

Motivations for the Creation of Social Justice Guides: A Survey of ARL Member Institutions

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abstract: This study surveyed librarians and staff at Association of Research Libraries (ARL) member institutions to determine who assembles social justice guides (that is, LibGuides), what motivated the creation of such guides, and how these guides are deployed. Additionally, the survey gauged employee perceptions of library and institutional responses to social unrest. Sociopolitical events, perceived educational need, and work assignments to develop such a guide were the primary reasons motivating the creation of the guides. Social justice guides are seldom incorporated or deployed into wider library or institutional programming, however. Overall, library and institutional diversity statements and responses to social unrest were perceived as words without action. Results from this survey shed light on library employee perceptions, on the emotional labor involved in the development of anti-racist resources, and on library and institutional responses to social unrest.

Introduction

An earlier article by the authors of this study highlighted that academic libraries created and presented social justice guides (that is, LibGuides) centering on anti-Black racism in ways detached from the highly charged social context that inspired them. In this regard, libraries and other information-focused institutions default to informational “neutrality” on topics that are inherently contextual and have implications that disallow for a passive stance.¹ A secondary assertion of the first study was that social justice work was disproportionately designated to librarians who identified racially as nonwhite. The study focused on a structural and content analysis of social justice guides that centered anti-Black racism, leaving unanswered several questions related to the development of such guides. The present study seeks to determine who is doing the work of assembling anti-racist social justice guides, what factors motivate

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the decision to create such a guide, and how these guides are deployed. Additionally, it gauges librarian and staff perceptions of library and institutional responses to social unrest.

Many librarians create guides (that is, LibGuides) to address systemic racism, specifically anti-Black racism, in their communities and across the United States. These guides provide resources of all kinds and are directed at varying audiences and communities.² Building on their previous study, the authors believe that identifying the motivation behind creating these diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) focused guides as well as analyzing their use and incorporation can help determine the impact of this work on librarians and on their libraries and institutions. Because of the cost of the emotional labor required, it is important to consider the rationale for why a librarian decides to create a social justice guide. Responses to these questions also provide insight into the organizational culture and the sense of obligation that may motivate the creation of social justice guides.

To explore these issues, the authors deployed a “mirrored” question format in the survey, with questions that pointedly asked why an action, in this case the creation of a social justice guide, was undertaken. This study surveyed librarians and staff at Association of Research Libraries (ARL) member institutions to answer the following research questions:

1. Who is making social justice guides (LibGuides)?
2. What are the motivations behind the creation (or non-creation) of social justice guides?
3. How are social justice guides being used?
4. What (if any) is the connection between the creation of social justice guides and wider library and institutional responses to social justice issues?

Literature Review

Primarily White institutions of higher education have a history of discriminating against the Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) employees in and around them. Academic institutions such as Barnard College of Columbia University and Harvard University utilized slaves in different capacities. According to the Report of the Committee on Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery, enslaved people cooked meals and made beds for the students and faculty.³ Frederick Barnard, Barnard’s founder, utilized slaves as research assistants, but he may also have allowed his female slaves to be sexually exploited.⁴

Academic institutions have started to address these past wrongs, but White supremacy remains embedded in the culture. In 2018, the campus police at Yale University were called because a Black graduate student fell asleep while studying in a common room of her dorm. According to the *Yale Daily News*, the Yale University Police Department asked the student to prove that she belonged in the building by opening the door to her apartment. Even after she complied, the officers requested her ID and required that she provide further proof of her right to be there by demonstrating her keycard access to the building.⁵



This system of discrimination against patrons and employees is institutional and insidious, and libraries are not exempt from participating in it. In 2021, a security guard at the Moody Memorial Library of Baylor University in Waco, Texas, called Baylor police because the guard felt a group of Black students was causing a noise disturbance. According to the student newspaper, the *Baylor Lariat*, a student employee said that the group was no louder than other groups she had observed while working in the library.⁶ Baylor University, like many others, has a statement on its website about its commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Reviewing diversity initiatives at liberal arts college libraries, Julie Gilbert noted that diversity work was valued but not prioritized at an organizational level. Survey results found that only about one-third of respondents reported that their library had a stated commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion through official library documentation. Shortages of time (51 percent) and lack of funding (44 percent) were identified as the primary barriers to pursuing diversity-related activities.⁷ In an analysis of content, communication, and messaging regarding DEI statements on academic library websites, Eric Ely found that 37 percent of the language focused on racial diversity, specifically naming Black, Latinx, Native American, and Asian American people, was found in strategic plans. Twenty-seven percent of such language appeared in values statements. Including DEI

Only about one-third of respondents reported that their library had a stated commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion through official library documentation.

in values statements or strategic plans was not implicit proof of measurable institutional change or dedication to DEI work. Ely's analysis found a majority of statements gave vague conceptualizations of diversity. Only a subset used anti-racist and social justice language that positioned the library as an active agent of social change.⁸

As April Hathcock noted, "Rather than being framed as a shared goal for the common good, diversity is approached as a problem that must be solved, with diverse librarians becoming the objectified pawns deployed to attack the problem."⁹ Myrna Morales, Em Claire Knowles, and Chris Bourg asserted that to actively pursue social justice within libraries, librarianship must acknowledge that many current practices reinforce existing structures of privilege and inequality.¹⁰ Alyssa Jocson Porter, Sharon Spence-Wilcox, and Kimberly Tate-Malone identified four concepts that impact women of color (WOC) in librarianship: emotional labor; impostor syndrome; racial battle fatigue; and microaggressions.¹¹ These factors work together to create a system that can lead to burnout and turnover, especially with librarians of color. Impostor syndrome, a person's mistaken belief that their accomplishments do not deserve praise or success, may result from a combination of feeling out of place in academia and having experienced microaggressions.¹² Microaggressions are small exchanges that belittle, stereotype, or insult those in marginalized groups, even if unintentional. Emotional labor is the internal and external work that librarians of color must do when they are required to mask their feelings, endure micro and macroaggressions, or educate without compensation.¹³ Racial battle fatigue may result from frequently seeing Black and Brown people killed in the media, from being forced to volunteer, or from being told to serve on an equity committee, all

while questioning if the work will lead to any substantive change.¹⁴ Nicole Cooke's autoethnographic article highlights the price paid by employees of color in academia for "simply existing in predominately white spaces where their countenances are not the norm."¹⁵

According to Jina DuVernay, Black and Indigenous librarians of color (BILOC) often do additional work to make their library a welcoming space for other underrepresented individuals.¹⁶ The additional labor comes in many forms and puts such librarians at risk

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of emotional and mental burnout from feelings of obligation and institutional requests or demands. Jocson Porter, Spence-Wilcox, and Tate-Malone identify this as a system of dysfunction that impacts the health of BIPOC librarians, specifically WOC.¹⁷ Within this system, it is important to look at how such concepts as institutional buy-in and the phrase "other duties as assigned" in job descriptions impact BIPOC librarians and staff.¹⁸ An organization might create a diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and accessibility (DEIJA) statement, but if members of the institution and administration do not believe

in or understand the importance of the statement, they might resist measurable change.¹⁹ Even individuals dedicated to improving the DEI of the institution might have little or no support from colleagues or administrators.

A plan with measurable outcomes that allocates the needed resources for DEI initiatives is critical in both the retention of librarians and the prevention of burnout. As Peace Ossom-Williamson, Jamia Williams, Xan Goodman, Christian Minter, and Ayaba Logan explain: "Libraries must take measures to avoid virtue signaling, the taking of insincere, largely symbolic, actions 'for clout,' also known as paying lip service. We must move beyond performative acts of equity, inclusion, and diversity, and go beyond words to implement true change for individuals and institutions."²⁰ Institutional commitment to DEI work needs to be reflected in the library employees who create these social justice guides feeling that their work is supported by management and administration, that they receive the resources they need to complete the work, and that it is viewed as a priority, not an afterthought.

Alyssa Jennings and Kristine Kinzer provide examples of what small groups, library departments, and individuals can do to reframe the conversations. They insist that an institution must have adequate BIPOC representation to fully decenter Whiteness within library and information science (LIS).²¹ In a review of the LIS literature, Emily Jones, Nandita Mani, Rebecca Carlson, Carolyn Welker, Michelle Cawley, and Fei Yu found that engagement in social betterment was identified in academic libraries and across all areas of practice, most frequently in research and scholarship and in collection development.²² They determined that the LIS field has engaged with anti-racism initiatives more often in areas related to broad advocacy or raising awareness.²³ The physical and visible presence of BIPOC librarians is critical to building a community. Institutions can issue diversity statements, but they also need to make a fiscal commitment, not only for DEIJA training, but for projects that address systematic racism.



The University of North Carolina invested funds in a project by its Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) Council called *On the Books: Jim Crow and the Algorithms of Resistance*. This ongoing research project utilizes machine reading to identify the Jim Crow laws that enforced racial segregation and to create a searchable database from the results.²⁴ Such projects may not relieve the emotional burden, but they are a step toward making DEIJA part of an institution's core values. The present study attempts to address the gap between libraries' actions on DEIJA issues and employee perception of those actions.

Methods

As this study builds on a previous investigation focused on ARL members,²⁵ the survey was also limited to the 124 ARL member institutions. Five members (the Center for Research Libraries, Library of Congress, National Agricultural Library, National Archives and Records Administration, and National Library of Medicine) were excluded because they were a library consortium or federal government library. Additionally, for this second study, all Canadian ARL member institutions were excluded because survey questions dealt with social unrest in the United States. The guides and institutions which formed the basis for the survey were drawn directly from the earlier study.

Of 119 ARL institutions identified within the parameters of the previous study, after the exclusions mentioned, 57 had social justice guides within scope. Five of these institutions had two social justice-related guides each. Of the included institutions, 30 had no social justice guide. Guides were considered within scope if they were general subject or topic guides; if they focused at least in part on anti-Black racism; and if their primary purpose was as an outward-facing educational tool to inform. For complete inclusion and exclusion criteria for how social justice guides were defined, see the original study.²⁶

The authors distributed the survey via Qualtrics to 87 ARL member institutions. If the library had a social justice guide, an e-mail survey invitation was sent to every person listed as a guide owner or author. For libraries without social justice guides, the investigators identified people at the library who had administrative or coordinator roles related to education. A total of 140 e-mails were sent via the Qualtrics e-mail distribution system. Three e-mails could not be delivered (2 bounced, 1 failed), bringing the total to 137 e-mails sent. Three individuals declined to participate in the survey. The final number of participants was 64, for a 47 percent response rate. The survey was active between January 20 and February 25, 2022. The questionnaire (see the Appendix) was deemed exempt by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Of the 30 institutions where no social justice guide was found, 13 respondents across 12 institutions completed the survey. Of the 57 libraries with social justice guides, 37 completed the survey, with 7 institutions having multiple respondents. In total, 49 institutions responded, a 56 percent response rate. The response rate by institution (not the total number of participants) was 65 percent for libraries with social justice guides versus 40 percent for libraries without them.

Respondents had the option to skip questions; the "force response" rule was turned off in Qualtrics. This led to varied response rates by question, which are noted in the results.

Results

Demographic Questions

Three demographic questions sought to determine survey participants' gender, race, and role. All these questions allowed only one response.

When asked "To which gender identity do you most identify," 79 percent of 62 respondents ($n = 49$) identified as female and 13 percent ($n = 8$) as male. Eight percent ($n = 5$) described themselves as nonbinary or third gender or preferred not to say. No respondents identified as transgender. That breakdown was similar between libraries with (82 percent, $n = 51$) and without (18 percent, $n = 11$) social justice guides except for the percentage who preferred not to say, which was higher for libraries without guides (18 percent, $n = 2$, versus 4 percent, $n = 2$) (see Figure 1).

Respondents were also asked "To which race do you most identify?" For this question, the authors recognize that allowing only a single response limited participants who identify as more than one race. Of 62 respondents overall, 73 percent ($n = 45$) identified as White, 10 percent ($n = 6$) as Black, 6 percent ($n = 4$) as Asian, and 3 percent ($n = 2$) as American Indian or Alaskan Native. No respondents described themselves as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and 8 percent ($n = 5$) preferred not to respond. The percentages from libraries with guides ($n = 51$) were similar to the overall responses. Respondents from libraries without guides ($n = 11$) differed, with 55 percent ($n = 6$) identifying as White, 18 percent ($n = 2$) describing themselves as Black, and 27 percent ($n = 3$) preferring not to say (see Figure 2). An additional question asked if respondents were of Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish origin. Of 63 respondents, 86 percent ($n = 54$) responded no, 9 percent ($n = 6$) answered yes, and 5 percent ($n = 3$) preferred not to say.

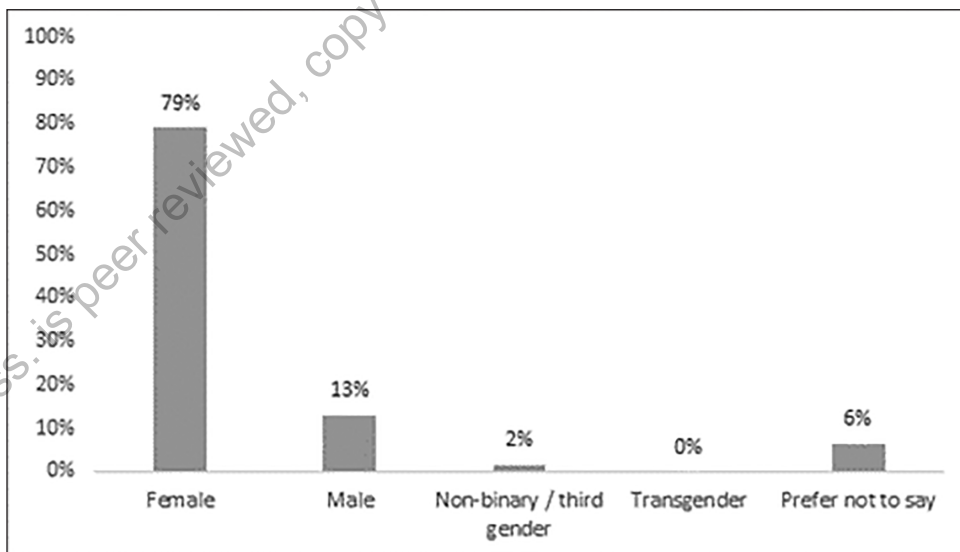


Figure 1. Survey respondents' answers to the question "To which gender identity do you most identify?" (N = 62)

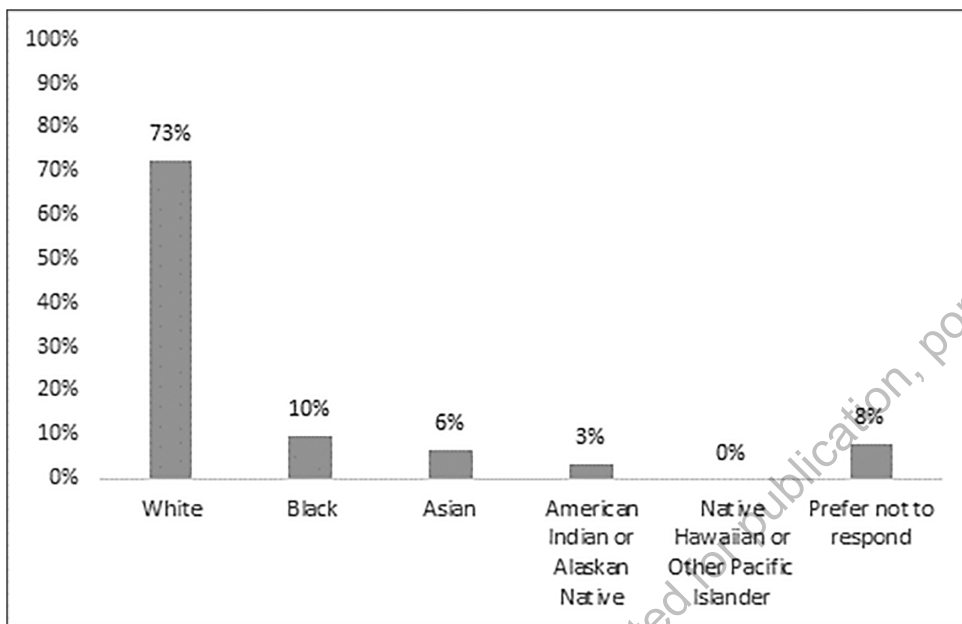


Figure 2. Respondents' answers to the question "To which race do you most identify?" (N = 62)

Comparing the demographics of this survey with national demographics allowed the authors to identify what portions of the population were underrepresented within the current sample. A 2017 Ithaca S+R survey of DEI within ARL member institutions identified 61 percent as female and 38 percent as male. Seventy-one percent described themselves as White, 8 percent as Black or African American, 8 percent as Asian, and 6 percent as Hispanic. Less than 1 percent identified as either American Indian or Alaskan Native or as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.²⁷ According to a 2017 demographic study by the American Library Association (ALA), 81 percent of librarians identified as female and 19 percent as male. Eighty-seven percent described themselves as White, 4 percent as Black or African American, 4 percent as Asian, and 1 percent as American Indian or Alaskan Native. Four percent identified as other.²⁸

Broken out by whether a library had a social justice guide, demographics by gender were largely similar (see Figure 3). Demographics by race were slightly different, however, with a higher percentage of Black respondents but a lower percentage of White respondents in libraries with no social justice guide. One hundred percent of American Indian or Alaskan Native and Asian respondents worked in libraries with a social justice guide (see Figure 4).

The final demographic question asked respondents, "What is your primary role/position at your library?" Of 63 respondents overall, 92 percent ($n = 58$) reported that they were librarians and 8 percent ($n = 5$) described themselves as staff. Again, those percentages were slightly different for the 11 institutions without social justice guides, 82 percent ($n = 9$) librarians versus 18 percent ($n = 2$) staff.

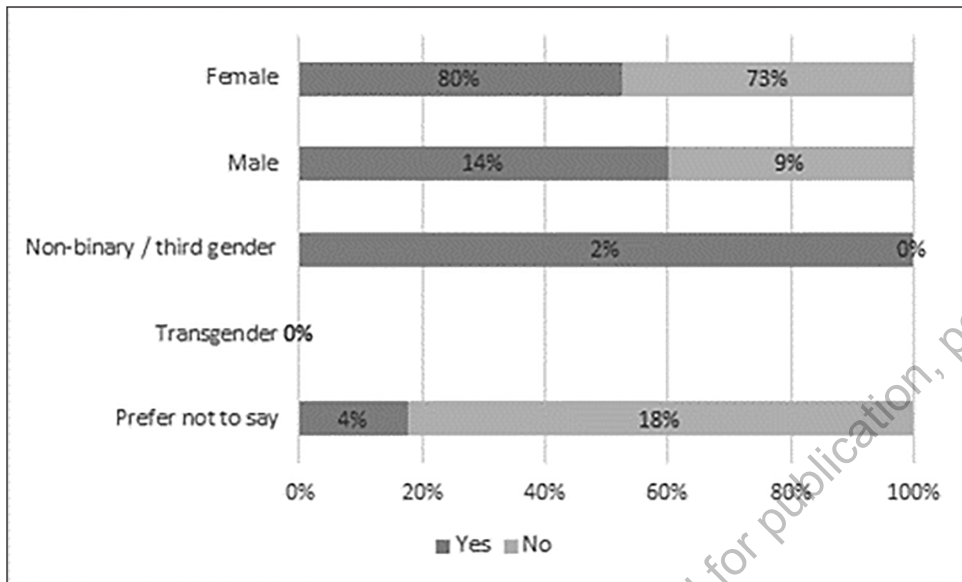


Figure 3. Respondents' answers by gender to the question "Does your library have a social justice guide(s)?"

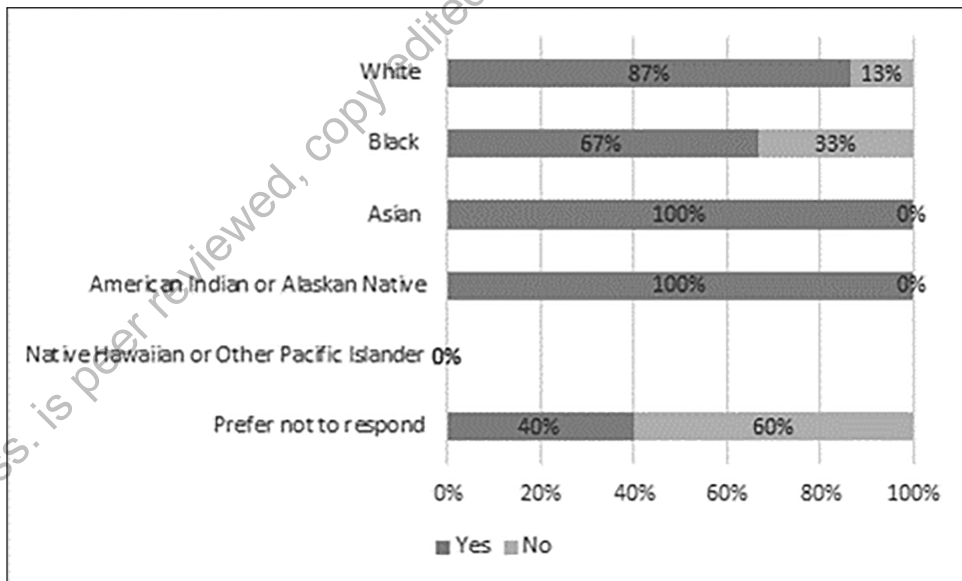


Figure 4. Respondents' answers by race to the question "Does your library have a social justice guide(s)?"



Content Questions

After the demographic questions, respondents were asked whether their library had a social justice guide. Of 63 respondents, 83 percent ($n = 52$) replied yes and 17 percent ($n = 11$) answered no (see Figure 5). After answering this question, respondents were asked different questions depending on whether their library did or did not have a social justice guide.

Libraries with Social Justice Guides

Fifty-two respondents stated their library had a social justice guide. Of those, 46 responded to the question “Whose idea was it to create the social justice guide(s)?” Thirty-three percent ($n = 15$) indicated that the idea was theirs (mine), 22 percent ($n = 10$) credited a colleague, 20 percent ($n = 9$) indicated that it was a library committee or task force, 7 percent ($n = 3$) answered library administration, and 2 percent ($n = 1$) attributed the creation to campus administration. No respondents indicated a campus committee or task force was the impetus for the guide (see Figure 6). Seventeen percent of respondents ($n = 8$) chose the response “Other,” which allowed free-text entry. The other people or groups credited with suggesting a social justice guide included a group of colleagues, an informal group of librarians, the reference department overall, the campus office of diversity and inclusion, other campus stakeholders, and the administration of the university or college. Some answers indicated that different guides for different issues were the ideas of various individuals and groups or that an access services staff member advocated such a guide to the DEI committee. Still other responses credited a shared impetus among several colleagues or multiple initiatives by administration, the library, and a library committee or task force.

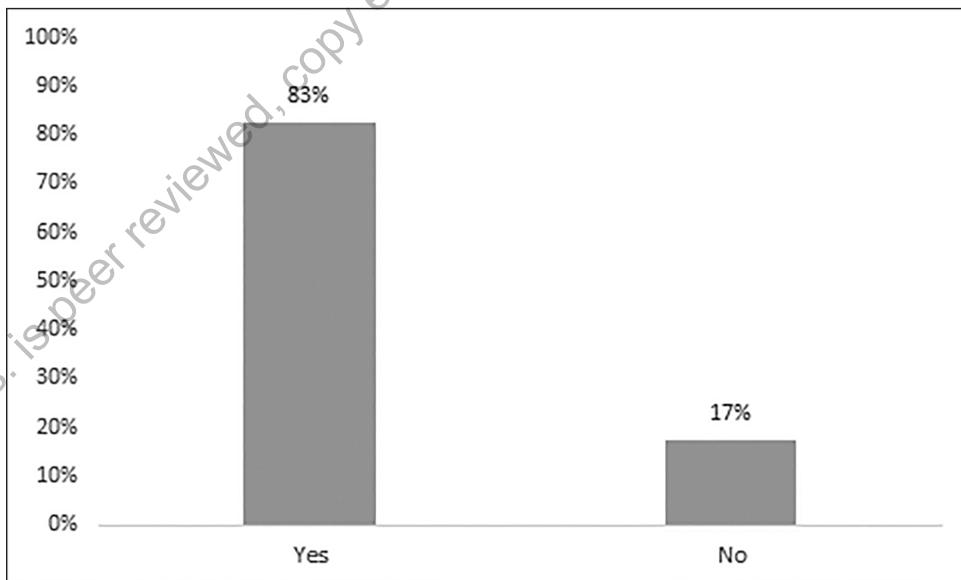


Figure 5. Answers to the question “Does your library have a social justice guide(s) (e.g., LibGuide)?” (N = 63)

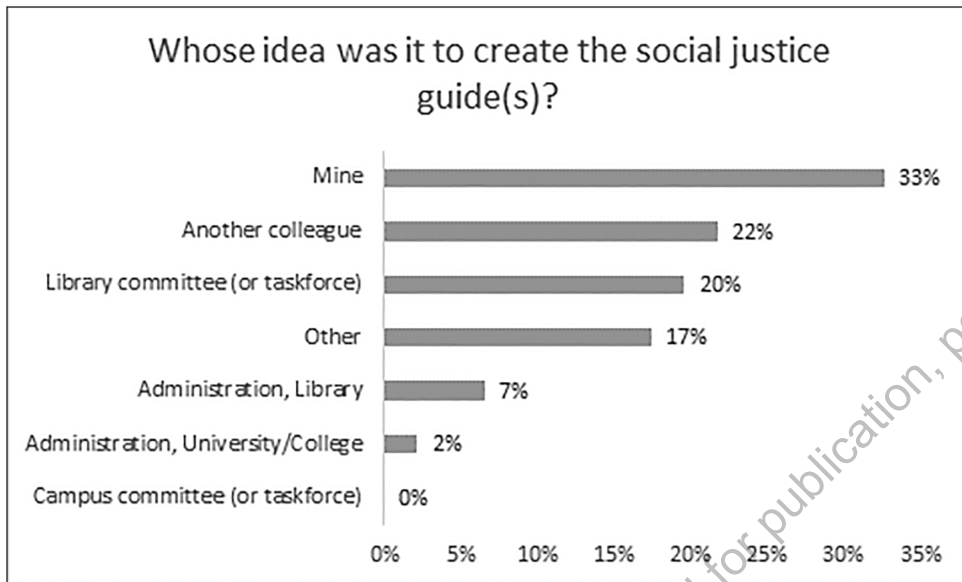


Figure 6. Answers to the question “Whose idea was it to create the social justice guide(s)?” (N = 46)

An open-ended question asked, “What motivated the creation of the social justice guide?” Responses (N = 43) were coded into the following factors as motivations: not sure, directed to create, educational need, and sociopolitical events. Among these, 40 percent ($n = 17$) indicated a sociopolitical event was the primary motivating factor in their decision to create a social justice guide. Educational need was the second most cited factor at 26 percent ($n = 11$). Being “directed to create” was the third most common answer (16 percent, $n = 7$). “Subject expertise” (14 percent, $n = 6$) was cited second to last. Lastly, some respondents (5 percent, $n = 2$) reported being unsure of what motivated the creation of the guide (see Figure 7). Mostly, those who were unsure stated that their guides were inherited from another librarian.

When asked “How was your social justice guide(s) composed/created?” most respondents indicated it was a collaboration between multiple librarians and staff, with 46 percent ($n = 21$) giving that answer. Twenty-eight percent ($n = 13$) credited an individual librarian or staff member, and 9 percent ($n = 4$) named a DEI task force (see Figure 8). Seventeen percent ($n = 8$) of respondents chose “Other.” Free-text responses included collaboration between librarians and student employees and the local Black life student group; collaboration between two librarians that was sent to others in the library and to relevant cultural centers on campus for input and feedback; and partnerships between the library and other campus units. One respondent said that the guide was maintained by an individual librarian with collaboration between multiple librarians.

For respondents who indicated their guide was created by a DEI task force ($n = 4$), a follow-up open-ended question asked about the composition of that group. One response was that the group was a DEI professional development subcommittee consisting of a business librarian, a special collections archivist, an instruction librarian, access services staff, and subject librarians. Other respondents answered that the task force

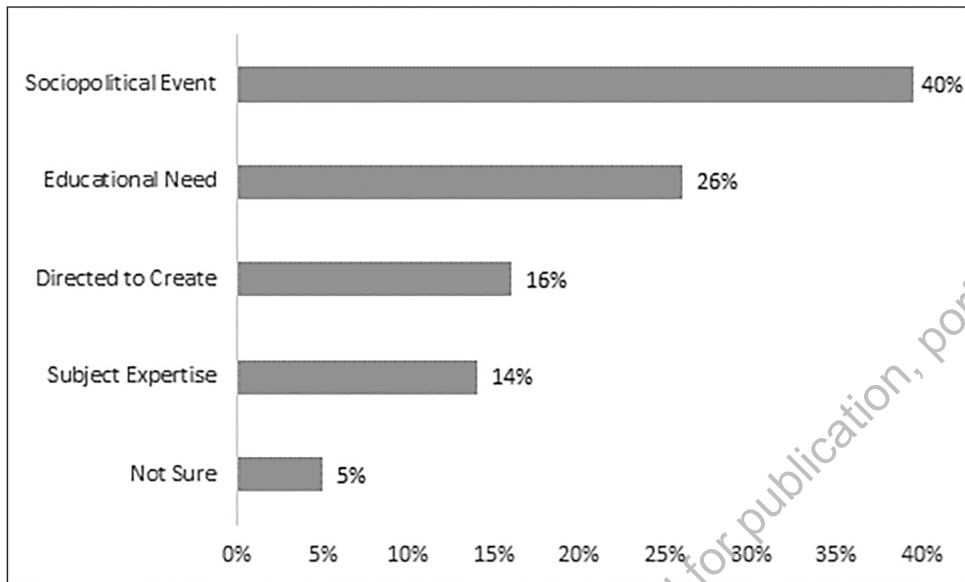


Figure 7. Respondents' answers about what motivated the creation of the social justice guide. (N = 43)

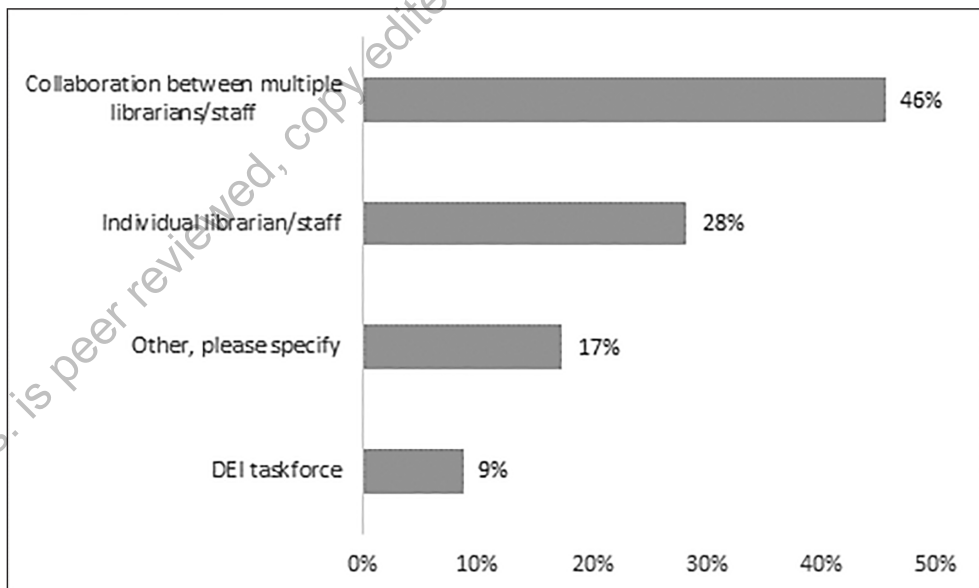


Figure 8. Answers to the question "How was your social justice guide(s) composed/created?" (N = 46)

was a diversity and inclusion team consisting of librarians and staff, or that the group was a mix of library staff and librarians encompassing cisgendered, nonbinary, queer, heterosexual, White, and POC members.

For the 28 percent ($n = 13$) of respondents who indicated that an individual librarian or staff member created their guide, a follow-up question asked them to identify “the primary or most applicable work area of that librarian/library staff member.” Liaison librarian was the most common response at 62 percent ($n = 8$). Liaison areas mentioned included history; African and African American studies; political science and international relations; English; education; Native American studies; and Jewish thought. “Other” was the next most common response at 23 percent ($n = 3$). The work areas mentioned included middle management, a diversity resident librarian, and a mix of several areas. Collection development and archivist/curator were each chosen by one respondent.

A series of open-ended questions sought to determine the support for and reception of the social justice guide as well as any other related efforts at the respondents’ institutions. Only 19 percent ($n = 12$) of respondents answered an open-ended question about administrative support for the development, creation, and marketing of guides (see Figure 9). Of these, 58 percent ($n = 7$) reported that they received no administrative support. Conversely, 42 percent ($n = 5$) indicated that they had some administrative support.

Almost exclusively, respondents indicated that administrative support took the form of assistance with marketing the guide via the library’s social media. The other form of support mentioned was recognition from their leadership team for their work on the guide. Only one individual reported that their work creating the social justice guide was considered in their promotion and tenure case. Another respondent reported that they were recognized by their administrative leadership team only after receiving external congratulations for their efforts. Only one person mentioned receiving suggestions for additional resources from their colleagues.

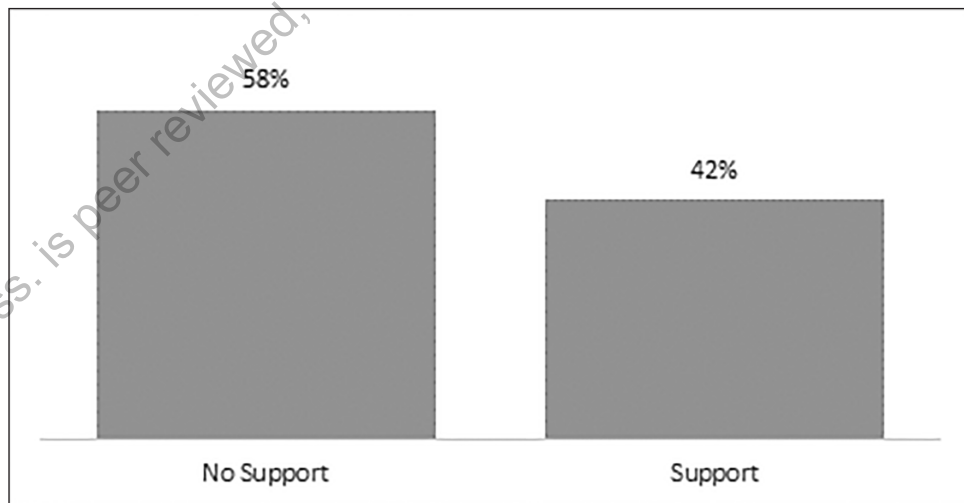


Figure 9. Administrative support for social justice guides. (N = 12)

Seven participants answered the question “Did you get pushback on the creation of the social justice guide(s)? Please explain.” Seventy-one percent ($n = 5$) responded that they experienced no pushback when they published their social justice guide. Twenty-nine percent ($n = 2$) described some opposition, however. One individual commented that while the campus generally supported their social justice guide, one faculty or community member challenged the inclusion of certain texts within the guide. Another respondent reported that politicians or groups opposed to critical race theory leaked their personal information. According to critical race theory, race is a socially constructed concept that functions to maintain the interests of the White population who created it. As a result, the respondent restricted access to their social justice guide. Neither the library nor campus administration provided support to the individual in question during these events.

The survey asked, “How has the social justice guide(s) been incorporated? (For example, how was the guide marketed? How did instructors respond?)” Sixty-seven percent ($N = 43$) of individuals responded to this question (see Figure 10). Thirty-five percent ($n = 15$) reported that they did not know or were unsure how the social justice guide was incorporated into other areas. Nineteen percent ($n = 8$) indicated that neither the guide nor its resources were listed on their library website with other linked resources. This minimal usage suggests that a social justice guide was not a top priority for those institutions. Librarians created the social justice guide, but only 16 percent ($n = 7$) reported that their library advertised the guide through its social media accounts. Only 12 percent ($n = 5$) declared that their guide was tied to active programming or outreach efforts on campus. Guides created because of librarian collaborations with DEI-focused academic units (14 percent, $n = 6$) would more likely be used directly in an educational context. Only 5 percent ($n = 2$) of participants indicated that they employed their social justice guide in a core instructional capacity.

Sixty-four percent ($N = 41$) of respondents answered the question “Besides the social justice guide(s), at the level of library collections what has been done at your library to address social justice issues?” (see Figure 11). Thirty-nine percent ($n = 16$) indicated that their libraries allocated funding from collection development resources to purchase more marginalized voices and DEI content. Only 15 percent ($n = 6$), however, reported doing or receiving training on DEI auditing for their collections. This suggests that the funding might not have been allocated optimally to fill gaps within library collections.

The second highest response to the question about what was done to address social justice issues was the creation of internal mechanisms to deal with DEI. Strategic planning and DEI subcommittees both accounted for 12 percent ($n = 5$ each) of the strategies that individual libraries deployed. Only 5 percent ($n = 2$) of individuals reported targeted hiring efforts to diversify their staff. This small percentage may indicate that DEI and anti-racism are only minimally incorporated into the infrastructure of the library and

The respondents viewed administration as focused on performative tasks done mostly for show, such as climate surveys, data collection, reports, and assembling task forces.

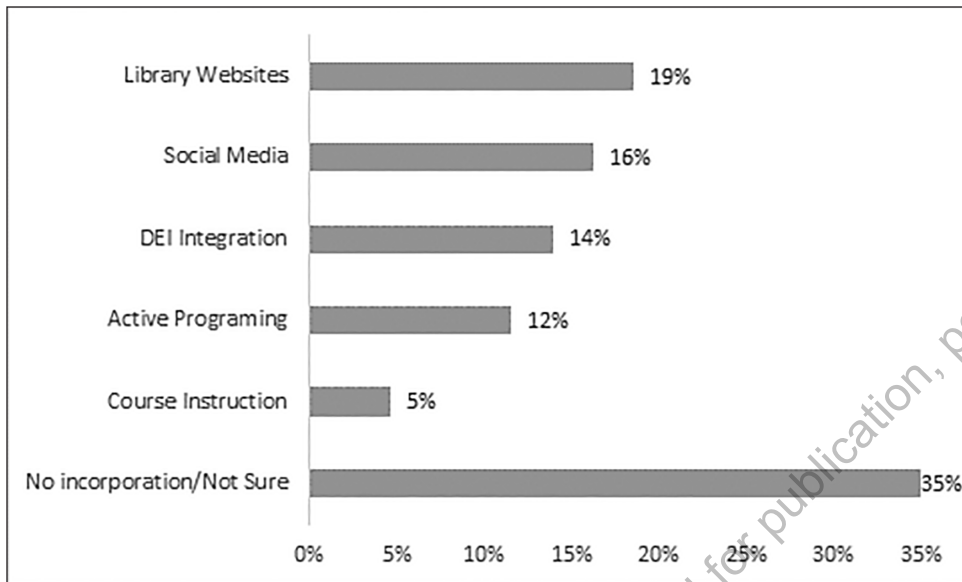


Figure 10. Answers to the question “How has the social justice guide(s) been incorporated?” (N = 43)

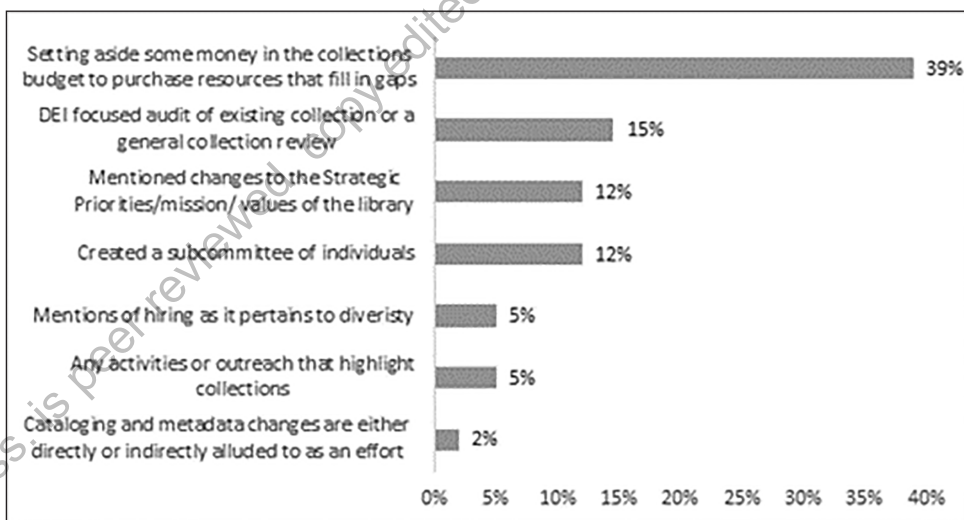


Figure 11. Answers to the question “Besides the social justice guide(s), at the level of library collections what has been done at your library to address social justice issues?” (N = 41)

its organizational culture. Ten percent ($n = 4$) of respondents answered that they were unaware of any other DEI integration within their library or provided responses outside the scope of the question. Only 5 percent ($n = 2$) reported that they created displays to highlight specific collections. Just 2 percent ($n = 1$) indicated that they changed their metadata and cataloging practices.

Sixty-three percent ($N = 40$) of individuals responded to the open-ended question "What other initiatives did you, or your library, do to thread diversity through the library?" (see Figure 12). Themes within administration accounted for 23 percent ($n = 9$) of reported institutional initiatives. The respondents viewed administration as focused on performative tasks done mostly for show, such as climate surveys, data collection, reports, and assembling task forces. These efforts reflect more passive or distant engagement with issues related to DEI and result in few or no tangible changes in the organizational culture. Persistent noncompliance or actions resulting in no organizational change were classified within the unaware/no change theme, which equaled 23 percent ($n = 9$) of total responses. Eighteen percent ($n = 7$) indicated that their institution added diversity by creating or hiring a new position. Thirteen percent ($n = 5$) signaled that diversity was treated as a core competency and promoted through increased programming efforts. Ten percent ($n = 4$) said that diversity was entwined through greater training opportunities. Lastly, only 3 percent ($n = 1$) suggested instruction was a method of advancing diversity initiatives.

Libraries without Social Justice Guides

Respondents were asked as an open-ended question "You indicated your library does not have a social justice guide(s). What factors went into not creating social justice

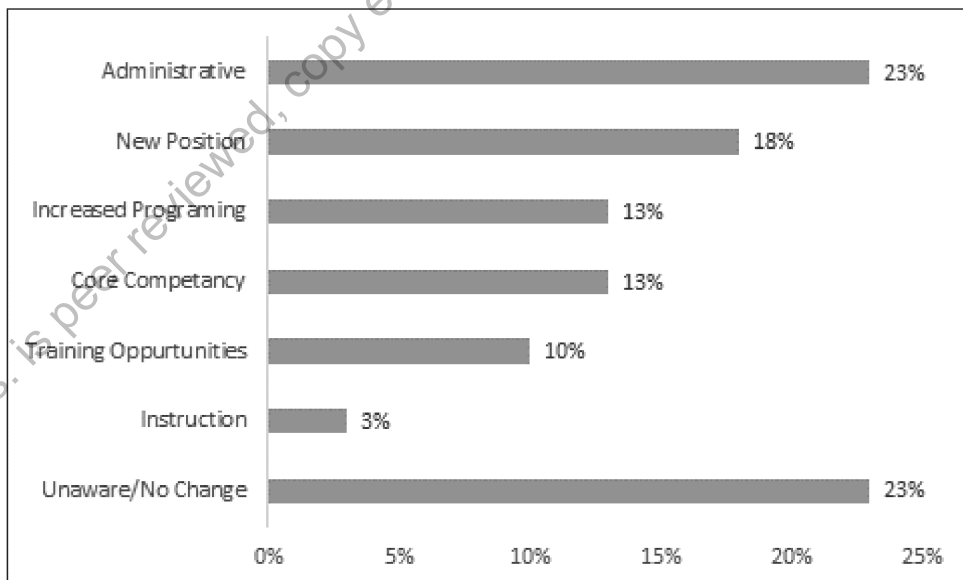


Figure 12. Answers to the question "What other initiatives did you, or your library, do to thread diversity through the library?" ($N = 40$)

guides?" Of the eight responses to this question, 38 percent ($n = 3$) signaled that subject or disciplinary boundaries were a primary factor in the failure to create a social justice guide (see Figure 13). One individual (13 percent) reported that they considered DEI as a separate category of specialized knowledge that they lacked, disconnected from issues on which they needed to focus as a subject expert within their core discipline area. Furthermore, 25 percent ($n = 2$) stated that they had never thought to create such a guide, and another 25 percent ($n = 2$) commented that they had contemplated creating one but their institutions were too "understaffed and resourced" to give adequate time and attention to the project.

The Social Justice Climate

The survey asked all respondents four questions that sought to understand the social justice climate and response at their institutions. The first question was "Does your library (or university/college) have a diversity statement?" ($N = 56$). Fifty-nine percent ($n = 33$) responded that both their library and their university or college had a diversity statement. Eighteen percent ($n = 10$) had a statement at the university or college level, and 13 percent ($n = 7$) had one at the library level. Two percent ($n = 1$) lacked such a statement at either the university or college or library level, and 9 percent ($n = 5$) responded that they did not know if there was a diversity statement (see Figure 14). The percentages were similar for libraries that did and did not have social justice guides. A higher percentage of respondents from libraries without social justice guides stated that both their library and their university or college had diversity statements (70 percent without guides versus 56 percent with them).

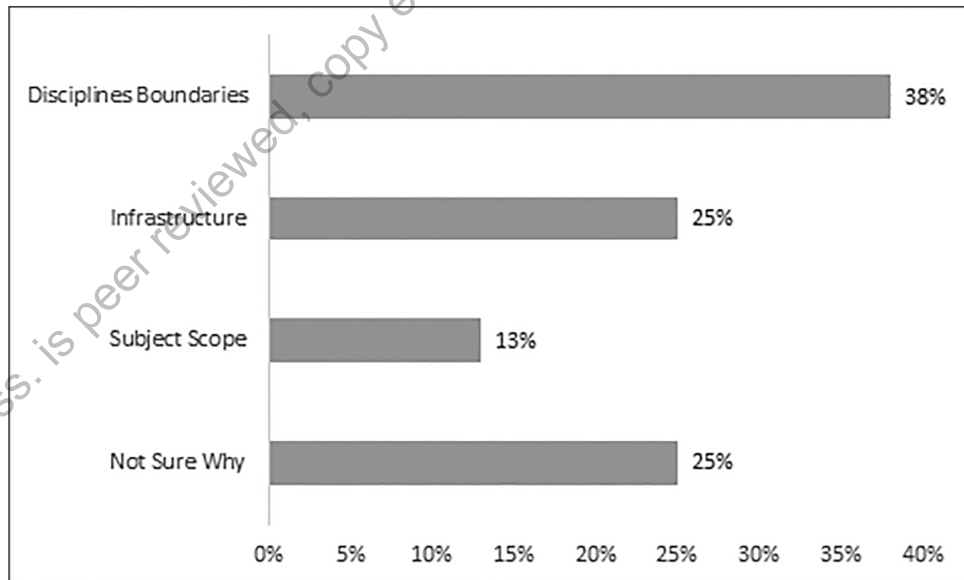


Figure 13. How respondents who indicated their library does not have a social justice guide answered the question "What factors went into not creating social justice guides?" ($N = 8$)

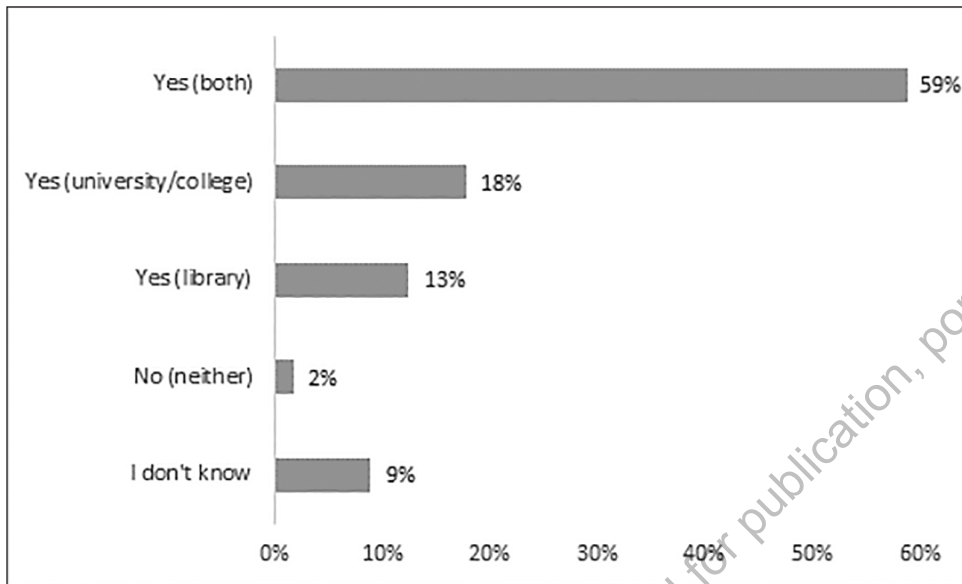


Figure 14. Answers to the question “Does your library (or university/college) have a diversity statement?” (N = 56)

For respondents who affirmed that their university or college, library, or both had a diversity statement, a follow-up question asked, “Do you think your library and/or university/college diversity statement is strong enough?” Among 46 respondents, 54 percent ($n = 25$) responded yes, and 46 percent ($n = 21$) answered no. Respondents were asked to explain their answer. Those signaling that the diversity statement was strong enough mentioned specific points in the statement and what resources were provided. Many respondents indicated that, while the statement was strong, it was just a statement. Actions and accountability were more difficult to measure. Reasons why respondents felt the diversity statement was not strong enough included that it did not go far enough and failed to focus on true liberation; it lacked substance; it was vague or performative—that is, done mostly to make a good impression; and it lacked enforcement and accountability mechanisms. As one respondent stated, “It may be strong enough, but a statement is worthless without action.” Another noted that the statement was created by the university administration and then given to the diversity committee to implement. Still another respondent declared that their library’s statement “says untrue things that will never be true, making liars out of the library.”

Respondents ($N = 55$) were then asked a third question, “Did your library (or university/college) put out any news releases or statements on social justice unrest (e.g., related to George Floyd protests)?” Thirty-six percent ($n = 20$) responded yes, their university or college had published both news releases and statements related to social justice unrest. Five percent ($n = 3$) stated their library put out a news release. Four percent ($n = 2$) replied that neither their library nor their university or college issued a release, and 18 percent ($n = 10$) indicated they did not know (see Figure 15). Again, percentages were similar when broken out by libraries with or without guides.

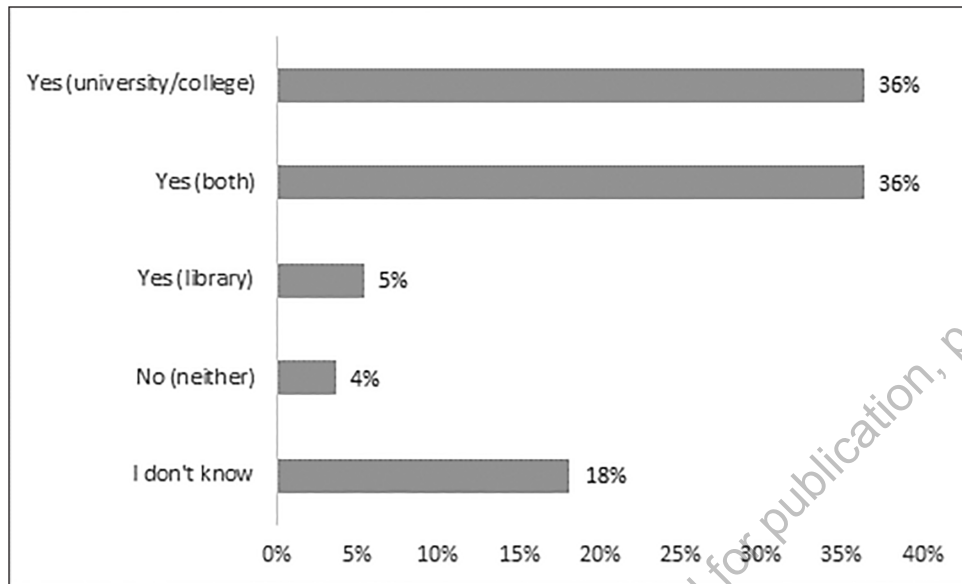


Figure 15. Answers to the question "Did your library (or university/college) put out any news releases or statements on social justice unrest?" (N = 55)

A follow-up fourth question asked respondents if they thought the news release was strong enough and to explain their answer. Over half, 57 percent ($n = 21$), of respondents replied yes, the release was strong enough; 43 percent ($n = 16$) responded no, it was not strong enough. Reasons respondents thought the news releases or statements were strong enough included that they clearly stated actions or accountability that would be taken; that they reflected a sincere effort to address violence and inequalities; and that they were released immediately after events. One respondent said, "While I am conflicted about the use of statements by orgs/ companies, I think as statements go they did pretty well. They really didn't shy away from addressing the reality of our society and the traumatic events that occurred." Another explained, "The statements responding to the murder of George Floyd included specific actions that the library and university were going to take related to anti-racism."

Respondents who replied no, the news releases were not strong enough, did so for reasons similar to those for the previous question regarding diversity statements. The answers suggested that the news releases were just words without action. One

One respondent mentioned that the university did not match its statements with actions and that it continued racist behavior and traditions.

respondent mentioned that the university did not match its statements with actions and that it continued racist behavior and traditions. Another noted that the library ignored recommendations from the DEI team. Other reasons mentioned were that the releases and statements were watered down (for example, language such as "abolish police" was not included) and distanced from the events without



acknowledging how the campus, library, or both contributed to the environment. One respondent declared, “There is still a lot of fear of offending donors.” Another respondent was blunter, saying, “Always in service of covering library / university’s ass rather than truly seeking change or justice.”

Discussion

Interest in social justice appears to be growing within librarianship, especially as a topic for research.²⁹ This study sought to add to this body of scholarship by determining who does the work of assembling social justice guides, what factors motivate the creation of such guides, and how these guides are used or deployed. Additionally, the survey gauged perceptions of library and institutional responses to social unrest via diversity statements and news releases.

RQ1: Who Creates Social Justice Guides?

In their earlier study, the authors noted that BIPOC librarians seemed to contribute disproportionately to social justice research guides.³⁰ But that conclusion was based on observation of profile photos on the guides, not through direct confirmation of who the guide owners were. In this current study, survey respondents were predominantly White and female, aligned with the race and gender breakdowns of librarians overall. During the analysis, the authors discovered that most social justice guides are created by collaborative teams, many with a core focus on DEI. Not surprisingly, the individuals creating social justice guides are those already involved in campus DEI efforts.

RQ2: What Motivates the Creation (or Non-Creation) of Social Justice Guides?

As discussed, sociopolitical events, such as the death of George Floyd, the death of a person of color in police custody, or the Black Lives Matter protest movement, were the most cited motivating factors for creation of a social justice guide. Following that was perceived educational need and being directed to develop a guide. According to Lalitha Nataraj, Holly Hampton, Talitha Matlin, and Yvonne Nalani Meulemans, organizational frustration can be an added burden for those engaged in DEI or social justice efforts. They explain, “Anecdotes . . . abound of library workers crafting recommendations and providing detailed feedback and concerns, only for upper management to

enact something entirely different—giving the appearance (rightly or wrongly) that they had already predetermined the solution.”³¹ Such disregard becomes demoralizing for the librarians doing the work and may represent an extra layer of scrutiny and judgment from White colleagues for BIPOC librarians. One respondent explained their motivation for creating a social justice guide by saying, “I was already frustrated with the white supremacist

Sociopolitical events, such as the death of George Floyd, the death of a person of color in police custody, or the Black Lives Matter protest movement, were the most cited motivating factors for creation of a social justice guide.

culture at my library, and after the murder of George Floyd, I felt compelled to create a guide of anti-racism resources.”

There was also a recurrent feeling of personal responsibility. For example, one respondent professed to “see the ‘social justice’ guides as a part of my role.” Providing social justice-themed literature was treated as a fundamental component of their primary

Equivocation regarding the responsibility for a social justice or anti-racism guide made it easier to avoid providing such a guide for patrons and community users.

job responsibility. Those reporting that they did not have a social justice guide repeatedly commented that they lacked direct personal responsibility. One respondent stated, “I suspect someone’s thought of it, but since it’s interdisciplinary, there’s a concern about which subject liaison(s) should be in charge of it.” Equivocation regarding the responsibility for a social justice or anti-racism guide made it easier to avoid providing such a guide for

patrons and community users. The library and information studies field may value social justice and diversity as concepts, yet it insists on making social justice an area of individual specialization. Social justice, like critical race theory, has become a political flash point from which libraries or individual librarians may want to distance themselves. As Alex Poole, Denise Agosto, Jane Greenberg, Xia Lin, and Erjia Yan noted:

Social justice work must recruit the entire LIS community—associations, institutions, administrators, faculty, staff, and students. Such work, moreover, must enlist not only those people already invested in social justice but also those who view themselves as unaffected by the issue or who even imperil their own privilege by engaging with it.³²

Disengagement with social justice contributes to an overall failure to view it as an informational need.

RQ3: How Are Social Justice Guides Used?

Do libraries value DEI and social justice or do they merely seek the validation achieved by creating a social justice-themed guide? This question relates to how the social justice guide was incorporated (or not) and what initiatives the library implemented to embody diversity. Alice Cruz recognized five key areas where academic libraries can meaningfully and intentionally integrate diversity: staffing, culture, collections, services, and programming.³³ According to Mónica Colón-Aguirre and Kawanna Bright,

Incorporating DEI into research is no longer a matter of preference; it is a way in which scholarship can keep up with the changes in society, including advancing areas of research on DEI that go beyond age, professional groups, and gender to those that tackle more complicated issues such as race and ethnicity. These changes need to be captured in multiple ways, including through research done by faculty and students in the field.³⁴

A large proportion of respondents (35 percent) maintained that their social justice guides were not incorporated at all.

The utilization of social justice guides in course instruction was reported as the least common form of incorporation (5 percent). This result was surprising, consider-



ing that most respondents had liaison responsibilities, including information literacy and research support, as a core aspect of their position. This finding reaffirms Jennifer Brown and Sofie Leung's point that

Work is assigned to either a position (e.g., Diversity Librarian) or a committee as though that will be enough. It's easy to point to these as clear evidence that diversity work is being done—after all, it's in the name—and that absolves anyone else in the organization from having to do diversity work.³⁵

There is a perception among liaison librarians that DEI and social justice are “extra” and “outside” the scope of their primary responsibilities. Such passivity highlights a larger pattern of disengagement with social justice topics once a guide has been created. Budget allocation for targeted purchasing of more resources was the most cited strategy for addressing social justice issues, but despite such spending, there was almost no corresponding educational or outreach programming to highlight new collections. The lack of observable difference feeds into the perception among librarians that nothing has changed because of their social justice guide.

There is a perception among liaison librarians that DEI and social justice are “extra” and “outside” the scope of their primary responsibilities.

RQ4: Social Justice Guides and Wider Responses to the Issues

A perception of bias is also reflected in survey responses related to strategies and initiatives for incorporating social justice throughout the respondents' institutions. David James Hudson charges that centering anti-racist work in libraries around inclusion inhibits “meaningful treatment of racism as a structural phenomenon.”³⁶ But, as Paul Jaeger, Lindsay Sarin, and Kaitlin Peterson have argued,

The ultimate goal of focusing on diversity and inclusion issues in LIS education, research, and practice is to make a library and its professionals a more integrated part of the community that they serve. That means being a member of the community, being knowledgeable about the community and the various populations it comprises, and being welcoming to all populations in that community.³⁷

The connection between an academic library and the institution goes both ways. Respondents largely perceived library and institutional diversity statements and press releases related to social unrest as strong but performative, with no action behind the words. Having or not having social justice guides made no difference in respondents' perceptions of library and university or college diversity statements and responses to social unrest.

Respondents largely perceived library and institutional diversity statements and press releases related to social unrest as strong but performative, with no action behind the words.

The authors would argue that performative responses by library and institutional administration are at best a form of workplace negligence and at worst a hostile act.³⁸ Either way, such responses lead to increased emotional labor, lower morale, and burn-out. Furthermore, as Bharat Mehra says, it is “important to integrate the application of social justice with other information-focused topics such as information organization, collection development, grant writing, and public library management.”³⁹ Yet almost 18 percent of respondents mentioned only the creation of a new position when asked about strategies for interweaving DEI and social justice throughout the library. Closer inspection of the positions mentioned revealed that most institutions sought to address their social justice needs by undergraduate recruitment measures or by filling diversity residencies, staff lead positions, or graduate assistantships. Many of these positions were envisioned as needing “expert knowledge” but not important enough to fund full-time or long-term. For meaningful change and action, DEI work cannot be relegated to a single position. As Nicole Pagowsky and Niamh Wallace emphasize, “The practice of examining, questioning, and researching strategies for undoing oppressive institutional structures should be part of our ongoing work in academia and should be recognized and supported by institutional resources as well as acknowledged as valid outputs in the annual review and tenure processes.”⁴⁰

Limitations

Regarding participant demographic data, one limitation of the present study is that respondents could choose only one gender and one race. This decreased the ability to determine racial and gender nuances. Another limitation is the small number of survey respondents who did not have a social justice guide as opposed to those who did have such a guide. This response rate ratio potentially skewed results.

Still another limitation of this study was that it did not account for the high turnover rate within the LIS profession. Twenty-two percent of survey respondents credited another colleague for the initial idea of developing a social justice guide, and many respondents described themselves as carrying on the DEI-related work of former co-workers. Further interrogation into how many social justice guides were inherited from BIPOC predecessors might reveal more about the extra DEI labor for BIPOC librarians.

Conclusion

This study sought to determine who assembles social justice guides, what factors motivate the creation of such guides, and how these guides are used or deployed. Additionally, the survey gauged employee perceptions of library and institutional responses to social unrest. In the authors’ earlier study, they noted that BIPOC librarians seemed to contribute disproportionately to social justice research guides.⁴¹ In this study, survey respondents were more aligned with the race and gender breakdowns of librarians, predominantly White and female. Sociopolitical events, perceived educational need, and being assigned the task were the primary reasons motivating the creation of guides. Most social justice guides are not deliberately or strategically incorporated, nor are they deployed into broader library or institutional programming. This seems like a missed opportunity,



and the work of creating such guides may be seen as wasted. A good area of future research would be to administer this survey to a wider group of libraries and librarians to determine if the trends noted among ARL member institutions are generalizable.

It is important to examine the connection between the creation of social justice guides and wider library and institutional responses to social justice issues. As the Bible says, "Faith without works is dead."⁴² Although diversity statements and press releases were perceived as strong, efforts by library and institutional administration were largely viewed as performative and done primarily to make a good impression. Library and institutional administration should be cognizant of the negative impact on employees when they fail to back up their words with action.

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Appendix

Survey

1. To which gender identity do you most identify?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Transgender
 - d. Nonbinary / third gender
 - e. Prefer not to say
2. To which race do you most identify?
 - a. American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - b. Asian [American or international]
 - c. Black [American or international]
 - d. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
 - e. White [American or international]
 - f. Prefer not to respond
3. Are you of Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or of Spanish origin?
 - a. No
 - b. Yes
 - c. Prefer not to respond
4. What is your primary role/position at your library?
 - a. Librarian



- b. Staff
5. Does your library have a social justice guide(s) (e.g., LibGuide)?
- Yes
 - No
6. You indicated your library does not have a social justice guide(s). What factors went into not creating social justice guides? [Open]
7. Whose idea was it to create the social justice guide(s)?
- Administration, library
 - Administration, university/college
 - Mine
 - Another colleague
 - Library committee (or task force)
 - Campus committee (or task force)
 - Other, please specify _____
8. What motivated the creation of the social justice guide(s)? [Open]
9. How was your social justice guide(s) composed/created?
- DEI task force
 - Individual librarian/staff
 - Collaboration between multiple librarians/staff
 - Other, please specify _____
10. You indicated your guide(s) was created by a DEI task force. What was the composition of the task force? [Open]
11. You indicated your guide(s) was created by an individual librarian and/or library staff. What is/was the primary or most applicable work area of that librarian/library staff member?
- Access Services
 - Acquisitions
 - Administration
 - Archivist/Curator
 - Cataloger
 - Collection Development
 - Digital Resources
 - Electronic Resources
 - Instruction
 - Liaison (please identify the subjects) _____
 - Metadata
 - Reference
 - Scholarly Communication
 - Systems
 - User Experience
 - Other, please specify _____
12. What support was/is available from administration (library and/or campus) for the social justice guide(s) (for example, in areas related to development, creation, marketing)? [Open]

13. Did you get pushback on the creation of the social justice guide(s)? Please explain. [Open]
14. How has the social justice guide(s) been incorporated? (For example, how was the guide marketed? How did instructors respond?) [Open]
15. Does your library (or university / college) have a diversity statement?
- Yes (library)
 - Yes (university / college)
 - Yes (both)
 - No (neither)
 - I don't know
16. Do you think your library and/or university / college diversity statement is strong enough? (Please provide a brief explanation for your response.)
- Yes _____
 - No _____
17. Did your library (or university / college) put out any news releases or statements on social justice unrest (e.g., related to George Floyd protests)?
- Yes (library)
 - Yes (university / college)
 - Yes (both)
 - No (neither)
 - I don't know
18. Did you think your library or university / college news releases or statement were strong enough? (Please provide a brief explanation for your response.)
- Yes _____
 - No _____
19. Besides the social justice guide(s), at the level of library collections what has been done at your library to address social justice issues? [Open]
20. What other initiatives did you, or your library, do to thread diversity through the library? [Open]
21. If there is anything related to social justice guides not covered but that you would like to add, please do so here. [Open]

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