

18 June 2020

TO: RAILS Board of Directors

FROM: Deirdre Brennan

SUBJECT: RAILS responsibilities to build a better society

Board members, attached is a document that I would like to discuss with you at tomorrow's board meeting. I referenced this topic in my report, and asked that we discuss RAILS role in supporting libraries as they work on racial injustice and bias, as well as the importance of examining RAILS itself through our equity, diversity and inclusion initiative.

I have become convinced that we cannot stay silent on this issue, as equal access is a fundamental value of libraries. I will not be asking for approval of any statement or policy tomorrow but I certainly need your input and advice.

Thank you.

RAILS responsibilities to build a better society

RAILS condemns the systemic racism and bias that cause inequities in individual access to education, employment and other opportunities that everyone needs to live a successful and fulfilling life.

The fundamental role of a library is to provide equal and equitable access to information and educational resources and to encourage social responsibility, civility, diversity, inclusion and free expression of ideas. Libraries are essential for building and maintaining a democratic, enlightened society.

Libraries have long been and continue to be forces for good. We are regularly engaged in work that brings people and communities together, as we help build understanding of each other and what is happening around us and provide opportunities for the community to talk together.

This work is particularly challenging right now, but desperately needed. How do libraries do their work in a time of polarization, hatred, systemic racism and inequality? What is the role of RAILS, right now? What can we do to not only support libraries in their work but, as an organization, work to solve the huge, systemic problems that afflict us?

Issues to consider as we do this work

The RAILS strategic plan has a goal of leadership. Libraries and other systems do look to us. What does this goal/value mean now?

Hold ourselves accountable for doing the work. It's a long road and will require commitment.

We have to look first at our own organization. We have begun this work with our Equity Diversity and Inclusion initiative. This project becomes even more imperative now. We will need to continue to interrogate ourselves honestly as we do this work and the world continues to change around us.

We also need to look at the library profession and how it contributes to bias and inequity, and how we can help change this.

What is the call to action?