

**2021-22
DIVERSITY
EQUITY AND
INCLUSION
ASSESSMENT**



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Executive Summary

KCLS has committed to its core values of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). As part of its work, the organization undertook a year-long, holistic review of the current state of DEI in the library system. Led by KCLS Director of DEI Dominica Myers, a diverse group of staff convened to examine internal and external influences using both quantitative and qualitative methods. This group worked in sub-teams, each of which had a specific area of focus and set of methods for gathering rich, reliable data. The four teams were: Community Asset Mapping, External Interviews & Reports, Internal Documents, and Library Experience. KCLS retained two consultants, Co/Lab Capacity LLC and BERK Consulting, to analyze the data and produce strategic recommendations for its DEI work over the next five years.

This report begins with a broad overview that sets the context and describes the methodology of the assessment. Next, it summarizes the methods and findings of each team, then lists the specific recommendations that were derived from that area of work. Following the individual sections, the report examines all recommendations holistically and integrates them into an overall DEI strategy for the next five years. The strategy and its recommendations are focused primarily on high-level, overall direction. This is because they are intended to inform an upcoming work planning process, in which specific time-bound goals and activities will be identified for each library, region, and department.

This report is both a culmination and a beginning. It represents more than a year of systematic inquiry conducted by a dedicated and diverse team. From the data gathered, this report draws strategies and recommendations for how KCLS should focus its DEI efforts over the next several years. This report, like DEI work at KCLS, centers the most impacted. Centering the most impacted means trusting, valuing, and lifting up the lived experiences of people and communities who are most affected by structural inequities (Centering Voices Workgroup, 2018). It means approaching decisions by asking how they will affect those most excluded, rather than how they will affect ourselves or a perceived majority or dominant group.



Key Findings

The assessment included a comprehensive community demographics and language analysis that will undergird future library planning. It found that, of the more than 1.5 million residents who live within the KCLS service area, almost half identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC). One-third of the community speaks a language other than English as their first language. Spanish is by far the most common primary language other than English. A quarter of residents were born outside the United States, with the most common countries of origin being India, Mexico, China, Vietnam, the Philippines, South Korea, Canada, Ukraine, Taiwan, and Ethiopia.

Engagement with community partners through surveys and interviews helped to further characterize community needs and desires, as well as highlight potential areas for collaboration. The assessment found that communities are struggling to access basic needs, including affordable housing, food security, reliable transportation, and access to healthcare. While almost all partners were familiar with core library collections, there was a steep drop-off in awareness for all other types of services. Partners wanted culturally relevant services, programs, and resources, particularly in languages other than English. They also expressed interest in accessing library resources and services in community spaces, and sustainable programs and services that support long-term systems change, rather than stand-alone or temporary programs. External community partners also encourage KCLS to work with impacted communities to determine how data should be gathered, created, used, and shared to make collective decisions that help communities achieve their goals.

Examination of library operations and the ability to deliver on DEI values for patrons and staff drew on a range of data from staff surveys, listening sessions, and interviews, demographic data analysis, and facilitated Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) sessions at all locations. U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) self-reported data for 1,030 staff showed that overall, KCLS staff was 71% White and 29% BIPOC. This is significantly less diverse than the area KCLS services (48% BIPOC). Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous communities are particularly underrepresented when KCLS staff is compared to overall county population. In higher-paid professional and administrative roles, such as librarians and regional and department leadership, the disparity becomes more extreme.

Responses to staff interviews and surveys revealed concerns about occurrences of microaggressions, racism, and bias from patrons, and from other staff. There were several bright spots in communication practices, and promising signs that KCLS is on the right path to living into its DEI values, but also a sense that there is more work to do. With the assessment complete, staff are eager to see progress on diversity and representation, world languages access, training, accessibility, autonomy, community partnerships, and programming.

An internal subcommittee identified and examined 45 of the highest-priority key internal documents through a DEI lens such as policies, procedures, guidelines, and instructions, whether formal or informal. The result was a recommendation for each of the identified documents, suggests overall best practices for internal document assessments, and a proposed tool for future policy creation or review on a standard cycle.

KCLS conducted a scan of the national field for best practices to help define the path ahead in sharing this work and creating DEI accountability with community. These practices include making DEI content highly visible and interactive on the public website, both highlighting and integrating DEI content, combining data and community engagement to hold the library accountable to community, investing resources to hold the organization accountable for progress internally, specifically welcoming the most impacted, and empowering the most impacted communities to lead.

Next Steps

Taken together the findings of the assessment lead to four primary strategies:

1. **Systematically apply a DEI lens to internal processes and resources (Systems).** KCLS must have appropriate internal infrastructure and support in place, including policies, practices, and resource allocations in and outside the DEI Department. Additionally, reviewing existing practices for DEI and applying a DEI lens in the creation of new ones must be built into larger KCLS systems and processes so that the work happens regularly and consistently.
2. **Co-create and evaluate services with most impacted communities (Co-creation).** KCLS should proactively engage most impacted communities at every stage of public service design and development. Communities should help form initial ideas and directions, participate directly in the design and implementation of services, and provide evaluation and feedback.
3. **Adopt a trauma-informed approach to staff well-being (Staff Well-Being).** Staff who feel that they are cared for, valued, and belong in the library are best positioned to create that same type of environment for patrons. Yet KCLS staff, especially BIPOC staff working directly with the public, may be exposed to or experience trauma rooted in racism and bias. By investing in supports for most impacted staff, KCLS can express that their well-being matters – that they matter.
4. **Publicly communicate DEI accountability (Accountability).** KCLS needs to communicate its DEI goals and progress clearly and proactively. Doing so keeps the organization publicly accountable for its commitments to its most impacted communities. This requires a communication strategy that both highlights DEI efforts and makes them easy to see in one place, but also weaves a DEI perspective throughout everything KCLS does. It also means working with most impacted communities to re-examine what data KCLS should gather and how it should be shared.

As a large, high-profile system, KCLS has faced challenges along its DEI journey. It has navigated situations without easy answers and critics for doing both too much and too little to advance DEI. Throughout this assessment, KCLS has engaged in deep learning and reflection centered on most impacted communities. By investing in such a robust and thorough process, KCLS has demonstrated a commitment to actualizing its DEI values. DEI work is never finished. This assessment should be seen not as an end to learning or organizational self-reflection, but a launching pad for the learning and action that is still to come.

Acknowledgments

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Most importantly, thank you to the community leaders and partners who took the time and energy to offer their invaluable feedback to our assessment process. We truly appreciate you.

Sincerely,

Dominica A. Myers, MNPL (she/her)

Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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