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Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Assessment Report

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Section 1

Executive Summary

St. Louis County Library (Library) selected Hicks-Carter-Hicks (H-C-H) as a partner to collect data regarding the community's perspective of the Library's offerings. The Library is a leader in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and the purpose of this project was to gather feedback from the community that can then be used to further the Library's efforts. To accomplish this, the H-C-H team conducted ten interviews with staff, leadership, board members, and community partners. Interviews were designed to understand individuals' perceptions of the Library's diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts within the community. The information gathered from these interviews helped inform the project's next step, which was to conduct nine focus groups. Five focus groups were held virtually, with four being held in-person. The in-person focus groups were assembled at the Lewis & Clark, Florissant Valley, Grant's View, and Headquarters locations.

Both data collection methods yielded a large amount of rich qualitative data. Using this information, H-C-H created a survey designed to elicit community perspectives of the Library's DEI offerings and initiatives. A survey of this nature allows for a broader perspective by gathering information from many individuals. Altogether, over 1,600 community members responded to the survey. From this pool, 500 responses were semi-randomly selected to be a part of the final survey sample for analysis (see pg. 12 for more information on this process).

In analyzing the interview, focus group, and survey data, several themes about the Library's DEI efforts emerged. One of the consistently highlighted points across all the data collection efforts was that the Library is a leader in the DEI space. Participants indicated their appreciation for all that the Library offers and what the Library does to create an inclusive, equitable, and accessible space for all community members. With that being said, respondents highlighted certain areas for the Library to further strengthen these efforts. For a complete list of themes and results, please see pgs. 5 – 24.

Firstly, while respondents knew that the Library was focused on promoting DEI, they were unaware of the Library's specific goals. Respondents indicated a desire to understand what steps the Library planned to take to promote DEI. Part of this involves concretely explaining how specific programs and events help achieve this goal, and the other aspect is effectively communicating this to the community at large.

Secondly, the Library partners with many community organizations to provide a variety of offerings, but there is a desire to focus on partnerships that specifically promote DEI. There are several organizations locally that focus either on DEI broadly or cater to underrepresented and minoritized individuals. Partnerships with these organizations would strengthen the Library's offerings, improve communication efforts, and help to better understand community needs.

Overwhelmingly, responses illustrated the staff's friendliness, helpfulness, and knowledge when interacting with patrons of the Library. However, many participants indicated that they wished the staff represented the community being served. The majority of the staff is made up of white individuals. In some branches, there is very little representation of Black, Indigenous, and People

of Color (BIPOC), making some visitors feel as if the Library does not represent the larger community.

Finally, survey results broken out by racial and ethnic identity showed relatively consistent patterns among the various groups. One area where this differed was the question, "I would like to see additional community outreach services and library programming that caters to the diversity of the community." Individuals who identified as white or who did not indicate their racial or ethnic identity skewed towards a more neutral response. In contrast, all other groups skewed more positively, indicating a desire for more programs that cater to the community's diversity. This highlights a potential pressure point for the Library with resistance to initiatives focused on reaching out to minoritized groups within the community.

Based on the data collected, many recommendations are provided to strengthen the Library's offerings (see pg. 25 for the complete list). Even though the Library has priorities and values regarding DEI, survey results indicated a disconnect with the community as to how programming and events promote these ideals. The Library would benefit from clearly highlighting these values and then communicating how various offerings promote these priorities. Another recommendation is to continue to amplify minoritized voices within the Library and better communicate these efforts. This applies not only to the collections, but also to the programming, services, and events. Many patrons indicated that the Library needed to provide offerings that are actually already being provided. This indicates a clear need to market and promote the existing offerings so that all patrons are made aware of the existing programs and services. Another recommendation is to focus more closely on Library accessibility. While many of the buildings have been renovated, or are soon to be renovated, there is a need to evaluate improving transportation and physical access to Library locations. There is also a need to increase offerings around disabilities and neurodivergence. A final recommendation is to reconsider the Library's internal efforts. While internal efforts were outside of the scope of the existing project, themes around staff diversity, recruitment, and training were brought up throughout all data collection methods. An internal DEI audit is highly recommended to further explore these topics.