Our mission: Empowering our community to learn and create

1. Free access for all
2. A trusted guide for learning
3. The leading advocate for reading
4. A champion for equity and inclusion

Organizational priorities

1. Making connections for a stronger community
2. Removing barriers
3. Helping meet basic needs
4. Honoring the past, embracing the future

Our commitment

Multnomah County Library acknowledges the existence of racial inequities and systems of oppression. With this understanding, the library is committed to

- Centering the voices of those most impacted by systems of oppression.
- Addressing racial equity from an intersectional approach.
- Demonstrating zero tolerance for acts of hatred.
- Engaging in ongoing reflection and action.
- Standing for equity and inclusion.

Equity and inclusion goals

- Strengthen and demonstrate institutional commitment to equity and inclusion
- Create and sustain an institutional culture where individuals of differing cultural backgrounds, identities, abilities and life experiences are welcomed, valued and supported
- Expand community engagement and relationships
- Recruit, retain and support a diverse staff that reflects the community it serves
- Gather and act upon culturally relevant data and information in organizational planning and decision making
As an institution committed to serving all members of the community, Multnomah County Library has an important role in removing barriers to success and taking action against systemic racism and oppression. This library strives to live up to that ideal by lifting up people and communities that have been historically excluded, marginalized and discriminated against.

The library has long demonstrated its commitment to creating an environment that is welcoming and inclusive, but as we seek to reach and hear from those in our community who haven’t been equitably served, we recognize we have a lot more work to do.

We know that leadership accountability matters, and our leadership team is placing equity and inclusion at the forefront of our decision making. Our 2019–2021 strategic priorities identify areas where we are allocating time and resources to ensure we continue to make progress toward our goals; among these priorities are helping our communities meet their most basic needs and removing barriers to access.

This report includes some of the incredible efforts over the past year — in hiring, digital services, programming, the collection, and more — to represent, serve and celebrate the diversity and lived experiences within our community.

I must also recognize and thank all the library staff who welcome and serve this community each and every day and make the accomplishments detailed in this report possible. Their hard work and unwavering commitment to the people we serve is at the center of delivering on our promise to be a place that empowers our community to learn and create.

Thank you for your confidence in and patronage of Multnomah County Library. We are here for you and because of you.

Vailey Oehlke
Director of Libraries
In recent years, both locally and nationally, communities of color and other communities subjected to marginalization have been deeply affected by the emotional and physical violence stemming from racism and hatred. The library sees the impact of these experiences in our communities each and every day. We are working to ensure that no matter who walks through our doors or seeks library services, they feel welcome and know the library is for them.

In Multnomah County, as in other communities around the country, people of color have worse outcomes on almost every indicator of success from education to health. To help shift the inequities, it’s critical that the library continue to lead efforts that remove barriers to accessing resources; help our community members meet their most basic needs; provide opportunities for people to connect; and champion equity and inclusion.

In 2018, the library worked to develop and enhance programming for diverse audiences; train and educate staff to better understand other people’s experiences; and support staff of color who are experiencing the greatest impact of racism and oppression.

We know that we have a long way to go and are committed to doing better, but we’re excited about the movement and successes we’ve made so far. This report includes some of the highlights of our efforts and demonstrates the passion and commitment of our staff. The lived experiences of our library staff provide the richness and depth that make this work possible.

Sonja Ervin
Equity and Inclusion Manager
Multnomah County Library’s vision of equity and inclusion is to operationalize a system that equitably nurtures, empowers, and lifts staff, patrons and the community to their highest potential.

The Equity and Inclusion Team’s focus is on the development and actualizing of equity and inclusion initiatives that support MCL’s mission and priorities. The team provides support and strategic guidance 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.
Black Cultural Library Advocates

The Black Cultural Library Advocates (BCLA) is a team of library staff dedicated to leveraging the library’s platform and resources to preserve and strengthen Black communities. The BCLA helps create culturally relevant programming; conducts outreach and reconnects the community to the library; advocates for the Black community; consults within the library; and partners with community agencies and organizations.

The library continues to invest in BCLA positions across information services, access services, and programming and outreach.

- Over the past five years, the library increased BCLA positions by 383%*.
- In 2018, the library hosted 122 programs serving the Black community. These events brought in 1,624 attendees.

2018 programs included

- African American Genealogy ◊
- African Song and Dance
- Black History Month Film Fest
- Black Storytime
- Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Things You Might Not Know ◊
- Our Story: A Place Called Home: From Vanport to Albina ◊
- Vanport: A City That Was
- Writing to Heal: A Trauma-Informed Writing Workshop for African American Women

*Based on total FTE
Our Story

The library launched a first-of-its-kind online collection celebrating Black life in Oregon. The collection features images and interviews with the people who make this community special. The inaugural collection explores the theme “Building Community;” additional themes and materials will be added to the collection in the future. The collection was produced in partnership with the City of Portland Archive & Records Center, Know Your City, Oregon Historical Society and Vanport Mosaic.

Black Pacific Northwest Collection

A new special collection at North Portland Library highlights the history and experiences of the region’s Black community. The Black Pacific Northwest Collection features more than 200 items of literature, music, film and other creative expressions of the Black experience in the Pacific Northwest. The collection is growing, and the library has sought community input to identify more items to add.
Elleona Budd
Black Cultural Library Advocate library assistant

“The library is a place where anyone can foster creative ideas,” says Elleona, a Black Cultural Library Advocate and library assistant at Central Library.

Elleona, who identifies as nonbinary, has been learning various parts of library work — everything from helping regular patrons at St. Johns Library find titles, to leading outreach work in the Black community — for the past three years.

Elleona joined the library as an access services assistant after graduating from Lincoln High School in downtown Portland. As a student, they gravitated toward history and language courses, including learning Spanish, Korean, Mandarin and Arabic. Elleona’s rigorous academic curriculum continues, as they pursue a degree at Portland State University in International Relations and Conflict Resolution, with a minor in Chinese.

“When I first started my job at the library, I hadn’t been back in eight years! I had so many fines from my youth and had been worried I wouldn’t be able to use anything so I avoided it. I happily learned that the library had waived all youth fines and started a new policy so that no youth would accrue fines going forward.”

Elleona, who says they originally loved the idea of working at a library because of a love for books and working with people, now appreciates it because they have an opportunity to help people feel welcome and to connect patrons with library services and resources.

Elleona is helping identify ways to improve collections and services for the Black community. Sometimes, that means creating library displays featuring poetry by queer and trans people of color. Other times, it means organizing large-scale events to provide opportunities for discussion about topics such as the African diaspora.

“I want to help start conversations. I want everyone to walk into a library and think ‘this is a place for me.’”
We Speak Your Language is a library effort — supported through staffing, programming, communications and collections — to connect immigrant and refugee communities to the information and resources they need to be successful in the United States. Library staff with designated cultural expertise in the library’s core service languages engage our communities with friendly guidance to help them navigate resources and opportunities that will allow them to enrich their lives.

- We Speak Your Language positions increased 42% over five years*.
- MCL provides services in six languages: English, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Vietnamese, Somali.
- In 2018, the library hosted 2,727 We Speak Your Language programs. These events brought in 45,550 attendees.
- The most common languages other than English spoken in Multnomah County are Spanish, Vietnamese and Russian.

*Based on total FTE

2018 We Speak Your Language programs included

- Día de los Niños y Día de los Libros (Day of the Children and Day of the Books)
- Mid-Autumn Festival
- Listos para el kínder (Ready for Kindergarten)
- “Library Hour” Russian radio & TV
- ¡Música en acción! (Music in Action!)
- Juntos Storytime
- Chinese (Cantonese) Storytime
- Lunar New Year
- Citizenship Classes
- Slavic New Year
- Vietnamese Storytime
- Vietnamese Knitting Club
Listos para el kínder (Ready for Kindergarten)

Listos para el kínder (Listos) is the library’s kindergarten readiness program for Spanish speakers. Through a culturally responsive curriculum delivered in Spanish, Listos aims to address educational readiness gaps for preschool-aged Latino children; prepare them with the academic and social skills needed to succeed in kindergarten; and empower parents to support their children’s academic growth.

Listos uses culturally responsive activities that respect diversity and engage the motivation of all participants.

In 2018, four Multnomah County libraries offered Listos, with 943 children and adults in total attending the program.

According to a parent evaluation:
- 100% of the families increased awareness of easy ways to support their children to be ready for kindergarten.
- 92% of the families increased positive reading practices.
- 90% of the children increased interest in books.
- 100% of the participant families learned about library services.

Día de los Niños y Día de los Libros (Day of the Children and Day of the Books)

In April 2018, the library held Día de los Niños y Día de los Libros (Day of the Children and Day of the Books) celebrations at Gresham Library, Midland Library and St. Johns Library, drawing nearly 10,000 attendees and 100 volunteers for a fun day of literacy activities. Young attendees received a free book courtesy of The Library Foundation. The event offered multiple storytimes, literacy activities, resources for parents to support their children’s literacy development, and information from community partners such as SNAP, Causa and Latino Network.
Staff reflections

Ana Ruiz Morillo
Spanish outreach coordinator

For Spanish Outreach Coordinator Ana Ruiz Morillo, growing up in the Dominican Republic amidst pronounced wealth disparity led her to pursue a career in education and community outreach — she wanted to help others find opportunities and paths to success.

“When I came to work at the library, my supervisor told me, ‘you will always make a difference to students in the classroom, but through the library, you will broaden your impact. It’s a door to the whole community.’”

Now, Ana coordinates Spanish outreach services for the library. Working with bilingual library staff from across the county, volunteers and interns, Ana helps foster connections and build programs, services and networks between the library and Multnomah County’s Latinx community.

In 2018, Ana led El Día de los Niños y El Día de los Libros (Day of the Children and Day of the Books), an annual celebration of childhood and bilingual literacy that drew nearly 10,000 attendees to neighborhood libraries.

Eddie Arizaga
Spanish bilingual librarian at Central Library

“Spanish is my first language, and the library wasn’t always about serving me. Now, we are working towards making the library more reflective of the community and encompassing more of the people who live there. It’s a center of the community.”
“I love how you incorporated our Mexican culture and other cultures while our children learned about the colors of flags, country names, etc.” — 2018 Día attendee

“I like the cultural diversity. Lots of welcoming pictures for immigrants.” — Anonymous

Lunar New Year

On February 5, 2018, approximately 400 people came to Holgate Library to celebrate Lunar New Year, the “Year of the Pig.” The annual event, held at several Multnomah County Library locations, showcases the richness of Asian culture and traditions. The event includes decorations, book displays, dance and martial arts performances, and family craft activities.
The library’s staff innovation program, Curiosity Kick!, identifies and supports creative staff-submitted projects that help the library fulfill its mission and better serve the community. Each year, staff submit and vote on project ideas. The votes are tallied, and the library award funds to support the implementation of the winning project.

### Welcoming refugees with free dictionaries

In partnership with Catholic Charities and two other local resettlement agencies, the library distributed free Oxford picture dictionaries to newly settled refugees. The dictionaries were purchased as part of the staff-led library innovation program, Curiosity Kick! In addition to distributing the dictionaries at cultural orientation sessions, the library helped refugees get a library card and provided them with information about library materials and services, including English conversation classes, citizenship classes and one-on-one adult tutoring.

### Sewing classes for the Somali community

In 2018, Capitol Hill and Gregory Heights libraries piloted a series of sewing classes aimed at serving the Somali community. In response to local interest, the library purchased 10 sewing machines, a bin of sewing supplies, and a cart to transport the equipment and supplies. The new classes were taught in Somali by local instructors, and each class filled to capacity.

“This program not only responded to community requests, it created a space for women who usually don’t feel safe or comfortable using public institutions due to language barriers. By providing an instructor that shares the same language and culture, we reduced that barrier, and got over 100% attendance, 100% of the time.” — Library Assistant Suad Mohamed.
Connecting and supporting families, youth and teens

**Summer Lunch program**

Approximately 20% of Multnomah County youth experience food insecurity. To help address this issue, the library worked in partnership with local community organizations to offer free lunches to youth 18 and under during the summer. Lunches were available at Gresham Library, Midland Library and Rockwood Library.

In summer 2018, the library served 2,726 free lunches.

The 2018 Summer Lunch program was made possible thanks to partnerships with Multnomah County Department of County Human Services (DCHS), Partners for a Hunger Free Oregon, Gresham Barlow School District, Reynolds School District and Meals on Wheels.

**Every Child A Reader**

The library’s Every Child A Reader program invites parents to have positive, loving and fun interactions with their children around books and stories, while also helping their children develop literacy skills. The program provides 32,000 books for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers to 30 partner organizations (7,833 families total) each year. The library provides books for the program in Arabic, Burmese, Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), English, French, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Vietnamese, Amharic, Karen, Nepali, Tagalog and Urdu. In addition, the library offers wordless books, and books that reflect Native American cultures and African American culture.

In 2018, program staff conducted focus groups with Burmese and Somali families to identify ways that the program can better serve culturally and linguistically diverse communities. In addition, program staff attended the National Black Child Development Institute Conference to identify ways to better serve African American families.
Talking to Your Kids about Race

Research shows that children not only recognize race from a very young age, but that they also develop racial biases by ages three to five. To help parents and caregivers begin discussions about race, the library offered the new class, “Talking to Your Kids about Race.” Held at Hollywood Library and North Portland Library, this program filled to capacity both times, with waiting lists at each. North Portland Library Administrator Kirby McCurtis and Youth Librarian Danielle Jones taught attendees the importance of talking about race and racism with children at a young age and how to start having these conversations.

Drag Queen Storytime

In fall 2018, several library locations offered a new program: Drag Queen Storytime. The storytimes offer a fun way for children to experience gender diversity and foster empathy and creativity with a literary focus from glamorous role models.

Geared for kids ages 2 to 6, each storytime features a guest who reads stories about inclusion and diversity, sings songs, and leads a craft or dance party. Guests have included Poison Waters, Meesha Perú and Carla Rossi.

“Drag Queen Storytime teaches children to embrace gender diversity in themselves and in others, and helps to curb bullying of LGBTQ children and kids who may be perceived as different in all kinds of ways.” — Lyndsey Runyan, Programming Librarian

“I am so proud to be part of a library that offers drag queen story time! I just heard it on the news and it brought a smile to my face. I had to write to say thanks for being a positive voice in a country needing acceptance.” — library patron
The library began family literacy efforts at Multnomah County Inverness Jail and Columbia River Correctional Institution to help parents in custody support their children’s literacy development. Through the “A Book is a Bridge” program, which includes weekly classes, tutoring, and new youth materials in family meeting areas, adults in custody are learning new skills and creating stronger family ties during and after incarceration.

“This was one of the most productive 1.5 hours that I have spent learning how to be a better parent.” — Book is a Bridge participant

The program, for adults in custody, has already seen results:

- 110 adults attended early childhood literacy classes.
- 96% of attendees reported learning new information about helping their children get ready to learn.
- Library staff have added sensory activities, linguistically and culturally diverse children’s books, and family resources to lobby areas.
- Families of adults reported their children are more comfortable and engaged during visits.
The Multnomah County Donald E. Long Juvenile Detention Center is a detention facility for youth ages 12–17. As part of a broader set of programs for youth in custody, a library outreach specialist visits each unit and connects with the youth through books. The library outreach specialist listens to what they’re interested in, purchases materials that both meet those interests and introduces new topics, and gives brief but high interest booktalks.

In 2018, the library provided youth at the Donald E. Long facility with over 2,300 new books and 200 hours of direct service staff time.

Supporting schools and educators

For many students, classroom teachers are their bridge to the library. The School Corps team provides a range of free services to K-12 educators to support their use of library materials and resources in the classroom.

The library offers many services to support social and racial justice education in the classroom, including:

• Presenting free workshops for educators and parents, such as “Talking Equity and Social Justice: Free Booktalks and Community Discussion.”

• Providing K-12 teachers with crates of books, webliographies and booktalks that feature diversity, equity, racism, social justice, Muslim culture and more.

• Resource lists for educators and caregivers about how to talk with kids about racism.

After eliminating fines on youth materials in 2016, the library expanded its support for educators in 2018 by eliminating fines on educator cards. Educator cards allow users to borrow and renew materials to use with youth and students for six weeks; have up to 40 unfilled holds at a time; and permit fee waivers for two lost items per year.
Digital equity

- Ten percent of Multnomah County households don’t have internet at home\(^1\), with many citing cost as a barrier. In some areas, the number is as high as 50%.

- Communities of color and women are underrepresented in the technology industry.

- Multnomah County Library is the largest provider of free internet access in the state.

- Multnomah County Library provides more than 2.5 million computer and wifi sessions each year.

\(^1\) U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

Digital Inclusion Network

Multnomah County Library is a lead partner in the Digital Inclusion Network (DIN), a community coalition of more than 48 partners across nonprofit, government, business, education and media. As a group, we are working towards the vision that every Portland/Multnomah County resident has the opportunity to fully engage in our digital society. As part of this effort, we developed the Digital Equity Action Plan, which outlines 17 actions to address the digital equity gap around three key areas: broadband access, devices and training. The DIN is also building a policy framework that supports digital equity and meaningful internet adoption, leading to better community outcomes.

Digital Equity Action Plan vision

All residents of Portland/Multnomah County will have barrier-free access to high-speed broadband internet at home and school, an affordable computing device, and the training to use them effectively.

Goals

1. **Access:** Ensure access to affordable high-speed internet and devices for those in need.

2. **Training/support:** Provide training and support to ensure that everyone has the skills to use digital technology to enhance their quality of life.
3. **Leadership/capacity building:** Empower community partners to bridge the digital divide through funding, coordination, training and staff resources.

4. **Connectivity to the digital economy:** Create opportunities for jobs in the digital economy for underserved populations.

5. **Policy:** Build a policy framework that supports digital equity and meaningful Internet adoption, leading to better community outcomes.

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**Welcome to Computers**

Multnomah County Library, along with MetroEast Community Media and Free Geek, provides multi-week digital literacy training at community organizations across the Portland metro area. The Welcome to Computers program focuses on low-income adults who need a computer and basic computer skills. After successfully completing the program, participants receive a Free Geek laptop and one year of technical support.

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**Rosewood Initiative**

At a Welcome to Computers program at the Rosewood Initiative, the library taught 20 adult participants basic computer skills. The Rosewood Initiative helped support participants by providing meals and childcare. All sessions were taught in Spanish.
Workforce equity requires a multilayered approach that moves beyond diversity of our workforce. In 2018, Multnomah County adopted the Workforce Equity Strategic Plan, which outlines five focus areas for building an organizational culture across all county departments where employees feel valued and can succeed.

Under the framework of the county’s plan, the library implemented an approach that includes providing training and education to address issues of bias, racism and oppression; opportunities for staff of color to develop and showcase skills; and support for staff who are negatively impacted from systems of marginalization.

Joint Librarians of Color Conference

In September 2018, Multnomah County Library sent 13 staff to the Joint Librarians of Color Conference in New Mexico. In addition, select staff presented the program, “Transforming your staff, transforming your library: creating a more culturally responsive library in one of America’s Whitest cities.”

The Joint Librarians of Color Conference is a nonprofit organization that advocates for and addresses the common needs of the American Library Association’s five ethnic affiliates: the American Indian Library Association, the Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association, the Black Caucus of the American Library Association, the Chinese American Librarians Association, and the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking (REFORMA).
To reduce isolation and build community among staff of color, the library created the Central Library Staff of Color group. The group provides a safe space for staff of color to receive support, strengthen a sense of community, and share resources. The group is committed to helping create cultural change at Central Library to ensure staff of color are heard and respected by their colleagues and the organization of Multnomah County Library.

**Shareen Jacobs**
Central Library staff member

“Central [Library] is a big space with a large population and a lot of moving parts. People of color (PoC) make up a small percentage of that population and because of it, can be days, if not weeks, of not seeing or working with other PoC much less having time to connect with one another.”
“The staff are so nice, patient + helpful to people with diverse needs + disabilities and it always cheers me up to be in such an understanding and safe space as the N. Killingsworth library [North Portland Library]. I hope they all are recognized for their important service.” — Michelle, North Portland Library patron

**Equity Learning Series**

The library offers staff training to support ongoing learning and development in equity and inclusion through the creation of a library-specific equity learning series. Library staff of color were asked to join the Equity Training Team, which brought lived experiences to the trainings and provided professional development opportunities.

- All new library employees are expected to attend Part One: Othering in the Library, which discusses how historical experiences impact patterns of library use for generations; how we can work to interrupt systemic oppression; and where we have space to learn and grow.
- In 2018, 96% of permanent new employees attended Othering in the Library.

**Committees**

Multnomah County Library had representation on some culturally specific committees of the American Library Association:

- The Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA)
- Association for Library Services to Children Equity and Inclusion Task Force
- Chinese American Librarians Association
- National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking (REFORMA)
A diverse group of volunteers help the library to serve the community. Volunteer roles at the library include shelving and checking in materials, teaching digital literacy skills, tutoring for GED or citizenship exams and encouraging young readers through the Summer Reading program.

“I actually wrote about the library for one of my college essays. I talked about it as a place where my sister and I felt protected. It’s where I was able to learn English and read my first chapter book. It was a place I could call home.” — library volunteer, Ben Nguyen

In 2018, 1,823 volunteers (of which 1,052 were youth volunteers) contributed 66,629 hours of service.

Over 30% of volunteers spoke a language other than English, with 38 different languages spoken in total.

Supporting organizations

Thank you to our library partner organizations who continue to support the library’s ongoing efforts to meet our vision of a system that equitably nurtures, empowers, and lifts staff, patrons and the community to their highest potential:

- The Library Foundation
- Friends of the Library
- Library Advisory Board

◊ These programs are made possible in part by gifts to The Library Foundation.
Renew your wonder.