Developing and Implementing a Diversity Plan at Your Academic Library

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Introduction

This article outlines steps that librarians can take as they begin to develop diversity plans for their institutions. The aim is to provide broad, simple, adaptable guidelines that librarians charged with creating diversity plans for the first time can use as they begin the process of developing and implementing their plans. This article will highlight steps towards developing and implementing diversity plans. As the Association of College and Research Libraries notes, "Diversity is an essential component of any civil society. It is more than a moral imperative; it is a global necessity. Everyone can benefit from diversity, and diverse populations need to be supported so they can reach their full potential for themselves and their communities."[1] Diversity isn't just a moral imperative or global necessity. As Winston points out, it makes sense for libraries and higher education to pay attention to diversity. Writing about diversity at small liberal arts colleges he notes a "relationship between diversity and organizational success or performance in the academic environment. The institutions that are rated most highly in terms of diversity are also rated highly in relation to other measures of organizational success. . . these results suggest important implications for academic libraries, based on the relationships between larger institutional efforts to foster diversity and similar efforts undertaken within the college library."[2]

Library diversity plans are important for the library, but also for the larger campus community. Dewey and Keally note that "academic libraries are well qualified to play leadership roles in advancing campus community diversity initiatives because of the inherent commitment to encompassing people and the multitude of ideas reflecting the breadth and depth of the human experience."[3] The creation of a diversity-specific plan in the library is one way to help advance diversity initiatives internally, and perhaps to help encourage the advancement of initiatives externally as well. Library diversity plans should be developed collectively by a representative group and result in a regularly reviewed, assessed, and revised document. They should be based in a strategic framework addressing the library's underlying beliefs, central diversity values, vision of diversity, mission, diversity goals and strategies and should be driven by climate assessment, include a timeline for review, and include meaningful goals, objectives, and strategies.[4] A diversity plan may include a statement of diversity values or goals, a description of strategies for recruiting ethnically/culturally diverse staff to the library and retaining them once they are hired, an outline of programs that promote ethnic/cultural sensitivity in the workplace, results from a work climate assessment, and other similar elements. It may be a stand-alone document or part of a broader document, such as a library strategic plan on an institution-wide diversity plan.[5]

Drafting a diversity plan specific to the library does not have to be an onerous or drawn-out task, and has some distinct advantages over simply incorporating diversity into a general strategic plan or an institutional plan. A library-specific, stand-alone plan helps librarians direct their efforts in making services and buildings more welcoming and inclusive and communicates these efforts to library personnel, university administration, and patrons.

It consists of local approaches and goals in the context of organizational missions and situations.[6] As Jody Gray writes in the American Library Association resource on strategic planning for diversity, "creating a Diversity Plan for the library is one of the most important actions we can take to ensure that diversity and inclusion become integral to the way our institutions function, both internally and externally."[7] A library-specific diversity plan will ideally: help guide library actions by creating a holistic framework with diversity as a foundation; serve as a codified statement of a library's commitment to diversity; illustrate the actionable steps the library will take to work towards diversity; and help bring the library in line with professional standards.

Creating a Library-Specific Plan

It is important to create not just *a* diversity plan, but *your* library's diversity plan. Diversity can be campus specific. There are, of course, legal definitions and protections in place, such as Americans With Disabilities Act requirements, for example, that are vitally important. Each library's plan will have to take these into account, but it is important to create a plan tailored to a specific library, not just a plan for the sake of having a plan. It is also important to take into consideration the environment of higher education and the diverse populations on your campus, broadening diversity beyond race and gender to include at-risk students, nontraditional students, international students, and distance students.[8]

A library-specific plan has to include actions that are achievable for your library at your institution. One of the ways to do this is to look at the populations on your campus and in your state and see how your plan can support them. Be realistic about your expectations and focus on local or regional diversity. In Montana, for example, 6.5% of the population are Native American – it made sense for us to focus on these populations and cultures because they are regionally significant for the state and for our campus. When we create a plan that focuses on making people aware of Native cultures and also on meeting the needs of Native students we are creating something that is regionally significant, reflective of our circumstances, and achievable.

Environmental Scanning

Several authors recommend conducting an environmental scan or some other kind of assessment ahead of drafting a plan.[9] Others note the importance of assessing diversity initiatives in order to measure progress and success.[10] An environmental scan is certainly something that can help make a case to administrators. The advantage of an environmental scan is that it grounds a diversity plan in the local atmosphere and reveals specific areas that need to be addressed. The disadvantage is that it takes time. For example, our diversity plan had to be created within a rather short timespan – one that did not provide the possibility for an environmental scan. Our solution was to include action items that ensured that we would engage in an environmental scan as part of the institutionalization of our plan. This allowed us to complete our plan and also ensured that we would indeed conduct a scan and use it to inform future iterations of the plan.

Gathering Documents

Most universities have some statements or documents pertaining to diversity. Finding these, and reading and becoming familiar with them, will be helpful in preparing your diversity plan. Discovering what kinds of documents already exist at your institution will mean that you are not trying to create a plan in a vacuum. Finding, reading, and integrating existing

documents will save time and provide a head start on preparing a library-specific document. Already existing documents will help make a case for your diversity plan because you will be able to illustrate that diversity is a concern (or even a priority) of the institution as a whole. Any useful documents or definitions you come across will be able to be used as the basis of your plan. An institution's existing framework will help set the plan into an institutional context, giving it weight with administration and hopefully making it easier to convince the library of the importance of a diversity plan.

Many universities might have information scattered throughout the institution. It may take some searching to find what is out there. Check the university's website for definitions of, or statements about, diversity. Look at specific webpages within the website – there may be statements about diversity on the Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action, the president's, the provost's, the dean of students' or the student affairs webpages. The university's strategic plans might mention diversity. Universities can have multiple strategic plans, including separate institutional diversity plans, so be sure to check into all of them. The vision or mission statement of a university might include a statement about diversity. Finally, if your university has a dedicated diversity officer, check that person's webpage and make contact with him or her to determine if you are missing any critical documents. Remember to look for specific statements about diversity, but don't forget to look more broadly at statements that support diversity without actually using the word "diversity" – such as statements that address equity of access, freedom of inquiry and expression, and campus climate and safety.

The library may also have documents that could be useful. Look for definitions or statements on diversity and explore the library's strategic plan, vision, and mission statements, as well as any other documents or statements on accessibility, equal access, or freedom of expression. Check with state governing boards that work with higher education. For state funded institutions, look also at any statements or documents that address diversity more broadly at the state level. Be sure to see if any other departments or units on campus have their own internal diversity plans or standards. If a unit or department already has a diversity plan, make it a point to read the plan and to make contact with colleagues in that office to learn what steps they took in drafting and implementing the plan. Pay special attention to offices in student affairs. They have long been aware of and concerned with issues of diversity and will likely have strategies and resources they are willing to share.

Communicating in Order to Build Support

If you do not currently have the support of your administration, drafting a proposal is a good place to start. It can help convince administrators that a diversity plan is a necessity for the library and that it is possible to develop one without too much trouble. The emphasis here is on securing administrative support. Some administrators might not be familiar with the diversity initiatives in librarianship. Likewise, they may or may not be familiar with diversity initiatives on campus. A proposal provides an opportunity to explain how professional standards can intersect with campus policies and values.

If you have the backing of your administration already, draft an email letting all library personnel know that the library will be crafting a diversity plan. Throughout the planning process be in regular communication with everyone in the library. Because everyone in the library should ideally be a part of making the plan a success, it is necessary to model clear communication from the initial stages of planning. Letting colleagues know that administration supports the plan and that a committee will be drafting a plan, asking for feedback, and expecting everyone to contribute to the plan's success is important information to share. The committee should have broad representation, and communicating

the genesis of a planning process allows colleagues to begin thinking about participating on a committee.

Whether you are drafting a proposal for administration or an email to colleagues – or both – each should include several elements. It should bring together the ACRL Diversity Standards, documents and definitions from the library, and documents and definitions from the university to help ground the plan in an institutional and professional context. Take time to illustrate the benefits of a plan for the library. For example, the plan could help with library decision making, set a model for diversity planning on campus, strategically outline goals to be achieved over the next few years, serve as a basis for future strategic planning and visioning, or support future reaccreditation. Think about what the plan will do for the library and lay out that case in your communication. Be clear, draw on existing resources, and set the stage for plan development.

Form a Committee

There are several important elements to consider when setting up a planning committee, including clearly establishing this as a working committee in which all members will be expected to contribute, and selecting a variety of members who broadly represent the library. These two things go together – the committee should be small enough to actually produce a plan, but large enough to try to capture a variety of interests. The planning committee should also have a specific task and a specific timeline. Ideally, the person chairing the committee charged with drafting the plan will be the person to choose other committee members. In some cases, though, a dean or other administrator will select the committee membership. If this is the case, try to work with administration to convince them of the importance of keeping the committee small, with members from throughout the library who are willing to work.

The committee should represent the library broadly, include people with an interest in (though not necessarily a specialization in) diversity, be comprised of people who can commit the time, and include people with specialized skills that might be useful in developing your plan, such as assessment coordinators and instructional designers. The chair should have knowledge of diversity and should be the person most responsible for diversity initiatives at your library. If library faculty will be responsible for the final endorsement of the plan the chair of the committee should be a faculty member. The primary role of the committee should be to develop and secure endorsement of the plan. Leave the administration of the plan to a separate committee, which may or may not contain some of the same members. But don't neglect the formation of a committee to administer the plan. Williams notes that the "success of the plan will. . .depend on the existence of a diversity committee at the. . .library level as a means to broaden ownership of and accountability of the plan."[11]

Creating a Plan

The planning committee will have to work through several steps, though the order of the steps might vary depending on how the committee prioritizes its work. Important steps include researching diversity plans and developing action items, reviewing action items, sorting out or combining duplicates, and prioritizing the most important ones and organizing them into goals. The committee will also be responsible for drafting contextual statements and definitions, if needed, and serving as point people for questions, comments, and feedback. Some of the specific steps include:

1. Researching diversity plans, professional standards, documents in existence.
2. Drafting action items and goals.
3. Sharing the plan with select stakeholders.
4. Soliciting feedback.
5. Revising the plan based on the feedback of select stakeholders.
6. Sharing the plan with the entire library.
7. Soliciting feedback.
8. Revising the plan based on feedback.
9. Securing endorsement from governing bodies.

Define and Contextualize

To build your plan you will need to define diversity, develop a contextual statement, develop a new or build upon an existing diversity statement, outline your action items, goals, and strategic choices, and create a lifespan for the plan and a timeline for review and revision. If possible, try to use a definition of diversity that already exists at your institution. If your institution doesn't have a definition, or has a narrow definition that only looks at legally protected classes, consider broadening your definition to include things like diversity in ideas and perspectives and socioeconomic or political status. With the definition and the mission, don't create what you can borrow. See if you have an institutional mission statement that explicitly mentions diversity. If so, use that, adapt it, or build upon it, mentioning the specific ways in which your library supports diversity. While your diversity definition should be established before you begin drafting your plan, your mission statement might be the last thing you write – growing out of the action items you decide upon in your plan.

Your contextual statement provides the rationale for your plan and sets it in a larger context. There are three important ways libraries can contextualize their plans. The first is within the institution: the contextual statement is the place to highlight other institutional documents, such as strategic plans, that mention an institutional commitment to diversity. The second is to professional organizations: aligning your plan with ALA, ACRL, and the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) will provide an opportunity to illustrate how these professional organizations are committed to diversity and librarianship, and will establish your plan as part of a larger series of professional initiatives. The third lies in better articulating the work that librarians do with human rights. The ALA and IFLA both have documents pertaining to the importance of human rights in our professional ethics and standards. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which provides 30 articles proclaiming the rights of all people everywhere, includes the following:
Article 18: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. . ."
Article 19: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers."
Article 27: "Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits."[12]
The first two articles have been explicitly mentioned by the ALA. The third is something that all libraries should consider as well.[13]

Internal to librarianship, the ALA's Universal Right to Free Expression: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights states that "freedom of expression is an inalienable human right."[14] The IFLA committee on freedom of access to information and freedom of expression – FAIFE – exists as "an initiative within IFLA to defend and promote the basic human rights defined in Article 19 of the UDHR."[15] Diversity and freedom of expression and

inquiry are interrelated, and incorporating specific and explicit human rights language in your plan helps raise awareness of human rights and of the role of librarianship within them.

Developing Action Items and Setting a Lifespan for the Plan

The bulk of your plan should be the action items, goals, and choices you decide on implementing at your library. This is what people will think of when they think of the "diversity plan," and they will shape the course of diversity efforts at your library. Action items are specific initiatives you want to accomplish in your library. These can be more broadly grouped into goals, which are more general in nature. Goals can be grouped into strategic choices, which are statements of commitment to diversity in a specific areas. These are the terms we used at our library – you can use terms that are best understood at your institution. But nesting items in this way provides a nice structure for your plan. For example:

> Strategic Choice: "Our library will promote diversity in our services and programming."
> Goal: "Collaborate with campus partners to support diversity."
> Action Item: "Partner with the Office for International Students to host a library open house for new international students."

Remember – you want action items that speak to qualitative diversity as well as quantitative diversity. So include action items that deal with creating a climate in which diversity can flourish, as well as items that address specific recruitment goals, for example.

Look at the examples in the ACRL Spec Kit 319 – specifically at the sample plans from other libraries. Look also at the diversity plans of any other libraries you know, including your peer institutions. Look at action items that may be in other institutional plans. For example, we were able to directly use some of the action items in the university's larger institutional plan as part of our plan, which linked our plan to the university and also helped us with some "ready made" action items. Consider what you are already doing well at your library and what you'd like to codify in your plan. Look at the ACRL Standards and see if there is anything you can pull from there, thus rooting your plan in that document and providing you with more "ready made" items.

Your action items should be a mix of some easy, low-cost initiatives and longer range, more resource-heavy initiatives. Think both small and large – develop items that you can achieve and those that you want to achieve but may seem a bit out of reach at the moment. Including them in your plan, and having library-wide endorsement of the plan, will mean that they are on the radar and that resources might be redirected. And remember, give your plan a lifecycle so that you will be able to prioritize easily achievable action items early in the cycle and still have time to work on bigger initiatives. Our plan has a lifecycle of three years – during which time we will achieve progress where we can and begin progress toward longer term goals. At the end of the cycle we will review the plan, remove any one-time-only items that were accomplished (such as developing multilingual signs, for example) and develop new action items or revisit action items we couldn't use in the first iteration of the plan.

Communication and Implementation

In general, you want to be sure that you keep the entire library informed of the plan development throughout the process. Regular email communication, starting with emails announcing the committee members, the committee charge, and the timeline will help people

become aware of the plan. Continue regular communication as you draft the plan, letting everyone know that the plan belongs to the whole library and that everyone in the library is responsible for it. Let people know that you will be requesting feedback once the plan is drafted. As action items and goals become solidified, share them with the key stakeholders who will be responsible for coordinating efforts towards achievement. Sharing relevant parts of the plan with key stakeholders, inviting their feedback and incorporating it where you can, will mean that when you share the full plan with the entire library you will already have some key players behind your efforts. The only person who should receive the plan as a whole before the entire library does is the library dean, with whom you should meet to get feedback before announcing the draft plan to the library as a whole. It is extremely important to get buy-in from the dean and the library administration. As Aronson notes, the "single most important ingredient in successful diversity programs is commitment from the top." Diversity has to be – and has to be seen as – a leadership priority.[16] Hall adds that "the upfront support of the individual to whom you report as well as the director of the institution, if not one and the same, is critical for getting diversity efforts off on solid ground. The lukewarm support of either one can thwart the initiative before it even takes flight."[17]

Once you have incorporated the feedback of key stakeholders and the dean, share a draft of the plan with the library as a whole – via email or at a special meeting if possible. Invite comments, questions, suggestions, and revisions and reply to all feedback received. Thank people for their feedback, answer questions and explain things as necessary. Gather all feedback, share it with the planning committee, and incorporate or revise action items as you can. Share the revised plan with the library, letting people know that you have incorporated feedback where you could and pointing out specific instances of revision. The governing body of your library should be asked to formally endorse the plan. Once endorsement is secured, share the plan with your campus community and post it on the library website.

Once your plan is in place, start to think about how you will administer it: dissolve your planning committee and form a diversity committee charged with administering the plan. The chair of the planning committee might want to chair the diversity committee – especially if that person is your diversity librarian. Prioritize action items on a year by year basis. Ask for a budget – you will likely have some action items that will require resource allocations of some kind. Try to secure even a small budget to tackle your prioritized action items. Funding for diversity is a practical necessity for implementing diversity initiatives, and also serves as a way for your library to "walk the talk" of diversity.

As you make progress towards your actions, remember that excellent diversity programs evolve from excellent diversity plans. . .best practice in diversity management in higher education and its libraries is driven by. . .a diversity plan focused on fostering a climate where a diverse staff and user population feel welcome, valued, and respected. . .that focuses on effective preparation, recruitment, development, and deployment of personnel in order for the library to have the best possible staff, composed of personnel who represent and can serve a diverse community.[18]

Conclusion

Smallwood and Becnel note that "Libraries are in a pivotal position to strengthen their communities by giving voice to the diverse members of their communities through programs, collections, and services and, most importantly, by creating environments of inclusiveness, respect, empowerment, and empathy. . .[we] must take action to draw in and work hard to better serve" diverse patrons.[19] A library-specific diversity plan is one way in which librarians can explicitly commit to working towards an environment of inclusiveness, respect,

empowerment, and empathy. This article outlines steps that librarians can take as they begin to develop diversity plans for their institutions. The aim is to provide broad, simple, adaptable guidelines that librarians interested in pursuing or charged with creating diversity plans for the first time can use as they begin the process of developing and implementing their plans. Ideally, as more libraries develop diversity plans, librarians will continue adding to the literature of plan development and implementation in order to share best practices for diversity plans in the profession.

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