

# Guiding Principles and Pathways for IDEA in Collections

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# Guiding Principles and Pathways for IDEA in Collections

UConn Library  
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## Executive Summary

Over a nine-month period of dialogue and reflection in 2021, the UConn Library IDEA in Collections Working Group (ICWG) developed definitions, guiding principles, and recommended pathways for building inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) into all aspects of library collections management and development. The principles will inform collecting activities, policies, practices, budgets, and community engagement. The pathways will catalyze, guide, and sustain strategic work to advance IDEA across the Library's collections and to empower staff to enact IDEA from wherever they are.

## Introduction

In February 2021, the UConn Library's IDEA in Collections Working Group convened under the auspices of the Library's [Strategic Framework](#). As a grassroots effort by library staff, the Working Group sought to craft a set of guiding principles for fostering inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) in all aspects of the UConn Library's special and scholarly collections. The Working Group also developed recommended pathways for action. These principles and pathways reflect and advance the Library's Strategic Framework and its values of equity, inclusion, inquiry, and trust.

IDEA work is underway across the Library despite facing significant barriers and challenges, including lack of central coordination or grounding in clear-cut shared understandings and aspirations. IDEA-related work pertaining to collections has included fostering systemic change in the digital preservation repository program, acquiring materials from small publishers, enhancing metadata on works about marginalized communities, and filling gaps and bringing new voices into UConn's archives and special collections. The Working Group seeks to build on these efforts, acknowledging that its members are continually learning and growing in this space and seeking out the wisdom and experience of colleagues across UConn and beyond.

The Working Group's goal is to ensure that the UConn Library as an organization builds IDEA values into the work of developing and managing general and special collections, connecting to the Library's community of learners through representation in materials, empowering staff to think critically in their work, and engaging the community to support IDEA values in the Library. Historically, collections reflect mostly white, male, cisgender perspectives. By committing to IDEA principles, Library staff can redress this imbalance and demonstrate their commitment to developing and supporting inclusive learning and teaching environments and position UConn Library as a model for other organizations.

## Working Group's Process

In February 2021, the co-conveners distributed an all-staff open call for nominations to form the Working Group. Seven staff, representing a wide range of functional areas and units in the library, volunteered, and the group began meeting regularly in March 2021. To foster shared understanding and dialogue, the group began by conducting research and discussing select readings. In May 2021, the Working Group broke out into three subgroups to craft shared definitions of “inclusion,” “diversity,” “equity,” “accessibility,” and “collections” in a collections context; conduct an environmental scan of peer practices and policies; and compile IDEA-related resources into a bibliography.

The work of the definitions subgroup helped to establish a shared understanding and to stabilize conceptions of IDEA in the context of collections, helping to guide subsequent conversations. The subgroup sought to situate its work in the context of wider University efforts, looking to existing terminology from UConn's Office of Diversity and Inclusion as a foundation from which to build. Discussion with the larger working group helped refine these definitions further, bringing clarity and consistency to the group's collective shared understanding of IDEA in the context of members' work as collections professionals.

The second subgroup sought to understand how other academic institutions have approached the incorporation of IDEA principles in their collections work. The subgroup identified peer and aspirant institutions, consulted their websites, searched for scholarly outputs, and contacted library staff with collections responsibilities. The subgroup found that the majority of these institutions espoused goals to promote IDEA in collections, but that efforts were largely decentralized and autonomous, and generally focused on ADA accessibility compliance; the purchasing of collections in diversity areas; and work with vendors to increase the diversity of authors, topics, and publishers offered.

The third subgroup conducted a review of the literature, using a [Zotero bibliography](#) to glean themes, identify ideas, and draw conclusions about the state of the literature for IDEA in collections. Comparatively few studies have focused on IDEA in the collections context and even fewer on research collections. The Working Group reviewed dozens of articles, reports, chapters, and blogs to ground its own work in past efforts.

In addition, the ICWG collected input from Library staff through semi-structured group conversations and a survey. The Working Group hosted seven group conversations with a range of units and staff doing collections or collections-adjacent work and additionally emailed a survey to all library staff. ICWG members facilitated and took notes at each conversation and then reconvened to digest and discuss their findings using a [Google Jamboard](#). Key findings included the importance of coordination and policy support for IDEA and the need to engage with the communities the Library serves to understand their needs and aspirations. Staff ideas and comments were factored into this report.

## Working Group Membership

Phara Bayonne, Stamford Campus Library Director  
John Cropp, Access Services Associate  
Rhonda Kauffman, Metadata Management Librarian (co-convener)  
Michael Kemezis, Repository Manager  
Erika McNeil, Head of Interlibrary Services  
Rebecca Parmer, Head of Archives & Special Collections (co-convener)  
Michael Rodriguez, Collections Strategist (co-convener)  
Graham Stinnett, Archivist  
Merlita Taitague, Acquisitions & Electronic Resources Support Assistant  
Renee Walsh, STEM Librarian (through August 2021)

## Timeline of Group Activities

November 2020: Strategic Framework proposal approved  
February 2021: IDEA in Collections Working Group formed  
March-May 2021: Research conducted  
May 2021: Subgroups formed  
August 2021: Definitions finalized  
September 2021: Library staff engaged via all-staff survey and unit conversations  
November-December 2021: Guiding principles and report prepared  
January 2022: Report published

## Definitions

These definitions offer a shared understanding of core concepts in the context of library collections work. ICWG sees these as living definitions that may evolve over time.

- **Inclusion:** Creating, sustaining, and making accessible library collections in which individuals or groups can be and feel represented, respected, supported, and valued.
- **Diversity:** Stewarding collections that reflect the heterogeneity of perspectives, lived experiences, and cultural and social aspects of our communities, and support their information needs.
- **Equity:** Striving to provide just and fair access to collections for our communities, and to identify and dismantle structural barriers to this access.
- **Accessibility:** Eliminating barriers and creating conditions to ensure that our communities are able to use our library collections.
- **Collections:** Content (inclusive of all formats and types) that libraries acquire, steward, and provide access to, along with the services, infrastructure, and partnerships that facilitate use of that content.

## Guiding Principles

The IDEA in Collections Working Group presents the following guiding principles for fostering inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility in the UConn Library's collections and informing the work of building and stewarding collections. These principles offer a holistic vision for how we, as UConn Library staff, view our relationship with collections.

- We recognize collections as a living ecosystem that encompasses collections content as well as the people, services, infrastructure, and engagement activities that enable the usefulness of that content.
- We see collections as reflections of the communities we serve and the systems within which we work. We strive to subvert systems of oppression. We approach collections work iteratively, critically, holistically, and flexibly.
- We envision a paradigm shift toward taking an IDEA-first approach to collections work, rather than treating IDEA as an afterthought.
- We work collaboratively and collectively to advance and concretize IDEA values at UConn and with our global partners through all aspects of collection development, access, and stewardship.
- We engage and empower staff with responsibilities for collections at all levels of the organization to encourage and provide space for them to advance IDEA from wherever they are.

## Pathways

These pathways are intended to catalyze concrete actions to advance IDEA in collections. They set general potential directions that guide and sustain structural and strategic work, and they empower staff to enact IDEA from wherever they are. They will enable a Coordinating Group to bring cohesion and concrete actions to IDEA work.

- Foreground diverse voices across the full range of collections activities, such as collection development, digitization, and discovery.
- Cultivate partnerships and pursue initiatives that advance IDEA in collections.
- Analyze and understand the needs, aspirations, and makeup of our communities.
- Guide and support work to advance IDEA in collections cohesively and comprehensively at every level of the organization.
- Reflect on and assess the Library's current collections, policies, and practices and recommend changes to advance IDEA.
- Reconsider and diversify our acquisitional sources, including vendors, donors, consortia, and partner organizations.
- Explore ways in which our collections budget structures and priorities can reflect and advance IDEA principles.
- Engage our students and student employees and interns more meaningfully in the work of IDEA in collections.
- Foster professional learning and sharing and help staff to think critically about their work through IDEA lenses.
- Establish an IDEA in Collections Coordinating Group to coordinate, catalyze, and communicate this critical work.

## Readings & Resources

The following selections offer broad, actionable perspectives on IDEA, collections, and related concepts such as social justice, intersectionality, and neoliberalism. The IDEA in Collections Working Group discussed these resources and used them to help frame the group's thinking. The group's [working bibliography](#) is freely accessible online.

- Baildon, M., Hamlin, D., Jankowski, C., Kauffman, R., Lanigan, J., Miller, M., Venlet, J., & Willer, A. M. (2017). [Creating a social justice mindset: Diversity, inclusion, and social justice in the collections directorate of the MIT Libraries](#). MIT Libraries. <http://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/108771>
- Clarke, R. I., & Sayward, S. (2020). [Metadata for diversity](#). *Journal of Documentation*, 76(1), 173–196. doi:10.1108/JD-01-2019-0003
- Engseth, E. [Cultural competency: A framework for equity, diversity, and inclusion in the archival profession in the United States](#). *The American Archivist* 81(2), 460–482. doi:10.17723/0360-9081-81.2.460
- Hurley, D. A., Kostelecky, S. R., & Aguilar, P. (2017). [Whose knowledge? Representing indigenous realities in library and archival collections](#). *Collection Management*, 42(3–4), 124–129. doi:10.1080/01462679.2017.1392805
- Leung, S. Y., & López-McKnight, J. R. (Eds.). (2021). [Knowledge justice: Disrupting library and information studies through critical race theory](#). MIT Press. doi:10.7551/mitpress/11969.001.0001
- University of Connecticut Office for Diversity and Inclusion. (2021). Resources. <https://diversity.uconn.edu/resources/>