

# Making Decisions Centered Around EDI

**M**any library associations recognize the importance of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), including the Illinois Library Association, Public Library Association, and American Library Association. In response to the Associations' call to action, many libraries have committed to EDI work which regularly translates to training for staff and issuing broad statements. While these are important steps, library staff have reported they are unclear about how to apply what they have learned to their daily work. To combat this, the Downers Grove Public Library has developed an EDI Decision-Making Tool to help staff members and the Board of Trustees when beginning the decision-making process. With explicit consideration of EDI in these moments, libraries can move past the more obvious methods and regular strategies of doing the work. Staff members of every level are encouraged to utilize the EDI Decision-Making Tool, which will help them develop strategies and actions to be more mindful as they go through a choice point that will impact library services. Because this tool was purposefully designed for all staff members, it can be applied to any library regardless of type, size, or budget.

**The tool consists of four questions to ask yourself when making a decision that can impact internal and external library services:**

- How is my decision being influenced by white supremacy or dominant culture?
- Is a historically, intentionally, and traditionally marginalized people group (HITMPG) being harmed directly or indirectly by my decision?
- Who has a voice in making this decision besides me?
- How does your decision affect other staff and community members, in the short term and long term?

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The tool then has suggestions to consider how to reflect on the questions and explore the potential impact of your actions. For the Downers Grove Public Library, we encourage staff who are unclear and looking for additional guidance to reach out to our Equity Advisory Team, which consists of staff members, a Board Trustee, and community members. If your library does not have an Equity Advisory Team, it is important to seek help from a resource or organization that would have direct experience in that area instead of reaching out to an individual HITMPG staff member. For example, when posed a question about inclusive language on a Disability Awareness Month bookmark, a member of the Equity Advisory Team reached out to multiple disability advocacy and awareness organizations who provided valuable feedback. In this instance, the team offered a recommended response, however, in many cases the team will refer staff members to resources and offer suggestions. The ultimate goal of the EDI Decision-Making Tool is to empower staff to make informed decisions on their own with an always-on EDI lens.

The EDI Decision-Making Tool is not a checklist or decision tree to arrive at a final answer, but rather, it is a guide to help you walk through your process by proactively asking questions and being intentional. Working through the tool is a nonlinear process and can feel cyclical at times. There is never one right answer or way to proceed. Instead, the focus is to work on cultivating ideas and suggestions that are both effective for the organization and that are equitable, diverse, and inclusive. While the EDI Decision-Making Tool does not need to be applied to every situation, it is best used for choices that can impact internal and external library services, such as (but not limited to): policies and procedures, large communications, hiring practices, large purchases, proposal items, programs, and safety protocols.

The tool is most effective when library workers use it at the beginning of the decision-making process. The tool can also be used after a decision has been made, in reflection, to hold yourself accountable on your personal EDI journey, as well as to evaluate the outcomes of previous decisions. As we continue to learn and grow, we can improve our decision-making and re-examine our past choice points; this may result in recognizing a need to change a previous decision.

Downers Grove Public Library's EDI Decision-Making Tool. Credit: Cindy Khatri and Van McGary.



In order to make sure that the EDI Decision-Making Tool is used effectively and consistently, it is important to make sure that all staff are trained on the tool on a regular basis. For the Downers Grove Public Library, this includes onboarding training, annual training, and regular discussions throughout the year. To provide a visual reminder and allow for easy access, the tool is posted in all workrooms, in all managers' offices, and on our Staff Wiki, which is our internal webpage.

This tool has been successfully implemented in various situations at our library. For example, when we received the American Indian Library Association Talk Story Grant to fund collection items and programming featuring Native experiences, we intentionally supported Native vendors. Not only were the materials made by and about Native peoples, the vendors chosen were also Native-owned and supported Native causes. Utilizing the EDI Decision-Making Tool helped encourage us to support HITMPGs beyond the program's presenters.

Another example was a question presented to the Equity Advisory Team by library programmers about how to be inclusive when planning an activity kit for Lunar New Year. Staff were unsure what terminology to use (Lunar New Year vs. Chinese New Year), what language to utilize on the handout, and what crafts to include in the bag. Utilizing the tool, the team made recommendations to the programming staff for them to further explore, learn, and reflect before making their decision.

To supplement the EDI Decision-Making Tool, the Downers Grove Public Library has introduced the Curious Q&A newsletter and drop-in sessions. The internal newsletter documents how the Equity Advisory Team utilizes the tool to demonstrate the process while discussing a choice point. Additionally, staff members are invited to share their own experiences and insight on a topic, as well as pose additional questions, at the drop-in sessions.

With regular use of the EDI Decision-Making Tool, it becomes a part of who we are and how we function in work and in life. This will help library workers uphold the core value of serving everyone by incorporating equity, diversity, and inclusion into all that we do. **ILA**

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