

Strategic Roadmap for the EDI Framework for NJ Libraries Project

Phase 3 Status Update | July 2025–June 2026

The Strategic Roadmap for the EDI Framework for NJ Libraries is a statewide initiative designed to advance equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility across New Jersey libraries. Guided by four core goals, the project focuses on building staff capacity, fostering inclusive library environments, strengthening diverse staff power, and enhancing equitable and accessible services.

Phase 3 marked an important transition from the development and launch of the EDI-NJ Institutional Assessment toward deeper implementation and organizational action. Between July 2025 and June 2026, the project tested a more intensive model of support through the EDI Institutional Assessment Pilot Project, continued development of statewide EDI resources, expanded the project’s visibility, and gathered important lessons about what libraries need to translate organizational assessment into meaningful and sustainable change.

Goal 1: Build Capacity for EDI

Increasing the knowledge, skills, and abilities of library staff across New Jersey to understand and implement EDI principles remained a central focus throughout Phase 3. Following the May 2025 launch of the EDI-NJ Institutional Assessment and companion implementation module series, the project initially focused on promoting the assessment for independent use by libraries across the state. When early completion rates were lower than anticipated, the project team shifted toward a more supported model designed to provide libraries with direct consultation, structured learning, and sustained guidance. This strategic shift, first described in the January status update, led to the creation of the EDI Institutional Assessment Pilot Project

Eight libraries representing public, academic, county, and school library contexts were selected to participate:

- Burlington County Library System
- Hunterdon County Library System
- Jennings Library at Caldwell University
- John P. Faber School Library
- Moorestown Library
- New Brunswick Free Public Library
- Piscataway Public Library
- University Library at Rider University

All eight participating libraries completed the Institutional Assessment. Following assessment completion, teams participated in a January cohort workshop and individualized facilitated debrief sessions to examine their results, identify organizational strengths and opportunities, and determine priority areas for action.

The pilot then moved from assessment into strategy development. Participating libraries received individualized consultation and planning support to translate their priorities into SMARTIE goals and begin identifying the action steps, resources, success indicators, timelines, and accountability structures necessary for implementation. By the end of Phase 3, seven libraries had completed the full pilot, including all strategy sessions, with each developing an EDI workplan containing at least two actionable goals.

This experience reinforced one of the central lessons of the pilot: providing an assessment tool is only one component of building organizational capacity. Libraries also benefit from dedicated space, facilitation, and practical tools that help them interpret findings, prioritize opportunities, and move from reflection toward implementation

Goal 2: Foster Inclusive Library Environments

The Institutional Assessment Pilot Project served as the primary vehicle for advancing this goal during Phase 3. The assessment was intentionally designed to help libraries examine the policies, practices, organizational culture, and community engagement structures that shape inclusion within their institutions.

Through the pilot, libraries used their assessment results to identify institution-specific priorities for strengthening equity and inclusion. While priorities varied based on library type, community context, organizational capacity, and existing EDI infrastructure, several common areas of focus emerged. Libraries developed goals related to equity-centered policy review, multilingual access, internal communication and staff engagement, professional development, inclusive collections and cataloging, community feedback, outreach and partnerships, participation tracking, and stronger organizational structures for sustaining EDI work.

Importantly, the pilot encouraged libraries to focus on a manageable number of priorities rather than attempting to address every opportunity identified through the assessment. Strategy sessions emphasized developing goals that were specific enough to guide implementation while remaining realistic within each library's capacity and context. The resulting plans demonstrate the range of ways that inclusive environments can be strengthened through organizational systems and practices. They also reflect an important evolution in how EDI work can and should be approached— not only through programs or one-time learning opportunities, but through

policies, procedures, communication systems, data practices, collections, accountability structures, and ongoing organizational decision-making.

Goal 3: Strengthen Diverse Staff Power in Library Workspaces

Work toward strengthening diverse staff power continued through statewide resource development, professional learning efforts, and collaboration. During the fall, two project subcommittees were reactivated. One focused on identifying and organizing resources for an EDI Resource Hub and New Jersey-specific toolkits, while the other focused on identifying and reviewing EDI-related professional development opportunities. The January update identified limited membership and volunteer capacity as an ongoing challenge for both groups.

To expand capacity and broaden participation, the project brought on a library school student to support research, coordination, and resource compilation and developed a public submission form through which members of the broader New Jersey library community could recommend EDI resources and training opportunities.

The pilot also provided additional insight into the internal conditions that affect staff power. Across participating institutions, conversations about EDI frequently intersected with questions of staff communication, professional development, participation in decision-making, organizational responsibility, and the structures available for staff to contribute to equity-focused change. These findings will help inform continued development of statewide resources by grounding them in the practical needs and organizational realities surfaced by participating libraries.

Goal 4: Enhance Library Services and Accessibility

Enhancing the accessibility and inclusivity of library services remained embedded throughout the Institutional Assessment and pilot process. As described in the January update, the assessment prompts libraries to examine service design and delivery, community engagement, and accessibility across seven core operational areas.

The pilot provided an opportunity to see how these areas translated into concrete organizational priorities. Several participating libraries identified goals directly connected to the ways community members experience and access library resources and services.

Examples included expanding multilingual access to library information, strengthening mechanisms for community feedback, developing more intentional outreach strategies, diversifying collections, improving inclusive cataloging practices, and strengthening partnerships with community and student organizations.

The individualized nature of these goals underscores the importance of contextual approaches to equity and accessibility. Instead of prescribing a single set of interventions for every institution, the assessment and planning process supported libraries in identifying changes that responded to their own communities, organizational structures, strengths, and areas for growth.

The pilot was also intentionally designed as a case study of a collaborative, reflective, and action-oriented approach to organizational equity. The experiences of participating libraries will inform recommendations for strengthening the assessment and supporting broader implementation across New Jersey.

Additional Achievements

Phase 3 also provided opportunities to increase the visibility of the Strategic Roadmap and share New Jersey's approach with the broader library field.

In June 2026, the project was represented at the American Library Association Annual Conference in Chicago. The presentation highlighted the development of the statewide EDI framework, evolution of the Institutional Assessment, and lessons emerging from the supported pilot model. This national platform provided an opportunity to share both the project's accomplishments and the practical challenges of developing sustainable equity infrastructure across diverse library contexts.

Following completion of the pilot, a formal evaluation was conducted to assess participants' experiences with both the Institutional Assessment and the facilitated consulting and strategic planning process. Eighteen participants representing public and academic libraries and a range of organizational roles completed the evaluation. Overall, results were overwhelmingly positive, with average ratings across measured dimensions ranging from 4.0 to 4.6 on a five-point scale. Eighty-eight percent of respondents indicated that they would recommend the assessment to other libraries

The evaluation demonstrated that the value of the model extends beyond the assessment instrument itself. The two highest-rated components of the entire pilot were the prioritization activities (4.61) and consulting support (4.56). One hundred percent of respondents agreed that the prioritization activities helped their teams identify realistic areas for action, while 94% found the SMARTIE goal framework useful for developing meaningful goals. Nearly nine in ten respondents (89%) also reported feeling prepared to begin implementing the goals developed through the process.

These findings reinforce a central lesson from Phase 3: the greatest value of the initiative lies not in the assessment as a standalone tool, but in the integrated model of assessment, facilitated reflection, prioritization, strategic planning, and implementation support. The pilot evaluation concluded that this combination transformed the assessment from a diagnostic instrument into a practical capacity-building process for organizational change.

The evaluation also identified opportunities for strengthening future implementation, including allowing greater flexibility within the assessment for areas outside a library's control, increasing the amount of consulting and planning time available to participating libraries, strengthening between-session and post-planning implementation support, expanding peer learning opportunities, and embedding continuous evaluation into the process.

Looking Ahead

As Phase 3 concludes, the project has reached an important transition point. Over the course of the Strategic Roadmap, the initiative has developed and tested resources, built partnerships, piloted new approaches, and demonstrated the value of a coordinated statewide infrastructure for advancing equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility in New Jersey libraries. The question moving forward is increasingly not just what the next project phase should include, but **how this work can become a more permanent and sustainable part of New Jersey's library infrastructure.**

The EDI Institutional Assessment Pilot provides especially strong evidence for this direction. Seven libraries completed the full pilot and developed EDI workplans containing at least two implementation goals, while approximately 32 individuals participated across the pilot's onboarding, workshop, assessment debrief, and strategy sessions. Evaluation findings further demonstrated that libraries valued not only the assessment itself, but the sustained consulting, facilitation, and strategic planning infrastructure surrounding it.

Moving forward, there is a desire to transition from a series of time-limited EDI projects toward an ongoing statewide model that provides libraries with sustained access to assessment, consultation, implementation support, learning opportunities, and shared resources. A more permanent model could preserve institutional knowledge, strengthen continuity, respond to emerging needs, and allow libraries to engage with support according to their own readiness and organizational timelines. The pilot evaluation offers several directions for what such a model could include. Participants' interest in continued peer exchange also points toward opportunities for a community-of-practice model that allows libraries to share successes, challenges, and emerging practices over time.

This next stage will require conversations among project partners about governance, ownership, funding, staffing, and long-term stewardship. Establishing a sustainable structure will be critical to ensuring that the knowledge, tools, relationships, and momentum developed through the Strategic Roadmap remain available to New Jersey libraries beyond the lifespan of the current project. Phase 3 demonstrated that there is both a need and a viable model for this work. The opportunity ahead is to move from proving what is possible through a project-based approach to determining how EDI capacity-building can become an enduring component of the support available to libraries across New Jersey.