

# Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Needs Assessment for Evanston Public Library

Submitted September 24, 2018

## 1 Executive Summary

This document shares perspectives from Evanston community members with the Evanston Public Library Board of Trustees and leadership and makes recommendations for future actions. The purpose is to enhance leadership's understanding of community members' needs and expectations that have not been met, and to position the Library to reflect best practices related to equity, diversity, and inclusion. This effort was undertaken because Library leaders, as with many leaders in organizations across Evanston and the United States, find themselves at the center of emotionally charged discussions related to race and equity. An expressed commitment to equity and diversity is not enough, though. Evanston Public Library leaders sought a third-party to help gather and translate community expectations; a party that understands the complexities of cross-cultural communication, is credible within librarianship, and brings lived experience as a person of color.

This equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) needs assessment was conducted by DeEtta Jones and Associates (DJA). DJA is a minority- and woman-owned consulting firm established in 2005. The scope of services includes equity, diversity, and inclusion training, and organizational development and strategy consulting. DJA's clients are approximately 70 percent libraries and span a broad array of other industries. DJA's principal, DeEtta Jones, has worked within and across the library professional community since 1996. She has been at the helm of numerous national level programs aimed at increasing the number of people of color in the field of librarianship and in leadership positions. Her understanding of the professional community of librarianship, knowledge of EDI, and ability to establish rapport and build trust across diverse groups was key to the success of this engagement with so many community members involved.

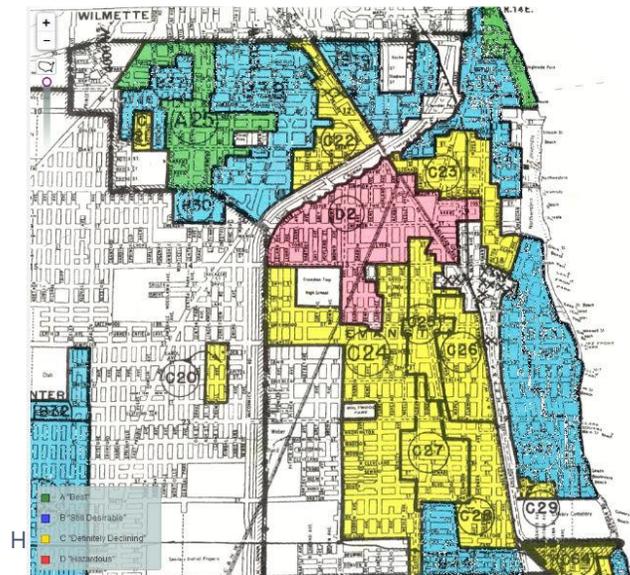
### Evanston's History of Racism

Evanston's racial and ethnic demographics are changing in line with national trends in the United States. Immigration patterns have altered the racial and ethnic makeup of the city. Demographic shifts include growing Latinx and Asian populations estimated at 9% and 8.9% respectively of the total Evanston population in 2010. African Americans continue to make up the largest minority group within Evanston at 18.1% of the total

population. Representation of African American and Asian populations are higher than the national average. These demographic shifts will require thoughtful consideration and review of existing and new public services that can accommodate the growing diversity in Evanston. (U.S. Census)

Evanston has a long history of de facto and de jure racism that needs to be directly addressed. Historically, U.S. public institutions have struggled to represent and provide equitable services to minority populations in society. Systematic discrimination and disenfranchisement of communities of color have contributed to decades of unequal socioeconomic opportunities, class and racial segregation, and limited public services created to benefit or support these communities.

The historic African American communities of Evanston carry a documented and lasting history of discrimination. In New Deal America, the historic African American communities of Evanston were subject to housing discrimination practices documented through the Home Owner Loan Corporation (HOLC) reports. African American neighborhoods in Evanston were labeled “hazardous” and a “serious problem for the town,” due to their high concentration of African Americans (Nelson et al., 2018; Smith 2018). In the same 1930s housing report produced by HOLC, residents of these neighborhoods were described as “servants for many of the families all along the north shore” (Nelson et al., 2018; Smith, 2018).



The HOLC's property assessment and risk management practices of the 1930s have been recognized by researchers as important factors contributing to the preservation of racial segregation, intergenerational poverty, and the continued wealth gap in the United States (Nelson et al., 2018). The Evanston Public Library can play an important role by providing programming and services that acknowledge and support the underrepresented needs of the African American community.

Racial tensions are exacerbated by socio-economic gaps. In 2016, the median household income in Evanston increased to \$71,317 from \$68,051 in 2010. The mean household income also increased from \$106,416 to \$110,589 in 2016. The percentage of households with incomes topping \$200,000 rose to 14.6% from 12.4% in 2010. Despite these changes, the percentage of persons living in poverty increased from 11.8% in 2010 to 13.7% in 2016. (U.S. Census)

This document includes a more substantial list of potential areas for further exploration based on staff input and relating to a broad array of equity, diversity and inclusion topics and communities (Section 4). Recommendations highlighted in Section 2, however, are

more targeted to reflect the areas that the consultants believe will have the highest immediate positive impact on the Evanston community. Further, given the protracted period of time over which interviews were conducted and consulting services provided, some of the recommended items are already underway.

## Methodology

Members of the Library leadership team initially met with the consultants to establish a clear understanding of the engagement's scope. Next, members of the staff who represented a range of Library units, programs and services were identified. DeEtta Jones and Associates consultants met with those staff in-person over the course of several days. The EPL leadership team then identified members of the community to invite to meet with the consultants. Criteria for selection at this early stage included:

- People who represent a range of diverse cultural backgrounds
- People who represent a range of community organizations (Family Focus, District 65, Evanston Collective, etc.)
- People who had previously expressed an interest in the Library's diversity efforts
- People who play leadership roles or are involved with community organizations that offer services to diverse populations

People in the first round of meetings were asked to supply names of additional community members, as were EPL staff. All EPL Board members were invited to be interviewed. Additional names of community members continued to be supplied to the consultants through mid-September. Overall, more than 100 members of the EPL community and staff were interviewed and provided input reflected in this document.

## Recommendations

The list of recommendations appears in the order prioritized by DeEtta Jones and Associates. Prioritization, in some cases, reflects the idea that some of the recommendations are dependent on others happening first. For example, exploring Library space in the Fifth Ward (#6) requires that other steps happen first, such as #1, #4, and to some degree #5.

DJA is aware that how and when the Library pursues these recommendations will be dependent on availability of resources and other competing priorities. It was with this in mind that these recommendations were identified and forwarded. All of the recommendations are 1) informed by members of the Evanston community, 2) taking into consideration current financial and systems limitations, 3) consistent with best practices across public libraries, and 4) reflective of contemporary equity, diversity and inclusion best practices.

It is DJA's belief that regardless of the reality of budget limitations facing EPL, other libraries, and City departments, all of these recommendations are actionable. Further, action on these recommendations can seamlessly integrate into EPL's ongoing strategy

once a commitment has been confirmed. It is noted that many of these recommendations have already started to be adopted by the Library.

1. Issue a statement that explicitly recognizes historic racism in Evanston and commits the Library to social justice.
2. Invest in cultural competence development for EPL leadership and staff.
3. Develop a talent management plan that identifies goals for hiring, developing, and promoting people of color.
4. Create a group focused on equity and race composed of Library staff and community members.
5. Create and use metrics to assess and adjust efforts in support of the Library's EDI values.
6. Create an innovative approach to space and services in Fifth Ward.
7. Expand book collections that reflect the needs and interests of the Black and Latinx communities.
8. Continue supporting culture-specific engagement specialists.
9. Shift the focus of communications from the multitude of programs and services to engagement.
10. Embed EDI into the Library's ongoing communication strategy.
11. Work with other City agencies to advance Library and City EDI goals.

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## What EPL is doing right

When asked about what Evanston Public Library is doing particularly well, community members were eager to begin with "I love the Library." Some of them described coming

to the Library as children, others involving their own children with Library programs and services. People know and admire the work of the Library staff who work in the community. They are also aware of the huge variety of programs and services offered.

Some of the programs of note include working with community organizations, like Family Focus and the school districts providing books and story time to young children. The Library has invested in developing their own bilingual librarians through a new tuition reimbursement program for current staff. In less than a year's time, since the beginning of this needs assessment engagement, there is more diversity represented on the Library's staff, including at the a senior leadership level. Library staff report that people in the community are providing feedback, "Some people are telling us they are noticing a difference. That means a lot to us, and we will keep striving to get better."

In conversations with the variety of stakeholders engaged, people were quite generous with their description of the Library's efforts and staff members' intentions. People expressed concerns, even disappointment, but even that was rarely related to issues that lay solely at the feet of the Library or its leadership. Instead, it is clear to the consultants and to people engaged that the array of hurts and disappointments expressed represent a more tangled web of the complex history and relationships that are Evanston.

## 2 Background

One community member shared, "Things in this community are very much Black and White. For a long time, diversity in Evanston means Black and White relations. One out of five students in Evanston are Latino....There are also Asian families that are often affiliated with Northwestern, a growing refugee population, and many multi-generational families."

The Library has a responsibility to serve all members of the community. In discussions with members of the community, this theme surfaced over and over: the Library's priority is those who have the least access. Those most in need "are often the least able to fully access and use the services available to them." This includes cultural backgrounds broadly defined, including ability (cognitive, mental, aging, the recovering).

While DJA recognizes and agrees that diversity is more than a black and white issue, the opportunity for the Library now is to focus explicitly on race, class, and the marginalization that has resulted from real and perceived barriers for people from nondominant groups. This focus is not to exclude other groups or issues, but to devote attention, skill-building, and relationships to this important issue.

## Racial Divide

To say that the perception of Evanston is uneven across racial groups is an understatement. When the phrase “racial divide” was used in a discussion, the consultant was quickly corrected. The historic racial divide in Evanston presents a real, current day barrier to true progress. Healing is needed. People who have been and felt marginalized need to know that white leaders “get it”, are willing to acknowledge the past and work to co-create a future that is equitable.

*“Racial divide is watered down. We are dealing with historic, systematic, ongoing, and institutional racism.”*

## Closing of West Branch

The closing of the West Branch Library was described in discussion with a Library representative as a “financial decision” based on “low usage data”. In discussions with members of the historic African American community, one person said:

They closed our library because we weren’t meeting their numbers, the numbers that are important to them. Those numbers don’t mean anything to us. What means something to us is watching everything that belongs to us be taken away, then given to other people.

The closing of the West Branch Library, though decades ago, continues to be an open wound for the historic African American community in Evanston.

## Opening of Robert Crown

Library leaders are enthusiastically communicating about the opening of a new branch. The area draws people from neighborhoods within and outside of Evanston, particularly known for its ice skating rink. The transformed facility will boast a beautiful new library space with room for collections and programs. It will also feature free parking, which responds to a consistent complaint about the Main Library.

Of course, there are reasons why this new branch will be strategic and useful over time. However, it is also incumbent on the Board and library leaders to acknowledge and accept that this is hurtful for some members of the community. Some members see this new branch as acknowledging that the library has the will and the resources to invest in a community branch, just not “our community.” Other members of the community express hope that leaders will begin actively involving diverse voices that will shape future space layout, programs, and services.

## Symbolic and Real Implications

We are living in an age where libraries are among the leading voices in North America calling for Equity, Decolonization, Antiracism, Truth, and Reconciliation. It is not palatable for leaders to only talk about the future, to espouse commitments to “respect everyone” or “value diversity.” Today’s and tomorrow’s leaders are expected to have a more nuanced understanding of what it means to seek equity. Moreover, leaders of conscience

are actively recognizing discriminatory practices of the past and their implications on people, systems and attitudes in operation today and are willing and able to create space for sometimes difficult conversations.

In conversations with community members the comment was made, "Repair work is needed. There is such a strong history here of marginalization (redlining, segregation, etc.). The YMCA did a 'GREAT PUBLIC APOLOGY' that could be a model for the Library and other parts of the City. We need a simple acknowledgement and apology."

Another person shared how Northwestern is dealing with Evanston's history of racist practices. They referenced Northwestern's effort "to acknowledge the role of Northwestern in keeping Black students off campus." It is not DJA's belief that the Library alone has work to do, nor is it more responsible than other parts of the community for misgivings that continue to exist in parts of the Evanston community. However, the Library has a wonderful opportunity to step forward in the service of professional values and model the kind of leadership that is expected across other parts of the community, including the City itself.

### 3 Recommendations

#### 1 Issue a statement that explicitly recognizes historic racism in Evanston and commits the Library to social justice.

The Library's current diversity-related language focuses broadly on providing services to all members of the community. While this seems inclusive, it actually sends a different signal to members of historically marginalized communities. Contemporary expectations are for organizations and their leaders to be comfortable and competent to directly address issues of historic marginalization and the need for a social justice lens and level of commitment in order to move forward. Anything short of this kind of direct commitment, particularly with regards to Evanston's history of racism, will be perceived as tone-deaf and disingenuous.

An EPL staff member's comments support this recommendation, and perfectly captures the tension within the profession of librarianship:

This is indicative of growing pains in our profession as a whole. We are neutral. We don't show our biases. We don't take a stand. Now we need to stand for something.

#### 2 Invest in cultural competence development for EPL leadership and staff.

Conversations with members of the African American and Latinx communities consistently surfaced examples of not feeling welcome in the Library. More than one African American person described personally witnessing Black youth being reprimanded more quickly and/or more intensely than White youth for the same behavior, such as running or talking loudly. A woman from the Latinx communities shared her sense of

hopefulness that the Library was offering a *Día de Muertos* program, only to attend and realize that all of the books were in English. As she described, “it came off as tone deaf.” A White community member characterized “the Library staff’s look of horror on their face” on more than one occasion when large African American male users approached a service desk. Many more people of color conveyed, without solicitation, a feeling that the Library does not feel welcoming. An Indian woman described she did not have this experience personally but could see clearly how African American and Latinx people were treated and experiencing the Library. When probed about differences across the branches, people spoke most about the branch with which they had the most familiarity, but comments about lack of welcoming environment were not isolated to one Library location.

According to an EPL staff member, “we have a lot of rules. White people have a lot of rules and are used to them. We have families from other cultures, like immigrant families, that come to the Library not realizing that we are quiet in libraries. Our staff might hush a child and the parent feels like their child was scolded, like this isn’t the right place for us.”

Creating a welcoming environment is a clear commitment of Evanston Public Library staff based on discussions with them, the array of programs and design of library space. Intentions of well-meaning professionals and experiences of people from underrepresented groups, however, may differ. The gap appears to be intent versus impact. The EPL staff need safe yet growth-promoting developmental experiences that help them explore what may be done to understand the varying needs of different community groups and ways to respond to those needs, from the perspective of the group members themselves.

A few people talked explicitly about expectations of the Library’s leadership, including Board members:

What I saw on the Board was a group of people—the white Board members leading the discussions (the Black board members didn’t speak)—who seemed to enjoy talking about equity but aren’t willing to do anything. They clearly haven’t done any training. Their ignorance (about contemporary EDI issues) was striking. For example, when the community told them that the children’s books don’t reflect enough diversity, they rationalized. They do not see beyond their intentions, just impact.

Beyond the children’s section, my experience is more dependent on the staff member. If I’m going to upper floors for a meeting, I wonder how patrons feel if they get that kind of ‘face’. The staff in general needs to be more culturally competent. Not just ethnicity, but also income, high and low functioning. The staff may not be aware how to adjust their tone or communicate with someone without knowing their language. Sometimes they just don’t know, or they just have burnout.

This is another area where the Library can and should work cooperatively with the City. The City offers an array of professional development programs that Library staff are attending as possible. Skills developed should range from contemporary language and concepts to personal awareness of bias and associated implications for creating a welcoming environment in the Library. The Library should create an expectation for managers to provide coaching and support, both for practicing and learning new skills and for affirming positive effort and impact. This effort can be guided by the Library's newly formed Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Committee, which was being formed at the beginning of DJA's engagement.

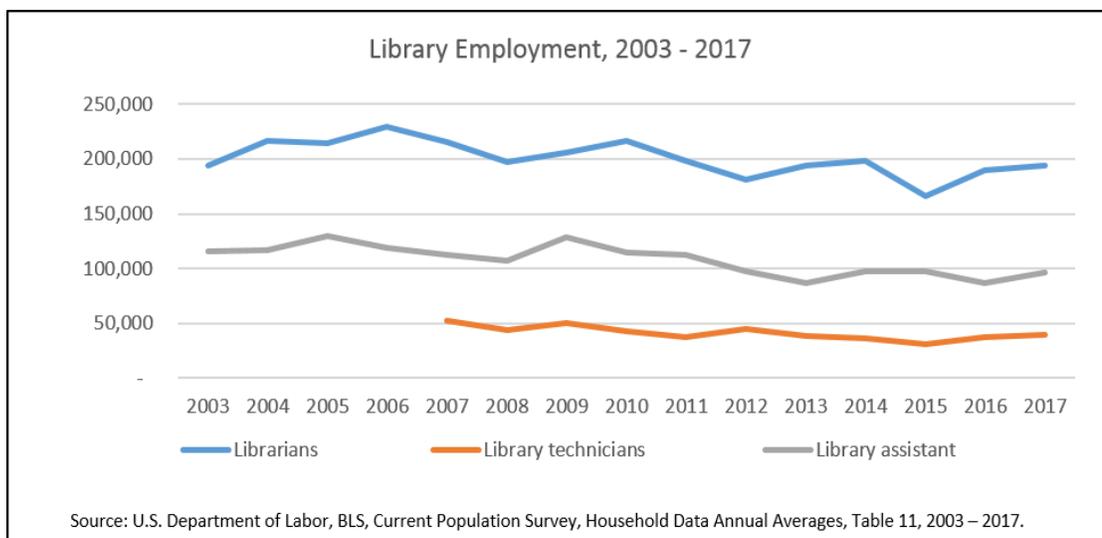
The EDI Committee should consistently over time have representatives from the Library's leadership team, managers and staff, as well as people who reflect a variety of diverse identities. Committee members should be encouraged and supported to make individual investments in learning and invest in helping the Library build capacity in cultural competence. The Committee will also begin to satisfy some of the expressed needs of staff who are anxious to represent the Library's values in the community but feel unsure about language and approach.

### 3 Develop a talent management plan that identifies goals for hiring, developing, and promoting people of color.

A number of people described disappointment with the lack of diversity represented on the Library's staff. "There's not a lot of Latinx representation in higher up positions in the Library or the City." One community member shared, "I think there needs to be an all-out effort to diversify the staff." Another said, "the elementary school is hiring an African American achievement specialist" as an example of commitments to being made and acted upon in other parts of the City. A clear expectation was communicated that the Library should hire a person to focus on the needs and interests of the African American community, someone who is a member of that culture.

An EPL staff member of color shared, "even now I am conscious of being the only Hispanic person in the room. I feel like I'm being judged, even if no one is mistreating me. The lack of diversity in our staff only underscores it. Having more diversity in staff will help with this." Some members of the community believe that the Library has a lower representation of Black and Latinx staff members than other City agencies.

There are differences between degreed librarians (people who hold a Masters in Library Science) and staff, and the overall percentage of degreed librarians is low compared with national representation of people of color. According to recent figures produced by the AFL-CIO, "over 86 percent of librarians were White, non-Hispanic in 2017". In the same year, "just 6.4 percent of librarians were Black or African American, 10.4 percent were Hispanic or Latino, and 5.2 percent were Asian."



Source: Library Workers: Facts & Figures, Fact Sheet 2018  
Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO

This recommendation is typically, when presented to library leadership teams, the most fraught with rationalization. The rationalization builds upon the data reflected about availability and include: 1) “we do not have enough people of color pursuing librarianship as a profession to give us a viable pool of qualified applicants,” 2) “our geographic location makes it difficult for us to recruit people from diverse communities,” and 3) “our hiring practices are outside of the Library’s control and leave us with a very limited pool of people to consider for open positions.” All of these rationalizations are described by people who are EDI practitioners as “externalizing”: that is, identifying or creating factors that are beyond the control of the leaders and/or the organization to impact. There is data to support the assertion that these factors are not factual limitations at the macrolevel (Schonfeld & Sweeney, 2017). The work of exploration and working to identify alternative solutions at local levels is called “debiasing systems”. DJA notes here that sometimes the systems that are most in need of debiasing are the mental models of those in decision making roles.

“The Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) provides examples of organizations that have made progress debiasing systems and increasing the number of people of color on staff—St. Paul, Madison, Seattle. According to a person interviewed who is familiar with work in other cities, “in St Paul after they did a racial equity assessment they were able to double the staff of color in just two years.” The debiasing systems aspect is being willing to ask and deeply explore questions that get at the root of hiring limitations, such as “what are the different policies that are getting in the way of recruiting people of color?”

One such limitation for Evanston Public Library is representation among full-time staff as compared with part-time staff. According to EPL leadership, “part-time staff is 70 percent

of EPL's workforce and demographics for this pool are not available in City reports." Having a significant percentage of part-time staff is absolutely an equity issue that requires focused attention. It is a perfect example of a system that needs debiasing. Expecting people to be able to work part-time, with limited benefits and often a need for more income than is provided by the Library alone certainly limits the Library's ability to recruit and retain people who could contribute significantly to the organization's equity and diversity goals.

The feedback from the community about wanting to see more people who are Black and Latinx in professional, leadership and community-facing positions is significant. Just having people from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups on staff is not enough. Having people who view themselves and are viewed by members of the community as having cultural perspective is critical. This might mean, in some cases at least, rigorously exploring whether or not having a Masters in Library and Information Science is as important as having lived experience delivering the services and working with the content related to particular communities as a primary or optional qualification on a position description. Mentoring and promotion programs that support people from diverse backgrounds and who are already committed to the Evanston community are also important options to pursue. Of course, there is the continued need to engage with community members to ensure that communication is flowing and there is understanding, in both directions, of expectations, opportunities, and real and perceived hiring limitations.

Though this recommendation is surely a long-term commitment and one that will have challenges in its implementation, it is not optional. In DJA's experience, the only times that significant progress has been made on diversifying staff, including representation at every level of the organization, are when senior leaders made a full and assertive commitment. When decision-makers realize and are willing to commit the personal effort associated with interrogating one's mental models, possibilities are boundless. This will require suspending some current practices, leaders inserting themselves into hiring processes, and active collaboration and negotiation with the City and others who have influence on hiring practices.

#### 4 Create a group focused on equity and race composed of Library staff and community members.

Library leadership, staff, and community members, particularly those from the African American and Latinx communities, should work together over time to identify opportunities for change, make the needed adjustments, measure impact of those adjustments, and commit to sustained collaborative effort. Though there are many ways to think about diversity, race and equity are the explicit and intentional focus of this suggested group. This recommendation is made because of Evanston's history of racism, and because confidence and trust in the Library's leadership around the topics of equity and race need to be nurtured. Black and Brown community members shared example

after example of times when the Library's leadership seemed "to hear but not get what we are saying"; where "opportunities for listening to the specific needs of our community were overshadowed by a list of programs that the Library is offering"; where "the difference between equality and equity are painfully unfamiliar to those who are making decisions about resource allocation."

There are clear ideological differences between what the Library's leadership believes is the role of a public library and the sentiments of many of the people interviewed. Leadership espouses making "services available to all citizens," whereas many community members believe that "those with the most need should be given priority." Another ideologic difference is how and where services are offered. Library leaders have emphasized "bringing services where people are at" like schools and camps. Many community members believe that this approach may reach children but often fails to engage parents. Further, many community members describe a preference for "a space of our own" that "is in our community", meaning places where congregating naturally happens, that are near where people live, and that allow a more customized feel than the current Library's branch environment.

In order to address some of the differences in perspective and approach, and identify solutions that will truly reflect EDI aspirations, many public libraries and other mission-based organizations are forming groups that play a vital role in enhancing engagement with communities served. Given the eagerness of Evanston community members to offer support, the Library is perfectly positioned to launch such a group. This group should focus on strategic topics like building rapport within and across diverse segments of the community, identifying and supporting new or emerging diversity-related initiatives, and ensuring ongoing effective communication between the Library and the community. Positive and measurable outcomes of such a group might include: 1) increased diversity of the Library's volunteer pool, 2) increased philanthropic involvement from diverse communities, 3) increased access to diverse authors and performers, 4) increased access to nuanced perspective for cultural celebrations, programs, services and collections, 5) penetration into communities that have not been active users of the Library, and 6) expanded advocacy for the Library.

## 5 Create and use metrics to assess and adjust efforts in support of the Library's EDI values.

In the words of those we interviewed:

There is a tendency for people to forget that libraries are publicly funded public institutions. They are not privately funded organizations like art galleries or museums, or businesses like Barnes and Noble, which are retail-oriented. A Barnes and Noble isn't required to attract or serve the entire public. The library, like the post office and the park district, shouldn't have power users. Everything about the way the Library is organized reflects power users' needs. Power users are not low income Black and Latino users.

Once people have taken some training they should be using an equity assessment tool in every decision they make. It's a self-application process, and a commitment. Racial assessment tools used are now being used by the school district.

There should be more measures beyond those traditional for libraries. How much does the new Jodi Picoult book change people's lives? How much of a difference are you making in people's lives? That's the measure of success. We need a commitment (from Library leadership) to focus on how we can be changing people's lives.

The Library uses a variety of methods for assessing and making decisions about programs and services. Those are not to be discounted or necessarily abandoned. For decades libraries of all types have struggled with the topic of assessment. At local and national levels what to measure and why are major conversations in the professional community. Often metrics have been driven by national and local expectations. At the national level, assessment is typically to help rank and organize different libraries by type: public, academic, research and special (e.g. corporate and law). Typical assessment measures include: number of full-time employees, number of employees with an MLIS degree, size and uniqueness of collections, physical footprint, collection budget, etc. Local level expectations often serve a different audience, the organization that allocates resources to that library among the competing interests of others. For public libraries, local assessment is often meant to help City and other local funding agencies decide how to prioritize use of public space, budget for full- and part-time staff positions, and provide funding for programs, collections and special services, like social workers.

It is contemporary best practice for libraries to rethink their assessment methodology. The challenge for leaders is balancing the need for producing significant positive measures on current metrics while challenging the viability of those metrics for future alignment and resource allocation. In some cases, library leaders work directly with external decision-makers and funding agencies to negotiate a suspension of certain

metrics while new measures are incorporated. In other cases, parallel metrics are put in place to allow time to demonstrate the viability of the new measures. This balancing act between two competing models is not new to libraries, it is akin to print versus online resources. Both need to be counted to support current and future collecting practices; both are important parts of a changing landscape in publishing. The landscape related to equity, diversity and inclusion is changing, too. As it does, libraries' approach to identify the most important questions to ask to measure effectiveness should also change. This effective approach, DJA asserts, is to ensure that metrics actively reflect the Library's espoused values and that data collected be used to make decisions about resource allocations consistent with those values.

Several community members underscored the importance of using data to drive decision-making as a reflection of the Library's, and the City's, commitment to EDI. When considering the types of measures to incorporate into or replace current assessment, the most important element of this recommendation is that they be co-created with members of the community. It is essential that Library decision-makers have direct access to input from community members that will expand perspective, help shape the measures themselves as well as how data is collected and used. This kind of co-creation will also allow for shared understanding, expectation setting and the transparency needed to nurture trusting relationships.

## 6 Create an innovative approach to space and services in Fifth Ward.

When I was a kid, I went to the branch that was within walking distance from me.

This statement reflects a comment shared by a member of the Evanston community and surfaced multiple times across conversations with different people. People expect a library to be "in our community" and "accessible to us", with accessibility reflecting how people in that community move around and congregate.

A mother of a young son shared, "ABSOLUTELY there should be a library in the Fifth Ward. A library in the Fifth Ward would be amazing. We should be able to walk to it. The Library downtown doesn't feel warm." When probed a bit more she went on:

There's definitely something that's missing. We always have to go into these other spaces to try to get our needs met. People are not listening or are not accepting what they're being told. I know that they're trying but what they're trying is not working for us...You have no idea how much a library in the Fifth Ward would do for morale. I think we would really take ownership of it. We would feel like it's ours.

I want to see lots of books that show people of color, Black authors. You can't be what you can't see. I want to see programming specific to the community. Asking us instead of telling us what would be best for us. I'm sure it would be used as a community meeting space. I can see lots of older people there for close

resources—like a social worker or a community engagement specialist. It could offer policy kinds of things, support with elections.

I work with young women, some of the most vulnerable in the community between 14 and 24. If there were a library in the Fifth Ward, they would go there with their kids. If they had something close to where they are, they would feel comfortable. They would have access to a safe space, where they don't feel weird when they walk in.

According to another community member, “where the libraries are located—we have used all this money to serve white, well-off neighborhoods. Its unethical and inconsistent with their mission. They are not focusing resources on lower income people and people of color.”

A member of the historic African American community said, “There’s a senior group that meets in Fifth Ward every Wednesday. We have children there for the YMCA programs. Family Focus has 60 children every day after school. We have buses that run up and down Emerson. We are right there and would use the library.” When probed about how a library presence in the Fifth Ward might be customized to meet community needs: “If you had a library in Fleetwood Jourdain/Family Focus, it could bring in Shorefront Programs or focus on technology, and the arts would be heavily used.” Further, a number of times people talked about a community branch just acknowledging that different cultural groups interact differently. The rules, policies, and focus on quiet in the other branches is not representative of all cultures nor does it convey a sense of inclusivity.

The idea of having a library presence in the Fifth Ward, when explored more deeply during the interviews, was met with objection by some. In those cases, the North Branch is pointed to as a viable option that is relatively close to the Fifth Ward. Others, who are in favor of a Fifth Ward presence suggest, “If you didn’t know anything about the racial segregation and were just trying to figure out where to put a library you would locate it where Family Focus and Fleetwood Jourdain are... Also, people in North Branch area have cars and access to resources to get to and from a branch outside of their immediate area.”

The Library needs visible, immediate action to demonstrate a commitment to an inclusive future. It is DJA’s recommendation that EPL find a way within a year’s time to establish a meaningful presence in the Fifth Ward, one that is informed by people who live in that community. Moreover, the process has to be one of co-creation—community members and Library leaders side-by-side exploring needs and opportunities, establishing clear and shared expectations, and committing to metrics that are applied with an equity lens. To be clear, past experiences of “bean counters coming into our space then telling us that our branch is closing because it isn’t performing according to measures that never worked for us” cannot be repeated.

The Fifth Ward has available space from stores who have left the area. A library is an ideal tenant, short-term or long-term, that can bring traffic to an area in need. Work with the City and a developer to find a space where the Library can get no-cost or low-cost rent. Make some minor cosmetic improvements. Move in. Engage the community in deciding what services to offer. A large collection might not be needed, but a program space for story time and job search classes would be influential. If there is a need for technology and wiring needs improvement, have laptops that people can check out for use with wi-fi. Another alternative is to make available Chromebooks with a cellular plan for internet access. Look for creative, low-cost ways to give the community what it needs to thrive. Then communicate not just what the Library and other investors are doing but also *why*. Tap into the newly formed group (recommendation #4) to communicate the message.

Requirements for pursuing this action:

- Quick turnaround time from recommendation to announcement and planning
- Aggressive timeline for identifying a space and services
- Selection of a symbolically significant location with the support of influencers in the historic African American community
- Work that can be done inexpensively and with community partners
- Placement/commitment of an initial and strong slate of programs for the first year (or whatever else is identified as essential by community partners)
- Clarity about how assessment of success will be approached

## 7 Expand book collections that reflect the needs and interests of the Black and Latinx communities.

I am a huge reader. My mom only speaks and reads in Spanish. The Library does not have a huge or good selection, and the ones they have are translations of English books. There are amazing books by Latinx authors. Not just translated books.

The Library should enhance the array of books in Spanish. For adults, the book selections are often too elementary, do not cover a diverse array of genres, or are Spanish translations of books written in English. For children's books, the representation is too narrow.

They need to figure out "who are the authors?" We need diverse books...beyond just the New York Times and other book publications but they're not providing diverse authors. We Need Diverse Books and seeing who they're following. Morgan Jenkins is a recent author; I read her book and I now read whatever she mentions. I love exposing my kids to other books.

I would love to hear people talk about their books in Spanish.

I constantly have to remind people in Evanston that not all Latino people are Mexican. They need to bring in the voices of people from many cultures—not just for the Latino community but from all communities.

People in the community care about and are deeply committed to access and literacy, a shared value of the Evanston Public Library. Community members strongly conveyed the important role that the Library plays in providing books to young children. An expectation exists that the Library increase the number and type of books available to Black and Brown patrons. Some community members expressed disappointment that enough copies of particular books were not available, or not available in their branch. When discussing this with Library staff, sometimes the issue was not that the Library failed to purchase the book but that all copies were currently checked out by other users. Usage patterns of books and closer relationships with community members as part of the Library's ongoing commitment is going to be essential.

Metrics could lead to and grow support for new collecting practices such as regularly seeking to identify Spanish books written originally in Spanish, or identifying and selecting books from beyond professionally reviewed journals, the traditional best practice.

The Library's efforts to date to diversify collections should be noted. The Library recently began supporting a staff member's attendance at the Guadalajara International Book Fair. This event is known and regarded highly throughout the professional community of librarianship. The Library has started going beyond professionally reviewed journals for

new authors or titles. They are going to small bookstores and small presses, even looking for self-published books. Further, members of the EPL staff expressed early on in the EDI needs assessment process a desire to create a community advisory group to help inform collections decisions. Though the suggestion of working more closely with the community is supported by DJA, it is our opinion that a more broadly focused group should be formed that allows co-creation and collaboration on an array of Library programs and services, including collections (see recommendation #4).

## 8 Continue supporting culture-specific engagement specialists.

Continue supporting culture-specific engagement specialist positions and filling them with people who reflect the cultures being served, namely Latinx and African American cultures. One person interviewed said about the Latinx communities, “our populations, though often lumped together, are very diverse. Having someone who just speaks Spanish or looks Latino but doesn’t know the culture or doesn’t come from the culture is a shortcoming.” The same can be said for the Black and African American community.

A new Latino Engagement Specialist was recently hired, a hire that has been met with much approval and appreciation. This position has experienced high turnover in the past, a point made by members of the community and EPL staff during interviews. It is suggested that the Library, as part of a larger talent management plan, find ways to increase retention and promotion particularly in positions where the individual has formed strong relationships in the community, as did Miguel Ruiz (the previous Latino Engagement Specialist). Several people reported that Latinx community leader activities were interrupted when Miguel vacated his position. This affirms not only Miguel’s unique contribution but also the important role that this position plays in the community.

The Evanston Public Library is also strongly encouraged to hire or appoint an engagement specialist to support the African American community, and beyond. The historic African American community in Evanston expects the Library to engage with them more and differently in the future than has happened to date. Children and community members of Evanston should have people “who look like them and who know the cultural relevance associated with different aspects of our cultures.” Particularly given the unique history between Evanston and its African American community, having a designated person to work closely with this community is important. Further, community members dedicated specialists in other parts of the city that are focused explicitly on the needs of the African American and expect the Library to hold the same standard.

## 9 Shift the focus of communications from the multitude of programs and services to engagement.

We need true engagement.

In conversations with the community, one comment came up more than any others: In one instance the consultant asked, “Can I attend a community meeting to begin developing rapport on behalf of the Library?” The answer was clear: “We don’t want the Library to send their ambassador.” People in the Evanston community want genuine relationships with the Library’s leadership and other parts of the City, and the nature of those relationships are different from the array of programs and services currently offered.

Currently, many of the Library’s messages focus on describing the services offered to various communities, from young children to seniors, including a number of multicultural populations and in various locations around the city. These examples of services were not met with the same enthusiasm by community members as was used by Library leadership and staff in delivering the messages. As a matter of fact, in some cases, community members asked for “less and more targeted” or “fewer but with a higher level of focus on authentic engagement.”

Of course, the Library will want to continue to share the programs and services being offered, but a more focused representation may be better received. This will require that Library leadership develop meaningful relationships with the variety of communities within Evanston in order to understand how to nuance communication and make sure that listening is evident. “People want to have their voices authentically heard in the process. They might not make the final decisions but know that they are being listened to and have feedback on how our input was considered. We need to have a relationship built that allows rapport, TRUST.”

One example of how the Library might continue its presence in the community but with more targeted efforts at engagement is to “connect with parents at the schools. Have a table for the Library at the parent conference night. They aren’t coming to the library for events because they are working second or third shift, or may not speak English.” This example does not diminish the Library’s desire to bring programs into the community, but shifts the focus from primarily providing experiences to children to developing rapport with parents and families.

Other examples of experiences that were well received by community members and can lead to new thinking about engagement were shared. “Miguel (Ruiz) started a group of leaders in the Latinx community—we have a Google group of Latinx leaders. Cradle to Career hosted an event for this group. (A Latina Library staff member) came. She brought books. She had a table. It was wonderful, but she wasn’t paid for her time. The Library needs to think outside of the box; not be so narrow minded.” The opportunity for the

Library could be, consistent with this recommendation and a talent management plan, to find ways to meaningfully reward people of color on staff for community contributions that are in the service of the Library's engagement efforts.

The Library should also identify new access points for connecting with diverse communities. "The library needs to have more consistent connections across different parts of the diverse Latinx communities—schools, markets, churches." A member of the Latinx community said, "I would love people to have SlamPoetry in Spanish—for teens."

Another community member commented about the difference between outreach and engagement in this way, "It's not just putting out books and signs. It's a feeling. Having staff be warm and approachable and not just staring from behind the counter... I have a masters in multicultural communication, so I understand these dynamics." The DJA consultant responds, "in my opinion the staff are trying to be engaging." The interviewee's response, "they're not." She goes on:

My son is active and excited. He often gets looks that make it seems like they think he's an unruly kid. How hard would it be to say hello to every person? 'Hi, how are you? Are you looking for something specific today?' Maybe they need to provide customer service training in addition to cultural competence....It really is about a feeling: feeling welcome and like my opinion matters. Or else, I feel that I'm clearly not welcome here. If the Library could understand that it would be a world of difference. I currently use South Branch or Main Branch. When we use the Main Branch we often see a lot of Asian Indians in the library, but my son and I are the only Black faces.

This recommendation, related to engagement, reflects the commonly expressed desire as shared by community members. It is also the most difficult to convey as an action item. In every instance, people of color interviewed proactively described and asked for more engagement. In every instance, when probed for actionable behaviors that could be given as examples to Library staff, the words "it's a feeling", "warm", "trust" or "relationship" were used. This recommendation may be one of the most difficult to act on and measure by traditional standards. The difficulty is shared by libraries across the United States. Some organizations that provide special funding to scalable library projects, like the Andrew Mellon Foundation, have been so inundated with requests associated with this theme that they are strategically focusing resources on efforts to create and nurture inclusive library environments.

The complexity of understanding and translating "engagement" and "inclusive" across cultures does not diminish the need for immediate and sustained commitment. Every Library staff member interviewed expressed desire to better understand what the engagement means for community members and willingness to demonstrate their commitment. For example, the Library Director went door-to-door in the Fifth Ward sharing information about the summer reading program. Throughout the EDI

assessment engagement Library leaders and staff have been actively attending various sessions to listen to community members.

It is a DJA firm belief that equity lives in the process. Particularly for communities that have felt unheard, where equity has not been their experience, engagement is going to take time. It is also going to take a sharp focus on process. Examples of processes that have an impact on people's experiences and some of the associated questions for further exploration by Library leaders and staff include:

**Decision-making:** What is the process for decision-making? Who makes decisions? Are the values of decision-makers consistent with values of community members? What are the criteria? Are the criteria reflective of espoused EDI values? What level of transparency is available? Is it clear to people how their input has influenced the final outcome?

**Resource allocation:** Are resources allocated in ways that are understood? Are they equitable as compared with equally distributed? Are the Library's espoused values apparent in the allocation?

**Rules:** What rules are adopted and how are they applied? Do the Library's rules allow for different cultural norms? To what extent are all of the current rules still relevant and useful?

**Policy:** What policies are established and how they are enacted? Do the Library's policies prevent people or groups from having full access to materials, services or programs, even unintentionally?

**Communication:** How and at what stages are community members invited for input? How is information shared and by whom? Is as much or more energy going into listening versus sharing information? Are Library leaders and staff visibly and authentically available in the community? To what extent are Library leaders and staff using language and behaving in ways that convey cultural competence? Are Library leaders and staff comfortable adapting their interpersonal styles as needed for different cultural audiences?

## 10 Embed EDI into the Library's ongoing communication strategy.

This recommendation extends and supports the Library's enhanced engagement efforts and brings culturally nuanced lenses to communication with various communities.

Articulate the Library's EDI goals and values explicitly: "What we believe; where we are; where we are going." Assist staff with discussing EDI values and goals. Make sure that EDI commitments and measures are visible throughout the annual report and all other formal communication channels. Assure Evanston that services to target constituencies are being highlighted in existing communication channels, rather than left to the Latinx or Outreach Specialists.

The Library can also enhance the channels it uses to communicate to diverse communities. When asked, “How can the library reach people in the Latinx community better?” The consistent response was: “the churches. The one that’s in Rogers Park; Supermercado Chapala, Morelia Supermarket.” Another member the Latinx community said, “HECHOS EN EVANSTON (Events in Evanston) is a Facebook page...It is a closed page for (Latinx) community members....Some are leaders and some are just regular people with regular jobs. We are trying to think of other people... Reaching out to different places and different kinds of communities.” The Library, leveraging its engagement efforts (recommendation #9), could support community members in these efforts and use some of these established communication outlets to differently engage the community.

A Black resident said, “come to church with me at Second Baptist...Even if the Library is going to camps, they’re talking to kids rather than getting to know the community members—parents, teachers, elders.” An enhanced communication strategy will seek to be informed directly by the various communities being served, and learn with and from those communities in a way that reinforces trust. This strategy is only viable if people in the Library are willing to explore nontraditional channels for communicating. In this case, the Library’s communication team will need to be present and willing to inquire, initiate and nurture relationships with a broad and diverse constituency. A robust EDI communication strategy must include an opportunity for people’s first-person voices to be heard—their stories in their words the way they would have it told. This means showing up in places where one may not feel comfortable initially, such as a church service being held in Spanish or a Black church. Leaders of conscious realize that Black and Brown people have been making behavioral adjustments and showing up in places that do not always feel comfortable as necessary survival strategies for years.

In sum, identify preferred modes of communication to targeted demographics. Assess awareness of current communication outlets and information needs of these communities with regard to library programs and services. Facilitate community access points for the community that are embedded in key communication channels. Work with the Evanston community to create access points that account for different communication preferences and targeted Evanston users.

## 11 Work with other City agencies to advance Library and City EDI goals.

Community members regularly reflected on new EDI developments that are happening across the Evanston. “District 65 has resources in place that are explicitly focused on closing the digital divide and closing the racial achievement gap.” Given the current momentum and the Library’s ongoing commitment, it should aggressively invest in collaborations that are explicitly aimed to close both of these gaps. Specific opportunities might include offering “internet and computers—checkoutable laptops and iPads” according to one community member. The Library has “all these databases that it subscribes to that no one really uses. Anyone in the Evanston schools should be

able to use them without a library card.” Or the Library could use work with the school system or City to find different ways to provide library cards, rather than the current policy of requiring two forms of identification. There is no shortage of collaborative projects. Of primary emphasis here is working directly with the schools and the City to identify a plan to advance specific and measurable EDI goals, leveraging the assets of each and exploring ways for overcoming past barriers to success and increasing needed resources.

In this pursuit another City resource is the Equity and Empowerment Officer. This relationship should be tapped to support the Library’s assessment, program development, and community engagement efforts. It is not recommended that the Library create a stand-alone engagement assessment. Evanston community members have experienced too many varying assessments without satisfying feedback loops or outcomes that reflect input received. Going forward, a new and more consolidated approach across City agencies and the school system is suggested in order to gather input once, make targeted adjustments based on input, and leverage limited resources.

## 4 Summary of Input

### Conversations with Community Members

DeEtta Jones, met with a number of community stakeholders, most of whom were identified and invited to a conversation at the Main Library on March 21–22, 2018. The format was relatively unstructured and informal. The intent was to gather people’s impressions and ideas in a comfortable setting and to reinforce the Library’s commitment to listening and engaging in meaningful exchange. Conversations always included at least two people beyond DeEtta.

Questions explored during the meetings were:

1. What is EPL doing particularly well related to how they serve and collaborate with the diverse communities in Evanston?  
Please share examples from your own perspective.
2. Related to equity, diversity, and inclusion, in what ways would you like EPL to focus new or different energy?  
Why? What are the/your unmet needs/expectations?
3. What do you want/need to see happen as a result of their new/different effort?
4. What would a satisfactory outcome of EPL’s current focus on an equity, diversity, and inclusion assessment and strategy look like for you?

### African American Communities

The African American communities, based on the consultants’ limited experience, fall into multiple categories: historic, transplant, and stakeholder but not a resident. One person, a transplant, shared, “My kids grew up at this library. We always felt welcome here. It was free, safe. I could teach them how to read. There’s so much for everybody. Sometimes I

think they do too much--trying to reach every subset." This person went on to say that they didn't expect the Library to offer as many programs and services, but really focus on fundamentals like literacy.

A multigenerational Evanstonian shared, "the Black community has been so disenfranchised in so many ways. There used to be so much more support—YMCA, hospital. Our YMCA was destroyed, and they rebuilt a YMCA for white people. I can't remember my dad ever using the library—it wasn't a welcoming space."

One person, a transplant, suggested, "Consider closing the branches and shore up the main library. The Evanston 150 Committee has discussed this idea in the past. We can create some BIG IDEAS that could mean a lot, have a major impact, and focus on those."

This opinion, closing the branches and focusing exclusively on the Main Library, was shared only once during discussions with DeEtta Jones and Associates. For the most part, when asked "what can the Library do to meet your needs/expectations", "open a West Branch" or "add a library branch in the Fifth Ward" was the reply. When asked about the role that the new Robert Crown branch will play, none of the African American respondents saw it as a replacement for a branch in the Fifth Ward, and a number expressed cynicism about whether or not it would be heavily used by the African American community.

Other examples:

- About the type of programming: "I know that the attempt is made to reach out to Black folks. I just don't find the programs particularly appealing to my friends. They have to be meaningful to the groups we are trying to reach."
- Welcoming environment in the Library: [We don't come to the Main Branch because] "we feel comfortable in the community. Some grandparents wrote a book and we held a reading at the Main Branch. The turnout was low. When the next reading was offered the authors insisted that it be at Family Focus, because we feel more comfortable there."
- People the Library is not reaching: "Who's not using the library and why aren't they using it? I think the people who aren't using the library are the people we are most trying to serve."
- About a Library in the Fifth Ward: "I think we don't have a branch in the fifth ward because it's an 'undesirable area'. What kind of message are we sending?"

### The Latinx Communities

One person with whom we spoke said, "I love the library and we need to do better reaching out to the Latino community. Over the past 10 years we have gone through 10 Latino liaisons. I get the feeling that person doesn't feel supported." They went on to say, "Latinos are always a second thought in this community."

Among the themes that emerged from Latinx community members was “there’s no space for Latinos to come together.” Specific suggestions about immediate steps the Library can take were limited because “the Latinx community is spread all over, not just a specific ward.” Cautious optimism was expressed about the potential of the new Robert Crown Branch providing some of the needed space. “There is talk that there might be more Latinx community members because it’s closer. However, our voice was not included in on the opinions about what would be included there. The focus groups were not geared toward the Spanish community. The fliers were not in Spanish, there was no mention of translation. That usually happens—we’re an afterthought. There’s a lot of stuff that happens and then ‘and what about the Latinos?’”

Further, “we need more learning about what the library can provide, and how they can provide it.” A lot of the outreach that is currently being provided by the Library connects with children, but parents are not aware of the array of services and programs available.

Some of the people with whom we spoke, who were not members of the Latinx communities in Evanston, described the Latinx communities as “reaping the benefits of City and Library’s current diversity and inclusion efforts.” Within the context of the public school system, people described the support for the Spanish speakers as an ongoing tap on resources. Within the Libraries, the presence of a Latinx Outreach Librarian was another example of finite and valued resources being directed specifically to the Latinx population, possibly to the exclusion of other groups.

One of the community members with whom we met described the Latinx community in Evanston as “invisible”. When asked to share more perspective, they went on to explain that within the Latinx community, for a variety of reasons, there is often a sense of disconnect from the larger community and from social issues and causes. Some of these may be related to varying residence status, and others may be communicated through cultural norms about keeping oneself off the radar in order to avoid negative attention.

Some of the issues shared were:

- “Undocumented people can’t get library cards.”
- “There are no challenging novels or new authors in Spanish. It’s always pretty simple book selections. Even magazines, like Sports Illustrated, would be good to have in Spanish. That would help me think we are represented across a variety of levels and types of interest.”

One community member shared that what may be interpreted as apathy in the Latinx community is more appropriately reflected by this popular Spanish saying:

*Comer y caller.*  
Eat quietly.

## Northwestern Families

We did not speak with anyone who described themselves as representing Northwestern families living in Evanston. However, perspectives about these communities were shared with us at a high level. Significant numbers of Asian and Indian families are coming to Evanston as employees, students, or family members of employees or students of Northwestern University. The Library's children's programs are particularly well attended by young children and parents/grandparents/extended family members of Northwestern students and employees. On the other hand, other people with whom we spoke said, "The story times that are available during the week and in the mornings aren't accessible for People of Color because we are working. Or, they might be the only one (only person from that racial group in attendance)."

## Staff Presence in/with the Communities We Serve

It is essential to have people in the community who represent the diversity and values of the community and in places where community activities take place. Some people requested the Library "add another outreach librarian. It connects the community to the library."

They went on "Outreach programs in the schools work particularly well with early age and young children. For teens, it works better at the sites. There are too many barriers to get to the main branch." And when asked a bit more about the teens, particularly Fifth Ward teens using the North Branch, "Our kids, predominantly African American and Latino, do not feel comfortable going to the North Branch. They do not feel welcome there."

In addition to staff presence in the community, people spoke about their desires for a "warm" relationship with the Library Director.

## Conversations with EPL Staff

DJA consultants were on site at the Main Library on December 12, 2017. Open and relatively unstructured discussions took place about the Library's equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts, challenges, and staff needs. Notes from those discussions follow, along with initial potential areas for future exploration and consideration based on input from EPL staff. A summary and recommendations document, based on staff input collected in December 2017, was shared with Karen Danczak Lyons and Teri Campbell.

## Communication and Development

### Positives

Evanston Public Library has dedicated staff in charge of the management and execution of the organization's communications and publicity. The Library's current communication strategy is multidirectional and includes bimonthly newsletters, social media accounts (Twitter and Facebook), program brochures, annual reports, and fundraising materials, among others. The Library's community following is consistently growing and includes a

mailing list of 32,000. The Library has worked with an outside consultant to assess efforts and establish a formal communication strategy.

The Library also has a dedicated Development Officer in charge of advancing procurement and fundraising at the local and national level. The Development Office is actively capturing library service usage data and outcomes reported to grants and communicated to donors such as the Library's successful mobile hot-spot program. The Development Officer actively communicates the work of the Library and its staff to donors and constituencies.

There are formal channels of communication established by the Library to the community. Information about library service data and impact stories have been captured. A communication strategy is in place. Access to a Development Officer may allow the Library to match fundraising efforts to community-led initiatives that respond to specific service needs that would require additional resources to undertake. Staff is aware of and eager to support Evanston's diverse users including the historic African American community, as well as its growing Latinx and immigrant communities.

### Challenge Areas

Staff expressed a concern about how best to communicate effectively and sustainably with all of the Library's diverse constituents. Staff expressed feeling they were at capacity to meet internal needs. Additional support would be welcome to pursue new communication initiatives for target communities that would benefit from custom messaging in their primary languages.

Staff are concerned about the community's expectation of equitable service for the entire community given the Library's existing capacity. In particular, staff are concerned about the expectation of the community regarding the Library's mode of operations including allocation of resources.

Staff are eager to support the African American community but are struggling with how best to engage with them. The majority of staff do not feel they have agency with the Black community to articulate or develop services that may address concerns raised by the Evanston activists. Staff expressed a desire for facilitated engagement and dialogue with the Black community.

## Children and Young Adult Services

### Positives

The Library has made a conscious effort to bring children and youth programming off-site by embedding mobile programs throughout the community in partnership with other organizations. For example, the Summer Reading program has experienced increased participation and completion rates for all ages. Other programs such as "Cradle to Career" and partnerships with teachers in the Ridgeville Park District have allowed the Library to advance literacy and STEM-based services, including services to

ESL and ELL students. Outreach services are currently offered at various off-site locations. The Library's children and youth programs strive to provide a safe space with educational STEM and literacy programs as well as recreational activities. The Library so far has supported community-led family programming and collections for Chinese and Korean patrons.

The Library's children and youth services are actively serving and responding to demographic changes in the Evanston population including a growing immigrant population. Library personnel are looking to strategically allocate their time and resources where they may be most effective and impactful in meeting their diverse communities' needs.

### Challenge Areas

All community institutions are challenged in bringing services to the South side of Evanston. Library staff are aware of the Library's service gaps to this area and community. A variety of factors are contributing to this service gap:

- There is a lack of buildings or service space available in this area to facilitate outreach or mobile services.
- Staff turnover at partner organizations has affected responsiveness and programming collaborations. Relationships with partners were cultivated over time and disrupted by staff turnover. Scheduling has been an issue with off-site partners.
- Collaboration with community partners was not integrated effectively or communicated to front-line staff, although accepted by Library leadership.
- Transportation and mobility of residence in this area are barriers to access for residents.
- The new branch will not help to address this issue.

The Library's children and young adult programs are serving very distinct communities with different service needs. The Library's equity values encompass service delivery to all members of the Evanston community and are not specific to racial (Black/White) equity. Staff are challenged in serving all patrons without prioritizing one group over the other. In addition, diverse low-income communities are challenged with mental health, drugs, gangs, food-desert locations, low literacy, domestic violence, and housing and food insecurity, among other vulnerabilities and stressors.

There is an expectation for the Library to offer educational and literacy programs after school for children and youth. The staff struggle to balance activities that provide them with a safe space, compliment school curricula, and also offer reprieve and entertainment. The staff strive to cultivate positive relationships with youth and their families. Staff expressed an interest in better serving patrons who speak and read different languages through collections and family programming. Limited language expertise in the cataloging department has hampered the bibliographic information

made available for the Chinese and Korean collection. The Library has bypassed this gap by allowing the materials to circulate with limited bibliographic information from a collection access point in the Children's area of the Library.

In addition, there is a challenge to leverage existing services to serve demand inside of the branch with current staffing levels.

Areas for further consideration/recommendations:

- Advance the bookmobile initiative to service the south side of Evanston.
- Through focus groups and interviews with target community stakeholders, discuss and prioritize Library services for children and youth (educational, entertainment/recreational, literacy, information literacy, cultural, collection-specific, outreach, etc.). Assess current participation in existing programs and self-reported barriers to access for existing services.
- Internally with library staff, prioritize service areas. Allocate staff time and resources to prioritized areas.
- Work in partnership with the local school district to address complementary programming for children and youth.
- Review current community partnerships. Formalize partnership with community partners that outline expectations for both partners regarding communication, programming objectives, supplies, space, delivery of services, and reporting outcomes. Assess whether key community partners are missing who align with targeted communities' service needs. Communicate and publicize the Library's partnership list and off-site services.
- Identify areas where community volunteers could be recruited and trained to assist in supporting library programs and services.
- Review circulation of foreign language collections, physical and digital access points, as well as available children's books by African American authors or including African American protagonists.
- Work with other Evanston public institutions to address community stressors.
- Encourage partnership with the Northwestern Department of Education to engage literacy and to coordinate with multilingual faculty in serving target communities.
- Identify library vendors for Chinese, Korean, Arabic and Spanish materials, and investigate foreign language cataloging services available through OCLC or Northwestern Area Studies Library Department.
- Consider supporting food insecurity through "Lunch at the Library" programs.
- Review personnel and job recruitment procedures for the Library. Encourage posting of openings through diverse communication channels.
- Review job descriptions, specifically desired/required skills regarding language for existing and future hires.

- Provide professional development training for staff for serving target demographics.

## Outreach and Community Engagement

### Positives

The Library has dedicated outreach positions for adults, youth, and the Latinx community. The positions work in partnership with Evanston community organizations, businesses, and schools to provide alternative service points and embed Library services as appropriate. Through these positions, the Library is able to expand its literacy and educational programs to children and youth through collaborations such as ABC Boosters, LEAP, and Head Start programs. The Latino Engagement position is working to develop relationships with the Evanston Latinx population, which has limited points of service within the community and/or history of coalition. The staff are seeking out cultural competency professional training and exploring best practices in intercultural communication. Staff are connecting with diverse patrons including African American children and youth through outreach programs.

### Challenge Areas

Adult programs focused on health, financial, and digital literacy are limited. Safe communities, housing, and job assistance are a need for the adult community. Coordinating with partners can be challenging in off-site locations.

### Recommendations

- Identify the current list of partnerships and services provided by the Library through outreach positions. Work with existing partners to brand these programs as services from the Library. Communicate these services through the Library's website.
- Through focus groups and interviews with target community stakeholders, discuss and prioritize existing Library outreach services for children, youth, and adults (educational, entertainment/recreational, literacy, information literacy, cultural, collection-specific, outreach, etc.). Assess current participation in existing programs and self-reported barriers to access for existing services.
- Develop a community of practice internal to the Library to support cultural competency professional development for staff and the library board.
- Facilitate a debrief with Library staff regarding recent events and next steps for the library. Discuss the role of each department for next steps and internal/external expectations.
- Identify and establish clear lines of communication within the Library and with the community.
- Focus on regaining trust and agency with the African American community. Focus on developing the library as a safe and trusted space for the community.
- Assist to tear down the social stratification of the Evanston community.

- Acknowledge and advocate for more public spaces in the west and south sides of Evanston.
- Assist to promote community dialogue and dissipate tension among the Black and Latinx population.

## Technical Services and Collection Development

### Positives

Collection development and technical services work collaboratively as part of the same department. The collection development manager has a strong background in children's literature and is recognized in the field as a children's author and literature reviewer. The Library has access to the Collection HQ tool to assist with collection assessment. The Library is interested in exploring a pilot program to promote patron-driven acquisitions and requests for African American children's books.

### Challenge Areas

Collection development staff are working to identify existing African American children's materials in the collection. The interdisciplinary nature of these collections makes it difficult to assess the current inventory of the collection. There is no defined scope or quality indicators for an African American collection. While the Library allows the community to recommend purchases online or in-person, the acquisition budget is limited.

### Recommendations:

- Through focus groups and interviews with target community stakeholders, discuss and prioritize Library collection needs (educational, entertainment/recreational, literacy, information literacy, cultural and format, etc.) for children, youth, and adults. Assess current on-site use and circulation of the collection by targeted demographics and self-reported barriers to access to the collection from the community.
- Develop and pilot a Black advisory group with defined group charter, roles, and training for participants. Articulate volunteer and Library staff roles for this initiative.
- Revise and publicize a collection development policy with defined short- and long-term goals regarding EDI collections.
- Consider a fundraising campaign for EDI collections.
- DJA can share best practices for assessing and tracking EDI collections. These methods can be customized to fit the Library's workflows.
- Develop visible access points for the community to recommend collection materials of interest. Follow up with these recommendations through volunteers or designated staff.
- Share information with the community regarding how to request holds or find materials not immediately available on the shelf.

- Distinguish between EDI circulating collection and visible artifacts (marketing, signage, etc.) that welcome targeted demographics into the library.

## Latino Engagement Librarian

### Positives

The Library has launched a new Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion committee. The committee has received support from Library staff and leadership. The committee charge is being finalized and includes input from the Library. The committee chair sought additional feedback from DJA Consulting regarding the goals and description of the committee. The goal of the committee is to support external and internal equity work in the Evanston community (i.e., proactively integrating EDI in library spaces, collections, and programs).

The Latino Engagement Librarian is seeking to create authentic relationships in the community to solicit and hear the community's self-reported needs. As a part of this effort, the Latino Engagement Librarian has created an advisory group made up of nonprofits, community leaders, and Latinx-serving organizations to discuss services to the Latinx community in Evanston. This voluntary group operates through a listserv and meets on a monthly basis. This group serves as a mechanism to leverage community partners to inform community members of library services and programs that are relevant to the Latinx community. A listening tour is planned to document the experience of the Latinx community in Evanston.

Evanston has experienced a recent demographic change including an increase to the Latinx community (reported as 17%, up from 10%). New and existing Latinx residents have been perceived as moving into spaces traditionally occupied by African Americans. Community demographic shifts including Latinx, Asian, and other immigrant populations have contributed to a cultural shift in the community, but not effective integration.

The Evanston community may have survey fatigue and may be resistant or defensive to future survey requests or town hall meetings. In the past, these methods have not resulted in significant outcomes or responses from data collected.

### Recommendations

- Work with the Library to finalize the EDI Committee's charge and responsibilities.
- Identify community stakeholders, partners, and organizations who can inform and be called upon to partner with the Library on programs, services, and assessment methods.

## 5 People/groups Consulted

Over 100 people were consulted with during this process, both in-person and via phone, some in individual discussions and some with small or large groups. People were not expressly asked for permission to share their names in a written document, thus they do

not appear here. Everyone was made aware that their comments would be shared without attribution in this report.

Some people interviewed were citizens of Evanston; others were City employees or worked in Evanston. Most were Library users directly, with their children, or in the provision of services to the communities they served. Many were self-described activists, and so brought tremendous perspective and passion to discussions about the role of a vibrant and inclusive library for their community. Individuals represented the following groups; while not everyone was affiliated with a specific group, some were “regular people who happen to care about the Library”. Generally, interviewees fell into one of these categories:

- Evanston Public Library Board of Trustees
- Evanston Public Library employees
- City of Evanston employees
- Evanston community members
- Fosters Seniors Club
- City of Evanston Equity and Empowerment Commission

## 6 Best Practices from the Field

### Outreach versus Engagement

Public libraries have been experts at outreach for many years, bringing library service out into the community to expand their reach. Today’s public libraries are now expanding their work to include community engagement.

Understanding the difference between outreach and engagement is critical to a library’s success. Definitions and descriptions vary, but in general outreach is focused on the library and its programs and services while engagement is focused on the community and helping to solve community problems. Both are necessary in today’s public library.

True engagement positions the library as a catalyst in the communities it serves. It starts with building strong relationships with individuals and organizations to identify opportunities where the library can play a role. Examples of successful community engagement projects include:

- Lexington (KY) Public Library launched the “At the Table” program to engage over 11,000 citizens in conversations about the city’s future.
- Wichita (KS) Public Library developed and hosted “Candid Conversations” to discuss the issue of race relations between the community and police officers to help forge better relationships.
- King County (WA) Library System developed the “Addressing the Opiate Epidemic” series to help communities struggling with a growing crisis to identify challenges and solutions and to discuss pathways forward.

Each community presents unique challenges. The critical first steps for effective engagement must identify the specific needs for the community being served so that the work is a true partnership.

## Central and Branch Libraries

Many of our public library systems were set up with a central or “main” library and a network of community branches. Today’s public libraries are wrestling with that model to decide if it still works for their service area. Those that maintain a central library are working to redefine its role in the library system. Others have decided the concept is no longer necessary given the changes in their cities and counties.

A central or “main” library often serves as the symbolic heart of the library system. It is generally located in the downtown area of a city and is often a large and architecturally significant building. This can be an important role. The City of Seattle built its impressive downtown library in 2004 with the specific purpose of sending a visual message to all that the city values learning, education, and knowledge. It is used quite differently from the system’s branch libraries, and while it is costly to operate the city considers it an important point of service.

Some library systems have opted to operate without a main library, instead using a system of community branches located more conveniently to where people live. King County (WA) Library System operates in this manner. With no central areas through which most residents traversed, KCLS found it better to focus on serving the community through smaller libraries. This strategy keeps one community from feeling like their library is less important than another community library with a somewhat level playing field. Others like the Topeka Shawnee County (KS) Library have the reverse, operating a single main library with no branches to serve a large area. They rely on a delivery system to transport materials to pick-up locations throughout the county and provide programs and services at partner organizations.

Many cities use the title “central library” rather than “main library” to diminish the notion that it is more important than the branches. In Evanston, the heavy emphasis on geographic distinctions and wards would need to be taken into consideration if renaming were to be considered.

Omaha, NE is considering closing its main library and replacing it with a small downtown branch. They would then build a large central library out west where the population center is located. It wouldn’t be as big as the current main library, but bigger than the branches. Opinions on this are divided, as the downtown library is seen as an important destination location.

Defining a branch library is different now than in the past and there are lower-cost models for maintaining a footprint in a community. Omaha has four libraries in shared spaces: one merged with an elementary school library, one with a community college

library, and two located in community centers. KCLS has several mall locations which are vibrant, busy libraries. There are also kiosk and pop-up libraries, and other inventive ways of getting out into the communities we serve.

### Engagement Surveys

One freely available assessment that measures civic and community engagement among other areas is Project Outcome

(<http://www.ala.org/pla/initiatives/performancemeasurement>). Project Outcome helps libraries measure four key patron outcomes—knowledge, confidence, application, and awareness—in seven key library service areas.

### Climate Surveys

ClimateQUAL (<https://www.climatequal.org/>) is an online assessment on organizational climate measuring diversity, teamwork, learning, and fairness, as well as current managerial practices, and staff attitudes and beliefs. It focuses more on internal perceptions but research correlates staff perception with user satisfaction. This tool has been used primarily by academic libraries. A one-time fee subscription is required.

## 7 Professional Development Next Steps

In addition to this document, DJA has offered several professional development experiences to the Library staff and Board of Trustees.

### Enhancing Cultural Competence within the EPL Staff

DJA offers in-person and online professional development services. Cultural Competence for Library Leaders is an in-person learning experience designed to expose people who work in libraries to contemporary trends, practices and strategies for creating more inclusive experiences. It has been offered for over ten years, across North America and to hundreds of people who work in libraries.

Full-day sessions were offered to all EPL staff on June 22 and 29, 2018. Dr. Pat Efiom, the City's Equity Officer, attended one of the sessions in an effort to identify opportunities for continued collaboration between the City and the Library. DJA and Dr. Efiom met with Library administrators and managers on June 29, 2018, for a 2-hour strategy session with the purpose identifying action items as an outgrowth of the workshop discussion. In Summer 2018, DJA and the Library's administrators launched the Library's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee and provided guidance about next steps at meeting and subsequently.

### Enhancing Cultural Competence within the Board of Trustees

A 4-hour professional development session was offered to the Library Board of Trustees on May 30, 2018.

## Additional Learning Resources

In addition, DJA offers online learning experiences that are available to supplement in-person Institutes which are both scalable and able to be supported over time. The Equity Toolkit is a four-course online series that provides the knowledge, language, skills and framework needed to become proficient working across cultures. The courses are offered in a sequence, with concepts and skills introduced in earlier courses becoming a foundation for strategic and systemic action by the end. The courses are:

- [The Essentials of Cultural Competence](#)
- [Reducing the Negative Impact of Bias in the Workplace](#)
- [The Inclusive Manager's Communication Toolkit](#)
- [The Strategy, Structures, and Culture of an Inclusive Workplace](#)

A plethora of other learning experiences are available to EPL employees and stakeholders. Those outlined above are highlighted because DJA is able to customize offerings for the Library, and potentially the City.

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