



Antiracism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ADEI) Assessment Report

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Executive Summary

From October 2023 through July 2024, OhioNet engaged consultants Pamela Espinosa de los Monteros and Janice Jaguszewski to conduct an Antiracism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ADEI) Assessment. Collaborating with a team of six DEI library practitioners, including BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) librarians and allies, they developed and conducted an inquiry-led assessment across OhioNet member libraries.

Recognizing the significant harm caused by racism, inequity, and exclusion, along with the negative effects of tokenism, bias, and systemic gaps, the assessment noted that current approaches to ADEI—primarily focused on addressing system dysfunction and raising awareness of systemic racism through employee learning and development—have achieved limited success and yielded mixed results (Zheng, 2024; Sugiyama et. al, 2023; Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). As a result, the ADEI consulting team adopted a new approach centered on positive organizational development. This approach integrates appreciative inquiry, inclusive excellence, and elements of intentional change theory, moving the conversation toward a strengths-based, human-centric, and relational model.

Using this approach, 40 BIPOC librarians in Ohio were interviewed to identify which ADEI organizational practices were driving meaningful and transformative change in their careers. As a result, three interdependent areas of focus emerged: (1) Empowering BIPOC Librarians to Thrive, (2) Unleashing Potential through Inclusive Libraries, and (3) Embracing the Energy in Difference. The consulting team developed vision statements and best practices for each area to outline an ideal future where libraries fully realize and meaningfully integrate ADEI. These vision statements were then explored and further refined during three “dream summits” (one in-person and two virtual), which were attended by over 100 librarians from across Ohio.

Additional support is now needed to advance each interdependent area of focus, and we offer the following prioritized recommendations for OhioNet and its member libraries. We strongly recommend a programmatic approach that reinforces concepts, provides opportunities for practice over time, and creates the conditions for individual and organizational change. **See the report for further detail.**

1. Empowering BIPOC Librarians to Thrive

Develop, deliver, and evaluate a comprehensive BIPOC Professional Development Accelerator Program designed to empower and equip BIPOC librarians for career advancement and success in the Library and Information Science (LIS) field. This dynamic program will integrate experiential learning, mentorship, career planning, and skill-building activities to help participants unlock their potential. Insights from the

program can help member libraries further identify and create effective resources for supporting BIPOC librarians' development and career advancement.

2. Unleashing Potential Through Inclusive Leadership

Develop, deliver, and evaluate an Inclusive Leadership Professional Development Program to enable deans, directors, and DEI liaisons to embed impactful inclusive practices within their organizations. This program will develop strategic ADEI goals, establish accountability practices, review and update organizational policies, navigate organizational tensions effectively, and close equity gaps. In addition, implementing a dynamic inter-institutional cohort model will enable collaborative learning and growth across organizations and cultivate a supportive network of leaders.

3. Embracing the Energy in Difference: Co-Creating and Sustaining a Diverse Library Community

Develop, deliver, and evaluate a pilot program with one or two libraries that supports ADEI organizational change through individual and collective action. The program will enhance the ability of librarians and library staff to integrate meaningful ADEI practices into their daily work and experiences through positive, human-centered organizational development methods.

By analyzing impactful ADEI practices, the assessment also uncovered key conclusions:

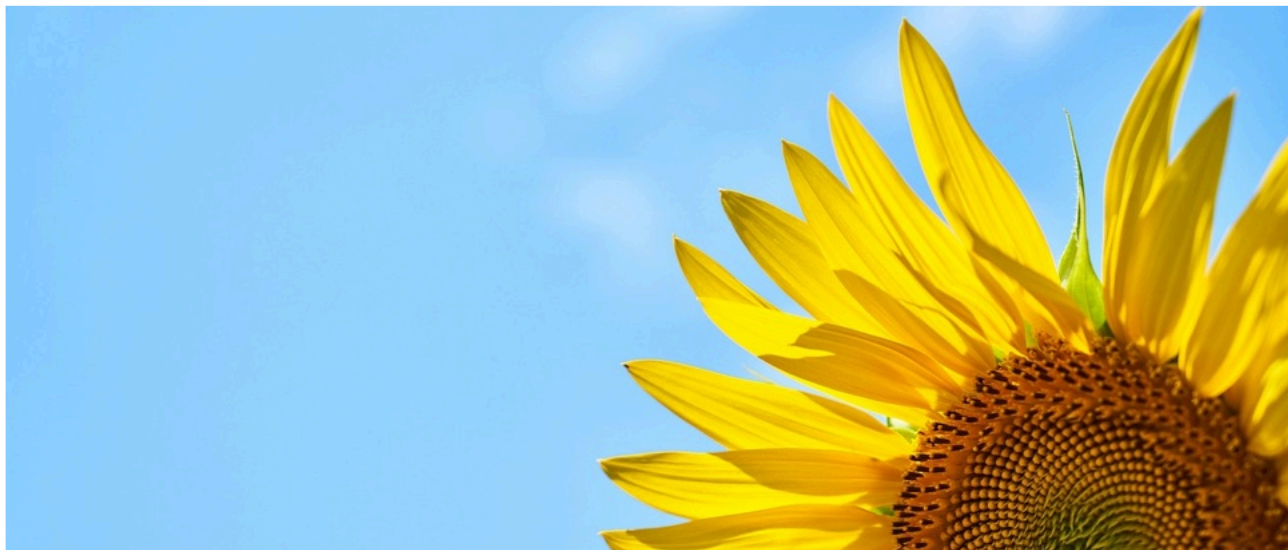
- **Value BIPOC Librarians' Origin Stories:** Recognize that BIPOC librarians' unique origin stories and experiences extend beyond demographic labels.
- **Leadership and BIPOC Librarians:** Ensure BIPOC librarians are supported by supervisors who are available and committed to their success and personal goals. Additionally create opportunities for relationship-building within the organization.
- **Aligning Values with Organizational Capabilities:** Help BIPOC librarians establish strategic boundaries and align their goals with the organization's capacity, supporting their career development and well-being, within and outside of librarianship.

However, the greatest insight into ADEI practices is that the most significant impact is not achieved through traditional DEI committees, policies, trainings, cultural events, or strategic plans. Instead, ADEI is often achieved through authentic connections.

Moments of empowerment and investment in relationships across the organization and the LIS community, combined with inclusive leadership, are what is truly transforming the experience for BIPOC librarians. The collective power of daily actions, behaviors, and supported interactions among individuals within the LIS community bring ADEI practices to life.

The assessment recommendations, methodology, and best practices included in this report radically depart from how ADEI is traditionally approached and practiced in libraries. This is intentional. To reach our goals, the recommendations encourage individuals, library communities, and OhioNet to evaluate and experiment with new approaches—together.

Overview



Background

Since 2015, the American Library Association Council endorsed diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as a strategic direction of all libraries. In response, libraries have integrated DEI as a core value, shaping their strategic directions, goals, and services. Additionally, some libraries have sought to address social justice, equity, and racism by proactively reexamining social structures and implicit beliefs about race and interracial relations in order to develop policies, practices, procedures, and programs that challenge systemic racism and, in its place, center the principles of belonging.

“Some of the greatest challenges of dismantling racism are related to defining, interpreting, and detecting racism, but also deciding what the work of antiracism should connote.”

M. Cronwell *“Antiracism in Encyclopedia of Diversity and Social Justice” (2014)*

However, meaningful progress towards advancing antiracist and inclusive libraries, including addressing underrepresentation in the field, remains a critical and ongoing challenge. Concerted efforts, such as diversity residencies, scholarship programs (e.g., ALA Spectrum Scholarship program), and career development initiatives (e.g., the Kaleidoscope Program, the Minnesota Institute for Early Career Librarians, and the ARL Leadership and Career Development Program), have aimed to enhance the representation of librarians. However, the BIPOC library workforce remains largely unchanged (Kendrick, 2023), impacting not only the diverse communities served by libraries but also the potential BIPOC workforce. Research on libraries’ DEI initiatives — particularly the difficulty of accurately capturing librarian demographics without rigorous tracking and reporting (Hulbert & Kendrick, 2023)—reveals limited action, a lack of scalable

strategies, and insufficient role clarity among library leaders, organizations, and BIPOC librarians, all of which impede significant progress in transforming existing patterns.

OhioNet ADEI Assessment

In 2023, under the leadership of Nancy Kirkpatrick and the OhioNet Board, OhioNet commissioned an Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion (ADEI) Assessment to address the underrepresentation of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) librarians in the state of Ohio and the broader library and science field. The assessment's findings are intended to guide the OhioNet board and staff in advancing antiracism practices through core services and inform the development of new programs focused on improving BIPOC recruitment and retention in Ohio.

Led by organizational development consultants Pamela Espinosa de los Monteros (Imagine Lucha Lab) and Janice Jaguszewski (Janice J. Consulting), and in collaboration with the ADEI library cohort (Beronica Avila, Nimisha Bhat, Mandi Goodsett, Elizabeth Lang, Shannon Simpson, and Desiree Thomas), the assessment focused on identifying ADEI practices that enable BIPOC librarians to grow, lead, and thrive. By clarifying ADEI practices through their impact on BIPOC librarians and their careers, the assessment assists librarians, leaders, and their organizations in advancing ADEI strategies that can drive both everyday practice and systemic change. Additionally, the assessment provides insights into organizational capacity, uncovering unmet needs while highlighting the strengths and opportunities that Ohio libraries and librarians can leverage to advance ADEI initiatives.

We want to emphasize that there is no singular way to be or define a BIPOC librarian. Even the term "BIPOC librarian," which we use to refer to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, may not always align with how librarians from historically marginalized backgrounds seek to call themselves. While we have opted to use this term in our assessment to highlight the collective voices of librarians that constitute this vibrant community, it is vital to recognize that each BIPOC librarian brings their own unique identity, perspective, purpose, and expertise. As the LIS community advances ADEI, we recommend approaching identity through origin stories rather than relying solely on demographic categories.

Project Goals

The following goals guided the project to identify impactful ADEI practices in libraries:

- Identify and invite BIPOC librarians working across Ohio libraries to participate in the ADEI assessment. Capture their experiences in diverse library organizations, including K-12 schools, public libraries, academic libraries, and special libraries.

- Develop a questionnaire using appreciative inquiry to explore BIPOC retention through ADEI best practices, incorporating insights from inclusive excellence and leadership development.
- Identify the distinct strengths BIPOC librarians bring to their roles; assess the strengths and capacity of Ohio libraries in advancing effective ADEI practices; and draft actionable visions for inclusive libraries based on these insights.
- Engage leaders, BIPOC librarians, and library professionals in community through three Dream Summits—held in-person on May 10 and virtually on May 22 and June 5—to unpack the assessment findings. Refine the assessment visions and identify actionable next steps for OhioNet ADEI strategies.

Methodology

Core Advisory Groups

To support the administration of the assessment, the lead consultants convened two advisory groups: the **OhioNet Planning Team**, consisting of key members of OhioNet staff and the board led by interim Executive Director Andrew Whitis, and an **ADEI library cohort, composed of six DEI librarian practitioners, both BIPOC librarians and allies, from OhioNet’s extensive network of member libraries**. The lead consultants and the ADEI library cohort collectively formed the “consulting team.”

The ADEI library cohort played a pivotal role in conducting structured interviews, informing the scope of the assessment questions, advising on the visions, and shaping the final recommendations.

Assessment Representation and Participation

The consulting team, in collaboration with OhioNet, purposefully sought to include representation from across Ohio and OhioNet member libraries. With input from the OhioNet Planning Team, ADEI Library Cohort, and community partners, the consulting team identified 70 BIPOC librarians working in Ohio libraries, including schools, public, academic, and special libraries. A call for participation was also issued, inviting BIPOC librarians to take part in the assessment.

We found that data on the BIPOC library workforce in Ohio is scarce, with many institutions not tracking it, and existing data often lacking details on retention, growth, or departure. As a result, our consulting team relied on their own networks as well as input from the OhioNet Planning Team, BIPOC librarians’ networks, library partners, and LinkedIn to identify assessment participants. Ultimately, the process highlighted a significant need for better information.

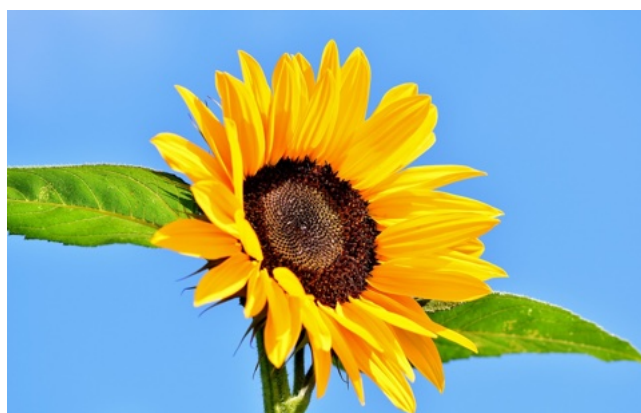
From the assembled list of 70 BIPOC librarians, **40 participated in one-on-one interviews**, sharing their career experiences related to inclusion, equity, and belonging, while also highlighting unmet needs encountered throughout their careers. Of the 40 librarians interviewed, 19 had worked or were working in public libraries, 15 in academic institutions, 2 in special libraries, 2 in seminary or theological schools, and 2 in K-12 schools.

Interviews with BIPOC librarians

The assessment methodology used structured interviews that integrated appreciative inquiry with inclusive excellence, and concepts from intentional change theory to advance sustainable and desired change. This approach allowed the consulting team to inquire about and explore ADEI practices that are most impactful for BIPOC librarians, and gather information on organizational capacity, gaps, and opportunities across libraries.

The approach examined

- peak moments in librarianship
- moments of inclusion and empowerment
- impactful ADEI best practices that addressed equity, diversity, or inclusion
- unmet needs
- their vision of an inclusive library, including allyship, leadership, and their role
- how to best acknowledge identity



We shifted the focus from identifying and addressing system dysfunction to uncovering the conditions that most effectively enable libraries and their staff to adopt and excel in ADEI practices. This method identifies key contributors to ADEI success and the resources that support it.

See Appendix A for the assessment questions asked of each interviewee. The questionnaire is provided as a resource for libraries to carry out their own assessments.

Appreciative Inquiry

What happens when we focus on the possibilities more than shortcoming, and do so in a manner that connects our curiosity (head) with our compassion “heart” - first within ourselves and then with each other.”

Tanya Cruz Teller, Inspiring Inclusion with the Appreciative Inquiry Lotus Model

Appreciative Inquiry is defined as a “positive strengths-based approach to leadership development and organizational change.”¹ Its life-centric orientation provocatively shifts from a conventional top-down, diagnostic, and deficit-based approach to change, towards one that builds on strengths, potential, and innovation to achieve collective action towards a shared future. Through a dialogic, inquiry-led, relational, inclusive, and emergent process, Appreciative Inquiry helps organizations co-discover strengths, explore shared meaning, build capacity for cooperative action, and collectively design for transformative change. It invites leaders and organizations to leverage evidence-based practices from change management and positive psychology.

To learn more about appreciative inquiry, see the [introduction packet](#) available from the David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry at Champlain College.

Appreciative Inquiry + ADEI

Combining Appreciative Inquiry and ADEI can help organizations

- Center BIPOC voices in the assessment design
- Identify existing strengths, resources, and capacity
- Draw on stories to explore the experiences of BIPOC librarian in context
- Explore what is working, what is possible, and what is driving success
- Reframe challenges to discover opportunities through creativity, curiosity, and innovation, while suspending judgment
- Engage in system-wide conversations to inclusively discuss challenging topics, identify gaps, and explore collective opportunities
- Use a relational approach to build and support generative connections

¹ David Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry. “About Appreciative Inquiry,” Champlain College accessed May 09, 2024, <https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/about-appreciative-inquiry/>.

Together We Thrive Dream Summits



Photo: Attendees of the in-person Dream Summit on May 10th, 2024

Using the interview data and insights from the ADEI library cohort who conducted the interviews, three interdependent areas of focus emerged: (1) empowering BIPOC librarians, (2) inclusive leadership, and (3) inclusive library cultures. Vision statements and best practices to support these statements were then developed for each area of focus. Both human and AI-assisted theming were employed in developing these initial visions.

The consultant team then facilitated three *“Together We Thrive”* Dream Summits—one in-person and two virtual—inviting librarians, leaders, and staff to engage with the draft vision statements and discuss individual and collective next steps to advance each vision. Over 100+ librarians from across Ohio participated. The Dream Summits and [workbooks](#) supported participants to clarify their roles and agency in advancing ADEI through everyday actions.

Recommendations

We propose actionable next steps to support meaningful ADEI advancement for OhioNet and its member libraries. Each recommendation is designed to advance the ADEI vision statements of empowerment of BIPOC librarians, inclusive leadership, and inclusive library cultures. These recommendations build on what we heard and elevate best practices. In addition, **we strongly recommend a programmatic approach that reinforces concepts, provides opportunities for**

practice over time, and creates the conditions for individual and organizational change. We do not recommend stand-alone workshops. Research shows that individual workshops have mixed results and limited applicability or impact (Zheng, 2024; Sugiyama et. al, p. 1683-1684) 2023).

1. Empowering BIPOC Librarians to Thrive

What we heard:

Key Quotes

“I remind myself that every day I can, because every day I have.”

“The best lesson I learned was to never let someone else believe more in you than you believe in yourself.”

“If I can be in an environment where I feel accepted and I’m authentic, then I can excel. But if I feel like I am not accepted for who I am, I’ve already been pushed down, and I feel I have to work harder to be acknowledged for who I am. And it may never happen.”

“I chose you for this reason. Now I need you to choose this for yourself.”

Many BIPOC librarians rely on informal personal networks for career development and advancement because access to professional development resources and credible performance feedback can be inconsistent or unavailable. They seek dedicated community spaces, personalized mentoring, and targeted programming that address their unique experiences and can help them navigate the profession and build their careers.

Recommendation:

Develop, deliver, and evaluate a comprehensive BIPOC Professional Development Accelerator Program designed to empower and equip BIPOC librarians for career advancement and success in the Library and Information Science (LIS) field. This dynamic program will integrate experiential learning, mentorship, career planning, and skill-building activities to help participants unlock their potential. Key components include self-assessment tools to identify strengths and career goals, mentorship matching with experienced professionals and LIS leaders for personalized guidance and feedback, and skill development through experiential projects that enhance participants' portfolios and showcase their talents. The program could be further refined to target early- and mid-career librarians as well as those aspiring to positions of leadership. Insights from the program will help member libraries further identify and create effective resources for supporting BIPOC librarians' development and career advancement.

Best practices for BIPOC librarians include:

- Recognizing and affirming their distinct value and contributions, with the confidence to express themselves and exercise influence.

- Developing an awareness of their assumptions, about themselves and others, and cultivating skill in determining whether those assumptions are true.
- Accessing and spending time in psychologically safe spaces that inspire, support connection, and emphasize inclusivity.
- Engaging in ongoing coaching and receiving constructive feedback to support their growth.

2. Unleashing Potential Through Inclusive Leadership

What we heard:

Key Quotes

“They championed me, they saw potential in me. They helped me utilize my talents and skills.”

“It takes years to build an inclusive culture, modeled by leadership where everyone supports and values one another including their input...we all experience that culture from the past director who cultivated a way for us to voice our thinking.”

“Libraries hire for diversity but manage for assimilation.”

“Listen to what I have to say, I don’t care to be asking for it.”

A leader is uniquely positioned to influence organizational culture, make a positive impact, and advance the growth of others. Their fluency in ADEI can set the standard for the organization and define its limits. Inclusive leadership, as both a style and a framework for supporting strategy and change, is a skill that requires continuous development, experimentation, and refinement. Developing inclusive leaders supports the BIPOC community and strengthens organizations.

Recommendation:

Develop, deliver, and evaluate an Inclusive Leadership Professional Development Program to enable deans and directors as well as DEI liaisons to embed impactful inclusive practices within their organizations. This program will develop strategic ADEI goals, establish accountability practices, review and update organizational policies, navigate organizational tensions effectively, and close equity gaps. It supports individuals in developing key inclusive competencies, such as active listening, emotional intelligence, empathetic leadership, psychological safety, and cultural humility, to empower not only BIPOC librarians but all employees. Additionally, it will help leaders better understand their critical role within the organizational system. The program includes a dynamic inter-institutional cohort model that will enable collaborative learning and growth across organizations and cultivate a supportive network of inclusive leaders.

Best practices include:

- Intentionally developing authentic and trusting relationships with all librarians and staff, creating an environment where everyone feels valued and has a clear pathway for professional growth.
- Actively acknowledging the expertise and value of BIPOC librarians, inviting them to lead initiatives with new challenges and “stretch” opportunities that advance their careers in the profession.
- Engaging in reverse mentorship and reciprocal learning, fostering growth, understanding, and continuous improvement.

3. Embracing the Energy in Difference: Co-Creating and Sustaining a Diverse Library Community

What we heard:

Key Quotes

“We learned from each other in our practices. ...We learned a lot from each other, by experiencing each other.”

“If I can be in an environment where I feel accepted and I’m authentic, then I can excel.”

“I was embraced, and they brought me into the fold. My ideas were welcomed, and we did things together.”

“I am in meetings run by people I don’t feel safe with.”

“Allow for different work styles and allow new ideas. Let people be themselves and trust diversity.”

To advance ADEI, libraries have tended to rely on DEI committees and initiatives, overtaxing BIPOC librarians and achieving limited success. Organizations typically seek to resolve existing ADEI gaps with policies and procedures, and individuals tend to seek changes in *other* people’s behavior without understanding how they themselves can shift and improve organizational patterns. To address these issues, librarians and library staff will seek to build an intentional workplace culture that enables every person to thrive. The skills needed for such transformational change include connecting across differences, deep listening, engaging in critical conversations, and successfully navigating the tensions that naturally exist in any organization.

Recommendation:

Develop, deliver, and evaluate a pilot program with one or two libraries that supports ADEI organizational change through individual and collective action. The program will enhance the ability of librarians and library staff to incorporate effective ADEI practices into their daily work and experiences through positive, human-centered organizational

development methods. It will help participants shift away from top-down strategies and passive learning approaches to engage with colleagues more deeply.

Best practices include:

- Learning how to navigate tensions constructively and with compassion, recognizing and valuing the differences that make a difference.
- Giving feedback in a kind and supportive way that recipients can hear and understand; receiving feedback with an open mind, turning any defensiveness into self-reflection and an opportunity for growth.
- Fostering effective team and committee dynamics, soliciting everyone's ideas and perspectives and distributing engaging and challenging assignments.

Consultant Observations and Lessons Learned

As we worked with the ADEI consulting team, engaged with the BIPOC librarian community, analyzed all interview data, and listened to feedback during the Dream Summits, we were struck by a number of additional observations and lessons learned that highlight key areas that would further advance ADEI within libraries.

1. Valuing BIPOC Librarians' Origin Stories

As part of our assessment, the consulting team listened to the origin stories of over 40 BIPOC librarians, who generously shared the aspects of their ancestry, race, and/or ethnicity(ies) that are integral to their identity. We learned that each librarian's distinct origin story transcends demographic categories, revealing the intersections of race, ethnicity, and personal experiences that shape their multifaceted identity. We listened to stories of mixed families, global migration, and caregivers who worked tirelessly to provide opportunity and education for the librarians who now comprise our LIS workforce. These stories highlight identities and cultural frameworks that librarians continue to unpack as part of a legacy connecting past and future generations. We encourage the LIS community to connect with BIPOC librarians' origin stories, expanding their understanding of identity beyond limited demographic categories.

2. Leadership and BIPOC Librarians

BIPOC librarians need to be supported by supervisors who are committed to their success and personal goals, providing active support and availability. **Key leadership qualities that BIPOC librarians seek include deep listening, transparency, openness, and accountability.** Additionally, BIPOC librarians need to connect and build relationships with key individuals within the organization.

3. Aligning ADEI Values, Goals, and Responsibilities with Organizational Capabilities

Many BIPOC librarians enter the profession with a deep commitment to supporting underrepresented communities and addressing disparities. As a result, they may assume disproportionate ADEI responsibilities within their libraries and encounter ethical dilemmas as they strive to meet the needs of individuals seeking their help.

BIPOC librarians are empowered to thrive when they establish strategic boundaries for advancing their work, including ADEI efforts and community outreach. They may need guidance in aligning their professional goals with the organization's capacity, defining what is considered “good enough,” and identifying areas for gradual development, all while prioritizing their well-being.

Without well-defined ADEI goals and boundaries, BIPOC librarians can become overextended, shoulder unsustainable workloads, and experience burnout.

In addition, organizational inaction on ADEI goals can create dissonance for BIPOC librarians, which can undermine engagement and, over time, erode trust in leadership and colleagues. We recommend organizations set clear, strategic ADEI goals aligned with their mission, capacity, and reward systems. These goals should be broken down by department and role, integrated into staff responsibilities and compensation, and supported with appropriate evaluation and recognition.

4. Realizing BIPOC Potential in the LIS Profession and Beyond

BIPOC librarians need opportunities to explore their strengths, clarify their core values, and pursue meaningful work within the library. Supervisors can help them evaluate different library career paths to find the best fit for their long-term goals, moving beyond vocational awe. **While librarianship can be a powerful avenue for social mobility and professional growth, especially for first-generation professionals, it is essential to acknowledge that over time other careers might better align with their evolving strengths and interests.** BIPOC librarians need support to fully realize their potential, whether within the library or beyond it.

Additional Recommendations from the Dream Summits

The formal programs that we recommend would have the greatest impact over time. However, depending on available resources, OhioNet may want to consider alternative ideas proposed at the Dream Summits:

Research and Data Collection on BIPOC librarians

- Support member libraries in tracking BIPOC librarian representation, retention, and career progression. Highlight libraries that excel in these efforts.

Build Community

- Host regular networking events for BIPOC librarians to build community and connect with each other, as well as with library leaders, allies, and key partners.
- Create online avenues for BIPOC librarians to connect and find each other, including through profiles.
- Host and develop intra-institutional affinity groups for idea exchange within the LIS community, ensuring inclusivity in representation of diverse identities and experiences.
- Prioritize programming for isolated BIPOC librarians, providing targeted support to enhance their community integration.
- Partner with other LIS groups and associations to create joint initiatives and programs.

Celebrate and Elevate

- Elevate the presence of BIPOC librarians in Ohio by creating opportunities to celebrate their work and impact. Raise awareness of their contributions to their roles, the community, and ADEI.
- Use newsletters, social media, and other OhioNet channels to highlight BIPOC contributions and achievements to member libraries and communities.

General Professional Development

- Offer Appreciative Inquiry training for librarians and libraries.
- Offer conflict resolution and empathy training.
- Offer services and programming to support career planning for BIPOC librarians seeking advancement, exploring career transitions, or setting strategic goals.

ADEI Advancement

- Support a community of practice for ADEI practitioners that facilitate information sharing, learning, and collective experimentation.
- Partner with other institutions to offer ADEI training and learning opportunities (e.g. Kirwan Institute, Kaleidoscope Institute, University of Michigan, etc.)
- Share and provide access to recommended DEI and ADEI resources

Advance ADEI at organizational levels

- Create a dedicated ADEI position, mid-career residency, or term liaison at OhioNet to spearhead ADEI initiatives, actively engage with the BIPOC community, and oversee the implementation of relevant programs and events.
- Integrate ADEI strategies into OhioNet's next strategic plan.
- Elevate ADEI visibility at events and conferences to underscore a strong commitment to these efforts.
- Offer organization-wide workshops and consulting services to help libraries advance their ADEI or DEI goals effectively.

ADEI Vision Statements, Best Practices, and Research



From the interview data, three interdependent areas of ADEI organizational focus emerged: (1) Empowering BIPOC Librarians to Thrive, (2) Unleashing Potential through Inclusive Libraries, and (3) Embracing the Energy in Differences. The consulting team developed vision statements and best practices that articulate an ideal future in which libraries fully realize and meaningfully integrate ADEI. The statements focus on creating inclusive and positive library environments by strategically amplifying ADEI practices successfully prototyped by Ohio libraries and librarians. Emphasizing relationships, trust-building, and initiating change within ourselves, these vision statements are written with an appreciative mindset and a strengths-based approach, highlighting personal agency and responsibility in each organizational role.

Each vision is accompanied by a literature review focused on supporting the underlying principles and best practices highlighted in the vision. This literature review, prepared by Nimisha Bhat, highlights the scholarship in library and information science.

Vision 1: Empowering BIPOC Librarian to Thrive

BIPOC librarians are dynamic and influential professionals in the LIS field. Confident in the value of their purpose and identity, they serve as visionary innovators, leaders, mentors, and empowering colleagues who ignite positive change within their libraries. Leveraging their unique expertise, backgrounds, and networks, they play a pivotal role in creating user-centric library services that transform and expand the reach of libraries. And by advocating for equitable access to information and empowerment for all, they create libraries that are truly places for everyone - where all individuals feel valued, respected, and empowered.

They serve as inspirational role models and trusted leaders within the diverse and vibrant communities they belong to and advocate for. They maintain autonomy and discernment in choosing when and how to embrace this role, recognizing that prioritizing their well-being is ultimately what matters most. Their distinct origin stories fuel their passionate engagement within libraries, actively advancing a legacy that champions opportunity through education. They adeptly navigate a delicate balance between their professional and personal/cultural identities, purposefully presenting their authentic selves as an opportunity for others to also embrace who they uniquely are. They cultivate the ability to constructively confront bias and preconceived

notions, and they strategically discern whose opinions hold weight and where to focus their energy. To thrive, they center their attention on amplifying the positive relationships around them and their transformative impact within libraries.

BIPOC librarians flourish when they connect with colleagues of color in vibrant professional communities. These dynamic networks of diverse people and ideas foster joy, creativity, innovation, and inclusivity; alleviate isolation; and provide renewal and professional growth.

As leaders, BIPOC librarians pay it forward by guiding the success of the next generation of BIPOC librarians. They boldly advocate for their needs and ensure the valuable work they do in the library is recognized, knowing that making their contributions visible allows people to come to know and appreciate their important contributions. They uplift the BIPOC community by recognizing their unique strengths, celebrating their achievements, and the positive impact they make on the LIS profession every day.

Best Practices for BIPOC Librarians

- Access to and time in psychologically safe spaces that inspire, support connection, and emphasize inclusivity.
- Engage in ongoing coaching and receive constructive feedback to support their personal and professional growth.
- Develop an awareness of their assumptions, about themselves and others, and cultivate skill in determining whether those assumptions are true.
- Seek work environments that
 - recognize and affirm their distinct value and contributions, and provide them with the confidence to express themselves and exercise influence
 - acknowledge and honor them for their unique roles as vital pillars of their communities and compensate them accordingly, while not expecting them to speak on behalf of their entire community
 - provide them with opportunities to lead initiatives beyond those related to identity.

Literature Review

Conscientious efforts are necessary to ensure that underrepresented librarians' involvement, contributions, and leadership roles in professional organizations, committees, task forces, and other activities focusing on underrepresented groups are neither trivialized or dismissed, but are accordingly regarded, encouraged, and supported as being as significant and as prestigious as participation in other types of organizations (Beaudin et. al, 1990). The special skills and contributions of underrepresented librarians to these activities are invaluable and should be recognized for their importance. Often such activities are a primary avenue for underrepresented librarians' professional growth, development, and contribution. By committing to a common goal

of uplifting all librarians to thrive, libraries allow BIPOC workers to live authentically and bring their unique and creative perspectives to meet organizational and user community needs. According to Shearer and Chiewphasa (2021), “Imagining spaces where BIPOC staff thrive is forthrightly an appreciation of what can happen when power dynamics are redistributed more equitably and marginalized voices are amplified to the fullest extent possible. Asset-based perspectives allow BIPOC individuals to claim their workplace instead of playing along to performative ‘solutions’ that fail to engage in meaningful progress and reparations.”

Vision 2: Unleashing Potential through Inclusive Excellence

Inclusive leaders - frontline supervisors, managers, and library directors - empower libraries to provocatively reimagine librarianship through an ADEI lens. Their actions model the standards for advancing a thriving, diverse, and inclusive LIS (Library and Information Science) workforce.

Their leadership brings the organization’s ADEI values to life, empowering BIPOC librarians through everyday practices. They approach ADEI work as fundamentally relational, inspiring collaborations across differences and skillfully addressing tensions constructively. Through their openness, active listening, empathy, commitment to transparency, and adeptness in addressing conflict and facilitating critical conversations, they create environments where authenticity and creativity can thrive. ADEI is a priority and core to what they do.

Inclusive leaders recognize that their greatest strength lies in empowering the people they work with and for. They demonstrate an unwavering commitment to their own personal growth and responsibility, embracing vulnerability as they strive to embody their best selves in leading and serving others. To achieve this, they cultivate a culture of trust by listening deeply, communicating often, failing forward by acknowledging mistakes, and seeking continuous feedback from, and responding to, those they lead. Inclusive leaders prioritize equity and inclusion by seeking to better understand and address the individual needs of each BIPOC librarian to foster their success. Leaders show BIPOC librarians that their unique skills, perspectives, and contributions are valued by offering professional development opportunities, eliminating barriers to participation, and prioritizing access to mentors who advocate for them within the profession. As a result, BIPOC librarians can meaningfully contribute and realize their potential in meaningful ways that align with their personal goals.

With inclusive leadership at the helm, libraries are environments where everyone can flourish.

Best Practices for Inclusive Leaders

- Intentionally develop authentic and trusting relationships with all librarians and staff, creating an environment where everyone feels safe, valued, enabled to participate, and has a clear pathway for professional growth. Be accountable for cultivating an inclusive culture.

- Embrace diversity as a foundation of strength, leverage varied perspectives and experiences to propel librarianship forward to better serve patrons and user communities. Invite engagement and dialogue with diverse and dissenting voices to better understand distinct organizational views and ideas.
- Actively connect, acknowledge, and engage the expertise of others, including BIPOC librarians, inviting opportunities for librarians and staff to lead initiatives with new challenges and “stretch” opportunities that advances their careers in the profession.
- Model effective allyship, utilizing humor, working through discomfort and tensions, and embracing openness, vulnerability, and humility.
- Advance ADEI to help each person reach their full potential and amplify their best selves.

Literature Review

Library leadership and direct supervisors are a primary area within organizations that can have the biggest effect on workplace culture and environment (Heady et. al, 2020). When leadership is inclusive, supervisors, managers, and administrators have the power to develop their staff by investing in them and their goals. An inclusive leader provides a workplace that is comfortable, equitable, and provides psychological safety for BIPOC librarians (Magurany & Dill, 2022). This could include such actions as promoting workers to positions in which they can take part in decision making, reevaluating salaries and benefits to better support workers who come from financially impoverished communities, or dedicated funding for workers to develop their perspective through research and scholarship. An antiracist paradigm for diversity in hiring and staffing might take this one step further to include an investment (and potential redistribution) of resources to support workers from historically marginalized communities (Brook, Ellenwood, & Lazzaro, 2015). Professionals at all stages of their careers are able to succeed when they have access to groups and networks that encourage personal growth and are attuned to the particulars of life and career situations (MacKinnon and Shepley, 2014). For librarians of color, this means having an awareness of the specific challenges minorities in monocultural environments face (Anantachai, Booker, Lazzaro, and Parker, 2016). Mentorship that allows for expressing authentic and intersectional identities requires compassionate approaches to supporting and encouraging marginalized librarians. When mentoring affirms the experiences of participants and is founded in empathy, mutual development built on trust occurs for both mentor and mentee (Lucey and White, 2017). Particularly in academic environments, librarians of color need the guidance of those who have managed to identify and overcome the challenges inherent to being a minority in higher education (Brown et. al, 2018).

Vision 3: Embracing the Energy in Difference: Co-Creating and Sustaining a Diversity Library Community

Together, members of the library community acknowledge their active role in co-creating an appreciative and inclusive environment built on mutual care, ensuring that every person is seen,

heard, and believed. They recognize that the many differences in personality, perspective, background, and experience that members bring are what enables libraries to grow and innovate.

Members acknowledge that navigating tension lies at the core of advancing meaningful DEI efforts. Understanding that tensions are normal within any organization, they proactively develop skills to navigate these situations constructively and with heart. They embrace the inherent paradoxes within groups and choose to appreciate them rather than seek to minimize, assimilate, or control them. They strive to see the best in others, actively working to transform disagreement into shared exploration, judgment into curiosity, assumptions into appreciative questions, and defensiveness into self-reflection for growth. They encourage and assist one another in engaging in critical conversations that both reinforce inclusive behaviors, accountability, and build relationships.

Members recognize that diversity, equity, and inclusion rely on a relational foundation and are best advanced through daily conversations and interactions, making incremental progress with each step. These everyday collective efforts contribute to co-creating their ideal culture, which brings them into closer alignment with their articulated inclusive values. Members seek to foster genuine connections with those who are different from themselves, actively listening to, learning from, collaborating with, and growing alongside those with an origin story distinct from their own. To do so effectively, each member is committed to honing their allyship skills in meaningful ways, aiming to bring out their best qualities such as compassion, curiosity, empowerment, kindness, and respect. They strive to develop trusting relationships, seeking advice, sharing expertise, enjoying humor, offering grace, and apologizing when needed, while maintaining accountability to ensure continuous growth.

Inclusive libraries are a continuous work in progress. A genuine commitment to advancing ADEI in impactful ways fosters inclusivity at all levels, from peer interactions to organizational decisions. With curiosity and from love, members work diligently to create safe spaces where diverse opinions can be freely expressed, enabling BIPOC librarians to bring their authentic selves to the table and eliminating the need for code-switching. Inclusive libraries courageously explore and model ways of connection that embrace the energy in difference, supporting all to thrive.

Best Practices for Members of Inclusive Libraries

- Learn how to navigate tensions constructively and with compassion, recognizing and valuing the differences that make a difference.
- Give feedback in a kind and supportive way that recipients can hear and understand; receive feedback with an open mind, turning any defensiveness into self-reflection and an opportunity for growth.

- Foster effective team and committee dynamics, soliciting everyone's ideas and perspectives and distributing engaging and challenging assignments.
- Understand and practice allyship, recognizing how it differs from saviorship; strive to understand the experiences and perspectives of BIPOC librarians, use individual power and privilege to amplify others' voices, and work toward creating more equitable and inclusive environments for everyone.
- Together co-create a vision of an ideal inclusive culture that articulates desired behaviors and ways of interacting, and strive to put that vision into practice. Transform inclusion from a goal into a habit by implementing the systems needed to support it.
- Recognize where the organization is now and make intentional, iterative changes through experimentation, understanding that mistakes are part of the process and perfection is not the goal. Continuously assess for impact.

Literature Review

Sense-making, community narratives, and community development practices are often inextricably tied to cultural contexts and cultural identities. As a profession, we have a pressing need to ensure our new and existing professionals reflect the cultural knowledge and experiences of those we serve in order to ensure responsive and relevant collections, services and programs. When fully realized, having a culturally competent library staff results in excellent relationships between the library and community stakeholders, improved user satisfaction, and provides a dynamic and responsive work environment for library staff as well (Rivera, 2013). Diversity in the library workforce is worth striving for not just because it will make the profession better, but because a robust sense of social justice requires it (Peterson, 1996). Libraries in the twenty-first century should and must represent the vibrant, messy, beautiful, complicated, and diverse communities they serve. It is the responsibility of this profession to support marginalized voices and perspectives within its institutions, to be challenged by those voices, and to be changed by them (Brook, Ellenwood, & Lazzaro, 2015). A diverse and culturally competent staff is perhaps the only way to create safe, welcoming spaces and to develop the services that patrons need and want. To reach a place where library workers can use the creative potential of difference to transform academic libraries, all fronts must be acted on simultaneously, because just as the mechanisms of oppression are interlocking, resistance to them must also be complex and interwoven. More and diverse voices must be present in the conversations that determine library policy and practice, and those voices need to be invested with the power to be heard. This will require radical changes in the way that hiring and merit are determined, and an environment that will not alienate antiracist colleagues and colleagues of color, but give them room to flourish (Brook, Ellenwood, & Lazzaro). Ettarh (2014) suggests "intersectional librarianship" as a means for working effectively with diverse populations. An intersectional perspective can be developed by "learning to become allies ... not just learning about the issues that affect the underrepresented but also learning how our own biases and privileges make it difficult for us to build alliances" (Ettarh). Being surrounded by colleagues who understand their role in advancing

anti-racism would allow a greater focus on DEIA work itself, without the need to constantly defend its necessity for a healthy organization. And even if resistance surrounding anti-racism efforts arise, we would be more willing to push the boundaries and confront library leadership because we could seek support from an in-house and culturally proficient BIPOC community (Shearer and Chiewphasa, 2021).

Appendix A

Design of the ADEI Questionnaire

The Appreciative Inquiry questionnaire was developed with guidance from the OhioNet Planning Team and the ADEI Library Cohort, drawing on interdisciplinary literature about successful retention and recruitment practices for BIPOC professionals and students. The assessment questions were carefully crafted to better understand BIPOC librarians' experiences across their careers in the library and information science field focusing on the people, practices, and organizational elements that most supported or enabled their achievements, opportunities, growth, advancement, and sense of inclusion.

What factors supports retention efforts:

Self-efficacy Self-efficacy: a belief in one's abilities. Opportunities to develop and refine skills Network of resilience and support when facing prejudice/racism	Professional identity and networks Support networks both personal and professional Increase experiences that reinforce professional identity with minimal personal identity interference. Link and leverage cultural capital with their professional identity.	Positive experiences Minimize the accumulation of negative experiences and excessive challenges Genuine feelings of inclusion and belonging Alignment with values Autonomy, mastery, purpose	Organizational commitment to DEI Mentoring and active sponsorship Proactive support from peers and leadership BIPOC-focused programs that offer support at various stages of career development
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The questionnaire assists to better understand how and when BIPOC librarians experience key moments of connection, inclusion, value alignment, and advocacy. It examines who supports and empowers them, what these behaviors and actions look like, and how value alignment is achieved. Additionally, the questionnaire explores BIPOC librarians' vision for an inclusive library, including its leadership, culture, and roles, and how they want their identities to be acknowledged by their colleagues in this ideal environment. Each question aims to uncover the role of community, the internal relationships and interactions that make a difference, what accountability to ADEI looks like for individuals and organizations, what a BIPOC librarian's network of support looks like, and what environmental factors can most effectively mitigate racism, prejudice, and equity gaps.

ADEI Questionnaire

Icebreaker

1. What is your origin story? How do you self-identify your ancestry, race and or ethnicity/ethnicities?
2. Thinking back when you first decided to become a librarian, what most attracted you to the profession? Today, what is still attracting you? What is giving you energy at work at the moment?

Peak Experience

3. As a librarian, recall a time when you felt most alive, excited, and involved in the profession.
 - a. What were the most important factors that contributed to making this a peak experience?

Empowered to Thrive

Libraries are at their best when they excel at seeing, valuing, and empowering the talents of a vibrant and representative workforce .

4. When you think back on your library career including library school, early-career experiences, or where you are now, who are the people who made a positive difference in your work life? This can include a library colleague (peer or leader) who invested in your success or professional advancement.
 - b. What did they do for you?
 - c. What specific behaviors, actions or support did they provide to you that were significant?

Culture of Inclusion

Inclusive colleagues create and foster the conditions that allow everyone - across and with their differences - to be at and to do their best, to see their value, and to belong as well as participate in ways that are safe, engaging, appreciated, and fair (Ferdman, 2021).

5. Tell me about a time when you have been part of a team or group where you felt seen and you experienced a sense of connection and belonging?
 - d. This could include a formal or informal group, a professional association, BIPOC community, or other group/team setting.
 - e. How do you feel when you are in this group? What made it possible for you to contribute and why?
 - f. Could you give examples of specific behaviors and group features that made this an empowering, inspiring, and inclusive experience (e.g. communication, leadership, shared values, working style)?

- g. Based on this story and others like it, what are some lessons, best practices to take away?

Dream of the Inclusive Library

- 6. Imagine you woke up two years from now, you go to work and find you are in the best library environment of your life. You know you are valued and you are energized by your work. You are growing professionally and having a significant impact.
 - h. Describe what you see? Who is doing what? What are you doing?
 - i. What has changed the most?
 - j. How are you being acknowledged and valued by colleagues and the larger organization? How is your origin story known and recognized by your colleagues?
 - k. What is exciting for you in your work?
 - l. Based on your images you just described, what are 1 or 2 action steps that would ensure that talented and enthusiastic librarians like you stay in the profession?

Celebrating our Strengths

- 7. Based on all the responses and stories you have shared today, what would somebody who knows you the best say are your signature strengths?



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