

**Becoming Inclusive Community Hubs:
Internal EDI Work for Public Libraries**

Alexandra Birnbach¹, Hannah Giles², Lorena Romero³, Haley Zamora⁴

¹Contra Costa County Library

²Tulare County Free Library

³Santa Clara City Library

⁴San Diego County Library

Abstract

How do libraries position themselves as community hubs (partnerships)? In this project we focused on public libraries that actively serve Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities. We looked for libraries that have established partnerships with organizations in order to create inclusive community hubs. We conducted interviews with eight California librarians and two out-of-state librarians. These libraries were selected by the authors based on size, demographics, location, and services to BIPOC communities. Based on interview feedback, we learned that it is crucial for libraries to examine their internal Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) structures before bringing the primary focus to outside partnerships. There were four major themes that emerged: Staff Support, Partnerships, Education for Librarians, and Trust and Transparency. These challenges must be addressed by all libraries in order to effectively serve their BIPOC communities.

Keywords: community hubs, equity, diversity, inclusion, bipoc, public libraries

In March of 2020 the world shut down, and with it the doors of our public libraries. COVID-19 was identified as a public health threat, then a pandemic. Library staff went home to telework, trying to virtually maintain ties to their communities. In May 2020, with the country immobilized, we watched the video and news coverage of George Perry Floyd Jr. being restrained by police in Minneapolis, MN. Police officer Derek Chauvin, pressed his knee into Floyd's neck and back for 9 minutes and 29 seconds until Floyd stopped breathing. If anyone was unfamiliar with the Black Lives Matter Movement before, they knew about it now. Throughout the world, there were protests demanding justice for Floyd, the end to police brutality and recognition that Black Lives Matter (Altman, 2020). Systemic racism moved to the forefront of the national conversation and public libraries began to shift away from their historically neutral positioning.

In response to the changing national landscape, and recognizing its own problematic past, the American Library Association (2020) released a public statement in June 2020 acknowledging the association had been "...built on systemic racism and discrimination in many forms". ALA acknowledged the harmful effect it had on Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) library staff and included a pledge:

- To engage in dialogue with our members to inform our path forward.
- To address the disparities in access to information for BIPOC.

The following month, the Public Library Association (2020) built upon this statement with a call to action to their members, including:

- Study, amplify, and align with the policy demands of the Movement for Black Lives.
- Create a plan of action for addressing racism and working toward collective liberation.
- Address structural racism. Work with BIPOC communities to identify and implement structural changes that must occur within libraries.

- Develop and fund programs, services, and collections that center the voices and experiences of people of color and shift power to communities for co-curation and co-creation.
- Materially support organizations that provide resources and build community for BIPOC working in libraries.

Public library administration and staff have followed ALA and PLA's lead by publicly committing to anti-racism, showing solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement and denouncing violence against Asian-Americans. It is now common to see Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) statements on public library websites along with suggested reading lists of anti-racist and/or inclusive materials. In keeping with PLA's *Call to Action*, public library systems have begun to take a closer look at internal and external practices and policies through an EDI lens.

In order to build and advance an EDI framework in public libraries, it must be acknowledged that a major barrier is the lack of diversity in the field: 88% of librarians self-identify as white (Government Alliance on Race and Equity, 2018). This number has been static, not significantly shifting for decades despite efforts such as the ALA Spectrum Scholarship Program, which recruits and provides scholarships for BIPOC students, professional interest groups, such as the ALA Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Implementation Working Group, and resource collections such as *Cultural Programming to Promote Diversity* (American Library Association, 2008). The lack of lived experience or perspectives that do not typically include members of the communities being served leads to decisions and policies that neglect the needs and cultures of both BIPOC library staff and BIPOC communities.

Through interviewing BIPOC librarians, we found that when public libraries are successfully engaging BIPOC communities - either in or out of the building - it is disproportionately done by BIPOC librarians. Whether by choice or by assignment, BIPOC librarians are taking the lead to identify and partner with their communities through committee

work, outreach efforts, and by fostering personal connections and trust. In order to create a community hub and fully support BIPOC librarians it requires a thorough examination of past policies and procedures, current strategic planning and full staff participation in concert with input by partners and the community itself. Undoing hundreds of years of systemically racist public library infrastructure and creating a supportive environment for BIPOC staff and a true community hub will require slow and deliberate examination, planning and action by administration and participation and support by all levels of staff.

Definitions

Going into our project, we wanted to define two important terms from our challenge statement: “How do libraries position themselves as community hubs (partnerships)?” We came up with the following working definitions to be a frame of reference for the project:

Community Hubs

We know that communities are built on connection. A hub is the heart of a community and is created by and for the people. Community hubs foster essential connections by providing space for individuals to feel safe, find inspiration or entertainment, learn something new, or feel like part of something bigger. Beyond that, there is no single definition of a community hub. Every community is different, and each community defines (and finds) their own hub. The needs, backgrounds, experiences, and interests of the people determine what their particular community hub will look like. As the community changes, so does the hub.

Public Libraries have always strived to be community hubs. They have not, however, always succeeded in being inclusive ones. The ideals of a public library align with that of a community hub: a space for public interaction and connection which accepts, welcomes, and serves all members of the public: those of any age, race, gender identity, ethnicity, cultural background, ability, socio-economic status, profession, housing status, or religion. Historically however, libraries were built and designed for white people with services that catered to white

communities and often barred communities of color from joining in. Today, many libraries are still viewed as white spaces (Gooding-Call, 2021). People of color have faced a history of segregation and a lack of accessible resources and library spaces for generations (Greenlee, 2016). A true community hub reflects the interests of its diverse population and involves and welcomes everyone, not a select, privileged subset.

Public libraries are poised to become vibrant, anti-racist, inclusive, and diverse community hubs who serve their entire community on a more holistic and deliberately thoughtful level. We have seen tangible examples of how public libraries foster community-building through providing a place for individuals to share experiences with each other, from two caregivers commiserating over sleepless nights while their toddlers attend storytime to conversational language groups for English learners where strangers meet and share stories of their lives while practicing their English. These experiences happen every day at public libraries. But to be true community hubs, libraries have to offer a space where everyone in the community, particularly people of color, can see themselves as being equal and respected participants.

Partnerships

In order to become the most useful and important community hub for its people, public libraries must join forces with individuals and groups who are in and of the BIPOC community. As a predominantly white-dominated profession, public libraries may not know the true needs and interests of communities of color. There is a longstanding tradition in the U.S. of white privilege overriding voices of color and dictating what is believed to be “best” for minority communities. To correct this flawed and harmful path, public libraries must set aside current assumptions and involve people of color and BIPOC community organizations in evaluating how the library can act as a true community hub. Organizations that are made up of and already working with BIPOC community members are doing the work and have established trust. The

first step in serving BIPOC communities is to respectfully listen to these partners and be clear about the library's intentions.

We wanted to look at current partnerships between public libraries and community organizations that specifically focus on serving BIPOC communities. We were curious to see how those partnerships formed, how those partnerships are changing the way the library interacts with its BIPOC community, and where these lessons can take public libraries in the future.

The Project Trajectory

The group shares the belief that public libraries can and do act as community hubs and have the capacity to bring people together. To refine the focus, we discussed current issues including the impact of the pandemic, political divisiveness and social unrest. We searched for examples of how libraries are finding and working with inclusive partners to help change the way we view community hubs.

To gain an understanding of how libraries are tackling this important issue, we reached out to public libraries both throughout California and nationally. Our selection process included several avenues: we researched libraries who appeared to be actively reaching out to BIPOC communities and/or addressed EDI work directly through their strategic plans or on their websites. We also combed through professional publications, such as *PLA Online*, for articles featuring libraries serving BIPOC communities or addressing inclusive services. The most effective route was to reach out to colleagues with the details of the project to ask for leads. We received contacts for several public librarians and, ultimately, each group member virtually interviewed two to three librarians for this project.

We expected to focus our efforts on creating a toolkit that would assist public libraries to initiate, develop, and maintain partnerships that would create a more inclusive community hub for BIPOC communities. Through our interviews, however, we discovered that many public libraries are only just beginning this work and there is no finished example. Informed by the

responses of our interviewees, our project developed into: “Becoming Inclusive Community Hubs: Internal EDI Work for Public Libraries.”

Methodology

Projected Outcomes

Our projected outcomes are divided into two separate categories:

Projected Outcome for Libraries

- Library staff will better understand how to establish partnerships and what to look for when approaching community organizations that serve the BIPOC communities.

Projected Outcomes for BIPOC Communities

- Local organizations can expand their reach to the BIPOC community through partnerships with the Library
- BIPOC community members feel their needs are recognized by the library and addressed appropriately.

Our main goal is to offer library professionals a look at personal experiences from librarians that are already serving some of their BIPOC patrons. We hope that both seasoned library staff and those just starting are able to learn from the librarians interviewed, apply that knowledge into their own practices, and eventually develop their libraries into inclusive community hubs for their BIPOC patrons.

Interviews & Questions

Prior to selecting libraries, the team created a set of interview questions that specifically focus on services and partnerships to improve BIPOC resources. We created this list during our weekly meetings, originally starting with 15 questions and narrowing down to 10 (see Appendix I). These questions are organized in a structure that allows the conversation to flow naturally. It is important to note that, though these questions were our initial structure, we did not limit our

interviewees' answers to these specific questions. Rather, we encouraged our interviewees to speak freely and add or skip questions as the conversation naturally progressed. We sent these questions to the organizations ahead of time to give our interviewees time to reflect on the topic and get the questions approved by their library administration if necessary. Our interviews lasted anywhere between forty-five minutes to two and-a-half hours.

Interview Privacy

Our interviews covered raw, personal, and sensitive topics and discussed personal and professional experiences directly related to an individual's race. Because of the sensitivity of the information and personal stories shared, we are not releasing these interviews to the public. Our interviews were recorded individually for transcribing purposes only, and deleted after project completion.

Selected Libraries & Interviewees

Each of our group members conducted their individual interviews and utilized different methods when determining which libraries to include in our research. We considered the following factors:

- Size
 - We made sure to select different library systems, varying from small to large systems, and included both rural and urban libraries. We also focused only on public libraries, as this research is aimed for public library professionals.
- Location
 - Because this research is being conducted for the California Library Association Leadership Challenge, we included several California libraries in our research. However, we did not want to limit our research to our home state only, so each team member reached out to at least one

library in California and one library elsewhere in the United States. Our research includes interviews from six California libraries, one Arizona library and one Texas library.

- Demographics
 - California is one of the most diverse states in the country, so it was imperative that we interviewed libraries that serve different demographics throughout California and other states. Our research includes libraries that serve widely diverse BIPOC communities, as well as a variation of low and high income demographics.
- BIPOC Community Hub Status
 - We selected libraries that are in different stages of acting as community hubs for their BIPOC populations. Some of the selected organizations have just begun reaching out to BIPOC communities and creating partnerships, whereas others have been established in this field for several years.

Based on these factors, each of us reached out to libraries that fit in these categories and we were able to connect with incredible staff from eight different libraries. Our selected interviewees were as follows:

- Chermaine Burleson, Pflugerville Public Library (CA)
- Danny Le, Marin County Free Library (CA)
- Elaine Tai, Burlingame Public Library (CA)
- Erwin Magbanua, Chula Vista Public Library (CA)
- Lessa Kanani'opua Pelayo-Lozada, Palos Verdes Library (CA) and American Pacific Asian Librarians Association (APALA)
- Luisa Leija, Long Beach Public Library (CA) (former employee)
- Shawna Sherman, African American Center, San Francisco Public Library (CA)

- Sheridan Cazarez, Long Beach Public Library (CA)
- Tenecia Phillips, Pima County Public Library (AZ)

Obstacles

In mid-March, we began reaching out to selected libraries, excited at the prospect of gaining insight on this topic. On many occasions we did not receive responses, or the responses eventually came too late for our project timeline. At the time we reached out to libraries for interviews, California, like many states, began reopening after a year's closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of us received responses from librarians to inform us they could not spare the time to chat while others replied months later or not at all. It was not until we were past the bulk of our research that we heard back from several of the libraries we originally contacted.

Another obstacle we encountered was the unavailability of current data because of the pandemic. When chatting with libraries about BIPOC services and libraries, we learned that the majority of these services have been placed on hold due to library closures for several months during the pandemic. It is not possible to infer how successful these services may be when the pandemic ends. Many of our interviewees fear that these services may not return or may be permanently ended due to budget cuts and other massive changes caused by the pandemic.

The Current State of Libraries

Our team began researching this topic with the knowledge that the information gathered might change the direction of the project. It is important that the interviews help guide the project outcomes, rather than our team pre-selecting outcomes to fit our initial interpretation of the work being done. This project is *people-focused*, meaning the narrative of the people already involved in this work should lead to the end result. The staff members that interviewed are already actively engaged in working to make the library a more inclusive hub and gaining

community trust. Therefore, their experiences, hardships, and victories are key to understanding where libraries are currently in this process, and for learning how to shape the future of library community hubs and partnerships.

When we began this project, our team was expecting to connect with library staff who had found, formed, and were maintaining beneficial relationships with inclusive partner organizations that served and collaborated with their BIPOC communities. While indeed some of the interviewees have formed partnerships -- which were temporarily disrupted by COVID-19 and closures--others are just beginning to view their existing partnerships through an EDI lens and identify partners that align with their organization's values to provide equitable service to their community. These passionate library staff are doing important work, but it is clear that there is not a "finished example" that can be tailored and used in every library community immediately. Many libraries are in different stages of outreach, partnership, and inclusivity, and this is an ongoing project that clearly has a long road ahead.

Based on interview feedback, our team learned it is crucial for libraries to take an internal look into their EDI structures in order to create an environment of success for their staff and community *before* bringing the primary focus to outside partnerships. Otherwise, there is a risk of breakdown in communication and trust for all involved. The path to sustainability in this project starts with the culture of library staff and administration, and moves forward by building trust with BIPOC communities and partnerships. Instead of presenting a "how-to" roadmap for this project, by shining a light on the stories and experiences of the library staff that were interviewed, we show a snapshot of this work in progress and identify some of the needs from those working hard for their BIPOC population. Our team hopes to encourage our fellow library communities to assess their needs and assets to build a strong foundation for their inclusive community hubs and partnerships.

Key Themes

After looking at these respected library leaders and hearing their stories, our focus on highlighting partnerships shifted to include new themes. There were many stories and topics the interviews touched upon, however, our team agreed on four recurring themes that address key foundational needs for libraries and staff. While the quotations have been framed with context in these sections, the primary material has come from synthesizing and highlighting the voices of our interviewees.

1. Staff support: Time and resources; strategic planning and full staff support.
2. Partnerships: How to connect and continue to build partnerships; The community itself is a partner
3. Education for librarians: Changing education to make libraries more accessible
4. Trust and transparency: The community trusts the library and the library trusts the community

At the conclusion of this paper, considerations and actionable items will be offered to pursue as next steps for further research or implementation.

Staff Support

Time and Resources

The interviewees all express feeling driven to serve their BIPOC communities. They regularly perform outreach and work towards forming bonds, partnerships, and trust within the community. We found that while there may be larger EDI initiatives that have been adopted by administration, it is small committees of BIPOC staff or even a singular BIPOC librarian who is actively driving this work forward for their branch or library system: the hands-on work to reach BIPOC communities lacks wider staff involvement. D. Le shared his frustration about feeling alone in this work stating:

I hate being the only one, and that's what I'm hoping to change. I'm not saying a lot of libraries are not doing as much, but if we're going to talk about diversity, equity, inclusion -- you got to do better than [just] me. I don't want to be applauded...you too can do this.

(D. Le, personal communication, April 7, 2021)

The interviewees find it challenging to balance EDI work and outreach on top of their full-time public library work. All of the interviewees balance connections with BIPOC communities while also managing a library section, branch, or system. The time that is dedicated to EDI work is typically added onto an already full workload. As part of a small committee that works to “reach, support, and celebrate the Black community,” T. Phillips said:

One of the biggest challenges is that our team is small and mighty. We're small in number. We've got a team of six, and of that six, five are branch staff. That presented challenges at the beginning and still continues to present challenges because in addition to the work that we do at the branch, we are taking on this teamwork that we have chosen to do. (T. Phillips, personal communication, April 5, 2021)

Unfortunately there seems to be a catch-22 for BIPOC librarians: although increasing their own workload, BIPOC librarians sometimes choose to limit committee membership to fellow BIPOC staff. When EDI work is open to everyone, librarians of color find that there is an implicit expectation to become an educator or mentor to white colleagues, shifting the focus away from the community. In addition, there are feelings of frustration or emotional exhaustion when put in a position where they feel they must defend their opinion or position to white co-workers. E. Tai comments on her experience with a system-wide invitation to join the Equity Committee:

There needs to be whoever is interested to share the burden, so that does also mean you have both people of color and non-people of color, and you'll have people that you're also going to be spending time almost debating or explaining problems, which is

going to slow down some of the work. There are things that need to change and people on your Equity Committee could still be resistant to it. That's always going to be an issue – if you have individuals who are part of the committee who are still learning or unlearning you'll hear people almost talk about the work as self-improvement. (E. Tai, personal communication, March 31, 2021)

Administration in most public libraries have not yet created a culture or system of full EDI integration and support which is reflected in an uneven workload, in terms of both daily duties and the emotional toll it takes on BIPOC staff. L. K. Pelayo-Lozada puts the issue succinctly: “That [EDI work] is kind of a full time job unto itself. If an administration is really committed to it, they will make those resources available and give the library workers the support that they need” (L. K. Pelayo-Lozada, personal communication, March 31, 2021).

The Importance of a Strategic Plan and Full-Staff Support:

As public library administrations begin to introduce EDI initiatives into their staff training and service models, it is critical that they incorporate EDI into all aspects of their strategic plan. In addition, there should also be a concerted effort within the organization to encourage and facilitate difficult conversations about bias and systemic racism - developing a shared vocabulary that becomes part of the culture. Without such a framework the work being done to serve BIPOC communities is not done effectively nor sustainably and BIPOC librarians are disproportionately bearing the load. As L. Leija points out:

Library administrations should have a strategic plan. A strategic plan that is properly managed and holds people accountable--Without that from leadership, everyone's doing their own thing. Everyone's doing what they think they're supposed to be doing or what they want to do. Librarians of color are left alone to serve a massive demographic, among three people or four people, and for non-BIPOC librarians, helping out is optional. (L. Leija, personal communication, April 3, 2021)

This statement reflects the frustration shared by the majority of interviewees, however, S. Sherman with the San Francisco Public Library shows that there is a path forward. The San Francisco Public Library has a more developed EDI framework in place than most, in large part due to local government efforts that have positively impacted the library's work. In addition, administration apportioned selected staff a percentage of their work time to devote to EDI work. S. Sherman shares the importance of this framework and multiple levels of support for the library's EDI work:

We're given up to 20% of our time to help push it [EDI initiatives] forward and in the meantime, the Board of Supervisors passed an ordinance creating the office of Race Equity in the city. Since then, we have been off under the Office of Racial Equity, which, in fact, created the framework for our Racial Equity Plan. (S. Sherman, personal communication, April 19, 2021)

When EDI work is supported and becomes a common value, public libraries increase their capacity to better support and retain BIPOC staff. When the internal framework is strong, and all staff have a better understanding of systemic racism and their own biases, everyone is better poised to support BIPOC co-workers and communities.

Partnerships

All the librarians in our interviews agreed that a crucial component of community hubs for BIPOC patrons is establishing partnerships. These partnerships consist of either partnering with local organizations or the communities themselves becoming partners with the library.

Connections with local organizations

Each professional we interviewed has partnered with organizations to improve BIPOC community services. C. Burleson stated that her system has strong partnerships with schools to improve resources for students, and this partnership benefits both the library and the organization:

We work with the school, K through 12. We also have a homeschooling program that helped us get in contact with different types of families. We've reached out to nursing homes. We interact with our communities in that way. It seems like it's not like a big thing, but in talking with people, interacting with them, especially when you're interacting with the teachers and students, you get to learn about pockets of the community that either haven't come into the library before or that do and then you're interacting with them in another context. (C. Burleson, personal communication, March 31st, 2021)

L. Leija also elaborated on the benefits of partnerships with local organizations:

[The] Long Beach Library has a partnership with MOLA, which is the Museum of Latin American Arts, in which they invited the library to come and do outreach. We did our storytime there, and that's where we were able to cross pollinate the community. Then, people that saw us at the museum would come to the library, and vice versa. (L. Leija, personal communication, April 3, 2021)

E. Magbanua spoke of the Innovation and Energy Stations that are located at Chula Vista Libraries. The Innovation Station is a makerspace and community STEM lab inspired by Qualcomm® Thinkabit Lab™. This successful program is a collaboration between the Chula Vista Public Library, Qualcomm, and the Chula Vista Elementary School District:

We have our Innovation and Energy Stations that are part of career development for sixth graders. [This] will change the lives of all the kids who go through this program. They talk about work and careers, how they will develop their skills, and how to give them an advantage...Most of the kids are kids of color. We love to see these kids years down the line...how they are thinking of college and what they want to pursue with their careers because of the confidence they got from going through the stations. (E. Magbanua, personal communication, April 12, 2021)

Moreover, L. K. Pelayo-Lozada explained that organizations often reach out to the library in order to gain a bigger audience for their cause:

Our version of outreach for a really long time was just showing up with a table at community events... so we relied a lot on community partners that feel empowered enough to speak out [to the community]. For instance, we just had the 12th annual Living History Museum of African-American Heroes, which was started by three black persons who formed [the organization] because African Americans make up only 2% of the population [in Palos Verdes] and they were worried about their kids growing [up] in all-white environments. And so they were looking for different ways that they could engage with their culture. We were able to be here to help them with that. (L. K. Pelayo-Lozada, personal communication, April 15th, 2021)

A thought that resonated throughout different library systems is that libraries are not reaching out to BIPOC organizations as much as they should. L. K. Pelayo-Lozada claims that “the most successful [partnerships] have been the folks that have come to us” (L. K. Pelayo-Lozada, personal communication, April 15th, 2021). S. Cazarez also expressed that his systems’ most meaningful partnerships were created because the organization reached out to the library first:

Community partnerships have really only come to the surface as an essential part of our work in the last few years. There is a lack in the process of identification and evaluation of community partnerships. With a lot of the partnerships that we currently have, the partners found us, we didn't necessarily seek them. We have organizations like Centro Cha here in Long Beach-- an organization that serves primarily the Latinx and Spanish speaking populations and helps them go through the immigration and/or naturalization process. Latinos in Action is another one that we're partnered with. It's a group of Latinx

parents and young people who want to learn about their community, and they found us as well.

(S. Cazarez, personal communication, April 3, 2021)

L. K. Pelayo-Lozada included that establishing partnerships with BIPOC organizations for the development of their librarians of color is equally as important as establishing partnerships for BIPOC communities. The Asian Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA), of which L. K. Pelayo-Lozada is the executive director, has established connections with Librarianship organizations like Reforma, Black Caucus, AILA (American Indian Library Association), and CALA (Chinese American Library Association), among others. "Together," says L. K. Pelayo-Lozada, "we have quarterly meetings where we also meet with ALA leadership on a regular basis to outline our agenda and see how they can support it, and also to point out where ALA needs more work and the issues that we're seeing in the profession with retention and barriers" (L. K. Pelayo-Lozada, personal communication, April 15th, 2021).

However, partnering with BIPOC-specific organizations for community resources is not as simple as other types of partnerships. This can be due to demographics, lack of resources, or because BIPOC communities can feel intimidated by libraries. E. Tai expressed her difficulties establishing partnerships created by and/or organized by people of color due to the demographics of the City of Burlingame. Tai states:

I've had a really hard time with partnerships recently. I've tried reaching out to certain organizations. A lot of organizations are focused on uplifting their own communities, so the people they serve are like 'I don't need to go to a library in Burlingame for this.' It's harder to do BIPOC partnerships in an area like this. And a lot of these organizations, especially here, are run by white folks. (E. Tai, personal communication, March 31, 2021)

Equally as important as establishing connections with BIPOC organizations is creating strong partnerships with the community itself. Creating said partnerships may look different than a conventional phone call to set up an event with an organization. These partnerships can range anywhere between asking the community for feedback on resources, outreaching at places other than the Library, and ultimately recruiting speakers and performers directly from the community.

The Community as a Partner

In order for libraries to have successful community partners, a foundation needs to be established within the organization first and foremost. L. K. Pelayo-Lozada believes efforts to reach out to patrons need to be fully supported by library administration and staff:

I think that it should be community driven and community informed. If you don't have the support of the administration, you're not going to get very far. And you need an administration and you need a staff that is willing to listen to the community. (L. K. Pelayo-Lozada, personal communication, April 15th, 2021)

L. Leija explained that direct feedback from the community is a partnership in itself when measuring success for BIPOC resources:

The work that we do will make a noticeable difference as long as it impacts even just one person. We told the patrons: 'I want to see what you feel about it' because these resources can make a big impact. Even if you have just one person that's like 'hey, I haven't seen this before and this is very relatable to me. Thank you.' Then that's it, you know you succeeded. (L. Leija, personal communication, April 3, 2021)

A common misconception with BIPOC partnerships, especially with the community, is that only people of color can be involved. S. Sherman pondered on the hesitation from non-BIPOC librarians when reaching out to BIPOC communities:

I can't really speak for other librarians, especially librarians that aren't of color. I wonder if there's a nervousness about going out into the community. In all my jobs, I've gone out to community and tried to bring community in and it's easy for me to do that because people see me and they see a brown face. I can see how it would be hard for someone else to go into a space where they're saying, 'only if you're an ally' or 'only Black people are in this space.' (S. Sherman, personal communication, April 19th, 2021)

Similarly, C. Burleson explained that non-BIPOC people may feel intimidated to create partnerships for BIPOC communities, but people from all cultures should be present in order to succeed:

There is a committee of people from the community that are made of BIPOC people who are now discussing with the city council and the city managers on moving diversity forward. It is a really diverse group, because in the past, we know that people want to talk about this, but there are people who say, 'no, I'm white. I can't. I don't have a seat at this table.' Yeah, you do. You really do. You need to be here, too. (C. Burleson, personal communication, March 31, 2021)

Finally, there is no better place to find talent than the community. D. Le explains that libraries are an excellent tool for local artists to truly make their voices heard:

I'm giving them a platform to talk as much as to showcase their artistry or who they are. Let's talk about these racial inequities or stereotypes or the judgment that's often placed on people of color. If I [am not] able to show these narratives, whether it's in the library or virtually, I want the population, regardless of who they are, to know that these voices matter. We speak about libraries as hubs for community; hubs for opportunity. In order to reinforce that belief, we've got to bring the voices who don't come to the library, who seldom come to the library if at all. (D. Le, personal communication, April 7, 2021)

These partnerships expand beyond elevating voices from the community, measuring success by community feedback, or expanding diversity conversations between institutions and communities. The library and community can come full circle by recruiting talent from the community, not only limited to events and resources, but even recruiting for future librarians. Unfortunately, librarianship is not easily accessible to many BIPOC communities due to a myriad of obstacles.

Education for librarians

One of the more surprising topics that continued to come up in the interviews was regarding the issues surrounding education for librarians and the programs to receive a Masters of Library and Information Science. Although there was not a question included specifically on the topic of education, the interviewees brought it up unprompted because of the barriers they have observed within the educational system. These are barriers that the BIPOC community encounters on a regular basis, including financial burden, historical stereotypes, and missing gaps in library education as the needs of the library staff and community change.

Financial and Generational Barriers

Because the field of librarianship requires a master's degree, often this can be a financial burden as E. Tai points out, and it becomes a major deterrent to entering a program:

Something people get up in arms about is the MLIS degree. We don't all have time and money to get a Master's Degree, especially because of systemic racism and generational wealth. I grew up in an upper middle class environment, so to me it was like 'oh, it will be fine', whereas somebody else who didn't come from that environment might not be able to become a librarian. (E. Tai, personal communication, April 12th, 2021)

E. Tai discusses the debt that often follows higher education which makes it difficult to break the cycle of financial burden even after receiving a degree:

For librarians of color, the system has been created and designed to knock us down at every possible time. You want to go to grad school or want to get a Master's Degree? Here's your sixty thousand dollars of debt. You're still stuck." (L. Leija, personal communication, April 3rd, 2021)

Alongside the financial hurdles are the historical stereotypes and the lack of precedent for people of color to be welcomed into the LIS career. D. Le addresses the idea that library staff must break the mold of what is expected in the library world:

One: I'm not a quiet Asian, so I'm already breaking many stereotypes. Two: the stereotype of librarians has to change. It's culturally embedded because of generational stereotypes that have lingered which makes people who fit that mold gravitate to the profession. The [idea] that higher education's the only way hinders people who don't have opportunities to enter the field. I want to be able to break those kinds of stereotypes for other people of color to come into the field. (D. Le, personal communication, April 7th, 2021)

C. Burleson gives a little background on what led her as a woman of color into the field, and how important it is to give the BIPOC community a voice in LIS classes and the library profession:

When I decided to become a librarian I wanted to help everybody. It was important for groups of people who hadn't been acknowledged before to be highlighted and [I wanted that] to be something I emphasized in my career. People get nervous about race, but I knew as a Black woman going into the profession, [that] sometimes I was the only Black person in the [MLS] class[es]. I wanted to make sure that other people who were BIPOC, would have a voice and see themselves. (C. Burleson, personal communication, March 31st, 2021)

L.K. Pelayo-Lozada goes straight to the heart of the library education issue for the BIPOC community by looking at the programs themselves. She suggests we need to assess and rethink what LIS programs look like, and be willing to reshape the requirements and relevant experience needed in order to secure librarian positions:

We have to assess what an LIS degree does, because when we're talking about BIPOC library workers, they are disproportionately non-professional librarians. The MLS is a big barrier. I'm not saying we need to get rid of the MLS, but I think that we need to assess what we want out of those programs, and assess equity, diversity and inclusion within the curriculums that we're requiring for our LIS programs. These are of course much larger conversations, but there are different ways that we can address them on a local level with our minimum requirements for folks and how we can apply customer service skills from retail environments or other environments to the public library experience. (L. K. Pelayo-Lozada, personal communication, April 15th, 2021)

How the Job has Changed

Another obstacle that emerged in the interviews is how the job has evolved. There seems to be a lack of widespread acknowledgement for these changes which leads to a disconnect in staffing needs and a lack of relevant training. D. Le spoke about how difficult it was for him to discover he could have a career in libraries, because the requirements of library jobs can often appear to be unattainable to those unfamiliar with the library world: "If I'd known it was really, truly just connections and being able to understand community to be a librarian, I would have been doing it in my 20s" (D. Le, personal communication, April 7th, 2021).

Le continues talking about how changes must happen to create a more diverse and welcoming environment to those that have not been able to "fit" into the previous models:

I'm willing to break the mode of the system that has brought people in, whether you call it gatekeeping or an old guard mentality. I don't have anything against legacy, but I

believe that if we have to change to survive, we need to be able to embrace those changes. It doesn't mean you can't teach people who are new how to work or work the system, but you can't keep holding the door closed or stand in front of the door if people don't look and talk the way you're familiar with. (D. Le, personal communication, April 7th, 2021)

L.K. Pelayo-Lozada also addresses these disconnects by talking about the changing focus of the job, and how creating programs and developing community is at the forefront of the modern library mission. If the library could engage library workers that understand and are part of the greater community they serve, they may make strides to addressing the specific needs of the BIPOC population:

As library school curriculums change, and as the types of jobs that we have as library workers changes, [the] librarian job is not just doing reference anymore- it's programming. That's different than even 15 years ago. We need to take stock and redefine our mission, because we're doing more than just giving people information, we're creating community. We need to learn, [and] we need to make sure that we are trained in how to develop community. It's a skill that many of us come with, but what if you don't come with it? What then? We need to be able to have answers and resources for those folks. (L. K. Pelayo-Lozada, personal communication, April 15th, 2021)

There are many opportunities to improve the education and training surrounding libraries in order to break down any barriers that impede access for both BIPOC staff members and BIPOC community members. These discussions will be continued and refined if we keep our focus on people first. C. Burlison sums it up well: "That is going to be the thing, not only the diversity in thoughts and deeds and cultures and people, but also people who like and love people" (C. Burlison, personal communication, March 31st, 2021).

Trust & Transparency

The foundation of an inclusive community hub is trust. We specifically asked our interviewees how they approached building trust with their BIPOC communities and organizations. L. K. Pelayo-Lozada explains, “I think that’s a general public library problem that can be solved through conversation, building trust, relying, trusting the community. We want them to trust us, but we can’t do that until we trust them also” (L. K. Pelayo-Lozada, personal communication, April 15th 2021).

Libraries must name and own their accountability to communities of color. Honesty and transparency are also key. As T. Phillips notes:

Folks know when you're being honest with them or not. We have to be honest about the fact that we still have work to do. We acknowledge that we maybe did not do what we were supposed to in the past. At this point, we want to make a shift and we want to change. These are the ways that we are going to do this so that we can be held accountable. Acknowledging and listening to others, not just hearing feedback, but really listening to the feedback. For us, that has been really important in terms of building trust and also being seen stepping into those spaces where we haven't been previously. (T. Phillips, personal communication, April 5, 2021)

It is imperative that libraries acknowledge their responsibility and commitments both externally to the community and internally to all staff.

Getting to know the BIPOC community is the most crucial step. If libraries want to connect with the people they serve, they need to find ways to have significant, honest, and open dialogue. E. Magbanua shares, “Have those conversations with them, because you're never going to be able to address any real needs if you don't find out what their dreams and hopes are and what's really, what's really important to them” (E. Magbanua, personal communication, April

12, 2021). It's not enough, however, just to talk with BIPOC community members. E. Magbanua goes on to explain the crucial next step:

And then you follow up with them--really have those conversations and think those through. Constant communication with them and saying, 'we hear you, this is what we're hearing and this is what we can do - let's try to get there together and keep working.'" (E. Magbanua, personal communication, April 12, 2021)

It is incumbent on libraries to follow up and follow through. If BIPOC communities trust libraries enough to share their concerns, interests, and experiences then in turn, libraries have to demonstrate that they care through radical change. Our interviewees highlighted the importance of tangible, authentic action alongside messages of inclusion so the community could see the change rather than being met solely with well-intentioned yet hollow EDI statements. S. Sherman explains the responsibility that comes with public acknowledgment:

We [San Francisco Public Library] just passed a resolution for our Library Commission to say a land acknowledgement for the Ramaytush Ohlone. There was a lot of activism from the American Indian Cultural District to get those land acknowledgements read at official city meetings. Part of their request when they did that is that the land acknowledgement isn't just some statement that we read, but that there's actual meat behind it. They wanted the library to engage more with the community. (S. Sherman, personal communication, April 19th, 2021)

Another consideration in the path towards trust is the context in which libraries hold the conversations. The physical space of a library can be a barrier to trust and transparency with those we seek to serve. Therefore, meeting the community in its own spaces outside of the library walls is vital. Our interviewees share steps they have taken to engage with their communities of color in a different context:

We rely so much on chance to develop these relationships, but [it's important to] figure out when these folks' meetings are to ask if we can come visit them when we are out in the community. I wear my name badge out of the office right now, if I'm going to go pick up lunch so that folks can see it and then maybe we'll have a conversation that I would not have been able to have otherwise. (L. K. Pelayo-Lozada, personal communication, April 15, 2021)

Pima County Library has been providing outreach and holding monthly programs outside the library at a community center with historically Black roots:

We have been able to be seen in different ways - to introduce our team and the library to folks in a different space that isn't a library branch. Whether we realize it or not, sometimes our buildings can be intimidating. By connecting with this community center and their staff, we got our name out to other places and have had folks reach out to us. To me, that is a noticeable difference when we're being invited into spaces we weren't before. (T. Phillips, personal communication, April 5, 2021)

By making ourselves available to the community outside of the library space, we become more approachable, more human, less a symbol of an institution. Opening that doorway is crucial to forming genuine, sustainable partnerships and personal connections. Those connections can be transformative.

Libraries must continue to reach members of BIPOC communities who have never thought of the library as their own or may not believe the library has anything to offer them.

For Spanish speakers, they oftentimes expect poor service because there's a language barrier. There are racial concerns as well. So when they go into a place and all of a sudden they find somebody like me, who takes time to translate and phrase things correctly, that's really impressive for patrons. They go home and tell their friends, 'I went to the library the other day. They had a super cute storytime in English and Spanish. You

should come along next week.' And little by little, you start to build trust with your community because you have staff who are equipped, capable, and also have the passion to provide those services in a way that's equitable to the quality that you would offer an English speaker. (S. Cazarez, personal communication, April 3, 2021)

When community members of color see library materials in their native languages, stories featuring BIPOC voices, and consistent programs with BIPOC presenters, they feel more welcome and included.

Committing to communities of color means showing up and offering a space of solidarity and support. C. Burleson explains her dedication to creating an accepting and affirming library environment for her community, particularly in the face of challenges from people who may not understand or agree with those services:

There was a lady [member of the public] who was offended by us having a Black History Month celebration. She'll be mad because we're celebrating Transgender Day. We do things like that because it matters -- our community matters. I don't have to be a transgender person. I am a cisgender black woman and you can come out to me. I'm here for you. (C. Burleson, personal communication, March 31, 2021)

It sends a powerful message when library staff protect the rights of community members to have their lives and identities seen and honored. In giving space and centering the voices of communities of color, the library is making a deep commitment to its community.

The Library's commitment to its BIPOC staff is equally important. When communities of color see BIPOC library staff from similar backgrounds, identities, or life experiences, they feel more affirmed, welcome, and comfortable within the Library space. BIPOC library staff are able to connect and establish a level of trust with the community which may not occur with white library staff:

As a person of color, it's easier to go into certain communities. So that helps being a BIPOC myself. Hearing from teens, patrons coming to the library that [they] appreciate seeing another person of color in the space. You're making a difference. (S. Sherman, personal communication, April 19th, 2021)

Conversations and connections between patrons of color and BIPOC Library Staff can act as catalysts for inspiration for both staff and patrons:

I saw something that I needed to do as a male Vietnamese librarian. I wanted to inspire others - not just Southeast Asian children - but other persons of color to work in libraries as a profession to help bring a different perspective, especially those who care about community and want to work in the community. (D. Le, personal communication, April 7, 2021)

Public libraries need to develop a more diverse and inclusive library staff who come from the community if they want to build a foundation of trust and strengthen their relationship with BIPOC communities. In order to keep such valuable connections, libraries must recognize the additional work and stress added to library staff of color and find meaningful ways to create a supportive, healthy workplace which encourages professional and personal growth for BIPOC Staff.

In the end, what matters in establishing trust is the genuine desire to respect BIPOC communities and the ability to stay present, honest, and accountable as we learn from those communities. Building deep trust between public libraries and their communities takes time. As C. Burleson puts it, "Trying is the most important thing. Always wanting to try and to make it work" (C. Burleson, personal communication, March 31, 2021). The work of serving and honoring BIPOC communities is the ongoing work of a lifetime.

Considerations

Take small but steady steps

Meaningful change does not happen overnight. It is important to take small steps to successfully become a community hub for BIPOC patrons. Begin with establishing that rapport with the community and ensure each resource or partnership is fully integrated before moving on. Resources and partnerships for and with BIPOC communities require more work, such as outreach, translating materials, etc. Keep trying and figure out how to sustain your relationships.

EDI is a core service, not a statement

If institutions like the American Library Association are calling for equity, diversity, and inclusion, then these three components should be priorities for all libraries. BIPOC communities should be served with the same quality of service, and should have the same amount of resources available as English-speaking communities.

The entire library staff needs to commit to EDI work if we want it to be successful

It is imperative that all librarians regardless of cultural background fully commit to EDI work. Trust between BIPOC communities and partners with the library cannot be built unless all library staff provide the same quality and quantity of resources to all patrons. Successful EDI work involves having deep, difficult conversations about systemic racism, institutional bias, and privilege. In order to do that work, libraries must help all staff develop a common vocabulary and framework to use when addressing issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

EDI work requires a bigger budget

More often than not, EDI work is placed in the back burner and has a small, or nonexistent budget. Real budgets need to be invested in libraries working to address systemic racism and promote equity. The Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) is a valuable resource to properly train library staff on equity work. However, GARE is rarely promoted to staff outside management positions. Promoting GARE more heavily and including all staff in GARE presentations is a great start.

Measure success using different metrics

BIPOC events are valuable even if attendance is low. Rather than focusing on numbers, libraries can evaluate success based on feedback from the community. Whether it is a compliment from a patron, developing a language collection, or providing excellent service in other languages, victories with BIPOC services extend beyond numbers. BIPOC events and resources can impact a patron in a much more meaningful way. Thus, BIPOC services should not be measured with the same standard metrics.

Recommendations for Public Libraries

These are small steps for libraries to evaluate where they are in the journey towards becoming community hubs which serve their BIPOC communities in a just and equitable way:

- 1. Perform external and internal assessments-** Evaluate community demographics and your library's current partnerships, programs, and services.
 - a. Community Assessment** - Learn about your community; who is in it? Who uses the library and who does not? Research demographics, popular meeting spots and events, current community organizations, and respected individuals within the community.
 - b. Library Assessment** - With whom has the library already developed sustained partnerships? How is the library promoting itself within the community? Are there current programs focused on equity and social justice? If not, can the library incorporate racial equity into its popular programs?
- 2. Recognize, support, and mentor BIPOC library staff** - Libraries should examine their current workforce and commit to supporting and developing the talent, skills, and passion of their current employees. Avoid tokenism; it is essential to include library staff of color proportionally and in decision-making roles. (GARE Communications Guide, 2018)

- 3. Incorporate an EDI framework into the Strategic Plan** - EDI work touches every part of public service, including librarianship. To be true community hubs, libraries must commit to a strategic mission of working against systemic racism and towards equity. As strategic plans drive the mission, structure, and focus of public libraries, centering EDI in the plan is essential. Libraries can share their actionable strategic plan with BIPOC community partners to demonstrate their commitment and accountability.
- 4. Form an EDI committee to enact the framework and focus on outreach:**
 - a. Create a committee** - Libraries should look to integrate outside BIPOC community partners into their EDI committees whenever possible. It is vital to see who else can be included from the community to bring in other voices and views from the public. If the city or county has an established EDI committee or office devoted to EDI work, libraries should push to have representation at the committee meetings. The value of libraries and local government working together on EDI work is two-fold: library staff can advocate for their BIPOC communities and offer ways to help. Staff representatives can also report back, keeping the library informed about city or county-wide measures and how the library can play a role in furthering EDI work.
 - b. Liaison work** - Empower local branches to go out and recruit for the profession amongst their BIPOC community, particularly to share information about what librarianship looks like, how to pursue a degree, and resources for paying for school. The outreach team can promote opportunities for internships and other means for individuals to gain experience in a library setting, especially focusing on communities of color which may not think of the library as a place open to them.

Recommendations for the California State Library

Below are the team's recommendations for the State Library to consider in supporting libraries as inclusive community hubs for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. These recommendations were purposefully chosen to be small, incremental steps to highlight the importance of this work and the voices of library staff, as well as create transparency and continued channels of communication between California libraries and the State Library. Our team looks forward to seeing these conversations continue:

- 1. California Library Association (CLA) & California State Library Websites-** Create a prominent landing page on CLA and CA State Library websites devoted to EDI initiatives and opportunities, grants for EDI work, and funding for professional development.
- 2. Host an EDI Leadership Series-** Similarly to the CLA Leadership Series, the CA State Library can facilitate online meetings for different professional organizations, associations, community groups, and library staff to share their EDI work, resources and challenges. The participants would be able to engage speakers in conversation, ask questions and share experiences. These could be offered as consistent, monthly presentations with open access for all library attendees.
- 3. Funding-** Explore available funding to create more opportunities for public libraries to offer paid mentorships and internships. California libraries can conduct outreach to engage their community members and allow opportunities for BIPOC interns to learn about the library profession and gain library experience in a structured and safe learning environment. These programs may be modeled after similar programs in California that exist such as Los Angeles Public Library's Diversity and Inclusion Internships, California Librarians Black Caucus scholarship, and the CA State Library's Public Library Staff Education Program .

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Appendix I

Interview Questions

1. What first prompted you to focus on social justice and serving your BIPOC community?
 - a. What did you notice about how your library was serving (or not serving) your communities of color?
2. How did you identify community partners and organizations that serve BIPOC communities with which to work? What made you pursue those particular organizations?
3. Did those partnerships make a noticeable difference in your community? If so, how?
4. How do you and your staff build trust with your BiPOC community? Your community partners?
5. Were there particular funding sources you used?
6. Do you have a department within your organization/government structure that is focused on equity/diversity/inclusivity?
 - a. How well is the library supported in its efforts?
7. What were some of the biggest hurdles to this process?
8. How do you evaluate how successful you are at serving your BiPOC communities? Have you received direct feedback from your BIPOC communities?
9. Where do you hope your library will go from here? Where can you envision the library going as a community hub which serves its entire community?
10. What did we not ask about that you would like people to know?