

MANAGEMENT REPORT

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TO: Library Board
FROM: Kurt Heinrich, Chair, CRPD Committee
SUBJECT: Equity and Anti-Racism Policy Considerations

SUMMARY

This report is to consider a potential policy on equity and anti-racism that supports priorities in VPL's 2020-2023 Strategic Plan around Belonging and Connection and Organizational Strength.

PURPOSE

This report is for information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Board receive the report for information.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

The Committee discussed the challenges of developing policy in this area, where language and understanding of need are frequently changing, and explored how a policy could fill gaps identified by staff. They considered the options for scope, ranging from a policy addressing anti-racism to an intersectional approach that would include issues such as Indigeneity, poverty, ability, gender and sexual orientation, as well as public facing vs. internal staff facing content. They also discussed the likelihood that a policy related to equity, diversity, inclusion and/or anti-racism would require regular updating, and the role of the Strategic Plan. The Committee generally reached consensus that an update to the existing Diversity and Inclusion Statement is necessary.

POLICY

VPL has a number of policies that address racism and support equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) goals. However, most are internally facing and often address racism and discrimination in an indirect way. These include:

- **Diversity and Inclusion Statement (also included as Appendix 1):** VPL's Diversity and Inclusion Statement affirms the Library's commitment to provide excellent services to diverse communities through consultation with underrepresented groups. It includes language from the 2008 Canadian Library Association (CLA's) Diversity and Inclusion Statement. Written in 2010, it was primarily developed to complement VPL's community-led approach and does not address VPL's intention to actively work to reduce racism and discrimination. Staff have identified that it requires review.
- **Human Rights and Harassment Policy and Respectful Workplace Policy:** Both apply primarily to staff. The Human Rights and Harassment Policy addresses harassment as prohibited by the BC Human Rights Code; the Respectful Workplace policy deals with disrespectful workplace behaviour, commonly referred to as "personal harassment," which is not covered by human rights legislation. The focus of each is to ensure a respectful workplace, prevent disrespectful behaviour and outline processes for responding to workplace incidents of bullying and harassment. These are both City of Vancouver policies adapted for the VPL context. The City has been revising both of these policies and the corresponding VPL policies will be revised accordingly when the City completes their process.
- **Expectations of Behaviour:** While not a formal policy, VPL states its expectations of patron behaviour while in library spaces. These include that patrons will not "[d]isturb, obstruct, molest, fight or interfere with any person's comfort and use of the library", and that patrons will not "[v]erbally abuse (swear, yell, threaten), persistently argue or display belligerence towards other users or staff".
- **Code of Conduct Policy:** guides staff conduct. Section 2.4 states that VPL staff must abide by the *Library Act*, the *BC Human Rights Code*, and other associated laws and regulations, while abstaining from behaviour that would constitute harassment, discrimination, verbal abuse, or prejudice, or any behaviour that would compromise the provision of service to the community.
- **Collection Development Policy:** guides staff in selection of books and materials for library collections, and includes statements reflecting VPL's intentions: that collections must fulfill VPL's mission to "respect and reflect communities of various cultural, ethnic, religious, and philosophical backgrounds" and that "community led approaches are used to identify unmet needs and interests"

INDIGENOUS CONSIDERATIONS

VPL is committed to being a place to learn about the history and cultures of Indigenous peoples and training about the truths of the historic and ongoing impact of colonization on Indigenous Peoples is required of all staff. Our commitment to learning and Reconciliation informs and

guides our selection and promotion of programs, services and collections. A policy on equity and anti-racism provides an opportunity to consider whether the commitments VPL is making to Indigenous peoples and the actions VPL will take to combat discrimination experienced by Indigenous members of the public belong in this type of policy or in a separate policy.

Staff are aware that some Indigenous patrons may feel unwelcome, or discriminated against, in VPL spaces, as a result of actions by staff or by other members of the public. A policy which clearly outlines VPL's position on racism and discrimination would send a message to Indigenous and non-Indigenous patrons and staff about VPL's expectations for equitable treatment of Indigenous people and that VPL is serious about addressing issues that occur.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

As the overarching document guiding VPL's activities, the VPL 2020–2023 Strategic Plan includes goals that support equity, diversity and inclusion and combat racism, most prominently in the “Belonging and Connection” priority. The Library's commitment to Indigenous peoples and Reconciliation is an overarching priority that is interwoven throughout the Strategic Plan. Specific references to VPL's efforts in these areas include:

- Goal 3.4: Establish the library as a forum for civic conversation and understanding. VPL strives to “increase understanding and reduce discrimination against racialized and LGBTQ2S+ communities, and will support and showcase these voices, aiming to address racism, misinformation, and polarization.”
- Goal 4.1: Ensure VPL staff have the support and resources to adapt to a transformed work environment. Within this is identified the need to ensure that “VPL staff feel prepared and supported for the variety of interactions they encounter...”

The environment that staff work in has become increasingly stressful, with incidents of antagonistic behavior by patrons escalating through the pandemic. Often this takes the form of racist comments made toward VPL staff and security contractors, but it is also observed in patron to patron interactions.

BACKGROUND

The VPL Board established its priorities around belonging and connection, including reducing discrimination, and building our organizational strength by increasing the diversity of staff, as a result of community consultation in 2019 for the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan. Events in 2020 and 2021 have reinforced the importance of discussions and action to combat racism and other forms of discrimination, both overt and systemic. These events include, but are not limited to:

- The Canadian public's greater understanding of the impact of residential institutions, colonialism, and systemic racism on Indigenous peoples, in particular the confirmation of unmarked children's graves at residential institutions and the experiences of Joyce

Echaquan by nursing staff in Quebec and Maxwell Johnson and his granddaughter at BMO in Vancouver;

- amplification of the Black Lives Matter movement following the death of George Floyd in May 2020 and discussions about discriminatory streetchecks in Canada; and
- a surge in overt anti-Asian racism most prevalent in Vancouver, resulting in a headline “Attacks make Vancouver ‘anti-Asian hate crime capital of North America” in the Guardian on May 23, 2021.

Staff have also provided feedback that they need and expect more support to address the heightened incidents of discrimination and harassment that they have experienced and observed in the workplace, as well as in handling complaints from patrons about our choice of displays or programs. For example, types of complaints include those about Black Lives Matter content, or books such as “Po’s Two Dads” in children’s book displays.

Against this backdrop, staff propose to develop a policy that clearly expresses VPL’s stance against racism and discrimination, and provides for decisive responses to incidents of racism within the VPL environment.

DISCUSSION

VPL’s current Diversity and Inclusion statement (approved by the Board in 2010) outlines the expectation that staff will identify and consult with diverse communities, with a view to developing programs and services that meet community needs. It was developed in conjunction with the Community Engagement Values statement (since rescinded), and with the purpose of complementing that statement. It falls short of articulating VPL’s proactive role in combatting racism and discrimination.

What appears to be missing is a public facing policy that would serve two objectives:

- To convey to the public that *VPL is actively working to reduce racism and discrimination* and is prepared to stand behind our choices of programs, services and collections promoted. No current policy explicitly states this position, therefore there is no formal document for staff to point to other than the current Strategic Plan when faced with questions or complaints from the public about the content of VPL’s programs, displays, or collections.
- To ensure that everyone feels welcome and safe in library spaces, by formally communicating that *we will not tolerate racism* in our spaces, and that allegations of racist or discriminatory actions against patrons by staff, or by patrons toward staff, will be taken seriously.

No institution researched for this report has a dedicated anti-racism policy. Topics of racism and human rights are typically addressed in policies such as codes of conduct, anti-harassment

policies, and equity, diversity and inclusion statements. Two public libraries which have addressed racism and discrimination through policy include the Thunder Bay Public Library and the Oak Park Public Library (see appendix).

Terminology in this area is evolving, and in some settings anti-racism or equity may be preferred to diversity and inclusion.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost of developing and implementing a policy will be incorporated into VPL's operating budget. Budget for specific programs or projects to enact the policy will be considered individually.

Attachments/Appendices

1. VPL Diversity and Inclusion Statement (2010)
2. Thunder Bay Public Library – full policy
3. Oak Park Public Library - summary from OPPL's Anti-Racism Strategic Plan and Equity Diversity and Inclusion Statement

Appendix 1

VPL Diversity and Inclusion Statement

It is the responsibility of Canadian public institutions, including libraries, to support a society that respects diversity and fosters social inclusion. Vancouver Public Library is responsible for working with its communities to create services that diverse communities identify as respectful, inclusive, and accessible.

The library strives to deliver inclusive service, affirming the dignity of those they serve, regardless of heritage, education, beliefs, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or mental health, physical or cognitive capabilities, or socio-economic status. Library staff acts to ensure that people can enjoy services free from any attempt by others to impose values, customs or beliefs. (Adapted from the CLA Statement on Diversity.)

VPL staff will:

- Identify populations that may be under-represented or hard to reach based on diverse life circumstances.
- Seek to understand how diverse community groups define and describe themselves.
- Listen directly to communities rather than relying on indirect sources such as statistical reports, other public libraries, or community service providers.
- Work with diverse communities to develop inclusive consultation and engagement processes.
- Work with diverse communities to determine appropriate ways to design, deliver, and evaluate services.

This statement is intended to provide a fuller context for library staff who works with Vancouver's diverse communities, and a framework from which to consider how VPL understands diversity and responds to community needs.

Approved by the Library Board: June 23, 2010

Appendix 2 – THUNDER BAY PUBLIC LIBRARY (TBPL)

Policy No: 2.15 RESPECTING DIVERSITY & INCLUSION	
	Type: General Administration
	Originated: September 13, 2017
	Reviewed: May 25, 2019
	Amended: June 13, 2019
Related Policies:	

Purpose/Policy Statement:

The Thunder Bay Public Library provides free and equitable access to services which meet the changing needs of the Thunder Bay Community. The Library preserves and promotes universal access to a broad range of knowledge, experience, information and ideas in a welcoming and supportive environment that is free from discrimination and harassment. Everyone has the right to equal treatment with respect to the access and use of the Library's services and facilities without discrimination or harassment on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, race, colour, ethnic origin, creed and all other grounds set out in the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Discrimination and/or harassment will not be tolerated under any circumstances. This policy is intended to prevent such conduct and to ensure the dignity and safety of the public and the staff and to maintain the security of library property without disruption to Library services.

Thunder Bay Public Library (TBPL) is committed to achieving racial and social equity by contributing to a more just society in which all community members can realize their full potential. TBPL can help achieve true and sustained equity through an intentional, systemic and transformative Library-community partnership. The TBPL is committed to providing inclusive public spaces where everyone feels, safe welcome and valued. We offer resources, programs and services to all members of our community and seek to provide opportunities for social inclusion. We respect the rights of all individuals to access information, participate in programming, and engage with the community regardless of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status, disability or the receipt of public assistance.

TBPL is working to achieve equity in the communities we serve by:

- Eliminating racial and social equity barriers in library programs, services, policies and practices

- Creating and maintaining an environment of diversity, inclusion and respect both in our library systems and in all aspects of our community role
- Ensuring that we are reaching and engaging disenfranchised people in the community and helping them express their voice
- Serving as a convener and facilitator of conversations and partnerships to address community challenges
- Being forthright on issues that are important to our communities
- Recognizing each individual's unique abilities and capacity to engage in society, striving towards creative solutions to address barriers for marginalized individuals to support successful participation in our libraries and communities
- Seeking meaningful engagement, dialogue and collaboration with marginalized individuals to shape and inform library programs, services, policies and practices
- Reducing stigma and raising awareness of the challenges facing marginalized individuals to live with dignity as part of a thriving and caring community
- Facilitating collaboration, communication, and networking with community agencies, organizations, and advocacy groups to improve and enhance Library service for marginalized individuals
- Providing training to support staff awareness, comfort, and competencies in serving marginalized individuals
- Encouraging information and resource sharing amongst library professionals to improve our collective ability to provide service to marginalized individuals.

Libraries are trusted, venerable and enduring institutions, central to their communities and an essential participant in the movement for racial and social equity.

Appendix 3

Summary of OAK PARK PUBLIC LIBRARY (OPPL) – OAK PARK, ILLINOIS

Oak Park Public Library is included in this report as an example of an approach that is comprehensive, multifaceted, and contrasts to the other policies and institutions included. OPPL’s “anti-racism journey”, as it is called, has been ongoing for years. In early 2020, however, OPPL ramped up existing efforts and the library system has accomplished much during the past year and a half.¹ The community of Oak Park, outside of Chicago, has historically taken an active stance against racism, challenging racist housing policy beginning in the 1960s and promoting integrated neighbourhoods.

- In February 2020, OPPL teamed up with a specialized Black-led consulting firm to begin a process to determine the way forward for OPPL. The consultant held listening sessions with a vast array of library stakeholders, including all levels of staff and leadership, as well as members of the community. She also held sessions specific to affinity groups based on racial, gender, and other identities.
- In April, the consultant released a report outlining a recommended action plan for OPPL
- In June, a Black staff affinity group was created
- In July, OPPL convened its first anti-racism advisory team, made up of a varied cross-section of staff, leadership, youths, patrons, and board members
- In August, library leadership participated in four 3-hour workshops learning about being “vulnerable and authentic”, and learning about the necessary conditions for anti-racism work
- This training was subsequently made available to staff; in addition, OPPL consulted staff widely on their aspirations for OPPL’s anti-racism journey
- In December, the anti-racism advisory team had produced a draft Anti-Racism Strategic Plan
- At the same time, OPPL staff took a “deeper dive” into various aspects of racism
- In March of 2021, the Board approved the Anti-Racism Strategic Plan. This document will be separate from OPPL’s existing strategic plan for one year, in order to ensure its prominence and the focus on its priorities.²
- Overall, the Anti-Racism Strategic Plan adds a fourth strategic priority to OPPL’s existing priorities of “engagement, learning, and stewardship”.³

OPPL’s Anti-Racism Strategic Plan⁴

OPPL’s Anti-Racism Strategic Plan was developed over the course of several months by its Anti-Racism Advisory Group, with staff input. It incorporates evaluation and benchmarks, and monthly progress reports are produced for the Board.

¹ All information in this section is from Oak Park Public Library, “Aspiring to anti-racism: Milestones in our journey” unless otherwise specified. Available at <https://www.oppl.org/about/anti-racism/how-our-anti-racism-journey-began/>. Accessed 9 August 2021.

² “Anti-Racism Strategic Plan”. Oak Park Public Library. Available at <https://www.oppl.org/about/policies/anti-racism-strategic-plan/>. Accessed 9 August 2021.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

The Anti-Racism Strategic Plan is divided into internal practices and external practices. Each contains four goals with several accompanying objectives for each goal. The four categories are Internalized Racism, Interpersonal Racism, Institutional Racism, and Structural Racism.

For internal practices, the goals are:

- **Internalized racism:** “The Library will create opportunities to discuss how we have all internalized racism using affinity spaces and collective and intersectional spaces.”
- **Interpersonal racism:** “The Library will be a welcoming and affirming space for all new and existing staff members, both online and in-person, through consistent and intentional relationship building between staff that is free of racism.”
- **Institutional racism:** “The Library will employ policies, protocols, processes, and procedures that promote and advance anti-racist practices such as power, space, and resource sharing toward equitable, non-hierarchical program implementation.”
- **Structural racism:** “To decrease the negative impact of the Masters of Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree on the promotion opportunities and access to upward mobility at the Library.”

For external practices, the goals are:

- **Internalized racism:** “To mitigate the impact of external racism on the Library’s environment and on the greater Oak Park community.”
- **Interpersonal racism:** “To have a working, shared definition of racism that includes common and shared language and understanding of anti-racist practices that we can leverage to have conversations and collaborations regarding anti-racism.”
- **Institutional racism:** “Attract and retain more Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) staff at the managerial and leadership levels.”
- **Structural racism:** “Lead the charge in the galvanizing of multiple organizations in Oak Park and governing bodies toward the expansion of anti-racist practices in all that we are and all that we do.”

Oak Park’s Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Statement⁵

OPPL’s website also links to the Village of Oak Park’s EDI Statement, which complements OPPL’s plans and programs to effect transformative change. While it does not contain any statements concerning consequences for racist or offensive behaviour, it does contain strong statements expressing OPPL’s dedication to EDI and anti-racism. Some particularly relevant statements are reproduced below:

- “The people of Oak Park choose this community, not just as a place to live, but as a way of life and as a place to seek shelter, refuge and acceptance.”
- “Creating a mutually respectful, multicultural and equitable environment does not happen on its own; it must be intentional.”
- “We believe in equity. By embracing equity, with an explicit but not exclusive focus on racial equity, we work to break down systems of oppression, including racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia and other forms of bias and hate to achieve a society

⁵ “Oak Park Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Statement”. Village of Oak Park. Available at <https://www.oak-park.us/village-services/tenantlandlord-relations/oak-park-diversity-statement>. Accessed 9 August 2021.

where race no longer determines one's outcomes, where everyone has what they need to thrive. This is both a process and a goal. We reject racial barriers that limit and divide us, and we reject bias towards any group of people."

- "We believe in diversity because our commonalities and differences are both assets."
- "We acknowledge intersectionality and the compounding effect of multiple forms of discrimination that many in our community experience. We affirm all people as members of the human family."
- "We believe the best decisions are made when everyone is authentically represented in decision-making and power is shared collectively."