

A Practical Guide to EEO and Affirmative Action in Libraries

The ARL Diversity Program has taken several calls from library staff asking for clearly defined affirmative action (AA) language, examples of solid programs, and an explanation of the difference between an affirmative action program and equal employment opportunity (EEO) practices. While the most prudent advice is to consult the institution's legal advisors, some of the recurring questions encountered can be answered in lay terms, providing a framework of information.

An affirmative action program is a set of specific and result-oriented procedures designed to achieve prompt and full utilization of racial and ethnic minorities, women, and people with disabilities at all levels and segments of the work force. This language is good for practical application in library programs because it not only focuses on external search processes, but on internal training and promotion strategies as well.

Affirmative action strives for racial and gender diversity via the creation of statistically-based admissions and hiring goals. Legal parameters for AA goals are not required by law, but can be court imposed, mandated by Executive Order, or complied with voluntarily on the part of the institution.

Groups targeted by affirmative action include: African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic people, Native Americans, women, and people with disabilities. People with disabilities are included in affirmative action programs as a matter of practice via the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1992, rather than the original executive order language. Vietnam Era veterans are included in original affirmative action language, but current statistical measurements do not typically identify this group based upon appropriate utilization per availability. These protected class distinctions illustrate the confusion in creating and implementing AA programs.

Affirmative action is different - and more narrowly prescribed - than Equal Employment Opportunity. EEO protected categories include race, color, religion, sex, and national origin. Non-discrimination based on any of the aforementioned group membership is required by law. EEO guidelines include goals that address the creation of diversity and compliance with non-discriminatory practices. These goals may be statistically oriented (class action, systemic discrimination) and risk management oriented. Overall, EEO seeks to resolve issues at the most fundamental levels of an organization's personnel processes. The difference between the two may be described as neutral, non-discriminatory activity (EEO) versus a proactive shift in activity (AA).

For institutions interested in obtaining more information about affirmative action programs, the ARL Diversity Program is sponsoring a [one-day workshop](#) on May 12 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. A SPEC Kit of current library and higher education programs is also forthcoming.

The ARL Diversity Program

[1997 Seminar and Workshop Schedule](#)

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