

Friends of the Library, Montgomery County (FOLMC) envisions a community where all members have every opportunity to thrive. For nearly 40 years, FOLMC has supported Montgomery County Public Libraries (MCPL) and promoted lifelong learning through supplemental funding, programs, and materials. Our work has provided tangible benefits for the community, but our efforts are in vain if we do not acknowledge and address America's painful legacy of racial oppression and the ever-present impact of sustained systemic racism on equity and justice in our county.

The people of Montgomery County are diverse and vibrant with boundless potential, yet many of our residents are plagued by deep inequities in education, employment, income, housing, and criminal justice. FOLMC is one thread in the large tapestry of organizations working for the betterment of all people, still we recognize the power in making a strong and public commitment to securing racial equity across the county.

Background

On April 24, 2018, Montgomery County Council adopted Resolution 18-1095, affirming the council's commitment to creating a Racial Equity and Social Justice Policy for Montgomery County. Spearheaded by Council President Nancy Navarro and co-sponsored by County Executive Marc Elrich, this initiative has expanded to include a regional chapter in the Government Alliance on Racial Equity, community conversations, data gathering, and content creation.

In September 2019, the Office of Legislative Oversight released a report of findings from racial equity and social justice conversations. When participants were asked what challenges are most critical to achieving racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County, the top two answers were centered around access to information and access to resources.

FOLMC recognizes the critical role that public libraries play in serving as a central destination for access to information and resources in our communities. We commend the county council on their leadership, and we aim to support their initiatives through our work with MCPL.

Our Work So Far

FOLMC has long supported the pursuit for racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County. Here is a sampling of the work we engage in:

- Board Composition
 - We actively recruit board members in order to build a Board of Trustees that reflect the diversity and geographic spread of the county.
 - Amongst our staff and board members, we foster a culture of inclusion and mutual support to ensure that every person within FOLMC can thrive.
 - To monitor this, we maintain a matrix tracking key demographics of the board and compare the figures against available data.
- Programs and Marketing
 - We sponsor programs and community conversations intended to increase cross-cultural understanding and civic responsibility.
 - When we assemble panels or speaking engagements, we intentionally seek out community leaders and academics to maintain a diverse balance of representation within our events.
 - Further, we recognize the power in providing free programming for the county and we use this opportunity to spotlight voices from marginalized communities.
 - At all of our sponsored events, we strive to create accessible environments for all County residents and offer accommodations as requested.
 - To monitor this effort, we regularly review all programming and assess efficacy through a racial equity lens.
- Professional Training and Development
 - All staff are encouraged to attend professional development trainings on a regular basis.
 - Most recently, the Executive Director completed a Racial Equity course provided by Montgomery County Arts & Humanities leaders.
- Advocacy
 - We agree with the county government's conclusions that the educational opportunity gap perpetuates inequalities across generations. Through that lens, we partner with MCPL to advocate for budget and policy changes to expand library access and services for critical populations.

- Recent success includes championing the expansion of MCPL staff to include a new outreach children’s librarian as a means to extend the reach and impact of their early literacy programs as well as a funding increase to expand library hours at several key branch locations.
- We support the proposal for a revised policy around late return fines in order to dismantle this economic barrier to library use.

Our Commitments

FOLMC affirms our commitment to racial equity and social justice. We commit to the following actions to support and generate meaningful change for marginalized populations.

- Provide annual interactive racial equity training for all employees and board members.
- Expand community partnerships to reach underserved populations and share the resources available through MCPL to support their lifelong learning.
- Develop relationships with organizations that challenge institutional racial inequity and work for change.
- Sponsor inclusive programs and community conversations to increase awareness of patterns of power, racial inequity, and social injustice needs within the County.
- Evaluate demographic data from sponsored programs to inform future decisions on programming; adjust programming as needed to ensure all populations are engaged with our offerings.
- Seek all funding requests to directly address in the proposal of how racial equity will be supported.
- Regularly survey FOLMC staff and board members on our working culture to ensure we internally meet our vision of an equitable and just Montgomery County.
- Continue advocacy work to change governmental policies and expand funding to promote the best interests of all communities for generations to come.
- Examine the practices of FOLMC’s chapters to ensure their alignment with our racial equity and social justice goals.
- Publicly acknowledge that Montgomery County, and by default our organizational name, is inextricably tied to General Richard Montgomery, a Continental Army officer and owner of enslaved Africans.

Definitions

- Race: A social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (including color), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the social, economic, and political needs of a society at a given time.
- Racial equity: Changes in policy, practice, and allocation of resources so that race and racial constructs do not predict one's success.
- Social justice: Everyone deserves to benefit from the same economic, political, and social rights and opportunities, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual preference, religion, disability, or other characteristics.

References

- [Findings from 2019 Racial Equity and Social Justice Conversations](#), September 2019
- [Montgomery County Racial Equity Profile](#), June 2019

Revision History

Date of Approval	Nature of Revision