Adopting Critical Cataloging Practices Post Diversity Audit

Connecting the Community to Your Collection

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To increase patrons' ability to find resources, it is imperative to investigate barriers and biases in the descriptive catalog data for inclusive collection management and development standards. This study used a specially designed descriptive approach to gather quantitative data from 101 public librarians in Connecticut via a Qualtrics survey to identify the key variables that influence the successful enhancement of online public access catalog (OPAC) metadata after a diversity audit of the library materials. The results revealed factors that promote or impede the integration of inclusive cataloging that reflects the diversity of the community: (1) appreciating the benefits of audit methods that are focused on bibliographic records, (2) recognizing the need for buy-in and participation from the entire organization, and (3) stressing the useful integration of institutional and community feedback to improve the collection's accessibility and representation. The findings provide practical advice to public libraries that want to satisfy the diverse demands of their user base by integrating critical cataloging frameworks into their diversity and inclusion objectives.

Public libraries are, at their very core, institutions that connect individuals with resources. Because a vast amount of information has been generated over time, librarians play an important role in curating and organizing this knowledge in a manner that is useful, understandable, and convenient for their patrons. These materials must also mirror the "interest(s), information, and enlightenment of *all* people of the community the library serves."[1] However, not all patrons see themselves reflected in the selected books, and others struggle to discover relevant results in the online public access catalog (OPAC) due to outdated or problematic search terms.[2] This disconnect between established professional standards and actual practice has compromised the library's mission to guarantee that "the right of accessing information is not denied and that equitable services are provided for everyone."[3] In response, some libraries are evolving and refining their collections and metadata to remain inclusive and responsive to the needs and identities of their diverse patrons.

Two emerging strategies to address these issues are: (1) undertaking diversity audits of the physical collection, and (2) employing critical cataloging practices to improve metadata descriptions. Popularized by Karen Jensen in 2017, diversity audits, "as they pertain to collection development," are a recent trend in reaction to the long-standing need for greater diversity, equity, and inclusion in library services.[4] The audit process requires libraries to review and analyze their collection to identify any gaps in representation that would align with the needs and identities of their community. This concept

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embodies the foundational principles of the Library Bill of Rights and the "mirrors and windows" metaphor by Rudine Sims Bishop, who argued that books should serve as mirrors for readers to see themselves and as windows to understand the lives of others.[5] Various methods exist for conducting this audit. Still, the common overarching goal is to bridge the aforementioned gaps through improved collection management and development efforts—where the data can then be used "to guide purchasing decisions, track progress, and keep stakeholders informed about diversification efforts."[6]

Building on the insights gained from diversity audits, some libraries have taken further steps and subsequently remedied issues within their OPAC—which is "a catalog of bibliographic records for materials available from or through a specific library or library system" that can be "accessed online by the public" and "without the assistance of library staff."[7] Recognizing the OPAC's role in resource accessibility, these libraries have taken a proactive approach to making their diverse collection more accessible by adopting inclusive cataloging practices. Critical Cataloging, as this movement has been aptly named, fulfills the need to update the machine-readable cataloging (MARC) records to be more representative of users. This involves "questioning the status quo and seeking alternative controlled vocabularies," such as keywords, subject headings, and other descriptive information patrons rely on to locate and access materials in a convenient and self-sufficient manner.[8]

Although there is substantial literature on diversity audits and critical cataloging individually, there is a noticeable lack of studies examining the relationship between the two. As stated by Rachel Jaffe, "There has been discussion of the shortcomings, politics, and bias implicit in traditional cataloging and metadata tools and standards, [but] not as much attention has been paid to questioning how we assess metadata quality and what constitutes good metadata."[9] In particular, there are very few or no research studies that explore the decision-making process behind public libraries' choices when updating their OPAC's MARC records after a diversity audit of their collection.

To fill this void, we explored the overarching research question: *What are the primary motivations and evaluative criteria that drive Connecticut public libraries to adopt critical cataloging practices after a diversity audit?* Our aim was to identify common variables or choices among responding libraries that have conducted collection audits—such as community characteristics, audit methods, user feedback, and implementation challenges—to reveal patterns that can inform other institutions with similar needs. How can diversity audits assist in implementing critical cataloging practices after an audit? For the future, this understanding is vital to fostering a welcoming environment in both physical and digital spaces. It could also serve as a guiding model for other public libraries contemplating a revamp of their cataloging practices.

Literature Review

The American Library Association (ALA) "affirms that equity, diversity, and inclusion are central to the promotion and practice of intellectual freedom," and librarians must incorporate these principles into all aspects of their work.[10] As a result, diversity audits and critical cataloging have emerged as prominent strategies in the librarian's toolkit.

Purpose and Scope of a Diversity Audit

Within the context of a library, a diversity audit entails assessing the "diversity represented by subjects, fictional characters, authors, and illustrators" of the existing items in the collection—books, audiobooks, and other resources.[11] Findings are then compared to the patron population statistics to establish goals aligned with community needs (e.g., ethnicities, religions, socioeconomics). Each process must be adapted to fit the individual libraries "to yield the most efficacy."[12] Overall, a diversity audit not only evaluates the degree of inclusivity of the current collection but also sets a foundation for continuous improvement.

Despite having autonomy over the diversity audit, the 2022 *Library Journal* Materials Survey reported that less than half of responding libraries (46 percent) had completed an audit. Only 22 percent have "both conducted a diversity audit and set goals for increasing representation in their collection."[13] This percentage has increased since *Library Journal*'s 2019 survey, where only 9 percent had completed one, and 14 percent planned to do so in the future. Yet, more libraries must undertake an in-depth diversity audit to truly evolve.[14] This trend highlights a growing recognition of the importance of diversity audits yet underscores the persistent barriers libraries face.

Methodologies for Diversity Audits

Annabelle Mortensen, echoing the *Library Journal* article, highlights the pressing need for comprehensive diversity audits but notes that many libraries avoid them due to "the difficulty of developing a methodology that fits within already heavy workloads."[15] To address this, she planned for a "two-year audit designed to cultivate insights without overwhelming staff." However, she had to create a new methodology, as her "research failed to identify any libraries that had taken on such an enormous audit to use as a model."[16] Using a Google Forms checklist to categorize diversity attributes, her hands-on approach provided valuable insights for future initiatives despite being time intensive.

In recent years, standardized templates—such as checklists, catalog searches, book inspections, and the reframing method—have made audits more accessible.[17] Most approaches, like Mortensen's, emphasize hands-on methods, but some, like reframing, require critical cataloging for long-term impact. Treshani Perera's study supports this, finding that 35 percent of responding librarians (n=130) "consider creating a sustainable process for future inclusive description work to be of the highest importance."[18] To achieve these lasting benefits, Renate Beilharz suggests using audit data to add consistent keywords, improving accessibility while preserving past work.[19] Hence, critical cataloging practices are not only essential for realizing the immediate benefits of diversity audits but also key to their lasting impact.

Kara Bledsoe et al. also discuss the reform of cataloging practices when developing an audit model, citing the University of Alberta Library's Decolonizing Description Project (DDP) as an example; they suggest using the "reframing method" because "it can be implemented by identifying opportunities to apply new descriptions to the materials and/or present the materials in new ways through different discovery and access mechanisms."[20] Their study showed that this method could "open up opportunities to engage stakeholder groups" and "connect collections to new research."[21] This effort

was carried out within an academic institution, however, which provided resources that public libraries often lack—such as time, funding, and content experts. This difference implies that audit methodologies need to be flexible to various institutional contexts.

Regrettably, altering bibliographic records is not an easy task without resources such as those mentioned above. Limited personnel for description work is a significant barrier, with 86 percent of participants in Perera's study identifying it as a challenge (n=138).[22] Brian Clark and Catherine Smith also warned that "the intellectual task of updating the classification scheme and the manual labor of re-cataloguing thousands of records and relabeling items is huge."[23] Due to the complexity of this venture and the imperfect nature of the results, most public libraries tend to focus solely on maintaining and developing their collections during the audit. Collectively, these studies emphasize the need for practical, scalable audit methodologies that consider the limited resources of public libraries.

Bridging Gaps with Critical Cataloging

Despite sincere efforts by librarians to promote the newly diverse offerings post-audit, many titles remain reliant on patrons discovering them by browsing the shelves or by searching the OPAC. Elizabeth Hobart found retrieving records that lack appropriate keywords or subject headings difficult, noting that the catalog "always provided enough information for known title searching, but often lacked resources beyond that."[24] This stresses the need to incorporate inclusivity directly into standard library cataloging procedures so patrons can discover all titles. Without this step, items "insufficiently or incorrectly represented become effectively lost if they cannot be surfaced by a subject or keyword search within a public-facing catalog," rendering "a sizeable percentage of the library's available resources" inaccessible to the public.[25]

Critical cataloging aims to solve this issue by questioning the inaccuracies and harmful ideologies built into the current descriptive practices and knowledge organization systems, such as the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH). Just as diversity audits have evolved into flexible, templated methods with clear evaluative criteria, critical cataloging methods need a structured framework to support consistent and inclusive practices. As Perera points out, "dismantling biases in cataloging systems, standards, and tools can only be accomplished with systemic change. Systemic change is a collective responsibility."[26]

The Core Competencies for Cataloging and Metadata Professional Librarians could potentially serve as such a collective-based guide. Still, Bruce Evans et al.'s 2023 survey assessing its use found limited awareness and application of the document. Of the 399 respondents to the question, "Have you used the *Core Competencies* in your work? (select 'Yes' or 'No')," 65 percent responded "No," highlighting the need for revisions that incorporate diversity and inclusion and critical cataloging practices.[27] Their report suggested improvements in three areas: (1) updating technical competencies, (2) involving subject matter experts from other fields, and (3) increasing the document's visibility. In short, revising and promoting the *Core Competencies* is vital for addressing systemic biases in metadata systems.

Understanding Critical Cataloging

Inclusive catalog management practices are recognized as part of a broader effort to scrutinize the assumed neutrality of library metadata. Unbiased knowledge organization systems do not exist, as they are designed by humans and thus reflect societal attitudes, policies, events, and conditions of the time.[28] Nevertheless, libraries must rely on them to provide access to resources. Due to this issue, a critical examination of these systems, as well as the institutions themselves, is necessary. The movement for Critical Librarianship does so by challenging the alleged neutrality of the discipline and acknowledging the structures of "power and privilege that underpin the profession."[29]

As a part of this movement, Critical Cataloging aims to expose the subject headings, class numbers, and library metadata that contribute to the barriers and biases in these systems. Jennifer Martin, referencing institutions such as the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), underscores the importance of cataloging ethics since it "draw[s] on the primary values of serving the needs of users and providing access to materials."[30] Neutrality, a core value within the profession, has generally been a way to fulfill this duty—even though it is not explicitly mentioned in the ALA Code of Ethics.[31]

Despite the good intentions behind impartiality, it frequently conceals existing biases. As such, Jaffe asks: "do we claim neutrality or objectivity, or do we start questioning our purpose and practice?" Just as there are inevitable gaps in a collection, accurate representation within the OPAC "cannot be expected to be flawless" since metadata are "manifestations of human effort."[33] This discovery should prompt a reevaluation of these standards to serve accessibility goals better.

Jaffe's research touches on this problem, critiquing current cataloging processes and advocating for quality metadata. This includes shifting from evaluative, quantitative models to ones that include ethical, qualitative aspects since existing frameworks often overlook the impact on end-users and communities beyond the library profession.[34] Therefore, we addressed these shortcomings in our study by including survey questions targeting: (1) improvements to catalog accessibility, (2) development of inclusive keywords and subject headings, and (3) criteria for evaluating metadata. These topics also helped identify additional challenges libraries encounter when implementing inclusive cataloging practices.

Challenges in Implementation

The practice of critical cataloging, highlighted by #CritCat, is not new to social justice. Librarians like Sanford Berman, Hope Olson, and Emily Drabinski have long worked to reform problematic controlled vocabularies such as the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) and Sears List of Subject Headings.[35] These metadata frameworks, which have been in widespread use for over a hundred years, provide a structured way to categorize and access material records based on subject content—where "its scope has expanded far beyond the initial offerings first published in the early twentieth century."[36] Thus these terms are integral to the library's search system, making patrons' ability to retrieve relevant results reliant on the consistency and standardization provided by this authority control process.

The National Information Standards Organization's principles reiterate this by stating that good metadata should conform to community standards, be appropriate to the collection and its users, and support interoperability.[37] Yet, as the *Statements of Ethical Principles* created by the Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee remind us: "We recognise that interoperability and consistent application of standards help our users find and access materials. However, all standards are biased."[38]

Despite their importance, controlled vocabulary, such as subject headings, are "inconsistent, slow to change, and inadequate in representing certain topics"—where the Library of Congress (LC) choices may not match the patron's search terms when using the OPAC, leading to a decline in the results' efficacy.[39] One could use unauthorized terms that make the most sense to patrons and authors, but it is not easy to simply change problematic authorized subject headings. All formal changes need to be submitted to the LC, which is a lengthy and complex process.[40] Due to this procedure, we hypothesized that interoperability would be a common challenge among our participant libraries—especially when unauthorized terms are used in records.

Varying Definitions of Diversity

Interoperability is further complicated because "there is no one definition for 'diversity,' nor is there a methodology that can adequately account for the full breadth of diversity."[41] Karen Snow and Anthony Dunbar believe "the weight placed on efficiency contributes to centering on Whiteness," as the cataloging community often sees "everything else outside this structure as a deviation from the cataloging processes."[42] The focus on efficiency means catalogers "are less likely to discuss alternative opinions, even if those opinions could be more encompassing and justice-oriented than the current standards."[43] This severely hinders the process of confirming that the library's MARC records can accurately and inclusively represent the items—while also still being effectively retrieved during a search of the catalog.

Although there is no consensus on the definition of diversity, C. Rockelle Strader suggests adding keywords to serve "as entry points into the catalog and as guides for the assignment of controlled terms that have already been established" to compensate for lacking or offensive subject headings.[44] By incorporating these additional keywords, libraries can enhance discoverability and provide more culturally sensitive access points, potentially mitigating the limitations of standardized subject headings.

Clark and Smith also address the lack of recognized procedures by presenting a quantitative methodology to analyze established subject headings using R and Python to improve cataloging policies and collection development.[45] Their approach emphasized inclusive language for marginalized groups as a framework for evaluating MARC data. However, the findings indicate a need for a deeper understanding of each keyword's cultural implications and its relation to the library's community. Additionally, the study was limited to one academic institution and did not address ethical issues in selecting and replacing problematic subject headings. In contrast, our research examined multiple

public libraries and included survey questions on how librarians select cataloging guidelines for inclusive subject headings and keywords.

Requirement of Subject-Matter Experts and Community Involvement

Unfortunately, with their expertise in bibliographic management, most catalogers "act as generalists" and "rely on cooperative cataloging for resources on subjects too far outside of [their] comfort zone."[46] As a result, public librarians have leaned heavily on existing knowledge organization systems. Consequently, Clark and Smith found that "systemic issues of general cataloging practices, like those exhibited in LCSH, are often pervasive at the local level of cataloging responsibility."[47] Given these challenges, it is evident that input from subject matter experts is needed to develop comprehensive definitions and methodologies.

Sheila Laroque identifies this as the objective of the aforementioned DDP, whose aim was "creating new, more accurate and appropriate subject headings within our classification schemes" by "investigating more respectful ways of building relationships with Indigenous communities."[48] The project successfully engaged this target population, which provided invaluable insights and led to developing subject headings that more accurately reflect Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Although this project focused on a specific group, Laroque asserts that it is "essential to reflect this type of outward work for other institutions that would be interested in achieving similar goals."[49]

In fact, the DDP Symposium showed that "people were interested in more of the technical details and in discussing what and, more importantly, how these changes will be made possible."[50] This indicates a growing interest in shifting from diversifying a collection to making it accessible through inclusive bibliographic records, as well as understanding which professional documents librarians can depend on. Considering that "only a small subset of library professionals work at the intersection of metadata and DEI," conducting research to locate and share such expert insights is not only relevant but essential to improving local accessibility to the library collection as well.[51]

Engaging the community, particularly library users, offers another avenue for improving cataloging practices, for they "are also experts in the ways that our systems have either helped or hindered their research processes."[52] A study by Anitra Gates et al. suggests leveraging user-provided data from the diversity audit to pinpoint the subject headings that may have otherwise gone unnoticed.[53] Their research showed that some libraries included patron-driven subject access in the OPAC as a replacement or additional description through a tagging system, which allows library users to collaborate in developing other access points (e.g., #OwnVoices).[54] This approach may not fully capture the need to "include individuals of historically excluded populations in this collaboration." Still, it is a start to an endeavor that would otherwise be very time intensive.[55] Recognizing these limitations, our study seeks to identify additional strategies that ensure broader engagement in enhancing catalog records post diversity audit.

Leveraging Related Studies for New Research Frameworks

The need for inclusive descriptions in bibliographic records has gained recognition in recent years, particularly for literature published after 2020. Although many studies focus on understanding the philosophy and challenges of critical cataloging, they also suggest methodologies and future implications that can lead to actionable solutions.

Despite the positive steps highlighted in these articles, the interconnected nature of diversity audits of the collection and its effects on subsequent metadata enhancements has not been thoroughly studied, particularly at a local public library level. Academic libraries have "mastered" this feat, like the University of Colorado Boulder, X̱wi7x̱wa Library, and the University of Arizona, but it is essential to enhance the understanding of how libraries of all types can integrate these two aspects.[56] Developing a guide for merging audit findings with critical cataloging practices in public libraries will require collecting insights from related studies—addressing topics such as creating guides, evaluating descriptive terms, and developing assessment methods—while tailoring it to the unique needs of the patron community.

Building on existing literature, our study aimed to clarify the direct impacts of diversity audits on catalog accessibility and inclusivity. Previous research identified gaps in the critical cataloging discourse, but it did not do an in-depth investigation into key variables that inform public libraries' decisions to enhance metadata accessibility post diversity audit. Thus our study is pivotal in transitioning from theoretical underpinnings to practical application by outlining a methodological framework for successful critical cataloging at the local public library level, thereby creating accurate, complete, consistent, *and* inclusive bibliographic records.

Methodology

The lack of literature specifically on constructing a framework for critical cataloging practices using the data from diversity audits motivated the authors to adopt an online survey approach. This method aimed to explore an under-researched area by gathering quantitative data about variables impacting diversity and inclusion efforts, generating insights to inform future qualitative studies.

Survey Design

Although the primary aim of this research was to investigate the motivations and criteria underlying the adoption of critical cataloging practices in Connecticut public libraries after diversity audits, survey questions were developed to elicit practical information about the study's overarching research purpose. These questions were informed by identified gaps in the literature, guaranteeing a focus on essential issues driving cataloging decisions:

RQ1: How do the geographic setting, population size, and patron demographics of Connecticut public libraries influence the implementation of critical cataloging practices after a diversity audit?

RQ2: How do diversity audit approaches influence the adoption of critical cataloging practices, and what is their impact on catalog accessibility and inclusivity?

RQ3: What role does the assessment of patron feedback and user needs play in implementing critical cataloging practices post diversity audit?

RQ4: What challenges do Connecticut public libraries face during and after implementing critical cataloging practices, and how do these challenges affect the process?

From these research questions, key variables were identified as likely to influence a public library's strategic plan for enhancing representation within metadata post-audit. Clark and Smith found that "local cataloging practices can vary widely at both the institutional and individual level depending on a library's size, purpose, goals, level of specialization, finances, and staffing."[57] In response, our final variables included library classification, patron demographics, diversity audit process, catalog accessibility, feedback mechanisms, implementation challenges, and personal experiences. Survey questions were then developed based on these categories, aligning them with the study's overarching objectives.

Qualtrics was chosen as the research platform for its capabilities in creating, administering, and analyzing complex surveys, as well as its ability to collect informed consent. Participants were provided with details of how the platform protected participant privacy and confidentiality through the omission of identifiable information, including names, email addresses, or IP addresses.

The final survey encompassed three participant screening questions, fifteen closed-ended questions, and three short-response questions designed to collect measurable data and provide deeper insights into the decision-making processes after a diversity audit. The first two screening questions automatically disqualified those who did not meet the participant criteria, which required being a Connecticut public librarian who had conducted a diversity audit. The complete survey is available in Appendix A.

Participant Requirements

The anonymous survey started with three screening questions to ensure the proper participant pool was targeted. The first question asked, "Are you employed as a librarian or staff member at a Connecticut public library?" The second question asked, "Has your library conducted a diversity audit?" Participants were required to work at a library that had completed a diversity audit because these librarians (1) actively evaluate their collections for diversity, (2) possess the experience and insights needed to discuss the impact of these audits on cataloging practices, and (3) could provide focused, relevant data. In contrast, librarians without diversity audit experience were excluded because they lacked the foundational experience and specific knowledge needed to contribute meaningfully to the study's objectives.

Respondents then answered the third screening question: "Has your library adopted critical cataloging practices as a result of the diversity audit?" None of the participants were automatically exited since all

three categories offered valuable data. We believed that (1) "Unsure" librarians may engage in critical cataloging practices without formally recognizing them as such, and (2) "No" librarians could provide data for comparing variables.

Based on these participation requirements, as well as the progression of survey topics, we were aware that there would be a steady drop-off rate in responses. It was hypothesized that the librarians who were "Unsure" of their involvement in diversity audits and/or critical cataloging might exit once it became clear that they had not been a part of these practices, and "No" librarians would exit when questions involved cataloging.

Recruitment Process

We used a non-probabilistic purposive sampling strategy, targeting Connecticut public librarians who had completed a diversity audit, and applied convenience methods such as listservs and social media for recruitment. Using the Qualtrics sample size calculator, the ideal response size was determined to be ninety-three participants (95 percent confidence level with an 8 percent margin of error) based on the 240 public libraries in Connecticut.[58] However, since the study focused on libraries that had conducted diversity audits—a subset estimated at approximately 110 libraries based on *Library Journal's* data suggesting 46 percent of libraries have done so—the sample size was recalculated to sixty-three responses.[59] We maintained the same 95 percent confidence level and 8 percent margin of error to better represent this group.

Participants were recruited through state library listservs (CONNTech), social media groups, and direct contact with institutions like the Connecticut Library Consortium (CLC) and Connecticut Library Association (CLA). Using the contact list provided by the Division of Library Development (DLD), each library was sent the request directly through their website.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection occurred over a two-week period, concluding on March 20, 2024. We analyzed the quantitative data using Qualtrics' Stats iQ and Crosstabs iQ tools to calculate descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, and to explore potential correlations between variables like geographic setting, population size, and diversity audit outcomes (Pearson's chi-square tests). Though we did not conduct an extensive qualitative analysis, the short responses provided additional insights into some participant choices. Thematic analysis, using Qualtrics Text iQ, revealed themes such as inclusive representation, resource limitations, adaptive strategies, and systemic barriers. These themes informed our discussion, offering valuable context for understanding how diversity audits influence cataloging practices.

The results are sequentially organized based on our survey questions to achieve our overall objective of identifying the primary motivations and evaluative criteria that lead Connecticut public libraries to adopt critical cataloging practices after a diversity audit.

It must be noted that participants were allowed to select multiple options for applicable questions. This means the total number of selections for some questions exceeded the number of participants, resulting in cumulative percentages greater than 100 percent. For example, if Choice A was selected by fifteen out of fifty-six respondents (n=15/56; 27 percent), this indicates that 27 percent of participants selected Choice A.
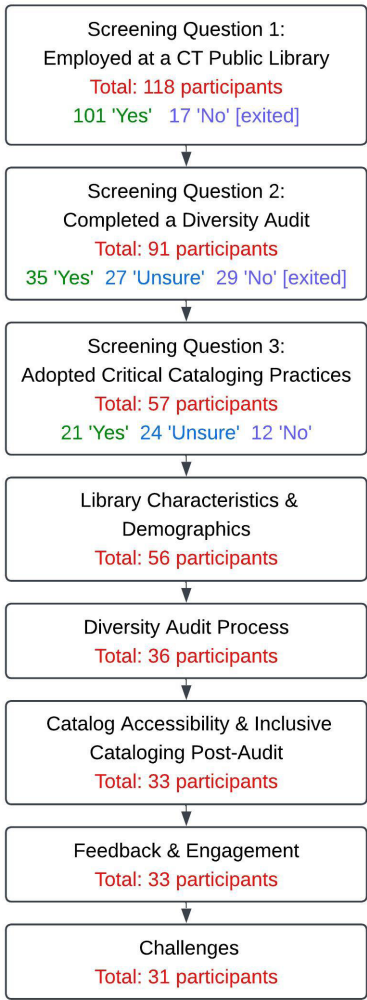
Results

Out of the 171 people who opened the survey, fifty-three exited after reading the participation requirements, leaving 118 to complete the three screening questions. The first screening question then eliminated an additional seventeen respondents who did not meet the targeted criteria. This resulted in 101 remaining participants—all Connecticut public librarians who met the requirements outlined in our promotional materials.

For the second screening question, librarians were asked whether their library conducted a diversity audit of their collection. A definition of diversity audit was provided for clarification, and the option to choose "Unsure" was included to accommodate librarians who may refer to the audit by a different name, such as collection assessment or catalog analysis. The survey was coded to exit-out those who did not complete an audit, which was 32 percent (n=29) of the ninety-one answering respondents, as their experiences were not relevant to the topic. Of the remaining librarians, thirty-five responded "Yes" (38 percent). However, there was a surprising number of librarians who were "Unsure" (n=27; 30 percent) of their library's involvement in an audit.

The last screening question aimed to establish the respondent's involvement or awareness of their library's integration of critical cataloging practices. Of the fifty-seven librarians, 42 percent were "Unsure" (n=24), 37 percent responded "Yes" (n=21), and 21 percent "No" (n=12). None of the respondents were exited from the survey to allow for an analysis of differences in approaches or perceptions among libraries at varying levels of engagement with critical cataloging practices.

As the survey progressed, the number of participants gradually decreased as questions became more specialized, reflecting the expected drop-off of librarians uncertain about diversity audits or critical cataloging practices. As seen in figure 1, a flowchart of participation rates for each section, the final number of participants was thirty-one.

Figure 1. Participation Rates for Survey Sections

Screening Question 1:
Employed at a CT Public Library
Total: 118 participants
101 'Yes' 17 'No' [exited]

Screening Question 2:
Completed a Diversity Audit
Total: 91 participants
35 'Yes' 27 'Unsure' 29 'No' [exited]

Screening Question 3:
Adopted Critical Cataloging Practices
Total: 57 participants
21 'Yes' 24 'Unsure' 12 'No'

Library Characteristics &
Demographics
Total: 56 participants

Diversity Audit Process
Total: 36 participants

Catalog Accessibility & Inclusive
Cataloging Post-Audit
Total: 33 participants

Feedback & Engagement
Total: 33 participants

Challenges
Total: 31 participants

Library Characteristics and Demographics Do Not Predict Critical Cataloging Practices

Next, to better understand how library characteristics and demographics influence cataloging practices, we explored the profiles of participating libraries (figure 2). The fifty-six representatives came from forty suburban libraries (71 percent), ten rural libraries (18 percent), and six urban libraries (11 percent). The majority of library communities were either "moderately diverse" (n=17/52; 33 percent) or "slightly diverse" (n=16/52; 31 percent); the remaining participants came from either "highly diverse" (n=13/52; 25 percent) or "not diverse" patron populations (n=6/52; 12 percent). Librarians also represented the same number of "mixed income" and "high income" (each: n=17/52; 33 percent) populations; ten had patrons of "middle income" (19 percent), and eight had "low income" (15 percent).

Figure 2. Breakdown of library characteristics
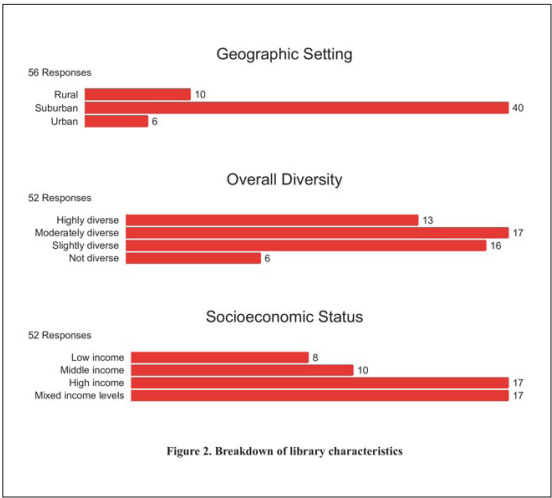
We then isolated the participants who answered "Yes" to both conducting a diversity audit (screening question 2) and adopting critical cataloging practices (screening question 3). This subset allowed us to investigate whether certain library characteristics or demographics could predict inclusive cataloging processes. Descriptive analysis demonstrated that the majority of responding libraries that completed both processes were categorized as serving "suburban" (n=8/11; 73 percent), "moderately diverse" (n=4/11; 36 percent), and "high income" (n=4/11; 36 percent) communities.

Chi-square tests revealed no statistically significant relationships between library characteristics (such as geographic setting and patron demographics) and the implementation of critical cataloging practices. However, we believe the detailed responses from this subset of librarians may still offer valuable insights. The statistical report for these participants, who completed the entire survey, can be found in Appendix B.

Metadata-Focused Audit Methods Lead to Greater Accessibility Over Hands-On Approaches

The relationship between specific audit methods and the likelihood of adopting critical cataloging practices was then examined. Participants were asked to indicate the audit method(s) they used, where the question allowed for multiple selections. The Book Inspection method received the most selections, with seventeen of the thirty-four participants (n=17/34; 50 percent) showing a preference for this hands-on method. In contrast,

Table 1. Audit method used

34 Responses

Audit Method	Choice Count	
Catalog Search Method: Analyzing catalog data for diverse titles/authors	32%	11
Checklist Method: Utilizing a diversity checklist to review each collection item's representation	29%	10
Book Inspection Method: Conducting hands-on reviews of books to assess the diversity	50%	17
Reverse Diversity Audit: Identifying gaps by checking for specific diverse titles/authors	41%	14
Sampling: Evaluating random samples from the collection to gain insights into its overall diversity	15%	5
Vendor-Assisted Audit: Employing a third-party vendor to conduct the diversity audit	18%	6
Reframing Method: Applying new descriptions to the existing materials	21%	7
Other	12%	4
Total		34

the Catalog Search Method, which entails using OPAC metadata to identify diverse titles/authors based on specific themes, subjects, or backgrounds, was used by eleven participants (n=11/34; 32 percent). As seen in table 1, the majority of respondents are conducting hands-on reviews of books to assess the diversity of content, characters, and authorship.

A comparative analysis using Qualtrics' Stats iQ was then conducted on the relationship between Critical Cataloging and Audit Methods (table 2) to see if those who updated their records chose different audit methods than the other participants. The colors on the chart correspond to different audit methods, with the length of each colored bar indicating the method's usage percentage among libraries with varying commitments to critical cataloging practices. This visual setup allows for a quick comparative analysis of the preferred audit methods across the "Yes," "Unsure," and "No" response groups.

Table 2. Critical cataloging practices vs. audit method used

Critical Cataloging Practices (Total Participant Count)	Audit Method	Count		Percent (Count / Total Participant Count)	
Yes (13 participants)	Catalog Search Method	7	of 13		54%
	Book Inspection Method	6	of 13		46%
	Reverse Diversity Audit	6	of 13		46%
	Checklist Method	4	of 13		31%
	Reframing Method	4	of 13		31%
	Sampling	3	of 13		23%
	Vendor-Assisted Audit	3	of 13		23%
	Other	1	of 13		8%
Unsure (11 participants)	Book Inspection Method	6	of 11		55%
	Reverse Diversity Audit	4	of 11		36%
	Checklist Method	2	of 11		18%
	Other	2	of 11		18%
	Reframing Method	2	of 11		18%
	Vendor-Assisted Audit	2	of 11		18%
	Catalog Search Method	1	of 11		9%
	Sampling	1	of 11		9%
No (10 participants)	Book Inspection Method	5	of 10		50%
	Checklist Method	4	of 10		40%
	Reverse Diversity Audit	4	of 10		40%
	Catalog Search Method	3	of 10		30%
	Other	1	of 10		10%
	Reframing Method	1	of 10		10%
	Sampling	1	of 10		10%
	Vendor-Assisted Audit	1	of 10		10%

The results demonstrated that the Catalog Search Method was used by a majority (n=7/13; 54 percent) of those participants who responded "Yes" to critical cataloging. In contrast, as seen in table 2, only 30 percent of those who answered "No" (n=3/10) to critical cataloging and 9 percent of those who were "Unsure" (n=1/11) used the Catalog Search Method. Instead, they opted to work with hands-on methods, like Book Inspection. This preference may stem from the perception that the Catalog Search Method would require additional staffing, particularly more catalogers, to manage the work needed to update OPAC records.

To further explore the effectiveness of these audit methods, we isolated the subset of participants who updated their metadata using the Catalog Search Method (n=11) to determine if these libraries paired analysis of bibliographic records with a hands-on approach, as Beilharz discussed (table 3).

Table 3. Audit methods paired with 'catalog search'

11 Responses

Participants who used 'catalog search method' also used:	Choice Count	
Checklist Method: Utilizing a diversity checklist to review each collection item's representation	36%	4
Book Inspection Method: Conducting hands-on reviews of books to assess the diversity	45%	5
Reverse Diversity Audit: Identifying gaps by checking for specific diverse titles/authors	64%	7
Sampling: Evaluating random samples from the collection to gain insights into its overall diversity	18%	2
Vendor-Assisted Audit: Employing a third-party vendor to conduct the diversity audit	18%	2
Reframing Method: Applying new descriptions to the existing materials	18%	2
Other	9%	1
Total		11

The results revealed a strong tendency toward a dual strategy, with seven participants (n=7/11; 64 percent) also using the Reverse Diversity Audit—a method that combines metadata analysis with hands-on review—and five participants (n=5/11; 45 percent) incorporating the hands-on Book Inspection Method. This finding suggests that most participants who update cataloging practices implement multiple audit methods rather than relying on a single strategy.

With the audit methods established, we then examined which specific library collections were prioritized for diversity audits and cataloging changes. The thirty-five participants selected the following choices, listed from most to least frequently targeted: (1) Entire Collection (n=11/35; 31 percent), (2) Children's Collection (n=10/35; 29 percent), (3) Young Adult Collection (n=9/35; 26 percent), (4) Adult Collection (n=7/35; 20 percent), (5) Fiction Collection (n=6/35; 17 percent), and (6) Non-Fiction Collection (n=3/35; 9 percent).

Next, in order to analyze the impact of specific collection audits on cataloging guideline changes, we separated responses that belonged to those who implemented critical cataloging frameworks post-audit. By filtering results through the variable Critical Cataloging Practices with values equaling "Yes" (table 4), it became apparent that this subsample of fourteen libraries was more likely to have audited the children's (n=5/14; 36 percent) and young adult collections (n=5/14; 36 percent), indicating a prioritization of these sections. We explore theories for this finding in the Discussion.

Table 4. Audited collections by critical cataloging libraries

14 Responses

Library Collection	Choice Count	
Adult	29%	4
Children's	36%	5
Young Adult	36%	5
Fiction	29%	4
Non-Fiction	21%	3
Entire Collection	29%	4
Reference	0%	0
Other	0%	0
Total		14

Libraries Prefer Customized, Community-Driven Cataloging Procedures Over Formal Critical Cataloging Documents

With audit methods and collection focus areas established, the next step was to explore how these efforts translated into cataloging changes. While the survey questions began exploring critical cataloging topics, there was a slow drop-off rate in responses—which left only thirty-three participants (as seen in figure 1). As mentioned in our Methodology, this was foreseen. Up until this point,

respondents who had answered "Unsure" or "No" were able to contribute data, but cataloging questions were more in-depth from this point forward.

The above was confirmed with the first question, which asked if any improvements were made to catalog accessibility, as the choice "no changes were made" had the highest choice count (n=18/33; 55 percent) from the thirty-three librarians. The remaining participants indicated they (1) "updated MARC records" (n=8/33; 24 percent), (2) "enhanced searchability with keywords/tagging" (n=8/33; 24 percent), and (3) "created more inclusive keywords/subject headings" (n=7/33; 21 percent).

Results from the second question provided a list of standards, guidelines, and frameworks used by libraries to evaluate the inclusivity of their bibliographic data (table 5). The top guidelines selected by the thirty total participants were (1) "own institution's inclusivity guidelines" (n=9/30; 30 percent), (2) "guidelines from professional associations, like IFLA or ALA" (n=8/30; 27 percent), and (3) "feedback from the community members or library users" (n=8/30; 27 percent). Two choices, "critical cataloging practices or frameworks" (e.g., #CritCat) and "Cataloguing Code of Ethics," were selected the least (n=2/30; 7 percent for each)—which, despite recent literature's assertion of its value, demonstrates a lack of adoption or awareness in the field.
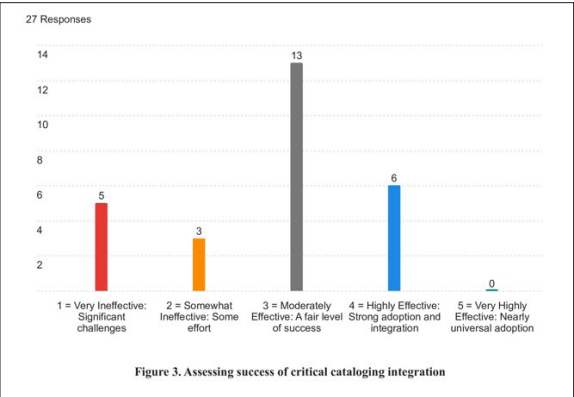
Table 5. Standards for evaluating MARC records		
30 Responses		
Cataloging Standards:		Choice Count
Cataloguing Code of Ethics	7%	2
Authorized Knowledge Organization Systems, such as Library of Congress Subject Headings	20%	6
Resource Description and Access (RDA)	10%	3
Own institution's inclusivity guidelines	30%	9
Feedback from community members or library users	27%	8
Author-generated subject headings and keywords	10%	3
Vendor-provided subject headings and keywords	23%	7
Guidelines from professional library associations (e.g., ALA, IFLA)	27%	8
Critical cataloging practices or frameworks	7%	2
None	20%	6
Other	17%	5
Total		30

It was also notable that the practice of using "author-generated subject headings and keywords" was used by three participants (n=3/30; 10 percent). Although this is a small percentage, this effective method is often a completely overlooked one, according to Strader.[60]
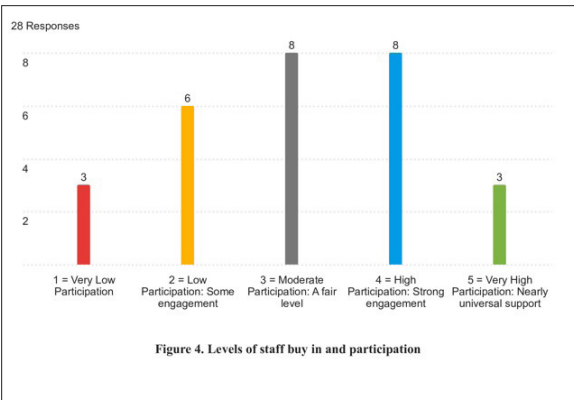
The objective of the last question in this section was to answer the overarching research question, specifically the motivational aspect of completing a diversity audit *and* making bibliographic data changes. In line with the hypothesis generated from related literature, findings showed that most of the thirty-two participants chose to change their cataloging practices to (1) "enhance discoverability of diverse materials" (n=16/32; 50 percent), (2) "better reflect the diversity of their community" (n=15/32; 47 percent), and (3) "address and rectify biases in existing cataloging practices" (n=14/32; 44 percent).

Successful Integration of Critical Cataloging Practices Relies on Institution-Wide Engagement

Having examined the motivations behind cataloging changes, the next step was to evaluate how effectively these practices were implemented. Participants were asked to assess the success of integrating critical cataloging practices (see figure 3). The majority of the twenty-seven librarians believed their method was "moderately effective" (n=13; 48 percent), whereas five participants (19

Figure 3. Assessing success of critical cataloging integration

percent) reported that it was "very ineffective," and six were "highly effective" (22 percent). None reached "very highly effective" (0 percent). Given that many libraries are still in the initial stages of implementing these practices and have faced challenges, it is not surprising that a significant number of libraries consider their efforts to be moderately effective at this stage.

When conducting a comparative analysis of "effectiveness of critical cataloging integration" versus "catalog accessibility improvements," as illustrated in table 6, most respondents who categorized their integration effectiveness as "moderately," "somewhat ineffective," or "very ineffective" also chose "no changes were made to the catalog." However, one can see that the respondents who marked "highly effective" (n=6) made the following improvements to their catalog: (1) created more inclusive keywords/subject headings (n=5/6; 83 percent), (2) enhanced searchability of diverse materials using keywords/tagging (n=4/6; 67 percent), and (3) updated MARC records to reflect diverse and inclusive content (n=4/6; 67 percent). This comparative analysis should be investigated further, but the initial findings suggested that such catalog changes contribute to more successful integration of critical cataloging practices.

Table 6. Relating critical cataloging integration and catalog accessibility improvements

Level of Critical Cataloging Integration (Total Participant Count)	Catalog Accessibility Improvements	Count	Percent (Count / Total Participant Count)
Highly Effective (6)	Created more inclusive keywords and/or subject headings using Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)	5 of 6	83%
	Enhanced the searchability of diverse materials in the catalog (ex. patron-generated tagging)	4 of 6	67%
	Updated MARC records to reflect diverse and inclusive content (reassessing the existing records)	4 of 6	67%
	Implemented user-friendly navigation features in the online catalog (ex. recommendation lists)	1 of 6	17%
	No changes were made to the bibliographic records	1 of 6	17%
	Improved the readability of catalog descriptions for accessibility	0 of 6	0%
	Other	0 of 6	0%
Moderately Effective (12)	No changes were made to the bibliographic records	8 of 12	67%
	Enhanced the searchability of diverse materials in the catalog (ex. patron-generated tagging)	3 of 12	25%
	Created more inclusive keywords and/or subject headings using Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)	2 of 12	20%
	Updated MARC records to reflect diverse and inclusive content (reassessing the existing records	2 of 12	17%
	Implemented user-friendly navigation features in the online catalog (ex. recommendation lists)	0 of 12	17%
	Improved the readability of catalog descriptions for accessibility	0 of 12	0%
	Other	0 of 12	0%
Somewhat Ineffective (3)	No changes were made to the bibliographic records	1 of 3	33%
	Other	1 of 3	33%
	Updated MARC records to reflect diverse and inclusive content (reassessing the existing records)	1 of 3	33%
	Created more inclusive keywords and/or subject headings using Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)	0 of 3	0%
	Enhanced the searchability of diverse materials in the catalog (ex. patron-generated tagging)	0 of 3	0%
	Implemented user-friendly navigation features in the online catalog (ex. recommendation lists)	0 of 3	0%
	Improved the readability of catalog descriptions for accessibility	0 of 3	0%
Very Ineffective (5)	No changes were made to the bibliographic records	4 of 5	80%
	Other	1 of 5	20%
	Created more inclusive keywords and/or subject headings using Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)	0 of 5	0%
	Enhanced the searchability of diverse materials in the catalog (ex. patron-generated tagging)	0 of 5	0%
	Implemented user-friendly navigation features in the online catalog (ex. recommendation lists)	0 of 5	0%
	Improved the readability of catalog descriptions for accessibility	0 of 5	0%
	Updated MARC records to reflect diverse and inclusive content (reassessing the existing records)	0 of 5	0%

The next survey question asked the remaining twenty-eight participants to rate the level of "staff-buy-in and participation" in making descriptive cataloging changes. Overall, the outlook was positive since nineteen (69 percent) of the twenty-eight participants assessed their library as "moderate" (n=8; 29 percent), "high" (n=8; 29 percent), or "very high" (n=3;11 percent) for participation level. This indicated a high level of support for institution-wide diversity and inclusion goals, which Bledsoe et al. deemed essential to success.

Figure 4. Levels of staff buy in and participation

In their article, Bledsoe et al. also emphasized the significance of the "reframing method" of diversity audit.[61] With this in mind, a comparative analysis was conducted to see if there was a connection between participation levels and audit methods. Interestingly, out of the three participants who scored "very high" in participation from figure 4, two-thirds (n=2/3; 67 percent) used the "reframing method." Despite the very limited sample size, it may be beneficial to further explore integrating both the "reframing method" and the "catalog search method" into a strategic plan for critical cataloging.

Resource and Staffing Limitations Impede Critical Cataloging

We then addressed common challenges librarians encountered when integrating new cataloging practices—which could have an effect on staff engagement. The data showed that "limited time and staff members" were a recurring obstacle to making successful collection and catalog changes. This was confirmed when 45 percent (n=14/31) of the thirty-one participants chose "limited staff resources or time" as a challenge in the last survey question (table 7).

Table 7. Challenges encountered when integrating critical cataloging practices

31 Responses

Challenges Faced	Choice Count	
Limited staff resources or time	45%	14
Insufficient training on diversity and inclusion practices	19%	6
Resistance or lack of buy-in from staff	6%	2
Accurately and respectfully identifying or choosing descriptive terms for diverse materials	39%	12
Technical limitations of the catalog system	10%	3
Level of Interoperability: lack of compatibility with other organizations or management systems	3%	1
Lack of clear standards or guidelines for diverse cataloging	6%	2
Did not implement critical cataloging practices	35%	11
Other	13%	4
Total		31

Surprisingly, the "level of interoperability" was marked as a challenge to only one librarian's organization (n=1/31; 3 percent). The choice "technical limitations of the catalog"—marked by three participants (10 percent)—could be interpreted as encompassing interoperability issues; however, based on the literature we reviewed, interoperability was hypothesized to be a more significant issue.

To see the main challenge for those who critically cataloged, we did a comparative analysis of "adopting critical cataloging" and "challenges encountered." Table 8 lists each group of respondents ("Yes," "No," "Unsure"), the challenges they encountered, and the percentage of that group who faced each challenge.

Table 8. Comparative analysis of critical cataloging practices vs. challenges encountered

Critical Cataloging Practices (Total Participant Count)	Challenges Encountered	Count	Percent (Count / Total Participant Count)
Yes (14)	Limited staff resources or time	8 of 14	57%
	Accurately and respectfully identifying or choosing descriptive terms for diverse materials	8 of 14	57%
	Insufficient training on diversity and inclusion practices	3 of 14	21%
	Technical limitations of the catalog system	2 of 14	14%
	Lack of clear standards or guidelines for diverse cataloging	2 of 14	14%
	Did not implement critical cataloging practices	2 of 14	14%
	Other	1 of 14	7%
	Level of interoperability	1 of 14	7%
	Resistance or lack of buy-in from staff	0 of 14	0%
Unsure (10)	Limited staff resources or time	5 of 10	50%
	Other	3 of 10	30%
	Did not implement critical cataloging practices	3 of 10	30%
	Accurately and respectfully identifying or choosing descriptive terms for diverse materials	2 of 10	20%
	Technical limitations of the catalog system	1 of 10	10%
	Resistance or lack of buy-in from staff	1 of 10	10%
	Insufficient training on diversity and inclusion practices	1 of 10	10%
	Level of interoperability	0 of 10	0%
	Lack of clear standards or guidelines for diverse cataloging	0 of 10	0%
No (7)	Did not implement critical cataloging practices	6 of 7	86%
	Insufficient training on diversity and inclusion practices	2 of 7	29%
	Accurately and respectfully identifying or choosing descriptive terms for diverse materials	2 of 7	29%
	Resistance or lack of buy-in from staff	1 of 7	14%
	Limited staff resources or time	1 of 7	14%
	Technical limitations of the catalog system	0 of 7	0%
	Other	0 of 7	0%
	Level of interoperability	0 of 7	0%
	Lack of clear standards or guidelines for diverse cataloging	0 of 7	0%

each challenge. We found that the participants responding "Yes" found "accurately and respectfully identifying or choosing descriptive terms" a significant obstacle. As seen in table 8, 57 percent of the

fourteen "Yes" participants (n=8/14) marked this as a challenge—the same amount as those who found "limited staff or time" to be an obstacle.

However, the most notable finding was that none of the fourteen participants who responded "Yes" reported "facing resistance or a lack of staff buy-in" (n=0/14). This indicates that the diversity audit *and* subsequent critical cataloging changes must be an institution-wide initiative and must be accepted as integral to the library's diversity and inclusion goals to be truly effective.

Discussion

Results revealed that there are several key variables that make the integration of critical cataloging into diversity audit procedures a success, as discussed below.

Foundations of Inclusive Library Practices

The first and arguably the most critical factor was that librarians who acknowledged diversity audits as a foundational step, not an isolated endeavor, were more likely to continue building inclusive collections by addressing and rectifying biases in the OPAC metadata. Looking at survey responses, it was apparent that this goal is also deeply intertwined with institution-wide engagement and participation—where a collaborative effort between staff, departments, administration, partnering libraries, and the community is required for meaningful changes. In this way, diversity and inclusion initiatives become ingrained and accepted into the library's collection development, management, and cataloging policies.

Audit Methodology Matters

Another variable of note was that the chosen audit method significantly impacts the success of critical cataloging. Results showed that the type or combination of diversity audits performed greatly influenced the library's transition to addressing the descriptive data in bibliographic records. Those librarians who reported that their library valued critical cataloging guidelines were more likely to employ a diversity audit method that incorporated the metadata of the physical collection, not just a hands-on inspection. When looking at the data, these libraries also had a higher report of using the "catalog search method" in combination with the "book inspection method."

Even more significant was the fact that librarians who rated their libraries highly for "successful integration of critical cataloging" and "staff buy-in" were more likely to use the "reframing method" in conjunction with the other approaches. These libraries emphasized starting with metadata, as this strategy was theorized to streamline the process of enhancing catalog accessibility by enabling simultaneous adjustments to bibliographic data during the diversity audit.

Focus on Youth Collections

The results showed a potential link between auditing children or young adult sections and using critical cataloging practices. Although the survey did not inquire further into this connection, several reasons

could explain this: (1) the growing awareness of the need for diverse and inclusive resources for young readers; (2) the influence of educational institutions' prioritization of diversity and inclusion possibly extending to public libraries; (3) the typically high-circulation rates associated with these collections; and/or (4) the relatively recent trend toward greater diversity in publications by authors, publishers, and advocacy groups. However, further research is necessary to accurately determine the relationship between audits of children/young adult sections and the adoption of critical cataloging practices.

Community Representation Is Necessary

Participants showed that the primary objective of a diversity audit is to develop a collection that accurately represents the patron population. Similarly, this should also be the aim of cataloging practices. The results demonstrated that direct consultation with the community was essential at each step of the diversity and inclusion initiative to achieve this goal. How the library incorporated feedback differed, but those who successfully integrated inclusive descriptive terms made sure to receive feedback from their patrons, staff, and other stakeholders—which indicated that this is an important variable to consider. Suggestions for how to do this can be found in this study's data, such as conducting regular community forums and personal interactions; additionally, other articles specifically on this topic could provide further advice for this stage of the plan.

Interestingly, exploring the role of library-specific factors on critical cataloging practices showed no significant relationship between the library's characteristics or demographics and the occurrence of diversity audits and cataloging changes. In particular, the "overall diversity" and "socioeconomic status" of the population were predicted to be a major influence on a library's motivations and strategies. This expectation was based on the belief that libraries strive to represent their communities accurately, leading to the assumption that more diverse institutions would be more likely to conduct audits to address representation gaps.

Contrary to our prediction, the majority of our responding librarians who completed both processes represented suburban (n=8/11; 73 percent), moderately diverse (n=4/11; 36 percent), and high-income (n=4/11; 36 percent) public libraries. This pattern could be associated with these libraries having greater access to resources such as funding, staffing, and community involvement—which helps facilitate the implementation of diversity audits and cataloging changes. Simply put, an effective strategy for one library does not guarantee that another similar library will find the same success. Although it is beneficial for librarians to review how other libraries tackled this issue, it is crucial that the cataloging framework be tailored to the unique contexts of individual institutions.

Ongoing Process

A reoccurring theme found in our results and within relevant literature was that critical cataloging must be an ongoing process requiring continuous improvement. Libraries must wholeheartedly agree to evolve and adapt these guidelines along with their community's changing needs. Resources from relevant documents, such as the *Inclusive Cataloging: Histories, Context, and Reparative Approaches;*

Cataloguing Code of Ethics; *Core Competencies for Cataloging and Metadata Professional Librarians;* CatalogingLab; and other social justice institutions are also invaluable to this endeavor.[62]

As many articles have noted, this would first require that libraries become aware of these resources and documents. The large portion of "Unsure" respondents to the initial questions regarding diversity audits and critical cataloging demonstrated a lack of awareness of these processes. Evans et al. suggest that institutions that want to advertise these diversity and inclusion efforts should refer to groups like the Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee, which "has provided a model for raising awareness of professional documents."[63]

Broad Inclusion of Research Participants

Our study was exploratory in nature, and to narrow it down, we wanted to focus on librarians who conducted an audit to see if there were common variables between those who made cataloging changes. However, results showed that the librarians who marked "Unsure" for the participation requirements provided an enhanced understanding of the collection management and cataloging practices already being implemented, which was not expected. This broader inclusion aided in the overall interpretation of audit results. When conducting similar research in the future, we recommend including a wider range of perspectives from research participants. For example, a future study might include those who had not done a diversity audit for comparison.

There was also a high open-response rate to the survey inquiry (n=171), and other types of librarians (metadata, academic, and school) directly expressed their interest in viewing the final results by emailing or messaging us. In future iterations, it may be beneficial to open the survey to librarians of other institutions, such as school librarians, since they could provide valuable perspectives and recommendations that can be applied to public libraries.

Considering the Current Political Climate

Since the conclusion of our study in March 2024, the broader debate over diversity and inclusion initiatives became polarized. In January 2025, an executive order targeting diversity and inclusion policies in educational institutions brought the debate to the federal level, influencing discussions on library practices as well.[64] Supporters of diversity and inclusion efforts argue that they promote fairness and inclusion, whereas critics believe they push certain beliefs and disrupt established practices.

Libraries implementing diversity audits and critical cataloging may face resistance from local governments, administration, patrons, or stakeholders who oppose diversity and inclusion–driven changes. This opposition can take the form of budget cuts, staff restructuring, reduced community support, and/or direct political intervention. Given that our study found community involvement as essential to the success of critical cataloging, the absence of such support can significantly hinder or stop these efforts.

Despite these challenges, the ALA asserts that "equity, diversity, and inclusion are central to the promotion and practice of intellectual freedom."[65] Professional committees, strong advocacy groups,

and resources, such as *Equity, Diversity, Inclusion: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights and Advocacy Assistance*, can provide support and guidance for librarians navigating policy shifts and external pressures.[66] These tools reinforce the long-term value of diversity and inclusion efforts and offer strategies to uphold inclusive library services.

Limitations

The survey response rate and sample size may have an impact on the findings. Although the survey attracted 171 participants, there was a smaller than expected sub-sample of librarians who had completed a diversity audit ("Yes," n=35; "Unsure," n=27). This, along with a considerable portion of "Unsure" responses, suggested that awareness of diversity audits and critical cataloging might not be as widespread as initially thought. This could also be interpreted as evidence of self-selection bias, as the poll was not representative of all librarians; rather, it may have drawn participants who were already interested in or involved in critical cataloging practices and diversity and inclusion projects.

Another limitation was the absence of a question regarding when the diversity audit and cataloging changes were completed, making it unclear whether these practices were driven by recent diversity and inclusion trends or were long-standing efforts. Comparing library practices before formal diversity and inclusion frameworks, during their widespread adoption, and in the current climate could clarify how libraries balance community needs with shifting policies over time.

The survey's anonymous nature also prevented us from confirming that respondents represented different libraries, reducing the generalizability of the findings. To address these limitations, further studies should expand survey distribution, improve follow-up strategies, and include participants from other states. Although this report focused solely on Connecticut public libraries, a broader nationwide analysis is needed to fully understand critical cataloging practices across different regions and library systems.

Conclusion

Future research must examine how critical cataloging can be successfully implemented, emphasizing effective diversity audit methods, accurate descriptive terms, and meaningful community feedback. Meanwhile, libraries are urged to take proactive measures by continuously updating their bibliographic records to remain aligned with the evolving demographics and needs of their patrons. This is essential to fulfilling their commitment to inclusivity and diversity, which extends beyond mere diverse representation in books. It is about fostering a sense of belonging and encouraging active engagement with collections that accurately mirror the identities of their patrons. For this reason, adopting critical cataloging practices post diversity audit becomes vital, for it is ultimately your community's connection to your collection.

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Appendix A

Data Gathering Materials:

Collection to Cataloging Connection Research Survey

Study Title: Adopting Critical Cataloging Practices Post-Diversity Audit: It's Your Community's Connection to Your Collection **[IRB Protocol #1045]**

Introduction

Welcome and thank you for participating in this survey. Your responses will contribute valuable insights into the impact of diversity audits on catalog accessibility and library practices. This survey is anonymous, and all information provided will be treated with confidentiality. You may skip questions and exit out of the survey at any time.

Informed Consent

Qualtrics setting: Forced Response

Qualtrics Option: Display Participant Consent Form

Download Option: **Participant Consent Form**

- ☐ I consent

- ☐ I do not consent *Skip Logic: display Concluding Message if 2nd option is chosen

Participation Requirements

*****Qualtrics setting: Forced Response for Q1-3**

1. Are you employed as a librarian at a Connecticut public library? (or previously)

- ☐ Yes

- ☐ No

Qualtrics termination response for "No": Thank you for your interest in this study, but participants must work, or have worked, at a public library in Connecticut that has conducted a diversity audit *Skip Logic: display Concluding Message if "no" is chosen.

2. Has your library conducted a diversity audit?

- ☐ Yes

- ☐ Unsure

- ☐ No

Qualtrics termination response for "No": Thank you for your interest, but this study is targeting CT public libraries who have completed a diversity audit *Skip Logic: display Concluding Message if "no" is chosen.

[Diversity audit definition note: analyzing the representation and inclusiveness of the library's books and resources to make sure they include a wide range of stories, perspective, experiences, and identities. Note: This could be a partial audit (ex. only Children's section)]

3. Has your library adopted critical cataloging practices as a result of the diversity audit? [Critical cataloging definition note: method in library cataloging that addresses and aims to correct biases and

 inequalities in how resources are organized and described (ex. subject headings, keywords)]

  □   Yes

  □   No

  □   Unsure

Qualtrics Added Note for #3: Even if your response is "No" for #3, we value your participation in this survey. Please continue with the questions relevant to your library's diversity audit process. Feel free to skip any questions that do not apply to your situation. Your insights are important to us.

Questionnaire

*Qualtrics setting: Allow for No Response

Library Classification by Geographic Setting and Size:

Please select the option that best describes your library's geographic setting and the relative size of the population it serves. This classification will help us understand the context and scale of your library operations.

1. Geographic Setting: (Select one)

  □   Rural

  □   Suburban

  □   Urban

2. Estimated Population Size Served: (Select one within your geographic setting)

  □   Small (serving a population size at the lower end typical for this setting)

  □   Medium (serving a population size at the mid-range typical for this setting)

  □   Large (serving a population size at the higher end typical for this setting)

Example Selection: [ ] Urban - Medium

3. Select the option(s) that best describe your library:

  □   Independent library

    ☐   Multi-branch system

    ☐   Member of a consortium

General Patron Demographics:

Based on your observation and experience, please select the options that best describe the overall demographics of your library's patrons. This question aims to capture a broad understanding of your library community.

1. Overall Diversity (Select One):

    ☐   Highly diverse

    ☐   Moderately diverse

    ☐   Slightly diverse   Not diverse

2. Socioeconomic Status (Select One):

    ☐   Low income

    ☐   Middle income

    ☐   High income

    ☐   Mixed income levels

Diversity Audit Process:

To understand the motivations and criteria guiding libraries to enhance metadata accessibility post-diversity audit, please select the audit methods you have used.

1. Audit Method Used (select all that apply):

    ☐   Catalog Search Method: Analyzing catalog data for diverse titles/authors based on specific themes, subjects, or backgrounds.

    ☐   Checklist Method: Utilizing a diversity checklist to review each collection item's representation of various criteria.

    ☐   Book Inspection Method: Conducting hands-on reviews of books to assess the diversity of content, characters, and authorship.

    ☐   Reverse Diversity Audit: Identifying gaps by checking for the presence of specific diverse titles or authors in the collection.

    ☐   Sampling: Evaluating random samples from the collection to gain insights into its overall diversity, suitable for large collections.

□   Vendor-Assisted Audit: Employing a third-party vendor to conduct the diversity audit, leveraging their expertise and resources for a comprehensive analysis.

□   Reframing Method: Applying new descriptions to the existing materials (ex. patron-generated tagging, inclusive keywords/subject headings

□   Other _____

2. Please indicate which sections of your library's collection were included in the diversity audit. (Select all that apply):

□   Entire Collection

□   Adult Collection   Children's Collection

□   Young Adult Collection

□   Fiction Collection

□   Non-Fiction Collection

□   Reference Collection

□   Other _____

3. How did you promote your diverse collection after the audit? (Select all that apply.)

□   Physical displays in prominent areas

□   Social media campaigns (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, Facebook)

□   Changes to OPAC (Online Public Access Catalog) data to highlight diverse materials

□   Email newsletters to library patrons

□   Collaboration with local community groups or organizations

□   Virtual events or webinars

□   Press releases or local media outreach

□   Staff training to encourage direct patron recommendations

□   Incorporation into existing or new library programs (e.g., book clubs, story times)

□   None

□   Other _____

Catalog Accessibility & Inclusive Cataloging Post-Audit:

Please indicate post-audit actions taken to improve catalog accessibility and inclusivity. Your input aids in assessing the connection between diversity audits and cataloging practices.

1. Did you make any improvements to catalog accessibility as a result of the audit? (Select all that apply.)

    ☐ Created more inclusive keywords and/or subject headings using Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) and/or Sears List of Subject Headings

    ☐ Enhanced the searchability of diverse materials in the catalog (ex. additional keywords, patron-generated tagging)

    ☐ Implemented user-friendly navigation features in the online catalog (ex. recommendation lists)

    ☐ Improved the readability of catalog descriptions for accessibility

    ☐ Updated MARC records to reflect diverse and inclusive content (reassessing the existing records – all or portions)

    ☐ No changes were made to bibliographic records. Other _____

2. What standards or criteria were used to evaluate the subject headings, keywords, tags, and other descriptives in the MARC records? (Select all that apply.)

    ☐ *Cataloguing Code of Ethics*

    ☐ Authorized Knowledge Organization Systems, such as Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)/Sears List

    ☐ Resource Description and Access (RDA)

    ☐ Own institution's inclusivity guidelines

    ☐ Feedback from community members or library users

    ☐ Author-generated subject headings and keywords

    ☐ Vendor-provided subject headings and keywords

    ☐ Guidelines from professional library associations (e.g., ALA, IFLA)

    ☐ Critical cataloging practices or frameworks

    ☐ None

    ☐ Other _____

3. What were the main reasons for undertaking new inclusive cataloging practices? (Select all that apply.)

□   To better reflect the diversity of our community

□   To enhance the discoverability of diverse materials

□   To address and rectify biases in existing cataloging practices

□   To comply with updated institutional or professional standards

□   To support academic research and education on diversity and inclusion

□   To respond to feedback from library users

□   Critical cataloging practices were not implemented

□   Other _____

Feedback and Engagement:

Even if your library has faced challenges in collecting feedback or engaging staff in the audit process, your experiences offer important insights into the diversity and inclusivity of library collections and services.

1. What methods your library uses to collect user feedback on the catalog and diversity of the collection (check all that apply):

    □   Online surveys

    □   Feedback forms available in the library

    □   Social media engagement

    □   Focus groups or community meetings.

    □   Direct email feedback

    □   None

    □   Other _____

2. Please assess the success of integrating critical cataloging practices following the diversity audit within your library on a scale from 1 to 5.

    □   1 = Very Ineffective: Significant challenges with implementation and acceptance of new practices.

    □   2 = Somewhat Ineffective: Some efforts at integration, but with notable resistance or lack of effective adoption.

    □   3 = Moderately Effective: A fair level of successful integration, with a mix of effective adoption and some challenges.

☐   4 = Highly Effective: Strong adoption and integration of critical cataloging practices with widespread support.

☐   5 = Very Highly Effective: Nearly universal adoption and effective integration of new practices across the library.

3. Please rate the level of staff buy-in and participation in the adoption of the critical cataloging process on a scale from 1 to 5.

☐   1 = Very Low Participation: Significant challenges with staff engagement and support.

☐   2 = Low Participation: Some engagement, but with notable resistance or lack of interest.

☐   3 = Moderate Participation: A fair level of participation, with a balance of support and resistance.

☐   4 = High Participation: Strong engagement and support from most staff members.

☐   5 = Very High Participation: Nearly universal support and active participation from staff.

Challenges:

Sharing the challenges and obstacles encountered during/after your library's diversity audit is invaluable to our study. It helps us understand the complexities of implementing these audits and subsequent metadata changes, as well as the support needed for success.

1. What challenges or obstacles did you encounter during/after the diversity audit when trying to implement critical cataloging practices? (select all that apply)

☐   Limited staff resources or time

☐   Insufficient training on diversity and inclusion practices

☐   Resistance or lack of buy-in from staff

☐   Accurately and respectfully identifying or choosing descriptive terms for diverse materials

☐   Technical limitations of the catalog system

☐   Level of Interoperability: lack of compatibility with other organizations and/or library management systems

☐   Lack of clear standards or guidelines for diverse cataloging

☐   Did not implement critical cataloging practices.

☐   Other _____

Short Response Questions

*Qualtrics setting: Allow for No Response

This section is dedicated to gathering in-depth insights into your library's choice to critically analyze OPAC metadata post-diversity audit. Your responses to these three short response questions will greatly enhance our understanding of the motivations, decision-making processes, and challenges encountered during this initiative. Thank you!

1. **Motivation and Goals:** Please share your motivation and goals for conducting a diversity audit and making subsequent changes to bibliographic records.

Response: _____

2. **Criteria for Catalog Evaluation:** What key factors guided the selection of evaluative criteria for cataloging library materials? Why were these factors important to your library?

Response: _____

3. **Challenges in Metadata Implementation:** Can you describe any challenges you faced in implementing changes to the OPAC metadata? How did you overcome these obstacles?

Response: _____

Survey Conclusion Message

[Qualtrics Option Chosen: provide a summary of responses]

Thank you for your time and valuable input! Your participation is instrumental in enhancing our understanding of the connection between diversity audits and critical cataloging in library practices.

Appendix B

Responses for Participants Who Marked 'YES' to Conducting an Audit and Adopting Critical Cataloging Practices

Geographic Setting

11 Responses

Rural	Suburban	Urban
1	8	2

Estimated Population Size Served

11 Responses

Small (serving a population size at the lower end typical for this setting)	Medium (serving a population size at the mid-range typical for this setting)	Large (serving a population size at the higher end typical for this setting)
0	9	2

■ Choice Count
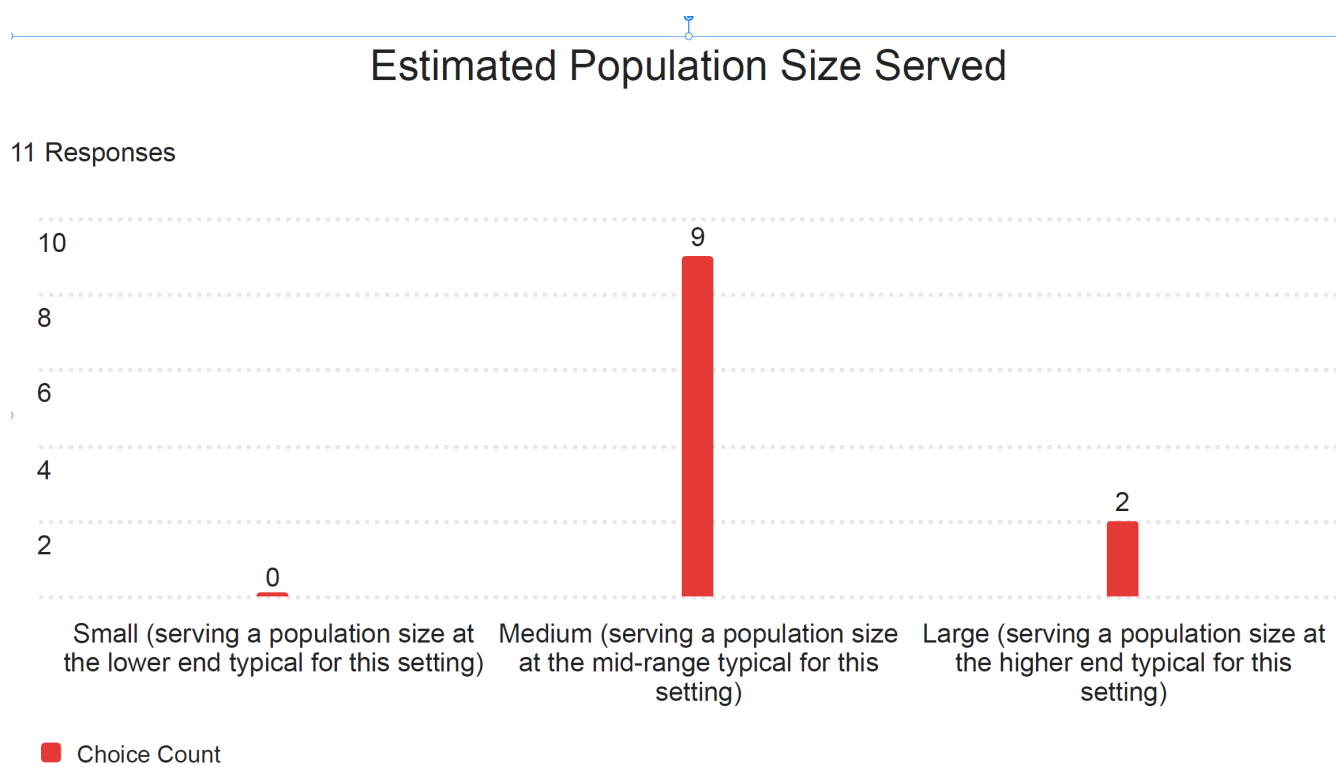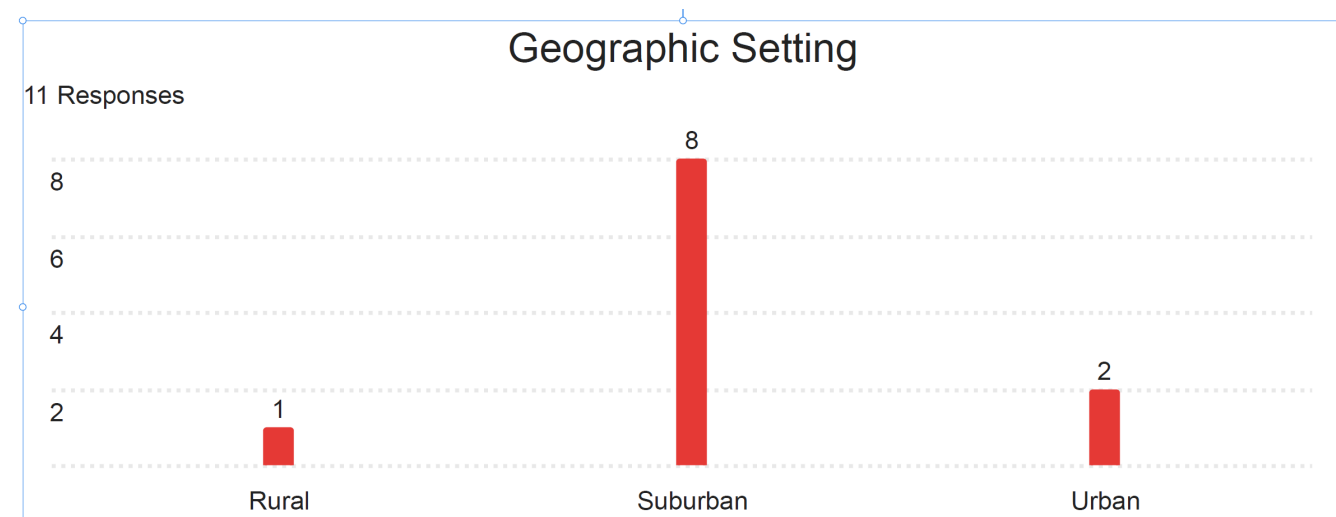
Overall Diversity

"Diversity" here refers to the mix of cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds, encompassing a wide array of identities and experiences.

11 Responses

Highly diverse: 3
Moderately diverse: 4
Slightly diverse: 3
Not diverse: 1
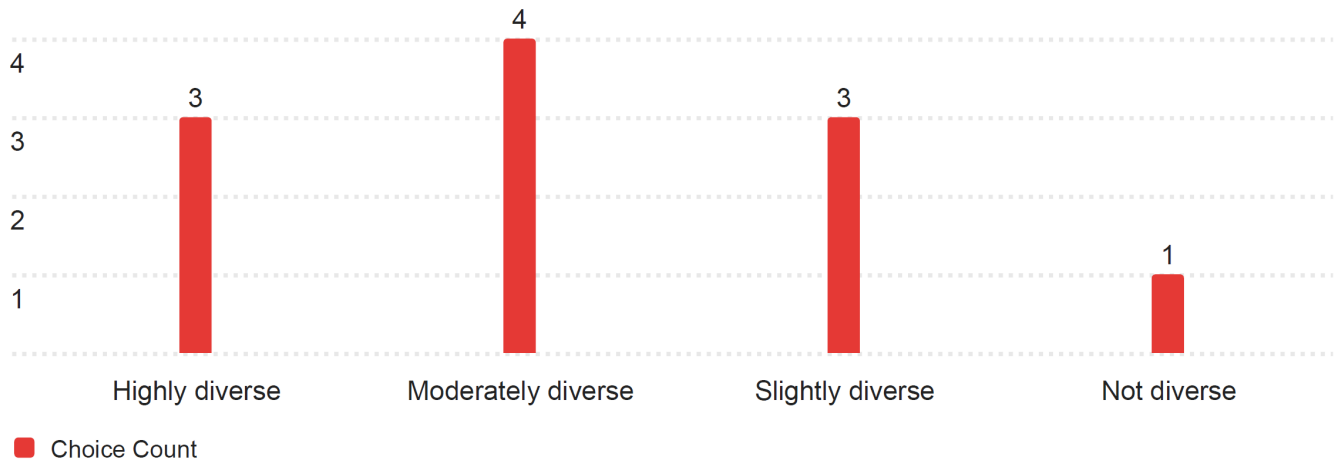
■ Choice Count

Socioeconomic Status

11 Responses

Low income: 3
Middle income: 1
High income: 4
Mixed income levels: 3

■ Choice Count

Audit Method Used

select all that apply

10 Responses

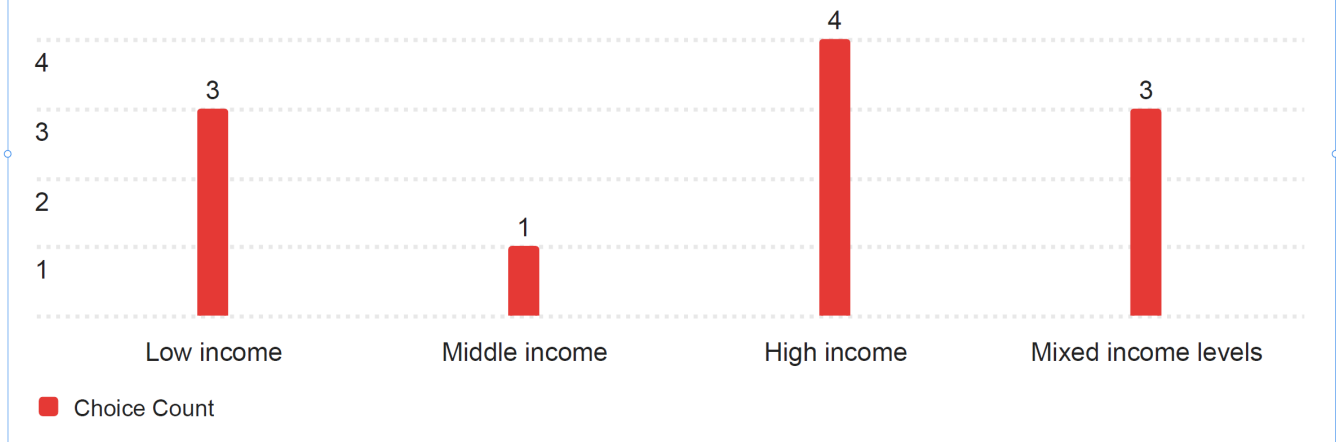| Audit Method:	Choice	Count
Catalog Search Method: Analyzing catalog data for diverse titles/authors based on specific themes, subjects, or backgrounds.	50%	5
Checklist Method: Utilizing a diversity checklist to review each collection item's representation of various criteria.	40%	4
Book Inspection Method: Conducting hands-on reviews of books to assess the diversity of content, characters, and authorship.	30%	3
Reverse Diversity Audit: Identifying gaps by checking for the presence of specific diverse titles or authors in the collection.	40%	4
Sampling: Evaluating random samples from the collection to gain insights into its overall diversity, suitable for large collections.	20%	2
Vendor-Assisted Audit: Employing a third-party vendor to conduct the diversity audit, leveraging their expertise and resources for a comprehensive analysis.	30%	3
Reframing Method: Applying new descriptions to the existing materials (ex. patron-generated tagging, inclusive keywords/subject headings)	30%	3
Other	0%	0
Total		10

Collection(s) Audit

select all that apply

11 Responses

Audit Method:	Choice	Count
Entire Collection	27%	3
Adult Collection	36%	4
Children's Collection	36%	4
Young Adult Collection	36%	4
Fiction Collection	36%	4
Non-Fiction Collection	27%	3
Reference Collection	0%	0
Other	0%	0

Catalog Accessibility Improvements

select all that apply

11 Responses

Accessibility Changes:	Choice	Count
Created more inclusive keywords and/or subject headings using Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) and/or Sears List of Subject Headings	45%	5
Enhanced the searchability of diverse materials in the catalog (ex. additional keywords, patron-generated tagging)	55%	6
Enhanced the searchability of diverse materials in the catalog (ex. additional keywords, patron-generated tagging)	9%	1
Improved the readability of catalog descriptions for accessibility	0%	0
Updated MARC records to reflect diverse and inclusive content (reassessing the existing records –all or portions)	36%	4
Updated MARC records to reflect diverse and inclusive content (reassessing the existing records –all or portions)	45%	5
Other	0%	0
Total		11

Standards Used To Evaluate MARC Records

select all that apply

10 Responses

Cataloging Standards:	Choice	Count
Cataloguing Code of Ethics	20%	2
Authorized Knowledge Organization Systems, such as Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)/Sears List	30%	3
Authorized Knowledge Organization Systems, such as Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)/Sears List	10%	1
Authorized Knowledge Organization Systems, such as Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)/Sears List	60%	6
Authorized Knowledge Organization Systems, such as Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)/Sears List	60%	6
Author-generated subject headings and keywords	20%	2
Vendor-provided subject headings and keywords	30%	3

Guidelines from professional library associations (e.g., ALA, IFLA)	60%	6
Critical cataloging practices or frameworks	20%	2
None	0%	0
Other	0%	0
Total		10

Reasons For Adopting Critical Cataloging Practices

select all that apply

11 Responses

Motivation:	Choice Count	
To better reflect the diversity of our community	64%	7
To enhance the discoverability of diverse materials	82%	9
To address and rectify biases in existing cataloging practices	73%	8
To comply with updated institutional or professional standards	45%	5
To support academic research and education on diversity and inclusion	18%	2
To respond to feedback from library users	27%	3
Critical cataloging practices were not implemented	0%	0
Other	0%	0
Total		11

User Feedback Method(s)

select all that apply

10 Responses

Methods:	Choice Count	
Online surveys	10%	1
Feedback forms available in the library	10%	1
Social media engagement	20%	2
Focus groups or community meetings	0%	0
Direct email feedback	10%	1
None	10%	1
Other	40%	4
Total		10

Success of Integrating Critical Cataloging Practices

scale from 1-5

11 Responses

- 1 = Very Ineffective: Significant challenges with ...: 1
- 2 = Somewhat Ineffective: Some efforts at ...: 0
- 3 = Moderately Effective: A fair level of successful ...: 5
- 4 = Highly Effective: Strong adoption and integration of ...: 5
- 5 = Very Highly Effective: Nearly universal adoption ...: 0
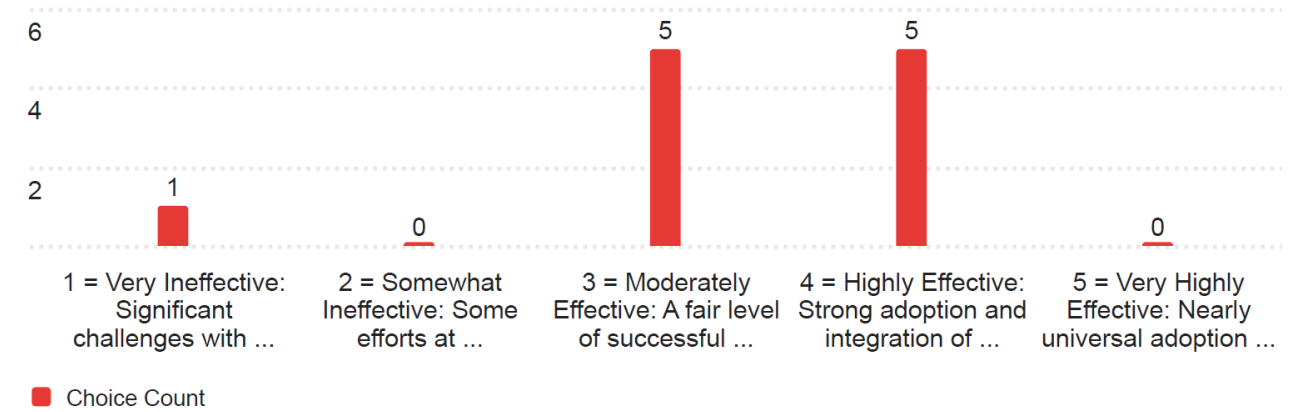
■ Choice Count

Count

Rate the Level of Staff Buy-in and Participation

scale from 1-5

11 Responses

- 1 = Very Low Participation: Significant ...: 0
- 2 = Low Participation: Some engagement, but ...: 1
- 3 = Moderate Participation: A fair level of ...: 4
- 4 = High Participation: Strong engagement and ...: 6
- 5 = Very High Participation: Nearly universal support ...: 0
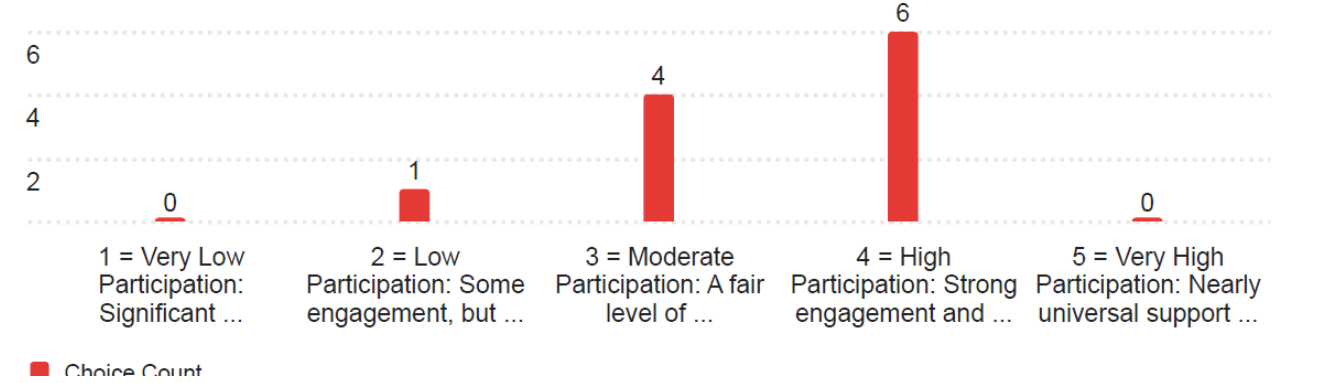
■ Choice Count

Challenges Encountered

select all that apply

11 Responses

Challenges:	Choice	Count
Limited staff resources or time	64%	7
Insufficient training on diversity and inclusion practices	82%	9
Resistance or lack of buy-in from staff	73%	8
Accurately and respectfully identifying or choosing descriptive terms for diverse materials	45%	5
Technical limitations of the catalog system	18%	2
Level of Interoperability: lack of compatibility with other organizations and/or library management systems	27%	3
Lack of clear standards or guidelines for diverse cataloging		
Did not implement critical cataloging practices	0%	0
Other	0%	0
Total		11