1. When we say diversity, and that we are forming a diversity committee, what is included under that term? What are some factors that should be considered?

The term diversity may be broadened by adding terms like equity and inclusion or DEI.

It’s important to determine what your team is trying to accomplish before taking action.

Some libraries may have a separate committee for cultural diversity vs. LGBTQIA vs. people with disabilities, but should they be separated out?

2. What do you think the primary purpose of a diversity committee is? Are there secondary ones you prioritize as well?

*EE: To educate the community and promote our mission (it’s one of FCPL’s mission) by developing programs and services, by promoting and supporting appropriate programs, services, and collection development of other library services.

To build bridges in our community through working together with other groups which promote and practice similar ideals of cultural diversity.

To train library staff on diversity through workshops or other suitable means – like informal get-together luncheons e.g. eating at a different ethnic restaurant each month, or potluck lunches of international dishes.

J: A diversity committee’s purpose is to ensure that the institution is providing programs and services that reflect the diverse cultures that make up our global community. This is accomplished by making staff and customers aware of diverse perspectives and cultures and promoting inclusivity. Secondary purposes are to better prepare staff for encounters with the diverse community they serve and to foster an understanding of the cultural values represented.

P: Every voice counts. The primary purpose is to ensure that an organization has diverse voices and perspectives involved in programming, services, and policies. Also, that strategies are viewed through lenses that are reflective of the staff and community. Secondary, a diversity committee, is a trusted advisor and a resource to help move the needle for equity and inclusion efforts of an organization.
3. Which libraries should have a diversity committee? Make a case for why a library that is mostly in a homogenous community should have one.

*J: All library systems and/or individual libraries should dedicate staff to examine library programs and services to make sure that diversity is incorporated into the services and programs offered. Only deliberate and systemic efforts to address diversity and inclusiveness issues will result in successful results. Homogenous communities actually need dedicated diversity committees most to ensure they are not simply reflecting the familiar but are fulfilling their role as an institution of life-long learning.

EE: All libraries should hopefully have a library administration that supports diversity and who would approve and support a Cultural Diversity Committee. Even with only a few on staff interested in diversity, working as an official committee would accomplish significant library work on diversity. NASA began as a committee, NACA (National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics) for decades with one paid employee and with an annual budget of $5,000 only. All the committee members were volunteers. Committees are non-traditional and non-bureaucratic, so they were innovative. NACA was a major force for technological change in aeronautics.

Even in a homogenous, conservative community, start with something acceptable like a club. This is the south – people like Councils and Committees. Examples are a French Cooking Club or Spanish Conversation Club (learning a new language). It will be harder for a homogenous library community to start. A solution could be going outside the library, partnering / collaborating on programs with other organizations that promote diversity. Another great project for any library is selecting a diverse materials collection that staff will use for Story Time or book club discussions or screening of films with a discussion after the movie. In our changing times there are a lot of materials that will help inform and increase awareness of issues.

P: I believe all library systems would benefit from an equity & inclusion committee. To be successful in serving a community you should design your efforts with the intent of inclusivity in everything. In a homogenous community, it’s not only about making it inclusive to those that are underrepresented in the community but awareness of the diversity, equity, and inclusion even in a homogenous community. The engagement also expands the understanding of diversity outside of their community.
4. How did your diversity committee come to be? Was there an instigating event or a dedicated person that paved the way?

*P: The Racial Equity Initiative gathered more support after a few incidents placed a highlight on Charlotte and how our city handled diverse issues: The Keith Lamont protest, 50 out of 50 study, are just a few. Efforts were dedicated to improving the awareness of racial equity and inclusion initiatives with an enterprise-wide training and action plans for next steps. CMLibrary is partially is funded by Mecklenburg County and could opt out of participating in the equity project but with the city and county participating in similar equity initiatives, our library found that this would benefit our community and staff. CMLibrary’s Equity Initiative Team is led by me and supported by the library’s CEO. We support, engage, and communication with our organization about the strategies Mecklenburg County is developing. Our library team was created to help discover strategies that best fit the Mecklenburg County DEI goals.

J: Our committee was one that was spearheaded by myself however my Library Director recognized the need to make sure we were meeting the needs of our diverse community. Though there were events and issues taking place within our city regarding the police and the non-white community, they were not the impetus of the formation of our diversity committee.

EE: Our Library Director in 2000 formed the committee by assignment, notifying the employee that he/she will be part of the committee. At the meetings, members decided on a name for the committee and the mission statement and goals of the committee.

5. Who should be on the diversity committee? If most staff are homogenous, what are some avenues committees should try to get that representation?

*J: An ideal committee will include both staff and community members. It should be reflective of the community including representatives of diverse cultures. In the case of a homogenous community, the committee seek out representatives from the broader community including the digital community, universities, religious institutions, LGBTQ community and others.

P: Ideally, having a widely diverse make-up of a diversity committee would great. It’s called a diversity committee; it should be reflective of the organization and community it serves. There is one caveat, often those who volunteer to be a part of the diversity committee are not diverse. So as with, a homogenous community, we must include other aspects that define individuals beyond the normal constructed roles.

EE: Every person is different and brings something different. Of course, anyone who is interested in multicultural anything and volunteers to work should be in the committee. For some it might be personal, like they may want to promote their own heritage - Irish, Native American... Some may like to experience “new” and “different”, like the ones who like to travel and attend plays and see foreign movies and go to Storytelling Festivals. In our case, even assigned members worked out as long as expectations were clear – we were expected to do the annual Lanterns Floating Ceremony (a message of peace program). From one successful annual project, the committee added another annual project, a Multicultural Crafts Fair, so now the committee had two annual projects.
6. What support do you have from your administration and has it changed?

*EE: No changes, the expectations are there for us to do what we can, and the support is evident. Library Administration pays attention to what we are doing. We have to give them a formal oral and written report every month whether we have something planned or nothing planned. We have a few projects a year and usually we get what we want. We wanted to contract / pay a speaker on Islamophobia, it’s approved. We proposed to do a workshop for Staff on Cultural Competency and pay a trainer, it’s approved and even made mandatory attendance by our Library Administration.

J: Our administration has been very supportive of our cultural diversity committee by providing opportunities for membership from all our branches and by providing a significant budget for our program planning and implementation. This has changed as of this fiscal year. The effort now is to require our libraries to include diversity in all aspects of our programming instead of providing system-led initiatives.

P: I approached our director a few years ago about having a diversity council but at the time, our conversations didn’t lead anywhere. The efforts currently are much more supported and encouraged. Our leadership is leading by example by attending the training and making it mandatory. They are also looking for other strategies for analyzing our services, programs, and policies through an equity lens. My volunteer work with equity work was elevated to a leader role.
7. What are the projects/initiatives your group does on a regular basis?

J: Some of our projects and initiatives were:

MACfest-A single day event designed to inform the library community of the diverse cultures that are reflected in Durham. The event involved music/dance, crafts and food in the form of International Food Trucks (Annual Event)

Diversity Dining-A monthly opportunity for staff to visit restaurants in our community reflective of those we serve. It involved lunch and a discussion/activity to learn about how the food and the culture are related. (Monthly Event)

International Culture Fest-This week-long celebration involved each branch being dedicated to a world geographic culture. Each location provided music/dance, crafts and food representative of the culture. (Annual Event)

Informational tables at large library events such as Summer Reading Kick-off.

P:

Provide training & conversations to compliment the Advancing Racial Equity training: Microagression, Interrupting Biases, Inclusive Conversations, etc.

Manage staff Equity Initiative page

Highlighting staff on our intranet page.

Providing resources: book lists, online training, assessments for self-discovery.

Lunch & Learn conversations

Tools for mangers to use during staff meetings

EE: We partner with USCIS (US Citizenship and Immigration Services) and host Naturalization Ceremonies twice a year – a Children’s Naturalization Ceremony and an Adult Naturalization Ceremony. It’s always a very moving, patriotic, special occasion. We invite a Library Board member to give the welcome speech to the new citizens. Board members are very happy to do this. They usually just attend meetings so they are doing something special for the library, they get to see us (staff) in action, get to know us and what we do. As a thank you, the Cultural Diversity Committee takes the library board member out to lunch at a nice, good food and affordable restaurant. It’s our working lunch meeting.

We help plan, organize, and participate at the City of Human Relations (also our partner agency) International Village Festival of Music and Food annual event.

We host a Thanksgiving Potluck Luncheon for Staff every year, the Thursday before Thanksgiving. When we ask, Library Administration will schedule meetings on that day and location so more staff will be able to attend.

The committee usually decides what to take on. Going rogue or solo is okay too. Sometimes it becomes a project of just a couple of members. Some committee members like to do a St. Patrick’s Day celebration for children in March, some want to do a Native American Month program for adults (more
serious) in November or one or two want help at a big Black History Month program. As the Chair of
the committee I just need to know – for feasibility (manpower, time, and budget) and for reporting
purposes. I have to get fees approved and do the required paperwork.

8. How does your group make decisions? Consensus, group vote, one person makes decisions but listens
to input. Why did you choose that method of making decisions? Does your group have any authority or
are you just making recommendations? (EVERYONE)

J: Our group makes decisions by attempting to establish consensus. Some decisions came down to group
vote but generally we were usually on the same page with our ideas and strategies. Our group did have
authority especially regarding how we wanted to use our allotted budget.

P: Our group makes decisions by group decision but use Decision Sprints for large tasks that need to be
broken down a bit more and strategically addressed. Training topics & conversations we have more
authority but anything else we are submitting recommendations.

EE: We are task oriented and meet only when needed. Members can suggest anytime what new
program, new project, they would like the committee to do. The committee chair calls for a meeting to
discuss the suggestions and also any other upcoming plans. Meetings could be working lunch meetings,
or regular conference table, or phone conference. For projects that the committee decides to do, as
much detail as possible are threshed out. Note that the Cultural Diversity Committee projects are an
addition to every member’s regular work.

9. One of the first things I (Lindsey) envisioned a diversity committee could do is serve as a resource or a
"first stop" for help and assistance when challenges come up for the system. There is a solid structure in
place when a book challenge comes up. What about diversity challenges? Think about these types of
scenarios:

Examples:

- a patron believes he/she is treated unfairly due to racism/sexism by either staff or other
  patrons;
- a patron would like to see programming/services offered that are accessible to them, and they
  feel, for whatever reason, this isn't currently happening.
- A staff member thinks a program/service/display offered is not on par with
diversity/equity/inclusion standards.

How might a diversity committee create a structure to deal with issues such as this?

Did not get to this question during panel.
Questions we will get to if time:

If your group isn’t already functioning the way you would like, what sort of things would you like to do with your committee ideally?

Once your group formed, what were the first steps the group took?

How do you measure the committee’s success in your community?

Do you have a mission statement? How did you write it?