore.ala.org or call 866-SHOP ALA (866-746-7252).

Information Technology Access Assessment Checklist
www.ala.org/lita
Click on Committees. A non-prescriptive checklist covering privacy and security, accessibility, price, databases, standardization, work environment and other concerns related to use of information technology. Compiled by the Technology and Access Committee of the Library and Information Technology Association (LITA).

Information Technology and Libraries
www.ala.org/lita
Click on Publications. A refereed journal published quarterly by the Library and Information Technology Association with content related to all aspects of libraries and information technology, including digital libraries, computer security and intellectual property rights.

Intellectual Freedom Toolkits
www.ala.org/oif
Guidance on a variety of issues from the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom, including "Libraries & the Internet", "Privatization" and "Developing a Library Privacy Policy."

Legislative Scorecard
www.ala.org/ala/washoff
Click on Publications. The Legislative Scorecard is published annually by the American Library Association's Washington Office as a tool to gauge elected officials' support of, or opposition to, library-related legislation.

Learning through the Library Best Practices Archive
www.ala.org/aasl
A collection of successful K-12 teaching-learning practices that reflect the Information Literacy Standards for Student Learning. Compiled by the American Association of School Librarians (AASL).

Library Outreach to Underserved Populations
www.ala.org/olos
Click on Outreach Resources. Timely and helpful resources on topics such as multicultural outreach in academic libraries, services to people with disabilities, services for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people, services to older adults, people of color and others from the ALA Office for Literacy and Outreach Services (OLOS).

Library Services for People with Disabilities Policy
www.ala.org/ascla
Click on Issues. This ALA policy adopted in 2001 includes recommendations for libraries in five key areas: services, facilities, collections, assistive technology and employment.

Librarians' Associations of Color
www.ala.org/olos
A list of associations that represent or target their resources to support traditionally underserved populations in library communities. The ALA Office for Literacy and Outreach Services is the staff liaison.

Libraries: An American Value
www.ala.org/oif
Click on Statements and Policies. Adopted by the ALA Council in 1999, this statement affirms the role of libraries in providing free access to the books, ideas, resources and information.

Libraries in the Digital Age: Visions for the Future and Road Maps for Change
www.ala/lama
Click on Professional Development for this and other regional institutes sponsored by LAMA on diversity, funding and other key issues related to information access.

A Library Advocate's Guide to Building Information Literate Communities
www.ala.org/ala/advocacybucket/ informationliteracy.pdf
Materials and tips to help build public awareness about the role of libraries and librarians in preparing children, adults and their communities to be information smart.

National Library Legislative Day
www.ala.org/ala/washoff/washevents
Held each year in May, this event brings together librarians, trustees and other library friends to Washington, D.C., to talk with their Representatives and Senators about issues of concern to the library community.

Principles and Strategies for the Reform of Scholarly Communication
www.ala.org/acrl
Guidance for academic libraries in addressing critical issues of access to scholarship in the electronic environment.

Public Programs for Diverse Audiences
www.ala.org/publicprograms
Grants, programming ideas and training resources to assist library staff in developing and hosting public programs for diverse audiences.

Recruitment for Diversity
www.ala.org/diversity
Tips, success stories and resources to support members of the profession in recruiting people of diverse backgrounds and abilities. Compiled by the ALA Office for Diversity.

Spectrum Initiative
www.ala.org/diversity
Established in 1997, the Spectrum Initiative seeks to bring more people of color into the profession through scholarships, mentoring, leadership and professional development activities.

Teen Reading/Teen Read Week
www.ala.org/yalsa
Tips and booklists on outreach to youth and their families.

YALSA Serving the Underserved Trainers (SUS)
www.ala.org/yalsa/professionaldev/ underserved/servingunderserved.htm
A cadre of trainers is available to conduct professional development programs on subjects such as adolescent development, reading interests, behavioral problems, youth participation, facilities and computer services for teens. Contact YALSA at 1-800-545-2433, ext. 4390, or via e-mail at yalsa@ala.org.

Contacts

ALA Office for Diversity
Telephone: 800-545-2433, ext. 5048
Fax: 312-280-3256
Email: diversity@ala.org
www.ala.org/diversity

ALA Office for Literacy and Outreach Services
Telephone: 800-545-2433, ext. 4294
Fax: 312-280-3256
Email: olos@ala.org
www.ala.org/olos
www.ala.org/literacy

ALA Public Programs Office
Telephone: 800-545-2433, ext. 5045
Fax: 312-944-2404
Email: publicprograms@ala.org
www.ala.org/publicprograms

ALA Washington Office/ Office for Information Technology Policy
Telephone: 202-628-8410
Fax: 202-628-8419
Email: alawash@alawash.org
www.ala.org/washoff

American Association of School Librarians
Telephone: 800-545-2433, ext. 4386
Fax: 312-664-7459
Email: aasl@ala.org
www.ala.org/aasl

Association for Library Collections & Technical Services
Telephone: 800-545-2433, ext. 5038
Fax: 312-280-5033
Email: alcts@ala.org
www.ala.org/alcts

Association for Library Service to Children
Telephone: 800-545-2433, ext. 2163
Fax: 312-944-7671
Email: alsc@ala.org
www.ala.org/alsc

Association for Library Trustees and Advocates
Telephone: 800-545-2433, ext. 5161
Fax: 312-280-3257
Email: alta@ala.org
www.ala.org/alta

Association of College and Research Libraries
Telephone: 800-545-2433, ext. 2523
Fax: 312-290-2520
Email: acrl@ala.org
www.ala.org/acrl

Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies
Telephone: 800-545-2433, ext. 4398
Fax: 312-944-8085
Email: ascla@ala.org
www.ala.org/ascla

Library Administration and Management Association
Telephone: 800-545-2433, ext. 5036
Fax: 312-280-5033
Email: lama@ala.org
www.ala.org/lama

Library and Information Technology Association
Telephone: 800-545-2433, ext. 4270
Fax: 312-280-3257
Email: lita@ala.org
www.ala.org/lita

Public Library Association
Telephone: 800-545-2433, ext. 5752
Fax: 312-280-5029
Email: pla@ala.org
www.ala.org/pla

Reference and User Services Association
Telephone: 800-545-2433, ext. 4398
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Email: rusa@ala.org
www.ala.org/rusa

Young Adult Library Services Association
Telephone: 800-545-2433, ext. 4390
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50 East Huron Street
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www.ala.org

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Rocks in the Whirlpool, Kathleen de la Peña McCook, May 2002. http://www.ala.org. Click on Our Association, ALA Governing and Strategic Documents, Key Action Areas and Equity of Access