



To: Kaukauna Public Library Board of Trustees  
From: Library Director Ashley Thiem-Menning  
Date: 4/14/22  
Re: PLA Notes

There were three areas that I will be focusing on going forward as a result of the PLA Conference.

#### Legal

I attended two sessions presented by an attorney from Michigan who was a public library attorney for the state. Her programs focused on first amendment rights regarding access, meeting room use and regulations, free speech, youth areas and policy. This also relates directly to policy, which is another focus area I have selected.

#### Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

A majority of the sessions that I attended were EDI related. While most of the libraries had huge EDI initiatives that included major grants and paid EDI staff, there were some takeaways that can be reproduced here on a smaller scale. One of the presenters made a comment about approaching EDI on a smaller scale at first, her comment being, "start with a cupcake, not a sheet cake."

One piece of information I heard at two presentations for example was having heritage months that were not exclusive to just those months. So ensuring that Black History Month displays didn't go up just once a year, but that we celebrate black Americans twelve months a year in display and programs.

There was also a session regarding a public library's role as neutral or necessary in terms of social justice issues. Their argument being that public libraries can no longer remain neutral and are necessary to having courageous conversations about EDI. Another takeaway that I wrote down was a quote from a presenter saying, "Your culture is defined by the worst behavior tolerated."

I learned again about how 86% of MLIS degree holders are white and that the profession needs to adapt if it wants to begin having libraries staffed to represent the communities they are in. There is a growing trend to stop requiring these degrees for librarian positions, which do not need to require it. For example, in Wisconsin statute says that Directors in certain communities must have the degree, but in other instances it is not required and could be removed from librarian job postings as a requirement.

The last session I attended was the most powerful for me personally, as I have always tried to look at barriers here and dismantle them. It was presented by the Director of the Grand County Public Library in Utah. She told us a story about a mother with three children that came into the library and could not check out

because she had lost items on her account and she could not pay for them. She mentioned that situations like this, where people are very upset, stick with you over the years because they don't feel right. The mother had told her that she would never be back to the library. Years later she had a police officer at the library and he mentioned to her that his mother hated the library and when she looked at his nametag, she realized that he was one of the kids that had been with the woman that day. She asked if he was a library user and he said no.

She said that was the defining moment for her when she decided that she needed to make changes at her library. She pressed us to decide what we are willing to give up to get the library we want. She also pressed us to ask ourselves what fees can we eliminate beyond fines. Further, she asked us to evaluate the equity of library billing practices. She also reminded us that we need to be looking at how much staff time goes into billing and if the rate of return is even worth the effort being output. This resonated with me because we are putting a lot of time into SDC lately.

#### Policy

While I was gone for the last Board meeting, I know that policy came up. It was also discussed in sessions at PLA frequently. Angela and I will be going through each policy that has already been drafted to ensure it is equitable and we will have the City Attorney review them as well. We have additional policies that need to be written as well.

