



OREGON LIBRARY ASSOCIATION  
EDI &  
ANTIRACISM  
COMMITTEE

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## **OLA Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Antiracism Committee Statement Calling for Meaningful Support for BIPOC Library Workers**

In response to ongoing violence against Black people in the United States, we, the OLA Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Antiracism Committee, reaffirm Black Lives Matter, and that Black people and African Americans, including library patrons and workers, are living under the weight of constant violence and other forms of discrimination and oppression. BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) library workers regularly experience racism in the workplace from patrons, colleagues, and/or managers. The movement to ban books that discuss race or racism, and erase the reality of the BIPOC experience further stresses and demoralizes library workers. This trauma can be mitigated through impactful racial equity and antiracism efforts.

Kaetrena Davis Kendrick and Ione Damasco's (2019) groundbreaking research on the low morale experience of BIPOC librarians found that BIPOC "who experience low morale cited inconsistent or superficial support or implementation of EDI programs as a factor that increased their low morale; and the most used phrase within their discussions of the diversity rhetoric enabling system was 'lip service.'"

**BIPOC library workers and patrons are not okay.** They need your support, and they need it now. This committee and allies will not sit by and passively observe our patrons, neighbors, and families being terrorized, murdered and otherwise abused. We invite Oregon libraries to join us in making it explicitly clear how and why Black Lives Matter.

BIPOC and other individuals from marginalized groups are the key to re-invigorating libraries and our communities. We need their ideas, their spirit, their energy and love. Diverse workplaces are more creative, innovative, and productive. Yet BIPOC often experience trauma in majority White spaces, mental and physical health disparities, disparities in access to quality care, and pressure to prioritize excellence at work over their well-being. The Urban Library Trauma Study's research found that "a significant number of participants of color reported receiving racist abuse... Participants who had experienced racial abuse also reported not feeling supported by their colleagues or administration." A sense of inclusion and belonging is often missing from library work environments for those who are marginalized.

**What are you doing** to create a work environment where workers from marginalized groups feel physically and psychologically safe, included, and valued?

**We ask** that you look at the systems you have in place for supporting the well-being of your library staff and fostering inclusion and belonging and question how well these systems reflect a commitment to antiracist practice. Whose comfort and whose well-being are you prioritizing? Reflect on the following questions and use them to craft policy and practice:

1. Are you publicly responding to racially motivated acts of violence, censorship and/or discrimination that are happening locally, nationally and/or globally?
2. Are you offering accessible support opportunities for your staff and community members who are experiencing fear, anger or confusion around identity-centered acts of hate?
3. On what policies and criteria are you basing your responses when community members are faced with trauma, and are these policies inclusive of being active in responding to attacks on marginalized individuals?
4. After what situations are you creating public-facing resources to offer support, and are these efforts consistent for situations impacting Black and Brown lives?
5. Who are the people you are prioritizing when it comes to support and resources following traumatic events?
6. How do you respond to criticism from patrons and staff and does your response differ depending on the race or status of the individual sharing the criticism? Does your staff feel safe criticizing you directly or do you often hear about concerns indirectly?
7. How do you support staff who have experienced racism first-hand in the workplace? Is there a clearly-communicated option to confidentially report acts of racism or prejudice and procedures for investigation and response?
8. What have you explicitly done to encourage work-life balance and wellness for your staff, especially over the past 2 ½ traumatic years?
9. How do you check in with your employees or create an environment in which employees feel safe coming to you when they're struggling?
10. Do you assess the workload of your BIPOC staff as part of staff wellness, including ensuring that the responsibility for EDI in your library does not wholly fall on their shoulders?
11. Do you offer advancement, professional development, networking, and other career-boosting opportunities to BIPOC staff?
12. Is EDI work done by your BIPOC staff part of their compensated workload, including participation in committees and affinity groups? How are you tangibly displaying the value of this work?
13. How do your policies, procedures, systems and institutions sustain a pattern of systematic oppression?

If you're interested in learning more about antiracist work, please visit these two projects of the OLA EDIA Committee:

- [Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Antiracism Toolkit](#)
- [Overdue: Weeding Out Oppression in Libraries podcast](#)

Questions or comments can be directed to the OLA EDIA Committee co-Chairs, Ericka Brunson-Rochette and Meredith Farkas at [edicommittee@olaweb.org](mailto:edicommittee@olaweb.org)



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**Mission Statement:** We recognize libraries serve a vast range of individuals with unique experiences and characteristics. We encourage an inclusive environment that promotes freedom of speech in conjunction with strong policies that protect patrons and library staff of all gender, national origin, ethnicity, religion, race, sexual orientation, disability, income level, age and all other personal, social, cultural and economic perspectives.

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Kendrick, Kaetrena Davis, and Ione T. Damasco. "Low morale in ethnic and racial minority academic librarians: An experiential study." *Library Trends* 68.2 (2019): 174-212.

[core.ac.uk/download/pdf/489844612.pdf](https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/489844612.pdf)

Urban Librarians Unite. *Urban Library Trauma Study*. 2022, [urbanlibrariansunite.org/ults/](https://urbanlibrariansunite.org/ults/).