

**ALA Core Interpretation Working Group: Equity**  
**Summary of Activity**  
**December 31, 2025**

## **Introduction**

The ALA Core Value working groups were asked to provide interpretations for each core value from the perspective of library workers. We strived to provide the description in plain language so the document would be easily understood. Below is the charge from the ALA Connect space for the working group.

“Core Values Interpretations Working Groups are created to further expand on each Core Values description. These interpretations will provide opportunities for further expansion and clarification of the values, addressing concerns about the potential loss of nuance.”

## **Background**

The working group for equity requested an extension at the 2025 Annual Conference to continue the work. Multiple members of the original working group opted to continue and work on a draft interpretation for review at the Council meeting hosted virtually January 24-27, 2026.

## **Participation**

The following individuals participated in the working group after the time extension:

Ozy Aloziem  
Joy Bridwell  
Rowan Buck  
Todd Cates  
Sandra Farag (co-chair)  
Mariel Matthews  
Eric Stroshane (ALA Liaison)  
Rene Tanner (co-chair)

## **Virtual Meetings**

Given our goal to have a draft prepared by January 2, 2026, the co-chairs invited the committee to work asynchronously between meetings. A Google Document was shared on October 3, 2025 for additions and discussion. The following meetings were held from September 2025 through December 2025:

- September 23, 2025 at 1:30 pm CDT
- October 27, 2025 at 3 pm CDT

- November 10, 2025 at 3 pm CST
- November 24, 2025 at 10 am CST
- December 19, 2025 at 10 am CST
- December 21, 2025 at 10 am CST (co-chairs; optional for working group)
- December 29, 2025 at 10 am CST (co-chairs)
- December 30, 2025 at 12:30 pm CST; 2 pm CST (co-chairs)
- December 31, 2025 at 12:00 pm CST; 2:00 pm CST (co-chairs)

### **Suggestion for Future Consideration**

During our work we discussed equitable hiring practices. There was a suggestion that the profession would benefit from a LibGuide outlining equitable hiring practices. We share this idea for future consideration.

### **Feedback and Revisions**

The draft Interpretation was shared in the latter part of November 2025 with ALA membership and other interested parties through an open-ended response survey with a deadline of Friday, December 12, 2025. The following groups were directly encouraged to provide feedback:

- ALA Membership through ALA Connect,
- ALA Committee on Professional Ethics,
- ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee,
- ALA Intellectual Freedom Roundtable Executive Committee, and
- Disability Network of Southwest Michigan (DNSM)

Feedback was received from 16 survey participants and one reviewer from the DNSM provided feedback via a Word document. The full set of comments was shared with the working group on December 15, 2025.

The co-chairs, Sandra Farag and Rene Tanner, met virtually on Dec 21, 2025 to revise the draft. The revised draft interpretation was shared with the working group on Dec 22, 2025. Comments were received from the working group on Dec 29, 2025 and additional revisions were made by the co-chairs.

### **Submission**

The enclosed draft Interpretation is provided for your review.

# DRAFT

January 14, 2026

## ALA Core Value Interpretation: Equity

### Core Value Statement for Equity

Library workers play a crucial role in fostering equity by actively working to dismantle barriers and create spaces that are accessible, welcoming, and beneficial for all. This is accomplished by recognizing and addressing systemic barriers, biases, and inequalities to create inclusive library environments where everyone can benefit from the library's offerings and services.

### Defining Equity

To apply equity in library practice, it is essential to understand the term. The following definition is from the ALA Office for Diversity, Literacy, and Outreach Services glossary and was adopted by the ALA Council in 2017:

Equity is not the same as formal equality. Formal equality implies sameness. Equity, on the other hand, assumes difference and takes difference into account to ensure a fair process and, ultimately, a fair (or equitable) outcome. Equity recognizes that some groups were (and are) disadvantaged in accessing educational and employment opportunities and are, therefore, underrepresented or marginalized in many organizations and institutions. The effects of that exclusion often linger systemically within organizational policies, practices, and procedures. Equity, therefore, means increasing diversity by ameliorating conditions of disadvantaged groups. (Adapted from [National Association of Social Workers](#))

### Purpose of This Document

This document provides library workers with a shared framework for understanding and applying equity across all areas of library operations. By systematically examining policies, programs, collections, spaces, and professional practices, library staff can make informed decisions that reduce barriers, promote inclusion, and align services with the evolving needs of the communities they serve.

Advancing equity in library work requires an integrated approach that combines community engagement, data-informed decision-making, reflective professional practice, and ongoing evaluation. Library staff strengthen equity efforts by drawing on multiple perspectives, incorporating community input, analyzing outcomes, and remaining responsive to change. Together, these methods support the development of library services that are equitable,

sustainable, and accountable, ensuring that equity is embedded as a core principle rather than addressed through isolated initiatives.

## **Advancing Equity in Library Practice**

Library workers play a critical role in advancing equity by intentionally dismantling barriers and creating library environments that are accessible, welcoming, and responsive to all. Library work is not neutral; it is shaped by power, institutional decision-making, and historical and ongoing systems of oppression. Acknowledging this reality, staff commit to ongoing learning and reflective professional practice, including developing awareness of power and privilege, applying trauma-informed approaches, and engaging in community accountability to identify, challenge, and address systemic bias, inequity, and harm.

Equity should be embedded across organizational culture, decision-making, and strategic priorities, fostering a workplace where staff are treated with respect and dignity, feel safe raising equity concerns, and where diverse perspectives meaningfully inform outcomes. Clear, transparent processes guide responses to bias, discrimination, and harm, while equity considerations shape workforce development, planning, budgeting, communication, evaluation, and all areas of library service to ensure resources are allocated intentionally and barriers are addressed.

### **Strategic Priorities**

Equity cannot be sustained through value statements alone—it must be strategically prioritized through planning, budgeting, and accountability mechanisms. Budgets should be evaluated through an equity lens, asking who benefits, who is burdened, and where gaps persist. Equity work requires library staff to continually examine how power operates within their systems, how decisions are made, and whose needs are prioritized.

### **Organizational Culture**

Every policy, practice, collection decision, and interaction reflects values and priorities, whether explicitly named or not. Advancing equity in libraries therefore requires intentional action, institutional courage, and ongoing reflection. Equity must be embedded not only in a library's mission statements and policies, but in its organizational culture, which includes shared values, norms, expectations, and daily practices of library workers who shape how work gets done.

### **Workforce, Training, and Professional Development**

Equitable staffing begins with reexamining how merit, professionalism, and readiness are defined. Job descriptions should use inclusive, gender-neutral language and prioritize essential skills over credentials that reflect narrow or exclusionary pathways into the profession. Hiring processes should be transparent and accessible, with clear guidance on requesting accommodations.

Equity in the workplace also requires reviewing internal policies such as dress codes, scheduling norms, employee handbooks, and advancement pathways. Inclusive hiring and retention practices strengthen library relevance, impact, and organizational resilience.

Libraries can further reduce barriers to the profession by offering paid internships, residencies, and mentorship opportunities. These experiences should support future library workers academically and professionally while allowing them to explore multiple career pathways. Once hired, staff benefit from ongoing training, mentorship, and professional development, including cultural humility and language skills that reflect the communities served. Investing in staff growth enables library workers to better support the lifelong learning goals of users.

### **Prioritizing Accessibility**

Accessibility is foundational to equity and must be integrated across physical spaces, technology, services, policies, and communication methods. Applying principles of universal design from the outset increases usability and access for the widest range of people.

In practice, this includes accessible digital platforms, assistive technologies such as screen readers and voice-to-text software, and websites and catalogs that meet or exceed current ADA standards. Accessible design helps bridge the digital divide and supports intellectual freedom.

Physical spaces should reflect universal design principles. Clear, consistent signage using symbols and multiple languages supports wayfinding. Environmental features such as quiet areas, stable lighting, and fragrance-free cleaning practices reduce barriers to use. Furniture should provide a range of options, including seating with and without arms, varied heights, and both fixed and movable pieces.

### **Library Instruction**

Library instruction and information literacy are essential to advancing equity. By intentionally designing inclusive instructional practices, library workers help dismantle barriers to knowledge and empower users to navigate, evaluate, and apply information effectively.

Instruction transforms the library from a passive information source into an active space for critical thinking, academic success, workforce readiness, and informed civic participation. Ensuring that all users can access information and use it meaningfully strengthens equity across educational and social contexts.

### **Library Collections**

Equitable collections reflect the diversity of the communities libraries serve and affirm the freedom to read. Library staff should support inclusive representation and select materials based on professional standards rather than fear of challenges or personal bias. Collection development policies should be reviewed regularly to assess representation, power dynamics, and the ways dominant narratives may limit or overshadow marginalized perspectives. Evaluating vendor diversity and conducting gap analyses further strengthen inclusive collection practices.

Equity-centered collection development recognizes that circulation alone is not the sole measure of value. In-house use, community relevance, and representation are also important indicators. Clear policies for selection, weeding, and responding to challenges promote transparency, consistency, and accountability.

Developing innovative offerings—such as Library of Things collections—expand access to learning by allowing users to explore new skills and interests through experiential and interactive resources that support curiosity and lifelong learning.

Accessible collections include materials in multiple languages and formats, such as digital, braille, large-print, and audio. The creation and acquisition of works in their original languages, as well as translated works, further advance equity by ensuring broader access to diverse voices and perspectives.

## **Library Programs**

Libraries serve as spaces for engagement, creating opportunities for people across the lifespan to learn, contribute, and interconnect. Thoughtfully designed programs can build confidence, reduce isolation, and foster a strong sense of belonging.

Equitable programming is grounded in meaningful community engagement. When programs are aligned with the priorities of community members and partner organizations, they are more responsive, inclusive, and impactful. Clear and accessible processes for participation and accommodation further support equitable access and strengthen a sense of belonging for all.

## **Collaboration**

Equity is strengthened through sustained collaboration between libraries and community partners, particularly organizations and groups that represent historically marginalized and underserved populations. Partnerships with local governments, cultural organizations, social service agencies, advocacy groups, and other libraries enable the expansion of services that address structural barriers to access. These collaborations may support initiatives such as mobile libraries, literacy programs, voter registration, tax assistance, legal clinics, and on-site social work support, extending library services beyond traditional settings and into the communities most impacted by inequity.

Collaboration with cultural and community-led groups is also essential to fostering cultural understanding, mutual respect, and acceptance within library spaces. By centering lived experience, cultural knowledge, and community expertise, libraries affirm the dignity and identities of individuals and communities that have historically been excluded or misrepresented. These partnerships support the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages, the development of oral history projects, access to language-learning resources, and the creation and acquisition of translated or original works in multiple languages.

Through shared decision-making, resource-sharing, and accountability, library staff help create environments where cultural differences are respected rather than minimized, and where users

see their identities reflected and valued. This approach deepens trust, strengthens cultural relevance, and ensures library services are responsive, inclusive, and grounded in the priorities of the communities they serve—advancing equity through understanding, acceptance, and belonging.

### **Assessment and Accountability**

Library workers advance equity when expectations are clear, practices are consistently applied, and staff experience equity as a meaningful part of their daily work. Regular assessment allows staff to adapt, improve, and remain responsive to evolving community needs while keeping equity at the center of decision-making.

Ongoing assessment is essential to advancing equity. Library workers should regularly evaluate programs, collections, spaces, hiring practices, and policies through both quantitative and qualitative methods. Listening sessions, focus groups, and community feedback loops help identify gaps, track progress, and ensure accountability.

### **Closing Thoughts**

Library workers promote equity by intentionally repairing historical and contemporary systems of exclusion that shape access to information, opportunity, and belonging. Library workers play a vital role in supporting full participation in a democratic society. Centering equity as a core value strengthens libraries as spaces of access, belonging, and empowerment.

When library workers intentionally apply equity across all aspects of their work, they reinforce the library's mission as a facilitator of lifelong learning, social connection, and community well-being.