

# 2020 RSJI Report to City Council

The Seattle Public Library  
July 16, 2021



# The Seattle Public Library is on Indigenous land.

These are the traditional unceded  
territories of the Coast Salish people,  
specifically the Duwamish people.

ti dʒidʒəlaɪɕ sʰalali ʔal tə ʔaciɫtalbixʷ swatixʷtəd.  
tiɪɫ ʔaciɫtalbixʷ swatixʷtəd xʷiʔ ləʔabʃid ʔə tə dʒixʷ  
ʔaciɫtalbixʷ, ʔə tiɪɫ dxʷdəwʌbʃ



# Library Approaches to Equity Work

- **Lead with race**
- Continuous learning and listening at all levels
- Strive for equity in access, services and programming
- Represent and invest in people of color and other prioritized audiences and communities
- Close the opportunity gap for children of color

# **2020 RSJI Accomplishments at The Library**







## RSJI Highlights

Proactive shift to create new virtual programming and services and collections for multiple audiences centering those most impacted by the pandemic:

- Virtual Library cards
- Increased digital collections
- Digital Resources aggregator webpage
- Covid Resources Information webpage
- Your Next Job program with support in 11 Languages
- Virtual Social Justice Programming: Love in the Time of Covid, Reflections, and BLOOM
- Multilingual Early Learning programming/Virtual Tutoring/Expanded Library Link/Online Homework Help/Virtual Youth Technology programs



## RSJI Highlights

- Physical materials (especially those curated to support non-English languages and non-white cultures) delivered to community partners when Library branches were closed
- Creation and significant expansion of captioning and ASL services for patrons
- Re-tooled Summer of Learning Program that resulted in major book distribution to students from marginalized communities via partner agencies in response for requests for print reading materials
- Wi-Fi Hotspots delivered to support community organizations, school pods and shelter locations
- Road to Reopening work including Restroom Services, Curbside Services, Mobile Services
- New Equity-focused position for programming on Leadership Team

# **2020 RSJI Challenges at The Library**





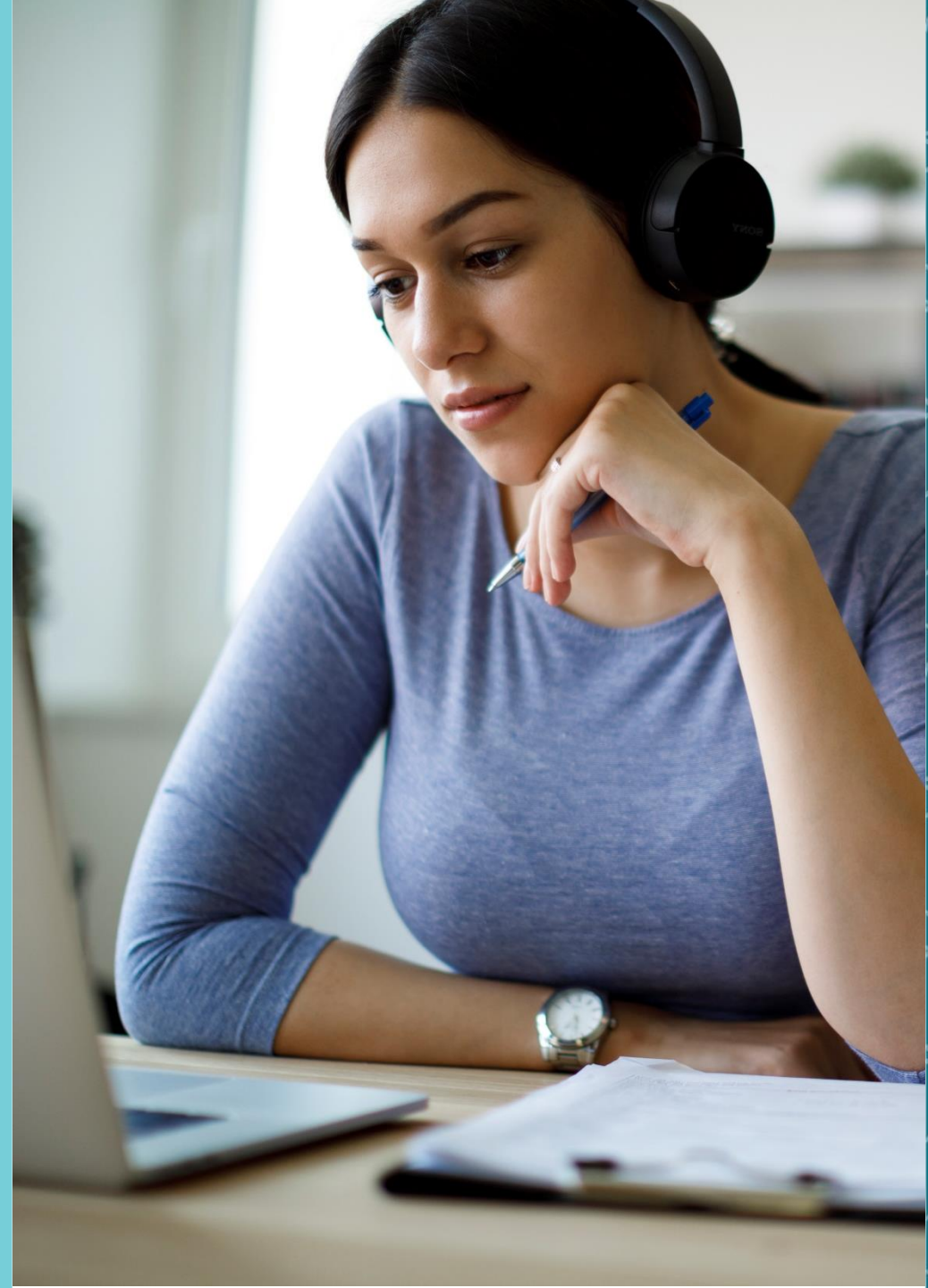
- Operating during a global pandemic and a Civil Rights Movement
- Staff of color bearing the burden of leading equity work while also dealing with civil rights issues and the pandemic
- New caretaking duties, new roles and constantly changing schedules within the organization to meet the new Curbside and Restroom Service schedules
- Technology barriers and positions that were unable to work from home
- RSJI Change team had recently adopted a model to embed into committees and work forces, and this work was disrupted
- City requirements for partner insurance to protect the City in case of volunteer misconduct, data breach, etc. made it impossible for smaller, community based organizations to meet

# **Racial Equity Toolkits Applied to Library Work in 2020**



# Your Next Job

- Virtual Job assistance in 11 languages
- Partnership with Regional Library systems to increase reach
- Launched in response to pandemic related job losses
- In language advertising of service in print, online and radio





## **Equity Goal and Outcomes:**

Provide much needed assistance navigating the workforce development landscape to those that been negatively impacted by the economic impacts of the COVID-19 health crisis.

Center residents from marginalized communities by offering assistance in applying for relief services, referrals to resources to opportunities for upskilling, and the ability to improve digital literacy skills in English as well as Seattle's Top Tier Languages so that they may be able to pursue economic assistance and ultimately employment aligned with the evolving economy.





# Youth and Family Services

- Multilingual Early Learning programming and addition of 10 SPS Early Learning sites to SPL Raising a Reader roster to insure learning progress goals were met
- Multilingual Virtual Tutoring/Expanded Library Link/Online Homework Help
- Virtual Youth Technology programs







## Equity Goal and Outcomes:

The Seattle Public Library builds and maintains community partnerships to provide high quality resources, services, and programs that promote the growth and well-being of youth and families furthest from educational and digital justice. The Library will strive to reallocate resources to prioritize this work, also recognizing the compounding negative impacts the pandemic has had on marginalized communities.

In doing so, the Library will honor community knowledge and self-sufficiency and consider how programs, collections, spaces, outreach, and staff can be utilized to serve those furthest from various forms of injustice. It will also foster growth, improved academic and economic outcomes while also improving the health, happiness, and safety of the whole community.



# Mobile Services Re-opening

**Equity Goal and Outcomes:** To provide library service centering BIPOC and other residents from other marginalized communities so they can access resources to help them to be self-empowered and thrive during and beyond the COVID-19 crisis.





This Racial Equity Outcome was designed with the principle that providing access to resources – including print and non-print materials as well as information about the library’s collections, programs and services will empower residents so they can make informed decisions about their lives. While many Seattle residents from marginalized communities are struggling with acquiring the necessities for survival, it should always be the goal of the library that survival is the minimum and its role is to help residents thrive. It may take some time for a new normal to be established in our community and the goal of thriving should not be delayed until the new normal is in place. Thus, the library wishes to contribute to communities flourishing both during and after the COVID-19 Pandemic.



## **What data, stories, and communities did you engage with?**

Both qualitative and quantitative sources were used. Qualitative sources included information gathered through established community based organizations and partnerships as well as relationships with other agencies such as Seattle Parks & Recreation, Department of Neighborhoods and Seattle Public Schools.





## **What are the burdens? What are the benefits?**

The identified burdens included asking partners to take on the responsibility of promoting Library services as well as distributing materials delivered by The Library.

The benefits including providing marginalized communities with access to library materials (books magazines, and DVDs) without having to travel to one of the few library locations that offered Curbside Services as well as materials about library services.





**Identity the way in which the four types of racism (internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and structural) animated your RET process and what you learned.**

The group focused on three of the types of racism by creating an environment that allowed members of the team to call out any internalized racism that was displayed during discussions and proposals.

The group considered and developed practices and procedures that overcame the institutional racism created by library policies and state laws governing use of library funds.

We also considered the cumulative impacts of structural racism such food sovereignty, transportation issues as well as lack of educational support and digital connection for many families have been marginalized.



## **How will you increase opportunity and/or minimize harm for the impacted community?**

One way the group opted to utilize to minimize harm was to create a menu of options of service for partner agencies to use as a starting point for discussing how the library could help them meet the needs of their constituents.

This allowed for some customization of service base on the needs of the partner instead of the library dictating what it could or would do in order to meet our goal.



## **What additional racial equity issues did this RET reveal?**

The project brought up several racial equity issues including the organization's struggle with prioritizing services that are rooted in equity against those that are rooted in equality.

In order to try to overcome these issues, the team developed new procedures, worked with other Library departments and other city departments as well as established new relationships to achieve aspects of the service.



# Curbside Services

**Equity Goal and Outcomes:** To provide library service centering BIPOC and other residents from other marginalized communities so they can access resources to help them to be self-empowered and thrive during and beyond the COVID-19







## **What data, stories, and communities did you engage with?**

We used OPCD Racial and Social Equity Index and Map to identify prioritized neighborhoods for reopening Library branches for Curbside Service.

Internal SPL data showing connection between socioeconomic disadvantage and library access barriers were also considered.





## **What are the burdens? What are the benefits?**

Burdens included difficulty of getting to library locations offering service on limited schedule; limited opportunities for community members to sign up for new library cards; long lines/wait times for access to limited services.

Benefits included free access to library books and other resources (including uncatalogued “grab and go” items not requiring a library card), voter registration packets, free printing of up to 10 pages per day, and children’s activity kits/coloring sheets.



**Please identify the way in which the four types of racism (internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and structural) animated your RET process and what you learned.**

Structural – Initial selection of curbside library locations prioritized locations serving lower-opportunity neighborhoods and neighborhoods with greater percentage of BIPoC residents. This resulted in tension/pressure from more privileged neighborhoods whose branches were slower to open.

Institutional – Library policies related to overdue materials, account suspension, and access requirements have historically created inequitable barriers to access. The group focused on increasing flexibility of policies to address these barriers.



## **How will you increase opportunity and/or minimize harm for the impacted community?**

The group used racial equity analysis to select library locations to offer curbside service and made efforts to reduce inequitable barriers to access by increasing flexibility of library policies

We continually reviewed procedures and made changes based on feedback received from impacted patrons

For example, we moved from an appointment-based to a first-come-first-served model after observing that the appointment system created backlogs and prioritized patrons who were best able to navigate the system. We also increased options for patrons to check out bundled materials without having to place holds. Librarians selected and curated materials in bundles focusing on BIPoC/LGBTQ/Own Voices titles



## **What additional racial equity issues did this RET reveal?**

Redesigning a core library service in the midst of a global pandemic and budget reductions forced us to provide service at a greatly reduced level.

We will continue to focus on racial equity priorities as we continue to reopen and provide higher levels of service, and will continue to face resource constraints.

As we bring back more services it is critical that we listen to and respond to the needs of prioritized audiences.

# The “Spirit” of RSJI at The Library





## Thrive Together

- RSJI Change team continued to meet virtually on a regular basis, and switched our meetings to a focus on self-care
- Team started work on a long term, more strategic approach to RSJ engagement to allow for staff to participate in the work in meaningful ways
- Created cross-functional Reopening Committees with representation across the organization with multiple feedback options for staff input
- Employee Engagement Committee worked with Leadership Team in recognizing staff, including planning staff recognition award at a virtual staff week themed 'Thrive Together'



# Looking ahead: 2021

- RSJI Change Team driven programming for staff, including different ways to engage, caucusing
- Equity programming training for a large percentage of staff as well as RET training for Leadership Team and management
- Reviewing positions to determine if they can be re-purposed to focus on programming that is rooted in equity and working with community
- Increased Language access
- Continued focus on Road to Reopening work to continue to increase access and services



# Questions?

[www.spl.org/Equity](http://www.spl.org/Equity)

[www.spl.org/Impact](http://www.spl.org/Impact)