

---

# Thoughts on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Reference and User Services

## Alesia McManus

*Alesia M. McManus is Environmental Sciences Librarian, Peter J. Shields Library, University of California, Davis; email: alemcmanus@ucdavis.edu.*

As is often the case with publication timelines, I'm writing my last RUSQ President's Column in February but it won't be published until June. My columns this year have focused on opportunities and challenges for RUSA and this column is no exception. At the 2017 ALA Midwinter Meeting in Atlanta, ALA Council accepted a proposal to add a fourth strategic direction to ALA's Strategic Plan. Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) is now the fourth strategic direction, joining advocacy, information policy, and professional and leadership development.

Here is a summary of the new strategic direction: The ALA recognizes that equity, diversity, and inclusion affect all aspects of work among members of the association, within the field of librarianship, and within the communities served by libraries. This work includes addressing, dismantling, and transforming policies, structures, and biases throughout both the organization and the field of librarianship. The ALA, through its actions and those of its members, is instrumental in creating a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive society.

This powerful statement is accompanied by specific goals for the association, including the following:

- committing to ameliorating marginalization and underrepresentation within the Association and the communities served by libraries through increased understanding of the effects of historical exclusion
- expanding the work of the ALA and its allies in building a diverse and inclusive profession
- providing context and understanding of the concepts of equity, diversity, and inclusion and recognizing their intersectional and complex nature
- empowering all ALA members to participate in the life of their organizations
- establishing resources and support so libraries and librarians can be effective advocates for the inclusion of all individuals in the life of their community
- establishing the ALA as a major voice for the values of equity, diversity, and inclusion in all areas of information policy
- providing a safe, respectful space for diverse voices and perspectives

This strategic direction is timely for many reasons given the current political situation in our country. Its implementation provides RUSA members with an opportunity for conversation about how considerations of diversity, equity, and inclusion affect reference and user services in libraries.

In June 2016, the ALA Task Force on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion submitted a final report which provided a total of sixty recommendations for the association in areas of conference program planning, annual conferences, priorities and planning, membership and participation, and recruitment, education, and retention. One of the recommendations strongly encourages all offices, divisions, and round tables within ALA to audit their goals, strategies, and outcomes for diversity and inclusion every three years. The task force also provided definitions for the terms equity, diversity, and inclusion.<sup>1</sup>

Anne Houston, RUSA past president, shared an important article with the RUSA executive committee that examines how well the RUSA “Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers” and RUSA “Professional Competencies for Reference and User Services Librarians” address societal racism.<sup>2</sup> In a 2015 article in *Library Trends*, Brook, Ellenwood, and Lazzaro use critical discourse analysis as a method for analyzing the RUSA documents using the lens of critical race theory.<sup>3</sup> In particular, the authors examine the principles of approachability, responsiveness, and objectivity in the documents and provide suggestions for an “antiracist reference practice.”

The RUSA executive committee has just received the draft revision of the 2003 “Professional Competencies for Reference and User Services Librarians.” The Task Force on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion recommends that, after an initial review by RUSA board, the competencies be available for a specified period of time for member comments. With

the help of RUSA board, I will be thinking of different ways that the RUSA membership can have a dialogue on equity, diversity, and inclusion and how we might develop actions for the RUSA strategic plan as well as reviewing the professional competencies in light of principles of EDI.

I would like to thank the members of the RUSA Professional Competencies for Reference and User Services Librarians Task Force, including Nancy Huling (chair), Larayne Dallas, Robin Kinder, Jo Bell Whitlatch, and Beth Woodard, for their work on revising the Professional Competencies.

As always, I would like to hear your thoughts on this topic. Please send an email message to [alemcm Manus@ucdavis.edu](mailto:alemcm Manus@ucdavis.edu). I look forward to the conversation.

## References

1. American Library Association Task Force on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, “Final Report of the ALA Task Force on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion,” June 2016, <http://connect.ala.org/files/TFEDIFinalReport%202016-06-06.pdf>.
2. Reference and User Services Association, “Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers,” approved by RUSA Board, May 2013, <http://www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesbehavioral>; Reference and User Services Association, “Professional Competencies for Reference and User Services Librarians,” approved by the RUSA Board of Directors, June 2003, <http://www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/professional>.
3. Freeda Brook, Dave Ellenwood, and Althea Eannace Lazzaro, “In Pursuit of Antiracist Social Justice: Denaturalizing Whiteness in the Academic Library,” *Library Trends* 64, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 246–84.