

# Multnomah County Library

Employees raise serious concerns with  
security, workforce equity, and staffing

December 2023



Multnomah County Auditor's Office

## A letter from Audit Director Dewees

I want to thank the staff at the Multnomah County Library for sharing their time and expertise during this audit. Our office last audited the Library in 2004. That report primarily focused on Library service delivery amid funding uncertainties at the time. The Library is once again at a critical juncture.

In 2020, the Library passed a bond measure to build a new flagship location in East Multnomah County and make improvements to existing locations, among other investments. This is a significant period of expansion for the Library system. This presents an exciting opportunity for expanding equitable access to Library services. We believe that delivering equitable service to Library patrons will require a healthy work environment. Audit staff found that many library employees are concerned about issues such as safety and staffing. The audit contains several recommendations to address these concerns. Each recommendation has a due date and the Auditor's Office will return to follow up on the status.

To prevent the perception of a conflict of interest, I oversaw this audit since Auditor McGuirk's spouse is an on-call employee at the library. Auditor McGuirk did not participate in the planning, research, writing, or any other phase of the audit.

Sincerely,  
Nicole Dewees, MBA, CIA  
Audit Director

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## Report Highlights

### What We Found

The Multnomah County Library workforce plays a key role in helping the Library achieve its mission to “empower our communities to learn and create.” Library employees serve as an important connection to welcome communities who have historically been excluded from accessing library services.

We found that the Library has struggled to respond to the changing safety and security landscape. Employees are frustrated about the gaps in the response to serious incidents, particularly for employees who frequently interact with the public. Improved coordination is needed between departments and county-wide services to develop a proactive response to serious security incidents.

In recent years, the Library has hired its most diverse workforce to better reflect the diverse communities it serves. However, we heard that some employees do not feel valued and employees with specific language and cultural skills need more clarity about their roles. Employees report lower staffing levels in neighborhood libraries contributes to reduced services, poor morale, and concerns about workplace safety.

### Why We Did This Audit

Before the audit, previous employee surveys conducted by our office and Multnomah County’s Evaluation and Research Unit revealed high levels of dissatisfaction within the Library work environment. The Library is in the process of renovating and constructing new buildings, including a new flagship library in East Multnomah County. By addressing workforce concerns, they can be better positioned to provide high quality services to the public when these new or updated locations open.

### What We Recommend

Our report includes 10 recommendations. Key recommendations, paraphrased, include:

- Implementing security processes to: ensure compliance with OR OSHA rules; analyze trends for more a proactive response; and improve employee support after incidents
- Planning for staffing after construction is complete, while addressing the workforce equity and security concerns raised in this report
- Improving internal communications to rebuild trust

## Preface

### Acknowledgement

We appreciate Library employees and leaders giving their time to this audit, especially while there were many changes in Library workplaces. Library employees and leaders have served the public and we recognize their sacrifices and dedicated service through challenging times. The pandemic exposed gaps in our support systems. These gaps placed a burden on places like public libraries.

We acknowledge that there have been traumatic workplace incidents, in addition to other stressors people have experienced. We thank library employees for sharing their experiences throughout the course of this audit.

### A note on language

When people think of libraries, they often think of the physical library in their neighborhood. However, there are additional services and work that go into the entire Multnomah County Library system. For example, employees provide services in the community, move books between locations, develop the collection of books and other materials, and much more. In this report, when we talk about the entire system, we call it “the Library” (capitalized). When we refer to operations just in the public library buildings that people visit, we call them “neighborhood libraries” (lowercased). We are including Central Library, a large flagship library in downtown Portland, in the term “neighborhood libraries,” along with the other 18 libraries across the county and temporary library spaces set up during construction.

Additionally, in this report we refer to categories for the racial and ethnic identities of Library employees. We use the categories that are in the county’s data system, as that is the information available to us. However, we recognize that these categories do not reflect all identities.

Finally, there are instances in the report where we describe traumatic or violent incidents. These descriptions are not detailed; however, some contain examples of violent language and could be triggering for some people. If you find that you need resources to support your health and wellbeing, Multnomah County offers resources for employees and community members. To find support, please contact:

- Multnomah County Behavioral Health Call Center 24/7: 503-988-4888
- Crisis Line for Racial Equity Support: 503-575-3764. This line is staffed by BIPOC Counselors available Mon. - Fri., 8:30 a.m. - 5 p.m.
- Trans Lifeline 24/7 (Spanish available): 1-877-565-8860

Multnomah County Auditor's Office also compiled [this community resource guide](#). This information is for everyone and emphasizes resources for BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities to support self-care, resiliency, and improved wellness. County employees can contact the Employee Assistance Program to learn about additional resources.

## Background

### Library has faced many changes in recent years

Library employees experienced changing workplace expectations in their roles throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Libraries operated under reduced services for over a year. Some Library employees temporarily moved to emergency operations roles. When neighborhood libraries began to reopen in June 2021, the Multnomah County Library was met with an increase in patrons experiencing behavioral health crises. In addition, the passage of a capital bond measure led to construction-related closures, starting in December 2022.



The Library opened a Community Tech Space in downtown Portland to meet patron needs while Central Library is closed for bond-related construction. Photo credit: Multnomah County Library.

### The Library has its own district and stable funding

Library operations are primarily funded by a dedicated property tax for the Library District. Before 2012, the Library relied on temporary levies and the General Fund, the county's source of unrestricted funding, to finance its operations. In the November 2012 election, Multnomah County voters approved a measure to create a permanent library district. This permanent taxing district provides the Library with a stable source of funding. The District also provides an ongoing source of dedicated funding for library services without having to compete with other programs for General Fund dollars.

The District is governed by the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners, which serves as its five-member Library District Board. Commissioners appoint members of the volunteer Library Advisory Board to advise the Library District on its policies and annual budget.

**The Library is currently doing major construction**

The downtown Central Library opened in 1913. The Multnomah County Library system has added 18 neighborhood libraries that serve communities across the county. In 2017, the Library published results from a capital planning process conducted by its Community Action Committee. This stakeholder group identified the need to expand library spaces, particularly in East Multnomah County, to ensure equitable access to services.

In the November 2020 General Election, Multnomah County voters passed a \$387 million general obligation bond to improve library facilities. The bond project includes renovations of neighborhood libraries, expanded materials handling, a new sorting center, and the construction of the new East County Flagship library.

**Bond-Related Construction at Neighborhood Libraries**



Source: Multnomah County Auditor’s Office, based on information from the Multnomah County Library. Bond-related construction at neighborhood libraries as of October 2023. Shown in orange are the six neighborhood libraries that are closed for bond-related construction. In blue are locations that are open to the public. Some locations are open and projected to start bond construction. Those locations are shown in blue with the construction icon. Note, the Library has opened temporary service sites during the construction closures that are not included in this map. This includes the Community Tech Space and the University of Oregon NE Portland temporary library site.

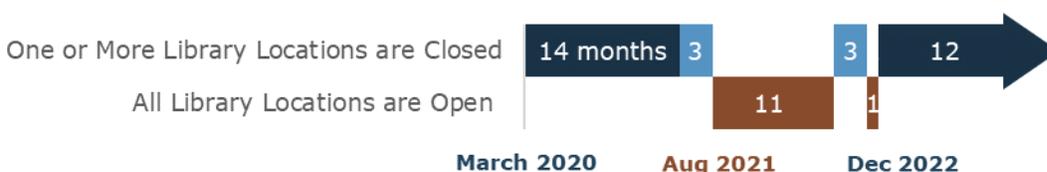
The Library has reassigned staff between locations to account for patrons who will visit the neighborhood libraries that will remain open. New services have also been established, like the Community Technology Space in downtown location, while Central Library is closed for most

of 2023. The bond-related construction is projected to be completed in 2025. According to the Library, these timelines are estimates and construction could last into 2026.

### The pandemic greatly affected Library services

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, county workplaces made significant changes in how they provide services to the public. In the Library system, neighborhood libraries reduced most in-person services for much of 2020 and 2021. Neighborhood libraries began new services, like lending Chromebooks and mailing and delivering books. As programs moved online, the Library also focused on bridging the technology gap through services designed to increase access to internet services and devices.

After COVID-19 pandemic closures, library buildings reopened before bond-related construction closures starting December 2022



Source: Multnomah County Auditor's Office, based on information from the Multnomah County Library. One or more Library locations are closed indicates that one or more neighborhood library locations were closed for public access to the building. Neighborhood library buildings were closed for in-person services in March 2020 (shown in dark blue). Starting June 1, 2021, library buildings began to reopen to the public over a three-month period (shown in light blue). Library locations were open for in-person services from August 24, 2021 to August 1, 2022 (shown in orange). Starting August 2022, Central Library was closed for construction (shown in light blue) before reopening for one month (orange). In December 2022, library locations began to close for bond-related construction (shown in in dark blue) that are projected to last until 2026. Closures are shown for full months and partial months were rounded.

The pandemic also coincided with the passage of the Library bond in November 2020. After reopening from the pandemic, neighborhood libraries closed for construction closures. Central Library closed for a construction project for a three-month period. Bond-related construction closures started in December 2022. As a result, there have been many changes within the Library work environment.

### An announced plan for layoffs in 2020 broke trust

During the COVID-19 pandemic, in the summer of 2020, Library leaders announced plans to lay off employees. They said that it was financially responsible since neighborhood libraries were operating under significantly reduced services. Employees and the union pushed back and plans were scaled back. Library leaders have said that no one was laid off involuntarily. However, some employees took early retirement or voluntary layoff, changed positions, or had their hours reduced. Some employees moved to temporary positions or to other county departments.

Importantly, employee trust in Library leadership was broken. Some employees felt that it was cruel to announce layoffs during a global health crisis, especially since the Library had sufficient resources to continue to pay employees.

Decisions made at that time continue to affect the Library work culture. Some employees we spoke with described an “us versus them” culture. Distrust of executive leadership remains high. We heard from employees who feel that leaders continue to not take their concerns – and consequently their well-being – seriously. This perception has perpetuated the distrust.

### The region’s housing and behavioral health crises affect neighborhood libraries

Many community members in Multnomah County face housing and behavioral health crises without access to adequate services. Neighborhood libraries are public spaces that are available and open to all. Patrons in the neighborhood libraries reflect the broader community.

Neighborhood libraries also provide an environment and services that can be beneficial for people with unmet housing or behavioral health needs. For example, neighborhood libraries offer indoor spaces that people can use as a place to rest and be protected from bad weather or air quality issues. They offer access to the internet and charging outlets for electronics. Additionally, they offer valuable information resources.

Anecdotally, neighborhood libraries are serving more patrons with unmet housing and behavioral health needs than they did in the past. Sometimes patrons have unmet needs that neighborhood libraries are not set up to meet, such as a patron in a mental health crisis. These situations can contribute to concerns about security.

### Challenges with security, staffing, and workforce equity affect services and worsen morale

Library employees report concerns with security, workforce equity, and staffing. During this audit, we conducted over 60 interviews with Library employees and managers. We also spoke with employees and managers while visiting five neighborhood libraries. To gather additional perspectives, we conducted an anonymous survey sent to all Library employees.

According to Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), employers have a responsibility to adopt workplace practices to “provide safe or healthful employment and places of employment.” We acknowledge that there are many factors that can impact workplace safety and security. Our audit focuses on the Library and county’s response to these challenges that are within their ability to directly influence as employers, managers, and organizational leaders.

## Defining safety and security

Within Multnomah County, safety and security have been defined in the Workplace Violence Prevention Administrative Procedure 3 (RSK-3) to clarify internal roles and responsibilities.

**Safety** describes “a condition of being relatively free from hazards that are likely to cause harm or injury”. The county-wide safety lead is the Finance and Risk Management Division, which is within the Department of County Management. Some examples of topics under safety workplace accidents and injuries. The path for resolving safety issues is typically through workers compensation and the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

**Security** is “a proactive deterrent to manage and mitigate acts of violence, that inflicts direct harm to a person, organization, or property.” The county-wide security lead is the Workplace Security Program, which is within the Director’s Office in the Department of County Management. Some examples of security topics include investigating assaults and other criminal acts in the workplace, managing security vendors, and conducting security assessments of county facilities. The path for resolving security issues may involve working with law enforcement to address potential criminal conduct.

 <p><b>Safety:</b> Focused on environmental and occupational health risks</p> <p>Responsibilities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Health and safety trainings (ex: bloodborne pathogen training)</li> <li> Preventing injuries while performing job duties</li> </ul> <p> <b>Risk Management</b></p>	 <p><b>Security:</b> Focused on workplace behaviors and structural vulnerabilities risks</p> <p>Responsibilities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Coordinating investigations of criminal acts (ex: assault)</li> <li> Assessing security needs in County buildings</li> </ul> <p> <b>Workplace Security Program</b></p>
<p><b>Both:</b> Incidents that result in injuries, such as those resulting from workplace violence, may fall within both categories.</p>	

Source: Multnomah County Auditor’s Office

In discussing the Library work environment, we will focus on the response to security-related incidents. These were the types of incidents mentioned most often by Library employees. However, workplace violence incidents that result in injuries, may fall within both safety and security categories. While those distinctions help to clarify internal roles, outside regulators like Oregon OSHA consider addressing safety and security risks under an employer’s responsibility to create a safe workplace.

## Security model has changed, more improvements are needed

There have been significant changes in the safety and security landscape of public spaces in Multnomah County. After reopening to the public, the Library experienced several workplace violence incidents. One of these workplace violence incidents occurred on in February 2022 when two Midland Library employees were physically attacked by a patron.

In response to this and other similar incidents, Library employees have called for making changes to the existing safety and security model. One significant change is allowing employees to choose whether to add security-related duties to their position.

Through union negotiations, the person-in-charge (PIC) role and its associated security responsibilities will change to a voluntary “opt-in” model. The person-in-charge (PIC) is a Library employee that serves as the primary responder to security incidents when there are not other security personnel available. They also respond to other customer, staff or facilities issues.

### **Other significant changes that the library has made include:**

- Hiring a safety and security manager
- Condensing Library rules from 27 to 10 rules
- Adding security personnel, including library safety liaison positions and contracted security, to library locations
- Providing security-related training
- Conducting security assessments of neighborhood library buildings, including to make security improvements to neighborhood library buildings during bond-related construction projects

### **The county has also taken steps to address security risks. Significant county-wide changes include:**

- Hiring a workplace security director to create a county-wide security program
- Creating a new Workplace Violence (RSK-3) administrative procedure
- Implementing an online reporting portal to report workplace incidents
- Creating a mandatory training on the new incident reporting system for county employees
- Launch of Multnomah County’s 24/7 Security Operations Center

We acknowledge the actions that Library and County have to improve workplace security and respond to workplace violence incidents. In this audit, we will focus on areas that we identified to further strengthen the response. In addition, we will focus on proactive measures, such as analyzing trends in incidents and including employees in the safety and security response.

## Staff face serious security risks

Since reopening neighborhood libraries to the public, Library employees report that the nature of security incidents have changed. They described an increase in incidents involving weapons, drug use, and people experiencing behavioral health crises. Longtime employees reported that while these are not new to the Library, the severity and frequency of serious security incidents has increased.

### **Example of serious incidents include:**

- A patron made threatening comments and told staff he had a knife when asked to put on a mask
- Incidents involving public nudity and sexual harassment, some unreported
- A patron made hateful comments about transgender people while carrying a knife
- Employees responding to drug use and overdoses
- A patron evaded security during closing and hid within the library overnight while carrying large knives

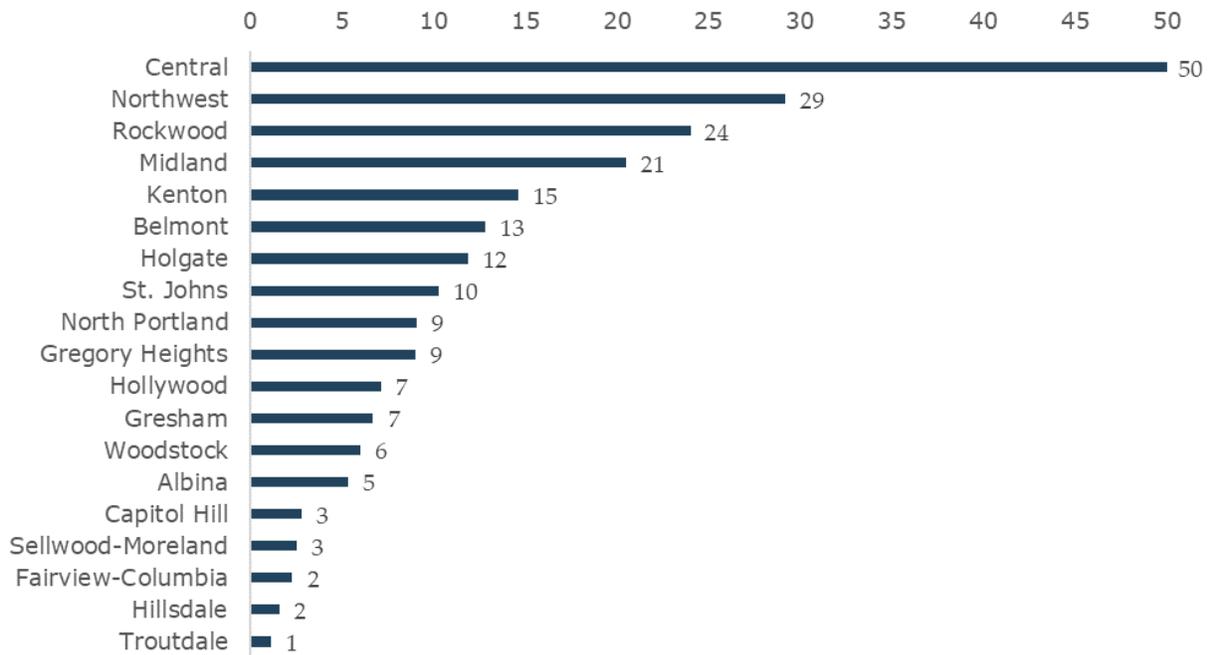
The Multnomah County Library has an online incident reporting form to document when patrons violate Library rules and any follow up actions, including a warning or exclusion from Library spaces. Incidents range from minor violations of library rules to serious incidents that involve acts of violence and threats of physical harm. From January 2022 to December 2022, there were more than 2,000 incident reports submitted at Multnomah County Library locations.

Overall, Central Library has the highest number of incidents reports. In 2022, the number of security incidents reported at Central Library (1,109) were four times the number of incidents as Midland Library (247), which saw the next highest number of incidents. Even when accounting for the difference in the number of patrons served by each location, most of the incident reports are from Central Library.

Employees describe the traumatic impact of responding to violent incidents. Repeated exposure to violent incidents is a well-known risk in some professions. Libraries are not usually considered in this category of workplaces. There are national studies, like the 2022 Urban Trauma Library Study, that describe the impact of repeated exposure to trauma on urban library employees.

### Central Library was the primary location for incident reports among neighborhood libraries

Incident rates per 1,000 visitors by location



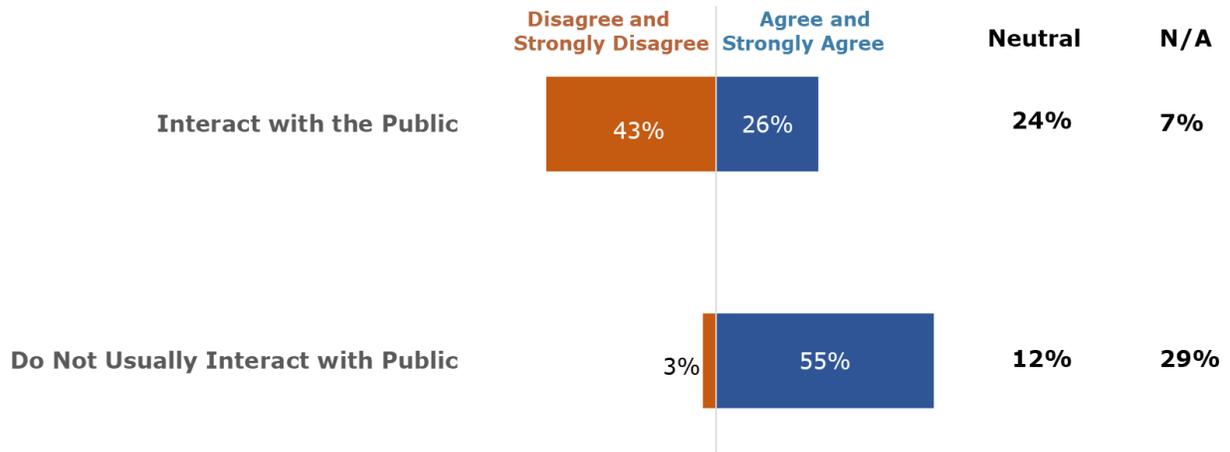
Source: Monthly incident reports shared by the Library from January to December 2022. Average door count data shared by the Library. We analyzed the security incidents per 1,000 visitors to account for differences in the number of patrons served by each neighborhood library. Incidents may range from minor violations of library rules to serious incidents that involve acts of violence and threats of physical harm. Note, the number of incident reports is not the same as the number of security incidents. Some incidents have more than one incident report associated with it when multiple staff members or multiple patrons are involved in a security incident.

### Staff who work with the public need more support

Library employees shared that they need support to maintain a welcoming environment for everyone who interacts with the Library system. Employees report that the lack of communication, clear protocols, and inconsistent response following incidents contributed to a poor safety environment.

In the employee survey we conducted, employees who work with the public were less likely to report feeling safe at work. About one in four employees who interact with the public in their role reported feeling safe at work. Responses were similar between employees that interact with the public in-person (27%) and virtually or over the phone (23%). In comparison, about half of library employees who do not interact with the public (55%) report feeling safe at work.

Workers who interact with the public in-person and virtually were less likely to respond that they feel safe at work compared to workers who do not interact with the public



Source: Auditor’s Office anonymous survey of Library employees. Responses to survey question “I feel safe at work” by the usual types of interactions with the public. Responses were collected November 2022. Note: Interacting with the public includes in-person, virtual, and phone interactions.

Some employees shared their perception that Library leaders that do not directly interact with the public may not act with urgency to address security risks, in part because they don’t see its impact in the library work environment. One of the suggestions we heard from employees was for Library leaders to spend more time in neighborhood library locations to gain a better understanding of challenges faced by public-facing employees.

Some employees also describe an inconsistent response from management to critical security incidents. A critical incident is defined as an incident that occurs on library property or is directly associated with someone’s library role and involves one of these elements:

- An attempt to physically harm a library employee
- An actual threat of immediate physical violence, sexual misconduct, or
- A security-related evacuation or lockdown that is not a drill.

The Library’s critical incident response procedure requires calling law enforcement and emergency responders when there is an active threat to the safety of patrons or employees that exceeds the role of the Library’s security staff. However, employees report that law enforcement rarely arrive while there is an ongoing incident. In one example an employee shared, a physically aggressive patron warned staff that they were not concerned about the police being called due to the slow response time.

We discovered that some of the information contained on the critical incident response procedure may be out of date. For example, the procedure states that decision about whether to grant administrative leave is determined by the County Chair. However, other Library leaders clarified that the Library Director and the HR Manager can also grant administrative leave.

Some employees shared that they need support from people with people from social work or crisis response backgrounds. The Library currently has a Crisis Intervention contract with Cascadia Behavioral Health that provides for social workers to be stationed at Central Library and be available to support other branches as needed. However, neighborhood library employees may not be aware that they can contact these social workers during crises to request guidance and on-site support. This resource is not included in the Critical Incident Response Procedure.



Rockwood Library exterior. Photo credit: Multnomah County Library.

When we asked Library employees what would make them feel safer, about half of the response included mentioned onsite security personnel. Within these responses, many employees shared that they value Library Safety Liaisons for their role in deescalating security incidents. On-site security personnel include Library Safety Liaisons and contract security. Central Library also has Safety Coordinator positions to respond to the higher security needs.

Library safety liaisons are Library employees that provide security support at some locations. Some library safety liaison assignments did not align with locations that have the highest security incidents. For example, Kenton Library did not have a library security liaison for part of 2022. Employees in two locations mentioned that when library safety liaisons are in the branch, other employees could focus on their jobs, compared to the more stressful environment when they are not there.

The Library has established an incident review team to review incident reports. The incident review team members include Library management and library safety liaisons, among other Library staff with security-related duties. The incident review team's primary focus is ensuring the incident responses are aligned with the Library's and county policies. Their objectives include reviewing exclusions, following up to collect additional information, and ensuring that incident reports have the appropriate information. The Library may consider other spaces for a

two-way dialogue between staff and management about post-incident response, including topics like reviewing trends in types of incidents and providing trauma-informed support.

### Library does not systematically analyze trends in security data

There have been significant shifts in the Library's safety and security model since the neighborhood libraries reopened their doors in June 2021. To make further improvements, the Library should collect and analyze trends in security data, as recommended in OSHA's Workplace Violence Prevention best practices.

The Library is not currently analyzing systemic trends in security incidents, in part due to the limitations of their security incident reporting system. Library employees report that security incident data is not easily downloaded in a format that allows them to perform robust data analysis.

To allow review of past incidents, data is manually copied from the Library's online Security Incident Response system and pasted into a monthly summary. The monthly summary included are the date, time, location, a brief description, and follow up actions taken. With around 200 incident reports per month, manually producing reports is time consuming and presents opportunities for errors.

Another data limitation is that the type of incident and the severity of the incident can be challenging to track under the current system. Incidents may range from minor violations of library rules to serious incidents that involve acts of violence and threats of physical harm. Knowing the severity and the type of incidents are important factors for making data-driven decisions about security needs.

Library leadership shared that they are exploring using other databases for this purpose. The new county-wide online incident reporting system, Origami, may help in the future. However, Library leadership said that the county system does not yet have all the functionality the Library needs. They have advised employees to continue to use both systems for the time being.

The Health Department is experiencing a similar rise in security-related concerns. They have started to provide monthly security updates to staff with a snapshot of the types of incidents and steps that department leadership is taking to respond. Providing regular updates and communicating about trends in incidents helps provide transparency and supports employees' overall feelings of safety.

## Safety committees may not be complying with OSHA rules

As auditors, we are directed to send early communication to management when we identify areas of potential noncompliance with existing laws and rules. Oregon OSHA requires many employers to maintain active safety committees. Safety committees are a minimum requirement to provide employees and managers opportunities to proactively address safety concerns. During our audit, we found that the Library was at risk of not meeting requirements established under Oregon OSHA rules under OAR 437-001-0765. Two of the five most common Oregon OSHA citations in 2022 involved violations of the rules for safety committees.

### **On May 24, 2023, we sent a letter to Library leaders and the Board of County Commissioners outlining the following areas of potential noncompliance (Appendix A):**

- Safety committees are meeting frequently enough and are active
- Meeting minutes are available to employees
- Inspections are occurring and being documented
- The Neighborhood Library Safety Committee receives annual comprehensive reviews
- Members are receiving required trainings

Since raising these concerns, the Library has provided updates about corrective actions that they have taken. The county's Risk Management and the Library have clarified that safety committees should meet monthly. Library staff have located some meeting minutes and inspection reports and posted them on the intranet. Not all past meeting minutes and inspection reports were located.

In October 2023, the Library transitioned to holding monthly safety committees. As part of this transition, they also shared their plan to meet OSHA's other requirements for ensuring that safety committee have enough members, meet training requirements for committee members, and meet documentation requirements. The Library has also shared their commitment to creating an internal Safety Committee Coordination team. Our follow-up work to this audit will evaluate corrective actions and steps taken to prevent noncompliance in the future.

## Countywide processes are not yet coordinated

The Library and county-wide offices have different processes for documenting and responding to security incidents. When these systems do not connect to each other, county leaders are not receiving critical information to address workplace risks and create a safe workplace for all employees.

Employees and managers are responsible for reporting some incidents and workplace accidents to county management. In 2022, the Risk Management 2 (RSK-2) form was used for this purpose. The RSK-2 form instructions define an incident as "all occupational accidents, injuries,

illnesses, harassment, violence in the workplace” and “near-misses where someone could have been harmed but was not due to fortuitous circumstances.”

Library employees document security related incidents less often on County Risk Management forms. Of the 177 RSK-2 reports submitted by Library employees in 2022, there were 25 security-related incidents reported. The majority of the RSK-2 reports are for safety and COVID-19 related incidents. However, on the Library’s incident reporting system, there were a total of 2241 incident reports submitted in 2022.

In addition, RSK-2 forms were missing information. RSK-2 forms include questions about the description of the incident, the root causes of the incident, and corrective actions being taken to prevent similar incidents. There were no corrective actions listed in about 1 in 4 RSK-2 forms. The date of implementing the corrective action was blank in half of the RSK-2 forms that we reviewed. When RSK-2 forms were not filled out, county management may not be receiving information about security incidents to allow for a coordinated response.

Improving coordination helps to lower the risk of repeating similar incidents across departments.

In June 2023, the county moved from paper-based forms, like the RSK-2, to a central online incident reporting portal called Origami. The rollout of the Origami system included a required training for all county employees. These steps may help improve coordination between county management and individual departments. These changes were being implemented during this audit. Further evaluation is needed to determine if these steps improve the response to security incidents.

### Services have been reduced, in part due to staffing issues

Lower staffing levels, combined with pandemic disruptions and organizational changes, have led to significant reductions of library services to the public. Neighborhood libraries have had to close or reduce services. The number of programs offered is also far below pre-pandemic levels.

Employees consistently brought up concerns with staffing in our interviews, site visits, and survey. We talked to employees during a unique time, after neighborhood libraries reopened from the pandemic and before they closed for bond construction. Currently, staffing constraints are less of an issue since staff have been reassigned during construction. However, there remains a risk of further disruptions after neighborhood libraries reopen, if Library leaders do not address the issues.

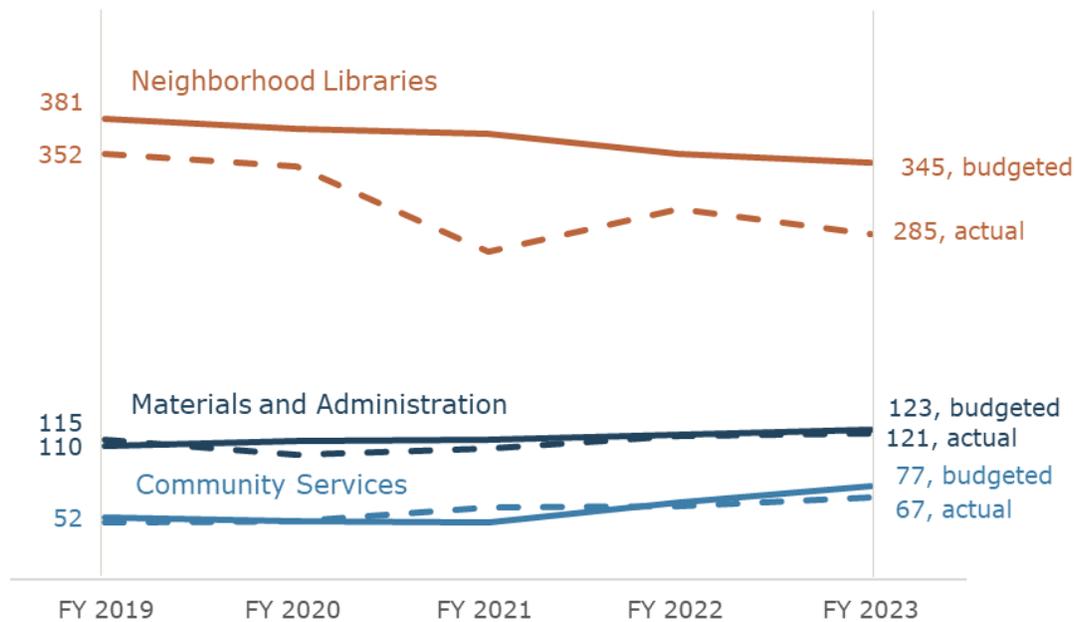
For this report, the term “neighborhood libraries” refers all public libraries in the county, including the flagship Central Library, 18 smaller libraries, and temporary locations set up during construction.

**Neighborhood libraries have fewer employees now than in past years**

Staffing levels at neighborhood libraries have decreased significantly in the last few fiscal years. The biggest drop was in fiscal year (FY) 2021. Layoffs were announced in July 2020, which falls within FY 2021. The actual number of employees working at neighborhood libraries rebounded, but has not returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Library leaders have reduced the number of employees they budgeted to work at neighborhood libraries over time and actual number of employees is even lower

Budgeted and actual numbers of full-time equivalent (FTE) employees across fiscal years (FY)



Source: Auditor analysis of Questica and Workday data.

Notes: Budgeted amounts are from the adopted budget at the beginning of the fiscal year. Actual amounts are from the end of the fiscal year to allow for hiring time. Amounts are based on cost center and do not include temporary, on-call, or contracted employees, such as contracted security. When the Library reorganized, a small number of positions may have changed categories without their responsibilities or location actually changing.

- Materials and Administration includes employees working in areas like leadership and upper management, HR, and IT, as well as developing collections of books and other materials, and moving those materials around. It also includes a systemwide staffing team that filled in where needed.
- Neighborhood Libraries includes positions at Central Library, temporary libraries during construction, and all other public library locations, including security liaisons employed by the Library.
- Community Services includes teams for programming, community outreach and engagement, and answering virtual questions.

However, this trend is not just due to the pandemic and layoff situation. As the graph above shows, Library leaders have decreased the number of employees they budgeted to work across all neighborhood libraries. This was especially dramatic at Central Library, where the budgeted number of employees was around 20% lower in FY 2023 than it was in FY 2019. Some of this change may be due to a staff reorganization.

Staffing levels in other areas of the Library have been relatively flat or have increased. Budgeted staff for the community services team increased 50% between FY 2019 and FY 2023. The community services team provides services in the community and virtually. For example, staff go to schools, answer questions over the phone, or work with community groups to plan programs. However, some positions have not been filled. The number of employees budgeted to work in administration and management has risen slightly, though again not all positions are filled. The number of employees working on developing the Library's collection of books and materials has stayed fairly flat.

Additional employees assigned to the community services team may help make up for some of the loss of employees in neighborhood libraries. Employees in community services teams will take on some work for answering virtual reference questions and planning and coordinating programs, events, and community engagement, which may have been done previously by some employees assigned to neighborhood libraries.

However, the growth in employees in community services does not fully offset the losses in neighborhood libraries, especially when looking the number of actual employees. In terms of actual staffing, around the equivalent of 45 fewer employees were working in both neighborhood libraries and community services in June 2023, compared with June 2019. Some libraries were closed for construction in June 2023.

Before construction closures, the difference was still there, but smaller. In December 2022, the neighborhood libraries and community services teams together had the equivalent of around 25 fewer actual employees than they did in June 2019. All neighborhood libraries were open in early December.

Most of the net loss in staffing within neighborhood libraries was in the clerk position, which is being phased out as part of the reorganization. Employees in the clerk position assist library patrons and sort and shelve books, among other duties. Instead, new employees are hired as either library assistants or access services assistants, which share some overlapping duties with clerks.

Library leaders reported that they did not hire staff during the pandemic due to reduced services. As bond construction approached, they again held off on hiring staff for some open positions in anticipation of construction closures.

The Library saved money by paying fewer employees in recent years. These one-time savings were put into reserves for future use. Library leaders report that a top priority for reserves is to backfill any future gaps in funding for library core services. Over \$18M has also been designated for future building improvements.

### Employees report higher workloads, but fewer patrons are coming into neighborhood libraries

During our audit, employees reported having heavier workloads and feeling stressed by lower staffing levels. However, the way that staffing levels have affected workload and service is complicated by changes due to the pandemic.

When we talked to employees, they frequently brought up concerns with staffing levels. They reported that lower staffing levels affect their workload and stress level, as well as the services they can provide. They also reported feeling less safe due to the low staffing. For example, employees working at Central Library told us that they work alone at desks that used to have two employees. Desks can be isolated in areas of the library without other employees nearby, which feels unsafe if a patron acts threatening or an incident occurs.

At the same time, the nature of services has changed since the pandemic. In 2022, the number of patrons entering neighborhood libraries was about half of what it was before the pandemic, according to Library data. More patrons are also accessing materials digitally than before the pandemic.

This means that even with fewer employees, there are far fewer patrons per employee than in the past. However, the number of patrons per employee is an imperfect measure of workload. Some patrons require much more time and assistance than others. Responding to security incidents also adds work.



Book display during a ¡Día de los Niños y Día de los Libros! event in St. John's Library in 2017. Photo credit: Multnomah County Library

## Neighborhood libraries have closed at times due to low staffing

In 2022, the Library had to close neighborhood libraries at times due to insufficient staffing. When neighborhood libraries could not find enough staff to safely keep a neighborhood library open, they would close or go to door service. According to Library tracking, there were 44 days when this happened in the first six months of 2022.

This time period coincides with a surge in COVID-19 cases. COVID related absences contributed to the closures. However, closures have continued since then at a lower rate.

***Neighborhood libraries closed or limited services 44 times in six months.***

A change in internal guidelines may also have contributed to the closures. In early 2022, Library leaders increased the minimum number of employees needed to keep neighborhood libraries open for safety reasons. They made this change following pressure from the union that represents Library employees. Depending on the size of the neighborhood library, the new standards require between zero and four additional employees at a time. The policy also increased the required number of employees who are trained to be the person-in-charge. With staffing shortages, it could be difficult to meet this threshold at all times.

Furthermore, the Library has lost some flexibility to have employees fill in as needed. The pool of on-call employees decreased by half during the pandemic and has not rebounded. The Library had also discontinued a team of employees whose job it was to fill in for openings at different neighborhood libraries. Instead, the Library increased the budget to pay part-time or on-call employees to pick up additional shifts. However, that budget increase did not come with additional employees.

During construction, staffing levels are less of a concern since many employees have been reassigned. However, some neighborhood libraries have still had to close because they did not have enough employees trained and available to work as the person-in-charge. Furthermore, we heard that some neighborhood libraries are busier as they get patrons who would usually go to locations that are closed for construction.

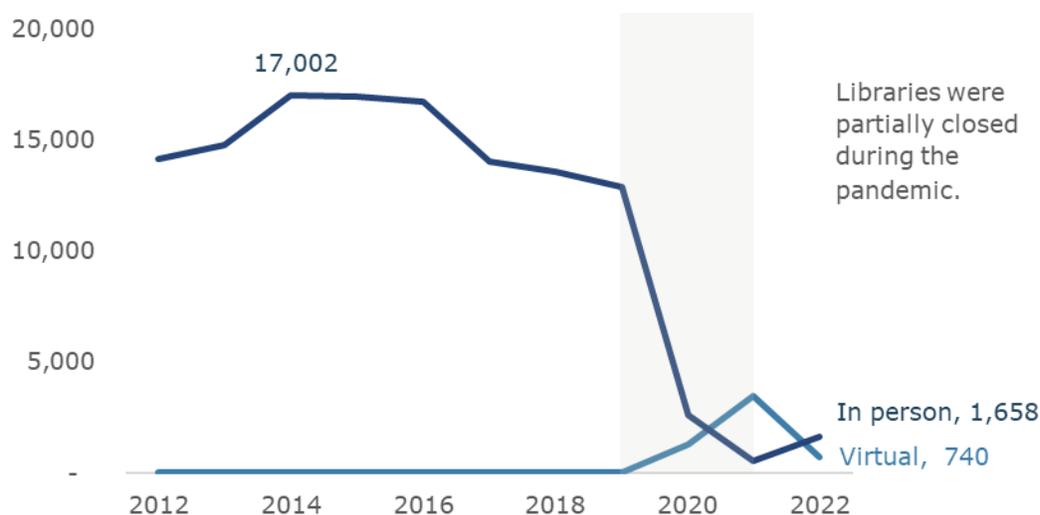
## Programming and community engagement have not ramped back up since the pandemic

The number of programs and events that the Library provided since the pandemic has been dramatically lower compared to before the pandemic started. As of December 2022, the Library was slow to reinstate programming. Programming includes things like weekly story times, computer training, or cultural events. Library leaders reports that they are in the process of reorganizing this type of work and applying equity tools to programming, which has

contributed to the delay. Staffing levels, disruptions from the pandemic, and a focus on prioritizing bond work, likely also contributed.

Programming decreased dramatically during the pandemic closures and has not yet rebounded

Number of programs or events across calendar years



Source: Library Google tracking sheets for reported programs. Programs include those hosted by the Library and events that Library employees participated in, but do not include home visits. As this data is reported by multiple Library employees, it may not be fully complete and should be considered as estimates. Data is as of Dec. 2022 and programs may have increased since then.

Lack of staffing probably contributed to reduced services. Library leaders prioritize keeping neighborhood libraries open over having employees provide or attending events or programs.

Employees reported frustration with this. For example, multiple employees told us about a Juneteenth Celebration that was cancelled at the last minute due to insufficient staffing. There were not enough employees to both work in neighborhood libraries and at the event. Employees reported that this caused harm and distrust with the Black and African American community.

A new community engagement team could help direct the strategy for programming, outreach, and engagement. The employees on this team will have a variety of cultural and language specializations to engage with different communities. The team intends to strategically shift to engaging with the community to determine what services the community needs most. However, at the time this report was written, the team was still being built up.

## Workforce equity concerns include unclear expectations and employees feeling undervalued and overworked

Library communications state that the Library values diversity, equity and inclusion principles. Library leaders have put this into action by hiring a more diverse workforce in recent years. This includes employees with cultural and language skills to provide community-specific services.

However, some employees with cultural and language skills, along with other employees, expressed frustrations of feeling undervalued and that they could not fully apply their skills. Also, Library leaders could provide clearer expectations to employees who may do community engagement or outreach on how much of this work they can or should do. Some employees with cultural and language skills may also have high workloads.

## We Speak Your Language and Cultural Advocates programs have grown

Over the last 20 years, the Library has increasingly built capacity to better serve communities of color and culture. It has done this by hiring employees with specific language and cultural skills. According to a report from the American Library Association, US libraries were historically built on a foundation of exclusion and whiteness. Intentionally hiring for language and cultural skills aims to push against that history and improve inclusion and access to information and resources for people of all cultural backgrounds.

The first Library positions with language requirements were started around 20 years ago by Rita Jimenez, with a grant program to expand services for the Spanish-speaking community. Since then, the program for bilingual and usually bicultural employees, called We Speak Your Language, has grown dramatically. The Library also added Black Cultural Library Advocates and an Indigenous Team that require cultural skills, but not language skills.

At the time this report was written, we identified 132 Library employees using cultural and language skills in their positions, based on them receiving the 4% pay premium for using those skills. We were able to identify 129 of those



Patrons watch a performance during an Asian American Heritage Month celebration at Holgate Library in 2018, before the pandemic. Photo credit: Multnomah County Library

employees as working in positions requiring specific cultural and language skills. The discrepancy may be due to data inaccuracies. It is also possible that some employees could receive bilingual pay if they regularly used language skills, even if they are not in a position designated as requiring those skills.

### Over 100 employees use cultural or language skills in their positions to serve specific communities

Communities served by number of filled positions, approximately

	<b>Filled Positions</b>
Hispanic/ Latino/ Spanish Speaking	51
Black/ African American	36
Chinese	15
Slavic/ Russian Speaking	8
Vietnamese	8
Indigenous	7
Somali	2
Multiple	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>129</b>

Source: Workday. Notes: There may be small inaccuracies in data, due to position data not being regularly updated. These should be considered approximations.

While the growth of these programs and increased employee diversity more broadly is positive, it has not been without challenges. In interviews, employees told us consistently that they valued these programs and the people working in them. But also told us that employees with language and cultural skills and Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) employees broadly would benefit from more support.

### Diversity, equity, and inclusion are stated Library priorities

Library leaders value hiring diverse employees who can connect with different communities in order to better provide equitable services. The Library website states that the Library “invests in specialized, culturally and linguistically relevant expertise and support to build active, trusting relationships...” At public presentations, Library leaders point to increased hiring of Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) employees as an achievement. Both the Multnomah County’s Workforce Equity Plan and the American Libraries Association advise reducing barriers to hiring, promoting, and retaining racially and culturally diverse employees.

Hiring employees with specific cultural and language skills is one of the Library’s strategies for improving equity and inclusion in service delivery. Hiring employees with cultural and language skills can also increase workforce diversity. However, it is important to note that not

all employees with specific cultural and language skills identify as BIPOC and not all BIPOC employees are paid to use cultural and language skills in their positions.

The Library has increased hiring of BIPOC employees in recent years. For example, of the employees hired in the last two years, 18% identify as Black or African American, 4% identify as American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 13% identify as Latino or Hispanic. Compare that with employees who have worked at the Library for over two years, of whom only 7% identify as Black or African American, 1% identify as American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 11% identify as Latino or Hispanic. The percent of employees identifying as African, Middle Eastern, Slavic, and two or more races also increased. One exception is employees who identify as Asian, who made up a smaller percent of recent hires (8%) than previous hires (9%).

More Black, Indigenous, and Latino/Hispanic employees have been hired to work in the Library in the past two years, than in years before

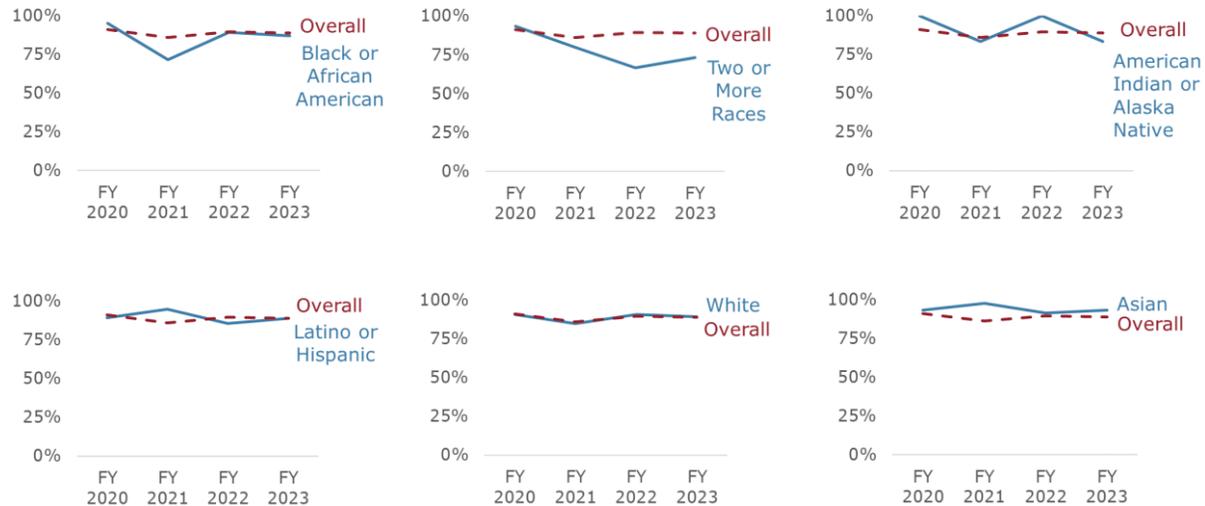


Source: Workday. Notes: Categories are based on categories in Workday data. Graphs show the distribution by race/ethnicity among previous hires - employees hired over 2 years ago, and recent hires - employees hired within the last two years. Gray band includes the following racial/ethnic categories: African, Asian, Middle Eastern, Slavic, two or more, White, and missing or declined to answer.

While diversity, equity, and inclusion are priorities of the Library, we also heard some concerns about equity from Library employees. Some employees told us that they believed there was not follow through on the Library’s priorities and equity was more talk than action. They noted instances when they perceived that staff were not valued or communities were not being well-served. For example, some staff questioned the decision to simultaneously close multiple neighborhood libraries that serve the Black community during construction work.

Library retention rates have been fairly stable, but suggest potential differences in experiences for employees based on race and ethnicity. Overall retention rates dipped slightly when layoffs were announced during the pandemic, but have mostly rebounded. Retention rates for Black or African American employees had a large drop during the pandemic. Retention rates for employees who identify as having two or more races are also below average. Retention rates show the percent of employees who stayed working at the Library for each fiscal year.

Overall retention rates are fairly stable, but dropped during the pandemic, especially for Black employees



Source: Auditor analysis of Workday data. Notes: Retention rate is calculated by taking the number of employees at the start of the fiscal year that were still employed at the end of the fiscal year, divided by the total number of employees at the start of the year. These calculations do not include temporary, on-call, or contracted employees. Employees who left the Library to work in other parts of the county or who switched to on-call work were considered no longer employed at the Library.

**Employees report that their expertise is not always used or valued**

Employees with cultural and language skills want their expertise to be valued and applied at work. Some employees we talked to felt that they were hired for their cultural and language skills but were not treated as experts or able to apply those skills in the community. This feeling extended more broadly to include employees without cultural and language skills. We heard from employees who felt like staff and middle managers in general were not often consulted on decisions or trusted to make decisions at their level. We also heard frustrations about a lack of opportunities for advancement, or perceptions that only some employees get opportunities to advance.

Additionally, library assistants are more likely than librarians to have cultural and language skills. Half of library assistants use cultural and language skills in their jobs, compared with 25% of librarians. Library assistants answer patrons’ questions and assist librarians with managing book collections and developing community programs.

The library assistant position has a lower pay scale and requires less technical education than the librarian position, which requires a master’s degree in library science. Library assistants are also more likely to be part-time positions than librarians. We heard that hiring librarians with

cultural and language skills is a challenge, since the candidate pool is smaller due to the education requirement.

### Library leaders could provide clearer expectations to employees with cultural and language skills

Library employees with cultural and language skills, and other employees who may do outreach, have unclear expectations about balancing outreach and program work with other duties in neighborhood libraries.

Library leaders states that they are changing the model for community engagement, outreach, and programs. Under the new model, there is a systemwide team to do planning and coordination work for community engagement.

Employees working in neighborhood libraries can still support these systemwide efforts, but their main responsibility is to perform their position's standard duties at their neighborhood library. Library leaders said that it is important to have employees with cultural and language skills that reflect the local community working in neighborhood libraries.

However, leaders have not made their expectations about outreach clear. The guidance about outreach on the Library's intranet is sparse. Position descriptions can describe the intended percent of work for outreach, among other activities, based on role. However, as described above, staffing constraints can affect employees' ability to do outreach and discretion is left to neighborhood library managers for approving outreach, which may not be consistent. Even with position descriptions, role expectations may not be clear, as they are not described in the guidance on the intranet.

Employees with cultural and language skills reported less role clarity in a survey we sent to all Library staff. In our staff survey, 54% of employees with cultural and language skills believe their roles and responsibilities are clear to them, compared to 67% of employees without cultural and language skills.

The tension between fulfilling standard duties in a neighborhood library and working on community engagement and outreach has led to some frustration.



People interact at a table displaying books during a Slavic Festival in 2016. Photo credit: Multnomah County Library

On one hand, we heard that some employees were frustrated that they could not spend more time working on outreach or programs with community members. For some employees it contributed to feelings of being undervalued.

On the other hand, we also heard that for those employees who were able to do more community focused work, that the workload of having multiple demands was high. Some employees spent a lot of time both meeting their standard work expectations, like shelving books or answering patrons' questions, and planning and doing outreach activities or providing input into Library initiatives.

Demands may be higher for some employees in library assistant positions. According to a survey we conducted among Library employees, library assistants using cultural or language skills reported higher workloads than library assistants in positions that did not require these skills. They also reported spending more time on community outreach.

Additionally, more responsibility may fall to the library assistants, if they do not have a librarian to assist. At the time this report was written, there were no librarian positions with Indigenous, Slavic/Russian, or Somali cultural and language skills requirements, while there are library assistant positions that require those skills.

## Library leaders have an opportunity to address employee concerns when planning for fully reopening after construction

In the spring of 2023, Library leaders announced an initiative that includes planning for organizational staffing once construction work is complete and neighborhood libraries fully reopen. As planning moves forward, leaders should consider the issues identified in this report.

Planning will help ensure that the Library can provide its core services to the public. The Library initially estimated that construction for new and renovated neighborhood libraries will be completed by fall 2025. That leaves less than two years



Central Library closed for construction in 2023.  
Photo credit: Multnomah County Auditor's Office

to plan, budget, hire, and train any additional staff that will be needed.

Library leaders have an opportunity with the current construction closures to proactively plan for future Library operations and address employees' concerns.

### Planning for the future should address issues in this report and ensure that core services will be delivered

Library leaders have announced an initiative to plan for future staffing. They state they will form a team to look at staffing in new spaces. They state that this initiative will also link with other planning work they are already doing.

As Library leaders move forward with future planning, they should address the issues raised in this report. These issues include having sufficient staff to provide services and meet security concerns. Leaders should also clarify the work expectations for employees with cultural and language skills and plan for balanced workloads.

We also heard suggestions that the distribution of staff with languages and culture skills could be reviewed or expanded. For example, an employee suggested having a designation and pay premium for LGBTQ+ cultural skills at the Library. Another employee said that the number of employees with Vietnamese and Russian language skills have not increased in many years. According to the Library's strategic plan, leaders are planning to do a review of language and cultural services.

### Trauma-informed internal communication could help rebuild trust

Throughout our audit, we consistently heard a desire from employees for better communication and more transparent decision-making. Library leaders already communicate extensively internally, however there is still a disconnect with employees.

Trust between Library leaders and employees was damaged when leaders announced layoffs in 2020. For some employees, nothing short of all new leadership could repair that broken trust. Other employees would like to move on as an organization. However, when communication or decision-making falls short of expectations, it can become further evidence to employees of the disconnect between leaders and staff.

To rebuild trust, support employees in a trauma-informed manner, and facilitate organizational change, Library leaders should strive to continually improve transparency and clarity in communications and decision-making. Multnomah County strives to be a trauma-informed work place. Many Library employees feel they have experienced trauma in their workplace due

to security issues, the pandemic, and the threat of layoffs. Transparent communication and involving people in decisions are important principles of trauma-informed practices. Additionally, internal communication is a critical component of change management. As the Library undergoes organizational change, communication is even more important.

Library leaders do already communicate extensively internally. Updates on various changes are posted on the intranet and communicated through emails. The Library also hosts webinars about once a month for presenters to share about different projects and events in the Library. And leaders have held listening sessions to gather staff feedback on major initiatives.

Yet there is still a large disconnect between Library employees and Library leaders. Employees feel like when they can give input they are not listened to. They often told us that they would like to see more, clearer, and earlier communication. Employees said they were often surprised by decisions and did not understand the rationale for them. For example, some employees were surprised when Library leaders announced that some neighborhood libraries would no longer have county employees providing security but would switch to contracted security. Leaders did not explain why they decided to switch and some employees said they did not understand or agree with the decision.

During the course of our audit, we saw examples of thorough communication and communication that was incomplete. For example, after an assault on an employee at the Kenton Library, managers sent out multiple emails to all employees. However, when a patron hid in the Central Library building after hours with a large knife, leaders did not send an email to all staff. They only sent an email to Central Library employees. The lack of communication with all employees creates an environment where rumors could spread and staff can feel that leaders were withholding important information from them.

According to the Society of Human Resource Managers and the Government Communications Service (UK), good communication is critical for change management. These sources state that internal communications should be through multiple methods and from multiple sources. Leaders should allow employees to explore the implications of changes. Leaders should listen to employees to identify misunderstandings and respond to concerns. They should allow time for messages to sink in, be honest about the reasons behind changes, involve middle managers, and allow opportunities for face to face discussions.

While Library leaders already employ some of these strategies, they could be more consistent. They could also communicate more clearly by using more direct and plain language. Refining how to clearly and authentically communicate about the important changes that affect employees the most would benefit the whole Library system.

## Recommendations

We recommend that Library leaders:

By January 1, 2024

1. Implement corrective actions and processes to ensure safety committees are meeting OSHA standards and champion them as a place to address security issues.
2. Coordinate with the County Security Program to complete a Workplace Violence Threat Assessment and Workplace Violence Prevention Plan and communicate the results to all employees.

By June 1, 2024

3. Create a plan for continuous evaluation of the safety and security program, including:
  - a. Evaluating security-related trainings, informed by staff feedback.
  - b. Developing a process to ensure all public facing staff have taken trainings and get refreshers.
  - c. Implementing an incident reporting process that includes data analysis of trends and identifying and documenting corrective actions.
4. Revise post-incident protocols to provide more detail, particularly around supporting staff and debriefing, providing guidance on serious but not “critical” incidents, as well as allowing more decision-making at the neighborhood library level.
5. Communicate to all staff after serious incidents and communicate summaries of incidents and trends.
6. Communicate the vision for outreach and engagement to all staff, including expectations on community outreach for staff working in neighborhood libraries.
7. Identify and document upcoming changes that will affect employees, which could benefit from focused internal communications.
  - a. For each change identified, implement a communications strategy that identifies multiple methods of communication, involves an element of staff input, and explains the reasons behind changes.
8. Develop and communicate a plan for the leadership team to regularly spend time onsite in neighborhood libraries.

By October 1, 2024:

9. Develop a staffing plan for when all construction is complete. In line with the findings in this audit, the staffing plan should solicit employee input during development and address:
  - a. Security, examining staffing for security and social work personnel including coverage on evenings and weekends.
  - b. Adapting the person-in-charge model to meet union agreements.
  - c. Staffing for neighborhood libraries, so they stay open.
  - d. Community engagement, so programs, outreach, events and engagement can increase, while addressing employee concerns around workload and opportunities.
  - e. Cultural and language skill allocation by position and location.
  - f. Allowing time to hire for hard to fill positions.
  
10. Communicate the staffing plan to Library employees and present to Board of County Commissioners both before all buildings fully reopen and after reopening. Request budget changes as needed to support the staffing plan.
  - g. Initial communication to staff and Board should occur by October 1, 2024. Follow up communication should occur by October 1, 2026.

## Objectives, Scope, & Methodology

The objectives of this audit were to:

- Describe the current security model, assess impacts on the safety environment, and identify improvements in safety and security.
- Identify structural staffing challenges that contribute to equity issues in the Library work environment.

To accomplish these objectives, we:

- Conducted 74 interviews, mostly with Library staff (37) and managers (25), many randomly selected to avoid bias, also sought out people based on expertise
- Performed five library site visits.
- Distributed and analyzed a library staff survey with 76% response rate
- Reviewed and analyzed documents, including incident reports and RSk-2 forms
- Researched OSHA guidance and other best practices
- Reviewed library policies, guidance, and documentation
- Analyzed Workday and Questica data to look at FTE and retention rates over time

The audit scope focused on FY 2022 and FY 2023.

For this audit, we analyzed HR data for the time period of FY19 – FY23 from Workday, the county's enterprise resource planning system and Questica, the county's budgeting system. We also analyzed data related to incident reports and programs at the Library. Incident report data is initially entered in Google forms, then moved to the Library's data system called Security Incident Reporting Database (SIR). Programming data is entered and retained in Google sheets, then uploaded to a data mart.

We assessed the reliability of data by (1) performing electronic testing for obvious errors in accuracy and completeness, (2) interviewing county officials knowledgeable about the data, (3) reviewing related documentation, and (4) worked closely with county officials to identify any data problems. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings, and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

## Appendix A. Employee Survey Results

### Summary

This appendix provides results from the Multnomah County Library employee survey. We conducted this survey to learn about Library employees' perceptions about workplace equity, staffing, and workplace safety and security. The anonymous survey was distributed to library employees in November 2022. We received 421 survey responses, about 76% of the Library's active employees at the time the survey was distributed.

We organized the survey into three sections: Workforce Equity and Staffing, Safety and Security, and Demographic Questions. The demographic questions included race and ethnicity, library work area, job classification, language and cultural skills and abilities designation (KSA), and types of interactions with the public. The survey also included optional short response questions.

### Survey Results are Representative of Library Workforce

Employee survey demographic results are overall representative of the Library workforce. We compared the Library workforce demographic data to the demographic data reported on the employee survey. For our analysis, we included represented, non-represented, limited duration, and on-call employees that were actively working at the Library at the time the survey was distributed. We found that there was less than a 5% difference in representation of BIPOC employees, job classifications, and employees with a cultural/language KSA designation.

There are possible areas where some demographic groups are underrepresented. White employees make up 62% of the Library's workforce and 55% of survey responses, a 7% difference. They may have also selected "Decline to Answer" for the race and ethnicity question, which made up 12% of the responses.

When looking at Library Work Areas, the work teams within the Library, there was some variation depending on how the Library workforce demographic data reports are downloaded. In addition, there were also some shifts in work teams during the Library's staffing reorganization initiative. We found that Location Services (67% of Library workforce and 57% of survey responses) and Administration and Management (15% of Library workforce and 4% of survey responses) may be slightly underrepresented. Alternatively, some employees may have also selected "Decline to Answer", which made up 14% of survey responses to this question.

## Workplace Equity and Staffing

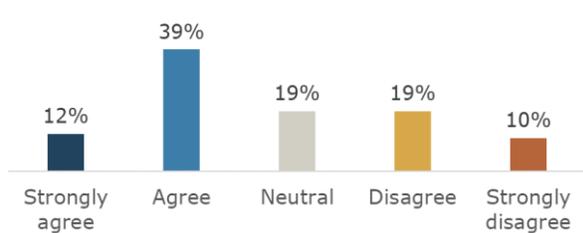
Overall, 51% of Library employees reported feeling supported in their role. Most Library employees responded that they believe the work they do is within their classification (56%), roles and responsibilities are clear to them (65%), and they have the tools they need to successfully do their job (63%).

When we asked about workload, about one in two Library employees (56%) report that they often or usually have more work tasks than they can accomplish during their work hours.

Staffing and career advancement emerged as areas of concern. About one in four Library employees (25%) responded that they agree or strongly agree that their primary work team is adequately staffed. Similarly, one in four Library employees (27%) reported that they have opportunities and support for career advancement.

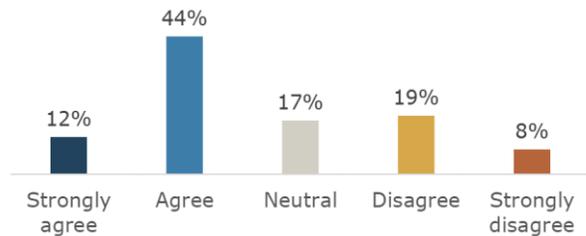
### Overall, I feel supported in my role

Responses: 420



### I believe that the work I do is within my job classification

Responses: 420



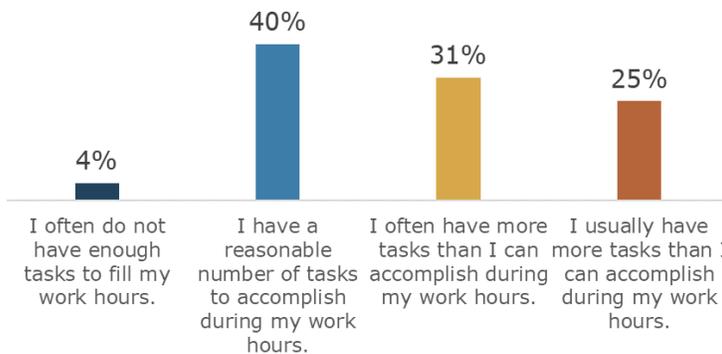
### When we analyzed responses to “Overall I feel supported in my role” by demographic groups, we found that:

- There were differences when we analyzed responses by Library Areas. Employees in Location Services showed the least agreement with feeling supported in their role (41% agree or strongly agree) and Administration and Management showed the highest agreement (94% agree or strongly agree).
- There were also differences based on classification. Employees in the following classifications showed agreement with feeling supported in their roles: Manager (69% agree or strongly agree) and Librarian (63% agree or strongly agree). Employees in the Library Safety Liaison (22% agree or strongly agree), Library Clerk (26% agree or

strongly agree), and Library Assistant (40% agree or strongly agree) classifications showed the least agreement with feeling supported in their role.

**Which of the following statements best describes your current workload?**

Responses: 419

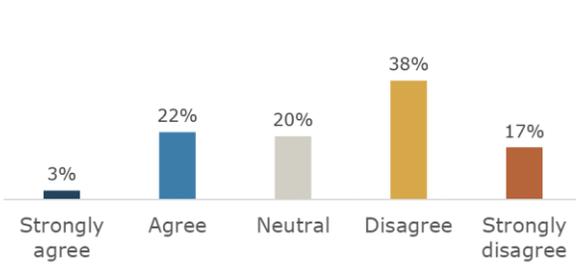


**When we analyzed responses to “Which of the following statements best describes your current workload?” by demographic groups, we found that:**

- Native American or Alaskan Native (67%) and Black/African American employees (63%) reported a slightly higher rate of often or usually having more tasks than they can accomplish, compared to 55% among White employees
- Among most Library Areas, responses were similar with about 56% employees reporting that they have more tasks than they can accomplish. However, this was slightly higher among Integrated Services employees, with 74% of Integrated Services employees reporting that they often or usually have more tasks than they can accomplish.

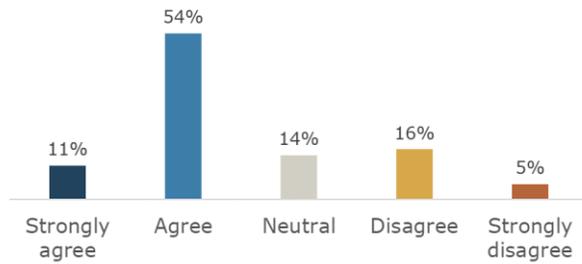
**My primary work team is adequately staffed.**

Responses: 418



**My role and responsibilities are clear to me.**

Responses: 420



**When we analyzed responses to “My primary work team is adequately staffed” by demographic groups, we found that:**

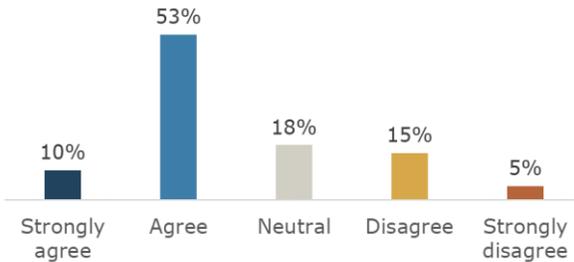
- There were some differences based on race and ethnicity. About 55% of White employees responded that they disagree or strongly disagree that their primary work team is adequately staffed. This was higher among employees that identify as African (75%), Asian (60%), and Black/African American (74%)
- There were also some differences among Library Areas. Most Location Services (58%) and Community Services (57%) employees disagreed or strongly disagreed that their primary work team is adequately staffed, compared to 22% disagreement among Administration and Management employees.

**When we analyzed responses to “My role and responsibilities are clear to me” by demographic groups, we found that:**

- There were some differences when we looked by whether employees have a cultural or language KSA designation attached to their role. About 54% of employees with a cultural or language KSA believe their roles and responsibilities are clear to them, compared to 67% of employees that do not have a KSA attached to their role.

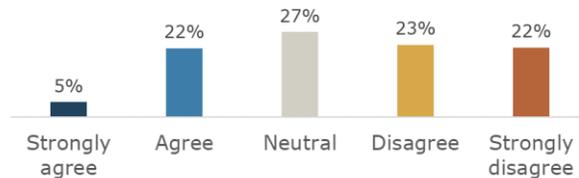
**I have the tools I need to successfully do my job.**

Responses: 419



**I have opportunities and support for career advancement.**

Responses: 420



**When we analyzed responses to “I have the tools I need to successfully do my job.” by demographic groups, we found that:**

- There were some differences based on Library Area. About 54% of Location Services employees agree or strongly agree to having the tools they need, compared to 70 agreement among employees in Community Services, 74% agreement among employees in Integrated Services, and 100% agreement among Administration and Management employees.

**When we analyzed responses to “I have opportunities and support for career advancement.” by demographic groups, we found that:**

- There were some differences by race and ethnicity. There was higher agreement with this statement among Latino (41%) and Native American or Alaskan Native (56%) employees, though still under 50% for nearly all racial and ethnic groups.
- This was consistent with employees with language and cultural KSA designations. About 41% of employees with a language and cultural KSAs report they have opportunities for advancement, compared to 23% of non-KSA employees. There was wide variation when we looked by specific KSAs. This may indicate that the KSA designation provides career advancement opportunities, though not consistently among different KSA designations.

**What is one systemic or structural change that you think the Library could implement to improve morale and/or trust?**

There were 314 responses to this question. The top themes were:

- Improving transparency, communication, and decision making (41%)
- Accountability of leadership for their decisions or changing leadership (32%)

- More onsite presence of middle or upper management at branches. (16%)
- Supporting and valuing staff or providing better pay or job opportunities. (20%)
- Acknowledging safety issues. (13%)

**Quotes from the survey include:**

- “Transparency, and improved communication. As a frontline staff member, I do not feel that I am given enough information in a timely manner to do my job or to trust that administrators have my, my colleagues, or our patron's best interests at heart.”
- “New leadership is my number one recommendation...”
- “Have members of EMT [Executive Management Team] actually visit and work at all the branches on a regular, ongoing basis.... A lot of the distrust and low morale is because those of us who work on the front lines feel as though EMT doesn't understand the reality of the work we do as they never experience it. They are the ones that make the decisions, yet don't participate in the actual day to day work of those on the front lines.”
- “Most of us who work on the ground are severely underpaid for the work we do, we are acting as therapists and social workers often in this role. We are fatigued and not supported. Staff of color should have additional time off to supplement for the violences we face. Take us seriously, value us genuinely...”
- “Better communication around safety incidents including steps taken by the Library to support staff and patrons that were affected by a security incident in the library...”

## Safety and Security

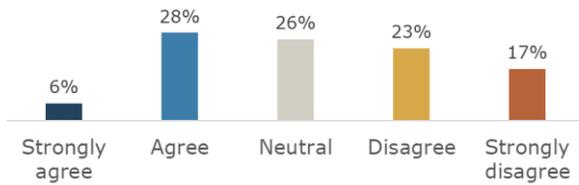
Overall, about 34% of Library employees responded that they agreed or strongly agreed that they feel safe at work. Employees were mixed about security measures. This section had higher neutral responses compared to other parts of the employee survey.

For example, when we asked about safety and security trainings, employee responses were nearly evenly split. About one in three employees (32%) of employees agree or strongly agree that the training they receive is adequate for their role, one in three (31%) are neutral, and the remaining (38%) disagree or strongly disagree.

Most employees reported that they believe that their colleagues (84%) and manager (60%) would support them after a security incident. This may indicate that managers and peers may serve as a source of support for employees.

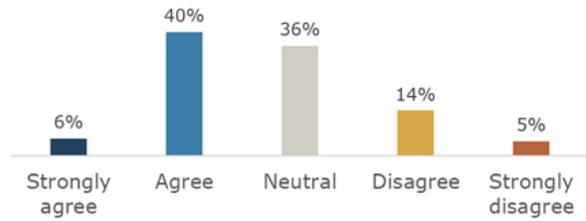
**I feel safe at work.**

Responses: 378\*



**If a security incident were to occur at work, I would know what to do.**

Responses: 414



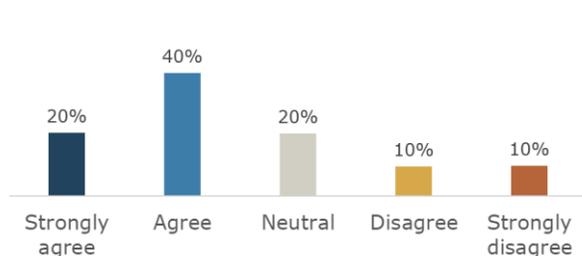
\* "N/A" responses were not included in this graph.

**When we analyzed responses to "I feel safe at work." by demographic groups, we found that:**

- These were some differences by race and ethnicity. About 12% of Asian employees and 26% of Black/African American employees responded that they agree or strongly agree with feeling safe at work, compared to 34% of White employees.
- When we looked by classification, about 51% of Managers reported feeling safe, compared to 16% of Library Assistants and 31% of Library Access Service Assistants.

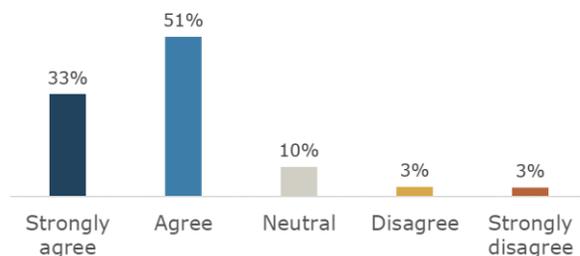
**I believe that my manager would support me after a security incident.**

Responses: 415



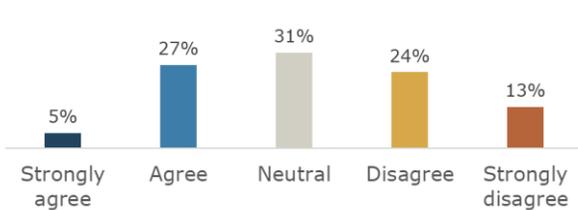
**I believe that my colleagues would support me during a security incident.**

Responses: 416



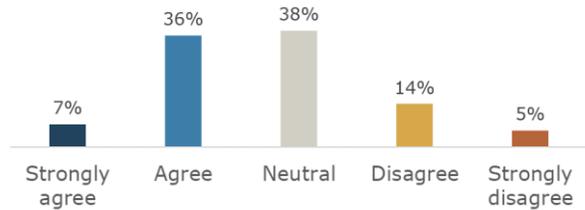
**The safety and security training the Library has provided me is sufficient for my role.**

Responses: 414



**I believe that incident reports accurately reflect what happened during security incidents.**

Responses: 410



**When we analyzed responses to “The safety and security training the Library has provided me is sufficient for my role” by demographic groups, we found that:**

- There were differences based on classification. About 22% of Library Safety Liaisons agreed or strongly agreed that the safety and security training is sufficient for their role, while 56% disagree, and 22% responded as neutral.
- The lowest agreement to the statement was among Library Assistants (18% agree or strongly agree) The highest agreement was among Managers (57% agree or strongly agree).

**What would help you feel safer at work?**

There were 284 respondents that left a response to this question. The top themes were:

- Increasing onsite professional security (52%)
- Having adequate staffing (13%)
- Executive leadership taking security more seriously and improving their response (13%)
- Improving security training (11%)

**Quotes from the survey include:**

- “To have well trained special professional staff responsible for security”
- “I do not believe I should be required to be the PIC [person in charge] in my role. I would feel safer if managers and people who want to be in security roles take leads on incidents.”
- “More involved and responsive management and sufficient staffing.”

- "...examining what went wrong in a situation, what could be done better? Does staff need trauma counseling and support? Time off to process event? And openness as to what occurred and what lessons we learned. Also, I would like acknowledgement that things need to change."
- "...Would appreciate more training on what we can and cannot do when a patron turns violent--beyond calling 911--which rarely (if ever) come."

## Appendix B: Early Communication about Safety Committees

### Letter on Safety Committees sent May 24, 2023

# Multnomah County Auditor's Office



Dani Bernstein  
Raymond De Silva  
Nicole Dewees  
Michelle Greene  
Mandi Hood  
Annamarie McNiel  
Rosalie Roberts  
Marc Rose  
Sura Sumareh  
Mark Ulanowicz  
Mical Yohannes  
Caroline Zavitkovski

Date: May 24, 2023

To: Jessica Vega Pederson, Multnomah County Chair and Library District Board Chair  
Vailey Oehlke, Library Director

From: Nicole Dewees, Principal Management Auditor  
Caroline Zavitkovski, Principal Management Auditor  
Mical Yohannes, Management Auditor

RE: Early communication about Library safety committee risks

Dear Chair Vega Pederson and Director Oehlke,

Government auditing standards direct our office to communicate with management and those charged with governance when we see circumstances that require prompt corrective action.

Therefore, we are using this letter to alert you to our concerns that the Library's four safety committees may not be meeting some Oregon OSHA requirements. In particular, we are concerned about whether:

- Safety committees are meeting frequently enough and are active
- Meeting minutes are available to employees
- Inspections are occurring and being documented
- Members are receiving training
- The Neighborhood Library Safety Committee is receiving annual reviews

We observed these risks during a performance audit of the Library. We are writing this letter now, rather than waiting until we release our audit report, so you can take prompt action to prevent further possible occurrences of noncompliance.

We examined documentation and saw that some aspects of safety committees may be out of compliance with Oregon OSHA rules under OAR 437-001-0765. Please note that we are not making determinations about compliance. Rather, we are highlighting areas at risk of being out of compliance.

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Multnomah County Auditor's Office  
501 SE Hawthorne Blvd., Room 601 Portland, OR 97214 503-988-3320  
mult.auditor@multco.us multco.us/auditor

To report suspected fraud, waste, or misuse of County government resources, call 888-289-6839 or visit [goodgov.com](https://www.goodgov.com).

We also examined the Library's policies and processes and determined that they were not sufficient to ensure that safety committees are meeting Oregon OSHA rules.

We describe the areas at risk of noncompliance in more detail on the following pages. We are also attaching the Oregon Administrative Rules that describes requirements of safety committees. Oregon OSHA requirements should be considered the minimum steps that organizations take to promote safety.

### Corrective action

We encountered these risks as part of a performance audit currently underway at the Library. We also will be reporting on this matter in our audit report. If Library managers provide us with verification of corrective steps they have taken, prior to our report completion, we will incorporate that into our audit report. We encourage Library managers to both address immediate issues and implement processes to prevent similar issues from arising in the future.

Thank you for taking the time to read this communication and taking our concerns seriously. Please let us know if you have any questions.

Thank you,

Nicole Dewees, MBA, CIA  
Principal Management Auditor

Caroline Zavitkovski, MPA, CIA  
Principal Management Auditor

Mical Yohannes  
Management Auditor

CC:

Sharon Meieran, Multnomah County  
Commissioner and Library District Board,  
District 1

Lori Stegmann, Multnomah County  
Commissioner and Library District Board,  
District 4

Susheela Jayapal, Multnomah County  
Commissioner and Library District Board,  
District 2

Serena Cruz, County Chief Operating  
Officer

Annie Lewis, Deputy Director, Library

Diane Rosenbaum, Multnomah County  
Commissioner and Library District Board,  
District 3

Michelle Cross, Risk Services Manager

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## Potential areas of non-compliance

### The Neighborhood Library Safety Committee meets quarterly instead of monthly

OR-OSHA Rule (5): Your safety committee must meet on company time as follows:

- Quarterly in situations where employees do mostly office work.
- Monthly for all other situations (except the months when quarterly worksite inspections are performed).

The Neighborhood Library Safety Committee meets quarterly. Under Oregon OSHA rules, safety committees must meet monthly, unless employees do mostly office work. Since neighborhood libraries are not office environments, the Neighborhood Library Safety Committee should be meeting monthly. We spoke with an Oregon OSHA representative, who clearly stated that libraries would not fall under the office work category.

However, according to representatives from Risk Management and the Library, Oregon OSHA has previously approved the Library branches' approach to meet quarterly. This has created a lack of clarity. We are unclear how long it has been since Oregon OSHA last approved this approach. A Library representative said that Oregon OSHA last reviewed this arrangement in 2013 or possibly more recently. Meeting minutes said that Oregon OSHA last reviewed the approach in 2006.

Meeting minutes also indicate that in June 2022 a Risk Management representative raised the point that Oregon OSHA typically requires monthly meetings and said that Risk Management would look into whether the quarterly meetings are still adequate.

In a recent email, a Risk Management representative said that monthly meetings would be required if more than half of library branch workers do work other than office work. A Library manager told us that the Library is willing to change its approach to match Risk Management's guidance.

## The Central Library Safety Committee has low attendance and little documentation

OR-OSHA rule (6): You must keep written records of each safety committee meeting for three years that include:

- Names of attendees.
- Meeting date.
- All safety and health issues discussed, including tools, equipment, work environment, and work practice hazards.
- Recommendations for corrective action and a reasonable date by which management agrees to respond.
- Person responsible for follow up on any recommended corrective actions.
- All reports, evaluations, and recommendations made by the committee

OR-OSHA rule (8) excerpt: Your safety committee must evaluate all accident and incident investigations and make recommendations for ways to prevent similar events from occurring.

OR-OSHA rule (2): If you have 20 or fewer employees you must have at least 2 members. If you have more than 20 employees you must have at least 4 members.

OR-OSHA Rule (5): Your safety committee must meet on company time as follows:

- Quarterly in situations where employees do mostly office work.
- Monthly for all other situations (except the months when quarterly worksite inspections are performed).

The meeting minutes for the Central Library Safety Committee indicate low participation and little documentation of the discussion of safety and health issues. This is despite Central being the Library location with the highest number of incidents. Oregon OSHA rules state that meeting minutes should include notes on the safety and health issues discussed and as well as recommendations for corrective action.

The Central Library Safety Committee notes are sparse. The committee uses a template that is often not filled in. There is a spot on the template to discuss accident reports. This section has been filled in with descriptions of discussions only three times since August 2021. It is possible that the committee is discussing accident reports without documenting them. The committee was also missing meeting minutes altogether for two months in the last year. It is possible that these were missed due to quarterly inspections, as allowed by Oregon OSHA rules. However, that was not documented.

Membership in the Central Library Safety Committee may also be at risk of falling below the required four members. Since August 2021, attendance at the Central Library Safety Committee has ranged from 1 to 4 members, not counting a liaison from Risk Management. Recent meeting minutes document that Risk Management recommended checking if members are active and recruiting new members. They also note that the member list on the intranet is out of date.

## The Macadam and Pettygrove (formerly Isom) Safety Committee is missing meeting documentation for five of the last 12 months

OR-OSHA rule (6): You must keep written records of each safety committee meeting for three years that include:

- Names of attendees.
- Meeting date.
- All safety and health issues discussed, including tools, equipment, work environment, and work practice hazards.
- Recommendations for corrective action and a reasonable date by which management agrees to respond.
- Person responsible for follow up on any recommended corrective actions.
- All reports, evaluations, and recommendations made by the committee

OR-OSHA Rule (5): Your safety committee must meet on company time as follows:

- Quarterly in situations where employees do mostly office work.
- Monthly for all other situations (except the months when quarterly worksite inspections are performed).

The Macadam and Pettygrove Safety Committee is slated to meet monthly. In the last year, five out of 12 months are missing meeting minutes. It is possible that some of these were missed due to quarterly inspections, as allowed by Oregon OSHA rules. However, that was not documented. Library representatives told us that this safety committee had either met or did a quarterly inspection every month in the last year, but some minutes were missing. We could not verify through documented meeting minutes or documented inspections that either a meeting or inspection occurred in those five months.

## Library Administration at Lloyd may not be meeting or represented on a safety committee

OR-OSHA Rule (4) excerpt: Your safety committee members must represent major activities of your business.

OR-OSHA Rule (5): Your safety committee must meet on company time as follows:

- Quarterly in situations where employees do mostly office work.
- Monthly for all other situations (except the months when quarterly worksite inspections are performed).

As far as we can tell, Library Administration at Lloyd Corporate Plaza is not currently represented on a safety committee. The Library Administration Safety Committee used to meet jointly with the Environmental Health Division of the Health Department. Library Administration is in the same building complex as Environmental Health. Different groups in the same building may meet together under Oregon OSHA rules.

However, the August 2022 meeting minutes state that the Library Administration may be pulling out of the joint Safety Committee. Library Administration does not appear to have been involved in this joint Safety Committee in recent months. The issues described in the meeting minutes are also specific to Environmental Health. However, Library Administration has not yet created its own new safety committee.

## Meeting minutes had not been posted to the intranet until our request, probably since 2020

OR-OSHA rule (8) excerpt: Your safety committee must make safety committee meeting minutes available for all employees to review.

Oregon OSHA rules require that safety committees make meeting minutes available for all employees to review. When we first looked for safety committee meeting minutes on the Library intranet, it looked like the websites had not been updated with minutes since 2020. Therefore, employees may not have had ready access to meeting minutes for several years.

We are not certain what Oregon OSHA's exact expectations are for making meeting minutes available to employees. However, the Library's Workplace Injury and Illness Prevention Plan states that safety committees should post meeting minutes to the intranet and that had been the Library's prior practice. After we requested meeting minutes, Library staff updated the intranet pages.

## Not all required inspections are documented

OR-OSHA rule (7): Your safety committee must establish procedures for conducting workplace safety and health inspections. Persons trained in hazard identification must conduct inspections as follows:

<b>Where</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>
Primary fixed locations	Employer and employee representatives	Quarterly
Office environments	Employer and employee representatives	Quarterly

Oregon OSHA requires quarterly workplace safety and health inspections. At the Library, each safety committee coordinates inspections for the locations covered under their safety committee. This means that for the Neighborhood Libraries Safety Committee there should be 18 inspections each quarter, for each neighborhood branch. Library representatives provided documentation to us for around half of the required quarterly inspections that should have occurred since August 2021. This is across all four safety committees. For the quarters missing documentation, we are not clear whether inspections occurred and were not tracked or whether they did not occur at all.

## Some safety committee members may not have completed training requirements

- OR-OSHA Rule (4) excerpt: Your safety committee members must
- Have training in the principles of accident and incident investigations for use in evaluating those events.
  - Have training in hazard identification.

To comply with Oregon OSHA training requirements, the County has created three trainings for Safety Committee members: 1) Safety Committee Roles and Responsibilities, 2) Hazard Identification, and 3) Accident and Incident Analysis. According to our analysis, only about half of safety committee members have taken all three trainings.

To evaluate whether these trainings were taken, we reviewed the list of trainings completed by Safety Committee member using Workday Learning reports. The list of Safety Committee members was based on the attendees included in the three most recent meeting minutes for the Neighborhood Libraries, Central, and Macadam/Pettygrove Safety Committees. It is possible that some members may have taken trainings before Workday was implemented in 2019.

## The Neighborhood Libraries Safety Committee is missing some annual comprehensive reviews

OR-OSHA rule (9) excerpt: If you rely on a centralized committee, you must also have a written safety and health policy that includes an annual written comprehensive review of the committees' activities to determine effectiveness.

The Neighborhood Libraries Safety Committee is made up of 18 locations, all of the library branches except Central. This is allowed under Oregon OSHA rules but has additional requirements. One of the requirements is an annual comprehensive review. This committee is missing documentation for annual comprehensive reviews for 2020 and 2021. While the pandemic affected branch operations during this time, some staff were still in the buildings.

### Additional observations

We have additional observations that also warrant examination. First, we noted above that the minutes for Central were sparse. While the other committees had more robust minutes, we found little documentation in any of the committee's minutes of recommendations for corrective action.

Second, we have heard varying perspectives on how safety committees should approach discussing security issues. We understand that, to the extent that security issues affect employee safety and health, they are covered under Oregon OSHA safety laws. Library leaders could provide additional clarity on the safety committee's role for addressing security issues.

Third, another requirement of having a centralized committee is to have a written policy. The Library does have a Workplace Injury and Illness Prevention Plan. This plan appears to address the topics that Oregon OSHA requires. However, the plan is not easy to find on the Library intranet. Furthermore, it does not appear that the plan has been updated in 10 years.

### Internal controls assessment

We assessed the library's internal controls<sup>1</sup> to ensure that safety committees are meeting Oregon OSHA standards. The Library's Workplace Injury and Illness Prevention Plan states that a manager in Library Facilities will monitor safety committee meeting minutes and inspections and notify the committees if they are not meeting frequently enough. Otherwise, responsibilities fall to safety committees, with no other oversight or controls in place. Based on this assessment and the risk areas noted above, we believe that internal controls are not sufficient to ensure compliance with Oregon OSHA rules for safety committees and should be strengthened.

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<sup>1</sup> Internal control is comprised of processes that management should use to run operations efficiently and effectively, report reliable information about its operations, and comply with applicable laws and regulations.

## Library's response to early communication

# Memo

Date: 6/16/2023  
To: Caroline Zavitkovski, Principal Management Auditor; Mical Yohannes,  
Management Auditor  
From: Vailey Oehlke, Director of Libraries

**RE: Library OR-OSHA update**

---

Thank you for your May 24th, 2023, letter outlining areas where the library could better meet the standards set out by Oregon Occupational Safety and Health (OR-OSHA) for required safety meetings.

We would like to provide you with an update on our progress in addressing the findings in your letter:

- The library and Risk Management have agreed on a new structure and approach for library location safety committee meetings. After follow-up with our Risk Management partners, the library has committed to establishing monthly region-specific centralized safety committees.

Each region of the system (North/Northeast, Central, West/South, Mid-County, and East County) will hold a monthly centralized safety committee meeting. By establishing region-specific committees, we can better align this work with our existing management structures and clarify responsibility and internal controls. The existing safety and health policy will be updated as a part of this reorganization.

The groundwork to create new and additional safety committees will take place in June and July of 2023. We anticipate that the initial monthly meetings will be in August. Once membership has been established, the participant roster will be shared with the library's Learning & Organizational Development team to initiate and track required WorkDay training.

- The library has identified two employees in the Lloyd Administration work group who will represent the library at the joint safety committee with Environmental Health. These employees have been added to the meeting invites and google groups for this committee, and are scheduled to attend the next monthly meeting on 7/26/2023.
- Available meeting minutes and reports have been compiled and posted to the Library Commons, in accordance with OR-OSHA requirements. Library leadership

has reemphasized the importance of maintaining and posting meeting minutes and inspection documentation with safety committee support staff. Documentation regarding internal controls will be developed as part of the regional centralized safety committee approach.

Like many organizations, we are finding that systems and processes in place prior to the pandemic are ripe for fine-tuning. For the library system, this has been further complicated by the disruption the bond program has had on our regular operations. We thank you for your review, and for the opportunity to update you on our progress.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Vailey Oehlke".

Vailey Oehlke  
Director of Libraries

## Audit Staff

Nicole Dewees, Audit Director

Caroline Zavitkovski, Audit Director

Mical Yohannes, Management Auditor

## Response Letter



## **Jessica Vega Pederson** **Multnomah County Chair**

501 SE Hawthorne Blvd., Suite 600  
Portland, Oregon 97214  
Phone: (503) 988-3308  
Email: [mult.chair@multco.us](mailto:mult.chair@multco.us)

*December 4, 2023*

Nicole Dewees, MBA, CIA  
Multnomah County Auditor's Office  
501 SE Hawthorne Blvd., Room 601  
Portland, OR 97214

Dear Audit Director Dewees,

We have reviewed the library performance audit and welcome this opportunity to acknowledge, reflect, and take action on the recommendations included therein.

As noted in the audit document, more than three years have passed since the 2020 Employee Experiences During the Pandemic Survey. It's clear that the library's decisions and actions during the early part of the pandemic have had lasting effects on employees' feelings, confidence in leadership and morale. The resulting disruptions, due in large part to contract-mandated bumping and reassignments—but also the formation of new work teams and a larger public services reorganization—were impactful and difficult for many library workers.

The audit also notes the widespread impacts of an unprecedented and ambitious voter-approved effort to build, expand and modernize library spaces. Ultimately this work will allow the library to better serve its community in new ways, but its timing and scope contribute to overall disruptive conditions and impacts morale.

At the same time, public service roles have become more difficult everywhere we look: from other county services like public health, to retail to public education. Myriad factors contribute to this, including the housing crisis and systemic issues of inadequate behavioral health and substance use resources. These conditions affect public libraries all over, particularly ones in urban settings with similar community needs.

Prior to the pandemic and continuing today, library leadership is leading a yearslong effort to advance its service model to account for changing demographics, emerging technologies and evolving patron needs. This is arguably the most transformative period in the 159-year history of Multnomah County Library.

These factors converge to create a challenging and dynamic set of circumstances to address simultaneously. During my time as District 3 Commissioner and now, as Multnomah County Chair, I have been in conversation with library leadership about these challenges and the library's effort to respond and improve. I know there are thoughtful and meaningful changes happening, but solutions to complex problems take time, concerted effort and resources. I am grateful for the opportunity to share some facts and details about the library's work and future direction to address the issues raised in this audit.

I also want to acknowledge the real and serious concerns about safety expressed by library employees, the desire they expressed for improved communication about security issues and decision making, overall workload issues, and clearer direction, particularly around culturally-specific roles.

The library and its county partners are taking action. Together, the actions and changes the library is working toward represent a security model that brings a variety of resources and expertise to meet complex challenges, while continuing to center equity and underserved communities.

Over a long period of time, the library has made a series of conscious decisions to focus on serving the people and communities experiencing the most barriers and shifting services and resources to support those priorities. All of this can be disruptive and uncomfortable.

It's worth noting the substantial amount of effort and resources the library has already committed to safety and security. Some of the proactive measures to highlight include:

#### Training

- Ongoing staff training, including general safety awareness and extensive Person in Charge (PIC) training
- Trauma-informed critical incident response training
- Equity training for contracted security personnel
- Creating and hiring a position focused specifically on security training

#### Staffing

- Annual increases of budgeted security resources (FY 2024 budgeted security spending at \$3.5M reflects a 70% increase since FY 19)
- Future Staffing model (detail below)
- Creating new Safety Coordinator positions
- Resources to engage with vulnerable populations (e.g. a new Houseless Services Coordinator position, social workers with increased hours)

#### Facilities changes

- Creating fewer hidden areas and improving sightlines in existing library locations
- New building design: lower stack heights, better sightlines
- Security cameras: Adding new cameras, replacement of older cameras

#### External security consulting and research

- Completed independent security assessment for each new building
- Completed independent security assessment for Central Library
- Library Safety and Security Literature Review

## Processes

- Extensive procedures and guidelines for responding to specific types of security incidents
- Multnomah County Workplace Security support
- An Executive Management Team (EMT) PIC model for critical 24/7 incident response and support
- Equity-focused resources, including a comprehensive equity rules review and a Protected Identities Decompression Space; staff and managers of color groups
- Communication protocols for critical incidents

The library and the Office of the Multnomah County Chair welcome the following recommendations. Our responses and additional information are included. We agree that further steps and resources will complement the actions the library has already undertaken. We are committed to a course of continuous improvement and we look forward to revisiting the recommendations and the library's progress toward implementing them in future conversations before the Board of County Commissioners.

### **Recommendation 1**

*Implement corrective actions and processes to ensure safety committees are meeting OSHA standards and champion them as a place to address security issues.*

The library has implemented this recommendation as outlined. We appreciate that you identified gaps in compliance. As detailed in documentation provided as part of this audit process, the library worked to resolve these issues with corrective action earlier this year when they were identified during the audit process.

As part of this work, the library created clearer lines of accountability to Regional Managers by restructuring meetings and providing Risk Management training, and it is formalizing a Safety Committee Coordination Team to help ensure compliance and standardization of practice. This group will include library staff from Facilities, Learning and Organizational Development, Security, and the Regional Managers group. As of October 2023, the library is now holding monthly safety committee meetings and is committed to better recordkeeping and better compliance with requirements.

The library has a history of good, immediate and continuous compliance with OSHA guidelines and mandates. Across library operations, the organization responded to changing guidelines very nimbly during the onset of the pandemic. Library services and phased reopenings were based on OSHA and county mandates and guidelines, which shifted over time around factors like social distancing, occupancy limits, masking, HVAC requirements and service freezes during surges and new variants.

As discussed elsewhere in this response, the library has a wide range of other proactive mechanisms and actions to address security issues that extend well beyond the scope of safety committees.

**Recommendation 2**

*Coordinate with the County Security Program to complete a Workplace Violence Threat Assessment and Workplace Violence Prevention Plan and communicate the results to all employees.*

The library will implement this recommendation as outlined. The library will coordinate with Multnomah County Workplace Security, the lead organizational unit for security leadership, to fulfill this action as required by OSHA and communicate the results to all library employees.

**Recommendation 3**

*Create a plan for continuous evaluation of the safety and security program, including:*

- *Evaluating security-related trainings, informed by staff feedback.*
- *Developing a process to ensure all public facing staff have taken trainings and get refreshers.*
- *Implementing an incident reporting process that includes data analysis of trends and identifying and documenting corrective actions.*

The library will implement this recommendation as outlined. We agree that security is and should be a top priority for the library, as evidenced by the focus of this audit and the library's significant ongoing investments. The library's security program is constantly evolving and has been for more than a decade.

The library strives to take a holistic approach to that work, including direct staffing for person-in-charge (PIC) and security roles, infrastructure to support those workers and the program (PIC coordinator and security coordinator roles, in particular), robust training, change management support, trauma-informed practices and social workers.

We agree that the library should seek ways to better analyze data and trends, both within current limitations and beyond, which relies on additional technology tools.

Currently, the Library Security Analyst runs reports and analyzes trends. This analysis identifies areas in which more training is needed. The Library Security Analyst reviews findings each month, sharing data and making recommendations for future training to the Director of Location Services, who then coordinates with the Safety and Security Trainer and the Manager of Learning and Organizational Development to implement recommendations.

Training is a key component of furthering the library's security efforts. Staff feedback is a vital mechanism to inform that work and the library solicits staff feedback for each training. The library strives to increase and improve its security-focused training. The library created a limited duration position in FY 24 to lead security training and will seek to make that a permanent role as part of the FY 25 budgeting process. The library implemented a mandatory basic safety awareness training just this year and an annual refresher training will follow. Other safety and security training includes PIC training, Crisis Prevention Institute de-escalation and non-violent crisis intervention training, and mental health de-escalation training.

Online learning components include trauma-informed practices, child abuse reporting, exterior safety, incident reporting, microaggressions, library rules training, and more.

The audit touches on some of the serious limitations in existing technology tools. The current, homegrown incident reporting system allows some extraction and trend analysis, but the library's needs exceed the limitations of this system (e.g. the audit refers to individual "security incidents" but quantifies the number of separate rule violations within an incident as different incidents, when often they are concurrent). The new countywide Origami system includes other functionality, but does not meet the library's full reporting and analysis needs, requiring a separate software procurement for this specific purpose.

A new incident reporting process using new software is dependent on the county procurement and contracting process. A sourcing event (an initial phase) for a new library system took place in September. The procurement process itself will likely last into 2024 based on contracting procedural requirements within Multnomah County.

#### **Recommendation 4**

*Revise post-incident protocols to provide more detail, particularly around supporting staff and debriefing, providing guidance on serious but not "critical" incidents, as well as allowing more decision-making at the neighborhood library level.*

The library requests clarification in order to implement this recommendation. We know that library employees deal with a wide range of difficult and trying situations, including many that are serious, impactful and frightening, that might not meet the criteria of a "critical incident." In communications with audit staff, the library expressed that more clarity would be helpful to implement this recommendation, particularly a definition of "serious incident" as compared to the established definition of a critical incident.

The library has numerous robust protocols already in place, as outlined in the Critical Incident Response Procedures, the Person in Charge (PIC) manual and elsewhere. This recommendation does not detail what new protocols might better serve library staff or which existing protocols are unclear. The library will seek to gain more understanding as recommended in this audit to help inform improvements in post-incident protocols.

If a serious incident does occur, the library uses an array of approaches and steps to support library staff. These include post-event discussions and debriefs, on-site leadership support and creating intentional spaces post-incident that focus on employee support and well-being, in addition to sharing resources like the Employee Assistance Program. The library recognizes that it can make improvements to ensure these resources are consistently provided and that all library staff are aware of the procedures for seeking support.

Typically, debriefs include Regional Managers, the Security Manager, and members of the library's Executive Management Team on site as soon as possible following a critical incident (the process varies based on staff preferences and input relative to each situation).

Further discussions and debriefs also happen during location huddles, and in security meetings to capture lessons learned, to determine if changes are needed in protocols or if additional training is needed.

It remains unclear what types of decision making is recommended to occur at the library location level. Library leaders work closely with the COO and Chair's Office to consider appropriate responses to a wide range of difficult incidents. These may include closure or moving to door service, allowing the use of administrative leave, or assigning additional security, PIC or other staffing support. The library's overall mandate is to keep public locations open to community needs whenever possible. While an incident is unfolding or has just happened, the library asks for and uses the feedback of location leaders and staff to consider next steps.

Often, library leadership will pursue the recommendation of those directly involved with the incident, but other factors may influence decisions. It's not always appropriate to involve staff or middle managers at all decision-making levels. It's important that the library remains clear and transparent. Management will not be able to ask for or act on staff input in the moment for every situation.

This audit touches on some of the many ways the library works to incorporate the desires and input of library staff. These include engagement and collaboration with AFSCME Local 88, numerous joint task forces and workgroups to explore and refine processes and support around incidents and exclusion processes, workload, roles and responsibilities, staffing models and more.

Significantly, the library and Local 88 have reached an agreement that allows represented staff to opt in (or out) of the PIC assignment—with expedited processes related to safety and traumatic experiences—and provides a 15% pay premium. We welcome feedback and specific recommendations on what other supports the library could offer to support staff through and after difficult incidents.

## **Recommendation 5**

*Communicate to all staff after serious incidents and communicate summaries of incidents and trends.*

The library requests clarification in order to implement this recommendation. Library protocols define "critical" incidents but not "serious" incidents. As discussed and shared throughout the development of this audit, the library maintains a set of [Critical Incident Response Procedures](#).

These procedures clearly define a critical incident; direct when to contact law enforcement or other first responders; provide direction for when and how to follow up with staff and patrons who are directly involved; and provide immediate direction for how to engage the library's Safety and Security Manager, resource counselors, the Executive Management Team Person in Charge (EMT PIC) and Facilities Dispatch. The procedures outline roles and responsibilities for the Safety and Security Manager and the EMT PIC.

They also guide post-incident actions like mobilizing a Management Response Team, dealing with medical issues; patron exclusions; potential library closures; use of administrative leave; release of records to law enforcement; media inquiries and numerous follow up actions with stakeholders.

We respectfully request assistance from the Auditors in defining what types of incidents would fall under “serious” to develop appropriate procedures. In addition, we hold concerns about whether communication to all staff after every serious incident is a trauma-informed approach.

The library uses a range of trauma-informed practices to guide communication around incidents. These include sharing incident reports with targeted audiences by location, PIC role and nature of the incident, with important and clear trigger warnings for incident reports that include disturbing/abusive language, threatening behavior, violence, and/or sexual misconduct.

As described below, the library relies on the experience and expertise of dedicated staff roles in internal communications, change management and security to guide mass communication of serious and critical incidents to the nearly 600 library staff members, many of whom do not work in public locations.

The library is currently discussing communication about critical incidents with the Workplace Security Team as well as Local 88 leadership through the Executive Security Team, a labor management team that includes members of library leadership, the Library Security Manager and Local 88 lead stewards.

We are committed to further discussing this recommendation and improving information sharing around incidents and trends that will benefit staff safety, wellbeing and security.

### **Recommendation 6**

*Communicate the vision for outreach and engagement to all staff, including expectations on community outreach for staff working in neighborhood libraries.*

The library will implement this recommendation as outlined. The library is committed to ensuring all library staff understand the vision for outreach and engagement as well as expectations for community outreach for staff working in neighborhood libraries. Library leadership will address aspects of this recommendation as part of a planned assessment of the language and cultural KSA program defined in [its strategic plan](#) as well as through our Future Staffing project described later in these recommendations.

While the library recognizes opportunities for improvements, there are a number of existing, documented definitions, procedures, roles and expectations for engagement and outreach that guide this work currently.

Within the library’s staffing structure, community engagement is principally led by a centralized Community Services team.

There are opportunities for location-based staff to engage with this work or even lead portions of it, if individual location business needs allow and if a specific employee's position description includes this type of work. Expectations for outreach by percentage of time is spelled out in each of these position descriptions. The current state of bond-related closures and temporary reassignments makes sustained location-based outreach work more challenging right now.

The Community Services workgroup also serves as the lead and main staff for community engagement and community-based library services (such as schools, transitional housing, etc.). The library has adopted a set of clear definitions for community engagement, community library services, community outreach and a set of related functions, including awareness, networking, marketing and more.

The library's outreach goal is to raise awareness of library services and activities, including programs and resources, with a priority focus on communities who historically have been marginalized or underserved by the library. Often this work is requested of location-based staff by community members or partners because of existing relationships and in-person requests. The library needs to balance and prioritize these requests based on other location-based needs, reach or impact, and other outreach activities.

The library's community engagement goal is to create active partnerships and relationships that intentionally invest in community power and capacity building so that the library can understand the barriers people face in accessing library resources and knowledge. The library is currently building capacity in this area with a variety of supports including hiring temporary Program Specialist Seniors, with cultural or language KSA designations. These staff members will utilize their subject matter expertise and leadership role to engage other library staff in this work.

The library's community library service goal is to deliver services to populations subjected to marginalization and underserved communities of culture and color, with the understanding that serving people where they are reduces barriers to library services. While some teams within Community Services have operations with needs-based metrics, others have not and the library has been working in FY 24 to consistently center race and equity in community library service.

More generally, the library is implementing systems to shift toward equity guiding systemwide decision making. Equity frameworks and tools, including an equitable program scoring sheet; an equity impact review sheet; project management equity tools; a systemwide project prioritization tool; workbooks; equity lens tools; a mandatory equity training for all staff; groups and spaces and meetings that center the voices and experiences of staff and managers of color and more inform many of the library's outreach efforts and help prioritize staff time for outreach.

### **Recommendation 7**

*Identify and document upcoming changes that will affect employees, which could benefit from focused internal communications.*

- *For each change identified, implement a communications strategy that identifies multiple methods of communication, involves an element of staff input, and explains the reasons behind changes.*

The library is already implementing this recommendation as outlined. Multnomah County Library is a high-demand organization for information and its leadership has made ongoing changes to meet those demands in new ways. The library works hard to keep employees apprised on systemwide initiatives, especially around the most impactful ones, including evolving models for staffing, security and patron service.

A detailed systemwide internal communications plan guides this work and articulates roles, timing and desired outcomes. Individual communications plans support specific initiatives. The library will review upcoming changes to ensure that it has plans in place or that plans are developed to ensure effective internal communications that fulfill this recommendation. The library uses staff feedback when appropriate and as part of a plan in which it can be effectively utilized and leadership will explore other ways to do this. Staff engagement is a planned component of the upcoming Language and Cultural KSA Assessment, the Future Staffing for Future Spaces effort and the Employee Satisfaction Improvement Team. Library leadership welcomes additional input or best practices that will further support or enhance these efforts.

Multnomah County Library was the first county department to create a position dedicated to internal communications, beginning in FY 2016. Since then, the library has added structure and focus to help employees understand and navigate changes to library services, tools and processes. These include a robust change management work unit within Learning and Organizational Development, enhanced training, and project management coordination and leadership within the Office of Project Management and Evaluation.

Currently, internal communications take a number of different forms to support different communication styles, roles and needs. These include:

- Email: A high volume of written information to share upcoming changes and developments, with subject lines that delineate whether action is needed, whether an item is informational only, etc.
- Library commons: a dynamic intranet that provides links to information that has been shared by email and where staff can seek out resources and information, or post information to share with colleagues
- Huddle notes: A weekly round-up of brief updates that have been previously distributed in different formats for recap and discussion at in-person huddle meetings (also distributed in writing to all library staff)
- The Download: A recurring Google Meet event with rotating topics and subject matter experts to present and answer staff questions about major initiatives and changes of systemwide interest
- Talking points and FAQs for staff to inform and aid in direct communications with patrons
- HR Connection newsletter: A weekly compendium of news, tips, reminders, resources, job openings and celebration of staff accomplishments
- Surveys and forms to gather staff input and preferences to support information sharing

- Manager previews and input: Sending advance drafts of written communication to familiarize managers beforehand and help them prepare for staff questions (this also can lead to feedback to improve message content) and monthly informational updates or discussion in manager meetings to address key changes
- Open access to schedule one-on-one in person coffee conversations between EMT members and any library staff member
- Project and communications planning that builds in time for change management and project management support and resources

### **Recommendation 8**

*Develop and communicate a plan for the leadership team to regularly spend time onsite in neighborhood libraries.*

The library will implement this recommendation as outlined. Executive Management Team members do this on an ad hoc and individual basis, but we appreciate the recommendation to add structure and regular frequency. Based on this recommendation, the library will formalize this effort for all executive team members. In addition to onsite visits to library locations, the leadership team will also plan to visit workgroups that do not work in public locations.

I would like to note that the bond-related efforts and the 24/7 EMT PIC role place a high demand on each member of the Executive Management Team's workload and availability, in addition to their other executive responsibilities. Having said that, the library understands the importance of direct staff engagement and is committed to improving EMT member presence at library locations.

### **Recommendation 9**

*Develop a staffing plan for when all construction is complete. In line with the findings in this audit, the staffing plan should solicit employee input during development and address:*

- *Security, examining staffing for security and social work personnel including coverage on evenings and weekends*
- *Adapting the person-in-charge model to meet union agreements.*
- *Staffing for neighborhood libraries, so they stay open.*
- *Community engagement, so programs, outreach, events and engagement can increase, while addressing employee concerns around workload and opportunities.*
- *Cultural and language skill allocation by position and location.*
- *Allowing time to hire for hard to fill positions.*

The library is already implementing most aspects of this recommendation. For the cultural and language skill allocation by position and location, the library will produce an interim approach by October 2024 but this plan will evolve as the library continues efforts to assess community needs for cultural and language specific services.

The library requests clarification on the recommendation to increase programs, events, outreach and engagement. Is the recommendation to increase all of these activities?

If so, what is the baseline data used by the Auditors to measure current levels of outreach and engagement? And, can the Auditors please define which activities or services are included in the term “outreach”?

While the library is already working on increasing programs, events and engagement, the library asserts that simply increasing outreach activities for which outcomes are unknown is unadvisable. The library’s Future Staffing Initiative underway is designed to help the library assess staffing resources required for all services. Before committing to increase outreach activities, the library must complete the future staffing planning in order to ensure adequate staffing for services the library has already committed to providing in new and expanded library spaces, which includes ensuring adequate security and safety staffing. This work is happening now as part of the Future Staffing Initiative, which is described below.

The library is committed to staffing libraries to serve the community effectively after construction has been completed. This relies on adequate numbers of staff, but also on new community-centered models and different kinds of service than past buildings would allow.

Multnomah County Library has been working to evolve its staffing model for many years to account for changing business needs. Those needs include profound changes in technology and information access, security resources, person-in-charge staffing, social workers, culturally specific outreach, materials movement and a host of support resources like training, change management, project management and more.

This work formally began in 2019 with the Future Staffing Model Team, a joint team of managers and staff, which culminated in a set of recommendations that the library is implementing now. The library’s Future Staffing initiative builds on work being done by library leadership, library managers, staff groups (including culturally specific services), Local 88 leadership and HR partners to align staffing and workflows across the organization.

In many ways, these are complex and detailed internal changes that can be difficult to communicate to staff who are busy with day-to-day location work, and to the public at large. Efforts to ensure appropriate future staffing include the Staffing Model Actualization Team and the Future Staffing Initiative. The library will begin additional staff-focused engagement components of this work in 2024.

The library is in the midst of a procurement process to engage with an Organizational Development firm with racial equity expertise to work with the Library to develop the Future Staffing plan. This process will involve staff engagement, including Local 88 involvement, and a broad assessment of future staffing needs, workflows, team structures, decision making roles, and service assessment. The implementation plan is expected to be completed in the Fall of 2024 in time for the FY 26 budget submission.

In addition, library leadership and Local 88 have reached an agreement on an opt-in PIC model that allows staff to opt in (or out) of the PIC assignment—with expedited processes related to safety and traumatic experiences—and provides a 15% hourly pay premium (note: these are all terms explicitly requested by staff members, agreed to as proposed by management).

The Library Events and Readers Services team is among the work units most deeply affected by the pandemic. Staff and management within this group has turned over completely from prior to the pandemic. Due to this attrition (including a loss of institutional knowledge), changes in community needs around programming, and ongoing library closures, the library is not providing programming at pre-pandemic levels.

Leadership has worked to rebuild both centralized programming and location-based programming and the The Library Events team is completing its staffing with a renewed focus on culturally relevant programming that will complement future library spaces. The library expects both of these functions to resume with new library spaces.

Additionally, the library has created a team of staff to design and implement new services for creative learning and programming, including makerspaces, audio/visual focused spaces and other new amenities that will be possible in new spaces. This team includes program specialists (including Black Library Cultural Advocates and Spanish language KSA roles and non KSA roles), a librarian, and a supervisor. In January 2024, Community Services will convene a summit, led by Learning and Organizational Development in which the scope and vision will be clearly identified for this work. Furthermore, a newly-hired Community Partnerships manager will be pivotal to engage community members and partners to provide and extend creative learning opportunities once new locations begin to open.

The library is also beginning a Language and Cultural KSA assessment initiative, which is part of the strategic plan. This work will establish goals and standards for defining service languages and cultures and assignment of language and cultural KSAs; clarify daily work expectations of staff with language and cultural KSAs; and ensure staff are supported in their language and cultural work.

A limited-duration position will lead this effort in coordination with staff and managers, with additional support and expertise provided by Learning and Organizational Development, the Equity Team, the Office of Project Management and Evaluation and others. The position will work with a project team that will include staff from each language and cultural KSA team. Soon, the library will finalize the recruitment process for this position, draft the project charter and solicit project team members.

### **Recommendation 10**

*Communicate the staffing plan to Library employees and present it to the Board of County Commissioners both before all buildings fully reopen and after reopening. Request budget changes as needed to support the staffing plan.*

- *Initial communication to staff and Board should occur by October 1, 2024. Follow up communication should occur by October 1, 2026.*

The library will implement this recommendation as outlined. The library will complete these actions as recommended. As indicated above, the Future Staffing plan is scheduled to be completed by October 2024 in time for the FY 26 budget submission.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to this audit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessica Vega Pederson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jessica Vega Pederson  
Multnomah County Chair