



RACIAL EQUITY BUDGET TOOL

Date Submitted:

Department: Milwaukee County Federated Library System

Please note: each response field below has a 2,500 character limit.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE CATEGORY 1: DIVERSE & INCLUSIVE WORKFORCE

What activities are you doing to attract and retain a diverse and inclusive workforce in your department? What are the associated costs of these activities?

BACKGROUND

The Milwaukee County Federated Library System (MCFLS) is run by a seven member board of trustees whose membership is approved by the County Executive's office and County Board of Supervisors. The makeup and authority of the MCFLS Board is set in state statute, with one representative from the resource library board (Milwaukee), two from other public library boards in the system, one County Supervisor and three citizen representatives. The power to attract and retain a diverse and inclusive workforce within the system is in the hands of the MCFLS Board with assistance from the system director, and by extension the County Executive's office and Board of Supervisors who approve MCFLS trustees.

RECRUITMENT

The system staff itself is small, with 4.63 FTE, and all staff members have been employed at MCFLS for at least 10 years and many for much longer. MCFLS is an equal opportunity employer and states that prominently on all position announcements. When positions at MCFLS have become open, the director advertises the opening on the system website and usually state and national library organization job recruitment sites like the American Library Association (ALA) JobList or Wisconsin Library Association job announcement boards. The system has also posted positions on Wisconsin.gov since MCFLS is a quasi-state agency and the UW-Milwaukee iSchool when appropriate to the position. These particular job sites may be appropriate to cast a wide net to ensure enough good candidates apply. In the future the system will need to consider posting open positions to other sites that can attract candidates to ensure a diverse and inclusive workforce that represents the libraries and communities we serve.

RETAINMENT

MCFLS offers many incentives to retain a diverse and inclusive workforce. The system pays employees a very competitive rate of pay and has been able to retain staff for many years as a result. In addition, all system staff become part of the Wisconsin Retirement System (WRS) shortly after employment and are eligible to take part in a tax deferred compensation program to help save for retirement. MCFLS also gives the option for staff to participate in the state healthcare plan, generally recognized to be one of the best available locally. To retain employees the total cost of salaries is roughly \$380,000 and fringe benefits around \$150,000 after staff copays are taken out.

How do you use professional development and advancement opportunities to advance equity in your department's workforce? What resources are used to support these opportunities for professional development and advancement?

Our system staff is small but all of them have access to a variety of professional development opportunities that MCFLS offers to our member libraries. MCFLS, along with other systems in Southeast Wisconsin, contracts with the Bridges Library System to offer access to high quality continuing education opportunities in the form of in-person events or online sessions and webinars. The group is named SEWI Libraries Continuing Education and has a website with registration and links to sessions throughout the year: <https://sewilibraries.org/>. The sessions are organized by a Bridges staff member with many years of experience and in recent years many sessions have focused on equity and inclusivity in the workplace and libraries. A few examples include:

- Improving Your Library's Accessibility
- Planting Seeds and Anticipating Blossoms: A Community Engagement Model
- Let's Talk About Race (Youth Services)
- Positive Interactions: Making the Library a Welcoming & Empowering Place for People with Disabilities
- Wakanheza Project Training Workshop

System subcommittees have also discussed race and equity over the past few years. A representative from the Milwaukee Public Library has shared her experience in developing a cultural awareness program with other reference librarians. This same librarian participated in Milwaukee County Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) sessions and shared information with the MCFLS system staff and directors at a meeting held last year.

In addition to local professional development opportunities, the Wisconsin Department of Instruction, Division for Libraries and Technology (DPI-DLT) employs an experienced staff member with responsibilities that include collaboration and information sharing for inclusive services for libraries at the state level. The DLT has made it a point of emphasis in recent years to make sure all library systems in the state are kept informed and collaborate on issues affecting equity and inclusivity.

MCFLS budgets \$9,000 for continuing education and participation in the SEWI group of libraries. Many other webinars and sessions come at no additional cost to the system.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE CATEGORY 2: PEOPLE-FOCUSED DESIGN

How and when have service users, particularly users of color, and other key stakeholders been engaged to inform decisions about your requested budget (Who was involved, what was the forum, what were the results)?

The Milwaukee County Federated Library System (MCFLS) operates as a member organization designed to facilitate collaboration and cooperation among all public libraries in Milwaukee County. The MCFLS Board and system have always considered our primary audience or service users to be our member libraries. System staff do communicate directly with the community in a general support role, assisting residents with questions related to use of the catalog and electronic resources like Libby, but the primary responsibility of MCFLS is to our member libraries who in turn support their residents.

Currently the key stakeholders we work with when determining the budget include the MCFLS Board, member library directors and system staff. The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) approves the system plan for services that does include the system budget each year. Member library directors are important to our budget process and are given the chance to offer input each year. The impact of the pandemic on our system budget is an unknown and may impact system services so feedback from member libraries will be even more important this year. System staff are also important in the budget process. We hold several meetings with staff throughout the spring and summer to determine priorities within our budget in conjunction with our strategic plan.

The MCFLS Board has determined that marketing system and member library services is a high priority for the next five years through our strategic plan. The initial steps require the system to collect and analyze data from several sources. Although we have not determined the scope of this data collection yet, surveying community residents about services offered by the system is a logical step in this process. We can use the feedback from this data collection to inform our budgets and allow our system to be more responsive to our communities, particularly people of color.



What are the multi-lingual needs of your department's service users? How do you use your budget to meet these language needs?

The multi-lingual needs of our member libraries and residents are generally focused on removing barriers to information that should be available to all our communities regardless of race or language.

- Since MCFLS is responsible for the automated library system and there is a significant Spanish-speaking population in Milwaukee County, we've worked with our member libraries and vendors to provide a Spanish language interface to the library catalog.

- In past years MCFLS used grant funding to provide the first significant Spanish language collection within the state OverDrive collection of ebooks and audiobooks. Maintaining and improving this collection has now been standardized as part of the statewide collection development policy governing the purchase of all materials. More materials in different languages have been added since this initial collection.

- In May 2020, MCFLS negotiated with our vendor to provide 3,200 electronic magazines to community residents through member libraries. These titles are offered in 18 different languages through an easy to use interface and app.

We support multi-lingual needs through a number of budget lines totaling around \$5000, including support for multilingual forms. Member libraries pay the costs of the electronic magazines, which for 2020/21 is around \$37,000. This does not include the thousands of multi-language materials owned by member libraries and made accessible through the online catalog and mobile app.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE CATEGORY 3: EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVE

Our employees can be a great resource for innovation and knowing what is working well and what needs work. Have you engaged a diverse group of frontline employees to inform decisions about your proposed budget changes? If yes, how was input solicited, who was involved, and what were the results?

The MCFLS system staff comprises five people: four full time staff and one part-time employee. The small size of our staff means each member has an opportunity and responsibility to influence our budget and share their views regarding possible changes.

The system director regularly polls system staff to identify changes for inclusion in the system budget throughout the year. The director, for example, will challenge the network administrator to engage in generative thinking to anticipate long term technology needs for the system. As a result the network administrator identified network routers at each member library that needed to be replaced over the next five years. We have now a plan and budget in place to address that need. This is but one example in an iterative process involving all system staff members.

Many elements of our budget are dictated by the 2020-2024 MCFLS Strategic Plan. System staff had a heavy influence on the makeup of that plan and are responsible for implementing activities related to the objectives within it. Some of these activities involved funding through the budget. In effect, system staff not only have a great influence on the strategic plan and the budget, but also in determining specifically ways in which that money is being spent.



Describe ways in which racial and economic data was used to prioritize resource distribution. (Data can include sources found in the resources section of this tool, department collected data, or any other relevant data from other sources.)

Racial and economic data has not been used to prioritize resource distribution in our budget process. The primary stakeholders that MCFLS serves are the public libraries of Milwaukee County. The system has always viewed the libraries as our constituents and connection to the communities they serve. The system board and staff rely heavily on constant communication with directors and library boards to determine the best way to serve their communities. This is borne out during negotiations with the libraries with regard to system agreements every 4-5 years, all of which result in direct payment to libraries for services they provide the system and other members. The data used to determine the agreements are internal reports that focus primarily on circulation statistics to determine use and ultimately compensation.

Discretionary resource distribution within our budget is further limited because of the amount of system operating expenses tied to these agreements. Over 50% of the MCFLS budget is tied to system agreements that run through 2024: 38% to reciprocal borrowing among member libraries, 9.5% for cataloging services from the Milwaukee Public Library and 7% is also earmarked to the Milwaukee Public Library to serve as the MCFLS resource library.

What are the positive or negative racial equity implications of your proposed budget changes? For reference departments may refer to the “Form 1 – Major Changes” tab of your Supplemental Forms 2021 spreadsheet. Any change with identified impacts should be described.

POSITIVE RACIAL EQUITY IMPLICATIONS

Since MCFLS does not directly serve county residents it is difficult to answer this question, but the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan does include objectives that may be viewed as having positive racial equity implications.

- Marketing. The system has done some limited marketing of system resources and services on behalf of member libraries recently, but nothing on the scale planned for 2021 and following. Those in disadvantaged communities and people of color can expect to gain more information on what is available to them through the library system and all the resources available to them with their library card. Much of this marketing will be created using positive and representative images to reinforce the library as a cornerstone institution within the communities they serve.

- Better User Experience. One of the priorities established through the strategic plan was a better user experience for library patrons, including the purchase of a new mobile app. How do we determine what a better user experience looks like? By asking our users through surveys, focus groups and other methods. Our budget will allow people of color and disadvantaged communities to have a significant role in determining what that user experience looks like.

NEGATIVE RACIAL EQUITY IMPLICATIONS

Some negative racial equity implications that we've been able to identify:

- This has yet to play out but the pandemic may cause our budget to be slashed anywhere from 5 – 10% depending on which scenario plays out. Since 97% of our funding comes from one source—the state—our ability to provide valuable services to people of color are at the whim of the legislature and governor. The introduction of a budget repair bill is almost a foregone conclusion. Any reduction in our system budget has negative racial equity implications because MCFLS operates on the margins and cannot accommodate reductions as easily as other organizations.

- MCFLS has traditionally focused on delivery and automation services to member libraries as our primary role, but the system also plays a role in coordinating inclusive and youth services for member libraries. Our experiences during the pandemic and completing this survey of our offerings has lead us to believe that the lack of focus on youth and inclusive service coordination is something has negative racial equity implications and will need to be addressed by system staff and the board.

What are the expected benefits and potential unintended consequences to disadvantaged communities of your proposed budget changes?

a. What analysis did you do to determine the expected benefits and potential unintended consequences?

We did not have the chance to perform an analysis this year, but would welcome the opportunity to do so in the future, particularly if the county would help with training on how to analyze our budget with an eye to better serving disadvantaged communities.

b. What will your department do to mitigate unintended consequences resulting from your proposed budget changes?

MCFLS will work closely with the system board and libraries to determine relevant needs as they come up. For example, the system and member libraries deciding to open up more access to our communities by expanding max checkouts on our hoopla streaming service as a result of the pandemic. The additional expense that resulted will be split evenly between the system and member libraries.

The system also has an established practice in place to make changes through a mid-year budget revision process. This process generally takes place in July or August after the system audit has taken place and is approved by the MCFLS Board.