

**OVERVIEW:** Trailblazers in Conversation and Heart and Hand Book Talk virtual programs engage customers in conversations about race, diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and other social topics.

**CHALLENGE:** In July 2020, the LA County Board of Supervisors passed a motion to create the Anti-Racism, Diversity, & Inclusion (ARDI) Initiative. The Board’s motion boldly articulated an anti-racist agenda to guide, govern, and increase the County’s ongoing commitment to fighting racism in all its dimensions. LA County departments were tasked with incorporating the motion into its own service model. In addition to evaluating policies, practices, and operations, the Library used the motion as a launch pad to leverage the Library’s virtual platforms (Zoom and YouTube) to create virtual programs that help customers engage in meaningful and civil discourse around topics related to justice, racism, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

**SOLUTION:** In an effort to address the needs of the diverse communities across LA County and reinforce the role of the Library as a civic and cultural center, a hub for public information and discourse, and an innovative institution of lifelong learning, new virtual programs were developed to both support the County’s ARDI initiative and connect to the Library’s mission to break down barriers, increase access to information, and encourage conversation. Heart and Hand Book Talk Series and Trailblazers in Conversation—launched in January 2022 and October 2021, respectively, and still continue. Held live on Zoom, with recordings posted on YouTube, both program series are moderated by LA County Library Director, Skye Patrick, and were developed from scratch by Library staff.

The Heart and Hand Book Talk Series hopes to inspire people to open their hearts and minds by challenging existing perceptions about systemic racism and injustice against people of color. These talks feature discussions on thought-provoking literature as well as conversations with noted authors and speakers. LA County Library has produced six of these engaging book talks and have featured discussions on topics such as Bruce’s Beach and the African American experience in the Jim Crow era, Black Indian ancestry, the use of social media to help address adult illiteracy, homelessness and child poverty, and cultural awareness through food, among other topics.

Trailblazers in Conversation, also hosted by Library Director Skye Patrick, is a dialogue series featuring politicians, authors, community organizers, and other trailblazers who are making a difference in the Los Angeles County community. To date the library has hosted six programs and has featured notable guests including LA County Supervisors Holly J. Mitchell, Sheila Kuehl, Lindsey Horvath, Activists Patrisse Cullors and Angela Davis, Chef Pyet DeSpain, Customer Service Expert and Author David Brownlee, and others.

**INNOVATION:** Both the Heart and Hand Book Talk Series and Trailblazers in Conversation programs were created specifically to address diversity, equity, and inclusion in Los Angeles County, to support the Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion (ARDI) initiative set forth by County leadership.

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The programs also support LA County Library’s existing iCount equity initiative, which ensures the Library makes a meaningful effort to design services and programs that address the needs of the diverse community it serves. With all of its programs and services, the Library aims to break down barriers and create an inclusive and welcoming environment for all, whether in-person or virtual.

Programs like these that feature diverse voices allow community members to see themselves represented while also developing cultural literacy and an appreciation of diverse cultures. LA County Library recognizes its role in connecting communities and embracing diversity, in part by developing diverse collections and programs. Recognized as trusted spaces that welcome everyone, libraries can help people to develop understanding and respect for people with varied backgrounds and differing perspectives. To encourage open and honest conversation around equity and help make cross-cultural connections, LA County Library specifically seeks out speakers for both series who represent or speak to the hugely diverse populace of Los Angeles: African American and Black, Asian Pacific American, Mexican American, Native American, LGBTQ+, and more to come. These changemakers and authors bring a thoughtful literary or community-focused lens to topics that can seem overwhelming or confusing to many, providing perspectives that open the door to deeper understanding and community building, and helping attendees develop the skills necessary to function in a culturally pluralistic society. By recording these live virtual talks and posting them to YouTube, LA County Library is developing a collection of free-to-access material that will live on beyond its original audience, continuing to raise awareness and encourage lifelong learning. Speakers who are authors may lead attendees to additional reading on topics that spark their interest. In February 2023, Los Angeles County released a Racial Equity Strategic Plan. It’s strategic goals include “Offer Education and Training Throughout the Region” and “Change Hearts and Minds.” LA County Library will continue to pursue both with these continuing virtual programs.

**RESULTS:** With twelve total programs to date, 3,244 people have attended the live events, and an additional 3,937 have viewed the program recordings after the live events took place, with a total reach of nearly 7,200 people viewing the content. Participants also have opportunities to provide feedback on the programming via post-event surveys. On average, nearly 67% of attendees who submitted survey responses indicated the program changed, validated, or influenced their perspective on the topic discussed and 40% indicated the program made them curious to learn more about the topic.

**REPLICABILITY:** This program could be replicated at any scale as long as other systems have access to virtual meeting platforms and streaming capabilities such as Zoom and YouTube. The program’s popularity indicates demand that likely expands beyond LA County.

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**ADDITIONAL MATERIALS:** See [PDF with sample graphics and links to websites and video recordings](#).

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