



DIVERSITYMATTERS

IDEAS FOR DIVERSITY IN PUBLISHING

FINAL REPORT 2022

WHAT IS IDEAS FOR DIVERSITY IN PUBLISHING?

Established in September 2021, Ideas For Diversity in Publishing (IDP) is a volunteer coalition of LGBTQIA+ book publishers focused on encouraging and promoting efforts to increase diversity and inclusivity within the publishing industry. Currently the IDP comprises five publishers:

Bella Books

Bold Strokes Books

Bywater Books

Flashpoint Publications

Ylva Publishing

WHAT DOES IDEAS FOR DIVERSITY IN PUBLISHING DO?

IDP provides a centralized platform for the public to share their suggestions for diversity and inclusion with all participating publishers. Publishers commit to implementing those ideas that best suit their business models and sharing the results of their endeavors.

OUR COMMITMENT

As LGBTQIA+ publishers we know how important it is for books to reflect our lived experiences, our hopes for the future, and to see ourselves in the protagonists of our books. We want this same experience for groups whose voices and stories have been historically silenced or ignored, and for those who have felt marginalized. We have made a commitment to prioritize diversity within our fiction.

While we have individually begun to address these issues within our companies, we believe that more can be accomplished if we work together. We formed the IDP coalition with the understanding that we do not have all the answers and that if we work together and seek the input of the people and communities we wish to represent, we have the best chance of achieving our aim of ensuring our books reflect the lives and experiences of every reader.

IDP is committed to promoting diversity and inclusion across the spectrum of race, ethnicity, age, nationality, sexual orientation, cultural identity, sex and gender identity, disability, mental health, religious beliefs, education, socioeconomic status, and body image.

HOW DOES IDP WORK?

Anyone may submit an idea or suggestion that could help publishers in increasing diversity via the online form at www.ideasfordiversity.com. The ideas are then batched and sent to all the participating publishers. Once received, the idea is shared with all participating publishers. Each publisher then has the opportunity to review the idea and determine how it might best be implemented in their organization

model. Publishers commit to reporting on how ideas were implemented and the efficacy of those suggestions that were executed (as assessed by the publisher(s) who implemented the idea). Those results will be made available to the public on the IDP website. They will also be included in our annual reporting.

MARKETING AND PROMOTION STRATEGY

The coalition routinely promoted IDP via each publisher's marketing channels including newsletter lists, social media, during online workshops, and advertising. Participating publishers also encouraged authors within the community to promote and share information about IDP. IDP was not promoted at in person events due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESPONSE

A total of 120 responses were received within nine months. Responses that did not come from individuals intending to contact IDP for its stated purpose were not included in the results. The majority of such responses were business mass marketing emails. Of the 120 responses received, thirty-six were intended as a response to the IDP. These responses fell onto three main categories with overlap between categories:

Personal anecdotes (5)

Opinions (30)

Encouragement (8)

Ideas (15)

Expressions of interest to join IDP (2)

THE MOST COMMON THEMES OF THE RESPONSES WHERE:

Acquisition of novels by and support for own-voices authors (20)

Education of authors and editorial staff on diversity (11)

Marketing to diverse communities (7)

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

Individual publishers and their teams were responsible for evaluating which of the ideas presented would fit with their publishing model, values, and budgets. Ideas implemented fell into six categories.

Team and editorial: including diverse hiring, sensitivity readers, training, style guides and, audiobook narration.

Authors: including workshops and training, new author development program, creating and distributing helpful resources.

Content: including select diverse publications

Corporate messaging, submissions: including adding more inclusive language

Marketing: including making titles more searchable, discoverable, and accessible.

Social Justice: including helping diverse communities in all corners of the world

Detailed below are the ideas that arose from the responses to IDP initiative, their implementation, and evaluation by the publisher. Many people contributed to the evolution and implementation of an idea over time and so all ideas are attributed collectively to the IDP.

TEAM & EDITORIAL

HIRING DIVERSE STAFF

Publisher hired: 1 non-binary gender diverse editor, 1 Black editor, 3 cultural consultants/sensitivity readers (Transgender, Black, Native American, and African American).

EVALUATION: Due to the time manuscripts are in production (three to twelve months depending on the publisher and manuscript) it is too soon to evaluate the efficacy of hiring diverse editors, in-house sensitivity readers, and cultural consultants. We are committed to hiring diversely into the future as new positions become available. We are hopeful that the diversification of team members will provide a robust and inclusive work environment within our organizations and assist in the publication of diverse books.

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Publisher has added resources for Authors and Production Staff by hiring a BIPOC editor and sharing a sensitivity database for authors and production staff to utilize as needed.

EVALUATION: it will take some time to see the results of these efforts, as effected manuscripts will not be published until late 2023.

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Publisher used compensated publishing interns who identified as non-binary Latinix (1H22) and neurodiverse (2H22).

EVALUATION: These internship experiences were designed as educational opportunities rather than part-time jobs. The experiences provided each person with a wide exposure to the queer publishing industry—evaluating submissions, content and copy editing, proofreading, cover and messaging design, social media communication, contracting, and development of press releases and catalog content. Since both individuals were interested in future careers in queer publishing, the goal was for them to develop new skills and gain a deeper understanding of learned concepts through hands-on application of the knowledge imparted through their prior academic experiences.

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Publisher offered to find sensitivity readers for any author who hasn't sourced one themselves.

EVALUATION: We believe that having sensitivity readers is fundamental when an author tries to portray different minority experiences in their work. Sensitivity readers help ensure that those characters ring true and three-dimensional, going beyond stereotypes. The vast majority of our authors already have some sort of resource in place to find sensitivity readers when they need it, so the offer of help wasn't met with much enthusiasm. If, in the future, however, an author needs assistance with this, we would be happy to point them in the right direction and advise the best ways to go about finding a sensitivity reader.

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Publisher implemented a program to financially support sensitivity reads from a corporate level when requested by authors.

EVALUATION: The goal of this commitment was to assist our authors in identifying and avoiding harmful language and perpetuating stereotypes, and/or offending and alienating readers. So far, authors seem to be embracing the use and recommendations of sensitivity readers—though many of these books are still in the production cycle.

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Publisher added sensitivity readings as needed to the production process and has also created a list of sensitivity readers from within the publishing house.

Evaluation: Affected books will not be released until the 2023/2024 season and so it's too early to determine if there is an impact or perception-shift among readers. However, authors have expressed appreciation for this additional step and for the resources provided.

EDITOR TRAINING

Publisher paid for a series of editor-specific diversity training workshops through the American Copyeditors Society (ACES). Topics included:

- Don't Eat Your Words: How We Talk About Food and Bodies and Why It Matters
- Editing in a Multilingual World
- Engaged Style Guides: Co-Creating Standards with Your Community
- Unconscious Bias and the Conscientious Editor
- Inclusive Language Webinar Series
- Microaggressions in Editing: Understanding Bias and Undoing Harm
- Perspectives: People of Color in the Editing Community
- Sensitivity Reading and Beyond: Empowering Editors to Talk About Conscious Language and Representation

Editors then met via zoom to discuss the training and its application in their work.

EVALUATION: These trainings were professional, informative, and applicable. Many editors found the information useful and relevant in their work. The most popular course was Unconscious Bias and the Conscientious Editor. The follow-up zoom meeting was the highlight of this idea. Editors had the opportunity to discuss what they had learned, how it applied specifically in the manuscripts they worked on with examples from works in editing and brainstormed best practices. Because all the editors face similar challenges in their work, and took the same workshops, an environment of psychological safety was quickly established, and editors were enthusiastic about working together to provide the most appropriate and comprehensive editorial experience for their authors. Editors voluntarily committed to a monthly zoom meeting to discuss diversity and other factors related to editing. Overall, we are very encouraged by the enthusiasm of the editorial team and, while it is too soon to see the outcome of the training, brainstorming, and support in the published manuscripts, we are optimistic that these efforts will have a positive impact. The editors appreciated that they could share the personal impact of training on diversity in a context of psychological safety and practical application.

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Publisher performed outreach to various editorial and writers' groups in an effort to increase production staff diversity. Publisher provided resources to editors in the form of online tutorials and forums, which included:

- Writing with Color
- Writing the Other
- Promoting Diverse Novels

EVALUATION: While authors expressed enthusiasm and changes have been implemented, it will take some time to see the results of these efforts, as effected manuscripts will not be published until late 2023.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Publisher paid for a team member in a leadership position to complete a Diversity and Inclusion Certificate at Cornell University.

EVALUATION: Team members in leadership positions such as Publisher, Chief Operating Officer, Senior Editor, and Production Manager are uniquely positioned to impact the direction and culture of the organizations they lead. Comprehensive tertiary education in diversity and inclusion assists in equipping the publishing house with the tools to navigate toward a more diverse and inclusive workplace. The team member found the certificate course useful and informative. They felt some of the assignments were relevant in their workplace with others only suitable to large corporate structures. The team member accessed a diverse array of resources and toolkits useful in leading their organization. The full impact of such training will be revealed over time, but this certificate course has helped the publisher and its team appreciate both the value and complexity of diversity and inclusion and confirmed their commitment to same.

STYLE GUIDES

Publisher addressed style questions regarding descriptive words in our fiction. For example, after research and talks with external diversity experts, it was decided to capitalize the B in Black and keep white lowercase, with regards to race.

The same rule applies to the foreign language-equivalent words in our book translations. All our discussions include the comparison on how diversity can be ensured across languages.

Our new style requirements have been issued to all our editors and authors.

EVALUATION: We believe that using the proper language in our books is fundamental if we want to be inclusive. Language is constantly changing and the accepted terms to refer to minority groups and experiences also change with time. Moving forward we will keep paying attention to these matters and update our guidelines and revise our manuscripts accordingly.

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Publisher developed and implemented a Diversity & Inclusion Style Guide for authors, editors, and proofreaders. This style guide is a living document and is updated on an ongoing basis.

EVALUATION: As a publisher, it is our responsibility to listen to our authors and audiences and pay close attention to the subtleties and nuances of our language as it evolves—meaning fair, accurate, and inclusive. In addition, it is important that the books we publish avoid harmful language, do not perpetuate stereotypes, and do not offend or alienate our readers. This Diversity & Inclusion Style Guide is meant to be a supplement to the Chicago Manual of Style, and references the GLAAD Media Reference Guide - 11th Edition. Since language and understanding continue to evolve, our authors, editors, proofreaders, and sensitivity readers continue to offer updates—when you learn better, you do better.

OWN-VOICES AUDIOBOOK NARRATION

Publisher commits that any audiobooks with Black, Indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC) main characters be read by narrators who are BIPOC themselves. We will work diligently to keep as close to production deadlines as possible while seeking own-voices narrators.

EVALUATION: This has been one of our long-standing commitments as a publishing house and we are proud to prioritize it. Giving more opportunities to BIPOC narrators is something very palpable that we can do to enhance diversity representation. So far, it has been extremely successful and we hope to continue doing this in the future.

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Publisher implemented corporate policy requiring that audiobooks with diverse main characters be read by narrators who self-identify in accordance with those diverse characters when possible. If for whatever reason this is not possible, we have committed to working with the author to find an acceptable and equitable solution.

EVALUATION: This became policy in early 2022. No audiobooks were produced in-house in 2022. For the authors who choose to self-produce audiobooks, we strongly encourage their use of narrators who self-identify in accordance with those diverse characters—and we find that our authors support the policy. It will take some time to see the results of this policy.

AUTHORS

AUTHOR WORKSHOP ON IMPLICIT BIAS

Publisher hired a professional diversity, equity, and inclusion expert to present a voluntary fifty-minute workshop on The Role of Bias for Fiction Writers. Workshop was recorded and subsequently made available via private YouTube link to publishers' authors.

EVALUATION: Publisher routinely provides online workshops for in-house authors. Attendance at the live zoom broadcast for the bias workshop was twenty percent higher than average. In addition, attendee interaction including participation, comments, and questions was considerably higher. Several authors who attended subsequently emailed publisher to comment on how valuable they found the workshop. The replay of the workshop has received a below average number of views. Potentially this workshop was valuable to authors already committed to diversity but did not reach authors who do not value diversity and inclusion as it was voluntary. The high number of live attendees was encouraging, and we hope that as the profile for diversity rises, the recording may be of value to authors seeking information.

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Publisher has begun including discussions about diversity in conversations with authors when discussing content, genre, themes, and stereotypes, and set up training for authors when writing diverse characters.

Evaluation: How these conversations are impacting author development and the books written and produced so far is difficult to measure at this point. Publisher recognizes that this effort is a long-term strategy that may take years to evaluate. Publisher is committed to this process and the change that it hopes to bring.

NEW AUTHOR DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Publisher implemented a New Author Development Program to connect new authors with in-house mentors and developmental editors. The goal is to help new authors with their writing, and to understand the stages of publication, answer questions, offer technical and emotional support. Included in this is assistance in identifying the need for a sensitivity reader, and how to effectively use the Diversity & Inclusion Style Guide in fiction writing.

EVALUATION: This is a relatively new program, though initial feedback suggests it is well-received and productive.

EDUCATION VIA NEWSLETTERS AND BLOGS

Publisher is educating our authors on general themes of diversity regularly in our newsletters, asking them to reflect on the subject and how they go about writing such stories.

This, combined with pointing them to our archive of blogs, which touch on everything from body shape and disability visibility to writing skin color, helps develop awareness of these areas.

EVALUATION: This has been a long-running program, but one whose effectiveness is hard to measure, as it is up to the authors to do the reading. Still, we will continue to supply them with relevant information and hope that it will color their writing and help them create sound, diverse representation in their books.

CONTENT

Published a short story collection by trans and non-binary own-voices authors. Stories were selected and edited by an own-voices editor. Publication of a non-fiction collection of trans and non-binary own-voices authors is forthcoming in 2023.

EVALUATION: Reviews of the anthology were polarizing, confirming that trans and non-binary representation is a spectrum. Some found their experiences represented in the anthology and others did not. Many expressed gratitude that such an anthology was published. Some expressed concern that the quality of the published stories was in general lower than average. It's difficult to determine if such an analysis is driven by implicit bias, but publisher is committed to mentoring and encouraging trans and non-binary writers who may wish to publish in the future. The publisher has made valuable inroads within the trans and non-binary writing community in providing a platform for these authors and their future works.

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Publisher launched new imprint in 2020 to focus on writers of color and those writing across the broader queer spectrum and expanded the lesbian and feminist mission of the original publishing imprint to include lesbian, women loving women, sapphic, and feminist themes:

EVALUATION: Publishing titles often takes months to years between signing and the publication date—therefore it is necessary to look at range of data to show commitment to diversity and inclusion across the full publishing catalog:

In 2021, the two imprints published:

- Books with gay leads: 5
- Books with bisexual leads: 2
- Books with lesbian leads: 14
- Books with Black leads: 5
- Books with Latino leads: 1
- Books with AAPI leads: 1
- Books with Jewish leads: 1

In 2022, the two imprints published:

- Books with gay leads: 3
- Books with asexual leads: 2
- Books with lesbian leads: 9
- Books with non-binary leads: 1
- Books with Latino leads: 1
- Books with Jewish leads: 2

In the first half of 2023, the two imprints will publish:

- Books with gay leads: 2
- Books with trans leads: 2

- Books with polyamorous leads: 1
- Books with lesbian leads: 7
- Books with Black leads: 1
- Books with AAPI leads: 1
- Books with Latino leads: 1
- Books with Jewish leads: 2
- Books with Neurodiverse leads: 1

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Publisher's publications in the past year have seen a growing and diverse representation in both our English and foreign language titles. We have published lead characters who are BIPOC, neurodiverse, disabled, of all shapes and ages, including characters in their 50s and 60s, and characters who are bisexual, pansexual, queer, trans, or non-binary.

Examples include our revised version of a book featuring a Deaf main character and a pansexual main character; a New Adult novel with two neurodiverse characters; and also out in 2022 is a translation of a book where both main characters are Black.

EVALUATION: Although diverse novels haven't sold that well in the past, we have seen an increase in interest in them recently, especially in the past year. One of our books with an Asian American main character and a dyslexic main character, for example, won an award this year. We are happy that diverse stories are gaining more traction among readers and hope to continue to publish more of them in the future and keep supplying that demand.

CORPORATE MESSAGING/SUBMISSIONS

Publisher updated submission language:

“We encourage submissions across all diverse experiences, including (but not limited to) LGBTQIA, Native and indigenous, people of color, gender diversity, neurodiversity, people with disabilities, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities.

We subscribe to a broad definition of disability, including but not limited to physical, sensory, cognitive, intellectual, or developmental disabilities, chronic conditions, and mental illnesses (this may also include addiction). Furthermore, we subscribe to a social model of disability, which presents disability as created by barriers in the social environment due to lack of equal access, stereotyping, and other forms of marginalization. Additionally, “lesbian, sapphic, and wlw” refers to a woman or nonbinary person who identifies as lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, Two Spirit, sapphic, homo/bi/pan-romantic asexual, and/or queer—this includes trans women.”

EVALUATION: The publisher listened to commentors on the Ideas for Diversity in Publishing website about specific recommendations for expanding submissions language. Due to the length of the production schedule, it will be some time before we can evaluate impact on submissions.

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Publisher added *Native American and indigenous* and *neurodiversity* in corporate diversity and inclusion statements.

EVALUATION: This was a specific request from commentators on the Ideas for Diversity in Publishing website, and it was heard and implemented.

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Publisher updated the language on the publisher’s website to be more inclusive, specifically outlining the publisher’s commitment to diversity and reinforcing that effort by specifically mentioning diverse groups in Publisher’s submission Guidelines.

EVALUATION: One year after updating the website language, total submissions received from BIPOC, Transgender, Bisexual and diverse authors increased by 15%. Of that amount, Publisher accepted 20% of the submissions for publication.

Anecdotally, when the publisher contacted each author, they were asked why the author selected this particular publisher for submission of their work. A high percentage of the author—over 80%—mentioned the inclusive language on the website as partly responsible for their decision.

Overall, the publisher feels that this single modification to the website was the most measurably successful change implemented by the publisher. Due to the length of the production schedule, it will be some time before we can see specific sales data of these accepted manuscripts.

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Publisher clarified submissions guidelines as follows: “We welcome authors of all identities writing queer content.”

EVALUATION: No measurable impact so far but publisher has always accepted submissions from authors of all identities writing across the queer spectrum and has no need for language that excludes men or male-identified non-binary people, including trans men. This simple statement welcomes everyone even if specific identity characteristics evolve over time.

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Publisher added a new inclusion policy to the company’s bylaws and website.

Evaluation: While no direct correlation can yet be made between the increase in diverse submissions and the addition of the Inclusion Policy, the publisher did see a slight increase of 10% in submissions from diverse groups over the past year.

MARKETING AND DISCOVERABILITY

E-COMMERCE STORE

Publisher updated the structure of their ecommerce platform to give prominence to bisexual and gender diverse titles. Publisher has plans to further update their ecommerce platform with a tagging system that will allow all inclusive identities to be visible and searchable.

EVALUATION: This initiative was time consuming for the publisher due to the relatively inflexible website design. To their surprise, once in place the changes went largely unnoticed by both authors and readers. There was no difference in sales data suggesting that all titles were as discoverable prior to the changes as after. Though this initiative has not had significant impact yet, the publisher is committed to publishing and marketing titles across the LGBTQ+ spectrum and, when able to update the infrastructure of the ecommerce platform, will implement a complex tagging system that allows for an infinite number of keywords to be searchable providing visibility for all identities represented in the novels.

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Publisher added POC book category to e-commerce store. Working on adding additional book categories to address diversity and inclusion.

EVALUATION: Customers are using the POC and POC Leads categories to search for books within the webstore. We will continue to expand our book categories to address diversity and inclusion.

ADVERTISING

Publisher partnered with a major LGBTQ online news magazine to promote diversity awareness. Promotion included publisher's self-identified diverse authors and/or books.

EVALUATION: No measurable increase in sales or reach of featured titles was seen.

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Publisher implemented specific promotion of the IDP initiative by placing a promotional banner in the vendor area at an in-person conference attended by approximately 300 Readers, Authors and Publishers. Included in the display were over 100 titles that the authors and or publishers selected specifically to showcase titles in their catalog that they deemed 'diverse'.

EVALUATION: Reactions to the display were mixed, but unfortunately mostly negative.

With regard to the IDP banner itself, there were no comments or inquiries directed at the IDP initiative or the banner itself. Instead, the focus was squarely on the books selected to be included in the display. The majority of individuals expressed doubt about the selection and felt that the majority of the books did not belong in the display because the books didn't fit their definition of 'diverse'.

We were somewhat surprised by the voracity of the comments made. Since each book was hand selected as ‘diverse’ by either the publisher or author themselves, it became clear that what one individual might identify as diverse is not necessarily how another individual might see the same book.

This, we believe, brings into focus a much larger issue for the IDP group as a whole. Clearly, what we have defined as ‘diverse’ may not necessarily be how others define that same term. It has been suggested that as we move forward, it is important for us to better understand and define the terms we’re using.

As such, we have begun to identify the need to do further study, probably in the form of a survey, to help us get feedback on what readers, authors and publishers alike identify as diverse. We have agreed to pursue this study over the next year, and expect to publish the results of our findings in the fall of 2023.

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Publisher updated frontlist and backlist keyword searches within Ingram CoreSource records to include diversity and inclusion keywords for easier and more comprehensive reader searches.

EVALUATION: It will be impossible to determine if the inclusion of diversity and inclusion keywords in metadata makes it easier for readers to find diverse books—however it is hard to believe it will not be helpful in making access to relevant titles easier.

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Publisher implemented diversity calendar into social media and sales planning.

EVALUATION: We find that some, but not all, of these posts get a wider audience and interaction. We have noticed an uptick in sales when we participate in diversity calendar promotions via Ingram—though it is impossible to determine if the uptick in sales is because of the promotion or the lower promotional price on featured products.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Helping diverse communities in all corners of the world is something the Publisher takes seriously and puts time and money into. Among the multiple queer and feminist organizations the Publisher has supported this year are Mitini Nepal and the Eurocentralasian Lesbian* Community (EL*C).

Mitini Nepal is an NGO that works for the rights and welfare of lesbian, bi, and trans women all over the country. The Publisher interviewed and blogged about Sarita KC, the organization’s executive director, to help spread her message. The Publisher also donated to Mitini Nepal to help it throw a Pride event for their community and raise awareness of Nepal’s limited rights for queer people.

The EL*C is a lesbian feminist and intersectional network for the rights, the visibility and the well-being of lesbians throughout Europe and Central Asia. The Publisher has been working closely with Élisabeth Chevillet, a French lesbian blogger, activist, and board member of EL*C. We have provided our website as a platform so she can discuss her general lesbian feminist issues and promote her network.

The Publisher has also been donating to and helping queer refugees from the Ukraine. Publisher’s Diversity Manager, will participate in the “Lesbian Resistance” conference in Budapest organized by EL*C.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

The significant number of responses and broad range of ideas already implemented, in progress, and slated for the future is extremely encouraging. This first report of the Ideas for Diversity in Publishing coalition provides a starting place from which publishers can grow and expand their diversity initiatives. The participating publishers worked diligently to fulfill the mission of the IDP and are proud of the diverse array of initiatives spanning hiring, authorship, own-voices, education, publication, corporate messaging, marketing, and sales.

Many of the ideas have not been in effect long enough to see tangible results so we expect the future to provide more concrete data on results as the work put into these initiatives bears fruit. Author initiatives with the widest marketing and most accessibility had a predictably larger response. The lowest response was seen in reader-oriented initiatives such as website design and marketing campaigns.

The publishers conclude equity for diverse groups is an ongoing struggle reinforcing the need for coalitions such as the IDP. The publishers hope that as society shifts toward inclusiveness for all groups, readers may expand their buying habits to include more diverse stories.

The publishers would like to thank all the respondents who contributed an idea, the authors who participated in the initiatives, the readers who embraced diverse books, and their fellow publishing professionals. The IDP coalition is the first of its kind and the first time traditional publishers of LGBTQ+ fiction have joined together toward a common goal. We cannot think of any more worthwhile aim than enhancing and promoting diversity and inclusion within our community. We look forward to the new ideas the IDP will bring and recommit to doing our part to create a diverse and inclusive publishing industry.