

Reading Public Library

DIRECTOR OF EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE FAQs (Updated 4/16/2021)

WHY THE LIBRARY?

1. Was this the library's idea?

No. Hiring a Director for Equity and Social Justice is the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Human Rights Committee that existed from March 2019 to December 2020

However, the library has been working on many related issues for several years. Examples of this include an internal equity, inclusion, and social justice committee that focuses on related staff education and public programming; the Pulse of Reading Community Conversation Series; and the development of inclusive programs such as our Sensory Storytime. Librarians regularly evaluate and improve the accessibility of all our collections, services, and programs to meet the needs of un- and under-served segments of our community. Also, the library's strategic plan includes supporting other equity and social justice efforts in Reading.

2. Why would the library hire someone who isn't a librarian?

Libraries across the nation are hiring employees with missions similar to that of this position. Many of these employees fall broadly under the heading of "social worker," providing support and education around discrimination and inequity of services. These non-librarian positions are ideal for work across municipalities or counties, to connect individuals who use the library with other municipal and state resources, and to help them partner with police, schools, public health, and similar departments outside the library.

3. Is there a benefit to having this position in the library?

There is a benefit to having a position like this in any town department. However, in Reading, the library is a welcoming space that is open and accessible for 60+ hours per week all year round. Unlike other town spaces, it is not specific to age groups, nor do you require a reason to enter.

The library strives to be a space of belonging and inclusion and an equitable public service for all ages, abilities, interests, and cultures. This mission blends well with the values related to work centered around equity and social justice.

REGARDING THE POSITION:

4. Where did the idea for this position come from?

In March 2019, the Select Board established the Ad Hoc Human Rights Committee. The final makeup of the committee consisted of five elected officials appointed by the Select Board: two Select Board Members, two School Committee Members, and one Library Trustee. Other community members and town employees participated in the open meetings, offering feedback and suggestions. Minutes from all the committee meetings are available on the Town of Reading website.

In September 2020, the Ad Hoc Committee recommended hiring a Director for Equity and Social Justice who would work with an advisory committee and that the new position would be housed within the library. This structure of a paid town employee working with a volunteer board is based on the Reading Coalition for Prevention and Support currently in the Reading Police Department. In December 2020, the Board of Trustees voted to add a Director of Equity and Social Justice in a new division of the library.

The Ad Hoc committee then sunset in December 2020 as they had completed their work.

5. Can you give an example of what this person would do?

The Director of Equity and Social Justice will provide direct programming, communications, and resources on equity and social justice topics. A few examples might include:

- Weekly or monthly newsletters and social media posts of events, articles, and community resources
- Supporting the Human Resources Director and Town Department Heads in offering bias awareness training for employees
- Cross-promoting the mission and programs of organizations such as Understanding Disabilities or Reading Embraces Diversity or Reading Cares.
- Joint programming on domestic violence awareness with the Reading Police Department and RESPOND
- Running a youth art contest on civic responsibility with the Reading Public Schools.
- Planning and directing a community-wide Juneteenth celebration
- Referring an individual to legal aid, social services, or civil rights assistance to address a specific issue or complaint

6. Do equity and social justice problems exist in Reading?

These problems exist everywhere. Reading is no exception. You may not have experienced discrimination, bias, or inequity in this community. However, you may be able to help those who have by supporting this position or attending education programs to learn more about these issues.

7. How can you expect one person to solve all these problems?

One person will not stop racism, sexism, homophobia, religious discrimination, domestic violence, income inequity, class/social bias, or any social issue. Our community is ultimately responsible for participating together in building and maintaining a just society.

The Director for Equity and Social Justice will offer and facilitate education and understanding. This person will also work with individuals and groups who already provide more issue-related resources such as the police department, the Attorney General's Office of Civil Rights, citizenship classes, or housing information.

8. Why have a paid Director?

There are appointed boards and community groups in town dedicated to equity and social justice issues. However, these boards and groups are led and run by volunteers who do not have the time, training, or expertise to develop educational programs or to meet with other committees, groups, or town departments to develop longer-term strategies and plans. Establishing a paid position does not eliminate the need for these volunteers. Instead, it is a way to support, expand, and amplify the work already being done within the community.

9. Does this position take away money from other departments?

The position was funded as a shared cost by the Town and School departments. Similar sharing has occurred numerous times in the past, for example, when adding a School Resource Officer to the Police department or adding social/emotional staff to the School department. There are some positions requested by other Town departments that are not included in the FY22 budget request. The Town Manager is responsible for presenting a balanced budget. He presented the balanced FY22 budget with the Director of Public Health and Director of Equity and Social Justice as priorities. Additionally, this new position will be a resource available to all town/school departments.

10. How will this position be held accountable?

This person will be held to the same standard of accountability as every town employee. The library director will provide an annual review on goals, accomplishments, and competencies. Additionally, the Board of Library Trustees will provide guidance and feedback as needed. The final job description will be reviewed by the Board of Library Trustees and may be subject to edits from the Director of Human Resources or Town Counsel.

11. What is the Reading Alliance for Equity and Social Justice? What will it do?

The Ad Hoc Human Rights Committee recommended that the Director for Equity and Social Justice be responsible for establishing and overseeing an advisory board called the Reading Alliance for Equity and Social Justice (RAESJ). Establishing the advisory board is meant to provide a voice for diverse community members and help as volunteers. This recommendation is based on the advisory structure for the Reading Coalition for Prevention and Support.

However, this may not be the ideal framework for working with equity and social justice.

Therefore, the new Director will immediately work with elected officials and community members to determine how best to include diverse and marginalized voices. Outcomes may

involve creating an advisory board as recommended, or a volunteer group, an expert panel of partners, or another body that has not yet been explored or suggested.

Town Counsel will be consulted to ensure compliance with any related laws or regulations.

Right now, the focus for the FY22 budget is the hiring of a Director for Equity and Social Justice who will have a level of knowledge and expertise in specific areas to advise the town on the next best steps.

12. Will the Director of Equity and Social Justice have the authority to make policy?

No.

13. Will the Director of Equity and Social justice have the authority to enforce laws or regulations?

No.