

ISSUE BRIEF



LOCAL AND REGIONAL
GOVERNMENT ALLIANCE ON
RACE & EQUITY

Advancing Racial Equity in Public Libraries

Case Studies from the Field

[RACIALEQUITYALLIANCE.ORG](https://racialequityalliance.org)



LOCAL AND REGIONAL
GOVERNMENT ALLIANCE ON
RACE & EQUITY

The Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) is producing a series of briefing papers that support institutions committed to achieving racial equity. This paper provides a framework for implementation by highlighting strategies public libraries are using to advance equity.

The goal of the GARE Libraries Interest group is to develop the capacity of libraries to make racial equity a priority within our libraries, cities, communities and national associations.

To download additional copies of this report or access more of GARE's racial equity tools, visit www.racialequityalliance.org/tools-resources/



LOCAL AND REGIONAL
GOVERNMENT ALLIANCE ON
RACE & EQUITY

This issue brief is published by the Government Alliance on Race and Equity, a national network of government working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all.

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race forward & *csi* CENTER FOR
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INTRODUCTION

OVER THE LAST DECADE, more than 50 cities and counties have partnered with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity to advance racial equity and opportunities for all. Together, these agencies have established a solid field of practice that aims to transform government, strengthen community partnerships and eliminate racial disparities.

From Seattle to Saint Paul, library departments have been at the forefront of local and regional initiatives to proactively change the policies, practices and systems that create barriers to prosperity and well-being for people of color.

This Issue Brief profiles a handful of public libraries that are leveraging the power and influence of their institutions to advance racial equity in library work and beyond. These libraries are using a shared framework and toolset while developing innovative local approaches to reduce race-based disparities. In doing so, they are beginning to see positive transformations in collections, partnerships, the library workforce, programming and – ultimately – communities.

By sharing the experience of these library leaders, we hope more libraries – working in coordination with local partners and across the field – will adopt and expand the GARE framework for institutional change.

If the vision of racial equity “is just and fair inclusion into a society in which all, including all racial and ethnic groups, can participate, prosper and reach their full potential,” then we hope this Issue Brief will be a road map for greater opportunity, participation and prosperity.¹

WHAT IS RACIAL EQUITY?

Racial Equity: When race can no longer be used to predict life outcomes and life outcomes for all groups are improved.

ACROSS THE UNITED STATES, public libraries aim to create welcoming and inclusive spaces; advocate for freedom of inquiry and expression, foster civic participation and economic opportunity; and ensure literacy and lifelong learning. At the heart of these goals is the premise of equity – a shared aspiration that every person might have all they need to succeed.

Yet, across the United States – in large cities and small towns – a person’s race remains a key predictor of access, opportunity, safety and well-being.

FACING INEQUITY

SIGNIFICANT RACIAL DISPARITIES exist in wages, housing, early childhood development, education, public health, the criminal justice system, economic development and environmental health.²

While civil rights movements have enabled significant reforms, patterns of housing segregation, employment discrimination and systemic neglect continue to limit opportunities, and regressive new policies threaten to roll back decades of progress.

When we look at income, gender, ability, immigration and sexuality, race intensifies existing disparities, resulting in higher infant mortality and maternal death rates, greater unemployment, lower high school graduation rates and concentrated poverty in many communities of color. As Angela Glover Blackwell, executive director of PolicyLink reminds us, “At a time when everyone is hurting, communities of color are hurting even more.”³

Among the nation’s 74 million children (age 0 to 18), 46 percent are youth of color. Ten million children live in extreme poverty and another 31 million live in low-income households. Nationwide, 50 percent of students of color attend schools in high poverty areas, compared to just 10 percent of white students. In 2015, 82 percent of African American fourth graders scored below reading proficiency, as did 79 percent of Latino and 78 percent of Native American students, compared to 54 percent of white and 47 percent of Asian students.⁴ “Children who fail to read proficiently by the end of third grade are more likely to drop out of high school, reducing their earning potential and chances for long-term success.”⁵

Within libraries, we can see this chain reaction across virtually every core service area. In early literacy and third-grade reading, adult and digital literacy, career and job opportunities, housing insecurity and the disproportionate surveillance of poor communities of color – racial inequity shows up everywhere.

Yet we are often reluctant to talk about race and, especially, the persistence of racism. While race-neutral approaches to library service may seem fair, colorblind or race-neutral practices often reproduce racial disparity, resulting in unfair access and outcomes. The fact that a person’s race remains a principal determinant of health, safety, education and opportunity in the 21st century, should compel libraries to focus on race and its impact on our work.

WHY FOCUS ON RACE?

Race is a construct deeply rooted in our historical, social and individual identities. Race also remains a primary predictor of opportunity in the United States. When we hold other factors like income and gender constant, inequities based on race persist across multiple indicators for success, including education, jobs, incarceration, health and housing. To advance racial equity, it is vital that we are able to talk about race and racism, and generate concrete action steps that lead to tangible outcomes.

Racism can also prevent marginalized communities from effectively working together for social change. By addressing race and racism, we address the interconnected ways marginalization takes place so that we can achieve greater unity across all communities.

RELATED RESOURCE

[*Advancing Racial Equity and Transforming Government: A Resource Guide to Put Ideas into Action*](#)

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FROM PERSONAL CHANGE TO STRUCTURAL CHANGE

“As a society, we often believe that individuals and/or their communities are solely responsible for their conditions. Through the analysis of institutional power, we can identify and unpack the systems external to the community that create the internal realities that many people experience daily.”

– **People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond**

MORE AND MORE LIBRARIES across the country are realizing we need a different approach if we want different outcomes for our communities. A Racial Equity Framework helps us go beyond individual change to begin changing the systems through which racism operates.

Racism is not “just how things are.” Racial hierarchies, rewards and punishments have been created and maintained by government and other institutions. Race-based policies and practices have been codified by government beginning with legislation to criminalize interracial marriage in the 1660s and continuing to today. Many of these policies continue to shape communities long after they’ve been outlawed. We call this structural or systemic racism.⁶

Across all areas of civic and economic life, structural racism excludes people of color from full participation in decision-making. While we can name exceptions to this pattern of exclusion, naming people of color with money or influence doesn’t dislodge the barriers blocking whole communities from power and opportunity.

Different from interpersonal racism, which refers to individual bias, institutional racism refers to the constellation of norms, policies and practices within an institution (e.g., schools, libraries or healthcare) that lead to racial disparities. Structural racism is defined as a historical pattern of exclusion across many institutions.

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DEFINITIONS

INDIVIDUAL/INTERPERSONAL RACISM

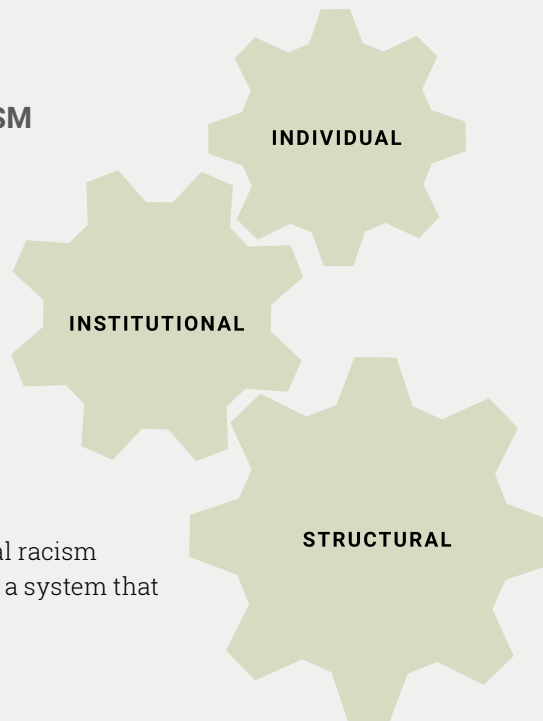
Bigotry or discrimination by an individual based on race.

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

Policies, practices and procedures that work better for white people than for people of color, often unintentionally.

STRUCTURAL RACISM

A history and current reality of institutional racism across all institutions, combining to create a system that negatively impacts communities of color.



DISCERNING RACISM: THE CASE OF LIBRARY FINES

INTERPERSONAL RACISM may play a role when library staff apply subjective criteria to enforcement of library policies. In the case of library fines, staff decide whether to renew a lost item to give the patron more time, mark it as “claims returned” or waive charges. These decisions are largely based upon staff judgement where implicit bias may play a role.⁷

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM is present when a library’s enforcement of fines has a disproportionate impact on people of color, who are overrepresented among low-income populations due to the racial wealth gap.⁸

STRUCTURAL RACISM exists whenever libraries rely on revenue from fines to cover general operating expenses. To the extent that people have difficulty paying these fines, negative consequences (e.g., being blocked from library and computer use, or being reported to a collections agency) are compounded across multiple institutions, contributing to systemic barriers.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF GOVERNMENT

BECAUSE RACE-BASED DISCRIMINATION has been created and maintained by government through both policies and neglect, government agencies have a special responsibility to address institutional and structural racism. Only when schools, libraries, health providers, cities and planning departments begin to analyze racial disparity and its root causes can we begin to uncover different solutions – and create different outcomes for communities of color.

Unlike diversity initiatives, which focus on addressing individual bias, a Racial Equity Framework focuses on systems change, guiding us to look at history to understand present-day challenges and to prioritize government action to address structural racism.

Luckily, the movement to end institutional racism is not new. By making racial equity a core part of our work, libraries and our civic partners are committing to build on a powerful legacy of civil rights and social justice in the United States, to stand with communities who are leading these efforts in the present day and to create a more just and fair society for all.



RACIAL EQUITY IN LIBRARIES

“If our nation is to live up to its democratic ideals – that all people are created equal and treated fairly – racial equity and inclusion must be at the forefront of how we shape our policies, institutions and culture.”

– **The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide***

THIS ISSUE BRIEF HIGHLIGHTS new approaches among a small group of public libraries working with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity through regional partnerships. Together, these libraries form The Libraries Interest Group, a learning group working closely with GARE while participating as leaders within city, county or regional cohorts.⁹

The Libraries Interest Group builds on a rich legacy of social justice work within librarianship. Our work is strengthened by a growing field of practice within the profession and inspired by the recent resurgence of strong, national movements for racial justice.

Across the country, hundreds of public librarians are joining racial justice leaders and prominent library scholars who have long argued for “critical race discourse” in library education and practice.¹⁰ We are heartened to see librarians building sustained initiatives that more seriously address institutional racism and cultivate anti-racist practices within libraries.¹¹

Through each of these initiatives, libraries are taking a more honest look at the strengths and the failures of our profession when it comes to racial equity.

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LOOKING BACK

WHILE LIBRARIES HAVE a strong progressive tradition and a great deal of public support across diverse communities, significant disparities exist within our profession. Together, GARE libraries have been identifying these disparities – both locally and nationally – and examining their root causes to strengthen the field of librarianship and become better partners to communities of color.

Historically and today, libraries have been white-dominated institutions. During the 20th century many libraries – from North to South – upheld racially segregated facilities. Many more failed communities of color through neglect, paternalism and tacit approval of prevailing norms.¹²

While some race-based discrimination operated through omission, other exclusionary practices were overt. Controversy erupted in 1936 after the American Library Association (ALA) elected to hold its annual conference in Richmond, Virginia. The local planning body told ALA's Black members “that although they would be permitted to use all hotel entrances, they would not be able to register or eat at conference hotels or attend meals scheduled as part of the conference program. And for all conference sessions, they would have to sit on the right side of the room.” After weeks of silence on the debate, ALA responded: “It was not the province of the organization to take up the question of general social or personal discrimination.”¹³ This was not a neutral stance on ALA's part, but an active endorsement of Jim Crow laws.

Even as America's civil rights movements gained ground, institutional racism persisted. Tacit approval of racial hierarchies continued in the post-civil rights era as library practices, collections and norms continued to emphasize white cultural universalism, adding scattered voices from communities of color without a meaningful shift in power, representation or authority.

While institutions embraced multiculturalism in the 1980s and 90s, these initiatives often failed to de-center white narratives, leading to race-neutral policies that continued to mask structural barriers. Writing at the time, Lorna Peterson astutely criticized this approach as one that “merely celebrates differences as exotic.” Peterson continued, “This careless language shapes library policy weak on equity.”¹⁴

Because efforts to celebrate multiculturalism usually focused on creating more tolerant individuals rather than more equitable institutions, such campaigns failed to transform economic, political and social conditions for most people of color, just as they failed to transform the demographics of the library profession. “Focusing on [diverse] numbers rather

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“We must act with urgency. As institutions committed to values of democracy and intellectual freedom, libraries have an obligation to move beyond diversity initiatives to grapple more actively with the power and responsibility of our position.”

than the deeper issues of experience and structural discrimination,” explains librarian April Hathcock, “allows the profession to take a self-congratulatory and complacent approach to the ‘problem of diversity’ without ever overtly naming and addressing the issue of whiteness.”¹⁵ Specifically, libraries have failed to fully grapple with the harm that white cultural dominance creates for library staff, patrons and the broader community.

Long after legal segregation ended, this failure continues to create a gap in public trust that can be hard to heal. For U.S. Congressman John Lewis, this meant a lifetime of public service without public libraries. “When I was 16 years old, some of my brothers and sisters and cousins [were] going down to the public library trying to get public library cards,” he recounted. “We were told the library was for whites only, not for coloureds.”¹⁶

It took another 60 years for Lewis to set foot in a library. When he did, it was to accept the National Book Award for his acclaimed series about the civil rights movement, *March*.

This legacy continues to shape how many people of color see libraries and librarianship today and continues to impact how libraries are perceived as partners in community problem solving.

Modern libraries need to grapple with this history as well as with our blind spots.

LOOKING AHEAD

AT PRESENT, 88 PERCENT of librarians are white, as are 73 percent of library assistants. Nearly three-quarters of librarians are white women.¹⁷ These statistics tell us we still have a long journey toward meaningful inclusion and institutional change.

These statistics also tell us: There is nowhere better to begin a racial equity process. Addressing racial bias and oppression in majority-white institutions is essential to “uprooting racism.”¹⁸ As Melissa Kalpin Prescott writes in *Topographies of Whiteness: Mapping Whiteness in Library and Information Science*, “White librarians need to develop an anti-racist analysis and apply it to librarianship, confront white privilege in its multiple manifestations, and work in alliance with librarians of color to dismantle institutional racism.”¹⁹

We must act with urgency. As institutions committed to values of democracy and intellectual freedom, libraries have an obligation to move beyond diversity initiatives to grapple more actively with the power and responsibility of our position.

Racial equity asks us to use our authority to shift the culture within our institutions, to redress injustices and to proactively build a more representative, democratic government. To do this, we need to change the way we think, operate and collaborate.

According to The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond, a racial justice training center based in New Orleans, “Persons who work in institutions often function as gatekeepers to ensure that the institution perpetuates itself. By operating with anti-racist values and networking with those who share those values and maintaining accountability in the community, the gatekeeper becomes an agent of institutional transformation.”²⁰

To become agents of change, library workers must begin by acknowledging our country’s history of race-based exclusion and its long-term impact. We can then accept the invitation, long ago extended by communities of color, to consider the unintended negative impact of practices, policies and procedures that work well for white communities but negatively impact communities of color – often inadvertently or unintentionally.

It may seem difficult to take responsibility for historical wrongs, and to see how each of us has the power to right those wrongs within our own sphere of influence. But this is exactly what community leaders and government agencies across the country are doing.

Through GARE and other equity initiatives, public libraries are making a commitment to racial equity for the long haul.

In the following section, we outline this approach and highlight best practices from libraries nationwide.



GARE EQUITY FRAMEWORK

“Cities have always been laboratories for meaningful social and economic change. By understanding how municipal operations affect race and equity, city government can begin to transform systems to drive to better outcomes.”

– Nora Liu, Living Cities/GARE²¹

THIS ISSUE BRIEF SHARES a framework to move equity from aspiration to action. These best practices have been developed over more than a decade, beginning with the City of Seattle, and drawing on an expansive field of practice among community organizations, social justice leaders and racial equity educators.

Local implementation is always unique. Each jurisdiction decides a path that is grounded in local needs, informed by data, reflective of genuine leadership among communities of color, and cooperative across departments and institutions.

While local strategies and action plans are customized, the GARE “theory of change” always includes three **complementary strategies** and six necessary **components**:

NORMALIZE

Jurisdictions prioritize racial equity as a key value, develop shared understanding of key concepts and create a sense of urgency to make changes. Directors, elected officials and leaders adopt a racial equity framework that accounts for historical patterns of inequity, fosters government responsibility and operationalizes change. Normalizing happens when we:

- 1) Cultivate high-level investment
- 2) Establish internal Change Teams

ORGANIZE

Libraries and other departments then build the internal will and capacity for transformation. Implementation begins when libraries develop infrastructure to deepen investment and expertise among a broad group of stakeholders. This happens when we:

- 3) Build capacity among staff and stakeholders
- 4) Partner with other institutions and communities

OPERATIONALIZE

With commitment, infrastructure and partnerships in place, jurisdictions are ready to put theory into action. This means using racial equity tools and data to inform decisions, partnering closely with communities of color, and developing action plans that are measurable, transparent and results driven. We operationalize change and accountability when we:

- 5) Use Racial Equity Assessment Tools
- 6) Create a Racial Equity Action Plan



EQUITY IN ACTION: LIBRARY INITIATIVES

“It takes political will, intellectual energy, and practical skill, first, to recognize the racist legacies of LIS structures ... and, then, to devise ways to transform them. Only by deciding that racism is a problem that we can no longer afford to sideline can we even begin to tackle this monumental task.”

– **Christine Pawley, Unequal Legacies²²**

AN EQUITY FRAMEWORK guides us to reduce barriers and direct resources to communities that bear the largest burdens of racial inequity. Using this framework, libraries are beginning to incorporate racial equity at every level of library operations, ensuring people of color are leading the work and involved in planning early and often. Below we illustrate how libraries are using the GARE framework to implement change and increase opportunity for all.

NORMALIZE

1) CULTIVATE HIGH-LEVEL INVESTMENT

Because race-based discrimination has been created and maintained by government, it is powerful when civic leaders acknowledge the role government has played and commit to organizational change.

While there is often a belief that change is hard and takes time, change can happen quickly when it becomes an institutional priority. Once jurisdictions make a high-level investment, equity becomes a shared value, central to the mission of the city or county, its departments and leaders. This ultimately transforms the way we act, think and make decisions.

The City of Seattle was the first to demonstrate that systemic change is possible when regions invest at the highest levels. In 2004, Seattle established the Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI), a citywide effort to end institutionalized racism and race-based disparities in city government. Since 2004, Seattle has evolved a clear organizational chart for its equity work with responsibilities across all levels of government from the Mayor's Office to individual departments.

Following Seattle's lead, more government leaders have made lasting commitments to prioritize and resource racial equity.

- **In Saint Paul, Minnesota**, school superintendent Valeria Silva reached out to Mayor Chris Coleman to address racial disparities in the makeup of Saint Paul's public schools. The team joined a two-day racial equity training, which led to the formation of a three-jurisdiction racial equity leadership group that continued for three years. The city convened libraries, parks and police to continue addressing educational disparities. In 2015, Mayor Coleman launched a citywide initiative requiring annual racial equity plans in every department. Under the leadership of Jane Eastwood, Saint Paul Public Library has been involved from the beginning, taking action to

address racial disparities in numerous areas including library hiring, computer access and participation in children’s storytimes. All new library staff attend the city’s one-day foundational racial equity training during their first quarter.

- The City of Madison, Wisconsin** built its equity initiative through a broad, interdepartmental coalition. Like many other cities, significant disparities motivated staff from the public health and civil rights departments to begin looking for solutions and partners. With the support of Mayor Paul Soglin and city council members, a call to action went out to city employees. A large group, representing half of the city’s departments, including Madison Public Library (MPL), convened to investigate the issues and look deeply at strategies to advance racial equity at an institutional level. The group included a broad range of city employees, from department heads to bus cleaners. This spirit of grassroots collaboration helped build momentum as participants saw the way structural racism operates, with each department perpetuating institutional barriers to opportunity, often unintentionally. The team began working to address barriers in hiring, purchasing, planning and development. A formal city resolution was passed in 2014, laying the groundwork for a permanent Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative. The city hired a Racial Equity Coordinator and assigned dedicated staffing to measure the initiative’s impact. A more focused leadership team, composed of department heads and elected officials, now operates with a mission “to establish racial equity and social justice as core principles in all decisions, policies and functions of the City of Madison.” Within this context, MPL has emerged as a leader among libraries doing racial equity work. Since 2013, MPL has integrated racial equity analysis into its hiring practices, staff training, workplace culture, local partnerships and strategic plans, while developing more equitable models for resource allocation, community engagement and programming.
- Multnomah County, Oregon** began its racial equity work in 2008 within the health department. In 2010, the county expanded this work to other departments, creating an Office of Diversity and Equity and hiring a new county-level coordinator. With leadership in place, Multnomah developed an Equity and Empowerment Lens, “a set of principles, reflective questions and processes” that changes the way county employees make decisions and develop solutions. Multnomah County Library (MCL) has worked closely with the Office of Diversity and Equity to apply this lens, making both a public commitment and the internal investment needed to create an inclusive environment for all staff and patrons. In 2016, the library hired a full-time Equity and Inclusion Manager to lead this work and required senior leaders to participate in an Equity Readiness Survey. By measuring the level of shared understanding among management, this survey gave MCL vital information to guide internal capacity-building plans. MCL’s executive management team now participates in monthly discussions on inclusion in the workplace, while staff at all levels participate in ongoing learning opportunities. MCL’s director has been vocal about the importance of an inclusive environment and maintains an open door policy for staff who wish to raise concerns or offer suggestions. By directly supporting staff of color and investing in continuous learning for all staff, MCL is providing a necessary foundation to create more inclusive libraries and equitable outcomes.

ASSESSING YOUR LIBRARY:

NORMALIZE

- What steps could you take to increase a shared understanding of bias, racism and racial equity?
- How does white cultural dominance impact people of color in your institution? What kind of culture shift is needed?
- How could you develop a clear racial equity vision?

ORGANIZE

- Who are the groups in your community working toward racial equity?
- How could you support community groups working to reduce disparities?
- How could you develop deep relationships with communities that have not been included in decision-making?

OPERATIONALIZE

- What topics or decisions call for a Racial Equity Assessment?
- What action steps and measures will you take to achieve results?

CASE STUDY

SEATTLE PUBLIC LIBRARY

The City of Seattle was first in the nation to adopt a citywide commitment to end racial disparities and achieve racial equity. In 2004, Seattle established the Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI), a citywide effort to end institutional racism and race-based disparities in city government.

Charter

Over the years, Seattle has evolved a clear organizational chart for its equity work with defined responsibilities across all levels of government – from the Mayor's Office to individual departments. The Seattle Office for Civil Rights provides leadership and consultation, supporting a Core Team of 40 city leaders, as well as Change Teams within each city department. Each team develops an annual workplan and is required to report outcomes.

Racial Equity Tools

Seattle has developed and refined extensive tools to guide this work. These tools include defined RSJI competencies for all staff and Change Team leaders; a toolkit for conducting racial equity assessment of programs, policies and budgets; and an extensive, inclusive outreach and public engagement guide. In 2008 and 2015, elected leaders issued executive orders requiring all city departments to utilize these tools to ensure greater accountability for outcomes and increased public engagement.

In 2015, Seattle Public Library (SPL) renewed its commitment to RSJI by reviving its Change Team and explicitly identifying "Race and Social Justice" as main components of the library's "Business Model" in its new Strategic Direction. Going forward, SPL plans to develop at least four new racial equity goals each year as part of its RSJI workplan. The library's executive director, Change Team and managers will each be responsible to collaborate and achieve results.

Analysis and Action

In 2015, the newly formed Change Team contributed to a fines and fees study and a study of branch hours. As a result of these efforts, SPL established greater flexibility in administering fines and fees procedures, and determined the need to expand branch hours in areas of the city that are lower income and more racially diverse.

More recently, the library defined several systemwide RSJI goals as part of its 2016 workplan. These include:

- **Staff Recruitment, Selection and Development.** Using an equity lens, define strategies for developing and advancing diverse professional and paraprofessional staff.
- **Policy and Procedure Review.** Apply equity analysis to the library's Diversity Policy and Procedure and revise accordingly.

- **Website Redesign.** Apply equity analysis to the new website design process and integrate findings into the website's design and implementation.
- **Staff Communications and Engagement.** Develop internal communications and engagement activities on RSJI and equity-related topics.
- **Systemwide Program Design and Development.** Complete an equity analysis of the flagship "one city, one book" Seattle Reads program and redesign programming and engagement strategies accordingly. For more on Seattle Reads, see page 31.

Due to the complexity and scale of these efforts, coupled with the fact that equity analyses are designed to slow down processes to achieve improved outcomes, some of these workplan items have extended into 2017 and 2018.

In addition to these workplan items, SPL has applied its *Racial Equity Toolkit* across a number of programs, policies and procedures. For example, in 2016, SPL conducted an analysis of the preschools and childcare centers served by its bookmobile.

SPL's bookmobile had been serving many stops for as long as 25 years. In 2013, the library tightened the eligibility criteria for bookmobile service, only visiting stops providing free programs for low-income families or that accepted subsidies for low-income families.

In 2016, the library collected more income data from the early childhood education programs the bookmobile was serving, along with data from public preschool programs the bookmobile was not reaching. SPL mapped these programs and then cross-referenced locations with racial and demographic data. A clear pattern emerged: The bookmobile was not effectively reaching as many low-income children of color as it should. Seattle used this information to change its bookmobile service criteria for preschools, which resulted in discontinuing service to 65 percent of the existing stops and adding new stops that serve more low-income children of color.

By conducting equity analysis early and often, many of SPL's new programs, procedures, communications and internal operations now prioritize racial equity from the outset.

SPL has proven time and again that prioritizing racial equity helps cities and libraries ask new questions, identify new service models and learn from communities in a more authentic way.

RESOURCES

[Seattle Race and Social Justice Initiative](#)

[Racial Equity Toolkit and other resources](#)

[Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement Guide](#)



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2) ESTABLISH INTERNAL CHANGE TEAMS

Normalizing racial equity within an institution requires dedicated staff time and infrastructure. Most GARE participants agree: The real infrastructure for racial equity starts when a core group of staff leaders come together to build a shared language and develop actions plans through ongoing training and collaborative work.

Most GARE cities establish Change Teams – or Equity Teams – within each department. Almost universally, these teams begin with multi-part training and honest conversations about the history of institutional racism in their city. This includes looking closely at historical government policies and practices that shape current conditions for communities of color. Through regular meetings and training, these teams build a shared language and deep understanding of a Racial Equity Framework.

By establishing Change Teams within each department and empowering the team with a clear charter, staff with diverse perspectives and strong community connections can shape the agenda for institutional change. The most successful teams prioritize inclusion at every step, ensuring people of color are leading the work and involved in planning early and often.

While the goal is always to expand the work to many staff and stakeholders, the Change Team plays an invaluable role as team members coalesce a leadership body that can carry the work forward.

ABOVE: Seattle Reads *The Turner House* performance by Northwest Tap Connection.

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According to GARE, establishing a Change Team with the authority to lead equity work “signals to staff and community that institutions are change-ready and serious” — a key step to building bridges and trust. Taking action to address racism within our workplaces signals to our communities that we are ready and capable of partnering to solve broader problems inhibiting success. Through high-level investment and Change Teams, we have the chance to show communities that government can actually work for them.

- Seattle Public Library** (SPL) established a Change Team in 2005 and developed a team charter to guide its work. This charter established expectations that supervisors build racial equity work into team members’ workplans and support their success. SPL’s Change Team consists of 15-18 members from throughout the organization and represents a variety of racial and cultural identities, job classifications and workplace locations. As part of its equity work, SPL outlines competencies for all staff and provides ongoing training. Additional competencies are outlined for Change Team members and library managers. These internal leaders are supported to develop a command of the institutional change process necessary to achieve racial equity; are able to articulate the value and benefit of eliminating institutional racism; consistently apply RSJI principles and tools to decision making, strategic planning and personnel policy; self-reflect and challenge personal preconceptions; and further the goals of the Race and Social Justice Initiative. Team members build expertise through training, research and project-based equity work.
- Oakland Public Library** (OPL) established an Equity Team in 2016 with support from the city’s Department of Race and Equity, which was created by city ordinance in 2015. Like many other GARE cities, Oakland’s Department of Race and Equity brings teams together from across the city, giving library staff a chance to learn from an even more diverse group of city workers. From public works to parks and libraries, city staff bring different vantage points on Oakland’s history of institutional racism and present challenges. This experience of peer learning strengthened the Equity Team and its members. Well known for its inclusive programming, diverse collections and willingness to tackle social justice issues, OPL has been implicitly supportive of equity principles for years. Yet without formal infrastructure and capacity, inequities persist and outcomes were hard to measure. Now, with an equity team empowered to lead training, analyze barriers and develop an annual Racial Equity Strategic Plan, OPL is building its capacity for institutional change. Led by librarian Susan Martinez, OPL took deliberate steps to ensure the team included staff of color and paraprofessionals. With broad investment, the team is “promoting the application of a racial equity framework and tools across the department’s activities,” beginning with a survey that revealed priority areas for research, training and action.
- San Antonio Public Library** began working with the City of San Antonio’s Office of Equity in 2016. That year, the library dedicated its annual manager’s training to the topic of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. The training provided 50 managers with a shared language and a chance to think about their work through this lens. Managers worked in groups to analyze case studies, discuss implicit and explicit bias, and identify examples of individual, institutional and structural racism. For many managers, it was the first time learning about racism and equity in these terms. Since then, the Office of Equity received funding to do a pilot project with GARE including five more city departments. GARE worked with each city department to establish Equity Teams, craft a vision and develop action plans. The Library Department team includes seven staff who have defined a focus on the guiding principle: “All children deserve access to library resources and services.” Building on the training they received, the Equity Team is currently examining barriers to access and identifying how to amend policies and procedures to eliminate barriers using a Racial Equity Assessment Tool.

CASE STUDY

HENNEPIN COUNTY LIBRARY

Hennepin County Library (HCL) provides library service to 1.2 million residents in 45 cities, including Minneapolis. A recent report rated Minnesota the second worst state in the country in terms of Black and white inequality.

In Hennepin, a countywide effort is underway to reduce racial disparities, focusing on seven key areas: education, employment, income, housing, justice, health and transportation. As part of the Minnesota Advancing Racial Equity Learning Cohort, facilitated by GARE and the League of Minnesota Cities, HCL joined nearly 200 colleagues from across the region in peer-learning and training. The cohort provides a vital space for learning racial equity tools and sharing best practices.

In addition to participating in this cohort, HCL also launched a cross-divisional Racial Equity Team in January 2017. The Equity Team is using GARE's tools, training and framework to see how HCL might build commitment and capacity for racial equity work within the library. During year one, library team members set three goals: To engage senior leadership and staff through training; to put racial equity tools into practice; and to initiate planning for a multi-year process.

Engaging Senior Leaders

To begin, HCL held two half-day learning retreats for its Senior Team, which includes the library director, division and department managers. Session one utilized GARE's Advancing Racial Equity 101 curriculum. Team members shared their early experiences with race and racism; and built a shared understanding of key concepts, the history of racism and the role of government.

In addition, Senior Team members completed a homework assignment in which participants researched the racial history of the communities HCL serves and completed a demographic survey looking at current and future populations. HCL brought team members together for a half-day Homework Lab where staff explored online resources and print materials at the Minneapolis Central Library. Team members partnered to research different topics. For example, one team explored reports focusing on intersections between race and homelessness. Another looked at the history of faith institutions and missions as they related to the displacement of indigenous communities in the Minneapolis area. Others explored historical annual reports from the library and shared examples of how individual implicit bias was evident in approaches to library services and programs, as well as in how materials were catalogued.

During a third half-day retreat, the Senior Team discussed the homework assignment and learned two tools developed by GARE: the ACT Communication Tool and the Racial Equity Analysis Tool. Team members spent time in groups practicing with these tools and discussing how they might use them in their work.

Engaging Staff

Building on this success, HCL's Racial Equity Team piloted the same two-part training series with a broader group of staff, many of whom were already engaging in racial equity work, including the Social Justice in Libraries Community of Practice; Black History and Culture workgroup; Celebrate Asia team; and Diversity and Inclusion planning team. These sessions included the same content and homework challenge as the half-day retreats for the Senior Team. At the end of this session, participants identified concrete actions they could take to advance racial equity and where they see opportunities for institutional change. Responses to the latter informed HCL's Racial Equity Action Plan for year two.

Moving Forward

In 2018, HCL is expanding its Racial Equity Team. The team will lead additional staff engagement and training; apply the Racial Equity Analysis Tool with a focus on examining administrative and everyday policies, practices and procedures; and develop ongoing learning opportunities for HCL's Senior Team. The team includes nine new staff from across divisions who are well positioned to support HCL's goal of examining policies and procedures.

As HCL lays the groundwork for institutional change, team members will continue to participate in GARE's Minnesota Learning Cohort where they gain support, technical assistance and connections with colleagues from other jurisdictions.

ORGANIZE

3) BUILD CAPACITY AMONG STAFF AND STAKEHOLDERS

Building capacity means building the internal will, infrastructure and expertise to shift culture and lead transformation – inside and out. In essence, it means laying groundwork so that effective organizing can bring more staff, stakeholders and community partners into the process.

Among libraries, this also means supporting equity initiatives within our field and more urgently addressing racial disparity in the profession. For most libraries in the GARE network, addressing barriers to employment and workplace inclusion for staff of color is a critical first step. This includes careful examination of racial bias in recruiting, hiring and workplace culture.

Often this means a multifaceted approach to institutionalize racial equity training among new employees, senior leaders, all staff, and stakeholders such as library funders, commissioners and advocates. An equity framework calls on libraries to invest time and resources to create new opportunities for discussion, learning and planning.

Some libraries begin by partnering with local racial justice organizations and community experts to inform plans and deliver training. More often, libraries draw from several sources, developing partnerships with racial justice leaders, collaborating with other departments to develop peer-learning opportunities, and using GARE tools and curriculum to develop in-house capacity-building plans.

“For most libraries in the GARE network, addressing barriers to employment and workplace inclusion for staff of color is a critical first step. This includes careful examination of racial bias in recruiting, hiring and workplace culture.”

For most GARE libraries, this includes defining racial equity competencies for all staff; providing ongoing staff training; developing a core group of staff as experienced equity trainers; and prioritizing leadership among staff of color in the learning process.

- **The City of Saint Paul** began its racial equity work by focusing on educational disparities and training nearly 500 city leaders in racial equity principles. As Saint Paul deepened its equity work, leaders saw the need for much broader and deeper adoption of racial equity principles. Training all city staff became a priority. In 2015, the city formed a 16-member training team representing staff from across departments, including two library staff. Former library director Jane Eastwood co-authored the training using GARE concepts and served as one of two coaches for the team. In May 2015, the library department became the first in Saint Paul to engage all 245 staff in a one-day foundational training. Since then, racial equity training and exercises have been incorporated into monthly managers meetings and twice yearly all-staff training days.
- Since 2013, **Madison Public Library** has integrated racial equity principles into staff training and worked to create an institutional culture that recognizes and addresses structural racism. Through the City of Madison’s Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative, library leadership has prioritized library staff participation in a three-part racial equity training focused on core equity concepts: interrupting bias, applying the city’s racial equity analysis tools and challenging white cultural dominance. In addition, racial equity has been at the center of the library’s annual inservice Staff Day. As part of its capacity-building work, MPL has looked to community organizations and activists to ensure that discussions about library services are framed through a social justice lens. These trainings and a consistent emphasis on building awareness of racial equity have helped to normalize conversations about race and create space for honest dialogue about practices that may result in barriers to opportunity.
- After forming its Equity Team, **Oakland Public Library** spent its first year focused on training and capacity building. Informed by surveys, the team identified three focus areas: microaggressions training for staff and managers, an introduction to racial equity for all staff, and an introduction to racial equity among influential stakeholders like library Friends groups. The team worked with a consultant to design and host a training on microaggressions for all branch managers and many branch staff; arranged a presentation during an all-staff meeting by Darlene Flynn, Director of the Department of Race and Equity; hosted a series of staff discussions using the film *Race: The Power of an Illusion*; and delivered a tailored presentation on equity concepts to the Friends of Oakland Public Library. In year two, the Equity Team is planning a community forum on racial profiling and conducting an equity analysis of fines and fees policies.



ABOVE: Multnomah's weekly Black Story-time celebrates literacy and African American experience.

CASE STUDY
MULTNOMAH COUNTY LIBRARY

Multnomah County has been investing in racial equity since 2008. Building on work started within the county's health department, Multnomah developed a planning and decision making tool, the Equity and Empowerment Lens, for use by all departments. In 2011, the Multnomah County Chair hired a lead coordinator who supports county departments to integrate the lens. Today, Multnomah County is a model for what can be achieved through a sustained multi-year investment.

Within this context, Multnomah County Library (MCL) has made racial equity a priority in planning, decision-making and resource allocation. Guided by the county's Equity and Empowerment Lens, MCL acknowledges that libraries and other government institutions operate based on historical systems that perpetuate institutional inequity. In response, MCL dedicates significant resources to promote equitable and inclusive access for staff, patrons and the broader community. An Equity and Inclusion Team at MCL is responsible for guiding the development of initiatives that support MCL's Mission and Strategic Priorities.

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Focus on Workplace Inclusion

Building on the library's precedent-setting community engagement work, more recently MCL has turned its equity lens inward. In 2016, the library hired a full-time Equity and Inclusion Manager to support and expand the Equity and Inclusion Team, build staff capacity and operationalize a culture of inclusion. MCL's approach is informed by research showing that a sense of belonging, respect and inclusion is vital for historically marginalized people to realize their full potential and provide the highest level of service.²³

Using this framework, MCL's internal capacity-building efforts include:

- **Equity and inclusion training for all new staff.** The training addresses the history of racism, the role libraries have played and how systemic oppression continues to impact libraries today. The training offers definitions for key concepts (racism, white dominant culture, racial equity), helping staff build a shared language for the work ahead. The training also normalizes conversations about race and racism, setting the expectation that staff should talk openly about these issues, participate in solutions and bring forward concerns.
- **Addressing implicit bias in recruitment and hiring.** Multnomah County has developed a tool for analyzing job requirements to reduce barriers (see [Minimum Qualifications: Best Practices in Recruitment and Selection](#)) and is developing training for human resources staff to help understand and reduce implicit bias in hiring and recruitment.
- **Equity and inclusion training for senior leaders.** Informed by research on positive results of workplace inclusion, MCL trains managers in four leadership behaviors that "create psychological safety, cultivating the right conditions for inclusion and innovation." These four behaviors are empowerment, accountability, courage and humility.
- **Ongoing professional development.** MCL made racial equity the focus of its annual All Staff Day in 2017, created a monthly discussion series for executive management to discuss workplace inclusion, and developed a learning series that will move all staff through a series of racial equity building blocks.
- **Normalizing conversations about racism and equity.** MCL ensures staff members have multiple avenues to discuss equity issues, and library leadership proactively follows through to listen, incorporate suggestions and coordinate change when needed. MCL's director has been vocal about the importance of an inclusive and welcoming environment and maintains an open door policy for staff who wish to raise concerns or offer suggestions. MCL also hosted a series of equity and inclusion roundtables at the Central Library, including two specifically for staff of color. Through these roundtables staff identified what the library has been doing well and where the library needed to improve. MCL then used this feedback to prioritize new staff learning and support initiatives.

By directly supporting staff of color, MCL is providing a foundation for all library staff to create more positive, inclusive relationships, services and environments.



LEFT: Multnomah's We Speak Your Language staff connect linguistically diverse communities to the library.

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4) PARTNER WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS AND COMMUNITIES

IN EVERY COMMUNITY there are people and organizations working to end racism. In most regions, community-based organizations have been the engine of social change – and many of these organizations gather data, develop policy solutions and develop youth and adults of color as community leaders. Successful racial equity efforts within government institutions recognize and support the vast expertise that already exists among people of color-led organizations in the community.

For libraries, building relationships with racial justice leaders is an important part of this process. As government agencies expand efforts to create change, it's important to support existing community efforts and focus library responses on the areas we can make a unique and measurable contribution to address community concerns. Identifying these contributions requires a commitment to listening and long-term relationship building.

Community engagement is different from outreach, which can be one-sided or promotional. Engagement is collaborative and participatory. Engagement goes beyond merely consulting community members for input on an existing plan.

To effectively engage community and partners, libraries must be ready to transform government, disrupt old models of gatekeeping, shift power and generate new visions for neighborhoods, cities and society. This part of the equity process means removing barriers to leadership for people and communities of color and developing plans together in a new way.

Only by partnering with communities experiencing racism can we identify solutions communities want and need. Libraries serious about racial equity are developing transformative community engagement processes that inform hiring, programs and services, collections, facilities and strategic directions.

BEST PRACTICES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Identify groups and individuals most likely to be impacted by the decision, policy, program, practice or budget. Find ways to involve them in the analysis.

The analysis can be conducted in a variety of ways. Some examples include:

- facilitated, full-group discussion or one-on-one conversations
- small group meetings

Create accountability by sharing the analysis widely with stakeholders, decision makers and the public. Be clear about how the process occurred, including who asked for the analysis, who participated, and how you identified missing elements such as data or stakeholder input.

This is not a prescriptive or linear process. Adapt it to your needs and reach out to GARE for technical assistance as needed.

SOURCE:

[*City of Madison, informed by King County's Community Engagement Guide.*](#)

- Using an equity framework, **Madison Public Library** designed [Tell Us](#), a successful new community conversation process. By designing and sharing a conversation toolkit, MPL enabled a broad group of community partners to host discussions in homes, schools and community spaces.²⁴ Partners included the community-based organization Unidos, the Urban League, a YWCA shelter for homeless families, a middle school class and a local university, among others. These agencies brought diverse community members together to discuss the issues and challenges they face and to identify solutions the library could support. MPL's *Tell Us* toolkit intentionally disrupts traditional community outreach models where the institution leads, and often steers, the conversation. By creating a model where agencies and individuals took ownership of the conversation, MPL was able to elicit information about the deeper values and aspirations of people who have not traditionally participated in library forums. This partnership-based model also enabled MPL to reach more people, including non-users, and ensured a level of racial diversity among respondents that matched or exceeded city demographics. Recommendations from these conversations informed the library's 2016 strategic plan and helped identify the need for new services on Madison's east side, where MPL is now building a new library.
- Through its We Speak Your Language program, **Multnomah County Library** fosters meaningful, ongoing engagement with culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Over the past decade, MCL has formalized staff teams with the "knowledge, skills and abilities" to serve Chinese, Vietnamese, Spanish, Russian, Somali and African American communities. The library hired staff with the experience to effectively serve these communities and designated a percent of staff time for new and existing employees to work on culturally-specific outreach and We Speak Your Language activities. Staff serving each language/cultural group meet regularly and all of the groups meet together quarterly. While increasing public engagement, these dedicated staff positions also increased staff morale and engagement, helping reduce isolation among employees of color. Through formal spaces to meet with staff who share similar cultural experiences, employees report feeling a deeper sense of connection and purpose in their work. We Speak Your Language is one way MCL creates ongoing opportunities to ask communities of color, "What do we need to do to serve you better?" Building on the success of the library's culturally-specific staff groups, MCL is also hosting "World Café" sessions, a participatory group process, to gather qualitative data from diverse stakeholders that will inform equity plans.
- **The City of Seattle** offers one of the most comprehensive guides for building equity through partnerships and public participation. Seattle's [Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement Guide](#) defines public engagement as "activities that intentionally enable communities to engage in deliberation, dialogue and action on public issues and in the design and delivery of public services."²⁵ Public engagement also includes, "Developing and sustaining a working relationship [with] one or more community groups." Through this guide, Seattle provides tools to identify the impact of institutional racism on public process and to create more effective forums and partnerships that center the experiences and leadership of people of color, immigrant and refugee communities. The guide outlines principles, strategies and a cultural competence continuum, and provides a planning template.

CASE STUDY

MARIN COUNTY FREE LIBRARY

In 2012, the Marin Community Foundation published a report on racial disparities in Marin County, California. *Portrait of Marin* described significant disparities in health, education and income.

Marin County is among the most beautiful, affluent, educated and healthy counties in the state of California. Yet, mere miles from multi-million dollar homes with breathtaking views, there is a 17-year gap in life expectancy and – among poor, Latino and African American children – only 1 in 3 will be reading at grade level by third grade.

In 2014, five county departments launched equity pilots to improve health and educational outcomes in regions with the greatest need – most notably Marin City, parts of Novato, and West Marin with its vast ranchlands. With leadership from Library Director Sara Jones and Library Foundation President Chantel Walker, Marin County Free Library (MCFL) embraced the opportunity to invest in an equity agenda. This has included making a deeper investment in library services for these parts of the county and developing the extensive partnerships needed to achieve results.

Mobilizing Supporters to Invest in Equity

Nowhere has the impact of this investment been more evident than in Marin City, home to 4,000 mostly lower-income African American residents. As with most low-income communities, public trust in government suffered after years of punitive policies and unkept promises. When librarian Diana Lopez came to work at Marin City Library, she knew quality service, diverse staff and community partnerships would be key to restoring community trust and addressing disparities. By listening to communities experiencing racism, Diana and her team began developing more community-informed services. When Diana noticed youth hanging outside the closed library on Fridays, she talked to residents and proposed a solution: 7 days of library service.

Informed by an equity agenda, MCFL leaders easily recognized a chance to make an investment where it mattered most. Library Director Sara Jones engaged the Library Foundation, donors, commissioners, Board of Supervisors and neighborhood partners, as well as voters who passed a parcel tax that year, to support the expansion of library hours. By explicitly talking about equity, race and poverty, MCFL raised community awareness and mobilized decision-makers to invest in Marin City residents. This branch is now the only location in the library's 90-year history to be open 7-days a week.

Most importantly, expanded hours allowed Marin City staff to increase award-winning science, technology and arts programming, while offering library materials and technology support to nearby schools. Marin City Library recently signed a contract with the Sausalito Marin City School District to provide school library materials, a makerspace and an AWE early literacy station, with a grant from the California State Library.

Leveraging Collective Impact

In Marin City and in other parts of the county, MCFL is also working closely with partners to make an impact on Third Grade Reading, a key goal in the county's Racial Equity Action Plan. MCFL plays a leading role in Marin Promise, a partnership using a collective impact model and data-driven decision making to identify programs that create true educational equity. Through the collaborative's Third Grade Action Team, MCFL is currently leading efforts to expand literacy programs, participatory learning and parent engagement.

In South Novato, where 64 percent of K-3 students struggle to read at grade level, MCFL partnered with the Novato Unified School District to build a joint-use campus, including a school-community library, makerspace, media lab and daily after-school programs. Last year, library staff issued library cards for every Novato student (more than 7,500 cards), and this year MCFL added staffing at South Novato library, investing in three new full-time positions to make a measurable impact on grade-level reading and STEAM education.

In West Marin, the library plays a leading role in partnership-driven approaches to serve immigrant families. Working with the West Marin Collaborative, the Marin Community Foundation and dozens of other partners, library staff have successfully expanded ESL and family literacy including a summer outreach program called Reading on the Ranches (RoR). The RoR program travels more than 1,200 miles during a six-week period, bringing books and fun to children in rural agricultural areas who lack access to transportation during the summer. This year, after struggling to find legal advocates who could make the trip to West Marin, three library staff studied and passed the COIL exam so they could begin providing immigration legal services out of the literacy services office.

When it comes to racial disparity, Marin County still ranks number one statewide. But MCFL is poised to make a difference. In just a few short years, MCFL has profoundly changed its service philosophy from an emphasis on "equal access" to an emphasis on "equity." While maintaining exemplary service across the county, MCFL is empowering staff to cultivate change and reallocating resources to support communities with the greatest needs.



ABOVE: Marin's Reading on the Ranches brings summer reading to agricultural areas.

OPERATIONALIZE

5) USE RACIAL EQUITY ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Seattle, Multnomah County, Madison, Saint Paul and other jurisdictions have evolved a national model for reducing disparity by formalizing use of equity planning tools. A Racial Equity Assessment Tool is a type of impact assessment designed to integrate explicit consideration of racial equity in decisions, policies, practices, programs and budgets. In this way, the assessment is both a process and a product.

A Racial Equity assessment:

- Proactively seeks to eliminate racial inequities and advance equity;
- Identifies clear goals, objectives and measurable outcomes;
- Engages community in the decision-making process;
- Identifies who will benefit or be burdened by a given decision, examines potential unintended consequences of a decision, and develops strategies to mitigate unintended negative consequences; and
- Develops mechanisms for successful implementation and evaluation of impact.

Using a racial equity tool during planning and evaluation can help libraries develop new strategies that reduce racial disparities by first examining how communities of color and low-income populations will be affected by a proposed action or decision. According to the City of Madison, "the use of these tools can increase objectivity, deepen dialogue and keep focus on institutional change."

The Racial Equity Assessment Tool includes Six Steps

1) Define desired outcomes. For any policy, program or topic, ask what factors might be affecting communities of color. Define equity outcomes that close gaps and address disparities.

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2) Analyze data. Gather detailed qualitative and quantitative data to obtain a better understanding of barriers and consequences.

3) Engage community. Convene community and staff to gain a full picture of how the issue benefits or burdens communities of color.

4) Develop strategies. Develop strategies and concrete action steps that will create greater racial equity or minimize harm.

5) Implement an Equity Action Plan. Follow action steps and track progress, including impacts on communities of color over time.

6) Evaluate. Communicate. Be Accountable. Continue to communicate with and involve stakeholders. Document unresolved issues. Apply racial equity tools to new areas.

Each city takes a unique approach to applying this tool and defining a racial equity action plan. Some start with staff surveys and focus groups, some start with data analysis and others start with community meetings.

Regardless of which approach you choose, it is important to create opportunities for group dialogue and analysis. The most important and complex questions may not be suitable for an online survey and should be considered for facilitated discussions.

Over the years, Seattle has developed a comprehensive toolkit and trained staff to apply it in their daily work.²⁶ Andrew Harbison, Assistant Director of Collections and Access, explains, “The toolkit process is intended to slow things down, guiding you to seek partners from historically underrepresented communities and gather data so that equity can occur in both the process and the product.”

GARE libraries have used the Racial Equity Assessment Tool to address implicit barriers in hiring, committee appointments and scholarships; to design new services with greater community input; to reallocate resources where they are most needed; and to redesign existing programs or policies to increase access and participation.

Following are a few ways libraries have applied a Racial Equity Assessment Tool to produce concrete action plans and outcomes.

- Twenty years ago, **Seattle Public Library** launched the flagship “one city, one book” program, Seattle Reads. Over the years, books chosen have tackled important social issues including race and racism. Yet book selection alone failed to transform racial disparity in access and participation. In 2016, Seattle Public Library conducted an equity analysis of this program. For five of the previous six years, the books were by white authors. Anecdotally, staff also observed that people of color were significantly underrepresented at events. Using the equity assessment process, SPL set out to redesign Seattle Reads with a focus on reaching African American residents and bringing SPL programs into new community spaces. To transform the program, SPL partnered with a local dance company, hired a consultant and convened community advisors, each selected based on strong ties to the African American arts community. The library’s willingness to address institutional racism and its track record for following through on equity objectives laid the foundation for these necessary partnerships. Through the consultant and advisory group, SPL ensured communities of color had control in the early stages of program planning and evaluation. The team agreed: People of color should be involved in the planning of the program and considered a primary audience; the content should reflect the interests, voices or needs of these communities; and program resources should be used to support people of color-led

RELATED RESOURCES

[*Racial Equity Toolkit: An Opportunity to Operationalize Equity*](#)

[*Racial Equity Action Plans: A How-to Manual*](#)

businesses and organizations. Books were distributed on an equity rather than equality model and SPL sought out professionals of color at every stage, including for behind the scenes roles. These steps ensured racial equity in both the process and the end result. The library succeeded in reaching its goals. After the redesign, more African Americans participated in Seattle Reads than in past years. For two-thirds of these participants, it was their first time participating in the program. Through the assessment, SPL also realized it could not ensure racial equity in programming without more data. The library now tracks participant demographics through surveys at all big public programs. Data from 3,500 surveys is now helping guide changes to other systemwide programs.

- During its first year in the Minnesota Advancing Racial Equity Learning Cohort, **Hennepin County Library** conducted a racial equity assessment of major program spending. HCL receives significant funding from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Legacy Amendment. These public dollars, which range from \$200-250k per year, provide funding for arts education programs highlighting Minnesota's culture and heritage. Staff members submit project proposals every two years and a review team determines project funding. Three of HCL's Racial Equity Team members worked together to train review team members to use a racial equity analysis tool in the decision-making process. The tool helped team members consider how funding should be prioritized, how HCL could expand community engagement and which projects could be strengthened to integrate equity outcomes prior to implementation. This process revealed the need for better data collection so the library could understand who is – and who is not – participating in public programs. Team members also practiced applying racial equity tools on an individual level. One team member used the process to assess a volunteer program at their branch. The assessment process (which clarifies desired outcomes and prioritizes community input) led the team member to explore new program models with greater appeal and fewer barriers for communities of color. Team experiences like these are providing valuable case studies for future trainings and the building blocks for HCL's equity action plan.
- Like many libraries, **Saint Paul Public Library** required patrons to log in with their library card when using public computers. They offered guest passes when visitors provided evidence of out-of-state residence. In practice, library staff used considerable discretion when giving out guest passes. Some were very strict and others were more liberal. After one manager suggested that the library's policy seemed to prevent more patrons of color from accessing computers, the staff agreed to monitor pass requests across all libraries during a one week period. Because asking each patron their race might have created discomfort or additional barriers, staff simply noted whether the patron appeared non-white or white. It was an imperfect solution, but a start at gathering some data. The week-long survey showed that more individuals who appeared to be people of color were denied a guest pass than those who appeared white. In response, the library set out to reduce barriers to computer access for people of color. For a three-month trial period, the library issued a pass to any patron who requested one. Wait lists and time limits remained in place. At the end of the three-month pilot, staff noted there had been no increased wait times for computers, a chief concern among those who wanted to keep the prior policy. Moreover, Saint Paul discovered that patron frustration, complaints and arguments over why someone couldn't use a computer vanished. In the end, providing a guest pass to use the computer was better customer service, eliminated barriers and improved patron relations.

CASE STUDY

MADISON PUBLIC LIBRARY

Madison, Wisconsin launched its Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative (RESJI) in 2013 to address deep racial disparities impacting children and families. With formal support from Madison's Common Council and Mayor Paul Soglin, a broad cross-section of city workers came together – including department heads, bus cleaners, librarians and human resources analysts. Through intensive training and team-building, the RESJI team developed a deep understanding of the ways structural racism permeates public institutions. Together, this team is developing recommendations for dismantling institutional racism at all levels of government.

Embedding Equity in Library Operations

Madison Public Library played a leadership role in RESJI and strives to apply a racial equity analysis in every decision-making process that has an impact on library policy or procedures. Since 2013, MPL has applied Racial Equity Assessment Tools to multiple policies and programs, resulting in concrete changes that have reduced barriers, deepened community engagement and informed the library's strategic direction. For example, formal equity analysis has been conducted for the library card registration process for school children, meeting and study room policies, catering procedures, library placement and staffing, and hiring processes.

Equity in Hiring

MPL made workforce equity a priority, setting a goal that its workforce should reflect the diversity of the community. Using the city's Equitable Hiring Tool, a framework for changes to the civil service hiring process, the library identified potential barriers to diversity at each stage of recruitment. As part of this effort, MPL also redesigned application procedures and rubrics for hiring paraprofessionals. These changes elevate customer service experience over the traditional emphasis on prior library experience.

By reducing unnecessary barriers, MPL is seeing a stronger, more diverse pool of candidates who bring valuable skills that were often overlooked in past recruitments. MPL and the City of Madison continue to make strides and recently conducted a cross-departmental racial equity analysis of the city's hiring process. Racial equity is now a central emphasis in all city recruitments.

Analysis Transforms Service Design

Propelled by RESJI's emphasis on collaborative work with other departments, MPL teamed up with Dane County Library Service in 2015 to expand library service in neighborhoods that lack access to brick and mortar libraries. Previously, bookmobile service decisions were based on a general commitment to serve Dane County cities and towns without a library. This approach used a race-neutral lens, without taking into account community needs, or access to information, technology and education.

Using racial equity tools, MPL and Dane County are now connecting with community leaders to gather input that will inform service expansion to neighborhoods with a demonstrated need for library service and public space. With a shared commitment to

racial equity, the library, city and county are looking to community leaders as valued collaborators as they design new models for service provision.

Analysis Transforms Programs and Outreach

MPL has also applied racial equity analysis toward more strategic deployment of staff and programming resources. Community Engagement Librarians conducted a racial equity analysis of a newly launched Library Takeover program in 2016. Inspired by a similar program in the UK, Madison's Library Takeover invites community members to propose their own library programs and participate in an event-planning bootcamp as they bring their ideas to fruition.

Initially, MPL staff noticed that open calls for participation in library projects often generated proposals from library regulars who already had programming experience. Conducting a racial equity assessment, MPL identified the application process as the first point where barriers reduced diversity among participants. In response, MPL partnered with local leaders of color with expertise in event planning, business and community development and redesigned its application and outreach process. The new application rubric measured the quality of the idea and potential to reach underserved communities, rather than the applicant's prior programming experience and connections. Once accepted, participants received stipends, mentorship and a programming budget to produce their own public programs.

In 2018, Library Takeover projects include crafting/making spaces led by women of color, a storytelling event from the Muslim community around the theme of love, and an event to promote access to self-care experiences within communities of color. The impact of these programs extends beyond the events themselves, deepening community ownership, connection and leadership within the library.

This model of community-driven programming has also inspired new library initiatives, including a Hip Hop Architecture Camp for which MPL was named Urban Library Council's 2017 Top Innovator in Race and Social Equity.

Through its participation in Madison's Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative and the library's proactive use of racial equity tools in planning and decision making, Madison Public Library is transforming traditional service models and developing more sustained partnerships with diverse communities.

RESOURCES

[Madison Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative](#)

[Madison Equitable Hiring Tool](#)

[Library Takeover](#)



ABOVE: Madison's Wanda Fullmore Youth Internship promotes youth leadership and a pipeline to library jobs.

6) CREATE A RACIAL EQUITY ACTION PLAN

At this stage, your Change Team, partners and leaders are prepared to develop a strategic racial equity action plan that will guide your library's work.

According to GARE, a strong Racial Equity Action Plan is guided by a clear vision of racial equity and structured to achieve meaningful and measurable results.²⁷

An action plan includes the following components:

- **Desired Results:** Community-level conditions you aim to achieve (the change you want to see).
- **Community Indicator:** The means by which you can measure improved conditions.
- **Outcome:** A future state of being, resulting from a change at the jurisdiction, department or program level. Strong outcomes articulate a clear improvement or define how much improvement will take place.
- **Actions:** Specific things your library will do to achieve the outcome.
- **Performance Measure:** A quantifiable measure of how well an action is working. Different types of measures include:

A. Quantity: How much did we do?

B. Quality: How well did we do it?

C. Impact: Is anyone better off?

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- **Timeline:** The month, quarter, and/or year(s) an action will be accomplished.
- **Accountability:** The position or body responsible for the action and/or accountable for its completion.

Within GARE's model, planning starts with results. Using this process, institutions and their partners first identify the desired change, or improved conditions, they want to see for their communities or libraries. Starting with results provides a compass for action and focuses attention on positive conditions of well-being.

Equity plans often include multiple steps or actions your library will need to take, quarter by quarter or year by year. For example, to achieve a workforce that truly represents most communities' racial diversity, institutions need to analyze present conditions, integrate new rubrics and changes to hiring practices, identify interim outcomes and measures, and identify changes that will take place over years.

The following table provides a few examples of tangible results and actions GARE libraries have included in Racial Equity Action Plans. Local plans should be even more specific in outlining tasks, roles and deadlines.

While many libraries develop strategic plans, program plans and other documents, it is important that a Racial Equity Action Plan be developed as its own document. An action plan should provide a concrete road map, set of measures, timelines and roles. At every step, it's important to be clear about who is responsible for implementation, communication and evaluation.

Libraries can and should integrate equity into the institutional mission, goals and objectives, but the Racial Equity Action Plan is your annual guide to implementation, accountability and transparency. A dashboard or regular reporting mechanism is useful to keep track of and report progress to staff and the community. See example on page 38.

The Racial Equity Action Plan provides the tool by which our libraries can create change and open avenues for ongoing communication with staff and the public about race, racism and racial equity. Again and again, GARE libraries tell us that a documented commitment to racial equity, follow through and open communication – over several years – deepened trust and laid the groundwork for new partnerships crucial to equity work.

The following libraries have developed expertise in creating and using Racial Equity Action Plans and may be willing to share their plans or discuss their processes:

- Seattle Public Library
- Multnomah County Library
- Saint Paul Public Library
- Madison Public Library

GETTING STARTED WITH RESULTS-DRIVEN PLANNING

DESIRED RESULT OR CHANGE	ACTION STEPS
<p>The Library workforce (both staff and management) reflects or exceeds the racial demographics of the community; all workers have equitable access to living wages, benefits, retirement and secure or full-time work.</p>	<p>Analyze hiring process for unintended barriers that narrow the diversity of the applicant pool; design an equitable hiring process and train managers.</p> <p>Require representative/diverse hiring panels, including community members when possible. Assess staff onboarding; provide mentors for new staff; ensure pathways to opportunity and leadership.</p> <p>Provide safe ways for staff of color to share feedback about challenges; address workplace conduct issues immediately.</p> <p>Create pathways to full-time work/benefits for part-time staff, and pathways to an MLIS or library credential for staff of color.</p> <p>Communities of color and low-income communities have equitable access to community spaces, materials, technology and support.</p>
<p>Expand library hours/services in communities with greatest need for services and technology access; ensure strong branch management and high-quality program/service delivery.</p>	<p>Make it a priority to provide programs, services and materials in languages other than English.</p> <p>Offer adult and child programs concurrently to eliminate need for separate visits and support multi-generational learning outcomes.</p> <p>Address disparities in rates of suspension among patrons of color; train staff to address implicit bias.</p> <p>Identify impact of fines and fees on patron populations; reduce or remove financial barriers to library use whenever possible.</p>
<p>The Library models racial equity leadership locally and nationally.</p>	<p>Include equity competencies in staff job descriptions.</p> <p>All staff attend racial equity training to build a shared language, address implicit bias and foster a more diverse and inclusive work culture.</p> <p>All managers and change team members are trained to operationalize equity, including making race conversations and equity planning routine.</p> <p>All branches, committees and departments identify racial equity objectives and report outcomes regularly.</p> <p>The library director advocates for racial equity at the library, regional and national level, and proactively sets tone by prioritizing racial equity in public statements, planning and policy making.</p>

EXAMPLE

QUARTERLY DASHBOARD - SAINT PAUL PUBLIC LIBRARY

AS OF OCT 1, 2017 DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR: Jane Eastwood RACIAL EQUITY LEAD: Peter Rudrud

GOAL(S):

1. End racial disparities within the City as an organization
2. Racial equity in City services and community engagement
3. Eliminate race-based disparities in our communities

BUSINESS DELIVERABLES	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
On track to meet goal of 8 additional FT staff of color						
Increase # of staff of color attending conferences, receiving scholarships (retention strategies)						
All-gender restroom options in all locations study continues with DSI, real estate						

NEXT STEPS (30 DAYS)	RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement new process for gathering demographic data re: presenters, performers. • Hire new Librarian I, II with possible opportunity to hire diverse candidate. • Racial Equity Change Team revise scope, responsibilities, 2018 goals. • Rondo Library informal open Oct 5; grand opening Nov 18. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three staff-translated commercial children's book in Hmong; plans to work with publisher on more. • YTD, 14 staff of color attended 18 conferences (up from 1 staff last year). • Revamped teen summer reading, with a 50% increase in diverse titles. • All interns employed by SPPL (4) of color. • Compelling photo exhibit re: MN refugees plus two programs at GLCL; well-received. • Two 100th anniversaries featured majority diverse performers.
KEY DECISIONS NEEDED	KEY ISSUES / RISKS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have plans to begin specifics and funding for gender-neutral restrooms. • Identify 2018 goals for Racial Equity team and SPPL overall in Oct/Nov. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City's hiring/promotion report doesn't count Library's increased promotion of PT to FT through stacking positions because salary doesn't increase (although hrs/ benefits do). • Work study student numbers low for Homework Centers, which are attended by a large percentage of students of color.

CASE STUDY

SAINT PAUL PUBLIC LIBRARY

Saint Paul is a city of 300,000 with a working adult population that is 60 percent white and 40 percent people of color. The school-age population is even more diverse: 78 percent of public school students are youth of color and 22 percent are white. One-third of all children live in poverty and 40 percent speak a language other than English at home. Saint Paul is home to the largest urban Hmong population in the country, with growing populations of Karen (Burmese) and others, followed by African American, East African, Hispanic and Native American populations. The Saint Paul Public Library serves its diverse communities with 13 libraries and a bookmobile as well as mobile workforce and early learning programs.

The Saint Paul Public Library (SPPL) launched its racial equity initiative in 2014 as part of a larger, citywide initiative. SPPL quickly became a leader among city departments in advancing key strategies outlined in then-Mayor Chris Coleman's plan for advancing racial equity in city operations and across institutions that impact residents' lives.

Planning for Results

A clear, annual Racial Equity Action Plan has been a critical part of SPPL's ability to achieve results. The library's action plan outlines desired outcomes, actions steps, measures, roles for those involved and a timeline for work on a range of priority areas. This plan aligns with three broad city goals and with the library's strategic goals around learning, community engagement and stewardship of resources. The library director submits an overall department plan to the city along with a quarterly dashboard on key activities, challenges, risks, next steps, decisions and deliverables.

Internally, each library branch is also expected to incorporate racial equity goals into their plans, as do all program/service teams such as early literacy (birth to K), Summer Learning, workforce services and others. The Library's Racial Equity Change Team reviews the dashboard quarterly and discusses progress. Library managers also review progress on their plans quarterly with supervisors.

The dashboard and annual plans help the library articulate a clear vision for change along with the concrete steps to get there. With a formal action plan in place, Saint Paul Public Library has been able to achieve impressive results.

Demonstrated Outcomes in Workforce Equity

Addressing workforce diversity and employment security among staff of color was an obvious priority for SPPL's racial equity workplan. As the City of Saint Paul set a goal to increase the diversity of its full-time workforce by 3 percent, so too did the library.

SPPL took a close look at hiring, retention and classification among library employees. The library found that a disproportionate number of part-time staff were people of color. Part-time employees lack full benefits, job security, consistent schedules and access to retirement and other forms of long-term economic security. Cumulatively this equates to lower overall wages. As a result, part-time staff often have to work other

jobs, which reduces family time, increases transportation costs and may create other stresses.

SPPL set a goal to increase number of full-time staff by creating pathways for part-time staff of color into permanent positions. As a first step, SPPL created opportunities for part-time staff to combine part-time positions to become eligible for full-time benefits. The library additionally made it a priority to seek internal candidates for existing vacancies and to develop an internal talent pipeline. To accomplish this, SPPL increased the promotion of its professional development funds and invited managers to speak individually and collectively about opportunities to attend relevant trainings and attain financial support for a library-related degree or credential (AA, four-year, MLIS). The library additionally hired 18 summer high school interns at entry- and intermediate-level positions. These youth are supported to become Library Aides as positions become available.

One year after setting these goals, the number of employees in full-time positions has increased 40 percent and the library is halfway to achieving its broader goal: a library workforce that truly reflects the community. By 2017, four staff of color received financial assistance to attain a library credential (up from zero the prior year), and more staff of color are attending conferences and other trainings.

SPPL's implementation of the GARE framework has strengthened the city, the library, its leaders and its staff. As noted above, the library's Racial Equity Action Plan and tracking tools are particularly strong. Using an annual workplan and quarterly dashboard, the library director and leadership team, along with the Equity Team define clear outcomes, specific action steps and clear staff expectations to produce measurable results.

BELOW: Community members celebrate the release of "Teach Me To Love," a children's book Saint Paul Public Library had translated into the Oromo language.



CONCLUSION

Our nation is at a crossroads. By 2044, the United States will be one of the most diverse nations in the world. No single ethnic group will be a majority.

Racial equity was important long before we were poised to become more racially diverse. Given these changes, however, just and fair inclusion is an urgent economic and educational imperative, a public health priority and an issue of human rights.

The fact is, ignoring racial disparities causes harm. In fact, the narrative libraries have about our own goodwill can obscure one of the most basic truths of institutional racism in the 21st century: It is most present and powerful where it is unnamed and unaddressed.

We can change that. We have the opportunity to create an inclusive democracy that is honest about its past and visionary in its claim to a different future.

By investing in racial equity, libraries and our civic partners are proactively working to end institutional racism, to examine the often-invisible ways it shapes our decisions and to listen more authentically to communities of color for whom its impacts have always been visible.

As these libraries show, putting equity into practice moves us toward a common vision for a fair and just future — where prosperity and opportunity is shared by all.

RESOURCES

National Organizations

Government Alliance on Race & Equity
www.racialequityalliance.org

Policy Link
www.policylink.org

Race Forward
www.raceforward.org

World Trust
www.world-trust.org

Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Social Policy
www.kirwaninstitute.osu.edu

Perception Institute
www.perception.org

The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond
www.pisab.org

YWCA
www.ywca.org

W.K. Kellogg Foundation - America Healing
www.wkkf.org/what-we-do/racial-equity

Living Cities
www.livingcities.org

National SEED Project
www.nationalseedproject.org

Library-Specific Resources

Public Library Association Task Force on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
www.ala.org/pla/about/people/committees/pla-tfedi

Joint Conference of Librarians of Color
www.jclcinc.org

Library Juice Series on Critical Race Studies and Multiculturalism in LIS
www.litwinbooks.com/series-critical-multiculturalism.php

Equity in the Library - website by Sandra Hughes-Hassell and Julie Stivers
<http://libequity.web.unc.edu>

Racial Equity in the Library - two-part series on WebJunction
www.webjunction.org/news/webjunction/racial-equity-partone.html

Engaged and Inclusive: Libraries Embracing Racial Equity and Social Justice - webinar
www.ala.org/pla/education/onlinelearning/webinars/archive/socialjustice

We Need Diverse Books
www.diversebooks.org

Reading While White
<https://readingwhilewhite.blogspot.com>

Tools, Guides and Reports

GARE Resource Guides and Toolkits
www.racialequityalliance.org/resources

Racial Equity Tools
www.racialequitytools.org

Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide from Annie E. Casey Foundation
www.aecf.org/resources/race-equity-and-inclusion-action-guide/

The Next America from Pew Research Center
www.pewresearch.org/next-america

Project Implicit Bias Assessment from Harvard University
<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

Race - The Power of an Illusion video from California Newsreel
<http://newsreel.org/video/race-the-power-of-an-illusion>

Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership at Kalamazoo College
<https://reason.kzoo.edu/csjl/community/resources>

ENDNOTES

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- 6** Libraries looking to host discussions on these issues might consider Richard Rothstein's *The Color of Law*, an expertly researched book on the origins of housing segregation and its ongoing impact on educational access and economic opportunity; or Michelle Alexander's defining work on mass incarceration, *The New Jim Crow*.
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- 8** Demos and The Institute on Assets and Social Policy. June 2016. *The Racial Wealth Gap: Why Policy Matters*. Accessed February 19, 2018. www.demos.org/publication/racial-wealth-gap-why-policy-matters.
- 9** As GARE's membership expands, the Libraries Interest Group will too. See Acknowledgments for a good reflection of current Interest Group participants, and visit www.racialequityalliance.org to see a map of the full GARE network.
- 10** As a starting point, see works by Clara Chu, E.J. Josey, Em Claire Knowles, John Berry, Isabel Espinal, Todd Honma, Cheryl Knott Malone, Lorna Peterson, Chris Bourg, Christine Pawley, April Hathcock, Nicole A. Cooke and Gina Schlesselman-Tarango.
- 11** Beyond the GARE network, racial equity initiatives are taking place in public libraries like Kalamazoo and Skokie; in associations like Urban Libraries Council, PLA's Equity, Diversity

and Inclusion Task Force, and ALA's Association for Library Service to Children; as well as through discursive spaces like #CritLib, the Joint Council of Librarians of Color, the Allied Media Conference, and the Library Juice Series on Critical Race Studies and Multiculturalism in LIS.

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18 A few starting points on white action to address racism include: *Uprooting Racism* by Paul Kivel; *Women, Race and Class* by Angela Y. Davis; *The Emperor Has No Clothes* by Tema Okun; *Towards Collective Liberation* by Chris Crass; and *A Promise and a Way of Life: White Antiracist Activism* by Becky Thompson.

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**Across the country,
governmental jurisdictions are:**

Making a
commitment
to achieving
racial equity

Focusing on
the power
and influence
of their own
institutions

Working in
partnership
with others

**When this occurs, significant leverage
and expansion opportunities emerge,
setting the stage for the achievement of
racial equity in our communities.**



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