

NURTURING AN INCLUSIVE LIBRARY



Inside

Insights and observations from
NOLS community members

Recommendations for future
action toward greater equity and
inclusion





Dear Mr. Glaude:

On behalf of Ascending Leadership, we deeply appreciate your trust and partnership in this assessment process. Thanks to your courage, collaboration, and desire to get to the roots of the North Olympic Library System's strengths, struggles, and opportunities, we were able to connect with the community and learn deeply about NOLS' history and culture.

We want to especially thank you and your team for providing us with access to information and stakeholders, partnership in the process, and vulnerability in the learning. We also express gratitude to all the staff, board, and community members who provided their invaluable perspectives, experiences, and ideas.

It was clear that those we spoke with and heard from are deeply invested in the success of NOLS. There is a strong sense of pride in NOLS and even the most constructive of criticism was rooted in the belief that NOLS can expand and improve to be even better. Every interviewee expressed positive regard for NOLS leadership and the impact of the programming.

The core themes that rose to the surface in this process were 1) Safety and Belonging; 2) Communication and Transparency; and 3) Equity and Accountability. Both the findings and recommendations fall within these core themes. We hope our recommendations will serve as a guide in your next phase of strengthening your ethos and deepening your impact.

With gratitude,

Leilani and Adana
Ascending Leadership

Organizational Assessment

North Olympic Library System

Hindsight

National/Historical Context

When the ALA President's Committee on Library Services to Minorities presented the report "Equity at Issue: Library Services to the Nation's Four Major Minority Groups¹" thirty years ago, the Personnel section of the report noted that over 88% of the library profession was white. In 2012, the ALA Diversity Counts² study found that progress in diversifying the library profession is elusive. Just over 12% of the total population of credentialed librarians are racial or ethnic minorities. Disabled librarians are less than 4% of the total population of credentialed librarians. Only 185 ALA credentialed librarians, out of 118,666 are Indigenous – that is just 0.16%. Meanwhile, 82% of credentialed librarians are women and 87.97% of credentialed librarians are white. The report does not capture data about other marginalized and minoritized communities, such as LGBTQIA+, veterans, and immigrants.

This lack of diversity and representation matters and has significant implications for the communities served by public libraries. By 2030, white Americans will be 55% of the population, while Hispanic or Latino/a/x residents will make up 21% of the population.³ Diversity is not just a buzzword, it is crucial to the success of public libraries. Nationally, there is one white librarian for every 1,830 white people in the general population, compared to one Latino/a/x librarian for every 9,177 Latinos in the general population. There are only 138 Black library directors in the entire country.⁴ This problem is not new – it has been lamented by the profession for decades. Like all social equity challenges in the United States, this problem is the result of a long history of inequality, racism, and sexism. Addressing these past injustices and developing more equitable systems, practices, and norms is not a simple undertaking and requires courage, persistence, systemic changes, and creativity.

Local Context

During the past several years, NOLS has taken specific actions with an equity, diversity and inclusion focus, but many of those actions were one-off and not a part of a larger strategic plan. For example, in August 2019 NOLS eliminated overdue fines and waived all prior overdue fines, eliminated barriers for many patrons. Programming staff have focused on offering a wide-range of programs with diverse presenters, and the Collection Management Team has begun to explore how to conduct a diversity

audit of the Library's collection. Additionally, All Staff Training Day sessions focused on EDI and implicit bias, and many staff attending training offered by the Washington State Library. Steps have also been taken to allow staff to use their pronouns on nametags and use gender-neutral pronouns in updated policies.

Partnership with Ascending Leadership

As part of its 2021-2022 Strategic Roadmap, NOLS committed to using an 'equity, diversity, and inclusion lens to begin to develop and implement a comprehensive plan to review NOLS' policies, practices, collections, programs, and resources'.⁵ As part of this effort, NOLS launched a search for a consulting partner to facilitate its strategic EDI (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) initiatives. This search was rooted in NOLS' commitment to the critical examination process required to dismantle inequitable and oppressive ideas/policies and becoming an equitable institution that actively promotes inclusion, equity, and belonging. After a robust search process, NOLS hired Leilani Raglin and Adana Protonentis with Ascending Leadership to support their assessment process.

Partnership Goals

Through NOLS' partnership with Ascending Leadership, the following goals were identified:

- Deepen understanding of experiences and perspectives of NOLS stakeholders
- Identify and root out inequitable policies and practices
- Develop recommendations for foundational norms, policies, and practices that promote equity
- Gain insights into strategic opportunities to cultivate an organizational culture of learning, practice, and application with a social equity lens
- Strengthen trust and relationships with NOLS community

Ascending Leadership

Ascending Leadership (AL) is a consulting firm based in King County, Washington, that specializes in strategy and leadership with an emphasis on equity. Ascending Leadership is a BIPOC women-owned

¹ http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/diversity/EquityatIssue_FullReport_1985.pdf

²

<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/diversity/diversitycounts/diversitycountstable2012.pdf>

³ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/3-ways-that-the-u-s-population-will-change-over-the-next-decade>

⁴ <http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2017/12/diversity-in-public-libraries-strategies-for-achieving-a-more-representative-workforce/>

⁵ <https://local.nols.org/Docs/Strategic-Roadmap.pdf>

collective of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion consultants, educators, and coaches. We bring an intersectional and relationship-centered approach to our work – honoring the complexity and nuance that humans need and deserve and seeking to deepen understanding and connection within organizations. In short, we help organizations create the conditions for their people to show up fully; secure in the knowledge that their authenticity will be affirmed and valued. Our organizational values are courage, care, holistic truth, transparency, and accessibility.

Insight

Process

Ascending Leadership conducted an organizational assessment that explored the history, culture, and operations of NOLS. Through surveys, interviews, historical research, and a public information review, Ascending Leadership heard from library staff, patrons, Board members, and community stakeholders.

Ascending Leadership focused on examining all aspects of the North Olympic Library System, including: safety, accessibility, equity, empowerment, transparency, inclusion, belonging, trust, cultural norms, communications, values, and accountability. This examination of experiences, perceptions, policies, and impacts was conducted using a broad, deep, and wide understanding of diversity and inclusion. Data were examined to understand how NOLS' impact is felt, not only from the perspective of race, but also disability status, position on the gender spectrum, veteran status, class, sexual orientation, immigration and generation status, religion, and housing status.

Surveys

All current NOLS staff and board members were invited to complete an online survey. The staff and Board surveys were nearly identical, except for phrasing that was tailored to address each audience, respectively. The survey consisted of demographic data collection, rating of experiences and perceptions, open-ended questions, and opportunities for narrative comments. Staff members were invited to participate in the development of the surveys, by suggesting themes to explore and proposing survey questions. The surveys were anonymous, and the raw data was/is only accessible to Ascending Leadership. The surveys explored the themes of safety, accessibility, equity, etc., that were described in the previous section. 53 staff members and 5 board members completed the surveys. Staff were encouraged to complete the survey during typical working hours and Board members completed the survey on a volunteer basis.

Ascending Leadership also invited community members to complete a survey. The survey was available in English and Spanish and was accessible online or in hard copy form at library branches. The survey

consisted of demographic data collection, rating of experiences and perceptions, open-ended questions, and opportunities for narrative comments. The surveys were anonymous, and the raw data was/is only accessible to Ascending Leadership. To thank survey respondents for their time and energy, respondents were invited to participate in a drawing to win a \$25 VISA gift card. 877 community members completed the surveys.

*Ascending Leadership did not solicit input from former NOLS staff or Board members during the assessment process.

Table 1: Data Collection Activities

Stakeholder	Method	Sample Size
NOLS Staff	Survey	53
NOLS Board Members	Survey	5
NOLS Community/Patrons	Survey	877
NOLS Staff	Interviews	13
NOLS Board Members	Interviews	4

Interviews

Staff Interviews: All current staff (as of May 10, 2021) were invited to express their interest in being interviewed by Ascending Leadership. 13 staff members expressed interest in being interviewed by Ascending Leadership and AL interviewed all 13 of those staff members. Interviews were conducted via Zoom on paid NOLS work time and each interview took approximately one hour. Interview response raw data was/is only accessible to Ascending Leadership and no identifying response data will be shared. The staff members that were interviewed represented a range of racial, gender, and age diversity, a range of length of tenure at NOLS, and expressed a range of how they rated their experience at NOLS on a scale of one to ten.

Board Interviews: All current Board members (as of May 10, 2021) were invited to be interviewed by Ascending Leadership. 4 Board members accepted the invitation and interviews were conducted via Zoom for one hour, each. Board members were not compensated for their interview time.

Organizational Historical and Policy Documents Audit

Ascending Leadership was provided access to a breadth of NOLS current and historical documents and information including, but not limited to:

- Employee position descriptions and HR policies
- NOLS programming information
- Board bylaws and meeting minutes
- Annual reports and other public facing NOLS communications
- Budget information
- Operational guidelines and procedures

Public Information

Ascending Leadership explored information about NOLS that is available to the public online including, social media posts, articles, and videos.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed exclusively by Ascending Leadership. Survey data was summarized using Survey Monkey analysis tools. Narrative responses from surveys were analyzed by Ascending Leadership through a process of identifying patterns and themes across the survey comments.

Interview data was analyzed through a similar process. Emerging patterns and themes were identified and summarized, without identifying individual interviewees. Summarized themes and individual quotes are provided in the findings.

Policy and practice data were analyzed for disparities in impact, clarity, and transparency. Frameworks such as the Equity and Empowerment Lens developed by Multnomah County Public Health⁶, Kimberlé

⁶ <https://www.multco.us/diversity-equity/equity-and-empowerment-lens>

Crenshaw's theories of intersectionality⁷, and John A. Powell's Targeted Universalism⁸ were applied in the analysis.

Limitations

We would like to acknowledge the following limitations in our assessment and highlight them as areas for potential further study. First, due to limited capacity, we did not conduct one-on-one interviews or focus groups with patrons or other community stakeholders for this assessment. Second, we did not interview or otherwise seek feedback from past NOLS staff members (though it is possible that former staff members participated in the community survey without our knowledge). Third, we acknowledge that this work has unfolded during an historic time, when all participants are experiencing the unprecedented stresses of a global pandemic and co-occurring racial reckoning. This combination of factors almost certainly impacted respondents' perceptions of organizational behavior and level of comfort describing those perceptions in surveys, interviews, and other group engagements. Finally, we acknowledge our identity-based limitations. Like all humans, our identities shape our perspectives and interpretations. While we take great care to screen for bias consistently throughout our assessment process, we are still aware of the limitations and biases we carry as people socialized within a hierarchical system of privilege and oppression.

Findings

Through data collection and analysis, three main themes rose to the surface: 1) Safety and Belonging; 2) Communication and Transparency; and 3) Equity and Accountability. Findings are presented within their respective themes.

Hopes for the Future

When asked to share their hopes for NOLS and its role in the community, survey respondents shared the following visions. These are a representative sample and included themes repeated throughout the survey responses that paint a picture of a community that values access, learning, inter-generational connection, and belonging.

"A thriving organization that offers information, supports literacy, and provides a variety of programs of interest to different people. Particularly a place that appeals to a multi-generational community."

⁷ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1229039?seq=1>

⁸ <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/targeteduniversalism>

“Continued outreach programming that brings the community together”

“Programs opening our minds about diversity, learning about the cultures and beliefs of community members.”

“An all-inclusive community that fosters children's imagination and a passion for reading, continued access to computers for those otherwise unable, an ever-expanding reference and research material, and an expansive collection of fictional and nonfiction reading material.”

“A place of community. I can use a meeting room, I can relax and read magazines or newspapers. Get book recommendations and help with research. I would like to learn about literacy programs and maybe programs for ESL occurring at my library.”

“I hope we can continue to have an open, inclusive, and thriving library and community. I hope the integration of tech still leaves room for silent reading areas, calm kid corners, and a continuation of all the amazing books libraries provide! I also hope to see the return of more in person library events, some of the zoom classes have been great too!”

“A friendly place, a happy place. A place that is easy to understand what the rules are and where you aren’t looked down upon if you need assistance.”

“I hope for everyone to be welcomed and not feel like they are alone.”

Safety and Belonging

Physical Safety

86% of NOLS staff respondents and 83% of community respondents expressed feeling physically safe at NOLS facilities. 90% of NOLS staff respondents felt that NOLS has adequately supported them throughout the pandemic. Staff and community members shared specific concerns about physical safety in interviews and in narrative responses to survey questions.

Staff safety concerns focused on two issues. First, some staff reported feeling unsafe and uncomfortable at library facilities in early morning hours or after dark. Staff reported that there are times that community members gather and linger in parking areas and engage in

behavior that feels unsafe. Staff members wondered whether some of these community members are unhoused, impacted by substance use disorders, or otherwise in need support from social services agencies. They shared that they have reported these concerns with mixed results in terms of follow-up and resolution.

Second, staff reported feeling uncomfortable and unsafe enforcing mask protocols with library patrons. Staff members shared that patron reactions to the enforcement of mask mandates are unpredictable and, at times, volatile. These reactions, paired with a national increase in hate crimes and identity-based violence, contribute to staff feeling worried for themselves and their colleagues.

Disabled library patrons were most likely to report that they feel unsafe at library buildings. Specifically, patrons who are trauma survivors, have psychiatric disabilities, are deaf/hard of hearing, blind/low vision, autistic, or who have a speech or communication condition most frequently reported feeling unsafe.

A review of the data, disaggregated by gender, revealed that respondents with minoritized and marginalized genders, specifically patrons who identify as trans or gender non-conforming, were most likely to report feeling unsafe at library buildings.

Emotional and Psychological Safety

Staff members express feeling a sense of trust (93% of respondents) and psychological safety (86% of respondents) with their colleagues. This feeling is consistent when the data is disaggregated by race. However, staff of marginalized and minoritized genders feel less psychologically safe, less comfortable expressing themselves authentically in the workplace, and feel less trust with colleagues. Staff who identify as disabled also report feeling less psychologically safe, less comfortable being authentic, and report feeling less trust with colleagues than their nondisabled peers.

Similarly, respondents to the community survey largely report feeling safe and valued at the library.

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	I DON'T KNOW	TOTAL
▼ I feel a sense of belonging at the library	1.30% 11	7.43% 63	43.63% 370	46.82% 397	0.83% 7	848
▼ I feel a sense of safety with library staff	1.06% 9	11.44% 97	37.15% 315	49.17% 417	1.18% 10	848
▼ I feel a sense of safety at library buildings	2.25% 19	12.43% 105	37.16% 314	45.80% 387	2.37% 20	845
▼ I have felt unwelcome at library buildings	40.66% 344	23.88% 202	18.09% 153	16.90% 143	0.47% 4	846
▼ I feel comfortable being myself at the library	1.42% 12	6.98% 59	37.99% 321	52.54% 444	1.07% 9	845
▼ I feel valued for being myself at library	0.95% 8	6.74% 57	39.13% 331	47.99% 406	5.20% 44	846

Overall, 34% of respondents to the community survey report having experienced discrimination from a library staff person and 37% report experiencing discrimination from other library users. Respondents with marginalized and minoritized genders report feeling less safe than others, as do disabled respondents. Respondents who are blind/low vision, deaf/hard of hearing, intellectually disabled, living with a speech/communication condition, or who are trauma survivors were most likely to report feeling unsafe with library staff.

Disaggregating the data by race revealed that white patrons are most likely to report feeling safe with library staff (91.93% of respondents) and Native Hawaiian and Indigenous patrons were least likely to report feeling safe with library staff or in library buildings.

I feel a sense of safety at library buildings

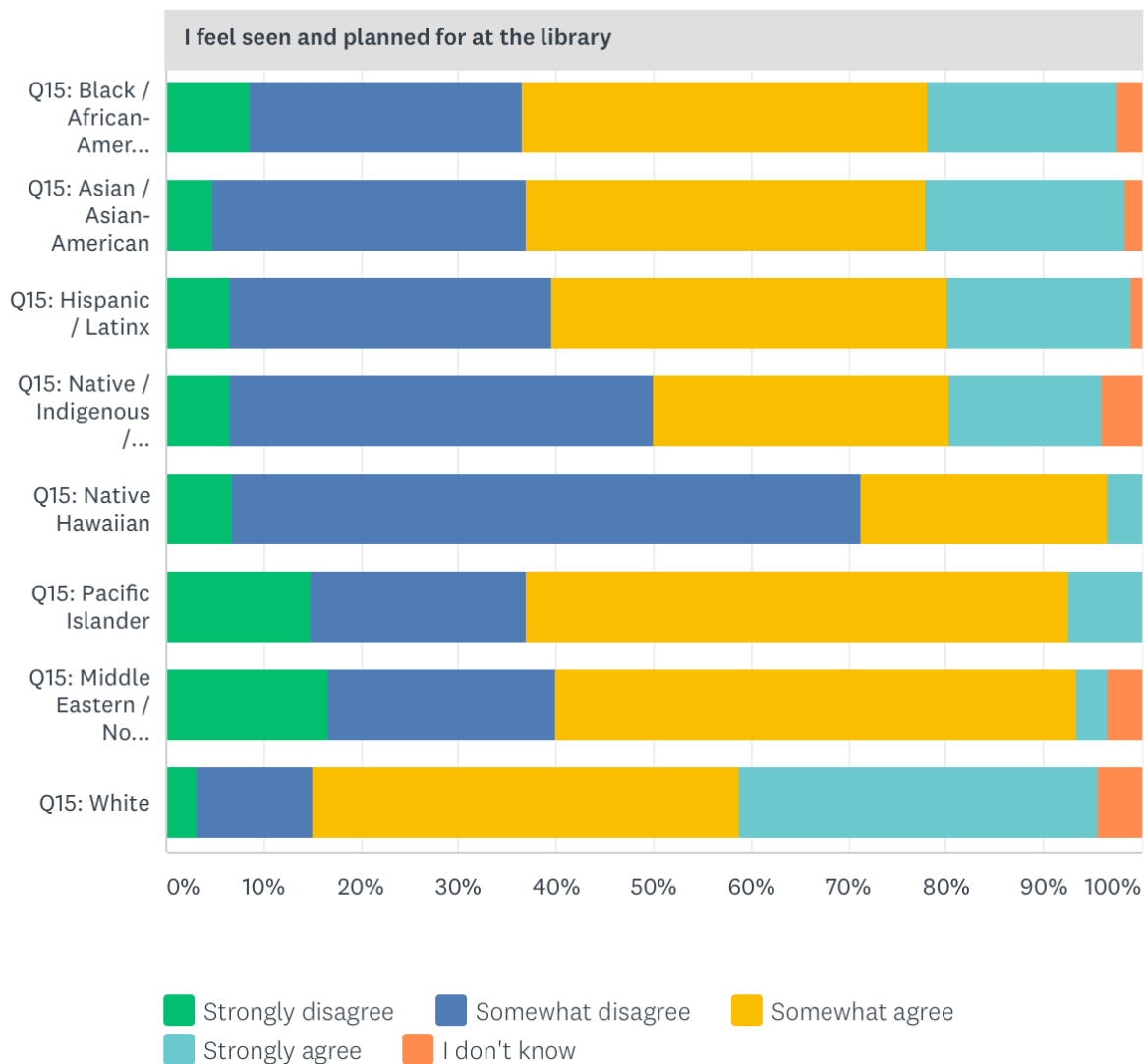
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	I DON'T KNOW	TOTAL
▼ Q15: Black / African-American (A)	6.02% 5 H	10.84% 9 CDE	46.99% 39 E	31.33% 26 DEH	4.82% 4	10.56% 83
▼ Q15: Asian / Asian-American (B)	4.96% 6 H	19.83% 24 DEH	41.32% 50 E	32.23% 39 DEH	1.65% 2	15.39% 121
▼ Q15: Hispanic / Latinx (C)	5.62% 5 H	26.97% 24 AEGH	39.33% 35 E	26.97% 24 EH	1.12% 1	11.32% 89
▼ Q15: Native / Indigenous / Alaska Native (D)	6.58% 5 H	35.53% 27 ABEGH	39.47% 30 E	15.79% 12 ABH	2.63% 2	9.67% 76
▼ Q15: Native Hawaiian (E)	5.08% 3	64.41% 38 ABCDGH	22.03% 13 ABCDGH	6.78% 4 ABCH	1.69% 1	7.51% 59
▼ Q15: Pacific Islander (F)	7.41% 2	14.81% 4	59.26% 16	11.11% 3	7.41% 2	3.44% 27
▼ Q15: Middle Eastern / North African (G)	12.90% 4 H	6.45% 2 CDE	58.06% 18 EH	19.35% 6 H	3.23% 1	3.94% 31
▼ Q15: White (H)	1.76% 10 ABCDG	6.87% 39 BCDE	38.38% 218 EG	50.88% 289 ABCDEG	2.11% 12	72.26% 568

I feel a sense of safety with library staff						
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	I DON'T KNOW	TOTAL
▼ Q15: Black / African-American (A)	2.41% 2	9.64% 8 BCDE	45.78% 38 DE	40.96% 34 DE	1.20% 1	10.56% 83
▼ Q15: Asian / Asian-American (B)	4.96% 6 H	23.97% 29 ADEH	39.67% 48 E	30.58% 37 EH	0.83% 1	15.39% 121
▼ Q15: Hispanic / Latinx (C)	5.62% 5 H	25.84% 23 ADEH	34.83% 31	32.58% 29 EH	1.12% 1	11.32% 89
▼ Q15: Native / Indigenous / Alaska Native (D)	3.95% 3 H	42.11% 32 ABCEGH	30.26% 23 A	22.37% 17 AEH	1.32% 1	9.67% 76
▼ Q15: Native Hawaiian (E)	5.08% 3 H	67.80% 40 ABCDGH	22.03% 13 ABGH	3.39% 2 ABCDGH	1.69% 1	7.51% 59
▼ Q15: Pacific Islander (F)	7.41% 2	18.52% 5	59.26% 16	11.11% 3	3.70% 1	3.44% 27
▼ Q15: Middle Eastern / North African (G)	3.23% 1	19.35% 6 DEH	45.16% 14 E	29.03% 9 EH	3.23% 1	3.94% 31
▼ Q15: White (H)	0.70% 4 BCDE	5.96% 34 BCDEG	40.00% 228 E	51.93% 296 BCDEG	1.40% 8	72.52% 570

Belonging

When asked about their sense of belonging, similar patterns emerge. Overall, 92% of staff report feeling a sense of belonging at NOLS. Staff who identify as disabled or of marginalized/minoritized gender are most likely to report that they do not feel a sense of belonging and that they have considered leaving NOLS due to feeling isolated or unwelcome.

Disparities in sense of belonging are not pronounced in staff survey data, but are pronounced in survey responses from patrons/community members. Nearly 30% of respondents who identify as Pacific Islander and 18% of respondents who identify as Hispanic or Latino/a/x report that they do not feel a sense of belonging at the library. Overall, responses from BIPOC community members indicate that they do not feel seen and planned for to the same extent as white respondents.



The patterns in both staff and community responses indicate that efforts to increase equity and inclusion should go beyond race and be intersectional, with particular attention given to race, gender, and disability (and the intersections of those identities).

Communication and Transparency

Staff Perspectives

Staff survey respondents overwhelmingly describe communication from NOLS' leadership as clear, respectful, and accessible. 94% feel they have the information necessary to be successful in their role and 90% feel confident in their understanding of NOLS' expectations. Staff report feeling that professionalism standards are clearly defined and that they know where to go with questions or for support navigating a conflict.

In interview responses, staff indicated that communication norms are inconsistent throughout the organization and described communication challenges that occur at lower

levels of the hierarchy, but are not present in more formal communication from organizational leaders. Staff shared examples of conflict-avoidant behavior, triangulation, microaggressions, and passive-aggressive communication that is unconstructive and undermines feelings of psychological safety. For example, one interviewee shared that when they put forth a new idea, colleagues will ask rapid-fire questions in a manner that feels aggressive, until the idea is withdrawn, rather than candidly state their concerns or opposition. Several other interviewees shared similar examples of experiences where they had shared an idea and had been “aggressively questioned” by colleagues to the point that they felt regret for speaking up and discouraged from taking similar risks in the future.

Another interviewee shared that they had been approached by a supervisor, because the supervisor had received a report that the interviewee had said “something offensive,” but the reporting party had declined to share specific feedback about the nature of the offensive remark, making it difficult to resolve and learn from the misstep. In another interview, the interviewee would make oblique references to discriminatory statements they had heard from colleagues, but was too uncomfortable to repeat or summarize the statements.

In general, staff are deeply reluctant to engage in uncomfortable conversation, even when that discomfort can be generative. Staff use euphemisms frequently and avoid naming social identities, such as race, or speaking frankly about forms of oppression, such as racism or trans oppression. In the interview process, staff demonstrated an attachment to comfort, niceness, and politeness that may hinder efforts to openly address issues of power, privilege, identity, and oppression. Several staff expressed uncertainty about whether it was acceptable or appropriate to discuss issues such as religion, race, or class. Others shared that they want to start discussing these topics, but need practice, encouragement, and clear guidelines.

Regarding transparency, staff expressed appreciation and respect for NOLS’ commitment to transparency. One respondent shared,

“I think there is an emphasis on transparency that is a positive. I feel like a few of the managers are really committed to listening and hearing feedback.”

Many staff were complimentary of the shift in culture initiated by Noah Glaude’s assumption of the role of Library Director. Staff remarked that the organization feels more open and that leaders feel more accessible with the change in leadership.

Staff expressed a desire for greater transparency in decision-making, specifically with regard to how power operates in decision-making processes. They also felt that promotion practices could improve in transparency (65% of respondents described promotion practices as transparent). In general, the desire for greater clarity and transparency fell along positional lines, with staff members who are not in positions of leadership expressing a need for more insight into the thought processes of positional leaders and, in some cases, expressing some distrust of positional leaders.

Board Perspectives

Board survey respondents feel that communication from NOLS is clear and 100% of respondents describe NOLS' decision-making processes as transparent. Board members expressed a deep commitment to being thoughtful stewards of NOLS' resources and to conducting Board business in an open and honest manner. They described a variety of actions that they take to ensure transparency in activities, including publishing Board packets and meeting minutes, and advertising Board meetings in local publications. As one Board member shared, "If you have access to the internet and you know where to look, everything is out there." This insight is an invitation to consider ways to more actively practice transparency. Community members who are unfamiliar with library governance structures, are English language learners, or do not have easy or consistent internet access may experience barriers to accessing information about the Board's role and activities, despite the Board's commitment to openness and transparency.

Community Perspectives

Community survey respondents feel that communication from NOLS is clear and over 65% of respondents describe NOLS' decision-making processes as transparent. In narrative survey responses, community members praise NOLS for being responsive and for communication practices that feel respectful.

Communication access is an area of potential improvement. 10% of respondents to the English language survey shared that library staff cannot consistently communicate with them in a language in which they, the respondents, are comfortable. In narrative survey responses, respondents to the Spanish language survey expressed a desire for more Spanish-speaking staff. Deeper exploration into this area could yield valuable information about which current and potential library users would benefit from greater language access.

Equity and Accountability

Staff Perspectives

NOLS staff members overwhelmingly (74% of respondents) expressed an understanding of the need for equity work and 20% of respondents shared that they feel equity work should be NOLS' highest priority. NOLS staff members value diversity and inclusion and, across all data collection methods, expressed a desire for more opportunities to learn about social equity and develop skills and capacity for facilitating inclusion and belonging.

90% of staff respondents reported feeling comfortable expressing concerns to leadership. 73% of staff respondents feel that staff can challenge NOLS practices without fear of punitive consequences. 88% feel comfortable requesting accommodations and support, when needed.

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	I DON'T KNOW	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
I feel comfortable requesting accommodations and support when I need it	4.00% 2	2.00% 1	28.00% 14	60.00% 30	6.00% 3	50	4.56

And yet, equity is also clearly a complex and evolving topic with staff members. In response to the question ‘What connections do you see between equity and NOLS’ mission and values?’ 24 respondents skipped the question and 29 offered an answer. During interviews, staff report that they need greater clarity about organizational expectations related to equity. Staff are unsure how it connects to their roles and responsibilities, where it fits into their scope of work, and whether their performance in EDI-related activities will be assessed as part of their performance evaluations.

Staff survey responses indicate several opportunities for deeper examination of practices that may be producing inequitable outcomes. Distribution of workload, processes for determining compensation, rewards for performance, processes for promotion/advancement, and ability to be heard regardless of position/clout/identity all emerged as areas where staff have widely varying perceptions of fairness and equity. Notably, nearly 30% of respondents feel the workload is not distributed equitably and 25% of respondents feel that rewards for work performance are not equitably distributed. Staff frequently named the assistant director vacancy as a contributor to unbalanced and unfairly distributed workloads.

When asked what values staff would like to see NOLS embrace, one respondent offered this insight:

A culture of positivity, encouraging staff and patrons by focusing on the good work we do. More equity in assigning work, managers have so many things to do they aren't able to actually manage the people at their branch. There should be some tier of leadership between manager and director, a head of programming or something. Otherwise it trickles down onto the people directly under the managers, who don't make nearly enough money for all the extra stuff they do. They keep getting "promoted" for \$100 extra a month that comes with tons of extra duties. And then the people under them have to take on their extra work etc. etc.

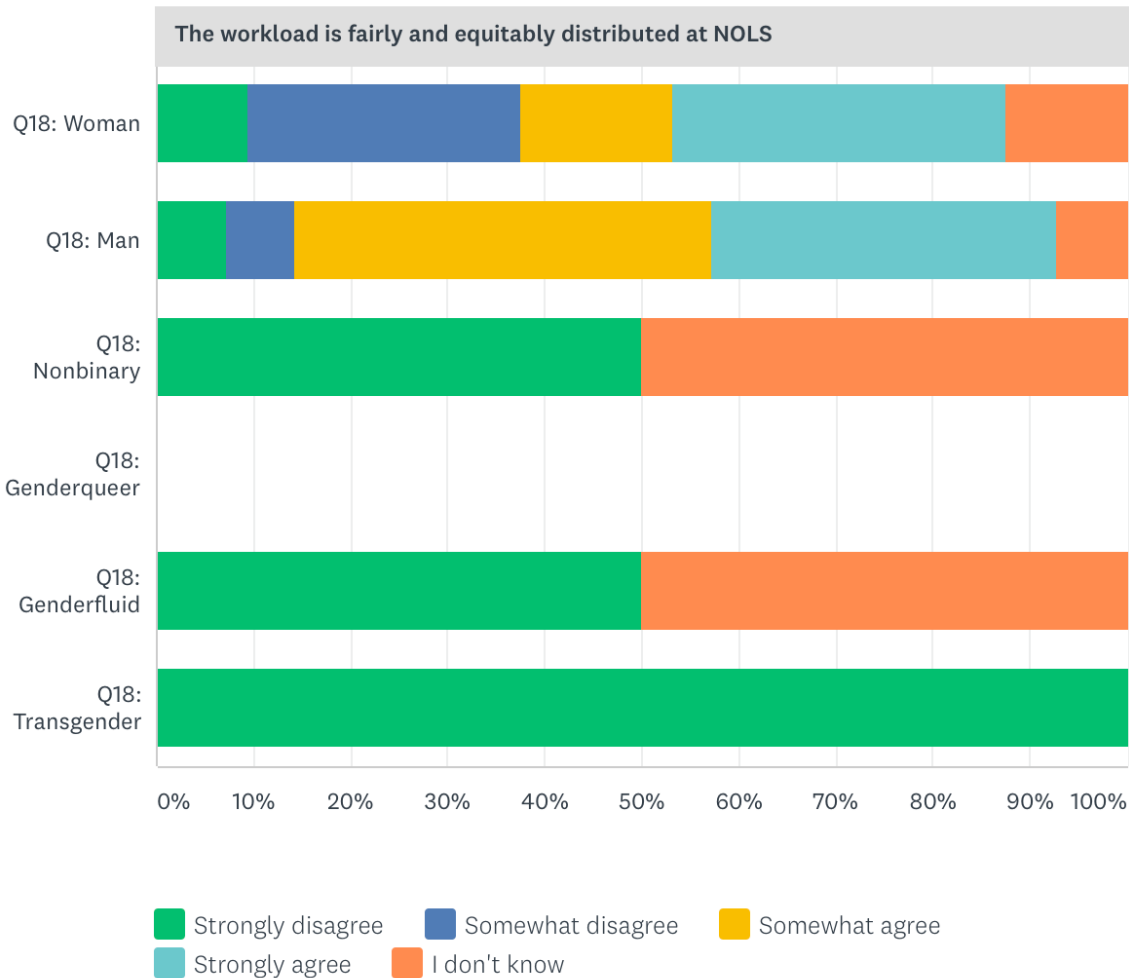
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	I DON'T KNOW	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
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▼ Professionalism standards are equitably enforced	4.08% 2	8.16% 4	30.61% 15	42.86% 21	14.29% 7	49	4.43
▼ Professionalism standards honor diversity of culture and expression	2.04% 1	4.08% 2	38.78% 19	38.78% 19	16.33% 8	49	4.57
▼ Qualification standards for positions are fair and appropriate	2.04% 1	14.29% 7	36.73% 18	40.82% 20	6.12% 3	49	4.18
▼ The workload is fairly and equitably distributed at NOLS	8.00% 4	20.00% 10	24.00% 12	34.00% 17	14.00% 7	50	3.98
▼ There are fair and equitable processes for determining compensation	6.00% 3	14.00% 7	36.00% 18	26.00% 13	18.00% 9	50	4.16
▼ Rewards for work performance are fairly and equitably distributed	10.20% 5	14.29% 7	20.41% 10	26.53% 13	28.57% 14	49	4.24

20% of respondents feel they have to work harder than others to be valued equally and 28% feel that voices are not heard equally, regardless of position, clout, or identity. These responses warrant deeper study to understand which factors contribute to the perception of being less valued and which positions, identities, and degrees of clout are more or less heard.

▼	STRONGLY DISAGREE ▼	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE ▼	SOMEWHAT AGREE ▼	STRONGLY AGREE ▼	I DON'T KNOW ▼	TOTAL ▼
▼ I have to work harder than others to be valued equally at NOLS	53.06% 26	18.37% 9	10.20% 5	10.20% 5	8.16% 4	49
▼ Voices are heard equally at NOLS, regardless of position, clout, or identity	16.00% 8	12.00% 6	22.00% 11	30.00% 15	20.00% 10	50

The perception that workload is unfairly/inequitably distributed at NOLS is strongest among staff with marginalized or minoritized genders, which is consistent prior findings in this assessment. Again, deeper exploration into the root causes of this perception is advised.



A review of NOLS' policies and practices also reveals that equity can be more fully operationalized throughout the organization. For example, part-time employees cannot access the same benefits as full-time employees, which disproportionately impacts disabled workers who cannot work a full-time schedule and workers who have caregiving responsibilities that make a full-time schedule impossible. This is an example of the type of policy or practice that can contribute to disparate perceptions of value within an organization.

Looking externally, staff identified a need to move beyond awareness and toward action. As one staff member explained,

I think they're (NOLS' values) clearly defined, I just don't think they're always acted upon. For instance accessibility is a core value, yet the Sequim Branch uses the bottom shelves and places those items upright, meaning elderly and disabled patrons have to squat or get on their hands and knees to access. We say they can ask staff for help, but we could just store less items in a more accessible way. When values are in conflict, the primary one of having lots of stuff on the shelves wins over accessibility, not to mention the wear and tear on staff bodies of shelving that low. In Clallam Bay the manager previously

was in a wheelchair, so she fought hard to get things on the right height of shelves, but because we don't have any regular library users in wheelchairs (currently) no one is fighting that battle.

This insight points to the need for EDI values and priorities to be embedded into organizational strategy and consistently tended to, so they are not dependent on individual staff members for operationalization and transition from espoused values to daily practices. This sentiment was echoed in staff interviews, where several staff shared that equity feels like an afterthought or add-on. Examples they shared related to inconsistent prioritization of equity (making a point to consider language access, but not disability access in programming, for example) and late engagement or a lack of engagement with marginalized communities in the area, such as tribal communities and immigrant communities. A staff member explained it well:

NOLS' stated mission and values support equity and outreach to the entire community. NOLS' values, in practice, are not inclusive of differently-abled staff. NOLS emphasizes certain kinds of diversity at the expense of others (multiple programs in Spanish, but no programs designed to be accessible for neurodivergent patrons; programs built without accessibility or accommodations for patrons with limited mobility).

Board Perspectives

NOLS Board members are in alignment with staff in terms of their understanding of equity as a priority and desire for more learning opportunities and skill-building in this area. During interviews, several Board members specifically noted that the Board does not have unified definitions of the terms 'equity', 'diversity', and 'inclusion' and that developing common language would aid their efforts to operationalize equity as a Board.

There were two particularly notable responses to survey questions that indicate a need for deeper exploration. First, when asked to rate the degree to which the Board openly discusses organizational power dynamics, including members' privilege and status as they relate to diversity, equity, and inclusion, the responses were extremely varied. The varied nature of the responses prompted deeper questioning during interviews. Board members were asked to identify barriers to open discussion about power, privilege, and status. In response, Board members named 'discomfort' and 'lack of skill or practice' as obstacles to candid conversations about equity, power, and identity.

The second survey question that elicited very mixed responses asked Board members to rate the degree to which the Board seeks ways to meaningfully increase the diversity of its composition across all lines of difference. One Board member disagreed that the Board seeks to increase diversity, one member strongly agreed that the Board seeks to increase diversity, and two members responded that they do not know whether the Board seeks to increase diversity. As with the staff, this seeming lack of alignment may simply be a result of the newness of the topic or it could indicate that Board members are not in agreement about whether diversification of membership ought to be a priority. Further exploration is needed.

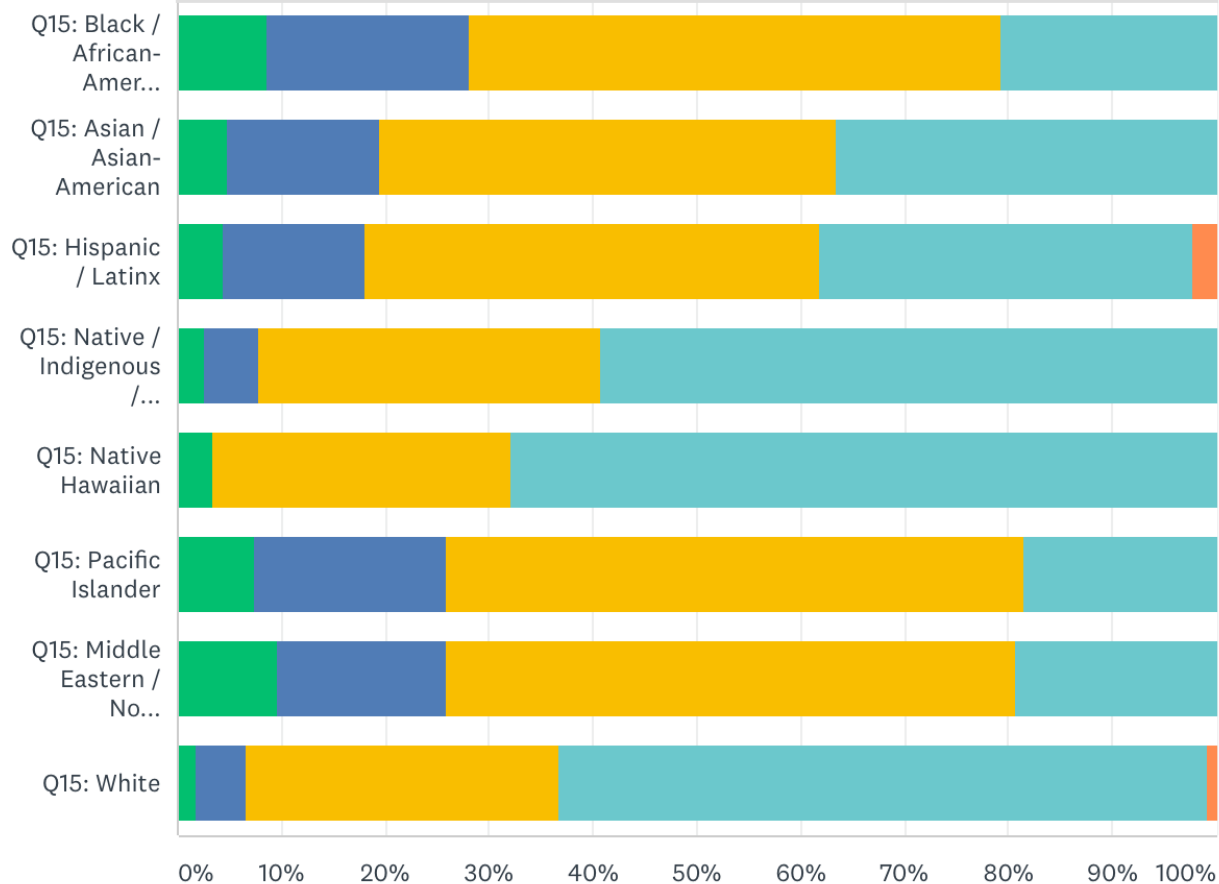
Community Perspectives

The primary equity concerns raised in the community survey responses are access and representation. The need for more equitable access was raised in several ways: hours of operation, access to services and amenities, and the impact of fees. The need for greater representation was raised in connection to materials and staff. Both of these themes – access and representation – are illustrated in the survey data below.

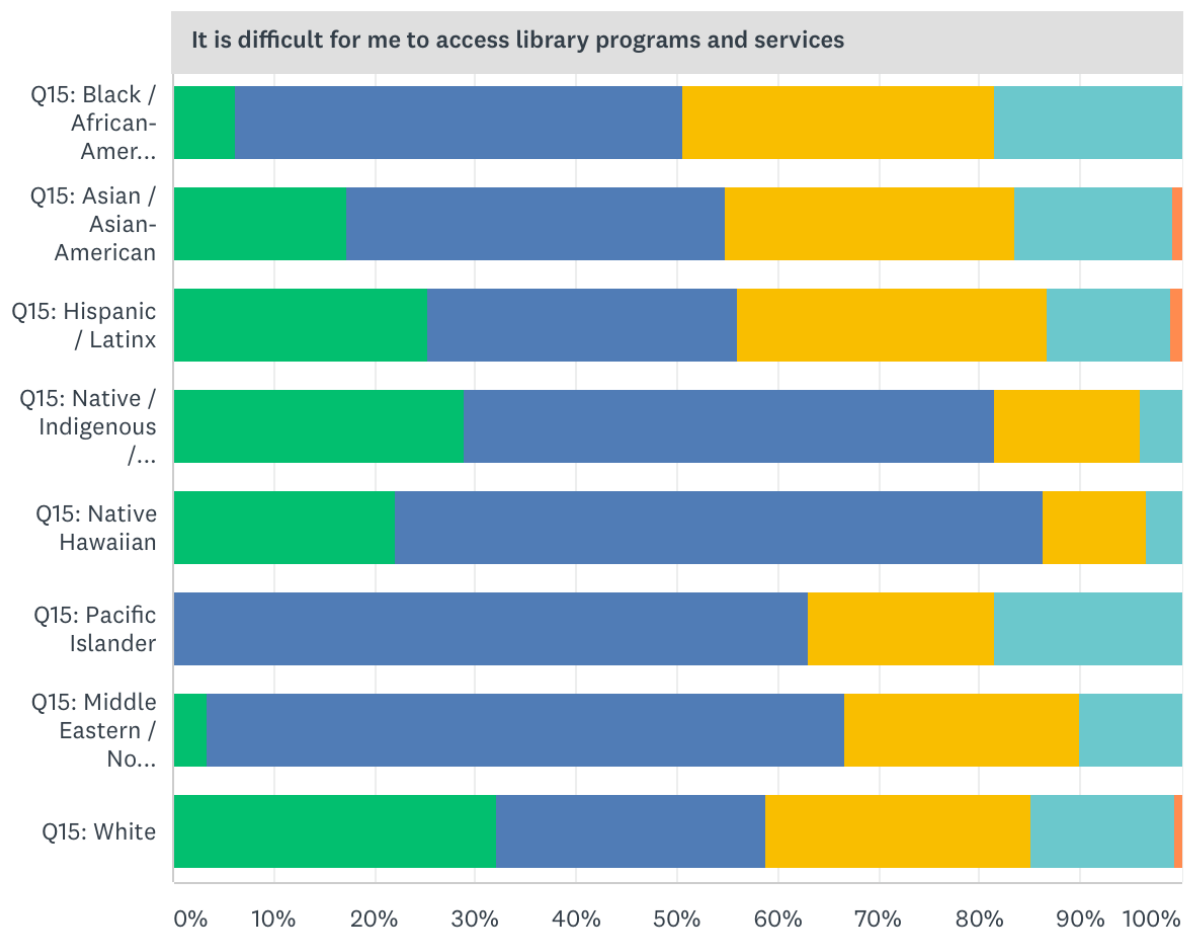
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	I DON'T KNOW	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Library staff can communicate with me in a language I'm comfortable in	2.25% 19	8.39% 71	31.68% 268	56.86% 481	0.83% 7	846	4.35
It is difficult for me to access library programs and services	27.24% 231	31.49% 267	27.00% 229	13.33% 113	0.94% 8	848	2.71
I see my community or background represented in library staff	2.48% 21	18.63% 158	38.33% 325	35.14% 298	5.42% 46	848	4.01
I can easily find materials at the library that reflect my background	6.75% 57	12.66% 107	34.79% 294	41.54% 351	4.26% 36	845	4.04
Library rules are fair	0.59% 5	8.99% 76	28.28% 239	57.99% 490	4.14% 35	845	4.47
Library fees are fair	1.67% 14	7.40% 62	36.75% 308	50.72% 425	3.46% 29	838	4.38
Library fees are a barrier for me	35.46% 300	21.75% 184	23.05% 195	17.49% 148	2.25% 19	846	2.72

Disaggregating these responses by race provides greater insight into which groups are most impacted by access and representation disparities.

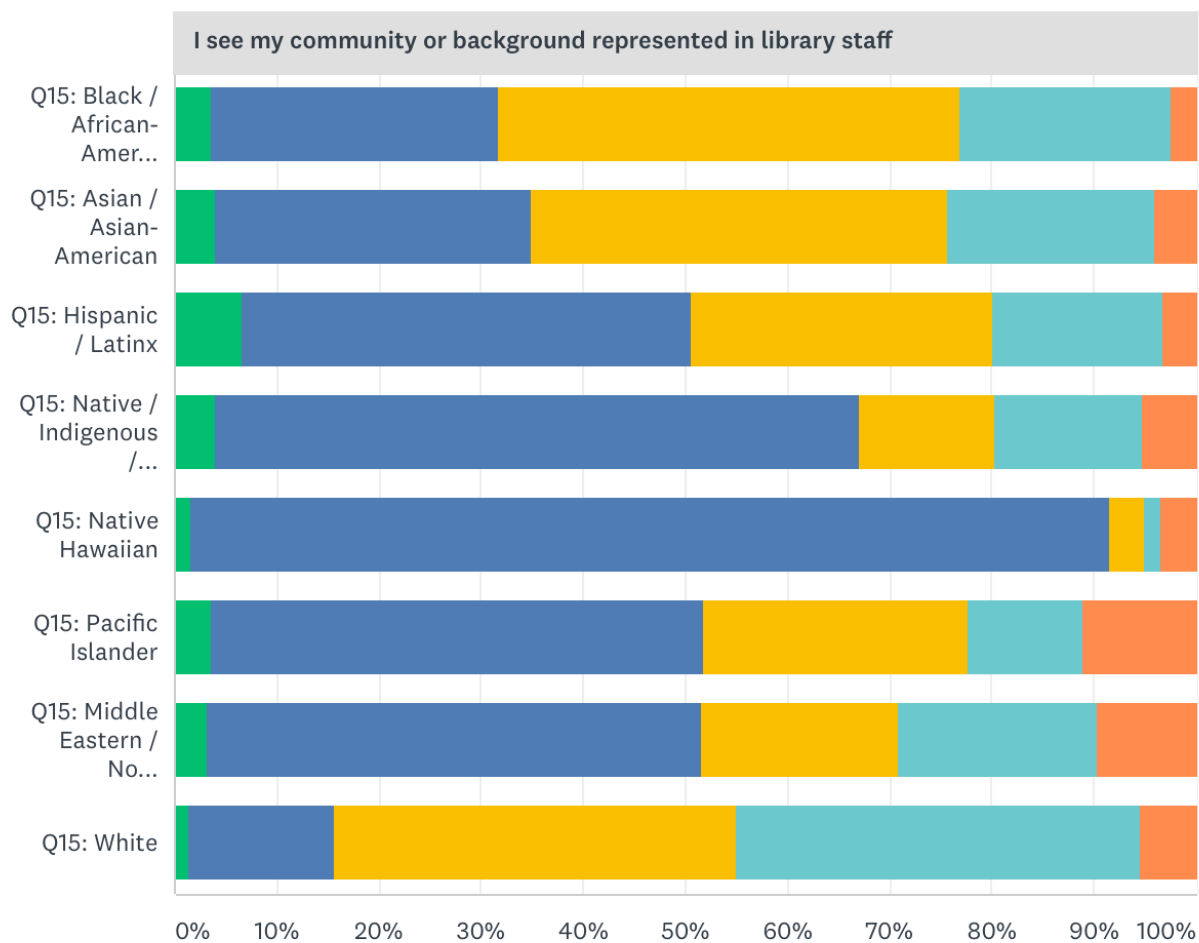
Library staff can communicate with me in a language I'm comfortable in



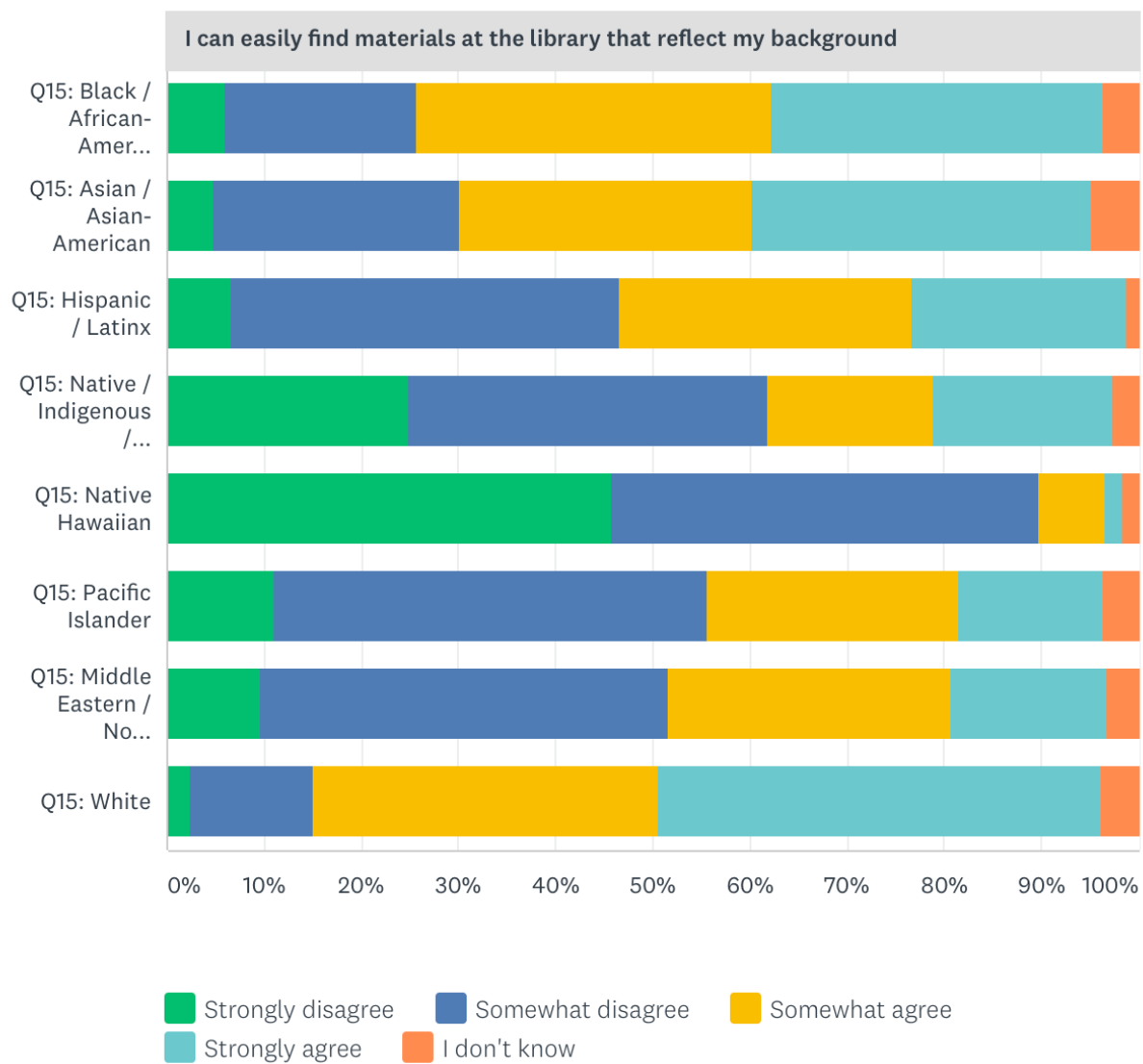
Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Somewhat agree
Strongly agree I don't know

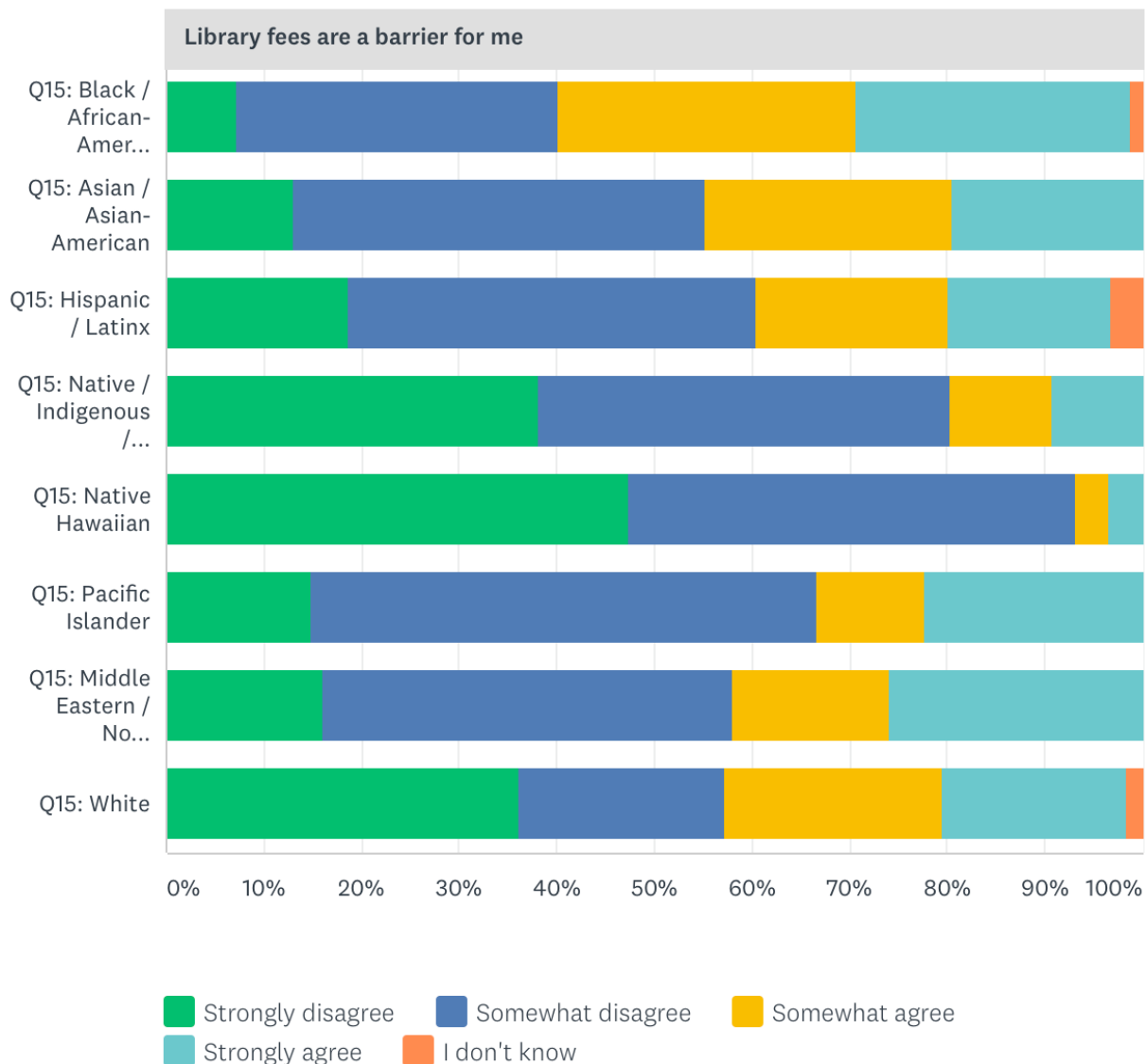


Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Somewhat agree
Strongly agree I don't know



Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Somewhat agree
Strongly agree I don't know





Disabled community members also report significant barriers to access and representation. In the interest of space, disaggregated community responses, by disability, are attached as an appendix, so they can be reviewed in their entirety. In summary, the overwhelming majority of disabled respondents report difficulty accessing services and programs, experience barriers caused by fees, and have experienced discrimination from both staff and fellow patrons.

As identified previously in this assessment, community members with marginalized or minoritized genders also appear alongside BIPOC community members and disabled community members as experiencing disparately negative impacts and barriers to equity. In all three cases – race, disability, and gender – it is important to keep in mind the intersecting systems of oppression that create the conditions for the disparities these community members are reporting. Racism, ableism, and sexism/heterosexism/trans oppression intersect with classism (among other forms of oppression) in ways that are multiplicative and mutually reinforcing. Disability is both a cause and consequence of poverty and, because of the relationship between race and poverty, BIPOC

community members are more likely to be both disabled and poor, exposing them to inequities and precarity from multiple fronts.

Foresight

Recommendations for Future Work

Sources consulted in the development of these recommendations include the Government Alliance on Race and Equity's issue paper "Advancing Racial Equity in Public Libraries: Case Studies from the Field," reports from the American Library Association's task force on equity, diversity, and inclusion, and data from the Public Library Association, as well as research from the Othering and Belonging Institute, Equity in the Center, and other leaders in equity-centered organizational change and development.

These recommendations were developed from and rooted in the perspectives and experiences of NOLS community (staff, Board members, patrons). Recommendations are presented within the following categories 1) General considerations; 2) Safety and Belonging; 3) Communication and Transparency; and 4) Equity and Accountability.

General Considerations

First and foremost, the insights, perspectives, and experiences shared by NOLS community members paint a picture of an organization that is in the midst of a culture shift. Tending to NOLS' organizational culture should be the top priority. Equity work is not about 'what' an organization does, so much as it is about 'how' the organization does it. 'How' is at the heart of organizational culture. Making thoughtful and intentional investments in the development of an equity-centered organizational culture that centers well-being, belonging, justice, humility, courage, and accountability will create the conditions necessary to produce the equitable outcomes that NOLS' community members desire.

The most significant equity disparities revealed in this assessment fall along lines of race, gender, and disability. This is valuable information to guide NOLS' efforts to develop strategies for the inclusion and belonging of all community members.

A small, but vocal percentage of community survey respondents expressed deep concerns with the library's engagement in EDI work. Without further study, it is not possible to identify the root of these concerns, but that does not make them less worthy of attention. Equity and inclusion have become politicized topics and the historical legacies of racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression require that these subjects be addressed with care and sensitivity. As NOLS is stepping into this period of exploration, growth, and skill-building it is important to be as clear and transparent as possible. Communicate openly, proactively, and frequently about what equity work is and what it isn't. Some survey respondents appeared to believe that working to make libraries more inclusive for some communities is a rejection of others. Addressing these concerns candidly and proactively may interrupt misinformation and create opportunities for deeper dialogue and shared understanding.

Both internal and external demographics are important to consider in developing and implementing EDI strategies. For example, an area of emphasis in conversations about equity is race and with good reason. There are clear and well documented racial disparities in outcomes in nearly all measures of wellbeing in the United States, from graduation rates to maternal mortality rates, to rates of suspensions and expulsions from preschools. Because of the intensity of these disparities, it is tempting to focus on race to the exclusion of all other facets of identity and that would be a mistake. It is important to be as holistic as possible in working to address these injustices and imbalances. Being thoughtful about organizational demographics is an important component of a holistic approach. For example, according to the ALA's most recent data, approximately 88% of credentialed librarians in the United States are white. At the same time, 82% of credentialed librarians are women. This means it is important to thoughtfully examine not only whiteness in the profession, but more specifically the experience of white women, the ways that the intersections of race and gender shape the culture and norms of libraries and use those insights to design and implement strategies to diversify the profession and address the impacts the lack of diversity has on library users.

Safety and Belonging

- Staff Learning
 - Focus on inviting staff into this work and creating access points for them to enter these conversations and see themselves in the work, no matter where they are in their development and skill.
 - Develop a two-pronged approach for staff EDI learning that includes regular all-staff learning opportunities and a smaller cohort of staff who will engage in deeper learning and capacity building. Prioritize development and training for senior leaders, emphasizing the cultivation of leadership behaviors that create conditions for inclusion and innovation, specifically empowerment, accountability, courage, and humility.
 - Normalize conversations about race, gender, religion, disability, and other forms of difference that can be marginalized and minoritized. Create safe and brave spaces to practice building skill in leading and participating in these conversations through routine and proactive dialogues.
 - Training in mental health first aid for front-line staff, especially as locations reopen to the public.
 - Suggestion from staff to normalize and add structure to brave conversations about inequity and to promote psychological safety:

“There needs to be a place a safe place where NOLS employees can talk about uncomfortable situations that happen during the course at work. Organizations tend to focus on when there is conflict between coworkers but when an employee has an uncomfortable interaction with a patron there is no follow through from managers or admin because the employee often doesn't have to place to vent those feelings (in the workplace). When an incident report is filled out there also needs to be follow up and debrief with admin/HR within a certain time period and time to reflect on what

happened and how improve it. HR or admin should check in with individual within 24-48 hours of next work shift. It's not that employees are encouraged to stay silent about racist/sexist things that happen it's that there isn't a place for them to voice such occurrences and they won't want the label of "being too sensitive". All employees especially anyone not white has described interactions with patrons who use microaggressions but they're so common that the employees don't see it as a "big deal" so don't report it to anyone because they don't want to make it an issue."

- Board Learning
 - Normalize conversations about race, gender, religion, disability, and other forms of difference that can be marginalized and minoritized. Create safe and brave spaces to practice building skill in leading and participating in these conversations through routine and proactive dialogues.
 - Develop an EDI learning plan for Board members.
 - Recommended topics include: community engagement, ableism, sexism/heterosexism/trans oppression, youth oppression, white supremacy culture, intersectionality, and organizational compassion.
- Increase psychological safety
 - Promote more open dialogues about power, privilege, and status.
 - Team cohesion sessions by branch with the goals of cultivating organizational compassion practices and developing conflict norms.
 - Develop feedback and accountability loops for incorporating staff ideas, input, and concerns.
- Prioritize cultivating belonging for marginalized patrons, particularly disabled patrons and patrons with marginalized genders.
 - Look for opportunities to practice 'microinclusions' (the opposite of microaggressions) for the purpose of supporting marginalized community members in feeling included.
- Increase racial, gender, and disability diversity of staff. *
 - Develop an anti-racist/anti-sexist/anti-ableist recruitment, hiring, development/mentorship, and retention strategy for staff.
- Increase racial, gender, age, and disability diversity of Board members*
 - Develop robust and active recruitment strategies that are tailored to the needs of the least represented communities. Consider prioritizing engagement with local tribal and immigrant communities and developing strategies for their representation on the Board.

*These efforts to diversify the staff and Board composition of NOLS should be initiated after significant work to cultivate an organizational culture that creates the conditions for a more diverse community of staff and Board members to thrive. Recruiting and hiring from a more diverse array of communities without first tending to the development of an inclusive organizational culture will contribute to poor retention and satisfaction for those new organizational members.

Communication and Transparency

- Promote and practice open dialogue and candid conversations.
 - Routine and proactive discussions about social equity issues.
 - Develop conflict norms and peer accountability measures connected to conflict norms.
- Strengthen Clarity of Processes and Decision-Making.
 - Develop and implement a transparency tool.
 - Implement staff response protocol and standards.
 - Outlining how and when staff will reply to requests and questions with accountability and transparency.
- Adopt Plain Language Practices (for greater accessibility for disabled community members and English language learners).

Equity and Accountability

- Clarify Accountability Structures.
 - Clearly map power structures within branches, between staff members, between staff and Board, etc.
 - Develop EDI public dashboard (to include staff and Board demographic and retention data).
 - Develop conflict norms.
 - Perform a compensation and benefit audit.
- Evaluate and assess digital equity for library users.
 - Can patrons access the devices they need, when they need them?
- Evaluate and assess the equity impact of NOLS funding models.
 - Study alternatives to fees for patrons who are disparately impacted by the fees for printing, lost books, etc.

- Evaluate hours of operation, timing/occurrence of programs and services for equitable access for patrons who work evenings and weekends.
- Further examine staff feedback regarding inequitable distribution of workload and develop strategies to more fairly distribute work.
- Formalize expectations for the role of EDI in staff responsibilities and scope of work.
- Perform a disability access audit of all buildings and programs.
- Evaluate and develop a strategy to improve language access for library patrons.

Conclusion

It has been a privilege to get to know the NOLS community throughout this process. The care that staff, Board members, and community stakeholders brought to their engagement in this process is a tangible representation of this community's commitment to working collaboratively to support NOLS in its ongoing work to foster inclusion and belonging in service of the community.

A central principle of EDI work is that it is iterative in nature. The work never stops; it continuously evolves. We are encouraged and inspired by the leadership and commitment shown by individuals throughout the NOLS ecosystem and are honored to have been trusted with the work of gathering the stories and perspectives that have shaped these insights and recommendations. We also acknowledge that it can feel overwhelming to be confronted with all of this information and with so many recommendations that can all feel important and urgent. We invite you to lean into the iterative nature of equity and belonging. Start where it moves. Honor your capacity and do what you can with what you have. Move at the pace of your humanity. As Rev. Jennifer Bailey wisely said, "Relationships move at the speed of trust, and social change moves at the speed of relationships." We are grateful for our relationship with NOLS and honored by your trust and faith throughout this process. We are so excited to witness your evolution and welcome the opportunity to offer support and partnership as you continue this journey.