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Message from the Director

Multnomah County Library is at an inflection point in its 154-year history. While the library has long sought to be an institution dedicated to the success and well-being of everyone in the community, its historical legacy does not align with the commitment to equity and inclusion we hold so deeply today. With an obligation to understand and dismantle the systems of oppression that have privileged many, while actively excluding others, the library is reinforcing its commitment to equitably and inclusively serving everyone in this diverse community.

During 2016-2017, we focused on backing up this commitment. As the library established new priorities for the years ahead, we recognized the importance of permanently demonstrating our responsibility to uphold this work. Now, one of the core "pillars" that define the library's role and value in the community proclaims Multnomah County Library as a "champion for equity and inclusion."

Throughout this report are many examples of our efforts to move this work forward. In 2016, the library hired its first equity and inclusion manager. Soon after, we formed a systemwide Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee to begin creating a sustainable foundation for placing equity at the center of our planning and decision-making.

We also began reflecting inward — examining the policies and practices that have created inequities over time. Our HR department and managers across the organization are engaging in implicit bias training so they can improve practices for both staff and patrons. We also created spaces for staff to share their own experiences of inequity and discrimination. Knowing where we have failed has been an important first step toward reducing barriers to access and building a stronger library system.

As this report reflects on the library's equity and inclusion goals and accomplishments, it also details the many challenges we face. Making the lasting and impactful changes necessary for creating a more equitable and inclusive library system, for today and future generations, requires a steadfast commitment to addressing a painful history of exclusion, systemic oppression and racial discrimination.

A well-deserved thank you goes out to all the library staff who are behind the wonderful programs and services you will learn about in this report and whose courage to share their personal experiences is leading us to make important changes in our organization. Their commitment to the notion that the public library is truly an engine of opportunity is evident in their work.

Thank you for your support and patronage of Multnomah County Library. We look forward to sharing our progress with you in the years ahead as we reinforce our dedication to this work.

Vailey Oehlke
Director of Libraries
Multnomah County Library mission statement
Multnomah County Library is a key community asset, serving people and enabling individual and community development. As the world around us changes rapidly, we hold constant four pillars that define the library’s role and value in this community:

- Free access for all
- A trusted guide for learning
- The leading advocate for reading
- A champion for equity and inclusion

Equity and inclusion vision
Operationalize a system that equitably nurtures, empowers, and lifts staff, patrons and the community to their highest potential

Urban Libraries Council statement on race and social equity
In October 2017, Multnomah County Library joined public libraries around the country in signing on to the Urban Libraries Council statement on race and social equity:

As leaders of North America’s public libraries, we are committed to achieving racial and social equity by contributing to a more just society in which all community members can realize their full potential. Our libraries can help achieve true and sustained equity through an intentional, systemic and transformative library-community partnership. Our library systems are working to achieve equity in the communities we serve by:

- Eliminating racial and social equity barriers in library programs, services, policies and practices
- Creating and maintaining an environment of diversity, inclusion and respect both in our library systems and in all aspects of our community role
- Ensuring that we are reaching and engaging disenfranchised people in the community and helping them express their voice
- Serving as a convener and facilitator of conversations and partnerships to address community challenges
- Being forthright on tough issues that are important to our communities

Libraries are trusted, venerable and enduring institutions, central to their communities and an essential participant in the movement for racial and social equity.
Government Alliance on Race & Equity (GARE)
Multnomah County Library is an active member of the Government Alliance on Race & Equity (GARE), a national network of government working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all. As members of GARE, library staff have opportunities to learn about best and promising equity practices and utilize resources that have been well established in moving equity forward in government organizations.

Multnomah County Library is also actively participating in the GARE Library Interest Group which is working to develop the capacity of libraries to make racial equity a priority within libraries, cities, communities and national associations. An issue brief on racial equity in libraries is forthcoming spring 2018.

Multnomah County Equity and Social Justice Core Team
Multnomah County Library actively participates in the countywide Equity and Social Justice Core Team. This team brings together equity leaders from county departments to collectively lead transformational change across the system and advance safety, trust and belonging. The team serves as a resource for the organization and practitioners. The team's goals include:

- Countywide technical assistance
- Coordination and support within and across departments
- Collective influence for county-wide equity strategies and policies
Introduction

We reflect and serve a diverse community. We serve every patron with respect and dignity. We offer resources that advance opportunity and equity. We hire and support talented staff members who reflect the community we serve.

— 2016–2018 Multnomah County Library strategic priority

Multnomah County Library provides critical services across 19 branch locations, including services to those in our county who are experiencing the most disadvantages and marginalization. Rapid changes in Multnomah County have pushed some communities further to the margins and created additional barriers, making it impossible for some to access resources and create opportunities for themselves.

As an institution committed to creating free and equitable access for all, the library must focus on dismantling the systems that create and perpetuate barriers. When we can create equity, we build healthy communities that benefit everyone.

This first Equity and Inclusion Annual Report reviews the library's progress in evaluating and addressing equity and inclusion for staff, patrons and communities. During 2016–2017, the library focused on an internal review of its current state of equity, with emphasis on supporting and educating staff to be better prepared to have open and authentic discussions about how we — individually and as an organization — positively or negatively impact experiences for members of marginalized communities.

This report recalls a number of the achievements of the past year, in addition to noting the challenges the library faces in moving forward. The report also outlines the goals and strategies that will continue to drive future equity and inclusion work.

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1 Equity: When everyone has access to opportunities necessary to satisfy their essential needs, advance their well-being and achieve their full potential.
Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee

Taking action to shift structures and practices to create equity and inclusion for staff and the community

During 2016–2017, the Executive Management Team (EMT) established an Equity and Inclusion Steering Team (EIST). The EIST includes executive, management and supervisory staff from across the organization. The team is responsible for the development and actualizing of equity and inclusion initiatives that support MCL’s mission and priorities. The team will provide support and strategic guidance to the library's forthcoming equity team in developing initiatives that will help the organization better understand and address the needs of the library's diverse staff, patrons and communities. The team also helps ensure that a focus on equity and inclusion remains at the forefront of MCL’s work.
Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee Priorities

While the team is still early in its development, the group has identified the following priorities:

- Develop a systemwide equity team that includes staff from all levels of the organization
- Provide training for the steering team to enhance understanding and skills in supporting equity and inclusion across the organization
- Provide training and development in the use of the equity lens in decision making
- Provide consultation to managers on location-specific equity concerns
- Evaluate equity in policies and procedures and provide ongoing support and recommendations
- Provide consultation, recommendations and assist with implementation of workforce equity strategies
Goal 1: Strengthen and demonstrate institutional commitment to equity and inclusion

Strategies

1. Provide clear, comprehensive and cohesive communication related to diversity, equity and inclusion
2. Build and sustain infrastructure to enhance diversity, equity and inclusion at all levels of the organization
3. Allocate budgetary resources to diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives
4. Ensure accountability of implementation of diversity, equity and inclusion work

Multnomah County Library is demonstrating commitment to equity and creating an inclusive environment, including improving systems and services that promote diversity among our staff and patrons. Following a 2016 equity readiness survey completed by all library managers, the organization began closely examining issues of equity and inclusion, and offering dedicated and focused resources to move the work forward. The director of libraries and the Executive Management Team are committed to improving the library experience for staff, patrons and the community.

2016–2017 accomplishments

➤ The library created an equity and inclusion manager position dedicated to leading the organization’s equity and inclusion efforts.
➤ The library created its first Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee and is working toward the creation of a library equity team.
➤ The library's executive management is engaging in structured, regular and ongoing foundational equity work, including:
  ● Evaluating resource allocation to ensure that appropriate resources are directed toward underserved communities
  ● Accountability to staff experiences of inequitable or non-inclusive treatment
  ● Reviewing library policies and procedures using the Multnomah County equity lens
  ● Ensuring community involvement and input in decision making
  ● Participating in national and local groups addressing equity
  ● Developing a staff equity and inclusion learning series

“When I go to the library, especially Rockwood, I always see people using computers, children reading books, and employees communicating with visitors in their native languages. I have also seen students getting help with homework. I appreciate the commitment that the library has to being a place of resources and encouragement.”
— Community engagement participant
Challenges

The library faces challenges in operationalizing a system committed to equity and inclusion. Staff are at different levels of readiness to participate in the work, and it’s challenging to create an environment of psychological safety for those being impacted by inequity and exclusion to come forward; it’s also hard for those struggling to move ahead in the work to openly discuss their resistance. Organizational commitment to equity and inclusion also requires intentional and focused review and reallocation of resources which can be difficult given increasing costs and finite resources.

Culturally specific programs and services

**We Speak Your Language**
Bilingual/bicultural staff work inside and outside the library walls to engage members of their communities. MCL offers collections, services and programming in Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Russian and Somali.

**African American Cultural Services**
African American KSA staff provide services to the African and African American communities, including creating culturally relevant programming, engaging in community outreach, and advocating for the Black community.

**FY17 Impact**

- Staff presented 1,714 language specific programs, engaging 26,050 community members.
- Black staff participated in and/or lead 135 programs serving 1,593 community members.
Goal 2: Create and sustain an institutional culture where individuals of differing cultural backgrounds, identities, abilities and life experiences are welcomed, valued and supported

Strategies

1. Use the equity lens in decision making, and policy and program development
2. Provide consistent onboarding and orientation for all staff to ensure awareness and understanding of MCL’s diversity, equity and inclusion policies, resources and goals
3. Create safe opportunities for staff to voice their experiences and feedback about their work and work culture
4. Ensure that all library buildings and facilities are accessible to all people and cultures

The library works to build and maintain a culture of equity and justice that is based on mutual respect and understanding. As an institution, our actions must reflect these words. While the library values and promotes inclusion, the reality is that even one incident of bias (e.g., racist, sexist, homophobic) or one member of the community feeling unwelcome or excluded is one too many. We have individual and organizational responsibility to ensure our actions align with stated values.

2016–2017 accomplishments

➤ The library's all-staff retreat in November 2016 focused on diversity, equity and inclusion. The event provided training sessions and opportunities for staff to participate in equity and inclusion discussions that support shared understanding and commitment.
➤ Equity and inclusion training is now a required component of the New Employee Orientation for all incoming library staff. Additional training is currently being developed and offered for existing staff throughout the organization.
➤ The library held five staff round table discussions at Central Library to help define values of equity and inclusion, identify library strengths of equity and inclusion and determine areas of improvement.
➤ Approval for a staff-of-color space to be developed in 2018-2019 to gain support and provide input on organizational culture for underrepresented communities

“I would like to be a representative because I know what it’s like on the streets. I've been on the streets for so long.” — Coffee and Conversation participant
Challenges
Organizational culture is the shared beliefs and assumptions about the organization's expectations and values. The library was built on a foundation where the established culture benefited some and burdened or excluded others. Systemic racism and oppression have been historically pervasive, and there are many policies that still continue to impact how the library operates. Culture change will require constant, long-term and active work to shift the system and the individuals working within those systems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inclusive services</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coffee and Conversation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>A 2013 patron survey conducted by MCL and the Multnomah County Department of Human Services identified that patrons experiencing houselessness visit the library more frequently, and stay at the library longer, than patrons who are housed.</td>
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In 2017, Central library began a series of gatherings called Coffee and Conversation. The conversations provide a space for patrons experiencing houselessness to meet, talk and build relationships with staff, and share their experiences and hopes related to the time they spend in the library.

**Preschool Sensory Storytime**
MCL offers preschool sensory storytimes that are especially welcoming for children on the spectrum and families looking for a smaller, more adaptive library experience. In FY17, MCL staff lead 124 sensory storytimes.

- MCL does not require a permanent address to get a library card
- Staff can waive charges for patrons experiencing a housing crisis
- MCL offers a “No ID” internet guest pass
- Disability Accommodation Group evaluates, provides recommendations and addresses concerns to ensure patron accessibility
- 20+ services for patrons with differing abilities
Goal 3: Expand community engagement and relationships

Strategies

1. Interact with and learn about the community through surveys, conversations and outreach opportunities
2. Ensure culturally sensitive, appropriate and relevant communications to diverse communities
3. Build effective relationships with communities experiencing disparate impacts through culturally appropriate outreach and engagement
4. Develop culturally responsive feedback processes to gather community input

To deepen understanding and connection with the diverse communities served and underserved by the library, MCL staff work to develop relationships with patrons and reach out to those in the community who may not come through the library doors. Formal community engagement efforts have been established to listen to those who our services impact—as the community of Multnomah County grows and changes, the library must review and expand its outreach efforts to ensure that it listens to, understands and works to meet the community’s needs.

2016-2017 accomplishments

➤ In 2016, the library formed a Community Engagement Committee to reach out to communities across the county for their input about what type of community they wanted to live in. The results informed the library’s 2019-2021 strategic priorities.
➤ The library hosted 13 culturally specific focus groups to help guide and inform the plan for future library spaces.
➤ Lead partner in the Digital Inclusion Network/Digital Equity Action Plan
➤ Co-delivered digital literacy trainings with 11 partner organizations
➤ Central Library began the new program “Coffee and Conversation,” which provides space and opportunity for patrons experiencing houselessness and staff to share experiences and build relationships.
➤ Partnered with the City of Portland Archive & Records Center, Know Your City, Oregon Historical Society, and Vanport Mosaic to help chronicle and celebrate the African American experience in Portland in a new digital collection launching in May 2018, Our Story: Portland through an African American Lens.

Challenges

Engaging marginalized and underserved communities can be challenging for government agencies because of a community’s lack of trust, failed prior outreach efforts, and the time required to authentically engage in community relationships and partnerships. In addition, because the library does not collect patron demographic data, it is difficult to evaluate efforts in reaching underserved communities.
Community Outreach

**People experiencing housing instability**
- **Shelters and transitional housing:**
  - Outreach to 50 sites
  - 15,000 items delivered

**People experiencing incarceration**
- **Inverness Jail**
  - Served 1,200 people experiencing incarceration
    - Materials
    - Literacy workshops
    - Children's literacy workshops with parents experiencing incarceration

- **Multnomah County Detention Center**
  - MCL provides crates of books to be distributed to people experiencing incarceration at Multnomah County Detention Center

**Seniors and homebound**
- **Words on Wheels**
  - Words on Wheels is a unique service for homebound adults. A trained volunteer delivers library materials directly to patrons who have signed up for this special service.

- **Lobby Services**
  - Large print, movies, paperbacks, and audiobooks in each of the lobbies of 29 retirement homes. We provide Russian, Chinese and Vietnamese materials at some lobbies and provide lobby support from Russian, Cantonese and Vietnamese speaking library staff.
Goal 4: Recruit, retain and support a diverse staff that reflects the community it serves

Strategies
1. Develop recruitment strategies to reach underrepresented communities
2. Offer bias awareness training and debiasing techniques for human resources and hiring managers
3. Utilize New Employee Orientation to communicate equity and inclusion expectations
4. Develop an inclusion learning series
5. Continue to offer leadership and professional development opportunities for library staff
6. Organize staff of color resource spaces

Workforce equity encompasses an environment of full representation and inclusion in the workplace, and requires us to remove structural and institutional barriers that impede this goal. Achieving workforce equity requires a fundamental culture shift that dismantles real and perceived barriers, in addition to making specific investments in the workforce. The library is committed to recruiting, retaining and supporting a diverse workforce, and ensuring that members of our diverse workforce feel connected and included in the organization.

2016-2017 accomplishments
➤ Recruitment
- Library HR expanded outreach efforts to 40 culturally specific organizations for recruitment of positions with a focus on African American cultural competency
- Added African American cultural competency to six positions
➤ Application and interview process
- Provided input into a new county process to address bias in application and interview processes
- Shifted requirements of some positions to highlight lived experience in place of formal education or formal employment
➤ Hiring
- Increase in staff of color (FY16- 22%; FY17- 26%)
➤ Onboarding
- Equity and inclusion training is now included in New Employee Orientation
➤ Retention
- 98% retention rate for staff of color (FY17)
- Staff equity and inclusion round table discussions
- Increase in staff of color reaching out to the equity and inclusion manager, HR manager and library director to share experiences of non-inclusion
Challenges
Workforce equity requires intentional focus on where and how the library recruits potential talent, and it requires the library to evaluate and redefine talent. Once potential staff are identified, interview panels must be comprised of staff with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Panelists and hiring managers often come to the interview process with implicit or explicit biases that can negatively and disproportionately impact candidates that are not a part of the organization's dominant group. These biases limit the hiring from diverse communities. Additionally, staff from underrepresented communities can face a sense of isolation, lack a feeling of belonging and experience microaggressions that make it difficult to navigate their environment. While the library is actively working on addressing these issues, individual and organizational awareness and change will require a consistent effort over time.

Staff Diversity and Inclusion

Multnomah County equity and inclusion trainings
Multnomah County offers a number of trainings that support staff in learning and developing skills that honor and support diversity, equity and belonging. Library staff are strongly encouraged to attend these trainings to supplement library work and expectations.

Multnomah County Library equity training at New Employee Orientation
The library is committed to ensuring that all staff understand the importance of addressing issues of equity and inclusion openly and honestly. Expectations are set for staff early with new employees participating in equity trainings as part of the onboarding process. In calendar year 2017, 85% of new hires participated in the equity training.

Recruitment, Hiring and Retention
- The library is working to increase diversity and support retention among our staff.
- The equity and inclusion manager and HR office are working to address bias in hiring, supervision and performance evaluation through training and consultation.
- In FY17, there was a 4% increase in staff of color and a 98% retention rate among staff of color.

“I am very happy to see more people of color at Central. Thank you for representing more of Portland residents.” — Central patron
Goal 5: Gather and utilize culturally relevant data and information for use in organizational planning and decision making

Strategies

1. Develop an equity-impact assessment tool to guide organizational planning and decision-making
2. Develop and implement systems for collecting disaggregated demographic data for board and staff
3. Explore possibility of systems for collecting disaggregated demographic data for patrons/community served by the organization and its programs
4. Use disaggregated demographic data to inform planning and decision-making
5. Engage staff and community for qualitative data and information

Gathering data and information—qualitative and quantitative—about the diversity and needs in our communities is essential. Data and information collection and analysis is where the cycle of cultural responsiveness begins and ends. Data begin the cycle by helping us better understand and serve clients and close the cycle by providing a reflection of progress and areas for improvement. We collect data and information to evaluate and meet state and federal reporting requirements, to set a foundation of cultural responsiveness and meet our patrons diverse needs, for appropriate and cost effective resource allocation and to address disparities experienced by our communities. Data are essential to understanding community and patron needs and planning library services.

2016-2017 accomplishments

➤ Management and Executive Management completed equity readiness survey
➤ Management began discussions about equitable resource allocation
➤ Community engagement data is being used to guide organizational priorities
➤ Capital planning process included community engagement and demographic data
➤ Began tracking number of culturally specific library programs offered and attendance at those programs

Challenges

The process of data and information collection can lack cultural sensitivity and relevance and not be reflective of the communities that are engaged. Qualitative data often provides the most relevant and powerful information that can be used to evaluate and develop services and programming. Gathering qualitative data requires deep connections with communities, outreach and engagement, and alternative processes that do not follow dominant culture norms.
Listening to those most impacted

Capital planning focus groups
As the library plans for future growth, the library listens to the communities most marginalized and impacted by potential growth. As part of the capital planning process, MCL engaged 122 community members, representing eight culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Participants ranged from elementary school to elders in the communities.

Staff equity and inclusion round table discussions
Central Library staff participated in equity and inclusion roundtables to begin the process of defining equity and inclusion, evaluating library strengths and identifying opportunities for improvement. Over 40 staff participated in five discussions. As a result of these discussions, it was determined that staff of color would benefit from having a safe space to engage, get support and provide direction to Central management. A staff of color group is currently in development.
Conclusion

For years, Multnomah County Library has worked to create an inclusive environment and has had many successes in engaging and supporting diverse staff, patrons and communities. However, there is more work to be done.

The library’s 2016-2017 accomplishments are outlined throughout this report, however the library faces long-term challenges to operationalizing a system that equitably nurtures, empowers, and lifts staff, patrons and the community to their highest potential.

To address these challenges, over the next year, the library will focus on and evaluate progress in key areas including organizational commitment and culture, community engagement, staff recruitment, retention and support and culturally relevant and sensitive data and evaluation.

While this work will require a critical examination of the many impacts of the library’s policies and its progress, the library is dedicated to weaving equity and inclusion into the fabric of its services and responsibilities to patrons, staff and the community.