MARYLAND STATE LIBRARY RESOURCE CENTER
ENOCH PRATT *free* LIBRARY

Enoch Pratt Free Library and State Library Resource Center Fall 2026 Conference

Tuesday, October 27 & Wednesday, October 28, 2026

Day One: Virtual - Tuesday, October 27, 2026

09:30 AM - 10:30 AM:
Welcome: Dr. Emil L. Cunningham, Executive Director, Office of Equity and Fair Practice, Enoch Pratt Free Library
Session: Introduction to Disability Justice and Liberation
Speaker: Ly Xīnzhèn M. Zhǎngsūn Brown, Community Organizer and Disability Advocate.

The disability rights and disability justice movements have challenged popular, harmful ideas about disability, illness, and unwellness for over half a century. Yet while more people today are familiar with disability activism, we still have a long way to go. The Disability Justice framework invites us to reconsider what we have been taught about disability and disabled people, and to learn from disabled people's wisdom and dreams of a world without violence. By focusing on access and care, Disability Justice offers us new ways of building community, offering support, and building a better future. In this session, participants will learn about the history of the disability justice movement, and how its principles can better inform library work as work for the public good and social justice.

11:00 AM – 12:00 PM:
Session: The Myriad Powers of Graphic Novels: Why They're Vital to a Healthy Civic Society
Speaker: Jarrett Dapier, Author / Youth & Teen Services Librarian

In this presentation by author and librarian, Jarrett Dapier, learn how graphic novels bolster civic, reading, and health literacies and why they are essential to all library collections.

1:30 PM – 2:30 PM:
Session: ERASE-ism: Confronting White Supremacy in Libraries Through Black and Multicultural Collections
Speakers:

- Tajuana Fulton, Branch Manager, Memphis Public Libraries
- Monique L. Williams, Regional Support Services Manager, Memphis Public Libraries

Public libraries are trusted community spaces, yet they are not immune to the systemic forces of white supremacy. From collection development to programming and policy, the erasure of Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized voices can be subtle--or alarmingly overt. ERASE-ism explores how libraries, intentionally or unknowingly, contribute to the silencing of diverse narratives through outdated practices, limited representation, and a reluctance to challenge dominant cultural norms.

Amid today's political climate, where efforts to ban books, censor curriculum, and rewrite history are accelerating, libraries stand at the forefront of the fight for equitable access to information. This session examines how challenges, biased selection criteria, and institutional inaction contribute to the erasure of Black and multicultural literature, and what that means for communities seeking truth and representation.
Participants will learn about the way white supremacy is rooted into the history and organizational design of both libraries and librarianship, and leave with a deeper understanding of how ERASE-ism operates within public libraries and gain practical, equity-driven strategies to resist these forces by building inclusive collections that reflect and empower the communities they serve.

3:00 PM - 4:00 PM:
Welcome: Dr. Emil L. Cunningham, Executive Director, Office of Equity and Fair Practice, Enoch Pratt Free Library
Keynote Session: Everyone Belongs Here: Libraries as Anchors of Welcome and Belonging
Keynote Speaker: Daniel Valdez, Deputy Director, Welcoming America

Across the country, communities are asking what it takes to become places where everyone belongs. For years, Welcoming America has helped answer that question through the Welcoming Standard, a roadmap of benchmarks that guides cities and counties in building inclusion into how they lead, serve, and connect residents, and through Certified Welcoming, the national designation earned by places that meet it. Libraries are an important part of this work and library workers bring that to life every day: welcoming newcomers, hosting citizenship and language programs, and making room for neighbors to meet across difference. In this keynote, Daniel Valdez of Welcoming America connects the national picture of welcoming work to the daily work of libraries, as trusted public spaces where neighbors meet, newcomers find their footing, and communities discover what they share. Attendees will leave with fresh inspiration and concrete ways to help their libraries become common ground for everyone they serve.

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Day Two: In-Person - Wednesday, October 28, 2026

08:00 AM: **Doors open for registration and breakfast**

09:00 - 10:00 AM: **Welcome and Keynote**
Welcome: Liz Sundermann-Zinger, Executive Director of External Affairs & the Central Library
Keynote Session: The Power of Being Seen: Libraries, Stories, and Community
Keynote Speaker: Roswell Encina, President & CEO, United States Capitol Historical Society

Libraries do so much more than preserve stories and provide access to information. At their best, they help people see themselves in the collections, resources, and history we share. Drawing on nearly two decades in libraries, Roswell Encina shares why, especially during these challenging times, it's more important than ever to make our collections and resources not just accessible, but relatable, inclusive, and meaningful to the communities we serve. Through personal stories, humor, and lessons learned along the way, he celebrates the power of libraries to bring people together, open doors to new opportunities, and remind everyone that their stories matter.

10:00 AM – 11:00 AM: **Session One - Choose One**

1a: **The Space Between Us: Designing Connection for Any Room a Library Opens**
Speaker: Lia James, Facilitator, &Human.

Libraries often serve as community hubs where people can connect, learn, create, and build a sense of belonging. This is something most institutions and businesses are now scrambling to develop, meanwhile, libraries have always been one of the best examples of how to provide this for its community. Yet still, there can be gaps in how we cultivate a sense of belonging, leading with human-first intentionality, and design our days for connection.

This session is a working practice where we'll uncover how to set the conditions before people arrive, build trust in the right order, then debrief what we did to understand what worked, why, and how. Whether you're engaging with a new team, a first-time parent night, colleagues who've shared a building for years but never really talked, or book club ready to go past the plot, you'll walk away with skills and a framework that scales and molds to the groups you're connecting with.

This session is a 60-minute, hands-on workshop that gives participants a repeatable, low-lift way to make leverage the infrastructure libraries naturally provide to support its community with engagement, conversation, and a human-first lens that says, "we're betting on humanity."

1b: **Shaping Safe Spaces for Adults with All Abilities**
Speaker: Yesenia Garcia-Navarro, Information Services Library Associate, Fletcher Branch (Hagerstown), Washington County Free Library

Inviting adults with all abilities to join the library for a Storytime has increased the usage of groups in the designated areas for adults. By creating a program where they feel safe and included, our patrons have felt more comfortable utilizing what is there for everyone since the space has become familiar to them. Working to shape a safe space for adults with all abilities can start with a program, accessible tools, and understanding disability laws & policies.

1c: **FULLY BOOKED: Craft and Connect: Building Community One Stitch at a Time (25 Attendees Maximum)**

Speakers:

- Teresa Miller, Librarian I, Spauldings Branch, Prince George's County Memorial Library System
- Storm Carman-Hanks, Library Associate II, Accokeek Branch, Prince George's County Memorial Library System
- Yolanda Carino, Circulation Assistant, Hyattsville Branch, Prince George's County Memorial Library System

If you've been wanting to host a craft group at your library but aren't sure where to start, here is your chance! Learn how to introduce fiber arts to a variety of ages, skill levels, and learning styles, as well as tips for creating community space, encouraging connection, and forming life-long friendships. Then, learn specific techniques for teaching crochet while trying the craft yourself. Open to beginners.

1d: **Tour of SLRC**

Join SLRC staff for this express tour of SLRC. View building highlights, and find out how SLRC can support your work with programs, training and materials.

11:10 AM – 12:10 PM: **Session Two - Choose One**

2a: **Civic Learning for Every Community**
Speaker: Madison Steele, Director of Intergenerational Learning, National Constitution Center

America's 250th anniversary offered communities across the country an opportunity to look back at the nation's founding, grapple with the complexity of its history, and consider how the principles at the heart of the American experiment continue to shape our civic life. But the work of civic learning doesn't end with an anniversary. Libraries have a unique role to play in what comes next. As trusted community spaces serving people across generations, backgrounds, and perspectives, they can create opportunities for people to explore principles like liberty, equality, representation, and civic participation—and to consider how those ideas have evolved, been contested, and continue to matter in communities today. Drawing from scholar-informed content, interactive learning tools, and community-centered programs developed by the National Constitution Center, this session will explore practical, nonpartisan approaches to engaging audiences with constitutional history and civic questions. Through conversation and hands-on examples, participants will consider adaptable strategies for fostering curiosity, navigating complex constitutional topics, encouraging civil dialogue, and creating opportunities for people to learn across differences.

2b: **Design for All: How Universal Access Enhances Every Library User's Experience**
Speaker: Alicemarie (AM) Dillon, Grants & Development and ADA Coordinator, St. Mary's County Library

When libraries design for their most challenged users, everyone benefits. This interactive workshop introduces participants to universal design principles that create welcoming, accessible spaces and services for all community members. Through hands-on activities and real-world case studies, attendees will discover how the "curb-cut effect"—improvements made for people with disabilities that benefit everyone—applies powerfully to library environments.

Participants will move beyond basic ADA compliance to explore innovative design solutions that serve diverse user needs simultaneously. From wayfinding systems that help both visually impaired patrons and overwhelmed newcomers, to flexible furniture arrangements that accommodate wheelchairs while creating dynamic collaboration spaces, this session demonstrates how universal design thinking transforms library user experience.

Using design thinking methodology, teams will audit existing library spaces, identify improvement opportunities, and develop actionable implementation plans. Real examples showcase how libraries have successfully integrated universal design principles while enhancing aesthetics, functionality, and user satisfaction across all demographics.
This timely workshop addresses growing community diversity and the profession's commitment to equity and inclusion. As libraries evolve to serve aging populations, neurodivergent users, and increasingly diverse communities, universal design provides a practical framework for creating truly welcoming spaces that work better for everyone—not just those with identified disabilities.

2c: **Introduction to SLRC**

Join a SLRC leader for this overview of SLRC's different services and roles. In addition to learning about all of our behind-the-scenes work, you'll find out how SLRC can support your work with programs, training and materials.

12:10 PM - 1:10 PM: **Lunch**

1:20 PM – 2:20 PM: **Session Three - Choose One**

3a: **Remaining A Resource in Partisan Times**
Speakers:

- Nikki Tyree, Executive Director, League of Women Voters of Maryland.
- Susan Paige Bacon-Ortiz, "paige bacon," League of Women Voters of Baltimore

Library workers are critical for resource guiding, and developing engaging political conversations at their libraries' branches while remaining nonpartisan and factually sound. This session will explore how to enhance and improve civic engagement programs, services, and resources at our libraries from the perspective of the League of Women Voters.

3b: **Building Accessible Collections and Providing Inclusive Services during Challenging Times**
Panelists:

- Genive Purchase, Chief, Neighborhood Library Services; Enoch Pratt Free Library
- Alyssia Gilmore, Circulation Manager, Harford County Public Library
- Sophia Sotilleo, Dean, University of Maryland Baltimore County, Albin O. Kuhn Library & Gallery

Moderator: Melanie Townsend Diggs, Area Director South, Prince George's County Memorial Library System

This panel discussion explores how libraries can continue accessible collections, along with inclusive and responsive services to all demographics during challenging times. Panelists will share strategies for navigating budget constraints, adapting services, and maintaining equitable access while meeting the evolving material and service needs of their communities. This discussion will offer practical insights and real-world examples to support library staff facing financial, operational, or material and service-related challenges.

3c: **From Welcome to Belonging: Building Community Connections**
Speakers:

- Ben Hamilton, Project Literacy Manager, Howard County Library System
- Aimee Chong, Instructor & Research Specialist, Central Branch, Howard County Library System

This session will help library staff create and expand welcoming learning opportunities for new American and immigrant patrons. For many newcomers, limited English proficiency, unfamiliar cultural norms, and experiences of social isolation can make library access and participation challenging. Two experienced library professionals from the Howard County Library System will demonstrate how to develop and facilitate inclusive, supportive programs, using the Bridges to Belonging Book Club as a model. This initiative was created in response to the needs of new American patrons, offering a safe and respectful space where English learners and long-established community members can build connection through guided, literature-based discussions. The book club also supports deeper understanding of the cultural, historical, and social context in the United States. This session will provide practical facilitation strategies and program-planning tools to create supportive environments that foster belonging and encourage ongoing engagement with immigrant communities.

3d: **Tour of SLRC (20 Attendees Maximum)**

Join SLRC staff for this express tour of SLRC. View building highlights, and find out how SLRC can support your work with programs, training and materials.

2:30 PM – 3:30 PM: **Session Four - Choose One**

4a: **Welcoming Work in Libraries: How Libraries Support Immigrants, Refugees, and Newcomers**

Speaker: Hayley Park, PhD Student | College of Information, University of Maryland, College Park

In 2025, the American Library Association (ALA) and Welcoming America launched a national partnership to strengthen libraries' role in building inclusive, connected communities. This collaboration highlights how public and academic libraries serve as vital anchors for belonging by fostering cross-cultural understanding, supporting immigrants and refugees, and creating welcoming spaces. This session will introduce the ALA–Welcoming America partnership and its connection to the broader Welcoming America network. Participants will learn practical ways libraries can engage in welcoming work, from programming and resource development to partnerships with local organizations. Examples will include language access, legal information resources, community celebrations, civic engagement, and support for multilingual immigrants, refugees, and newcomer community members. The session will also explore the Maryland-specific context and resources for welcoming work and how libraries can connect national efforts, including Welcoming Week, with state and local initiatives. Attendees will leave with strategies, resources, and partnership ideas to strengthen welcoming efforts in their own communities.

4b: **The Library is For Everyone: Engaging Adults with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (IDD)**

Speaker: Katie York, MS (they/them), Disability Educator and Advocate

This transformative workshop is dedicated to engaging patrons with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. We will explore inclusive strategies that build connection, lifelong learning, and community integration. The session will also highlight how to create accessible programming and sensory-friendly environments and partnering with local organizations to create radically inclusive spaces.

4c: **Different Plates. One Common Ground...Agriculture.**
Speakers:

- Victoria Stone, Middle School Educator, Maryland Agriculture Education Foundation
- Tonya Wible, Elementary School Educator, Maryland Agriculture Education Foundation

Every plate tells a story and every story connects us to agriculture. Join us to explore how libraries can cultivate curiosity, connection, culture, and belonging through agriculture. Participants will discover free, engaging resources that connect learners to the world around them while highlighting the important role agriculture plays in our daily lives and in the diverse cultures and communities we serve. Learn how to identify agriculturally accurate and culturally relevant books within your library collection and use them to spark conversation, build connections, and engage learners of all ages. Participants will discover hundreds of FREE hands-on lessons, activities, and educational resources that can transform the library into a welcoming community hub where learners can explore agriculture, share experiences, develop a deeper understanding of where their food comes from, and connect with one another. Together, we'll consider how agriculture-based learning can support culture and belonging in the library by creating opportunities for discovery, dialogue, representation, and shared experiences. Whether your library serves a school, public, or community audience, you'll leave with practical resources for programming and ideas for creating safe, inclusive spaces where every learner has a place at the table.

4d: **Tour of the DeWayne Wickham Room and "Black Political Leaders in Maryland" Exhibit**

Join SLRC staff for this express tour of our relatively new DeWayne Wickham Room, and newest exhibit, "Black Political Leaders in Maryland."

3:40 PM – 4:40 PM: **Session Five - Choose One**

5a: **From Golf Cart Driver to CEO: A Conversation with Chad Helton, CEO and President of the Enoch Pratt Free Library**
Speaker: Chad Helton, President and CEO, Enoch Pratt Free Library
Moderator: Dr. Emil L. Cunningham, Executive Director, Office of Equity and Fair Practice, Enoch Pratt Free Library

Join us for a moderated conversation with Chad Helton, CEO and President of the Enoch Pratt Free Library, exploring his career journey, the experiences that shaped his path to leadership, and his perspective on a library's role in bringing communities together. The conversation will explore how libraries create spaces where people can gather, connect, and belong - as well as the roles all of us as library workers play in developing those spaces.

Moderated by Dr. Emil L. Cunningham, Executive Director for the Office of Equity and Fair Practice, this session will begin with a candid conversation about Chad's journey and leadership perspective before opening the floor for questions and general discussions related to career planning for library employees.

5b: **FULLY BOOKED: How We Live Together: Achieving Civic Literacy**
Speakers:

- Lisa Greenhouse, Librarian II, Maryland Department, Enoch Pratt Free Library/SLRC
- Debra Elfenbein, Librarian II, Social Science & History Department, Enoch Pratt Free Library/SLRC

The mission of public libraries is to provide access to educational, cultural, and social opportunities. Civics programming in the library fulfills that democratizing mission by expanding participation in community, sharpening the ability to evaluate media, and increasing trust in and understanding of government functions. In this training for library staff, skill-building programs, games, activities, and resources are presented to support and inspire the efforts of libraries to strengthen civic culture and develop civic literacy for children, teens, and adults. "How We Live Together" ends with participants breaking into groups to brainstorm additional programs and, reconvening, to share them.

5c: **The Library Isn't Boring: Incorporating Emerging Adults' Feedback into Outreach Programming**
Speakers:

- Etana Laing, Acquisitions Librarian: Bowie State University, Thurgood Marshall Library
- Iteoluwakishi Dare, Library Services Specialist: Bowie State University, Thurgood Marshall Library

Why do we need libraries anymore?" is a question commonly heard in our profession. This presentation explores a library staff's efforts to answer that question through programming and marketing over a 3-year period. In 2023, library programs for emerging adults often saw low attendance, which led to the question... why. Staff engaged their student workers in focus groups to learn how best to connect with emerging adults. Using the feedback, library staff and students began co-creating events designed to reach our target audience. This feedback was used to build a new outreach program with students at the center. Tangible project outcomes have included redesigning the library website interface, library staff embedding themselves into the community as club advisors, purchasing popular fiction mentioned on TikTok, creating a book club co-led by students and library staff, and events designed and marketed by student workers. This session is for all library staff looking to increase the number of emerging adults in their programs or spaces.

4:45 PM: **Networking (Optional)**