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Equal Employment Opportunity Principles and Affirmative Action Practices in Library Supervision

The purpose of this paper is to share information I have gathered through experience and reading which I hope will illustrate why affirmative action can be sound management. This information should enable the reader to:

1. gain some understanding of the legal and social bases of equal employment opportunity and the need for taking affirmative action in the management of libraries;
2. know where to find basic information on equal employment opportunity and affirmative action;
3. apply equal opportunity principles in all areas of supervisory practice; and
4. provide leadership in developing support for, writing and implementing an affirmative action plan for the library in which you work.

First, I will briefly review definitions and legal bases, and will try to show why equal employment opportunity in libraries is necessary to provide equal access to information. Three reasons why libraries need to take affirmative action will be followed by a discussion of the impact of equal opportunity principles and affirmative action practices in these areas: interviewing, selecting, training, developing, evaluating, promoting, rewarding, disciplining and terminating employees. Then I will emphasize the value and importance of having the protection and guidance of a written affirmative action plan. I will outline some basic, but not necessarily easy, steps to take in ensuring that your library will operate by such a plan, and suggest some ideas for "action programs" libraries

can employ to resolve problems identified through various surveys and studies.

In conclusion, I will share some personal reflections, hopes and objectives for achieving both quality and equity in library personnel administration. My hypothesis, then, is that affirmative action is good management. The final proof of this hypothesis is the responsibility of each of us as we practice the art of good supervision.

DEFINITIONS AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Equal employment opportunity is the law. More accurately, it is a condition that someday may exist in organizations that have succeeded in eliminating not only blatant discrimination, but also covert practices which at present unfairly limit certain individuals' opportunities to be hired or effectively utilized in the organization. The goal of equal opportunity laws is to create an "employment environment whereby all employees and employment applications are judged on individual merit without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, physical or mental disability, or political affiliation."¹ Employers should disregard all other characteristics that are not job-related, such as sexual or affectional preference. Although the legal mandate for this does not yet exist at the federal level, it has been legitimized by some state and local legislation and is included in American Library Association (ALA) policy.

The achievement of equal opportunity in libraries of all types is hindered by a notable lack of awareness that a problem in this area even exists. If the issue is addressed at all by library administrators, it is often perceived only as a federal regulatory nuisance that threatens the receipt of federal funds and is designed to make it difficult or impossible for managers to manage. This abysmal situation is perpetuated by library managers who fail to assess accurately or objectively their own level of performance in personnel administration. "After all, no one in this organization, and certainly not myself, would ever discriminate against anyone," is the usual defensive response of those finally charged with violation of the fair employment law.

Unfortunately, it is often at this point, rather than much earlier, when endless bureaucratic interrogatories, lost administrative time, and court costs could still be avoided, that library managers or boards admit they must comply with the law and eliminate discriminatory practices. A court order does not, of course, serve to motivate administrators strongly enough to result in any meaningful change beyond a written plan. What a pity to have quotas imposed and management flexibility severely limited when all this could be avoided through sound management and planning, direct confrontation and problem-solving sessions with employees, and an effective affirmative action program!

If equal opportunity is seen as the goal, then affirmative action is the means, to be implemented through programs to improve the lot of those discriminated against in the past. The problem that exists in libraries, as well as in other organizations, is that we have not yet learned how to "translate the various regulations into positive personnel practices and procedures."² This is compounded by general ignorance of basic personnel management principles among some top library administrators. The well-managed libraries in this country now employ professional personnel administrators, a trend which I applaud. While many library directors' only response to the challenge of compliance is to complain about the lack of qualified minority applicants for professional positions, through affirmative action programs a few leaders in the profession are attempting to remedy past discrimination and prevent future discrimination. Most importantly, those who give it some thought are beginning to see that "an affirmative action program can be used as a management tool to help clarify institutional personnel policies. In addition to showing commitment to upholding the laws, it provides a way to set up procedures so that discrimination practices do not take place and the rights of [all] individuals are protected."³

Federal and state laws and regulations as well as local ordinances provide the legal basis for affirmative action. The most important federal law protecting minorities, women and other groups is the Equal Opportunity Act of 1972, which extends the coverage of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to state and local governments with more than fifteen employees. Universities also are prohibited from discrimination on the basis of sex by Title IX of the Higher Education Act of 1972, which extends the provisions of the Equal Pay Act of 1963 to executive, administrative and professional employees of academic institutions. Handicapped persons and Vietnam-era and disabled veterans are protected by the 1973 Rehabilitation Act amendments of 1974, especially Sections 503 and 504, and the Vietnam Era Veterans Readjustment Act. Other federal statutes supporting equal employment opportunity include the 1967 and 1975 Age Discrimination in Employment Acts and more recent amendments, the 1972 Revenue Sharing Act, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1973, and various Executive Orders. A detailed summary of major fair employment laws may be found in the 1978 *ALA Yearbook*,⁴ and in the 2-volume guidebook for employers, *Affirmative Action and Equal Employment*,⁵ available free from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in Washington, D.C.

There is usually much duplication between state and federal laws but more variance may be noted in county or city ordinances. Libraries writing affirmative action plans often cite a local statute establishing an

affirmative action plan for the municipality of which they are a unit. Conversely, many libraries have failed to develop their own plans precisely because they feel they are covered under the "umbrella plan," which, of course, is technically true. However, the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Subcommittee of the ALA, established to implement the Equal Employment Opportunity Policy adopted by the ALA Council in 1974, encourages libraries that are part of a larger governmental unit to write departmental plans and implement equal employment opportunity by tailor-making "action programs to rectify any problems applicable to library affirmative action."⁶

Voluntary compliance with equal employment law through the development of a written affirmative action plan is urged in the ALA/EEO Policy, which directs all libraries with fifteen or more employees to submit their plans to the Office for Library Personnel Resources (OLPR), with the reward of being listed in *American Libraries* as having submitted a plan. In accordance with this policy, the EEO Subcommittee has developed "Guidelines for Library Affirmative Action Plans" and on a confidential basis will review plans submitted to OLPR. Detailed critiques by two members of the subcommittee are consolidated into one report that is returned to the library with suggestions for improvements. These guidelines were published in the July/August 1976 issue of *American Libraries*, along with commentaries on the ALA/EEO Policy statement. To date, fewer than thirty libraries have made use of this free service.

Margaret Myers and Elizabeth Dickinson have written the best state-of-the-art summary to date, entitled "Affirmative Action and American Librarianship."⁷ An annual review of affirmative action-related developments in libraries is included in the *ALA Yearbook* under the heading "Personnel and Employment: Affirmative Action." In a thoughtful discussion entitled "Equity and Patterns of Library Governance," Michelle Rudy explored efforts to decrease discrimination that have had some influence on management style in libraries.⁸ Additional materials for those interested in developing affirmative action plans are available for \$1 from OLPR. ALA staff will also answer specific questions pertaining to personnel, give advice on affirmative action, or at least refer you to a knowledgeable source.

WHY LIBRARIES NEED TO TAKE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Beyond the obvious reason that affirmative action is required by libraries that accept any federal funds, there are two specific reasons why libraries need to comply with the law in administering library personnel systems. Before discussing these reasons, I want to state that at its best affirmative action is a management attitude based on the belief that

every person has the right to and, given the opportunity, is able to achieve his or her innate potential. Affirmative action may be perceived as the bureaucratic translation or expression of the human potentials movement. As Abraham Maslow noted, managers should "assume in all your people the impulse to achieve."⁹ I sense that the lack of this attitude toward all applicants and employees is one major factor contributing to the "chilling effect" of discrimination against minorities, the handicapped and women.

I have often wondered at the apparent disinterest in Fourteenth Amendment issues¹⁰ on the part of some library administrators and trustees who take pride in their unbending adherence to First Amendment rights as interpreted for library users in the Library Bill of Rights. Is not equal access to information — free and uncensored — a basic principle of library policy? Why, then, are librarians not concerned as well with equal opportunity in employment, without which equal access for some users may not exist? On a practical level, basic library service cannot be provided to the 12 million or more Spanish-speaking people in this country without affirmative action in recruiting and hiring bilingual librarians. How can deaf patrons truly be served without hiring deaf librarians or, at the very least, learning sign language ourselves? The second and most obvious reason, then, for affirmative action of all kinds in libraries is that, in order to meet the library and information needs of all segments of the public, the library should employ people who can reflect, relate to and communicate with the people in the community it serves.

Involvement of staff at all levels is the basic prerequisite for successful implementation of an affirmative action plan. It is my impression that those few libraries now in compliance with equal employment law generally are those that practice some form of participatory management. However, Rudy warned that:

Inequity can occur even with participation. . . . It seems unlikely that participation as an alternate form of library governance can ensure equity for minority and women librarians. . . . Nevertheless, participation and equal employment opportunity legislation, like the proverbial carrot and stick (the law to grab attention and the rewards of participation — increases in job satisfaction, morale, feelings of achievement and self-actualization — to keep it), have the potential for creating an environment where equity can flourish.¹¹

The underlying problem in implementing an affirmative action plan is that in order to remedy past discrimination based on criteria that are not job-related, such as race or sex, one must set hiring and promotional

goals based on those very criteria. This positive action brings those previously discriminated against into the applicant pool as "protected classes," which, in turn, stimulates a negative response on the part of those who previously had been favored, and Bakkes come out of the woodwork. Reverse discrimination may also be seen as a rejection of the ancient Judaeo-Christian ethic that the "sins of the fathers should be visited upon their children." What people fail to realize is that equal opportunity ultimately applies to everyone. In my opinion, and in spite of many confusing and contradictory interpretations, the Bakke decision only confirms this insight. Myers and Lynch concluded that, "The pressures on library administrators to take specific steps in improving employment conditions for women and minorities can also benefit the entire staff by actually forcing the adoption of good management policies, the establishment of concrete goals, and the determination and dissemination of non-discriminatory personnel policies."¹² In simple and positive terms, then, if we do achieve equal employment opportunity in our organizations, in the future we will more often select the right person for the job based only on job-related criteria, and we will be more consistent, objective and fair in our treatment of all employees. This is the third reason for affirmative action.

THE IMPACT OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION ON SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITIES

No matter how well-meaning people may be, affirmative action in libraries does not just happen, nor can isolated acts of goodwill on the part of individual employees constitute an environment in which equal opportunity can flourish. Affirmative action begins at the top with an officially adopted policy and firm commitment to equal opportunity principles in all management practices, by the library board, director and other top administrators. It is implemented and monitored at all levels of the organization through the chain of command. All members of the organization have a responsibility and should be monitored on their performance in equal employment opportunity areas. Supervisors are held responsible "up the line" for nondiscriminatory practices and equal treatment of all those who report to them. Disciplinary action should be taken for any act of racism, sexism or other violation of fair employment law. Of course, employees themselves, including those in the protected classes, have a responsibility to keep informed and take advantage of educational, training and career opportunities. They need to be sensitive to the frustrations and resentments of others, as well as be willing to share with management ideas for improving organizational effectiveness.¹³ Those who do take the initiative and learn and contribute on the job should be suitably rewarded through merit increases and promotion.

It is at the first-line supervisory level that most violations of equal opportunity law occur. Supervisors who realize their responsibilities for implementing affirmative action policies and procedures, many of which perhaps contradict previously held attitudes and beliefs, may act in both deliberate and covert ways that can make the organization vulnerable to charges of discrimination and in some cases to court action. According to Clark and Perlman, a fear exists in these supervisors that the protected classes will receive undue advantages:

Among the more common manifestations of this fear are: freezing or withholding information that the employee needs to do the job successfully; unfairly evaluating the employee's performance or even establishing unfair standards of performance for the employee; deliberately sabotaging the employee's efforts; and withholding of opportunities for the employee to compete against other, less threatening employees.¹⁴

It is in these areas of supervisory responsibility that affirmative action poses some problems, but it also carries the potential for significant improvement in the quality of the work environment.

Hiring

In a recent examination of libraries' employee selection processes, David C. Genaway discovered that 71 percent of academic libraries and 41 percent of public libraries reported that affirmative action was "somewhat" to "considerable" a factor at any stage [although] an ethnic minority was hired in exactly the same [5] percent of cases by both groups."¹⁵ If a library has set hiring goals for new employees who meet certain criteria, such as ethnic or racial representation or bilingual abilities, it is often the direct supervisor who is responsible at least in part for the selection decision. This may place the supervisor in a difficult situation, feeling torn between the conviction that only the "most qualified" person should be selected, and the organizational need to build a more representative staff. While ideally there should be no conflict between these two objectives (new minority librarians may be the best-qualified in every respect), in reality the supervisor may feel both compromised and threatened by this dilemma, especially if he or she has had previous experience with a complaint about treatment of a minority or female employee or applicant.

Three basic guidelines for conducting the hiring interview can be of help to the supervisor who wants to do the right thing and stay out of trouble. The first task is to develop a list of questions designed to elicit information on specific qualities, knowledge, skills and abilities basic to performance of the particular job, and then to ask these same job-related

questions of all applicants. (For an excellent discussion of what *not* to ask, read Barry Simon's article on "Personnel Selection Practices: Applications and Interviews."¹⁶)

While some different follow-up questions may be asked of certain applicants in order to clarify an incomplete answer, a fairly equal period of time should be allowed for each interview. The third rule is not always possible to follow, but effort should be made to ensure that the hiring panel is representative of the applicants, i.e., interviewers should include minorities, the disabled, males, females, etc. Even if all the applicants are white females, this is a good idea in order to screen out obvious bigots and obtain a broad spectrum of input in the selection process. While an interview by only one person has been upheld in court as not in violation of equal opportunity law,¹⁷ it seems both unwise and shortsighted for libraries to continue such a practice. Not only does it place the organization in jeopardy, but also limits the chances of actually selecting the best, most qualified person for the job. I truly believe this is one case in which the group process is superior.

Training and Development

In the current situation of strict budget limits, hiring freezes, and little or no turnover, some libraries may be unable to hire members of the protected classes, even if they are in the applicant pool. In such a case, the "best chances for compliance [may] lie with more effective utilization of women and minorities currently employed."¹⁸ A utilization analysis chart shows what percentage of each protected class is working at each level of the organization. Most libraries presently do not utilize significant numbers of minorities as librarians, or women as administrators. A typical affirmative action goal for these organizations would be to increase the utilization of women and minorities in these positions through action programs such as better on-the-job training and orientation, career planning, special recruitment efforts, tuition reimbursement for job- or degree-related academic courses, management development programs, and so on. While first-line supervisors may not be responsible for establishing such programs, their support is absolutely essential for successful implementation of an upward mobility program. The supervisor's major role in affirmative action is to assist, encourage and support each employee's efforts to improve or advance on the job. Specifically, schedules can be kept as flexible as possible to accommodate inservice or outside classes, individuals can be counseled about the value of setting career goals, and performance objectives can be designed to develop specific skills needed for promotion. Most importantly, the supervisor may be able to identify specific barriers preventing the employee from achiev-

ing greater potential, and to assist both management and employee in overcoming these obstacles.

Performance Evaluation

Performance evaluation has been called “a pivotal element in complaint prevention.”¹⁹ It does not occur in a vacuum. Griffen’s First Rule of Supervision is: Every supervisor should spend a minimum of fifteen minutes a week listening to and helping in problem-solving with every employee he or she supervises. It is amazing how rarely this happens. It is easy to get so caught up in our own tasks that we ignore those we are supposed to direct and support. The corollary to the above rule could read: Those who cannot find the time to do this should not be supervisors. Performance evaluation without regular communication is a farce. The employee will feel that the supervisor is not familiar enough with the work being done to make a fair judgment. The problem with any performance evaluation system, no matter how carefully designed, is that no one enjoys giving negative feedback, so supervisors put off discussions until they become confrontations. Criticism that falls from the sky like a thunderbolt once every six months, long after the particular incidents needing correction have been forgotten, will not be taken well, can be successfully rebutted, and will not result in improved performance.

Providing immediate feedback is almost as important as learning to listen to the employee. Listening becomes even more important when differences in cultural or ethnic values exist. Multi-cultural communication must be taken seriously since failure to cross these bridges will only feed the paranoia and fear that already may exist on both sides. Sometimes supervisors are afraid to evaluate a minority or handicapped employee for fear of a complaint to the Affirmative Action Office. This is a very real problem, and the only answer is the use of objective and uniform performance standards for evaluating all employees. The lack of such standards is one of the major obstacles to implementing affirmative action in libraries.

Specifying job-related factors is as much the rule in performance evaluation as it is in the hiring process. Standard position descriptions which spell out the functions and responsibilities of each job may be used to develop specific, objective criteria and performance objectives by which both the supervisor and the employee can measure whether and how well the work is being done. Examples are: “Reinforce a minimum of 100 books in an 8-hour day,” or “Improve skills in puppetry by using puppets with children during a class visit, story time or program at least once a month.” Setting performance objectives with employees can be helpful in motivating them to develop needed skills and overcome obstacles to promotion. During the probationary period, learning basic skills

and job duties can be the focus for performance objectives. After basics have been mastered, developmental objectives may be more helpful, and can be tied to participation in training programs or outside courses in a local community college or university, especially if scholarship support is available.

Personnel Actions That Affect Employees' Salaries and Status

Among the more onerous tasks that come with supervisory responsibility are recommendations to the "hiring authority" on giving or withholding merit increases, promoting, demoting, disciplining and terminating (the euphemism for firing). Supervisors should be reminded that they usually do not have the authority to fire anyone, and that consultation with top management, and the personnel office in particular, is advisable for those who want management support for their actions. Supervisors who blackmail employees into obedience by threatening instant termination should themselves be corrected in writing after proper oral warnings have been documented.

The basic rule for successfully carrying out any adverse personnel actions is: documentation, careful communication, special written evaluations, and impartial discipline on a progressively more severe basis for failure to perform. Most important is an attitude on the part of the supervisor of goodwill and a desire to ensure a climate and opportunities for improvement through direct and honest feedback, guidance and correction, no matter how difficult the confrontation may be.

Documentation is important but can be carried too far. If the supervisor constantly takes detailed notes on various behaviors and failures of those being supervised, employees will soon learn to take their own notes to use as protection in filing grievances or written comments on what are perceived as unfair evaluations or other actions on the part of the supervisor. Unfortunately, the supervisor must document an employee's failure to perform because eventually a management decision to take a particular personnel action may be challenged, either through normal grievance channels or through an affirmative action office. The important thing to remember about this particularly painful fact of organizational life is that it applies to everyone. A more positive approach is to document and reward outstanding performance as well as failure. "Assume that everyone prefers to feel important, needed, useful, successful, proud, respected, rather than unimportant, interchangeable, anonymous, wasted, unused, expendable, disrespected."²⁰ However, this philosophy, combined with wishful thinking, should not be used as an excuse for lack of complete candor and honesty in performance evaluation.

Careful communication in supervision of employees under discipline

occurs over a sustained period of time, first at the oral level, documented with a written memorandum describing the specific infraction and warning given. On the occasion of repeated infraction, a written warning should be given — in the presence of a witness — which describes the behavior for which the reprimand is given, details earlier memoranda and actions, notes specific improvements expected within specified time limits, includes an offer of help by the supervisor, and indicates the next, more serious step to be taken if improvement does not occur. Special evaluations, on either the standard performance evaluation form used in the organization or a written memorandum or letter to the employee, may be given at any time, but regular follow-up should occur, meticulously and on time, and improvement should be noted as well. Again, the use of performance objectives is recommended, and some method of daily, weekly or monthly reporting on the employee's progress should be instituted. A journal listing specific actions being taken to achieve improvement objectives could be kept by the employee under discipline. Feedback from coworkers or subordinates may also be incorporated as documentation, but the evaluator should be aware that this may generate reprisal or future hard feelings.

If — after your best efforts to support, encourage and reward improved behavior — you must finally recommend termination or other severe action, you must be able to document all charges and may have to submit to detailed interrogatories from one or more investigatory bodies. This will be an especially difficult problem in organizations that have never fired anyone, as one defense to disciplinary or termination action is to show that the complainant was not treated differently from other employees. This is a general rule to keep in mind when implementing any personnel system or affirmative action plan: treat all employees alike. If an alcoholic black man is finally terminated for abuse of sick leave and drinking on the job, you had better treat your white female alcoholic the same way. This is one area where all of us, without exception, need to check our own biases. We are especially vulnerable in the area of discrimination against the disabled.²¹ The fact that we do have prejudices is one more reason for conscious commitment to affirmative action practices in management, with built-in safety mechanisms for feedback and correction. We need to remember that no one is perfect, no matter how "liberal," and we must not react defensively to discrimination charges, for they may stem from our own lack of awareness.

Grievance Procedures and Channels

What happens if, in response to a management action such as discipline, counseling or transfer, the employee suddenly resigns, and just

after you have breathed a sigh of relief at this easy solution, you receive a subpoena from the State Attorney General's Office of Civil Rights on a racial, sex, age or reverse discrimination charge? This is known as "constructive discharge" — resignation by the employee because of management harassment or other intolerable or discriminatory conditions of employment. Even if you tried to talk the employee out of resigning, a charge can be filed. You need to keep in mind the possibility that you may have been in error, that your perception of what you were trying to do was different from that of the grieving employee, or that your strategy in dealing with this particular person was wrong. It is also possible that you may have acted correctly. The point is, once a charge is filed, the burden of proof is on the employer.

Grievance procedures can be a useful tool for management audit of affirmative action supervisory practices. The purpose of grievance procedures is problem-solving. Affirmative action grievances usually utilize channels separate from the ordinary run-of-the-mill complaints about working conditions, lack of due process, etc. Supervisors should remember that they are also entitled to use grievance channels. There are occasional employees who may appear to use a charge of discrimination as a way to harass a supervisor. There are also supervisors who are equally mean and nasty to all those they supervise, regardless of race, sex or creed. Investigatory methods should be developed to keep all contingencies in mind. In the future, personnel officers may need some paralegal training. At present, charges of equal opportunity violations must be taken seriously, investigated and reported on, with recommendations made to management for action, either to support the charges and initiate disciplinary and remedial action, or to suggest that the charge is groundless. In the latter case, one must always suggest other channels of recourse to the charging party.

The first recourse is usually to a municipal affirmative action office, which may be able to conduct an outside and perhaps more objective evaluation of the case. If possible, you might try to get them to do the initial investigation for you, especially if you are white and the grievance is filed by a minority, or vice versa. Keep in mind that EEO officers may also have biases.

The next step in filing a discrimination complaint may be with the County Commission on Human Relations or the State Attorney General's Office of Civil Rights. When a complainant files at three or four levels simultaneously, a situation both possible and common, the federal EEO Commission Regional Office will usually defer the investigation to the next level down, from federal to state, or the Attorney General or local commission may defer it to the municipal office. Findings at a lower level

are often upheld at a higher level without additional investigation. Employers charged can expect to receive in the mail either a subpoena to appear in person and testify at the Attorney General's office, or a long list of questions or "interrogatories" to which detailed and documented responses must be written, or both. If the investigator concludes that the employer is probably guilty of the charge, a "right to sue" letter may be given to the charging party. If the EEO Commission investigation supports the charge, the commission itself may choose to support legal action, especially if a precedent-setting case is needed, but often the complainant must pay the costs. If the employer is found guilty, however, he or she must pay legal costs as well as back pay or other compensation to make the complainant "whole." A decision either to submit to conciliation or fight the charges must be made pragmatically by top management, the library board if it is administrative in function, or the city manager, dean or other administrator in the parent organization. An agreement to conciliate or settle out of court may not be seen by management as an admission of guilt but as the most cost-effective way to resolve the problem.

One warning is in order. While employees may have access to established, well-publicized channels for grievance, they also have the right to ignore internal mechanisms and to file first with an outside, higher-level agency. It is also wise to remember that they have the right as citizens to complain to elected officials and probably should not be reprimanded for doing so, no matter how annoying this violation of procedures may be. Any action on the part of management that could be interpreted as retaliation against a complainant should be carefully avoided.

While certain "management rights" such as the right to counsel, assign, transfer, discipline, evaluate, etc., may not be "grievable" under personnel rules or union contract terms, any management action is grievable if an element of discriminatory treatment is charged. Certain federal programs such as CETA may also have additional grievance mechanisms that apply even to probationary employees who under regular civil service or other rules would not be able to appeal discipline or termination before the end of the probationary period.

There are times when implementing affirmative action seems to consist of negative actions, such as I have just outlined. "Setting things right" is always difficult, and people resist basic behavior changes for a variety of reasons. It takes both energy and commitment over a long period of time to institute the changes in attitude and practice that are preconditions to real equal opportunity in any organization.

DEVELOPING AN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PLAN

What can you do if your library does not have an affirmative action plan? It may be that the library administration does not realize that this is as much in violation of ALA policy as censorship of library materials is in violation of the Library Bill of Rights, which is also ALA policy. If your library receives as little as \$2500 in federal funds and employs fifteen or more people, it may also be in violation of the law. Begin with a positive approach to management, pointing out the affirmative side of providing equal employment opportunity for all, with a gentle reminder of compliance as a side benefit. Offer to provide a list of readings and the fair employment laws, or to write a brief proposal to appoint a staff task force to develop a plan. If your library is involved in community analysis, you may have the opportunity to point out the need to hire employees who can relate to specific underserved groups, such as bilingual librarians to serve Hispanic users.

A written plan usually is prefaced by the policy statement which the plan is to implement. A typical policy might read:

In accordance with existing Federal and State statutes and guidelines and in compliance with the Affirmative Action Program of the City of _____, it is and will continue to be the Policy of the _____ Public Library to provide equal opportunity to all applicants for employment and all employees, to administer all personnel practices such as recruitment, hiring, assignments, promotions, compensation, training, discipline and privileges of employment in a manner which does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, age, disability, marital status, and sexual or affectional preference.

This commitment is to be implemented through an Affirmative Action Program which will guide us to our goals in practical steps. This program includes guidelines to ensure proper treatment of each and every library applicant and employee, and of the users to whom we aspire to provide equal access to library and information services.

Responsibility for implementing this policy is vested in the Office of the Library Director and in all management and supervisory personnel in the library, and was adopted by the Library Board as official policy on _____.

After the policy statement, the plan should delineate specific responsibilities of line management at all levels, and the role to be played by the staff advisory committee. An EEO coordinator should be named, respon-

sible to the director, to serve as an auditor of personnel functions. There is some difference of opinion on whether the EEO officer should be separate from the personnel officer.²² Problems or barriers to equal opportunity can be identified through written surveys or committee hearings. The first step is a utilization analysis, usually done in chart format, which will reveal quite clearly where employees are now clustered and where they are not utilized in the numbers they might reasonably have been if equal opportunity had existed in the past. The setting of voluntary goals (which are not the same as quotas set by the courts for failure to take affirmative action) most often occurs at the hiring level in recruiting minority librarians or male circulation clerks, but training and promotional goals may also be set. Once specific barriers have been identified and goals have been set, action programs are designed to reach the goals. I have already mentioned a few. Others could include: (1) career ladders to open paraprofessional positions to clerical workers, and to enable paraprofessionals to become librarians; (2) better dissemination of promotional opportunities in job openings and training programs; (3) regular and special orientation programs; (4) cultural awareness and human relations training for supervisors; (5) regular publication of affirmative action information in a library newsletter; (6) recruitment trips to library schools with minority students; (7) revision of discriminatory civil service or other personnel rules; (8) remodeling of work areas to remove architectural barriers for employees in wheelchairs or with other handicaps; and so on.

All of this should happen within a specific period of time and regular progress reports should be made to both management and staff. The plan should be updated regularly, preferably once a year, and it should be well-publicized among staff and in the community. An affirmative action plan can be a basic management tool to ensure that personnel policies are appropriately and consistently applied. If your library does not have a written personnel manual yet, an affirmative action plan can be the beginning. In fact, I believe that affirmative action has been the major catalyst prompting libraries to examine carefully all past personnel practices and to establish the written policies and procedures needed in so many libraries.

DEALING WITH REALITIES

So your library has adopted a written affirmative action plan and you have been conscientious in your commitment to the principles of equal opportunity in your daily work. What can you expect? First, expect your motives in establishing an affirmative action program to be suspect. If you are not seen as a "do-gooder" or "soft on minorities" (i.e., you treat some "more equally" than others), you will be seen as primarily interested in "covering your flank." Also, you should not expect gratitude

from those benefiting from your programs, first, because they don't owe you anything, and second, because they are paying a price for the benefits they receive. It is not easy to be the first of anything in an organization, such as the first woman in a city department heads' meeting. The first minority librarian will see herself as only a token, because that is exactly what she is until there are many more like her, and she may tend to feel used in order "to make administration look good." Then there are those who will feel, no matter how careful and fair you try to be, that there is now less opportunity for them because they are not members of the protected classes.

A lot of hurt feelings and many confrontations may occur during the first years. Then, as the newly-hired grow and develop, promotional opportunities at the higher levels may not open as soon as necessary, and the library which has done a good job of recruiting and developing staff will lose them to other libraries with more sophisticated affirmative action programs and goals. Success requires much more than a written plan, no matter how often it is updated. It requires constant self-examination and self-criticism, willingness to admit mistakes and an ability to maintain transactions on an adult level in the face of the emotional situations and interpersonal stress that come with major organizational change. It requires constant verbal and written communication about your commitment to equal opportunity and what you are doing about it with both staff and the community. In the end, the emphasis is on action, with positive results in visible form.

It has been four years since E.J. Josey asked the question, "Can library affirmative action succeed?" Libraries still have a long way to go before we can answer in the affirmative. As he said then, "Higher education institutions and public libraries will not erase elitism or racism over night."²³ If this is to happen at all, it will require the positive efforts of all library trustees and higher education administrators, and of all library workers and librarians. It is not an easy task but I believe it is worth our energies. Ultimately, success in building a balanced and diversified staff will enable us to be much more responsive in meeting the library and information needs of the people we serve.

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