

2024-26



Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging Plan



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Background

In 2018 Evanston Public Library (EPL) contracted with DeEtta Jones and Associates to conduct an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Needs Assessment. The Assessment included reviewing Evanston’s history of racism, community conversations, recommendations for improving community access, engagement, spaces, and places, and the organizational culture and health viewed through an equity lens.

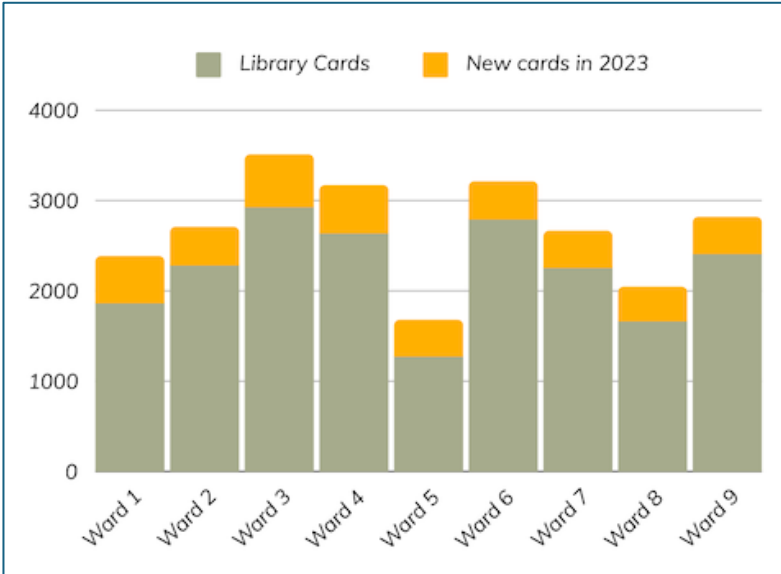
EDI Needs Assessment Recommendations and Where We Are Today

Recommendation	Current Status
1. Issue a statement that explicitly recognizes historic racism in Evanston and commits the Library to social justice.	Evanston Public Library’s Commitment to Racial Equity was issued in 2020.
2. Invest in cultural competence development for EPL leadership and staff.	Staff EDI Training began in 2019 and continues annually on an ongoing basis.
3. Develop a talent management plan that identifies goals for hiring, developing, and promoting people of color.	Ongoing

<p>4. Create a group focused on equity and race composed of Library staff and community members.</p>	<p>The Racial Equity Task Force was created in 2018.</p>
<p>5. Create and use metrics to assess and adjust efforts in support of the Library's EDI values.</p>	<p>The EPL Data Dashboard was created in 2021 but does not specifically track EDI.</p>
<p>6. Create an innovative approach to space and services in Fifth Ward.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>7. Expand book collections that reflect the needs and interests of the Black and Latinx communities.</p>	<p>EPL utilizes Collection HQ to analyze its collections, and two diversity audits have been completed around adult fiction and science fiction. Ongoing work continues to upgrade system data accuracy and create a written plan for allocating resource funding.</p>
<p>8. Continue supporting culture-specific engagement specialists.</p>	<p>The Library added two Family Engagement Coordinator positions specific to the Crown branch in October/November 2020. A Teen Engagement Librarian was added at the Main Library.</p>
<p>9. Shift the focus of communications from the multitude of programs and services to engagement.</p>	<p>EPL created a series of videos promoting services to the Black and Latinx communities in 2020.</p>

<p>10. Embed EDI into the Library’s ongoing communication strategy.</p>	<p>Strategic messaging continues to focus on equitable access to literacy and resources available to all through partnerships with EvanSTEM and District 65</p>
<p>11. Work with other City agencies to advance Library and City EDI goals.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

The formation of the Racial Equity Task Force aimed to reconcile varying perspectives on implementing equity within library operations and align solutions with community aspirations. While progress was made over the past five years, multiple factors, including the global pandemic contributed to the slow development of a plan. In the years since the DeEtta Jones report was completed, Evanston has experienced changes in its racial equity conversations to account for health inequities during the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2019 establishment of the Evanston Reparations Fund, the 2020 Black Lives Matters protests marching down Central Street and Sheridan Road, and the beginning of the Stop Asian Hate movement.



In 2023, 407 residents in the Fifth Ward were issued library cards, the greatest gains by percentage in any ward.



This Action Plan was created to outline specific actions to achieve over the next three years, fostering ongoing institutional change in equity and inclusion.



The Action Plan guides the development of the library's forthcoming Strategic Plan, structured around three focal areas: exploration and access, space and place, and organizational culture and health. Under the guidance of the Racial Equity Task Force, composed of community members and overseen by the Library Board of Trustees, the Action Plan remains flexible as a living document, open to evolution and updates as needed and endeavors to create an environment where all residents feel represented and welcome within the library's spaces.



The Robert Crown Branch, co-located in the Robert Crown Community Center offers Evanston's west side residents access to programs and materials in walking distance.

Introduction

The Evanston Public Library strives to be a vibrant heart of our diverse community. Our mission is to foster the growth of independent, self-confident, and literate patrons, ensuring equitable access to a wealth of cultural, intellectual, technological, and informational resources. As we embark on this journey, we recognize and acknowledge past injustices for all minoritized groups. We are committed to evolving alongside our community, guided by five core values critical to our mission.



Our Pride Month programming celebrates the LGBTQIA+ community for all ages.

Values: What We Believe In

Inclusivity & Belonging



We embrace diversity and strive to create an inclusive environment where everyone brings their authentic self and feels seen, welcome and valued.

Lifelong Exploration



We promote a culture of continuous learning and intellectual curiosity, supporting individuals of all ages in their pursuit of knowledge and personal growth.

Equitable Access



We are committed to allocating resources and providing equitable access to information, technology and programs, regardless of background or ability.

Community Wellbeing



We actively engage with our community and recognize our role as a catalyst for positive interaction contributing to the well-being, resiliency and vitality of our community through advocacy, outreach, and service.

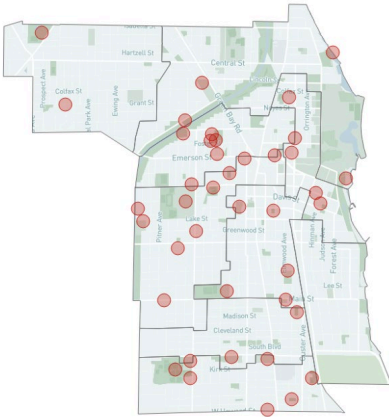
Sustainability



We are committed to fiscal and environmental sustainability and responsible stewardship of resources, incorporating eco-friendly practices and initiatives into our operations and facilities.

Priority Populations

Evanston's demographic landscape is diverse, with residents identifying as Black, Indigenous, Asian, Pacific Islander, Latinx, Middle Eastern, North African, and other People of Color. According to the U.S. Census, 37.3% of the population identifies as coming from diverse backgrounds. Specifically, 16.5% identify as Black, 11.3% as Hispanic or Latino, 9.2% as Asian, and 8.7% identify as belonging to two or more racial groups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).



Programs intentionally stretch into as many wards as possible annually.

Individuals who are from our priority populations have faced historical legacies of racialized oppression, which negatively impacts health, access to education, economic opportunity, and professional/personal life. Evanston Public Library prioritizes supporting all marginalized community members and recognizing all individuals' diverse identities and needs. We acknowledge the overlapping priorities among groups. Evanston Public Library aspires to be a safe haven for historically marginalized people. We believe that those who walk through the world with intersecting identities deserve to come to the library with all parts of themselves seen, welcomed and valued. To this end, we commit to implementing comprehensive strategies that address the unique needs of all marginalized groups, including older adults, individuals with disabilities, immigrants and refugees, the unhoused, vulnerable youth, and LGBTQIA+.



Evanston is also home to prominent Indigenous organizations like the Mitchell Museum and Northwestern University's Center for Native American and Indigenous Research (CNAIR).

Strategic Themes: What We Will Do

Exploration & Access



Evanston Public Library acknowledges and addresses historical disparities in access to information, technology, and other resources, aiming to create an inclusive and welcoming environment where everyone can benefit from the library's offerings. We commit to ensuring all community members have fair and inclusive opportunities to engage with library services and resources regardless of background or circumstances. We proactively reach out to underserved populations, remove barriers to access, and tailor programs and services to effectively meet diverse needs.



Exploration and Access focuses on services to individuals from birth through adulthood, including collections, programming, community outreach, cultural inclusivity initiatives, marketing, reference and research assistance, as well as technology access to ensure digital inclusion.

Strategic Objectives

1. Ensure inclusivity and community engagement by incorporating diverse experiences into our programs, services, and interactions to welcome and serve all community members effectively.
2. Develop a curated collection of materials that serves as both a mirror, reflecting our community's diverse experiences, and a window, offering valuable insight into experiences beyond our own, thereby fostering inclusivity and understanding.

3. Broaden the library's marketing efforts and enhance public awareness of the extensive resources and services available, maximizing community engagement and utilization.
4. Utilize current and emerging technologies to dismantle barriers, enabling seamless exploration and enhancing accessibility to the public.
5. Revitalize service delivery models and expand the library's dedication to reaching individuals where they are, ensuring accessibility and relevance across diverse communities.^[1]_{SEP}

2024 Actions

1. Establish a Library Board of Trustees appointed Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Committee.
2. Conduct a thorough assessment of the current collection to identify gaps in representation and diversity.
3. Establish a channel for acquiring diverse materials, including books, digital resources, films, and other media, that reflect the experiences of the community.
4. Launch initiatives to remove physical barriers to access within library facilities, such as improving signage, updating building layouts, and ensuring accessibility for individuals with disabilities.
 - i. Collaborate with the City of Evanston to advance ADA Accessibility.
 - ii. Ensure ADA compliance on all promotional and marketing materials.
5. Implement professional training programs for library staff to increase awareness and understanding of diversity and inclusion issues, and implicit bias ensuring they can effectively curate and promote the collection, and library programs and services.
6. Review and revise all policies through an equity lens.
 - i. Establish an internal staff policy review team to work with the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Committee on policy review before taking to the Management Committee.
 - ii. Develop a policy review schedule with regular review dates.
7. Issue a comprehensive marketing plan highlighting essential library resources and services through various channels such as social media, email newsletters, community events, and local partnerships.
8. Create branded, visually appealing promotional materials showcasing the library's offerings, including flyers, posters, digital signage, and presentations.
9. Add [Find More Illinois](#) access to the library catalog offerings.
10. Expand free printing and copying to all library customers at both locations.

11. Determine feedback mechanisms and establish performance metrics to gather input from community members on their experiences with library programs, services, and interactions.
12. Evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives implemented in previous years through data analysis, community feedback, and performance metrics.

2025 Actions

1. Optimize the EPL website and catalog to simplify navigation and ensure ease of use, facilitating access to the internet and other technological resources.
2. Explore Radio Frequency Identification Technology (RFID) migration and associated technology for ease of patron checkout and return of materials.
3. Launch community outreach initiatives to promote awareness of the curated collection and encourage community members to explore and engage with diverse materials.
4. Utilize targeted advertising campaigns to reach specific demographics within the community who may benefit from particular library services or resources.
5. Implement feedback mechanisms and data collection to gather insights from the community about their awareness of library resources and services, allowing for continuous improvement and refinement of marketing strategies.
6. Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of marketing efforts through metrics such as website traffic, event attendance, and community engagement levels, adjusting strategies as needed to maximize impact.
7. Train library staff to serve as ambassadors for promoting library resources and services, empowering them with knowledge and tools to communicate the library's value to the community effectively.

2026 Actions

1. Expand programming efforts to incorporate diverse perspectives and experiences, including author talks, cultural events, workshops, and discussion groups.
2. Develop partnerships with local schools, colleges, and community organizations to integrate diverse materials and programming into educational initiatives.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives implemented in previous years through data analysis, community feedback, and performance metrics.

4. Continuously assess and update technology access initiatives to ensure digital inclusion for all community members, including evaluating the effectiveness of training programs and technology resources.



Our annual Best Books for Kids list includes a diversity of authors and subjects to engage children with stories that reflect their lived experiences.

Place & Space



Evanston Public Library designs welcoming and inclusive environments to foster learning, community engagement, and social interaction, reflecting and honoring neighborhood needs. A deliberate, strategic effort will focus on space for services in traditionally underserved neighborhoods.



Place and Space includes custodial services and facilities maintenance, community outreach and engagement, safety and security measures, makerspaces, cultural connection and community meeting rooms and spaces, youth and children's areas, emphasizing customer service excellence.

Strategic Objectives

1. Implement strategies to create welcoming and inclusive environments across all library spaces, prioritizing the needs and preferences of diverse community members.
2. Prioritize traditionally underserved neighborhoods for the expansion of library services and facilities, ensuring equitable access to resources and programs for all residents.
3. Enhance custodial services and facilities maintenance protocols to ensure library spaces' cleanliness, safety, and functionality, providing a conducive environment for learning and community engagement.
4. Strengthen community outreach and engagement efforts to solicit feedback and input from residents in underserved neighborhoods, fostering collaboration and co-design of library services and programs.
5. Develop culturally relevant spaces, programming and events that celebrate diversity and promote cultural connection within the community, facilitating social interaction and mutual understanding.
6. Establish a trauma-informed and culturally responsive customer service model that aligns with community needs, prioritizing the well-being of both patrons and staff members.

2024 Actions

1. Develop a Master Facilities Plan to create welcoming and inclusive environments, begin planning for renovations or collaborations in existing library facilities, and explore the potential for future branch operations.
2. Complete a memorandum of understanding between the Evanston Public Library and the City of Evanston.
3. Establish a contract management system for greater financial accountability.
4. Forge collaborative partnerships with priority population partners to establish dedicated spaces within the main library, facilitating the inclusion and representation of historically marginalized voices in library programming, collections, and outreach initiatives.
5. Provide comprehensive professional training sessions for library staff to develop their understanding of trauma-informed care and cultural responsiveness, emphasizing the importance of self-care and wellness practices to support patrons and themselves.

2025 Actions

1. Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment to identify underserved neighborhoods and their specific needs regarding library services and facilities.
2. Develop outreach programs to engage residents in underserved neighborhoods and gather feedback on desired services and amenities.
3. Begin renovations and explore space-sharing opportunities in underserved neighborhoods, ensuring that the design reflects the needs and preferences of the community.
4. Launch new programs and services tailored to the identified needs of residents in these neighborhoods, such as culturally relevant programming, community workshops, and outreach events.
5. Implement training programs for staff members to enhance their skills in customer service excellence and cultural competency, ensuring that all visitors feel welcomed and respected.
6. Collaborate with local organizations and community leaders to promote the newly expanded library spaces and services, fostering greater community engagement and participation.

2026 Actions

1. Evaluate the impact of the redesigned library spaces and expanded services through surveys, focus groups, and data analysis to measure community satisfaction and usage.
2. Adjust programs, services, and facility designs based on feedback from community members and staff observations.
3. Continue to prioritize maintenance and custodial services to ensure that the library spaces remain clean, safe, and inviting for all visitors.
4. Explore opportunities for further expansion or enhancement of services in underserved neighborhoods based on ongoing community needs assessments and feedback.
5. Implement regular feedback mechanisms, such as surveys or focus groups, to gather input from community members on their experiences with library services, ensuring that the customer service model remains responsive to evolving community needs and priorities.
6. Develop a culturally responsive model for supporting employees, enabling the library to establish systems that nurture individual and community well-being.



Our outreach events at Temperance Beer Co. are a popular entry point for new patrons to engage with us outside of the library and learn more about our offerings.

Organizational Culture & Health



Evanston Public Library commits to cultivating an internal environment that places equity at the forefront for both employees and the communities we serve. This involves fostering a culture of trust and accountability, reinforcing our role as a responsible steward of taxpayer funds, and upholding our standing as a trusted institution within the community.



Organizational Culture and Health includes focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, data management and program evaluation, budgeting and financial management, strategic planning and organizational management, information technology, human resources and recruitment, learning and professional development, environmental sustainability, and resource development and partnerships.

Strategic Objectives

1. Foster a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion within the library, promoting trust, accountability, and mutual respect among employees and the community.
2. Strengthen transparency and accountability in budgeting and financial management practices, ensuring responsible use of taxpayer funds and alignment with equity principles.
3. Implement robust data management and program evaluation processes to collect and analyze data on equity-related outcomes, guiding strategic planning and organizational management efforts.
4. Develop a plan to nurture employees throughout their entire lifecycle within the organization by building their capacity to deliver on the library's mission effectively and providing opportunities for career exploration and advancement.
5. Invest in learning and professional development opportunities for employees to enhance their understanding of equity issues, build capacity for implementing equitable practices across all library functions.

6. Embed trauma-informed care and self-care practices as integral components of Evanston Public Library's organizational culture. This will enhance staff well-being, resilience, and professional growth while aligning with the library's commitment to equity, inclusion, and community service.
7. Align financial and operational resources with strategic priorities to ensure the organization's long-term sustainability while supporting climate initiatives and promoting equitable resource distribution.

2024 Actions

1. Recruit and onboard a finance manager to ensure equitable distribution of resources in alignment with the equity action and strategic plans while providing ongoing training and support to promote financial equity within the organization.
2. Recruit and onboard a safety manager to provide mentorship and training for safety monitors and ensure a safe environment for staff and patrons, promoting equity in safety practices and procedures.
3. Onboard a social worker, supported by community partners, to provide vital services directly within library facilities, addressing diverse patron needs and promoting equity by connecting them with necessary resources and support networks.
4. Conduct a comprehensive review of the current organizational structure to identify opportunities for improvement. Redesign the organizational chart, streamlining processes, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and enhancing efficiency and effectiveness.
5. Conduct comprehensive assessments of current technology systems and infrastructure to identify any disparities or barriers to access for patrons and staff.
6. Review and revise job descriptions to ensure equity for all applicants.
7. Expand recruitment channels to reach a diverse pool of candidates, including targeted outreach to underrepresented communities.
8. Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment among staff to identify current awareness and understanding of trauma-informed care and self-care practices. Use the findings to design tailored training programs and resources.
9. Begin providing comprehensive professional training sessions for all library staff to enhance their understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion principles, fostering a culture of mutual respect and understanding.

2025 Actions

1. Develop and implement a comprehensive onboarding and offboarding program to support staff members throughout their tenure with the organization.
 - i. Ensure new hires receive thorough orientation and training to integrate effectively into their roles and the organizational culture.
 - ii. Establish a plan for departing staff to receive support and resources to transition smoothly out of their positions, including exit interviews to gather feedback and insights for continual improvement.
2. Implement a facilities training program to hire, mentor, and train the facilities team, ensuring the effective maintenance and operation of library facilities while promoting equity in facility management succession practices.
3. Collaborate with the union to create growth opportunities for staff members seeking experience for their next promotion, providing mentorship, training, and advancement pathways to promote equity in career development opportunities.
4. Develop and implement a comprehensive succession planning program to hire, train, and mentor staff members, ensuring readiness for future leadership roles and promoting equity in advancement opportunities.
5. Establish a sustainability plan in alignment with the City of Evanston's Climate Action and Resilience Plan.
6. Develop and implement robust data management systems to collect and analyze demographic and outcome data related to equity initiatives, informing strategic planning and organizational management efforts.
7. Implement professional trauma-informed care training sessions for all staff members, focusing on increasing awareness of trauma, its impacts, and strategies for providing empathetic support to patrons. Simultaneously, launch a self-care resource hub, providing access to counseling services, mindfulness exercises, and stress reduction techniques.
8. Continue providing comprehensive professional training sessions for all library staff to enhance their understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion principles, fostering a culture of mutual respect and understanding.

2026 Actions

1. Establish comprehensive professional training sessions for all library staff to enhance continuing understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion principles, fostering a culture of mutual respect and understanding.

2. Implement transparent budgeting processes that prioritize equity considerations, ensuring that financial resources are allocated in alignment with the library's commitment to equitable access and service delivery.
3. Organize regular community and staff engagement forums or town hall meetings to solicit feedback from stakeholders on library services and programs, incorporating community input into decision-making processes.
4. Establish a feedback mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of the trauma-informed care training and self-care resources. Utilize staff surveys and focus groups to gather insights on the program's impact on staff well-being, resilience, and professional growth. Based on feedback, make necessary adjustments and improvements to sustain and enhance the program's effectiveness.
5. Celebrate success and begin work on the 2027 plan while remaining committed to continuous improvement and innovation in service delivery.



Staff Days offer fun opportunities for employees to engage with and learn from each other across departments and are opportunities for additional training.

More information

Learn more about our equity initiatives, drop by for a program, or pick up a good book in person or on our website.

Address: 1703 Orrington Avenue, Evanston, IL

Phone: 847-448-8600

Website: www.epl.org/equity

The Evanston Public Library relies on your generosity to expand our reach in the community. Want to contribute to our work advancing equitable access to Evanston's resources? Visit www.epl.org/donate or scan the QR code.

