Don’t miss the premier event for public library professionals—PLA 2022 Conference! Save the date and start your planning to join us next year in Portland, OR, March 23–25. We’ve learned and grown so much since PLA 2020, and we can’t wait to share what we have in store.

www.placonference.org
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**Thank you Kimberley Knight!**

The team here at *PL* and *PLA* are so incredibly grateful for the thoughtfulness and expertise that Guest Editor Kimberley Knight has brought to this issue and to her role as chair of the 2020/2021 *Public Libraries* Advisory Committee. Your ongoing commitment and invaluable contributions continue to inspire us. Thank you!

Kathleen M. Hughes
Editor, Public Libraries
From the Editor

Kimberly Knight, Guest Editor / kknight@alexlibraryva.org

Not only did the worldwide pandemic exacerbate existing inequalities in libraries, it threw into sharp relief issues that impede access in many areas of our work, communities, and society as a whole. The killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and countless others, brought a new urgency in our work to end inequality, focus on social justice, and commit to real change.

For this issue, we reached out to public library professionals across the country to learn how the profession is stepping up. We have found libraries are examining policies to remove barriers to access, removing fines, and disentangling fee structures from vital services like computer/internet usage. As Melanie Huggins mentions (page 7), we are listening to community members and committing to righting historical wrongs. Libraries are becoming more intentional about programs and service designs to bring more users in, leaving no stone unturned as we look through an equity lens at all that we do. Libraries are conducting diversity and equity audits, lending our spaces and voices to the fight for social justice, allying with professional associations, employing Equity & Diversity professionals, and lending staff time and efforts to partner organizations doing equity and social justice work.

Recently, when answering a complaint about the lack of diversity in my library’s staff and in our displays at one location, my first inclination was to point out all the work we’ve done on EDI issues and my strong stance on removing barriers through policy changes. However, as a Black library leader, I had to accept that I too, needed to ensure barriers through policy changes. However, as a Black library leader, I had to accept that I too, needed to ensure my commitment to EDISJ was clear, expected, and action-oriented. As Kimberly Garrett has written in an Oral History by E. Patrick Johnson.

Kimberly is currently reading Full Disclosure by Camryn Garrett. She is listening to Good Company by Cynthia D’Aprix Sweeney and Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South, an Oral History by E. Patrick Johnson.
In 2013, Richland Library (Columbia, SC) where I am the Executive Director, passed a bond referendum that enabled us to renovate and expand all existing libraries and build two new ones. We were proud, grateful, and excited to get started, which is why I was surprised when I started to get complaints from a community that felt left out. I reminded my trustees that the residents of this neighborhood were within two miles of Main Library (and one other branch), and the community didn’t meet our established criteria for locating a library. I suggested we move forward with our plans.

The community leaders were persistent. We met (many times) and they shared with me a story I didn’t know about my own organization. The story of a beloved library lost and of disinvestment in their proud Black community.

In September 1936, the Phillis A. Wheatley library—that saw its beginnings in the YWCA—moved to its own space in an old Methodist church. Its new name, the Waverly Branch Library, came from the surrounding, up-and-coming Black neighborhood. For thirty-six years, this library fed the hearts, minds, and souls of its patrons as the one “Blacks only” library in my city.

Former patrons (those persistent community leaders) of the Waverly Library shared with me that they have never forgotten what it was like to have access to that library. Some called it a “life-line”; others remembered Ms. Foster, the librarian who would search and search through the dusty books—most of which were inappropriate for children—and not stop until they could go home with at least one book that met their interest. The Waverly Library also employed Ms. Katherine Wheeler, its head librarian and the first trained Black librarian in my library’s system.

The Waverly Library was special. It was the heart of a tight-knit community, offering information, education, respect, and kindness to everyone who entered.

In May 1972, the Waverly Library closed; its operations moved to a busy, predominantly white neighborhood. It reverted to its former name and the (Phillis A.) Wheatley Library has operated there ever since.

The 1972 closure and move, in a just barely post-Jim Crow South was, to the residents that remember it, a painful disinvestment in the Waverly and adjacent Edgewood communities. While in practice, the new library was accessible to all people and all races, it may as well have been on the moon.

Becoming an Antiracist Library

Melanie Huggins / MHuggins@RichlandLibrary.com

Melanie is Executive Director, Richland Library, Columbia, South Carolina. 

She is currently reading Wilmington’s Lie: The Murderous Coup of 1898 and the Rise of White Supremacy by David Zucchino.
Our community’s painful and unjust past is right on our heels, tripping us up, try as we might to move forward. The injustices that have defined us as a country are so deep, it seems we’re left trying to reconcile a chasm of inequities, one decision, one interaction, at a time.

But that is what the work of being an anti-racist library is. Looking at each decision through a lens of justice, equity, and reconciliation. Understanding and coming to terms with our difficult histories as organizations and acceding power to those that have been marginalized or oppressed. According to Dismantling Racism: A Resource Book for Social Change Groups, the work of being antiracist is a transformation that “begins with developing a comprehensive understanding of how racism and oppression operate within an organization’s own walls.”

When I stopped to listen and understand the injustice in my library’s history, I was forever changed by those community members—and one became my board chair! That moment was a huge part of my transformation as a leader. It helped frame the way I consider where decisions are made, who has power, workplace culture, program diversity, and yes, location of services in clear and important ways. I had no idea that the questioning I was doing—about myself or my organization—were fundamental to becoming an anti-racist. In 2013, I’d never heard the term before. And I certainly didn’t know how hard it is to keep this work front and center. It requires an uncomfortable dissecting of your own beliefs and slowing down and questioning when you want to move forward.

The good news is you can do the anti-racist work while you are discovering how it is done. As writer and speaker Ijeoma Oluo states, “The beauty of anti-racism is that you don’t have to pretend to be free of racism to be an anti-racist. Anti-racism is the commitment to fight racism wherever you find it, including in yourself. And it’s the only way forward.”

In 2019, we opened Richland Library Edgewood, turning a vacant Dollar General store into a new library near where the Waverly Library once stood. To me, it symbolizes many things: an expansion of library services for our community, further investment in a neighborhood with a rich history and high aspirations, and an example of how, when we work with intention, we can make things right.

REFERENCE
2. Ijeoma Oluo (@IjeomaOluo), “The beauty of anti-racism is that you don’t have to pretend to be free of racism to be an anti-racist. Anti-racism is the commitment to fight racism wherever you find it, including in yourself. And it’s the only way forward,” Twitter, July 14, 2019, https://twitter.com/ijeomaoluo/status/1150565193832943617?lang=en.

PublicLibrariesONLINE

Digital Highlights

Working Paper Seeks to Quantify Library ROI by Gretchen Kaser Corsillo
As librarians, we know that public libraries provide a wealth of benefits to members of their communities, some more tangible than other. A recent working paper titled “The Returns to Public Library Investment” seeks to explore this topic. Read the entire article here: publiclibrariesonline.org/2021/08/working-paper-seeks-to-quantify-library-roi/.
PLA 2022 CONFERENCE

REGISTRATION OPENING SOON!

PLA 2022 will take place March 23–25, in Portland, Oregon. Registration opens September 22. A special early bird rate is available for PLA members and members of the Oregon Library Association who register by January 7, 2022. All other advance registrations must be received by February 18, 2022.

Offered biennially, the PLA National Conference is the premier event for public libraries, drawing public library workers, trustees, friends, and library vendors from across the country and around the world. PLA 2022 will feature preconference programming, Big Ideas sessions, more than one hundred educational programs, events and stages in the exhibits hall, and hundreds of library vendors.

Can’t join us in person? PLA 2022 will also feature a comprehensive Virtual Conference. Get more details and register at www.placonference.org.

I LOVE MY LIBRARIAN AWARD

ALA invites all library users to nominate their favorite librarians for the prestigious I Love My Librarian Award. The national award recognizes librarians working in public, school, college, community college, or university libraries for their outstanding public service contributions. Nominations are accepted online now through September 27, 2021 (https://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2021/06/nominations-are-now-open-i-love-my-librarian-award).

EMERGENCY CONNECTIVITY FUND TOOLKIT AVAILABLE

To help libraries take advantage of the new $7.17 billion Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF), ALA has created the ECF Solutions Toolkit (https://www.ala.org/advocacy/ecf). New resources summarize key ECF provisions and detail how public and tribal libraries can design, plan, and implement technology services using the new funding to serve library patrons who need it most. Established as part of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (http://www.ala.org/advocacy/american-rescue-plan-library-relief), the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) ECF program will provide funding for public and tribal libraries and K12 schools to purchase connected devices and broadband internet connections for use off of library and school grounds by library patrons, students, teachers, and staff who otherwise lack internet access. Libraries participating in the ECF will receive 100 percent reimbursement of costs for eligible equipment and services and the ability to receive upfront reimbursement. The toolkit, located on ALA’s ECF webpage (http://www.ala.org/advocacy/ECF), includes five scenarios that provide step-by-step guidance modeled on examples collected from libraries across the country—in rural, suburban, and urban communities. Options include tablet or laptop lending, hotspot lending, creating community Wi-Fi hotspot zones, and subsidizing home internet access. ALA also encourages libraries to take advantage of other ARPA funds to support related digital inclusion needs, such as programming, staffing, and staff training.
ALA COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION SEEKS FEEDBACK ON CORE COMPETENCES

The ALA Committee on Education (COE) released a discussion draft (https://www.ala.org/educationcareers/sites/ala.org.educationcareers/files/content/education/Draft - ALA Core Competences 2021 Update.pdf) of newly revised ALA Core Competences (ALACCs) for library professionals to guide those who hold LIS degrees on basic competences expected within the first several years of graduation. The draft ALACCs document will be vetted, discussed, and further edited based on ALA member feedback throughout the remainder of the 2021 calendar year. Dates and times of feedback sessions as well as a link to the feedback survey are found on the ALACCs draft document website (https://www.ala.org/educationcareers/2021-update-alas-core-competences-librarianship). The goal is to incorporate the feedback early in 2022 in time for ALA Council to vote on the revised document at Annual Conference 2022.

SEPTEMBER 11 POSTER AVAILABLE

In commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, the 9/11 Memorial & Museum is offering libraries a free digital poster exhibition. September 11, 2001: The Day That Changed the World (https://www.911memorial.org/learn/resources/digital-exhibitions/september-11-2001-day-changed-world) is a downloadable educational exhibition that presents the history of 9/11, its origins, and its ongoing implications. It explores the consequences of terrorism on individual lives and communities at the local, national, and international level, and encourages critical thinking about the legacy of 9/11. The free download includes fourteen ready-to-print posters, an invitation to a free virtual training and tour, and access to the 9/11 Primer, an online collection of resources for educators and online learners, to help libraries supplement the exhibition. Posters (both digital downloads and a limited number of printed poster sets) will be available for download starting on July 7. For any questions, contact posterexhibition@911memorial.org. Visit https://www.911memorial.org for more information.

NEW FYI PODCASTS!

HOSTING DIGITAL AUTHOR EVENTS

In this episode of FYI: The Public Libraries Podcast, Stesha Brandon, literature and humanities program manager at the Seattle Public Library (SPL) shares how SPL successfully moved author programming to a digital format during the COVID-19 pandemic. Tune in for tips and great ideas on creating or improving your library’s digital author programming. Listen to this episode here: http://publiclibrarysonline.org/2021/06/new-fyi-podcast-hosting-digital-author-events/.

MISINFORMATION, DISINFORMATION, AND MORE

This episode is about misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information. Whether it is lies about the election, or COVID-19, or conspiracy theories, we have seen just how insidious the spread of misinformation can be. Our guest is Suzanne LaPierre, the Virginiana Librarian at Fairfax County Public Library in Virginia. Suzanne has researched and written on these topics. She is also a regular columnist (The Wired Library). Listen to this episode here: http://publiclibrarysonline.org/2021/03/new-podcast-misinformation-disinformation-and-more/.
W
dwhile the mission of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) work in libraries is often clear and well-defined, the messaging associated with this practice can be blurred by differing expectations, ideas, and perspectives. Armed with this knowledge, and the desire to introduce a more cohesive, cross-sector approach to EDI, the Public Library Association (PLA), American Library Association (ALA), Association of Research Libraries (ARL), and Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) came together in 2019 to form the Cultural Proficiencies for Racial Equity Task Force (CPRE). The CPRE task force has been charged with creation of a highly anticipated racial equity framework that can be used broadly by libraries and library workers, whether academic, public, school, or special. The significance of this cross-sector approach to the development of a framework is particularly impactful, as it signals a shift from a more individualized response to EDI to a broader, more collaborative process that encourages a more global approach to change work.

The idea to convene the organizations of ALA was the brainchild of Mark Puente (he/his).
Mark, an EDI practitioner, associate dean for Organizational Development, Inclusion, and Diversity at Purdue University, and former director of Diversity and Leadership for ARL, is also a member of the CPRE task force. As the task force prepares to publicly share the completed draft of the framework, Mark spoke with me about the origins of the task force, the impact of a cross-sector developed racial equity framework, and his hopes for how this framework will engage libraries and library workers.

**CFG:** What is the purpose of the framework, and how did it come to be?

**MP:** The purpose of the framework came out of conversations I had with Jody Gray, former director of ALA’s ODLOS [Office for Diversity, Literacy, and Outreach Services]. We had been talking for years about the challenges to doing EDI work and the relatively little progress that we, as a profession, have made in terms of representation of BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and People of Color] individuals. In my consulting (in many different spaces with many different audiences) some of the same questions and problems kept coming up: the lack of a clear commitment on the part of libraries to label and address racial equity (always being under the larger umbrella of EDI); lack of a common vocabulary; lack of comfort on the part of white people (but not exclusively) in addressing the matters; and difficulty in managing difficult conversations. Jody and I took the idea of creating the framework to the executive directors of our respective organizations. The then-executive directors of PLA, ACRL, ARL, and ODLOS were highly enthusiastic about creating a process for the development of the framework and were willing to put some resources into it.

**CFG:** In drafting the framework, how did you ensure representation from all voices, particularly the perspectives of public library workers?

**MP:** We made certain that our call for expressions of interest was posted in PLA lists. We also posted to the lists of the ALA ethnic caucuses, the Spectrum Scholarship listservs, and other spaces that we know are occupied by public library workers. When we reviewed the “applications” we tried our best to ensure that people from public libraries were included.

**CFG:** The framework examines, interrogates, and addresses how white supremacy, white privilege, and racism show up in libraries. Why is it important to speak to this in the framework?

**MP:** This was the first thing that surfaced in the development of our logic model when we initiated this work. I know that many people (myself included) are sometimes reticent about or uncomfortable speaking so upfront about the concept of what white supremacy is because most people think of it as a manifestation of extremism and not as something that is embedded in our social fabric. Although we certainly did not anticipate it, there’s a growing collective consciousness about what white supremacy is and how it shows up in so many behaviors and policies. Again, the approach is to be as explicit as possible as to what the issues are. If we go directly to the heart of the problem, and call it what it is, perhaps we’ll have a better chance at eradicating it.

**CFG:** Even within the field, libraries and librarians are often siloed by specialty (academic, school, public, special). How can this framework for racial equity foster cross-sector, collaborative opportunities?

**MP:** I think the point of this framework is that racial inequity does not live (and thrive) in any system independently. The framework tries to be sector-agnostic (although we bring up examples from all types of libraries) so that people will understand the commonalities in how racism and racial inequity show up, but also that the best way to counter it is to do so with a collective voice. There are strategies that will be effective and accessible in some contexts, but won’t be in others. It’s important for us to learn from each others’ successes and failures and to approach the dismantling of racist/oppressive structures with a common analysis of how they came to be, how they are sustained, and how they can be
dismantled, re-envisioned, and rebuilt.

**CFG:** The development of a framework for racial equity comes with an expectation that libraries and library workers will lead and act with accountability. Can you share examples of ways in which EDI-centered organizational/individual accountability can be demonstrated?

**MP:** I think my feelings about this are mostly aspirational, because I’m not yet sure how we can build a spirit of mutual accountability. I do think that many associations and publications are showing more willingness to engage in the tough conversations that are needed to allow people and organizations to learn and grow. What we’re not so good at is how we position ourselves to learn and grow without taxing communities of color, or worse, re-traumatizing them in that effort. I do think that modeling the behavior and strategies is one of the best tools in creating change, and we start this at the micro level. We have to develop the will and the capacity to do this work at meso and macro levels. I think this starts with pockets of people who are interested in the work and who are committed to it (e.g., a “diversity committee” or an anti-racist reading group). You then build out the interest and engagement throughout the organization, understanding that not everyone is at the same place or will be ready for the same conversation simultaneously. It takes some careful calibration and a degree of emotional intelligence to know when certain people are ready to hear certain messages.

**CFG:** What is your hope for the framework?

**MP:** I hope that it will be a launching place for individuals and organizations to develop a level of understanding and a shared vocabulary on these issues. Most importantly, I hope it will lead to action at individual, organizational, and higher (perhaps societal) levels. I hope that libraries and archives can be positioned to model this work and to provide a template for other professional sectors about how to initiate this work.

**CFG:** When can we expect to see the framework? How will it be shared?

**MP:** We’re on track to share the preliminary draft of the framework by the end of August. It will be shared electronically with opportunities for feedback and iteration. Depending on how that process goes, we could be looking at a final version by early fall. That said, the framework will never be final. I anticipate that it will be a living document that is revisited and revised as language and perspectives change.

### Bringing Public Health and Public Libraries Together

**Explore the benefits of strong partnerships between Public Libraries and Public Health departments based upon findings from a collaborative project by Midwestern Public Health Training Center, National Networks of Libraries of Medicine, and Public Library Association.**

**mphtc.org/libraries**

Content for this project was informed by a collaborative project between the Network of the National Library of Medicine Greater Midwest Region, the Public Library Association, and the Midwestern Public Health Training Center.
Pivoting during the Pandemic
Ideas for Serving Your Community Anytime, Anywhere

Includes practical tips for
• Homebound delivery
• Citizen science programs
• Virtual reference
• Services to small businesses
• Remote readers’ advisory and book chats
• Early literacy storytimes
• Health services outreach
• Tech guidance for patrons
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• Social media and marketing

Print: 978-0-8389-4974-0
$29.99 | ALA Members: $26.99
PLA Members: $24.30

eBook: 978-0-8389-4989-4
$19.99 | ALA Members: $18.00
PLA Members: $16.20
For years as a children’s librarian and then programming supervisor, I recited talking points about the summer slide as justification for summer reading programs. Using compelling graphics, my library would use summer learning loss as the reason this flagship program warranted much of our annual programming budget and efforts. After reading Transforming Summer Programs at Your Library by Natalie Cole and Virginia A. Walter, I began to question the truth of that claim. Walter and Cole write that summer reading programs tend to show an “over-representation of children who are regular library users and avid readers. These tend to be children from middle-class homes whose parents encourage them to read and use the library.” If we’re not reaching beyond our regular patrons, are we truly closing gaps to keep all children active and engaged? As Cole and Walter relate, “To truly fulfill the public library’s potential during the summer months, staff must identify and reach out to underserved community members and engage them with programs that are designed to align with their aspirations and meet their needs.” A new initiative, “Building Equity Based Summers through California Libraries and Communities (BEBS)” is exploring these ideas and creating tools to help
libraries embed equity in summer planning and implementation.

**Building Equity Based Summers**

BEBS is a project of the California State Library and the California Library Association supported in whole or in part by the US Institute of Museum and Library Services, under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, administered in California by the state librarian. Linda W. Braun, learning consultant at LEO, and LaKesha Kimbrough of LK Consulting and Coaching, are cofacilitating the project. The first phase of the initiative ran from September through December 2020; the second phase started in January 2021 and is still in progress.

As Natalie Cole, bureau chief of Library Development Services with the California State Library relates, summer reading programs in California public libraries have a long tradition of focusing on outreach and equity through statewide outcomes and quality principles and indicators. Even so, the pandemic highlighted inequities across communities. She notes, “It was clear that we needed to be even more intentional and proactive about this work to ensure that summer programs are truly accessible and available to everyone in our communities.”

After a period of reflection at the state level, Cole notes that “it became very clear that the direction we needed to take was to begin working with libraries to ensure that summer programming is developed using a social justice lens and to ensure that it is truly equitable and inclusive.”

Trish Garone, program manager of Summer at Your Library with the California Library Association, agrees. She states, “We’d been hearing a desire from libraries throughout the state for a shift in how summer is typically approached. The national conversation around race and social justice in 2020, combined with inequities brought to light by the pandemic, highlighted the importance of ensuring that we support libraries with a framework and resources that help them plan summer programs and services with equity at the core.”

**Co-Designing Process**

Braun and Kimbrough facilitate a co-design process with participants from thirteen library jurisdictions across California. The application for commitment includes a managerial/administrative representative and a “front-line” staff member to ensure communication, buy-in, and cooperation from both levels of an organization. As Kimbrough explains, “One thing I was taught is that where the head goes, the body follows. So, if a manager- or administrator-level person is committed to the project and they are ‘bought in’ to it and the work, they can aid in helping others at this level understand the reasons for engaging in this work.”

The pairing improves investment from front-line staff as well. As Kimbrough notes, “These staff members directly engage with our communities, building relationships, and designing and implementing a vast array of programs. When frontline folks have an opportunity to get excited about the work and not see it as a directive from ‘higher ups,’ it can be very meaningful and help ensure greater success with outcomes.”

The facilitators and teams meet every-other-week via Zoom, frequently starting with a presentation or group conversation, dividing into smaller break-out rooms, and reconvening at the end of the meeting for sharing and discussion. Homework keeps the teams engaged between meetings and helps to directly apply ideas to each unique library and community. The list below is just a sampling of the many concepts explored to date:

- What does equity mean?
  - Forming a shared vocabulary and understanding.
- Mapping community assets and relationships.
- Finding community connectors: Building on asset mapping, finding connectors within the community to gain authentic input and public knowledge for relevant, culturally responsive programming.
- The importance of choice in creating more equitable
Building Equity Based Summers / Best Practices

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summers: A more customizable program can increase relevance to an individual’s life interests and experiences.

- Working within existing organizational and community systems and structures: How to share with other staff, stakeholders, and the community while realizing your own strengths and spheres of influence.
- Reconsidering past practices through lenses of equity and structural racism.
- Revisiting the “why” of summer services, centering the community in the sense of purpose.

Vision and Outcomes
Braun notes that the focus of the project is to define what it means to embed equity in summer services and to build tools to help libraries do so. She sees an equity-based approach as centered on “the needs of nondominant youth and families with a focus on how to leverage community assets to support those needs. An equity approach recognizes that to be equitable, library services need to move beyond the building and into the community to focus on building relationships with others in the community to align goals.” The facilitators follow Mizuko Ito et al.’s lead in using the term nondominant instead of descriptors such as underserved, minority, diverse, or people of color to call more attention to issues of power and power relations. Like Braun, Kimbrough sees desired outcomes leading to intentional embedding of equity throughout summer programming plus customizable resources to help libraries succeed in this work. She explains that success will include aspects of “intentional partnering with communities, strengthened relationships within and across teams as well as with all stakeholders, an integration of equity into all aspects of programming (at least a beginning of this) and not equity as an afterthought or something added to everyone’s already full plate.”

Getting Started
The statewide project coordinators and co-facilitators agree on the importance of jumping in and getting started, while acknowledging the process might be messy and challenging. They advise others hoping to do similar work to seek representative voices and professional connections, to create a shared understanding and safe space for conversations, and to embrace the discomfort and struggles inherent in understanding equity.

Seek Authentic Voices and Connections
Cole notes the importance of having representative voices on the co-design team to draw from a wide array of perspectives and experiences. She also emphasizes the value in connecting with other libraries and initiatives doing similar work (GARE and CREI in California, for example). Garone agrees, stating, “You don’t do this work in isolation. Tap into the amazing group of individuals and organizations leading this work. Find out who others are working with. Identify strong, trusted, and respected facilitators/advisors to help guide you through the work.”

Create a Trusted Space
Having open conversations about equity and race can be difficult, and the process should be intentional and not rushed. Cole notes the importance of taking things slowly and thoughtfully to build trust through a safe space and understanding through shared language. She states, “Doing the initial work to lay a foundation, the groundwork to create a safe environment where people feel comfortable sharing, it’s so important to work on building the foundation first. And then taking time to sit with the progress being made and be comfortable there, to allow time for the process.”

FURTHER READING
Lean Into Discomfort
Kimbrough encourages participants to, “lean into your limitations and explore your strengths.” She encourages ongoing self-reflection, and for participants to “explore your connection to and with systems of oppression and examine how it has and does impact how you show up in your work (and are in all aspects of your life). What can and will you do to heal this in and for yourself so that you can do it in and with community?”14
Braun also notes that this work involves “struggle,” and “often means feeling uncomfortable and re-thinking what you know about yourself and others. . . . I think that this work requires a lot of struggling to figure things out, struggling to look at oneself and understand the role you play in building equitable services, struggling to communicate with colleagues and community members about the importance of equity in summer services, and so on.”15
Participants feel discomfort around encountering possible pushback from stakeholders and community members. Most pairs agree that additional tools, skills, and practice would help to feel more confident. As Braun explains, “Library staff need to have opportunities to practice talking with others about embedding equity into summer services in order to be able to speak up for the importance of this work.”16
Kimbrough adds, “Be patient. . . . Use tools of curiosity and wonder to pose questions to help get at the root of the pushback. As you get closer to understanding the root of the pushback, offer to work collectively to seek ways to engage in the work that speaks to the concerns.”17
Take the First Step
With many facets involved, starting to embed equity in planning may feel overwhelming. As Braun explains, “You can’t expect [to] understand equity and embed equity into services by going to one workshop or reading one book. You must start to learn on your own about what equity means. Start having conversations and not being afraid to talk with others about equity. . . . It is an ongoing process, and the key is to start and to commit to that process.”18 Garone agrees, stating, “Get started. You can adjust along the way. The process may not be perfect, though it does need to be very thoughtful from the start. Having library administration buy-in and support for this work is key to the process.”19
While the codesign process is still ongoing, many participating libraries are already finding ways to influence positive change in their own summer program planning. For example, at Santa Barbara Public Library, Molly Wetta and Lisa Gonzalez are reimagining their summer reading program. Participants will set their own goals and will have other ways to participate beyond reading. The team realizes that not everyone will be in town all summer, and that daytime programs might exclude children with working parents. They will focus on bringing experiences and materials outside of the library to underserved communities. The team aims to reduce barriers and lessen the need for patrons to “jump through hoops to do things our way.”20
By establishing a foundation of trust, shared language, and understanding within a codesign process, Building Equity Based Summers through California Libraries and Communities is exploring the many facets of equity and developing tools for embedding equity within all aspects of planning and implementing summer services for all ages.

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PublicLibrariesONLINE publiclibrariesonline.org

Digital Highlights

Nicole Glover on Pocket Diaries, Floating Books, and Creating the Fantastical World of her Debut Novel by Brendan Dowling

With “The Conductors,” Nicole Glover creates a fascinating alternate reality—a Reconstruction-era Philadelphia where magic exists and is regulated by the government—in which readers will want to get lost. Hettie Rhodes, a former conductor on the Underground Railroad, spends her days working as an in-demand seamstress and her nights as a detective, tackling the cases that the white police force ignore. Hettie is aided in her pursuits by her husband, Benjy, a former Conductor like Hettie but now a gifted blacksmith. When an acquaintance is murdered, Hettie and Benjy dive into an investigation that causes them to explore the many facets of Black Philadelphia, while also confronting dormant issues in their relationship and events from their past. In her debut novel, Glover confidently creates a complex world rooted in real-life history, as well as a gift for empathetically delving into the interior lives of her characters. She talked with us about filling in the lives of her supporting characters, her research process, and what the future holds for Hettie and Benjy. Read the interview at http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2021/07/glover/.

IFLA Public Library of the Year Award Finalists by Laura Collins

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has announced five finalists for the sixth annual Public Library of the Year award, with the winner to be announced in August during the IFLA’s annual conference. The Public Library of the Year award goes to a library that shows both exceptional architectural design and technological innovation. In addition, judges look for sustainability efforts as part of the design—such as using recycled materials—and how the designs reflect local culture. To be eligible, the library must either be newly built or a recently refurbished building that was not previously a library. Out of the thirty-two libraries from around the world that were entered for the award, there are five finalists. Read the entire article at http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2021/07/ifla-public-library-of-the-year-award-finalists/.
Leading by Example

Gretchen Kaser Corsillo / corsillo@rutherford.bccls.org

As I sit down to write this column, my phone buzzes beside me with notifications from Slack. I serve as the library liaison to my municipality’s Civil Rights Commission, and the group is discussing how to honor the anniversary of George Floyd’s death at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer. Floyd’s murder took place on May 25, 2020, and immediately sparked a lengthy series of protests not just in Minneapolis, but around the US. In the midst of being preoccupied with my library’s pandemic-related reopening plan, this anniversary snuck up on me; the events of that day seem in some ways far longer ago but also much more recent than a full year.

Although the frequency of protests advocating for Black rights and against police brutality has waned since the early days of summer 2020, the importance of their messages has not lessened. One year removed from the biggest push for social justice that I have seen in my lifetime, though, I remain increasingly conscious of the fact that we as both librarians and members of our larger communities must continue to do the work of promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion for all. The buildings we manage no longer function solely as repositories of knowledge; they are one of the last remaining free spaces for patrons from all walks of life to gather, as well as strongholds for the free flow of reliable, diverse information.

We live in interesting times. Although immense strides have been made over the last year in bringing antiracism into the public eye, we are still far from living in a truly equitable society. As I perform collection development at my library, I see new releases from more diverse authors, and more titles that expand on antiracism. At the same time, titles like So You Want to Talk About Race by Ijeoma Oluo and How to Be Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi—so popular with our patrons one year ago—no longer find themselves at the top of our holds lists. The statements that so many libraries put out last summer about the importance of racial justice have either been taken down or buried on their websites. This isn’t unique to us;
the same thing has happened across corporate brands as well. In the midst of this, the fight against social justice persists. Recent headlines tell of the push to remove critical race theory from school curricula. March’s Dr. Seuss controversy resulted in loud voices condemning the publisher’s decision to cease printing these titles, minimizing the harmful racial stereotypes they contain. Voting rights have become a hotly contested issue, with several states seeking to make voting more difficult. The incredible polarization of our nation suggests that issues such as these will continue to present themselves in the coming months and years.

As the director of a public library, lately I’ve been thinking about where our field fits into this and, specifically, the role that library leaders play in continuing this work. I see two key areas in which public library administrators can take action: by focusing on their organizations’ public-facing collections and services, as well as leading internal change within their libraries.

The first is more obvious. Libraries are well-known protectors of intellectual freedom and access to information. Diversity audits are gaining traction in the effort to maintain rich collections that are truly representative of the communities we serve. As we emerge from the pandemic and are better positioned to invite patrons into our buildings, we can reassert ourselves as community fixtures where anyone can gather freely and safely without needing to spend money. We can offer educational and cultural programs—either virtually or, as it becomes safe to do so, in person—that can help our patrons learn about or experience ideas they may not have had access to otherwise. As leaders, it is on us to ensure that our organizations are serving all members of our community, not just the visible elites. Our marginalized community members are usually those who need libraries the most.

Internal change can be a bit trickier. Now is the time to ask ourselves critically if we are following through on the promises we made last summer about committing to fight for social justice and inclusion. As we continue to wrestle with the problems the pandemic has brought to our libraries, Rebecca Knight of the Harvard Business Review writes, “Leaders’ commitments toward racial justice are at risk of falling off the list of priorities.”

Even as we focus on diversifying our collections and ensuring our patrons have access to the information they need in order to learn about the civil rights issues in today’s headlines, we need to make sure that we as employers are leading by example. As librarianship remains a largely white, cisgendered female profession, we need to support our employees of color and work toward empowering a workforce that more closely resembles the patrons they serve. The more we model the behavior of making our libraries more inclusive places for all, the more that will permeate our institutional cultures and create lasting change.

One year ago, many of us wrote beautiful words about condemning racial injustice and violence, but the work does not stop there. We need to put that commitment into action as we serve both our communities and our workforces.

So, this summer, take a look at what you’ve accomplished over the last year. Pandemic notwithstanding, have you remained committed to the statements you issued last year? Is your library leading by example and welcoming patrons and staff from all walks of life? Are you continuing to offer diverse collections and programs, and ensuring your patrons have access to quality information about how they can dismantle systemic racism? Now is not the time to stop thinking about social justice; it is instead the time to measure how far your library has gotten and how far it still needs to go.

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**PublicLibrariesONLINE**

**Digital Highlights**

**Are We Reaching the End of Library DVD Collections? by Douglas Crane**

When then-President Trump early-voted at the Palm Beach County’s Main Library, late night host Jimmy Kimmel featured it in his show’s opening monologue. In addition to the usual jokes at the President’s expense, Kimmel was amazed by the long row of DVD shelving in the background. “Those are all DVDs. It’s a huge DVD section! There are hundreds of DVDs. In Florida they put up signs that say LIBRARY on all the old Blockbuster video stores.” [1] Kimmel’s shock at seeing the DVDs implied they are old technology. It is not surprising since the growth of streaming services and on-demand video should make discs obsolete. With so many streaming services available, why would anyone need a DVD or Blu-ray disc? Therefore, are libraries destined to ditch this once-popular collection? Read the entire article at http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2021/06/are-we-reaching-the-end-of-library-dvd-collections/.

**Why Do We Think Library Services are Free? by Nadine Kramarz**

I was in the library’s media lab helping a patron with Microsoft Publisher, and I recommended she learn how to use Publisher with an online course provided through the library. My co-worker chimes in, “and the best part is that it’s free!” I frowned and said, “it’s not free. It’s paid for with your tax dollars.” I am beginning to believe that how we think about public library services as free directly impacts how public libraries don’t get funded. Read the entire article at http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2021/06/why-do-we-think-library-services-are-free/.

**Cursed—A Conversation with Karol Ruth Silverstein by Catherine Ritchie**

Since 2004, ALA’s Schneider Family Book Award has honored an author or illustrator for a title that embodies an artistic expression of the disability experience for child and adolescent audiences. In 2020, the “teen” category prize went to screenwriter and first-time novelist Karol Ruth Silverstein’s Cursed, published in 2019 by Charlesbridge Teen. Readers meet 14-year-old Erika “Ricky” Bloom who not only is dealing with her parents’ recent breakup, but also confronting a months-old diagnosis of rheumatoid arthritis (RA). Silverstein used her own experiences with the same diagnosis at age 13 to shape her “angry” yet determined heroine as she rails against, and ultimately forges her way through daunting physical and emotional challenges. Read the interview at http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2021/07/cursed-a-conversation-with-karol-ruth-silverstein/.
We want to believe technology is neutral. So much of humanity is unruly that it’s reassuring to imagine technology as an objective realm of accurate efficiency. However, deep down we know machines are designed by humans. In machine learning, a subset of artificial intelligence (AI), algorithms use data selected by humans to learn tasks such as facial recognition or fraud detection. While bias can be mitigated by providing representative data, it is nearly impossible to eliminate because the nature of implicit bias is that we are unaware of it.

In a recent episode of United Shades of America, host W.Kamau Bell dons a virtual reality headset and notices his avatar’s hands, when they appear in the viewing area, are pale. “I have a white hand!” he exclaims.¹ Regardless of customization options, the game’s default assumption is whiteness. “Biases can become embedded in a product during any period of the development process. If the people making the products happen to come from a group that rarely experiences discrimination, those people will have a harder time predicting how bias will manifest itself,” writes Y-Vonne Hutchinson for MIT Technology Review.”² While Bell’s experience was observable, bias is often hidden in algorithms.

Algorithms are increasingly linked to opportunity in every aspect of our lives: from credit card and home loan applications to college admissions and hiring decisions. The unique danger of algorithmic bias is opacity. Invisibility enables deniability which can perpetuate and compound existing inequalities. Race after Technology author Ruha Benjamin coined the term “The New Jim Code” to describe “the employment of new technologies that reflect and reproduce existing inequities but that are promoted and perceived as more objective or progressive than discriminatory systems of a previous era.”³

Consider a Few Examples
MIT researcher Joy Buolamwini was designing a new program using facial recognition software, but the system wasn’t recognizing her face. When she put a
white mask over her dark skin the program immediately tagged the mask as a face. She ran some tests and found algorithms used by AI services were much more adept at recognizing white and/or male faces than Black and/or female faces. Many have since been redesigned to recognize a greater diversity of faces.

Serious consequences can result from biased algorithms in health care systems. Researchers found racial bias in a widely used algorithm meant to identify patients most in need of care. It used health care costs as a proxy for need. Inequitable access to health care made this a faulty metric, with serious implications for millions of Black patients. Data bias has also been a concern regarding trials of COVID-19 vaccines.

On the employment front, automated algorithms are increasingly used to sort applicants. One AI program eliminated female applicants for software developer jobs because details of their resumes didn’t match the data of the majority of people currently holding those jobs, who were male.

On the flip side of exclusion, unwanted targeting and surveillance raise privacy alarms. Racial bias has been detected in algorithms used by law enforcement to determine likelihood for recidivism, which can lead to stiffer sentencing. ICE proposed the Extreme Vetting Initiative, intended to automatically flag people for deportation or visa denial based on data derived from social media activity. Current AI tools “are not robust enough to be used in such high stakes scenarios,” according to computer scientist Timnit Gebru.

Why Is This Significant for Public Libraries?
Public libraries are often an intermediary between technology systems and people who use them. They provide access to new technologies, particularly for underserved populations. Library staff often train others to use technology and even publicize certain products related to library programs and services. Libraries are full of data, including personal information users submit to apply for library cards. Although libraries are committed to customer privacy, and most states have laws protecting confidentiality of library records, there are situations in which data is subject to disclosure. In some situations, law enforcement, other government agencies, and even third-party vendors can gain access to user data.

What Can We Do?
Awareness is paramount in preventing problems as well as addressing them. It’s a key factor on all levels, from selecting platforms to designing programs and assisting users. Because technology continually evolves, it’s necessary to keep learning, educate others, and be cognizant of protecting those most likely to be negatively impacted by bias.

However, some level of bias is unconsciously ingrained despite our conscious efforts and values. Therefore it’s critical to increase diversity in tech and information fields to lessen bias in design from the outset.

Practical Steps
- Before making decisions on purchases or subscriptions, find out whether the tech company has a well-defined plan for addressing inequity. Many post these online.
- Look for ways to boost diversity in education and mentorship to further
opportunities for employment and advancement.

- Revisit the ALA’s stance on privacy issues, including guidelines to protect user data. Many libraries are reducing data required for library card applications, such as eliminating gender fields.

- Allow alternative means of participation for those who wish to opt-out of supplying personal data. The Library Bill of Rights states children have the same privacy rights as adults. How much data must children submit to enroll in summer reading programs?

- Train staff at all levels. Most don’t have the power to purchase equipment, but awareness can enable intervention on other levels. For example, a paraprofessional leading a virtual reality program who becomes aware of an issue like the white hand default Bell experienced might begin the program with an exercise in customizing avatars, or reset defaults to Sesame Street Monster blue before the program.

- Workarounds don’t excuse poor design, but do come in handy for immediate needs of frontline public service staff. These can include knowing how to custom-crop photos to bypass race-biased auto-crop features, and how to enable privacy features.

- Many libraries have created Libguides on algorithmic bias to further understanding.

- Coding classes and other STEM opportunities for youth may inspire future engineers.

- Join organizations working toward greater social justice in technology. The Algorithmic Justice League (https://www.ajl.org/) offers options for getting involved, reporting problems, hosting workshops, or requesting an algorithmic audit.

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Diverse Books in All Book Clubs

Making the Case for Selection Criteria

There is a significant gap in the literature overall concerning book club selection criteria and the role of librarians in elevating diverse voices in book club selection criteria. The goal of this article is to add to the dialogues happening at many libraries concerning book selection best practices for programming and to provide support to professionals looking to intentionally make the case for reading diversely in adult book clubs.

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Joanna is Branch Manager and Marisha is Youth Librarian at the DeHoff Branch of Stark County District Library in Canton, Ohio.
Joanna is currently reading *Detransition, Baby* by Torrey Peters. Marisha is currently reading *The Grief Keeper* by Alexandra Villasante.
We have faced the politicization of public health and safety, an election filled with misinformation, and threats to the democratic foundations of our country. Our programming landscape shifted drastically, our services changed shape, and we struggled to support our communities and meet their needs through these multiple crises. Due to the pandemic, we could not offer the same types of physical spaces for congregation and conversation that we typically would in times of difficulty, but we did as we have always done and worked with what we had to offer as much as we could. Most library programs transitioned to the digital realm, causing us to reflect on the ways we can more deeply and intentionally serve our community, the role of equity in this conversation, and our responsibilities to the patrons we serve. One area that particularly requires deeper thought and discussion is the role of book clubs in our communities. While there are numerous facets that lead us to select a particular book title, such as availability and popularity, there is a deep need for us as library staff to take diversity and inclusion into consideration when selecting which books we wish to actively promote to our communities as book club choices. There is a significant gap in the literature
overall concerning book club selection criteria and the role of librarians in elevating diverse voices in book club selection criteria. The goal of this article is to add to the dialogues happening at many libraries concerning book selection best practices for programming and to provide support to professionals looking to intentionally make the case for reading diversely in adult book clubs.

For decades, educators and librarians serving youth have discussed the importance of diverse and inclusive books and considered diversity as a factor when assigning books for classroom reading or as an addition to a collection. One of the most recognized and discussed advocates of this argument is Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop. In her foundational article, “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors,” Sims Bishop argues that books can serve as mirrors that reflect the world of the reader, windows that offer readers glimpses of another world, or sliding glass doors that allow readers to enter into and become immersed in someone else’s reality.1 This has become an essential touchstone in both education and librarianship for assisting readers in exploring the depth and breadth of literary and real-life experiences. We can use her metaphors as a tool to help us better curate the content we present to our patrons, as well as to advocate for diverse collections, programs, and displays to our administrators and our communities.

The Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) and Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) have long advocated for and educated library staff on diversity. In “The Importance of Diversity in Library Programs and Material Collections for Children,” Dr. Jaime Campbell Naidoo argues that the library is uniquely positioned to “play an integral role in helping [children] develop understanding and respect” for others from different backgrounds, helping to build “cultural bridges” by integrating diverse literature into library programs in an authentic way.2 One benefit of this work, according to Naidoo, is helping readers to make “cross-cultural connections and develop the skills necessary to function in a culturally pluralistic society.” (5). This is framed as vital work, essential to the healthy development of children to be able to thrive in our diversifying communities. Similarly, in their article “Storytime-Palooza! Racial Diversity and Inclusion in Storytime,” Anna Haase Krueger and Tamara Lee recognized the importance of book selection when creating diverse story times and argued that intentionally promoting and planning for diversity is a core responsibility of library staff and is a societal, as well as professional, good: “While there is little to no monetary cost for this kind of planning and programming, there is a high cost to society if we continue to ignore the reality of our increasingly diverse world.”3 This idea holds true for library workers serving adults as well; intentional book choices that reflect humanity’s diversity are central to our professional ethics and our best practices in collection development. The books that libraries endorse by highlighting them as book club choices must reflect our professional commitment to diverse and inclusive collections as commanded in ALA’s Library Bill of Rights.

“Diverse Collections: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights” was adopted by ALA Council in July 1982 and has continued to be amended since.4 This statement supports that librarians have an obligation to engage in collection development
practices that promote, support, and provide access to resources by diverse authors and creators. While this statement is a critical mandate to library workers in terms of access, section B of the ALA Policy Manual provides us further guidance on the core values of librarianship which must permeate collections, services, programming, and all other aspects of our professional work. Diversity is intentionally highlighted in our professional values, and the ALA Policy Manual explicitly states that “libraries can and should play a crucial role in empowering diverse populations for full participation in a democratic society” (23). In this way, libraries are charged to be spaces of social justice and equity. It is our professional responsibility to promote both physical and intellectual safe spaces for all, which requires us to actively and intentionally seek out and call out such obstacles to equity as prejudice and intolerance in our communities. The PLA Statement and Call to Action for Public Library Workers to Address Racism specifically challenged public libraries and library workers to “commit to structural change and to take[e] action to end systemic racism and injustice.” One way we can do this is to intentionally promote titles in displays and book clubs that authentically and respectfully feature diverse characters, themes, and experiences. In addition, book club selection offers a prime opportunity to inclusively highlight diverse authors and illustrators as well as debut titles from members of populations that are underrepresented in publishing.

If we are concerned with our statistics or with alienating current club members by reading diverse titles, consider that diversity is something that book club members want. In BookBrowse’s report “The Inner Lives of Book Clubs,” they examine the “human side” of book clubs—what current and prospective book club members want out of their book clubs as well as what makes a book club flourish or fall apart. Book selection is a contentious issue in many groups, with 26 percent of those who left a book club citing book selection as a factor in their decision, often out of boredom with homogeneity in the group’s choices or feeling that they are “in a rut” (32). Commonly, participants spoke of the choices being limited in genre or not sufficiently challenging; conversely expressing a desire to read outside of their comfort zone: “It is not the book that is outside the group’s comfort zone that disappoints, but more often the one that is too comfortably in it”; in fact, 73 percent of respondents want their group to be challenged by their book selection (33). As the authority in the room and often the one responsible for, at the very least, recommending titles to read, library staff are uniquely positioned to help book club members in expanding their reading horizons in the ways they wish to do. And, in the process of being more deliberate with our choices, we may attract more club members—while the report did not directly ask about a desire for member diversity past age and gender, most respondents preferred more diversity, and some went out of their way to comment on their desire for groups that were diverse in multiple ways. Our statistics and patrons will not be harmed by including diverse titles in our selections. They will be helped.

Library workers are often seen as authoritative experts in the community and are trusted for their discernment in suggesting books and sharing information. As a trusted resource, library workers are given a unique opportunity to bring attention to stories that lack conventional publisher support. This means we can share those hidden gems that

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**Resources**

RA for All's Actively Anti-Racist Service to Leisure Readers  

University of North Carolina’s at Chapel Hill’s Project Ready Curriculum  
https://ready.web.unc.edu/

Harvard’s Project Implicit  
https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html

Courageous Conversations  
https://courageousconversation.com/
may not have the financial support of big-name authors and publishing houses. It is the professional responsibility of library workers to highlight these high-quality titles and get them in the hands of readers. Book clubs offer an ideal opportunity to draw attention to these stories and increase the circulation and readership of books that may not have found readers through traditional marketing. As numerous recent articles and the trending hashtag #publishingpaidme highlight, the publishing world has a significant diversity problem and historically oppressed identity groups, including BIPOC, individuals with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+, still struggle for equal footing and publicity within the publishing world. Library workers, through the choices they make for readers’ advisory, displays, and programming, can seize this opportunity to elevate the voices of diverse authors, inclusive stories, and debut authors. Unfortunately, many library workers are only suggesting and highlighting books written by authors of color if the patron specifically asked for them. Based on our experiences, this same problem exists for other works by historically oppressed groups; for example, many libraries highlight LGBTQIA+ titles in June but fail to include them on romance displays or as book club selections.

This article is not advocating for book clubs to read exclusively works by diverse authors, but rather to consider diversity as commensurate to other established factors. While no comprehensive list of criteria or best practices is easily located, some factors that must be considered when selecting titles for book clubs are accessibility, popularity, quality (as determined primarily by professional review sources), club interest, and (we argue) diversity. All these must be taken into account, along with the overall list of titles read in every book club, regardless of that club’s format, size, or composition. When we speak about diversity as a factor, we must consider not only the attributes and identities of characters, but also how aspects like voice, plot, theme, and creation affect the experience of reading. For example, a realistic fiction novel set in the 1992 LA Uprising following the Rodney King verdict, written by a black man who came of age in the 1990s is an essentially different read than a well-researched nonfiction book written by a white historian living in Cambridge. Both can be equal in merit for the purposes of a book club choice, but they provide vastly different experiences to readers. While the latter can serve as a window into the time, the former can be a sliding glass door that immerses a reader into an experience. Neither can or should be used as an excuse to exclude the other from selection, either now or later in time. By reading more diversely, we can provide a depth of possibilities for rich discussion and individual growth. It allows for readers to build an understanding of and empathy toward other people and supports relationship building and intellectual thought.

As we have become more aware of the intolerance that manifestly exists within our country and our communities, many in our profession have begun to promote equity in a more intentional and deliberate manner. By using scientifically based bias reduction strategies, we can help both our staff and our patrons to recognize and begin to break free of the stereotypes we all harbor. In their article “Mitigating Implicit Bias,” Molly Higgins and Rachel Keiko Stark discuss some methods of reducing bias, including one that is particularly useful to us—perspective taking—in which
people “consider and empathically understand the first-person experience of a member of the stereotyped group. It is not possible to fully understand the experiences of any individual or group but, by using empathy to understand their perspectives, librarians can start to break down biases.” For further research and support on these topics, please refer to the resources highlighted in the sidebar.

We wish to make clear that the responsibility for progress toward intentional promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of librarianship does not lie on the shoulders of those who have been oppressed. We acknowledge the emotional labor, suffering, and struggle of marginalized populations to simply achieve rights that many of us have taken for granted. Rather, progress depends on the individual and collective work of all of us, especially those advantaged by inequitable systems. The world today is a complicated place. Just as we have historically taken stands against censorship and in favor of patron privacy and confidentiality, it is time that we as a profession embrace our opportunity and responsibility to intentionally consider diversity when selecting our book club titles for the year. Libraries are not and have never been paragons of inclusion and virtue: we are part of the problem. Let us become the solution. Let us deepen our understanding of injustice through education and work to intentionally amplify the voices of those who have been silenced. In our professional capacities we can embrace Dr. Sims Bishop’s “mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors” with all readers and become a place where we celebrate our differences and unities and do the needed work to strengthen our communities. Read diverse books. Promote diverse authors. Amplify diverse voices.

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In 2020, through books like Ibram X. Kendi’s *How To Be Antiracist*, and via the Black Lives Matter movement, many Americans were introduced to the concept of antiracism. Generally speaking, antiracism is the commitment to fight racism wherever you find it, including in yourself. We wanted to see how public libraries are joining the fight to end systemic racism and using antiracism concepts both in the library and in the library as a workplace, so we checked in with a few libraries.

As you’ll see, these libraries are fully engaged with the idea of antiracist libraries and are going beyond baby-steps. They are working with their staff members and their communities to reimagine libraries and library policies, examining each via an antiracism lens. Building antiracist public libraries may be a daunting goal, but it’s one we must take on if we are to dismantle the policies and practices that contribute to inequity in our communities and among our patrons. This work is tough and ongoing. There are no easy answers. Mistakes may happen. Obstacles will be presented. For libraries and library...
leaders doing the work and committed to building a culture of anti-racism and honoring principals of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice, the payoff will be worth it!

Thank you to all the responding libraries! We know it was one more task to fit into your busy day(s) and we appreciate your taking the time to help us capture this snapshot.

ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY (MD) PUBLIC LIBRARY
Written by: Christine Feldmann, primary author, Marketing and Communications Manager; Becky Hass, Programming and Outreach Manager; Catherine E. Hollerbach, Chief of Public Services and Branch Management; Koven Roundtree, Chief of Human Resources; Bethany Lambert, Learning and Development Manager; Skip Auld, Chief Executive Officer

PL: How have you educated yourself and your library staff on antiracism? Please discuss any training the library has undertaken or planned.

AACPL: Anne Arundel County Public Library began its journey to become an antiracist organization in 2017. An intersection of events spurred this action including a noose being found hanging at an area middle school and the formation of a countywide antiracism campaign. At the same time, the county’s Partnership for Children, Youth, and Family issued a community needs assessment highlighting significant inequities for people of color. Against this background, our board of trustees adopted the Urban Libraries Council’s Statement on Race and Social Equity, which set the stage for a comprehensive approach to antiracism and diversity work.

Since then, library staff have embraced a variety of antiracism trainings and have offered some of these resources to the community at large.

Required staff trainings include:

- Dismantling Institutional Racism
- Your Role in Workplace Diversity
- Overcoming Unconscious Bias in the Workplace

Staff are encouraged and incentivized to take the following trainings:

- The Groundwater Approach: Building a Practical Approach to Understanding Structural Racism (offered to the community five times)
- Creating Anti-Racist Storytimes: Activism, Belonging, and Change Workshop
- White Privilege
- How to be an Antiracist

PL: How are equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice principles incorporated into your library? Please address your strategic plan, HR policies, and library policies. What are the metrics you have identified to measure success?

AACPL: One of the most visible ways we can live our system values of diversity is through proper categorization and make up of our collection. Last summer, we stopped cataloging certain titles as classics. Previously, this designation elevated certain voices and experiences, which tended to have limited and outdated viewpoints.

Additionally, we have updated our materials selection policy to base decisions on the principles below:

- The library is an agent for positive change for our community.
- The library is committed to the truth and to trustworthy information, fighting all forms of disinformation, censorship, and barriers to free inquiry.

ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY STAFF CONTRIBUTORS

Christine Feldmann  Becky Hass  Catherine E. Hollerbach  Koven Roundtree  Bethany Lambert  Skip Auld
The library is a welcoming, inclusive place for every customer and acts to dismantle exclusionary structures including racism, sexism, and xenophobia.

The library advances individual and societal goals for equity, inclusion, and social justice to benefit the whole of our community.

**PL: Are staff empowered to come forward with policies/procedures they have identified as problematic? If so, how? Is there a safe space at your library (e.g., a group or forum) for BIPOC staff? Please share details.**

**AACPL:** Our longstanding Workforce Quality and Diversity Committee is changing its name to the Library Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Team. The group is planning for an antiracism audit to figure out the best way to create a safe space for BIPOC staff to share ideas and concerns openly and honestly, and to look for ways to evaluate and make core institutional changes. The group will consider ways for us to develop accountable relationships both within and outside our library system, and ways that white members of our staff can listen to and learn from BIPOC individuals.

**PL: How does your library work to recruit and retain diversity among library staff members? Please discuss recruitment and retention.**

**AACPL:** AACPL advertises its open positions on various websites dedicated to diversity in the profession. We actively work with sites such as the Afro American newspaper, National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking (REFORMA), Black Caucus of the American Library Association, Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association, and many more.

We have recently revised our Educational Assistance policy, increasing the maximum benefits and adding a new developmental leave component that will enable staff to request three hours per week to attend classes. The point of this revision is to attract greater diversity to our library system and to retain our diverse staff members.

**PL: Becoming (and being) antiracist is an ongoing struggle. How is your library prepared to be in it for the long haul?**

**AACPL:** The important work of becoming an antiracist organization is a continual process. To that end, we are actively seeking out ways to be involved in this work throughout our community. Library staff serve as members of:

- Banneker Douglass Museum Antiracist Coalition
- The Government Alliance on Race and Equity
- Anne Arundel County Health Equity and Racial Justice Committee
- Interfaith Advisory Council

One of the most public ways we are demonstrating our commitment to becoming antiracist is through placement of a lynching memorial at our Severna Park Library. In partnership with the Equal Justice Initiative and Connecting the Dots Anne Arundel County, this marker will be a permanent reminder of the need to remain persistent in the pursuit of justice for all.

Additionally, we are actively participating in a Maryland State Library initiative to provide quality legal reference to customers in their local communities to ensure equity of access to justice.

In recognition of the significance of the end of slavery in this country, the library will be closed, starting this year, every Juneteenth. We also plan to participate in Juneteenth celebrations in the county.

**PL: Any further thoughts?**

**AACPL:** This takes us over our 700-word limit, but I thought I’d share these two statements and a list of resources:

- Statement on Racism—Library CEO Skip Auld | Anne Arundel County Public Library (aacpl.net) (June 4, 2020)
- Supporting Our Asian Colleagues, Friends and Neighbors | Anne Arundel County Public Library (aacpl.net) (March 20, 2021)
- Combating Racism | Library Headquarters (aacpl.net)
CLEVELAND PUBLIC LIBRARY
Submitted by: Dr. Sadie Winlock, Chief Equity, Education, and Engagement Officer

PL: How have you educated yourself and your library staff on antiracism? Please discuss any training the library has undertaken or planned.
CPL: Kendi defines antiracism as “to set lucid definitions of racism/antiracism, racist/antiracist policies, racist/anti-racist ideas, racist/antiracist people.” One of those definitions includes racial inequity, “defined by him as when two or more racial groups are not standing on approximately equal footing.” The Cleveland Public Library focused specifically on identifying and eliminating racial inequities by first positioning the organization to understand what diversity, equity, and inclusion means, building a policy around it, and beginning to review our practices and procedures to be inclusive. Our Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) policy states:

- Cleveland Public Library embraces and supports the diversity of our workforce as well as our community to include differences in race, ethnicity, language, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, socioeconomic status, military status, physical or mental ability or disability.

The library demonstrates its support by

- engaging the board, leadership, and staff in ongoing inclusion training, education, and professional development;
- creating a safe workplace environment in which employees’ voices can be included, heard, valued, and treated with respect;
- developing and implementing programs and services that incorporate the differences that make us a community, ensuring fair and equitable treatment with access to appropriate resources and opportunities; and
- developing a supplier diversity program that mirrors the patrons we serve.

As the chief of Equity, Education, and Engagement, I sit on all committees that involve potential engagement of external resources to ensure we utilize our process as well as ensure the above is demonstrated across the library system.

PL: How are equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice principles incorporated into your library? Please address your strategic plan, HR policies, and library policies. What are the metrics you have identified to measure success?
CPL: After establishing the policy, we organized a committee that supported the development of our three-year DEI strategic plan to begin to “demonstrate” our commitment to the policy. At a glance the plan states:

Year One—2020—Strategic Initiatives—Create Awareness/Build Foundation

- Education Department is established with a DEI division
- DEI coordinator/specialist is recruited and hired
- DEI vision and strategy is communicated internally and externally
- DEI education is developed and training begins with management
- Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) concept is introduced and begins to organize
- Programs and services assessment is completed and program changes recommended
- Supplier Diversity Council is established
- Supplier Diversity Policy is developed and approved by the board of trustees
- Supplier diversity strategy is developed and implemented
- Minority Supplier Diversity Academy is organized

Year Two—2021—Strategic Initiatives—Increase Understanding and Knowledge

- Education continues and begins to be expanded to all staff
Employee onboarding includes DEI training
Community assessments are completed to insure program and services inclusivity
Marketing and communications continues and is expanded to internal and external stakeholders
Some new/modified programs and services are rolled out based on community assessments
Measurement tools for programs and services are developed to include policy and procedure effectiveness
Supplier Diversity Council assists with establishing measurement and tracking
Minority Supplier Diversity Academy begins and or continues training and development
ERGs are organized and meeting to establish goals and strategies

Year Three—2022—Strategic Initiatives—Develop Best Practices

Organization begins to clearly demonstrate diversity in language, dress, religion, and nontraditional schedules
Policies and procedures are reviewed and periodically assessed for continuous improvement
Measurement tools are implemented
Human Resources practices and procedures are periodically reviewed for equity, inclusion, and diversity
Minority Supplier Diversity Academy continues to train

Since the implementation of the plan, we have developed six Employee Resource Groups, with a focus on understanding the many cultures in and outside of our libraries, and supporting the communities through appropriate programs and services, established goals for minority engagement in our facilities management, organized a Supplier Diversity Council that includes external stakeholders, implemented policies that intentionally include minorities in our procurement of $10,000 or less and over $10,000 on an annual basis, and hired a director of Inclusion and Leadership Education who will support developing and implementing education and training to close learning gaps from consistent definitions/language, shifts in thinking to shifts in behaviors. Our DEI training combined with leadership education provides support for both employees and external partners over a six-month period and will be provided every six months. Some of the training topics include but are not limited to:

- Becoming a Culturally Competent Individual
- Understanding Leadership and Gender
- Managing Unconscious Bias
- Understanding and Managing Micro-Aggressions
- Privilege and Work Dynamics
- Strategies for Difficult Conversations

The director of Inclusion and Leadership Education will begin to educate employees on common definitions and language around DEI and start conversations through the ERGs about our challenges and opportunities to better understand and incorporate those differences for both employee and organizational success.

PL: Are staff empowered to come forward with policies/procedures they have identified as problematic? If so, how? Is there a safe space at your library (e.g., a group or forum) for BIPOC staff? Please share details.
CPL: Currently we are using our ERGs to empower employees to share improvement ideas on policies and procedures. Employees are also empowered to contact my office directly with any concerns or challenges.

PL: How does your library work to recruit and retain diversity among library staff members? Please discuss recruitment AND retention.
CPL: We don’t have any challenges with diversity. There is diverse representation at every level at the library. Our focus is on inclusivity, making sure all employees have a voice. We make almost all decisions by committee. The committee model provides
a place at the table for every employee. We also just developed a new performance management system that will allow for advancement either in title or compensation for best performances. This new system will be introduced and implemented by the third quarter of this year.

**PL:** Becoming (and being) antiracist is an ongoing struggle. How is your library prepared to be in it for the long haul?

**CPL:** We have demonstrated our commitment by developing an Equity Department, hiring a director of Inclusion and Leadership Education, implementing an ongoing education track that is inclusive of DEI, and providing training and education to external organizations. We will include our inputs, outputs, and outcomes in our annual report, providing information to our community on our efforts and impact on the community.

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**Oak Park (IL) Public Library**

David Seleb, Executive Director

**PL:** How have you educated yourself and your library staff on antiracism? Please discuss any training the library has undertaken or planned.

**OPPL:** We started in 2014 by turning outward and listening to our community—most especially when they replied to “What kind of community do you want to live in?” We discovered that equity, diversity, and inclusion are always at the top of Oak Parkers’ list of priorities.

Working with library community partners and now a consultant on our antiracism journey has taught us much over the years. More recently, it has helped to identify notable blind spots, to show us how much more we need to learn, and to begin to outline a formal path for moving ahead. For a more detailed summary, see our journey milestones at http://oppl.org/anti-racism.

**PL:** How are equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice principles incorporated into your library? Please address your strategic plan, HR policies, and library policies. What are the metrics you have identified to measure success?

**OPPL:** In March 2021, our board of library trustees approved the goals and objectives of a formal Anti-Racism Strategic Plan. This was after more than a year of internal work and the formation of a new Anti-Racism Advisory Team, a cross-section of stakeholders including local administrators, staff, patrons, board representation, and young adults to help shape direction and to develop the plan.

Prior decisions, such as going fine free and replacing contracted security guards with a staff social work model, were also made with increasing equity in mind.

Metrics (or, as we name them in the antiracism strategic plan, benchmarks) are identified in a companion action plan. Benchmarks include:

- Quarterly interactions among staff of the same racial identity, where they consider the ways internalized racism has impacted their lives and their work.
- Semiannual antiracism training and learning events for all staff.
- Incorporate internalized and interpersonal training within the onboarding process for all new hires to be conducted within ninety days of start date.
- An audit of all position descriptions to identify and remove all unnecessary or inequitable educational or experiential requirements or offer the ability to obtain the requirement.
- A specific percent of expenditures is to be allocated to Black and Indigenous people of color (BIPOC) vendors.
- A document for discourse as it pertains to an understanding of the complexities associated with defining racism.
- Sharing that document with the library’s larger community of stakeholders.

**PL:** Are staff empowered to come forward with policies/procedures they have identified as problematic? Is there a safe space at your library...
(e.g., a group or forum) for BIPOC staff? Please share details.

**OPPL:** Yes, staff are empowered in multiple ways to share around this work. But this does not always happen freely or quickly. Building trust through transparency takes time. As does building relationships both within and outside the library to give this work authenticity.

In June 2020, the library established its first affinity group for Black staff members. Employees have since met monthly, using it as a safe space to gather, share, and support each other. Early on in our plan work, we asked and discussed with all staff what their aspirations for this work would be. We used a tool called ThoughtExchange, which allows anonymous participation. We also asked for staff input on an early draft of the antiracism strategic plan goals and objectives. Questions, concerns, and comments were welcome, many of which were integrated into the final document.

**PL:** How does your library work to recruit and retain diversity among library staff members? Please discuss recruitment AND retention.

**OPPL:** During the pandemic, we have not been actively recruiting. We have been working on strengthening relationships locally and in the library industry overall to be better positioned for the future. In fact, later this year we expect to be recruiting for a director of Equity and Anti-racism to join the library’s Leadership Team.

For retention, we focus on a variety of strategies including equitable pay, a commitment to well-being, and career advancement for current staff. Examples include converting part-time to full-time positions when we can, and providing training to support the library profession overall.

**PL:** Becoming (and being) antiracist is an ongoing struggle. How is your library prepared to be in it for the long haul?

**OPPL:** Having a formal, board of library trustees-approved plan is one way. Inviting community voices from the start to be creators of that plan—including the way the impact is measured—is another.

We recognize that this work is so much bigger than the library, but at the same time this is very much library work. We began to explore that in an editorial published in our local newspaper (https://www.oakpark.com/2021/05/11/why-anti-racism-work-is-library-work/).

Intentions are clearly outlined in the plan itself. Take, for example, this plan goal included to address structural racism: “Lead the charge in the galvanizing of multiple organizations in Oak Park and governing bodies toward the expansion of anti-racist practices in all that we are and all that we do.”

Still, making this new plan a board-approved document places it with policies that formalize and prioritize the work, independent of who is on the library board or staff. The plan defines a roadmap, and makes the organization accountable for moving ahead on it.

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**PRINCE GEORGE’S COUNTY MEMORIAL LIBRARY SYSTEM, MARYLAND**

Roberta Phillips, CEO

**PL:** How have you educated yourself and your library staff on antiracism? Please discuss any training the library has undertaken or planned.

**PGCMLS:** It was essential for Prince George’s County Memorial Library System to become a national leader in what it means to be an antiracist library. Serving a majority Black and Hispanic county with a very diverse population, library staff made this work critical and urgent. We knew we needed to educate not only our staff (at all levels, regardless of their own backgrounds), but also the community. This work was initiated prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the establishment of the library’s new Strategic Framework 2021–2024, which includes a focus area on inclusion. The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and too many others in early 2020 (and since the birth of our nation) pushed PGCMLS to be more bold and deliberate with proactive antiracism education and a to take a deep look at the systemic inequities in the library.
Education is the foundation for all of our race and social equity work. PGCMLS focuses on creating opportunities for staff, customers, and the community at large to learn about individual biases, structural inequities, and tactics for advancing social equity from the perspective of human rights as a nonpolitical issue. We invited staff to share their views and reflections on the social unrest of spring 2020 during confidential staff dialogues. These conversations, and ongoing discussions with staff, helped PGCMLS develop a clear and public stance that our library will stand up for the civil rights of Black Americans. We learned that more specific staff training was needed, across diversity, equity, inclusion, and antiracism topics in order to have a solid foundation to advance sustainable change. We understand that embarking on this work will not be a ‘one and done’ approach, rather that this will take years to implement and require infinite mindsets.

PGCMLS has offered the following trainings since summer 2020:

- LGBTQ+ Allyship and Best Practices Training
- Changing the Lens: Optics Workshop
- Bias Training
- All staff received a copy of Ibram X. Kendi’s *How to Be an Antiracist* as required reading, in advance of a major public event we hosted with the author that reached more than 226,000 live viewers in July 2020.
- COO for Public Services Michelle Hamiel served on the Urban Libraries Council Race and Social Equity Task Force that created a leadership brief to inform antiracism leadership in public libraries throughout North America.

Before we could begin to move the needle in our community, we knew that we would need to take a deep dive into our internal practices. This work is underway and being led by a staff race and social equity team. The team developed a Race and Social Equity Strategic Framework to guide a three-year internal racial audit process that will include external stakeholders.

**PL: How are equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice principles incorporated into your library? Please address your strategic plan, HR policies, and library policies. What are the metrics you have identified to measure success?**

**PGCMLS:**

- Created a Race and Social Equity (RSE) Team internally to assess current policies, practices, and procedures.
- RSE team created a three-year planning document for the work that must happen systemwide.
- Created a “Black Lives Matter. Period.” awareness campaign, including social media, a new antiracism webpage, and signage and buttons at the branches.
- Developed a Heritage portal that celebrates major cultural communities and heritage events (Juneteenth, Black History and Culture, Hispanic Heritage, LGBTQ+ Pride, Asian Pacific American Heritage, Women’s History, Native and Indigenous Heritage).
- Committed to publicly advocating to Stop Asian Hate.
- Developed an LGBTQ+ toolkit for staff, expanded LGBTQ+ programming and outreach; we were recognized with the Urban Libraries Council Innovations Award.
- Curated special Black Lives Matter issue of VOYA Magazine.
- Partnerships: Maryland Libraries Together statewide programming on social equity, joint programs with the Black Caucus of the American Library Association.
- Leading creation of Black Caucus, Maryland Library Association.

We realized quickly that our staff was hurting and needed a safe space to share their rage, hurt, frustration, and tears. Turning to our countywide Office of Human Rights, they helped us facilitate town halls where staff could share their experiences and
reflections for the benefit of their colleagues. This led to our staff leading the way in inclusion by becoming members of teams focused on key initiatives, writing for publications, and by creating programming around race, social justice, and inclusion. As the CEO for PGCMLS, I started hosting weekly Communication Conversations on these topics with expert guests to promote understanding and resources.

PL: Are staff empowered to come forward with policies/procedures they have identified as problematic? If so, how? Is there a safe space at your library (e.g., a group or forum) for BIPOC staff? Please share details.

PGCMLS: Prince George’s County Memorial Library System has a diverse staff, but it has become clear in recent months that we need to be more intentional with removing barriers to advancement across racial groups and socioeconomic classes. We started by making a MSLIS preferred, but not mandatory, when posting librarian positions internally and externally. A team was formed to create a more comprehensive career ladder that will offer more development for staff interested in promotion and leadership. We are evaluating our human resources policies through an equity lens as part of the strategic plan created by the Race and Social Equity Team. Retention happens when we give all staff members an opportunity to lead from wherever they are by encouraging them to join teams, lead programs, create content, and speak up. Leadership’s job is to listen to their voices and to create a culture where all staff feel valued and can utilize their unique talents and passions to serve the public. Staff are encouraged to lead programming, contribute to publications, present at conferences, and advance change in services and operations from wherever they sit in the organization. The Race and Social Equity Team, as well as other heritage-focused teams like the LGBTQ+ Team, provide staff with a forum to share concerns and identify actions to advance internal change.

PL: How does your library work to recruit and retain diversity among library staff members? Please discuss recruitment AND retention.

PGCMLS: We are in the process of addressing known barriers in recruitment and retention. We are reducing MSLIS requirements for librarian positions so that library staff with commensurate experience can move up to higher paying positions without the degree requirement. We established a team approach throughout the library to emphasize collaboration across departments and branches, and deepen staff engagement with initiatives driving the implementation of Strategic Framework 2021–2024. Staff at every level are encouraged to share their individual perspectives to inform operations decisions. We are creating new processes for recruiting, interviewing, and onboarding. Staff are encouraged to gain leadership experience on the job by leading projects or work teams with peers across departments, branches, and roles.

PL: Becoming (and being) antiracist is an ongoing struggle. How is your library prepared to be in it for the long haul?

PGCMLS: Prince George’s County Memorial Library System is dedicated to the work of being an antiracist library and to be a place that is truly inclusive. In part, this requires a collective recognition of the fact that advancing equity and antiracism is a long-term commitment to constant assessment and betterment. Public libraries should move on from the treacherous position of remaining neutral, but must stand up for all human rights. This does not infringe upon intellectual freedom. The strategies we are putting into place are starting with an initial three-to-five-year timeline, but we know that these frameworks will evolve with intentionality and as societal circumstances change. PGCMLS is investing financial resources and staff time in training, collections, and resources, and the long-term planning for advancing social equity in our agency and services. Public libraries must move beyond being transactional organizations to community organizations that focus on social impact, starting with the power of literacy and lifelong learning to help customers with their own journeys of self-discovery. We hold strong to our beliefs that libraries are essential in all communities to provide equity, inclusion, and democracy for all.
INTERESTED IN LIBRARY SOCIAL WORK TOPICS?

JOIN THE PLA SOCIAL WORK INTEREST GROUP

connect.ala.org
Raise your hand if you’ve heard (or even perhaps uttered) the age-old cry, “We’re not social workers here! We’re librarians!” Well, that statement only held water for a while, and then the earth began to shift! Increasingly library staff are connecting their patrons with information and referrals on housing, employment, health care, immigration, domestic violence, substance misuse and more. For many years authors Sara K. Zettervall and Mary C. Nienow have been studying the place where customer service meets social service. While paying respect to the boundaries that divide the two, they’ve come up with some very valuable advice on how to service not just information needs, but whole person needs as well.

PL: You’ve been a proponent of “social” or “whole person” librarianship for a long time. What is your inspiration?

SZ: This started more as a personal interest for me while I was learning what it means to be a librarian. That happened to be timed with the start of library systems looking into creating collaborations, so we’ve continued to ride that wave as it gets bigger and bigger. With so many new people joining the conversation all the time, it’s a dynamic and exciting movement, and we’re still learning, growing, and discovering what the future will be.

MN: I was inspired by Sara! She was doing an internship at a community center running a book club for Somali girls. She asked me to co-facilitate with her. We started talking more and more about the intersections between librarians and social workers. As Sara talked about some of the concerns and issues...
facing librarians when they work with patrons, I was listening with my social work lens and thinking about how I would approach the same situation as a social worker. I made a comment to Sara that social workers always consider the “whole person” whenever working with clients, and from there whole person librarianship was born.

PL: How do you define “whole person librarianship?”
SZ: When I present to library staff, I describe it in two parts. The first is the logistics of library-social work collaboration: How do we get social service providers into libraries at all different levels and ensure their roles are sustainable? The second part is applying the basics of social work concepts to library practice: How can library staff be better service providers while staying true to the library’s role as a source of information? This is the part that’s closer to my heart and has become what’s unique about the conversations I have with library staff. There’s a lot we can learn from each other, but that doesn’t mean librarians should become social workers. To make sure we settle on good boundaries, we need to keep talking about what our roles are in this shifting landscape.

MN: I think of it as an approach librarians can take to every encounter they have with patrons. No one comes to the library with one story, one information request—there is a complex interplay of factors which may never be known to the librarian, but are still there impacting upon the interaction. It is understanding and treating each patron with the dignity and respect they deserve as a whole person, not seeing them as just one thing.

PL: Speaking of your backgrounds, talk a bit about the journeys you’ve taken to get your respective messages across. Where have you found the greatest success and where have you hit the biggest wall?
SZ: I honestly didn’t get into this expecting to launch a whole side career of offering consultation and training. I just thought we were going to do some research and write a book! But the training work has turned out to be so crucial to the whole endeavor. While we were writing the book, we often presented together, and those interactions really shaped how we presented content in the book. Since then, I’ve mostly flown solo on trainings, and having those ongoing conversations has helped me continually refresh and refine my understanding of what’s most important to library staff in particular. I’ve been called on by people around the world, and that’s been a huge success. But at the same time, it’s been challenging to figure out how that fits into the rest of my life.

MN: When we first started this work, the ideas and concepts were really embraced by the library community. The majority of places we presented were library conferences. However, as I discussed it with students, colleagues, and connected with the social workers doing the work, it started to take hold. Similar to Sara, I think fitting in the time to do the research, networking, and presenting needed to really get the message across is the biggest challenge.

PL: Sara, in a Public Libraries article published in 2015, you credit the San Francisco Public Library as being the first to hire a full-time social worker. Why did they do it and how do you think it’s worked for them?
SZ: I saw a PBS News Hour video about SFPL at every training, and I recommend it to anyone who wants a great overview of their work (https://youtu.be/oOeBLhs5Jko). Even though it’s a few years old, it’s relevant and is a place where you can see the SFPL folks speak for themselves about their reasons and experiences. Their model continues to be the foundation for the vast majority of collaborations, so I would absolutely call it a success. The one thing I think has evolved the most since they started over a decade ago is that their program, and almost all of the initial library social worker hires, was based on a very urban need to serve large populations of patrons experiencing homelessness. What we see now is a diversification of the reasons libraries engage with social services and the responsibilities of library social workers. They address all kinds of basic needs among
patrons but support the mental health of library staff, too.

**PL:** What do you feel are the biggest challenges public libraries are facing today that might lead them toward considering adding a social worker to the team?

**SZ:** These collaborations were growing exponentially in advance of the pandemic, and a lot of that was in response to immediate needs libraries saw among their in-person patrons. During the pandemic, libraries lost funding sources and may not be able to continue to hire at the pace we saw a couple of years ago. But social service providers have struggled to make virtual connections just as much as libraries have, and we’ve been able to help each other expand our reach. I think the biggest challenge the pandemic raised, though, was that many libraries were asked to become social service providers, and this has really challenged all staff to face how we draw the boundaries of our work in a way that feels much more immediate. We’ve really valued mutual support and collaboration, but many library staff members don’t feel comfortable taking on de facto child care provider or health enrollment specialist roles. This is a moment of opportunity for librarianship as a profession to come together and decide who we are, who we want to be, and how collaborations fit into that big picture.

**MN:** I think the overwhelming human need is what will help them continue to move in the direction of hiring social workers, e.g., mental illness, homelessness, drug use, poverty, joblessness, health care, etc. I also believe as more of the outcomes of having a social worker in the public library become clear, libraries will see it as a necessary and efficacious investment.

**PL:** For libraries without a social worker but facing the same problems, what are some other solutions to improving patron services?

**SZ:** One thing I always try to convey to libraries is that you don’t need a social worker on staff (though they do contribute a lot). This is where we talk about the idea of “relationships are the new reference collection.” Library staff are capable of applying a reference-based model to their community partnerships: they can cultivate, curate, and connect to those interpersonal resources without taking on the roles of social service providers. If you have deep knowledge of the services available in your community and personal relationships with the folks who provide them, you can make a hand-off for your patrons that connects them to experts, so you don’t have to feel like you’re supposed to be the expert.

**MN:** In our book we discuss a number of different ways libraries can improve services without hiring a social worker. Sara’s response is one way. Other ideas include working with local schools of social work and providing the library as a practicum site; or having community social workers offer “office hours” or resource fairs at the library in order to connect with patrons and provide them with additional support.

**PL:** For many libraries, the best (and most realistic) answer is to train staff to better deal with the social issues their patrons bring in. How would you suggest they go about designing that training? What’s important to learn and how, where, and from whom can it be learned?

**SZ:** I really can’t emphasize enough that defining roles and boundaries is key. Before identifying training content and sources, staff members should have an inclusive conversation about challenges. Which questions do they get a lot that they can’t answer? When do they find themselves in uncomfortable situations with patrons? Ideally, staff have a facilitated conversation where they can come to consensus on what they want to take on vs. what they want to pass to other organizations. That can be used to say, we want to learn these things for ourselves, but for the rest, we want to learn what our partnering organizations do so we can feel confident handing patrons over to them.

**MN:** I think Sara’s answer really gets to the heart of it. One thing I know about librarians is that they are pretty resourceful! Looking at the community and identifying the local social services department, homeless
shelters, community clinics, non-profits, mental health clinics, hospitals, schools, community centers, nursing homes, Universities, legal clinics, city council members, county board, state legislative members, congressional offices, or advocacy organizations within the community will lead libraries to the people, resources, training, and social workers they need to design and implement high-quality training.

PL: In your book you suggest collaborating with students of social work and even considering bringing in interns. What kind of contribution could you ask and expect those interns to make?

SZ: It’s always important to keep in mind that while social work students may seem like “free labor,” they are there to learn. They need guidance and are working on a time-limited schedule. They’re best for clearly defined projects like developing one particular training, or doing an environmental scan to identify community partners.

MN: It depends on whether or not you bring in undergraduate (BSW) or graduate (MSW) students. Undergraduates are being trained as generalists, which means they are learning how to apply foundational skills. They can perform needs assessments, case management, resource referrals, basic interviewing, advocacy, and support groups. However, they are not considered clinicians, which means they can not do individual or family psychotherapy. Graduate students, depending on their specialization, may be able to provide more in-depth therapeutic treatments for higher need patrons. MSW interns may also be able to provide support to library staff who are struggling with difficult situations or complicated patron interactions.

PL: Could you each share what in your own careers or backgrounds most inspired you to write this book? What do you hope to accomplish?

SZ: My first master’s degree was in creative writing, so the idea of publishing a book of some sort was probably hanging over me more than it does for most people. But I might not have considered it for this if we hadn’t been approached by our editor at Libraries Unlimited, Jessica Gribble. She saw the potential in this work even though she had no experience with it and has been a great person to work with. As for what I hope to accomplish, I think we did it with the book. There was so much happening but nowhere to turn for guidance on creating these collaborations. I know the library social workers in big systems provide great guidance and insights for folks when they can, but for now, there’s nothing out there like what we wrote.

MN: As a university professor, writing and publishing is a major expectation within academia, so this was part of my motivation. It was also another opportunity to partner and collaborate with Sara. Bringing our perspectives together and interweaving them into a book was stimulating and incredibly rewarding. I hoped to provide readers a framework for this work. I wanted others to see themselves in the case studies and be inspired to replicate the work within their own setting. Because this is something new, it can feel overwhelming and people can struggle with knowing where to start. We often joked we were “building the plane while flying it.” This is the instruction manual for future pilots.

PL: Can you share a success story that library directors could use when first introducing the concept of “whole person librarianship” to their teams?

SZ: Our book centers each chapter on a case study, so I would love for library directors to look to those for success stories. Because the content of the chapter builds on the case study, they can immediately identify how they could implement the same type of work. Otherwise, I recommend taking a look at the interactive map on https://wholepersonlibrarianship.com, which shows where these collaborations are happening across the US and the world. They can identify libraries near them or library systems of a similar size and get contact information to reach out directly and hear from folks who are in their same situation.
**Whole Person Librarianship**

**MN:** I think it’s important for library directors to start with their own context. Why is this approach needed? Are the ways it’s being dealt with working? If not, whole person librarianship offers an alternative solution that has proven effective and can support not only patrons, but the library team.

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**ALA Executive Board Reinforces Commitment to Safeguarding Intellectual Freedom and Social Justice**

Recently, the ALA Executive Board released the following statement opposing initiatives to censor information resources, curriculum, and programs addressing racial injustice, Black American history, and diversity education.

*The American Library Association is committed to upholding our core values, which include equitable access to knowledge, social justice, and intellectual freedom. As members of a profession committed to free and equitable access to information and the pursuit of truth, we stand firm in opposing any effort to suppress knowledge, to label “controversial” views, or dictate what is orthodox in history, politics, or belief.

At present, efforts to censor any consideration or discussion of racism, slavery, Black American history, and related issues and concerns in our schools, colleges, and universities pose a real and present threat to libraries’ ability to fulfill their role as trusted community institutions that provide factual and accurate information that reflects the breadth of the American experience about these topics.

A commitment to intellectual freedom and social justice requires that libraries not only protect the truth from suppression but also prevent its distortion. Consequently, the American Library Association has joined other educational institutions and civil liberties organizations in opposing any legislative proposal or local initiative intended to ban instruction, consideration, or discussion about the role of racism in the history of the United States, or how systemic racism manifests itself in our schools, workplaces, and government agencies.

ALA member leaders and staff pledge to join with library workers, libraries, and state and regional library associations to oppose any proposal to censor information resources, curriculum, or programs addressing racial injustice, Black American history, and diversity education. We commit to supporting libraries, library workers, schools, and universities facing these challenges and to develop tools that will prepare library workers to defend their collections, counter falsehoods, and engage their communities in important conversations about racial injustice and empowering everyone to fully participate in our democratic society. Visit [www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org) for more information.
According to the latest 5-year estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (2019) there are approximately 386,000 library workers in the United States. This includes workers in three occupation categories: librarians and media collection specialists; library technicians; and library assistants, clerical. Of the total, 54.5% work full-time (35 or more hours per week on average), while 45.5% work part-time (1 to 34 hours per week). People under age 16 or those who did not work in the past 12 months are not included in the total.

49.2% work in libraries and archives (including public libraries), 20.8% in elementary and secondary schools, and 23.2% in higher education. The remaining 6.9% work in other industries. 66.4% of library workers are employed in the public sector (local, state, and federal government), while the remainder work in nonprofits, the private sector, or are self-employed.

Compared to the U.S. population as a whole, people of color are underrepresented among library workers, while white people are overrepresented. People of color are 25.3% of library workers (on the chart below this is all people except those identified as “white non-Hispanic”), compared to 39.3% of the U.S. population. Hispanic/Latinx people are particularly underrepresented: 9.1% of library workers compared to 18% of the U.S. population. Note that for the purposes of the Census, Hispanic/Latinx people may be of any race. On the chart they are excluded from the “white non-Hispanic” category, but they are included in other racial groups. Consequently, the percentages do not add up to 100.

Library workers as a whole are 80% female and 20% male. A higher proportion of school librarians are female (94%), compared to academic librarians (69%).

Explore the data online with this interactive visualization:
https://tinyurl.com/libdemographics

—Compiled by Sara Goek,
Program Manager, PLA
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Don’t miss the premier event for public library professionals—PLA 2022 Conference! Save the date and start your planning to join us next year in Portland, OR, March 23–25. We’ve learned and grown so much since PLA 2020, and we can’t wait to share what we have in store.

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