

Expanding Representation

ALSC's Equity Fellows Program

Nicole Rawlinson



Nicole Rawlinson is a teen and youth serving librarian, focused on supporting youth and communities through equity-building approaches to programming, services, and professional development. She serves as a Washington

state trainer on the YALSA Transforming Teen Services project and is a member of the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion within ALSC Implementation task force, which also includes co-chairs Danielle Jones and Sophie Kenney, Ayn Reyes Frazee, Sierra McKenzie, Kelly-Ann Smith, and Vicky Smith.

The Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) within ALSC Implementation task force exists to heighten visibility, increase opportunities, and eliminate challenges to participation within ALSC for BIPOC library workers.

The task force supports ALSC's charge to implement EDI practices while diversifying membership and future leadership. It aims to mitigate the impacts to participation associated with costs, perceived accessibility, and lack of diversity, while developing pathways to ALSC membership and leadership opportunities. Through the task force's work, one of the main initiatives to increase BIPOC representation within the organization was realized through the development of the Equity Fellows program.

In the pilot proposal, the EDI task force asserted its purpose and mission, affirming its commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion by engaging new generations of racially and ethnically diverse library professionals.

The Equity Fellows program, now in its second round, aims to grow BIPOC leadership representation within ALSC through a relationship and project-based approach. The program offers one-on-one mentorship, professional development, and networking opportunities to selected fellows throughout their experience, coupled with ALA and ALSC membership, conference registration, and a travel stipend to eliminate costs to participation. These opportunities not only develop leadership skills and encourage future participation, they also facilitate important connections to organizational leaders, other BIPOC members, publishers, and book creators.

Through a competitive application process, fellowships are awarded to BIPOC library workers who demonstrate a strong desire and commitment to children's services, equity, service within ALSC, and a capacity for future leadership within the organization.

The First Fellows

In the program's pilot, six fellows—Eiyana Favers, Ayn Reyes Frazee, Evelyn Keolian, Star Khan, Sierra McKenzie, and Jocelyn Moore—were selected to participate in the fellowship program. Throughout their experience, they engaged in the development and execution of a large-scale project while participating in regular meetings, networking opportunities, and mentorship activities. This year, the EDI task force welcomed five new Equity Fellows for its second cohort—Eboni Dickerson, Erika Lehtonen, Natassia Schulz, Melissa Stovall, and Mai Takahashi.

Favers explained that her decision to apply came at a time when she considered ALSC membership but didn't know where to start. She wanted to learn more about ALSC while also connecting with other professionals working in early literacy in urban communities like her own.

Current fellow Dickerson shared mentorship as her motivation for participation. She explained that the organization felt "too vast" and welcomed the opportunity to have guidance from someone who is already integrated into the organization.

Takahashi, a current Equity Fellow, explained that applying to the program was an extension of her commitment to equity within her own library system. Working with an urban Native community in Seattle, she was genuinely interested in learning about how other library systems implement EDI practices and expand her own professional network through the equity, diversity, and inclusion lens.

For both inaugural and current fellows, the opportunities for professional development and mentorship were reasons to apply. Another commonly identified consideration was the costs associated with membership and participation. The Equity Fellowship is one of the only no-cost pathways to both membership in ALSC and conference attendance; the cost of membership coupled with conference registrations and travel costs incurred had previously made active participation simply unattainable. While a variety of motivating factors were shared, a consistent thread among the fellows was the encouragement from colleagues and supervisors that gave them the confidence to submit an application and follow through the selection process.

Many of the inaugural fellowship cohort looked forward to the mentorship opportunities developed to support their navigation through the program and the organization. Looking back on the experience, McKenzie shared, “The fellowship gave me an instant network that I could lean on when I needed it and offered guidance on how to proceed. I think it would have been overwhelming and difficult to navigate without their tremendous support.”

Keolian described the ways in which the equity fellowship shaped her perspective of ALSC as a true inside look of how ALSC functions, “from how the committees work, to applying, appointment, actual service, and to other opportunities that exist for children’s librarians.”

She reflected on the experience compared to prior years as a member of ALSC without a mentorship component and identified stark differences in the experience. “While I had attended ALSC 101 and other sessions in the past, I never seemed to go beyond that. I filled out the volunteer application and heard nothing. It seemed like it was impossible, but the fellowship changed all of that for me.”

While the fellows were paired with EDI task force mentors, they also worked together as a collaborative team to complete a project that increased their knowledge of the organization and supported the increased effort to recruit a more diverse membership within ALSC.

Presented with the opportunity to create a project that supported ALSC’s commitment to EDI, the fellows developed a



Equity Fellows at the 2019 ALA Midwinter Meeting include, left to right, Evelyn Keolian, Sierra McKenzie, Ayn Reyes Frazee, Jocelyn Moore, Eiyana Favers, and Shahrazad “Star” Khan.

graphic guide to navigating ALSC as a new member. Throughout this project, they were encouraged to collaborate as a team and seek out guidance from both their mentors and ALSC leadership, leading to formative relationships and deeper understanding of the organization and its mission.

Since participating in the fellowship program, many inaugural fellows have deepened their commitment to service in ALSC. They have gone on to participate in both process and awards committees and have been selected for educational opportunities such as the Morris Seminar. One fellow is currently co-chairing a process committee and was on the ballot and elected to the 2023 Newbery selection committee. Two of the pilot fellows have joined the EDI within ALSC Implementation task force, and several of the inaugural fellows feel that the experience has prepared them to become leaders within ALSC and within their own communities. Leadership opportunities within ALSC are seen as plentiful by past fellows, and the more members are open to new experiences the more likely they will be to find their niche within the organization.

The current cohort has joined with great expectations for a year of growth and preparation for leadership. As a new fellow, Takahashi hopes to gain program management skills, network, learn more about ALSC, and most importantly, work to develop collaborative solutions to promote the power of literacy through anti-racism and anti-bias work.

The EDI task force hopes to continue the Equity Fellows program into the future, and encourages prospective applicants to consider the opportunity. After one complete fellowship cycle and a current fellowship in progress, it is clear that this opportunity can continue to affirm ALSC’s investment in and commitment to a more diverse set of leaders and a more equitable organization. While the Equity Fellowship has created new pathways to participation for BIPOC library workers and engaged a new pool of potential leaders, ALSC’s investment in equity does not end with the fellowship or even the work of the task force. Equity, diversity, and inclusion work must be woven into the very fabric of the organization. &