

Academic Libraries: Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Digital Resources Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Library Journal surveyed 220 college/university libraries early in the fall 2022 semester to quantify the extent to which academic libraries apply equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) standards when purchasing digital resources, and whether they have audited existing digital collections through the lens of EDI. This report will touch on the resources impacted, the sources used to make assessments, and EDI budgeting.

Diversity Initiatives

Importance of EDI

To get a sense of the importance of EDI to academic institutions and their libraries, we asked whether either specifically mentions equity, diversity, and inclusion in their mission statements. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (65%) say that their institution mentions equity, diversity, and inclusion in its mission statement, while 56 percent of academic libraries mention EDI in their own mission statements.

<i>Do your institution and/or library mention equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in their mission statements?</i>	<i>Institution</i>	<i>Library</i>
Yes	65%	56%
No	22%	30%
Don't know	12%	10%
N/A - no mission statement	0%	4%

Just over a third of libraries (38%) have formed an EDI committee, while 11 percent say plans are underway. The other half have not formed an EDI committee.

<i>Has your library formed an equity, diversity, and inclusion committee?</i>	<i>% of respondents</i>
Yes	38%
Plans are underway	11%
No	50%

EDI Audits of Digital Collections

An EDI or diversity audit analyzes a collection to determine what areas may need to be developed to represent a wider variety of points of view and experiences, and identifies existing resources that may be perpetuating stereotypes, centering privileged groups, or omitting underrepresented ones. Just under one-fourth (23%) of academic libraries have audited at least some part of their digital collections through the lens of EDI, while another 25 percent say plans are underway. Fifty-two percent have not EDI-audited their digital collections.

<i>Has your library audited any parts of its existing digital collection through the lens of EDI?</i>	<i>% of respondents</i>
Yes	23%
Plans are underway	25%
No	52%

Of those libraries that have conducted an EDI audit of their digital collections, ebooks were audited by about three-quarters of academic libraries (73%), electronic journals and databases were audited by about half (49% and 47% respectively), and digital archives by just over a quarter (27%). As one librarian from a large university in Texas commented, “We are just beginning this process...and it’s HUGE.”

<i>If yes, which resources has your library audited through the lens of EDI?</i>	<i>% of respondents that have audited parts of its existing digital collection through the lens of EDI</i>
Ebooks	73%
Electronic journals	49%
Databases	47%
Digital archives	27%
Other	22%

If a particular resource was flagged during an EDI audit, 36 percent of respondents say they “contextualized them with more information,” while 19 percent removed the resources or cancelled their subscriptions, 14 percent kept the resources in question but stopped recommending them, and 12 percent subjected them to further review by administration. Most of the “other” write-in responses were some form of “nothing” or “audit was to increase not reduce collections.”

<i>What happened to digital resources that may have been flagged during this process?</i>	<i>% of respondents that have audited parts of its existing digital collection through the lens of EDI</i>
Contextualized them with more information	36%
Removed resources/Cancelled subscription	19%
Kept them, but not recommended as course readings	14%
Put under review by administrators/board	12%
Other	40%

EDI Collection Building

One-half (49%) of libraries, to some extent, assess new digital resource acquisitions with EDI considerations—23 percent assess all new purchases, and 26 percent assess some purchases, through an EDI lens. Twenty-eight percent do not take EDI into consideration when making new digital acquisitions, and 23 percent were unsure how to answer. (Among respondents who are the final decision makers for purchasing materials for their libraries, 60 percent assess new purchases through the lens of EDI—23 percent assess all purchases, and 37 percent assess some purchases.)

<i>Does your library currently assess new digital resource purchases/subscriptions through an EDI lens to make sure they are not perpetuating stereotypes, centering privileged groups, or omitting underrepresented ones?</i>	<i>% of all respondents</i>	<i>% of respondents who make final decision about resources to purchase</i>
NET YES	49%	60%
Yes, all purchases	23%	23%
Yes, some purchases	26%	37%
No	28%	32%
Don't know	23%	8%

When acquiring new digital resources, libraries are most likely to assess ebooks through an EDI lens (75 percent of those that assess new acquisitions assess ebooks), followed distantly by databases (47%) and electronic journals (37%).

More than two-thirds of libraries (68%) have purposefully bought or subscribed to digital resources to increase the representation of marginalized groups¹, while only 14 percent have not. Eighteen percent were unsure how to answer.

<i>Has your library purposefully bought or subscribed to digital resources to increase representation in the collection?</i>	<i>% of respondents</i>
Yes	68%
No	14%
Don't know	18%

Forty-six percent of respondents set acquisition goals to represent EDI within the digital collection—26 percent say their library has formally set a goal while 26 percent say they personally set these goals. More than one-half (54%) do not set EDI goals on digital acquisitions.

<i>Does the library, or do you personally, set target acquisition goals to represent equity, diversity, and inclusion within the digital collection?</i>	<i>% of respondents</i>
NET YES	46%
Yes, the library sets goals	26%
Yes, I set personal goals	28%
Neither	54%

In an open-ended follow-up asking for a description of these acquisition goals, some respondents indicated that they are devoting a set percentage of the budget toward meeting EDI goals, and others indicated that, while not a formal rule, they do try to locate digital resources by and about marginalized people/groups, especially in the humanities.

¹ For example, digital resources by BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, disabled, neurodiverse, or other marginalized authors and/or resources about members of those groups as subjects/protagonists.

Information Sources to Aid EDI Acquisitions

Information sources used by academic libraries to discover and assess digital acquisitions through the lens of EDI are most often faculty recommendations (89%) and professional journals and newsletters (85%), followed by professional organizations (72%). Publishers and student recommendations (65% each) are also relied upon as information sources for digital acquisitions.

<i>What information sources are used to discover and help assess digital resource purchases through the lens of EDI?</i>	<i>% of respondents</i>
Faculty recommendations	89%
Professional journals and newsletters	85%
Professional organizations	72%
Publishers	65%
Student recommendations	65%
Other libraries	52%
Media	38%
Wholesalers/Distributors	25%
Other	7%

Digital Purchases Specifically About EDI

Three-fourths (74%) of academic libraries purchase or license ebooks specifically *about* EDI, while 48 percent purchase or subscribe to EDI-specific electronic journals, and 46 percent purchase or subscribe to EDI-specific databases. Eighteen percent of responding libraries do not purchase digital resources specifically about equity, diversity, and inclusion.

<i>Does your library purchase/license digital resources specifically about equity, diversity, and inclusion in any of the following formats?</i>	<i>% of respondents</i>
Ebooks	74%
Electronic journals	48%
Databases	46%
Digital archives	27%
Other	7%
None of the above	18%

EDI Spending

Fifteen percent of academic libraries dedicate a portion of their acquisitions budget for EDI initiatives, while the majority—85%—do not. Of that 15 percent, EDI-specific spending averages 10.9 percent of their budgets.

As for how academic libraries expect their EDI spending on specific resources to change in the current academic year (2022–2023) compared to the previous year, ebooks are the most important area (53% of libraries expect an increase in EDI spending on ebooks), followed by secondary contextual sources (32% increasing EDI spending). Fewer than ten percent of libraries predict a decrease in EDI spending for any digital resources this academic year. This backs up what one respondent noted in a comment about their top EDI-collection goals going forward, “To do more towards putting our money where our mouths are.”

<i>How do you anticipate EDI spending on the following resources will change in the 2022–2023 academic year compared to the previous year?</i>	<i>Increase</i>	<i>Decrease</i>	<i>Stay the same</i>
Ebooks	53%	5%	42%
Secondary, contextual sources	32%	4%	63%
Journals	28%	9%	63%
Historical primary sources	27%	6%	67%
Databases	26%	8%	66%
Digital archives	23%	7%	70%