

Evanston Public Library's Commitment to Racial Equity

In this statement, we will define what we mean by equity, diversity, and inclusion, apologize for our failures to live up to these ideals, and offer our commitments for achieving our goals. We believe this is only possible if we embrace and promote equity, diversity, and inclusion in everything we do.

Definition of Terms¹

- “Equity” takes difference into account to ensure a fair process and, ultimately, a fair outcome. Equity recognizes that some groups were (and are) disadvantaged in accessing educational and employment opportunities and are, therefore, underrepresented or marginalized in many organizations and institutions. People may be disadvantaged on the basis of race and ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identification, socioeconomic status, or physical or mental ability. Equity is not the same as Equality. Equality means that everyone has access to the same resources. Equity, in contrast, means people receive resources based on their needs and their potential to benefit.
- “Diversity” can be defined as the sum of the ways that people are both alike and different. When we recognize, value, and embrace diversity, we are recognizing, valuing, and embracing the uniqueness of each individual.
- “Inclusion” means an environment in which all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully; are valued for their distinctive skills, experiences, and perspectives; have equal access to resources and opportunities; and can contribute fully to the organization’s success.

Apology Statement

We believe a sincere and heartfelt apology is an important and necessary first step in the process of reconciliation. Maya Angelou teaches us that:

History, despite its wrenching pain,
Cannot be unlived, but if faced
With courage, need not be lived again.²

¹ Sources: "Equity, Diversity, Inclusion: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights", American Library Association, July 5, 2017. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/EDI> (Accessed March 10, 2020) Document ID: 7a43b47e-c032-2214-55bf-e1d57449bd8d. "The Equiticity Racial Equity Statement of Principle." Equiticity, August 13, 2019, www.equiticity.org/statement.

² Angelou, M. (1993). *On the pulse of morning*.

Too often, EPL has focused on being neutral rather than equitable. We did not adequately consult or reflect our community, and failed to question our own assumptions about what services and materials our community has either needed or wanted. Leadership placed too little importance on hiring staff from diverse backgrounds. This, coupled with the failure to adequately support and listen to staff members who could speak to the needs of their diverse communities, resulted in an overall passivity in reaching out to those who most need our services. We acknowledge and regret that already-marginalized community members felt excluded from and unwelcome in our spaces. Evanston Public Library must fully acknowledge its role in the disenfranchisement of Black community members of Evanston. The closure of the library branch that operated at 1715 Simpson Street from 1975-1981 is one example of this lack of commitment to Evanston's Black community, and has yet to be rectified. In addition, the library did not schedule regular bookmobile visits to the area, and the bookmobile services were cancelled entirely in 1997. The ongoing lack of services provided in Spanish continues to harm our community. We apologize for these actions and inactions, and seek to continue growing in our understanding of and commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Our Commitment

1. Strategic outreach to underserved populations and a breakdown of socioeconomic barriers.
 - a. Create and maintain community partnerships and programs, on and off-site, leveraging EPL resources to increase community engagement.
 - b. Highlight our digital resources and other various forms of access to those who find the library's building, location, or hours inaccessible.
 - c. Evaluate which audiences we are prioritizing, and evaluate how to best reach underserved populations.
2. Improve engagement with the community.
 - a. Learn what the community wants to see in Evanston libraries, participate in community events, and be more receptive to ideas from community members.
 - b. Increase non-English-language events to better reflect the languages spoken in the Evanston community.
3. Reflect the diversity of the Evanston community in library collections.
 - a. Expand our methods of asking the public what material they want to see on our shelves.
 - b. Form a community collections advisory group with residents and staff to inform future purchasing decisions.
 - c. Find new ways of increasing the visibility of books that reflect the diversity and richness of cultures, in particular those of Evanston residents.
 - d. Update and grow world language collections, including audio-visual materials and e-materials.

- e. Seek effective ways to market the collections that are available to residents throughout Evanston.
4. Develop a Racial Equity Tool to apply to decision-making in cooperation with Evanston city government.

Evanston has a long history of racism that continues to this day. EPL has been an agent of this racism in both passive and active ways. As one of our long-term commitments to combating this system of oppression, we will undergo a yearly review, incorporating both external and internal feedback, in order to evaluate our progress towards becoming a more equitable library. In this way, we are attempting to hold ourselves accountable, and will be archiving this feedback and making it public, as a foundation from which we may continue to build. We appreciate the chance to learn from past mistakes as we establish a model for redress and equity.