

What Does It Mean to Be Inclusive?
A Statement from the Division of Libraries and Technology
May 25, 2017

Wisconsin public libraries are places where everyone should be safe, welcomed, and respected in experiences such as (but not limited to):

- Arrival at the building (transportation, physical accessibility, signage, hours of service, greetings by library staff)
- Intersections with library policies (getting a library card, using a computer, paying a fine)
- Perusal, use, and request of library materials (navigating the aisles, accessing Wi-Fi, individual privacy, diversity of collection)
- Participation in library-sponsored or library-located events (marketing of events, time and location, transportation, registration, room set-up, novice-friendly vs. designed for frequent users)
- Interactions with library staff (body language, tone, diversity of library staff, proactive/reactive engagement)
- **Passive and virtual interactions through library signage, webpages, displays, and marketing (readability, tone, diversity, accommodations).**

The Division of Libraries and Technology interprets [Statute 43.24\(2\)\(k\)](#) “*Promotion and facilitation of library service to users with special needs*” to encompass **inclusive services**. Inclusive library services are holistic, spanning library policies, collections, space, and services. Inclusive services reflect equity and accessibility for all members of the community. Diverse communities are strengthened by libraries that intentionally develop and deliver services to individuals or groups for whom accessing and using the library is difficult, limited, or minimized.

The library director and board of trustees should provide awareness and leadership concerning the concept and implementation of inclusive services to library staff and stakeholders. Regional library systems should both support member libraries in matters of compliance, and communicate such efforts through annual system plans and reports. The state library agency will provide consulting and collaborate with libraries and systems regarding inclusive services. Wisconsin public libraries serve everyone, and it is the duty of everyone in the service of Wisconsin public libraries to foster inclusivity.

The practice of providing inclusive services requires continuous reflection and ongoing dialog with and between library administration, staff, and members of the community, with particular emphasis on including the voices of those who are underserved, underrepresented, and underrecognized within the community. Efforts should respond to the assets and needs of non-library users and users alike. Attention to actual, versus perceived, assets and needs is paramount; i.e., a barrier perceived by library staff may or may not be an actual barrier experienced by the user.

On a concrete level, inclusive services should be visibly incorporated into all library services. The concept that libraries are for everyone should be evident through every point of access or interaction with the library. A person’s age, citizenship, literacy level, ability, family structure, income level, health status, gender identity, sexuality, style of dress, familiarity with public libraries - or any other dimension of identity - should neither negatively influence nor interfere with access to library services.

When libraries honor the full diversity of their communities, communities thrive. First and foremost, inclusive library services should be developed locally with and for all community members. Wisconsin public library system and state library staff should facilitate coordinated regional and statewide inclusive services training and consulting. Our common goal is to improve life and learning opportunities for all Wisconsin residents.