

# DEI in Action:

## Implementing Project Ready at Your Library

Time breakdown: 10:45-11:45 (3 minutes: 1 minute introduction, 2 minutes Land Acknowledgement)

### **RR:**

Hello, everyone! Thank you for coming to DEI in Action: Implementing Project Ready at Your Library. My name is Ruth Ronnau and my pronouns are they/them. I'm a Youth Services Librarian and Outreach Coordinator at the Oswego Public Library District.

### **AP:**

My name is Alea Perez, my pronouns are she/her, and I'm the Young Adult Services Manager at Forest Park Public Library, here in the Chicago suburbs.

### **RR:**

Today we're going to be talking about our experience with Project Ready as both a participant and as the moderator at the Elmhurst Public Library, from which both Alea and I have since moved on.

### **[Change slide - transition to Land Acknowledgement]**

Before we begin our presentation on Project Ready, we'd like to acknowledge

# Land Acknowledgement

Time breakdown: 10:45-11:45 (3 minutes: 1 minute introduction, 2 minutes Land Acknowledgement)

## **AP:**

Before we begin our presentation on Project Ready, we'd like to acknowledge the:

Peouaroua (Peoria) - 1818

Bodwéwadmi (Potawatomi) - 1838

Myaamia (Miami) - 1846

Hoocąk (Ho-Chunk) - 1832

Kiikaapoi (Kickapoo) - 1839

as the original inhabitants of this land, now known as Illinois.

We recognize that these nations have been caretakers of this land since time immemorial, are still here in the present, and will be here moving forward despite their forced removal from this land, beginning in the 1800s, and the physical and cultural genocide of their people at the hands of the United States government over centuries.

We strive to recognize the harm we, as non-Indigenous settlers occupying Native land, have caused through colonization. We also strive to act in intention in order to rectify past harms as best as we can through education and action. We urge you to explore self-led Landback University educational modules on [landback.org](https://landback.org) and to

consider visiting the Field Museum's exhibit, *Native Truths: Our Voices, Our Stories*, which opened to the public in May of 2022 and created in partnership with 130 collaborators representing over 105 Tribes.

We further urge you as individuals and as members of larger professional organizations to donate to land back initiatives, to genuinely include Indigenous representation in your spaces by creating reciprocal partnerships with local Indigenous groups, assisting your area schools with culturally appropriate history and literature projects, as well as including Indigenous representation in your programs, displays, bibliographies, and in your strategic planning every month of the year, and not just in November. Please also consider the lens through which other areas of your collection perpetuate falsehoods or depict Indigenous nations as belonging to the past, rather than the present.

Lastly, we recognize that words have meaning and so we urge you to be intentional in your use of the word "decolonize." To truly decolonize libraries is to reject the principles libraries were founded on and continue to center today.

To learn more about the nations mentioned, please check out their websites. Links are provided in our uploaded resources in the ILA conference space.

Add to handout, do not read out:

<https://peoriatribe.com/>

<https://www.potawatomi.org/>

<https://miamination.com/>

<https://ho-chunknation.com/>

<https://www.kickapootribeofoklahoma.com/>

<https://www.ktik-nsn.gov/>

<https://kickapootexas.org/>

# What is Project Ready?

— — —

- Program: Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program
- Fiscal Year: 2016
- Federal Funds: \$569,583
- UNC-Chapel Hill's School of Information and Library Science Staff (white):
  - Sandra Hughes-Hassell, Ph.D.
  - Casey H. Rawson, Ph.D.
  - Kimberly Hirsh
- Advisory Board: 5 individuals
- Partners: 6 individuals
- Content Contributors: 22 individuals
- External Reviews: 3 individuals

<https://ready.web.unc.edu/about-us/>

<https://www.ims.gov/grants/awarded/re-40-16-0012-16>

Time breakdown: 10:48-10:51 (3 minutes)

**RR:**

So what exactly is Project Ready?

According to the website, Project Ready is a “series of free, online professional development modules for school and public youth services librarians, library administrators, and others interested in improving their knowledge about **race and racism, racial equity, and culturally sustaining pedagogy**. The primary focus of the Project READY curriculum is on improving relationships with, services to, and resources **for youth of color and Native youth**.”

Please note, while we are quoting some of this content directly from the Project Ready website, there are multiple instances where the staff included Black youth and Black individuals in general under the term “person of color” in their content, which we disagree with. Due to their history in this country, Black individuals should be acknowledged separately, as you would in the term BIPOC, or Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

Though the three main contributors, Sandra Hughes-Hassell, Casey H. Rawson, and Kimberly Hirsh, are white; they worked collaboratively with their advisory board, partners, and content contributors, many of whom are Black, Indigenous, or people of color.

In the Project Ready Positionality Statement, they write, “Our intention in creating this curriculum is not to center our voices or experiences as white women, but to be part of the ongoing conversation among library staff and educators about how to create more equitable and inclusive library programs and services for youth of color and Indigenous youth. We believe that it is not solely the responsibility or burden of communities of color or Indigenous communities to call attention to the issues of systemic racism, oppression, and inequity and to do the work of addressing them.”

Altogether, their curriculum comprises 3 sections (Foundations, Transforming Practice, Continuing the Journey) and a total of 27 modules, and also includes outside articles, videos, podcasts, and presentations, the vast majority of which are written or produced by people who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color.

# Project Ready Samples

From Module 9:  
Racial and Ethnic  
Identity Development



## REFLECT

In your [journal](#), write a short autobiography exploring your own racial, ethnic, or tribal identity. Consider these questions:

- When and how did you become aware of your racial, ethnic, or tribal identity?
- Describe a moment when your racial, ethnic, or tribal identity was important to, or took on particular meaning for, you.
- Describe a moment when your racial, ethnic, or tribal identity was important to, or took on particular meaning for, others.
- How do you benefit from your racial, ethnic, or tribal identity?
- How do you suffer or “miss out” because of your racial, ethnic, or tribal identity?
- How did your racial, ethnic, or tribal identity impact your experiences at school? In the library?
- How does your racial, ethnic, or tribal identity continue to impact your life today?



## REFLECT

When faced with discipline disparities like these, many people argue that students of color – in particular, Black students – are simply more poorly behaved than white students. At this point in the curriculum, we have explored several topics that might help you effectively counter this argument, including:

- the historical association between Blackness and criminality that arose after the Civil War as a result of the prison labor system ([Module 2](#));
- the systemic connections between the criminal justice system and the education system ([Module 5](#));
- implicit biases and their relation to stereotypes and media messaging ([Module 4](#));
- racial identity development frameworks ([Module 9](#)).

In your [journal](#), compose a response to the argument that students of color are simply “bad.”

From Module 14:  
(In)Equity in the  
Educational System

## Racism is:

- a system of advantage based on race;
- a system of oppression based on race;
- social and institutional power PLUS racial prejudice.

## Racism is NOT:

- racial prejudice, hatred, or discrimination.

Let’s unpack this definition, because this conception of racism may be different from the ways you have heard the term used in other contexts. Racial equity advocates define racism as a **system** – a set of things that work together for a common purpose or with a common outcome. Remember from our definition of “system” above that once established, a system does not require planning or initiative of individual people. Because inequity and differential treatment are embedded in the social, economic, and political systems of our country and therefore seen as “normal,” *systemic racism would exist even if racial prejudice and racial hatred were completely eliminated.*

Racism is both a system of **advantage** (for whites) and a system of **oppression** (for BIPOC). The system was created to concentrate **social and institutional power** among those designated as “white,” and to exclude all others from receiving these benefits. Again, because these systems are self-perpetuating, differential outcomes according to race will continue to be produced by them regardless of the action or inaction of individual people within the system, unless and until the system itself is changed.

Finally, racism is more than mere prejudice, hatred, or discrimination based on race. As we noted above, no one is completely free of prejudice, and it is certainly possible for a person of color to have negative prejudices toward white people. What elevates racial prejudice to racism, however, is the social and institutional power that allows one group to carry out systematic discrimination using the major institutions of society. Because, in the United States, these institutions were created and are still largely controlled by white people, racism refers specifically to a system that advantages whiteness and oppresses people of color and Indigenous people.

Why is it problematic to define racism as interpersonal prejudice or bias based on race? When we define racism as personal rather than institutional, our conversations about what is racist often devolve into a discussion of “what’s in a person’s heart” rather than the impact of their beliefs and behaviors. This limits racism only to intentional and conscious acts and therefore erases the real impact of both unintentionally harmful behaviors and large-scale systemic oppression and discrimination. Defining racism in a systemic way doesn’t ignore individual instances of overtly hateful behavior, but instead expands our understanding of what is “racist” to include less conscious, unconscious, and institutional manifestations.

From Module 3:  
Getting on the  
Same Page:  
Defining Race &  
Racism

## RR:

Each module begins with a list of what participants will learn by the end of that module.

Modules vary in length, and each cover specific concepts and material, with the information slowly building to more difficult concepts. For example, module two covers the History of Racism, followed by Getting on the Same Page: Defining Race & Racism, and then Implicit Bias and Microaggressions.

The modules also include definitions to terms like, race, racism, implicit bias, and microaggression, among others, which helps provide a shared understanding, which is particularly helpful if participating in a group. Here, on the righthand side, is an image of Project Ready’s definition of racism from Module 3: Getting on the Same Page: Defining Race & Racism. In this particular definition, they break down what racism is, and also what racism isn’t, as well as responding to the question: “Why is it problematic to define racism as interpersonal prejudice or bias based on race?”

Their answer: “When we define racism as personal rather than institutional, our conversations about what is racist often devolve into a discussion of “what’s in a person’s heart” rather than the impact of their beliefs and behaviors. This limits racism only to intentional and conscious acts and therefore erases the real impact of both unintentionally harmful behaviors and large-scale systemic oppression and

discrimination. Defining racism in a systemic way doesn't ignore individual instances of overtly hateful behavior, but instead expands our understanding of what is "racist" to include less conscious, unconscious, and institutional manifestations."

Without breakdowns of definitions like these, our discussions could have easily been filled with miscommunications that might have kept the discussions moving in circles, rather than moving forward through the curriculum.

The first module also provides a PDF of the Project Ready Journal. Throughout the curriculum participants are asked reflective questions that they can write answers to in this journal. I've included two different examples of reflective segments from both Module 9: Racial and Ethnic Identity Development, and Module 14: (In)Equity and Ethnic Identity Development. Module 9's reflection asks participants to write a biography about the participant's own racial, ethnic, or tribal identity, and then asks specific questions to prompt the reader in their writing. Module 14's asks you to consider what you have learned in previous modules and compose a response to the belief that "...students of color are simply 'bad.'" These are just a few examples of how Project Ready's reflections are vital to its curriculum--it requires participants to think critically when reading the material.

When I participated, Alea offered to print journals for any staff who wanted one, or she made sure that we knew where the PDF was located so that we could type our reflections, rather than use paper. (I will admit that I did have Alea print a journal out for me. I find I enjoy physically writing reflections rather than typing them.) The journal and curriculum were thoughtfully designed to accommodate participants regardless of DEI knowledge--all it asks is a desire to learn and think critically.

# How and Why it Came to EPL

- Addressing racial/ethnic inequities in libraries
- Pandemic opportunities
- Admin concerns

Time Breakdown: 10:51-10:56 (5 minutes)

## **AP:**

Now we can dive into how and why it came to the Elmhurst Public Library.

As a person of color in a predominantly white profession, I've experienced discriminatory, white supremacist, or racist behavior firsthand and witnessed it being directed at community members and other staff in professional library settings throughout my career. Because it is my hope that I can help to make libraries safer than they have been for me and countless others for those newly entering the profession, as well as those who have stayed despite the abuse it can entail, it has been a priority of mine to push for genuine and lasting change in our profession in order to address some of those inequities.

Some of what I've had the misfortune to experience or witness has been the centering of whiteness in displays, bibliographies, collections, programs, and the crafting and enforcement of policy, in addition to ignoring or fostering a work culture that allows for BIPOC individuals to be treated as less than. The social, cultural, and political events of 2020 - to include the onset of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the murder of George Floyd - made it evident that our society has a ways to go in providing equitable spaces, access, and opportunities for all and that libraries, as a reflection of the communities we serve, are not exempt from the need to do and be better. It

cannot be emphasized enough: libraries are not, nor should they aim to be, neutral.

While I would never intend to suggest the pandemic has been a good thing for the world at large, it was a disruptor of what had previously been and in that disruption, our library found our pre-pandemic services were paced and focused just differently enough to allow the Kids' department to take on this educational opportunity. Our visitor count and program schedule were both making their way back to pre-pandemic levels but were not there yet, making it easier to accommodate than it otherwise would have been.

I became aware of Project Ready by chance in 2021, as I was investigating ways to begin this work within my department, and once it was on my radar, it was hard to avoid it popping up in library circles as something worthwhile to try. Through some digging around, I was able to see other states whose Associations had organized statewide cohorts to work through the material together and borrowed tools and timelines, as well as asked questions, in order to best shape it for my department. Much of what I initially learned and used for my own team came courtesy of the Children's Literacy Specialist at the Maine State Library, the Library Services Manager of Public Services at Santa Barbara Public Library, and the South Carolina Association of School Librarians (SCASL), from whom I borrowed the original EPL curriculum document, which differs from the version of the curriculum you've been shown today.

The questions I was asking individuals from the aforementioned organizations in March of 2021 included:

- Prior to facilitating the cohort(s) you've led, did you go through the Project Ready training yourself (either individually or as part of a cohort) or did you get any specific facilitator training?
- Roughly how long did/does each cohort run?
- How many participants were/are in each cohort?
- Were/are sessions held live/synchronously for all, or were some parts or work done asynchronously? If the latter, did you provide a digital space for asynchronous interactions to take place, e.g. Google Drive, Slack, other?
- How was/is the content broken up: by entire sections, by modules either individually or grouped, other?

Following the murder of George Floyd, the management team began meeting on a weekly basis in order to have our own group learning opportunities on the topic of race. This work was not yet extended to non-managerial staff, but it was always the goal to bring all staff into the fold, and I hoped to discuss race in the Kids department through many avenues, including Project Ready. And although we were able to start Project Ready within the Kids' department, it was not without some pause and consideration on the part of the administration, at first.

When I brought the idea to the administration in the spring of 2021, they expressed two major concerns that caused me to pause the implementation of the curriculum from August of 2021 to January of this year. First, the Administration was concerned that because I was not making this work mandatory within my department, I may be creating an environment where those not participating might feel excluded or vulnerable to retaliation for choosing not to participate; and second, that the curriculum covers serious, heavy material and staff may not be able to maturely participate.

I'll touch on the former concern later in our presentation but with regards to the second concern about the seriousness of the information we'd be consuming and discussing, I did my best to assure the administration that I trusted my staff, we would be building in agreements to foster an environment of respect, and that by allowing it to be voluntary versus mandatory, we were better ensuring that staff who chose to participate were aware of just how uncomfortable it might get but also how important it was that we faced that discomfort in order to be better situated to create change. Two months after the Kids' department began our work, Administration also started working through the Project Ready Curriculum.

# Elmhurst Demographics

- **Population: 45,326**
- **86.8% White, 1.5% African American, 6.2% Asian, 7.7% Hispanic or Latino, 9.6% Foreign born persons**
- **Median House Value: \$442,400**
- **61.3% of residents 25+ have bachelor degrees or higher**
- **Median Household Income: \$123,869**

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/elmhurstcityillinois>

<https://abc7chicago.com/dulles-cleaners-elmhurst-dry-anti-asian-sign-protest/10448274/>

<https://abc7chicago.com/student-elmhurst-nooses-found-york-high-school/10590732/>

Time Breakdown: 10:56-10:59 (3 minutes)

## RR:

Now that we've shared a little bit about how and why it came to EPL, we wanted to put the library into some community context.

Elmhurst is currently home to roughly 46,000 people, the vast majority of whom are white. 1.5 percent are African American, 6.2 percent are Asian, 7.7 percent are Hispanic or Latino, and 9.6 percent were born outside of the US.

The median house value is \$442,400 dollars and Elmhurst is being touted as one of the most desirable cities to live in in Illinois by the realtors who drop their information into my family's mailbox a few times a week. 61.3 percent of residents 25 and older have bachelor degrees or higher, with the median household income being roughly 124,000 dollars. Altogether this makes Elmhurst a predominantly white, and highly educated city.

At the beginning and during the pandemic, several incidents occurred that highlighted a racial divide within the city. I'd like to highlight two of those incidents here.

In 2020, a local dry cleaner placed two signs in his shop window that said, "President

Trump wins 70% of the Vote. Over 400 Electoral Delegates. Pray for the Removal of Demonic Chinese Influence in Our Country.” Though the signs did spark protest, and resulted in a protest outside of the business, the owner felt comfortable enough to print them and place them in his shop window until he was confronted by Elmhurst residents and the threat that he might lose business over bad publicity.

During the summer of 2020, after the murder of George Floyd, there was some minimal community pushback after staff created a display with a sign that said, “Black Lives Matter.” And later, in 2022, a display celebrating Black History Month featuring prominent historical events in United States history. The display included homemade protest signs, which some library staff felt was too political, and were ultimately removed.

In 2021, two nooses were found hung at the high school’s football field. The student’s apparent “intent was to draw attention to mental health difficulties of not being able to play sports during the covid-19 pandemic.” The superintendent of Elmhurst Community School District 205 and the Elmhurst Police Chief Michael Ruth condemned the protest. Their condemnation, while appropriate, does not negate that nooses were and are used to intimidate Black people--threatening them with death. Personally, I find it difficult to believe the high school student wouldn’t understand their actions to be a hate crime--which the Elmhurst police did investigate, but ultimately dismissed.

These two incidents are not representative of the town as a whole--after the murder of George Floyd, a group of neighbors started having about race in their backyards, and later became a formal organization, called The Backyard Caucus. After becoming a formal organization, they reached out to the library, the Elmhurst Art Museum, and the Elmhurst History Museum, to partner with them in creating programming for the community.

The group also compiled essays from current and former Elmhurst residents into a book called, “Stories of Race in Elmhurst,” which highlighted both Black, Indigenous, and people of color and white residents' experiences living in a predominantly white city. I read the book shortly after it was published, one of which was an essay written by a Black high school classmate of mine, which allowed me to understand what her high school experience was like at the same time as mine. While I was living a ‘typical’ high school experience, she was having to navigate going to a predominantly white high school, where, looking back now, the racial divide was evident--to those that were looking.

Elmhurst Public Library is a vital and prominent part of the community--which loves and supports the library at every turn. However, both the library and the city are not unlike other such institutions in Illinois--predominantly white with clear racial and socioeconomic divides. And this was the environment where we were hoping our work in discussing racism in libraries would bring about positive change.

# Beginning Preparation and Implementation

- Gauging interest
- Facilitator
- Scheduling
- Discussion groups
- Project Ready participant agreements

Time Breakdown: 10:59-11:09 (10 minutes)

## **AP:**

In preparing to bring Project Ready to my staff, I first had to gauge their interest levels, as participating was on a voluntary basis. As part of my probing, I made it clear to staff that they would not be penalized or retaliated against for choosing not to participate. It would not show up in formal or informal evaluations.

I also had to let them know that, unfortunately, some of this work would have to be done while staff were off the clock. I did my best to convey that I firmly believe individuals should be paid for work done on behalf of their libraries. However, I was not able to give them additional hours or decrease their current workloads. If they chose to participate, I urged them to complete what they could on the clock but if they couldn't, anything they chose to do outside of work hours was unpaid. Not ideal, to say the least, and ironically, this model might be called out for the inequities it creates for those unable to do free labor.

Not being able to adjust their workloads was another motivation for keeping our work on the curriculum voluntary, versus mandatory. I did not want to overburden staff or set them up for failure.

Additionally, I hoped to avoid the harm that would likely be caused from making it

mandatory. There might be those who were not coming to this work in good faith and with a willingness to learn, and others who might believe they are above causing or perpetuating harms or are serving as allies, when they in fact are not. Either type of participant could have caused the space to become hostile or unduly uncomfortable due to differing beliefs or expectations about what can and should be discussed in a library setting.

Ultimately, if there hadn't been enough interest, I would have had to revisit my messaging to staff--finding another way for them to understand the value of this work and how it connected with my goals for the department.

Project Ready was a perfect accompaniment to the DEI projects we had already started and those which I had hoped to complete in the future. We had already begun an audit of our picture book collection; were addressing year-round representation in our bibliographies and displays, and were working toward ensuring all cultural programs we provided for the community were being presented by members of the marginalized community the program was focused around.

#### **RR:**

This also included our efforts to provide more equitable service to the less affluent parts of Elmhurst, particularly on the north side, where a large portion of our Hispanic and Latinx population lived. On the North side, Conrad Fischer Elementary School had a dual language program, to support students whose first or primary language was not English, as well as those children interested in learning Spanish. We had also included Summer and Winter Reading logs into the library's quarterly newsletter, as we knew it might have been difficult for some families on the North side of Elmhurst to make it to the library, which is much more accessible to the south side residents.

#### **AP:**

Less obviously, we were addressing white supremacist values that so easily find their way into all libraries: addressing environmental impacts caused by supply consumption, trying to do more with less, creating false emergencies around projects and deadlines, and not respecting boundaries around hours worked.

Fortunately, most staff were already on board with working toward a more equitable workplace and we had a total of 10 participants, including myself, of 15 total staff, for a 66% participation rate. The remaining staff were unable to participate for various unknown reasons, while some staff simply felt it was too political for a library setting--preferring to believe that libraries can and should be neutral spaces.

I then had to consider who would lead the staff discussions. For the purpose of timing and budgeting, and not wanting to delay our start any further than it had been, I took it upon myself to serve as the moderator for my staff as we worked through the

curriculum.

In terms of the actual implementation of Project Ready in our department, here are some of the basics of how it worked:

We began Section 1: Foundations the third week of January and were due to finish that section the first week of June, at which time we'd take a break to implement our Summer Reading Program.

We then planned to return to the work in early August, running through mid-November for Section 2: Transformation and Continuity. Section 2 is where Project Ready begins to transform from exploration of ideas to action items.

In our department, the 9 staff, not including myself, were split into two small groups - 1 group of 5 and 1 group of 4 - based on a combination of schedule availability and known interpersonal relationship factors.

Once the groups were set, we met mostly consistently on the same day of the week for each group - Mondays for one group and Fridays for the other - every two weeks, with minimal time variance to help staff with planning out their own schedules. Once a date and time were confirmed, it was added to our desk schedule for staff to consult.

Since the groups were not large to start with, if one or two staff needed to skip the meeting, it was agreed by the group that the meeting would carry on as scheduled. However, if it seemed to be bad timing for a simple majority, I would email the group to make a collective choice on how to handle moving forward. Options included combining modules to maintain the schedule, skipping a module discussion, also to maintain the schedule, or neither combining or skipping, and simply adding a week to the end of the scheduled timeline to ensure all material was addressed as a group.

# Samples

Hello, Tuesday group,

Please find information on October's discussion below. :)


**Module 2: History of Race and Racism**

**Date:** October 4, 2022 at 12pm -- **If this no longer works for you, please respond to the group so that a collective decision can be made to reschedule or move ahead as planned.**

- Describe how and why the concept of race was developed.
- Explain how the concept of race was applied throughout history in ways that advantaged white people and disadvantaged people of color and Native people.
- Outline how historical advantages and disadvantages based on race have accumulated to create and maintain the racial inequities we observe today.
- Connect historical events and trends to your own personal and family history.

**Activities**

- Complete journal entries 1-9 for Module 2. (This stays private, unless you choose to share any reactions.)
- Read and view as much of the module materials as possible.
- Bring one question and one observation you'd feel comfortable sharing with the group.

 **FOUNDATIONS**

**Module 1: A & B**

**Month:** September 2022  
**Contact Hours:** 1

**Agreements and Introduction**

- Describe why learning about race and racism is critical for library professionals and educators.
- Commit to a set of norms that will guide your progress through the Project READY curriculum.

**Activities**

- Complete journal entries.
- Read and view as much of the module materials as possible.

**Module 2**

**Month:** October 2022  
**Contact Hours:** 1

**History of Race and Racism**

- Describe how and why the concept of race was developed.
- Explain how the concept of race was applied throughout history in ways that advantaged white people and disadvantaged people of color and Native people.
- Outline how historical advantages and disadvantages based on race have accumulated to create and maintain the racial inequities we observe today.
- Connect historical events and trends to your own personal and family history.

**Activities**

- Complete journal entries.
- Read and view as much of the module materials as possible.

**Module 3**


**Month:** November 2022  
**Contact Hours:** 1

**Defining Race and Racism**

- Define race, racism, and related terms in ways that are consistent with racial equity advocates' use of these terms.
- Compare these definitions to the ways that these terms are colloquially used.

**Activities**

- Complete journal entries.
- Read and view as much of the module materials as possible.

 **1**

Time Breakdown: 11:09-11:19 (10 minutes)

## AP:

Here you'll see, on the right hand side, a page excerpt from the spruced up curriculum I created for a group to help match dates to modules. This is not, strictly speaking, necessary but it is helpful in reducing confusion over the schedule and can be done more simply by creating a table in an Excel sheet with date and module pairings or using online calendars.

If you're interested in taking a closer look at the full curriculum in this format, please visit the ILA conference portal where you can find a copy for download.

## RR:

On the participants' side, having this schedule prepared and available to us in advance was helpful in understanding the time commitment I was making, and then, at least try, to plan ahead accordingly. As I was a part-time staff member who only worked 16 hours per week, with 8 of those hours manning the reference desk, I wasn't often able to use my work time to read the materials, and I was fortunate that I had time outside of work to read the modules. Its availability online also meant that I was able to read the materials wherever was most convenient for me--which oftentimes was while I was riding an exercise bike at the gym.

I'm unsure if any of my coworkers were able to do all, or some of the reading at work. It would not surprise me if most of them had to do the reading at home, especially as the library began getting busier. Earlier this year, the library began having in-person programming and had already removed time limits on library visits, so we were seeing increased foot traffic as patrons began feeling more comfortable coming to the library, and coming to the library for extended periods. Some staff also voiced their hesitance in reading these materials at the reference desk, where their computer screens could be viewed by the public. They were concerned about patrons viewing their screen and reacting negatively toward them while they were at work.

Though it would have been nice to get paid for doing this work, I was happy to do it at home--as a relatively new librarian, I plan to work diligently to make libraries equitable spaces; I would have been doing something similar regardless, though less organized and without the group discussion.

**AP:**

To the left you'll see a screenshot of an email reminder that I've sent to a group ahead of the next discussion time, once again with the aim of reducing confusion of what is coming up next. I enjoy using email scheduling features, available in Outlook and Gmail, in order to prep a batch of these emails ahead of time.

**RR:**

I know that my coworkers and I found the reminder emails to be incredibly helpful when we were having particularly busy weeks at the library. They were a welcome addition in keeping me on track for each session.

# Beginning Preparation and Implementation

- Gauging interest
- Facilitator
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- Discussion groups
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Time Breakdown: 10:59-11:09 (10 minutes)

## **AP:**

After creating the curriculum schedule and determining the group discussion schedule, I then had to determine how to create a discussion space that would be productive in working through anti-racism and DEI work.

One of the great features of Project Ready is its inclusion of a set of agreements, made available whether you're working through this individually or as a group. Project Ready's agreements (which they expand upon) for working together in a group are as follows:

1. Listen to understand, not to respond.
2. Share accountability for challenging racism and the dominant culture.
3. Step forward, step back.
4. Use "I" statements.
5. Brave space.

We also created posters for our in-person meetings at the Library to remind us of what we had agreed to, which I personally found helpful. If you implement this at your library and wish to do the same, we have provided a copy of our posters in the ILA conference space for you to download.

Project Ready's initial agreements were helpful in creating a space where staff felt comfortable discussing such sensitive topics. While I personally might have felt uncomfortable or wary of sharing racist experiences or hurtful ideas I have encountered or experienced in the past, these rules alleviated some of my discomfort. But I also believe that I would have felt that wariness or discomfort anyways and that confronting that discomfort head-on is what enabled my continued growth.

When discussing these additional agreements with the groups, two additional agreements were added --one is what I refer to as the Vegas rule - what is brought up in the discussion stays in the discussion and is not mentioned elsewhere without the express permission of other participants. And two, that we could addend the agreements at any time, making it a point to revisit our agreements at the top of each discussion for any addendums or changes.

These two new agreements were helpful in creating boundaries between the group discussion and our other library work. While Project Ready informed much of the DEI work we were doing, we couldn't share the particulars of our group discussions, which both made sure that Project Ready participants felt comfortable sharing without fear of judgment, but which also, hopefully, made sure that nonparticipants didn't feel excluded or potentially judged

With these plans in place, we began Project Ready in earnest, with our biweekly meetings.

## Afterwards - Our Own Questions and Other Possible Models

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- How did the manager being in the space impact things, for better or for worse?
- How did group size affect discussions?
- How did staff's familiarity with one another affect discussions?
- Would it be more impactful with strangers/non-coworkers?
- How did the racial composition of the group impact discussions?

Time breakdown: 11:29-11:35 (6 minutes)

### **RR:**

So what did we learn in the process of implementing Project Ready and what can you take into consideration?

Well, we wondered a few things ourselves.

The first one was: how did the manager being in the space impact things, for better or for worse?

### **AP:**

As the manager and moderator, I did my best as the moderator to lead staff through lulls in the conversation, but wasn't always successful in encouraging staff to participate. And while the accompanying personal journal for the curriculum is great at prompting folks to think through various components of the work, it is understood that journal entries are never open to required sharing. So instead, I have since made it a practice in later groups I've worked through this curriculum with to have participants come prepared with at least one question and one observation to share with their group. By coming with a question to pose to the group as well as an observation, it is asking participants to do some higher level thinking and to take some responsibility for furthering the discussion.

We also discussed how our experience might have changed if we had hired an outside moderator, or asked a colleague from a different department. Bringing in an outside party might have alleviated some of the power imbalance. However, whether hiring an outside contractor or having a staff member to act as the moderator, it is vital to recruit someone that is invested in DEI and anti-racism work, and that they are able to lead others through uncomfortable topics and conversations.

We've also considered how an outside moderator may not have an accurate understanding of what participants are bringing to the discussions in terms of prior knowledge. To that end, it might be helpful to administer a pre-assessment to give an idea of where folks are starting.

At EPL, we were lucky to have the opportunity to work with Ozy Aloziem, a social worker as well as Denver Public Library's first Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Manager, who administered a 39-question pre-assessment for us leading up to a staff in-service day. Some of the questions included...[screen cap reference]

While the responses to that particular assessment were anonymous for staff, meaning no one on our management team could see them at any point in the process, I could have readministered the assessment just within the Kids' department, with their permission, to get a better sense of where everyone was in their learning.

# Pre-Assessment Samples

How often do you think about racial equity? \*

☐ Rarely

☐ Sometimes

☐ Often

☐ Almost always

How knowledgeable are you about: core constructs such as structural racism, equity, justice, white privilege, internalized oppression, anti-racism, etc. \*

☐ Not at all knowledgeable

☐ A little knowledgeable

☐ Somewhat knowledgeable

☐ Pretty knowledgeable

☐ Very knowledgeable

How knowledgeable are you about: The history of racism in public libraries. \*

☐ Not at all knowledgeable

☐ A little knowledgeable

☐ Somewhat knowledgeable

☐ Pretty knowledgeable

☐ Very knowledgeable

Please rate your level self awareness: Awareness of your social identities and their cultural influences, and how they intersect \*

☐ Not at all aware

☐ A little aware

☐ Somewhat aware

☐ Mostly aware

☐ Extremely aware

Please rate your level self awareness: Awareness of your prejudices, stereotypes, and biases \*

☐ Not at all aware

☐ A little aware

☐ Somewhat aware

☐ Mostly aware

☐ Extremely aware

## AP:

On the slide, you'll see two of the eight pages of the pre-assessment. Some of the questions that I kept for others to consider using include: "How knowledgeable are you about: core constructs such as structural racism, equity, justice, white privilege, internalized oppression, anti-racism, etc.?" and "How knowledgeable are you about: the history of racism in public libraries?"

As I previously mentioned, Ozy's pre-assessment included 39 questions. While those questions were incredibly helpful for bigger picture, strategic thinking and planning, I found that 16 of them more specifically applied to teasing out the knowledge staff were coming into something like Project Ready with.

We have included this modified version of Ozy's pre-assessment in the ILA conference portal that you may consider using.

## Afterwards - Our Own Questions and Other Possible Models

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- How did the manager being in the space impact things, for better or for worse?
- How did group size affect discussions?
- How did staff's familiarity with one another affect discussions?
- Would it be more impactful with strangers/non-coworkers?
- How did the racial composition of the group impact discussions?

Time breakdown: 11:29-11:35 (6 minutes)

### **RR:**

When I participated, Alea acted as our moderator, and she was able to gently coax other participants into speaking when they seemed hesitant, and was able to keep the focus on racism against Black youth, youth of color and Native youth in the world and in libraries, without trivializing our own experience, but also reminding us that there isn't an equivalent, and any comparisons we made as white people were false.

It might have made things more comfortable for the other participants if we had an external moderator, rather than our boss due to the power imbalance. For me, personally, I had no problem with Alea being the moderator. From workplace discussions we had already determined that we were in agreement on racism's pervasiveness in American society and libraries, which meant I already felt comfortable. I am also comfortable in discussions--as a student, teachers had more difficulty getting me to stop talking, than getting me to start. My talkativeness did mean that I had to be cognizant when I was hogging the discussion time.

We also wondered: how did group size affect the discussions?

To reiterate, there were two discussion groups--one with five members, and another

with four. Once we got started in our discussions, it became apparent that being in smaller groups made it harder for participants to hide their discomfort. Participation was an agreement and with fewer individuals in the room, it became all the more important for everyone to be sure they were prepared to share.

It is definitely something to consider if you plan to Project Ready at your own library--having small group discussions might prevent more candid conversations.

From there, we wondered: Did staff's levels of familiarity with each other affect the discussions? And how did having staff at differing stages in their DEI studies affect the discussion and overall experience?

In preparing for this work to begin, it was important for me and participating staff to keep in mind - and to explicitly state more than once - that engaging in this work would affect everyone differently, whether they had already done some work in DEI topics or were coming to the work anew.

When listening to my coworkers thoughts during discussions, I had to keep in mind how my being both nonbinary and queer set me apart from my colleagues--right from the start. Adding in that I had already done--and continue to do--work to unlearn my own racism meant that the reading wasn't introducing new ideas, definitions, or others' experiences to me, like it was with some of my coworkers.

I had to recognize and feel comfortable in our differences in advance, so that if my initial internal reaction was frustration, annoyance, anger, or judgment was not one that I openly shared with the group. I am not always sure that I was able to keep my emotions off my face as I would have liked, but regardless of my initial reaction, I tried then to feel compassion or have patience in our discussions.

**AP:**

For myself, despite my lifelong lived experiences as a person of color, and despite years of more intentional self-led learning on the topics of race, ethnicity, and racism, I knew coming into this work that I still had and have a lot to learn, that this work is never truly done. That although lived experience is incredibly important and valuable, it's not in and of itself a substitute for doing the work with intention. I also confessed to my staff my own perceived shortcomings; that I would be tempted, like Ruth, to do a lot of speaking and that I would likely struggle with feelings of anger or hurt.

Our fourth question: Would Project Ready have been more impactful if we had gone through it alone, or with a group of strangers?

As I mentioned earlier, in my own preparation research, I was able to see various models of how others have approached doing Project Ready, from state Association cohorts to individual, self-paced but work-sponsored participation, in addition to our own model of working through it collectively, but voluntarily, as a department. Working through it in a self-paced manner would address the issue of inequity I introduced; it would allow staff to only do this work at work and get paid for what they were reading, watching, and listening to. In what could only be speculation, I've questioned whether or not it might be more impactful for individuals to work through this curriculum in groups composed of people they do not know or do know, but do not share a regular workspace with. There's a certain freedom or sense of comfort in sharing vulnerabilities with someone they will not see afterwards, or when you know you will only ever see them intermittently.

Another possible model for implementing Project Ready includes co-opting a model seen in college classes of yore, in which individuals work through the readings, videos, and audio files on their own and rather than go through the stress of trying to align schedules for a discussion in real time, you instead create a shared virtual space where discussion spaces are provided and observations and reactions are shared via postings.

If you do consider implementing Project Ready but opt for staff to work through it entirely independently, you'll want to consider if you want to put any system of accountability into place - Google Forms check-ins or quizzes, as one example - and if so, what that looks like overall and what the motivation is for it.

Lastly, a question I've wondered about is: how did and does the racial composition of the group impact discussions?

Elmhurst is a predominantly white community and, as is the case in our field at large and in many public libraries in particular regardless of community composition, the staff at EPL largely reflected the community. This is something that needs to be addressed at all libraries, in order to begin truly creating and maintaining inclusive, equitable, and diverse staff in our organizations.

We have to consider what is gained, what is lost, and what is unaffected, if possible, for BIPOC individuals on staff who are almost certainly a member of the minority participating in work of this nature. How can we ensure that BIPOC individuals can be a part of DEI work without placing burdens on them to lead or comfort their white peers, and without causing harm to their mental well-being?

I know for myself, my involvement was complicated by being both a BIPOC individual with considerable interest and involvement in this work, and also as a manager sitting in those spaces. I still wonder if conversations would have been more open and honest without my presence or if it was ultimately more meaningful having me there,

even if other staff were more guarded at times because of my position or ethnicity.

While I was disappointed by being unable to complete all sections of the Project Ready curriculum, I still feel that what we were able to work through was illuminating and useful toward building a better understanding of the work that needs to be done in that library specifically as well as in libraries in general.

To that end, my work with Project Ready hasn't fully come to a close! Over the summer, organizing took place to allow me to continue this work with two small groups that are composed of RAILS Youth Services Managers from the Chicagoland area.

In my own current library, numerous initiatives have already been started to ensure we're walking the walk and not just talking the talk when it comes to doing DEI and anti-racism work. As a small sampling, and as part of our strategic plan, we have made a commitment to using recyclable and compostable products in our programming and events, as well as to minimize unnecessary consumption. Environmental issues and sustainability aren't often considered as part of the necessary work for equity but it's incredibly important, given who tends to be most impacted by the effects of climate change.

We've also made efforts to evaluate our staff and create a plan to attract, recruit, retain, and advance staff reflective of the diverse community our Library is nested in, to implement an DEI Employee Perception Assessment and create a customized training program in response, and to make the building more accessible to disabled individuals.

## **RR:**

In my work at the Oswego Public Library District, I'm weeding racist titles with a particular focus on Native American stories in the Youth Services collection, and then with technical services will be recataloging Native nonfiction materials, so they are no longer classified with folk and fairytales.

Do you have any questions for us?

# Questions?

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