



OREGON LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

EDI ANTI-RACISM SPECIAL COMMITTEE

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Dear colleagues,

The social events we have witnessed in the past months triggered a series of new statements, training, and resources offered by professionals of different fields and institutions to reaffirm their commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI).

At this point, there is no doubt we have all heard of EDI. Some of us have noticed these three letters misused in articles, statements, documents, policies, guidelines, terms, and conditions. Unfortunately, this acronym has become the new institutional jargon. The adversities black, indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) and members of minority segments in our society face on a daily basis are not a brand-new event, not a trend, and not a tendency. As such, the Oregon Library Association EDI Antiracism Committee believes we, as library professionals, need to refrain from using the letters EDI without understanding what each one of these letters represent in its social context.

Let's not allow the common sense of equality destroy the fight for EQUITY. EQUITY means that we uplift and empower those who have been historically and are currently oppressed by dominant culture. Treating everyone "the same" is a weak and false statement, especially when there are still human beings from different races, classes, gender and individuals with disabilities who are not seen, heard, served, protected, and respected as they deserve. Creating library programs for "all" does not affirm or reiterate your library's commitment to EDI. Creating programs that uplift and empower folks who have not been seen, heard, protected, and respected as they deserve, does.

Hiring different races, ethnicities, and gender-identity variances, doesn't show commitment to DIVERSITY, especially if we still refuse and/or are hesitant to empower these individuals — if we don't invest in them and if we don't give them opportunities to thrive and advance in their careers. "Diversifying" means applying variation. We need to go above and beyond that definition in order to affirm our commitment with DIVERSITY. When we say we support diversity, we need to reject racist and xenophobic ideas on immigration policies, we need to be comfortable being part of uncomfortable conversations, we need to hear without being defensive, and we need to advocate for causes that might even work against our personal secure position (in the racist structure) to benefit those who are oppressed.

Being "included" is a matter of consideration. INCLUSION is much more than that — it is our duty to evaluate and recognize when laws, processes, terms, conditions. Our everyday reality as a whole needs to be audited, adjusted, adapted, and sometimes completely changed in order to benefit people who are disadvantaged. This commitment may require us to fight for a benefit of which we will never partake or a right of which we will never need to exercise.

For those of us excited about this statement, let's not forget, if you are NOT racist, it doesn't mean you are anti-racist. An anti-racist person will disagree with statements such as "this is not my problem." An anti-racism advocate will recognize privilege without feeling victimized or attacked. A person who is anti-racist, will not speak ill or participate in conversations to dismiss, demoralize, and demonize other human beings based on their status in this country or the color of their skin. Anti-racist people don't passionately defend themselves stating they are not racists — on the contrary, they take time to examine their own biases and they educate themselves in order to become true allies.

Please understand we are not criticizing anyone's attempt to be a better human being and do better when it comes to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. We are only bringing to your attention these words need to be used in the right context so they can be as effective as they are meant to be.

We are excited to continue our work on OLA's behalf to develop resources and tools for the association, its members, and the Oregon library community that will support EDI and anti-racism work. The committee is actively developing an Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-racism toolkit. This toolkit is an educational resource that will help guide libraries in reflecting on their institutional practices and policies, and assist in guiding them to move forward. We look forward to strengthening our partnership with the OLA board and the association, and anticipate a long-lasting relationship that will help move Oregon libraries forward with EDI and anti-racism work.

Sincerely,

OLA EDI Antiracism Special Committee