



Libraries & Sustainability

Programs and Practices
for Community Impact

edited by RENÉ TANNER, ADRIAN K. HO,
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ALA
Editions

CHICAGO 2022

available at alastore.ala.org

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ISBNs

978-0-8389-3794-5 (paper)

978-0-8389-3647-4 (PDF)

978-0-8389-3646-7 (ePub)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021038772

Cover design by Alejandra Diaz. Book design by Kim Hudgins in the Skolar Latin and Bilo typefaces.

Ⓢ This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (Permanence of Paper).

Printed in the United States of America

26 25 24 23 22 5 4 3 2 1

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS *vii*

INTRODUCTION

Sustainability as a Journey Rather than a Destination ix

PART I LEADERSHIP

- 1 **Walking the Path to Sustainable Library Certification**
JILL DAVIS, JENNIFER FERRISS, AND LISA G. KROPP 3

- 2 **Rapid Library Disaster Response and Recovery
for Community Resiliency**
MICHELE P. STRICKER 17

- 3 **Changing Staff Behaviors around Waste Reduction
and Diversion Using a Community-Based Social
Marketing Approach**
AMANDA FOSTER KAUFMAN, BRIAN COHEN, AND JEFF ELLER 27

PART II PLANNING

- 4 **Demystifying Sustainability in Library Buildings**
LAN YING IP, TAMAR WARBURG, LAUREN STARA, AND
ANDREA BUNKER 39

- 5 **Using Permaculture in Rural Libraries
to Help Save the World**
APRIL GRIFFITH 51

- 6 **Sustainable Event Planning for Libraries
and Library Organizations**
EVAN MESZAROS AND MANDI GOODSETT 63

PART III PROGRAMMING

- 7 How Repair Events at Libraries Can Build Social Infrastructure and Create Sustainable Culture
GABRIELLE GRIFFIS 75
-
- 8 Modeling Sustainable Choices
Practical Suggestions for Librarians Working with Children and Families
LARISSA M. CLOTILDES 87
-
- 9 Connecting Community through Sustainability
Seeds, Climate Action Kits, and Repair Cafés
JENNIFER ROWAN, AIYANG MA, AND KAREN SHARKEY 97

PART IV TRANSFORMATION

- 10 Why We Can't Talk about Sustainability in Libraries without Also Talking about Racism
ERIN ELZI 107
-
- 11 Community-Based Librarianship
A First Step toward Sustainability
LING HWEY JENG 117
-
- 12 Libraries in the Doughnut Economy
MONIKA ANTONELLI, RENÉ TANNER, REBEKKAH SMITH ALDRICH,
AND ADRIAN K. HO 127

ABOUT THE EDITORS 141

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS 143

INDEX 147

INTRODUCTION

Sustainability as a Journey Rather than a Destination

I HAVE BEEN ON A JOURNEY. ON THIS JOURNEY I HAVE FOUND KINDRED SPIRITS.

This book is the culmination of what it looks like when like-minded folks start finding each other, working together toward a common goal, and, through our profession, making the world a better place along the way.

A little history: In 2013 ALA approved the formation of the Sustainability Round Table (SustainRT) where I, along with the lead editor of this book, René Tanner, served on its governing board. In 2014 the New York Library Association (NYLA) passed its Resolution on the Importance of Sustainable Libraries, and in 2015 the Sustainable Libraries Initiative was formed, cofounded by me and Matthew Bollerman (who also, coincidentally, is the first-ever ALA SustainRT Councilor, appointed due to the fact that SustainRT was the fastest growing round table in the association at the time). Through that initiative we cocreated the Sustainable Library Certification Program along with our peers from New York, the first of its kind in the world.¹

After passing its own Resolution on the Importance of Sustainable Libraries, ALA formed a Special Task Force on Sustainability in 2017, and René and I were honored to be named cochairs of this task force, working alongside our now coeditors for this book, Adrian K. Ho and Monika Antonelli.² Monika had edited a book, *Greening Libraries*, that I was lucky enough to write a chapter for back in 2012, but getting to work with her on the task force and this book have been a dream come true. Monika is a longtime visionary in our field who recognized the connection between libraries and sustainability many years ahead of this latest wave of activity on the subject in our profession. The task force issued its final report, containing fifty-two recommendations for the association and profession in 2018, the same year the State of America's Libraries Report identified sustainability, along with diversity and inclusion, as a major national trend in the profession.³

In 2019, at the recommendation of the task force, ALA Council adopted sustainability as a core value of librarianship and committed to upgrade graduate

program curriculum accreditation standards to incorporate sustainability.⁴

Also, in 2019 the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) recognized NYLA through their Green Libraries award, the first organization in the United States to be recognized under this award program. In that same year, the first three libraries were certified under the Sustainable Library Certification Program. You can read about their experience in chapter 1.

In 2021, ALA formed a permanent Council Committee on Sustainability in acknowledgment of the commitment they were making to carry out the remaining recommendations from the task force report and due to the various intersections emerging due to the increased focus on sustainability in the profession.

In eight years, we have seen the connection between environmental sustainability and the library profession become stronger and stronger, a talking point not met with confusion as it was when I first started being active on this topic in our profession. It is now met with curiosity and excitement as more library workers recognize the importance of climate action and how libraries can become involved.

Both ALA and NYLA adopted the “triple bottom line” definition of sustainability, recognizing that the goal is balance among environmental stewardship, economic feasibility, and social equity (see figure 0.1). We cannot achieve true sustainability for a product, program, facility, organization, or community until all three of these components are addressed. This has resonated with the profession, helping environmental sustainability move away from being a simple “go green” checklist or something we celebrate once a year on Earth Day, and becoming a lens through which decisions are made, a mindset for future planning, and a vision for not only what libraries can be but what we can help others achieve when we work together in the face of the climate crisis.

A Mindset Shift for the Future

This mindset shift is a journey. It is part of what is necessary for a just transition, away from an economy that puts earnings ahead of people’s ability to thrive in the natural world, away from a societal model with accepted systemic inequities, and away from the devaluation of natural resources and the ecological miracle that is our planet that we seem hell bent to destroy despite its essential nature to our very survival.

The Sixth Assessment Report issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 2021 has been described as “a code red for humanity” by UN Secretary-General António Guterres.⁵ Human activity is unequivocally the cause of climate



FIGURE 0.1

Venn Diagram Depicting the Definition of the Triple Bottom Line

Credit: "Venn Diagram Depicting the Definition of the Triple Bottom Line" from *Sustainable Thinking: Ensuring Your Library's Future in an Uncertain World* by Rebekkah Smith Aldrich, copyright © 2018 by the American Library Association. Used with permission.

change, and it is now clear that even if we do everything right in the coming decade, we will still experience a 1.5 degree Celsius rise to average temperatures within the next two decades. While rapid action to cut greenhouse gas emissions may limit some impacts, others are now locked in. We will experience a significant increase in extreme weather in the next two to three decades. More threatening heat waves, rising sea levels, more intense hurricanes, severe droughts, diminished biodiversity—this is all in motion as we speak.

Sustainable Thinking is a term explored in the early days of the NYLA Sustainability Initiative and one I took a deep dive on in the ALA Editions title *Sustainable Thinking: Ensuring Your Library's Future in an Uncertain World*. It requires that we align our professional values and resources with the local and global communities' right to not just survive, but thrive, and to do so in a way that builds the resilience of our libraries and our communities.

In this book, we've pulled together some of the brightest minds in our field that have made the connection, many of whom the editors have had the pleasure of meeting through our service to ALA. These authors have begun the hard work to embed sustainable thinking into library operations, program and service design,

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and planning for the future of their libraries and the profession; they are the vanguards.

This is just the beginning. What you read in the chapters of this book are a snapshot in time of the thinking and action in the profession. Chapters span from excellent real-life examples in leadership—including a chapter to help libraries own their role as “first restorers” in the face of disasters, disruption, and discordance; to planning—including a primer on demystifying sustainability in the built environment; to programming—such as repair cafés, seed lending, climate action kits, and so much more; and to three brave chapters that take a run at defining the coming transformation of our profession, our society, and the economy.

Our hope is that this book is viewed as a place to build from, *and we are asking readers to come with us on the next leg of the journey*. To envision a world where we see a just transition of our economy, where all humans are treated with respect and kindness, where the Earth is treated as an equal stakeholder in the future. Our hope is that what you read in this book is not just interesting to you, not just food for thought, but content that helps you actively reimagine your role in the library profession to one as an ardent advocate interested in joining us in the work to not only help libraries step into the necessary role as leaders on the topic of sustainability, but to transform the world in a way that combats climate change and builds community resilience.

We are stronger when we work together.

Be well,
Rebekkah Smith Aldrich
May 2021

NOTES

1. “Home: Sustainable Libraries Initiative,” Sustainable Libraries Initiative, <https://sustainablelibrariesinitiative.org/>.
2. “Resolution on the Importance of Sustainable Libraries,” American Library Association, <https://tinyurl.com/dkphcenw>.
3. “Report of the ALA Special Task Force on Sustainability,” American Library Association, <https://bit.ly/2SYhe6h>; “State of America’s Libraries Report 2018,” American Library Association, www.ala.org/news/state-americas-libraries-report-2018.
4. “Resolution for the Adoption of Sustainability as a Core Value of Librarianship,” American Library Association, <https://bit.ly/2Qm8khJ>.

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5. Richard P. Allan, Paola A. Arias, Sophie Berger, et al., “IPCC, 2021: Summary for Policymakers,” in *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis, Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge University Press, in press), https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_SPM.pdf.

For Review Only

A large, stylized white graphic of a plant branch with several leaves, set against a light gray background. The branch curves from the bottom right towards the top left. The leaves are simple, rounded shapes.

PART I

LEADERSHIP

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CHAPTER 1

Walking the Path to Sustainable Library Certification

JILL DAVIS, JENNIFER FERRISS, AND LISA G. KROPP

LIBRARIES ARE PERFECTLY POSITIONED TO BE BOTH THE INSPIRATION AND THE catalyst within their communities when it comes to nurturing sustainability as a mindset for all operational and partnership decisions. Sustainability in this sense goes beyond the typical “greening” of a building through sustainable products and supplies. To become a truly sustainable library the staff at each of these case study libraries (Hendrick Hudson Free Library, Saratoga Springs Public Library, and Lindenhurst Memorial Library) focused on the “triple bottom line” approach to sustainable practices, meaning they committed to becoming environmentally sound *and* economically feasible in their communities *and* socially equitable in their partnerships, programs, and services.

The working definition of *sustainable thinking* that oversaw this mindset and transformation focused on aligning each library’s core values and resources with the local and global community’s right to endure, to bounce back from disruption, and to thrive by bringing new and energetic life to all areas of library operations and outreach.¹ Each site transformed their community relationships, services, and long-range plans to focus on providing direction for their libraries’ communities using a sustainable focus and lens.

The Sustainable Libraries Initiative (SLI) is a national program that originated as an offshoot of the NYLA’s Sustainability Initiative, in response to both NYLA and ALA’s passage of resolutions recognizing sustainability as a core value of the profession and critical component to a library’s infrastructure. The SLI was specifically designed to create and guide leadership within the library profession, and to provide tools to mobilize libraries to think and act sustainably.

The cornerstone project of the SLI is the Sustainable Library Certification Program (SLCP). By committing to the SLCP program and its philosophy, our three libraries focused on

- creating an organizational culture that asked questions about operational and outreach decisions, using sustainability as the lens to filter everything;
- engaging our administrations, staff, and library trustees, asking them to join us in this new way of thinking and collaborating with our community;
- delving into our building’s energy use and output, analyzing our energy intake and cost, our waste output, our building’s carbon footprint, and the amount of greenhouse gases we could reduce from our operational side; and
- looking ahead to the long term, where we began conversations to future proof our organizations, and ultimately, our communities and profession!

Each library completed action items in twelve categories, such as organizational commitment, waste management, energy consumption, land use, partnerships, and social equity and resilience, as they worked through the certification process. The three sites kicked off their work by launching a staff survey to gather the staff’s thoughts on how sustainable they felt each library already was. A large piece of the fact-finding undertaken was the benchmarking of data like electricity and natural gas purchased to establish a starting point related to greenhouse gas emissions. As you will read below, each library had a different “why” for working toward certification.

About The Libraries

Hendrick Hudson Free Library, Jill Davis, Library Director

The Hendrick Hudson Free Library (HHFL) is located in Westchester County, New York in the hamlet of Montrose, which is part of the town of Cortlandt. It is an association library whose service area is the local school district, serving a population of just over 16,000 residents. The library is governed by a board of trustees consisting of community members who are appointed by the current board and approved at its annual meeting. The library has been in operation for over eighty years and serves a community that is demographically diverse. Hendrick Hudson patrons come from many different economic, educational, social, and racial backgrounds, making our role vital in introducing the community to new and important information that will benefit all its users.

Saratoga Springs Public Library, Jennifer Ferriss: Head of Circulation and Technical Services

The Saratoga Springs Public Library (SSPL) is chartered to serve the local city school district (with a population of approximately 46,000) in upstate New York and is governed by a board of trustees elected by district residents. Saratoga Springs has two slogans that describe the city succinctly, “Health, History and Horses” and “City in the Country.” Visitors, including the rich and famous, began to travel to the region in the 1800s to taste, heal, and bathe in the natural mineral waters. The Victorian-era city is preserved and surrounded by a “greenbelt” where development is limited, and nature preserves, state forests and parks, and protected farms encircle the densely populated area, which includes the library building. Many of the farms support the thoroughbred horse industry and the late nineteenth century racetrack that is still running horses each summer.

Lindenhurst Memorial Library, Lisa G. Kropp, Library Director

The Lindenhurst Memorial Library has a varied history. It began as a village library purposefully created as a memorial to the Lindenhurst residents who were veterans of World War II. Over the years, the charter was changed to incorporate both North Lindenhurst and the unincorporated sections of Lindenhurst, and in 1964 it became a school district public library, with a publicly elected board of trustees, serving a population of over 42,000 residents. It moved to its current location in 1969 and is currently undergoing its first major expansion and renovation in fifty-two years.

Deciding to Pursue Certification

JILL DAVIS: HHFL’s journey to certification came via our work with the Westchester County-based Green Business Partnership (GBP) where we were asked to join a pilot group of businesses (both for-profit and not-for-profit) who undertook the challenge of evaluating our policies, practices, and building with an eye on environmental sustainability, both current and future. When the library board was approached for their thoughts and approval on this undertaking, they quickly agreed. They knew that being a leader in the community meant stepping out of their comfort zone and educating the public in many different areas. We knew that leading by example would enable us to encourage our patrons to think about the choices they make in the library, and at home, to protect our world. Shortly after being certified in the GBP program, the library became involved in the NYLA grassroots effort to

promote sustainable practices in New York State Libraries. These efforts allowed HHFL to build on the base provided by the environmental-focused items of the GBP certification and include the economic and social pieces that represent the triple bottom line.

JENNIFER FERRISS: In 2017 the SSPL board of trustees approved the library's 2017–2020 Strategic Plan, "Toward a Sustainable Future," which laid the groundwork for the library's participation in the certification process. The plan was created by conducting interviews with community members, and involving the staff, board of trustees, volunteers, and key stakeholders. As a result of listening to the community, a renewed value and mission statement were adopted. The library committed to be stewards of our natural resources, operate sustainably and transparently, and appreciate everyone for their uniqueness. The strategic plan has a full page on sustainability with two goals: (1) minimize our environmental impact, and (2) empower residents to productively engage in dialogue and have the resources to ensure a more resilient future. Communication, education, and staff buy-in were key to making this commitment and organizational change happen within the year.

LISA G. KROPP: The Lindenhurst Memorial Library lost a bond referendum vote in November 2017 that would have expanded the current building by 10,000 square feet while completely renovating the interior. The long-term library director retired that December, and as the new director, the board of trustees and I realized the need to reach out to the community to learn from the failed vote and strengthen our communities ties. We believed the library was an important piece of the community; yet we needed to share *why* we thought so, in order to gain buy-in both for the future of library services, and for a possible revision of the capital bond project.

At the same time, I was becoming more involved with the philosophy of sustainability and libraries, and was inspired by the work that Hendrick Hudson Free Library and Saratoga Springs Public Library were doing. It felt like the benchmarks, coupled with some community surveys and more meaningful partnerships, could help the library better understand what our community needed, and wanted, from its library.

Building Internal Buy-In with Stakeholders

JILL DAVIS: The decision to expand the library's mission to include sustainable practices in all areas of library service was the easy part. Without board and staff support, the implementation would have been challenging if not impossible. Although the library board strongly believed in the benefits of certification, without staff buy-in it would be difficult to be sure that the outcome of this endeavor would be successful and have long-term positive effects for the library and the community. The board had shown its commitment by quickly approving an overarching environmental policy. Launching the staff surveys, provided as part of the certification procedure, allowed us to gauge staff interest in sustainable practices at home, in the workplace, and if making sustainable practices a part of our library service model to the community seemed like a good idea and fit into our mission. Of our thirty-eight employees, thirty-six responded to the survey; 94 percent believe HHFL is an environmentally friendly workplace, and employees wanted to see a focus on energy, recycling, paper use, and green purchasing as a starting point.

JENNIFER FERRISS: Communicate and engage with your stakeholders. For SSPL, communication and modeling began at the September 2017 All-Staff Development Day, the official kickoff of the certification project, where the plan was explained, and the seeds were planted for the needed staff volunteers to create our Green Team. The morning session showcased the existing sustainable connections and resources the library already had by featuring local nonprofit organization leaders who valued sustainable thinking. Empathy training and an afternoon wellness opportunity to assist local organizations with a project, including cleaning up the park, helping at the food pantry, and removing weeds in gardens allowed staff to understand that sustainability is not just about the environment. Our lunch was provided by a local restaurant that worked with us to provide take-out containers to avoid food waste and all food was served with kitchen stainless steel instead of one-time use aluminum and plasticware. Finally, we announced to staff the Saratoga Reads, our one community, one book selection, *The Sixth Extinction* by Elizabeth Kolbert.

LISA G. KROPP: The first section of benchmarks, which focused mostly on the environmental metrics, allowed us to gauge cost savings to the community made

when the Library Board invested in new windows, heating, ventilating, and air conditioning (HVAC), and a white roof back in 2013. Our energy consumption post infrastructure work showed about a 32 percent savings in energy bills. This gave us a positive starting point to share with the community, as we began working behind the scenes on strengthening community partnerships. I joined local service organizations such as the Kiwanis and Rotary clubs, and began embedding the library into the community to help with issues and projects that were community, not library, driven—such as taking a table every month to the local farmer’s market, where the library shared, for free, the herbs and produce grown in our community garden.

Getting Started

JILL DAVIS: With the trustees and staff support evident, our work began moving quickly. We developed a green team consisting of eight staff members from different departments and challenged them to develop a plan to better inform all of our employees and the community of current and future sustainable initiatives. Our commitment went beyond the active participation of the green team. The entire staff played a role, from gathering electric bills, planning upcycling programs, researching green cleaning methods and sustainable office products, and installing signage to direct patrons to proper recycling containers. Our new mission to be a leader in environmental stewardship in our community was acknowledged by a certification celebration with local officials, countywide when we received Eco Awards in both 2016 and 2018 for being the first library in Westchester County to become certified as a green business and establishing ourselves as a library leader in promoting sustainability efforts. We were honored with the New York State Joseph Shubert Library Excellence Award and became the first sustainably certified library in New York, using the Sustainable Libraries Initiative certification benchmark program. All of these recognitions proved to staff, the board, and our patrons that what we were focusing on was important and respected beyond the community we serve.

JENNIFER FERRISS: Organizational change, actually any change, is difficult. Forming a green team of like-minded colleagues or those who are willing to learn and be cheerleaders and change makers for the project is essential. By spreading out the work it helps get messaging across the organization.

If you can partner with a school, I recommend an intern to help with the clerical work. We were fortunate to have a college intern from Skidmore College help out with the environmental portion of our certification. She helped with data entry, researching alternative cleaning supplies, figuring out our Energy Star ratings, and labeling every light switch to say, “turn off when not in use,” and water faucets to say, “every drop counts.”

LISA G. KROPP: Administering the staff surveys as our first step into the certification process was eye opening because it showed across the entire staff a desire for the library to “do more” when it came to sustainable thinking. Staff members actively sought out more information about sustainability in libraries and asked to join the library’s sustainability team. The amount of genuine interest and support from staff allowed us to quickly jump in and get the work started. Once we had that staff buy-in, the sustainability team focused on different areas of the benchmarks to spread the required actions out across the team. For example, our business office staff worked on the bulk of the environmental data, while our clerks, custodians, and librarians focused on the programs, policies, services, and recycling efforts in the benchmarks. Meeting as a group every other month also helped us set deadlines to hit.

Project Highlights

JILL DAVIS: Successful completion of the SLI for HHFL included not only implementing an overarching environmental policy, but adding our support of sustainable initiatives into job descriptions and employee review processes; having a financial plan in place that will help ensure the future of the library and its staff; installing solar panels; the introduction of a staff composting program and a community water garden; expanded support of our school district with our summer camp program; a hot-spot lending program and support of our local food pantry; and partnerships with businesses including Field Goods, which resulted in locally grown produce to be delivered to the library and local restaurants. Considered a “community treasure,” the library wanted to present itself as a truly sustainable organization, and the SLI was a guiding compass leading us to success.

JENNIFER FERRISS: New and expanded partnerships formed through the work of the certification program helped get our message to the community, providing

validation, educational opportunities, and support. We created an internship opportunity with Skidmore College for an environmental science major who already had experience working on this topic over the summer. We also strengthened our partnership with the nonprofit Sustainable Saratoga in 2018 and we worked with them to debut the county's first repair café, a free program where beloved items are fixed in tandem with a volunteer coach. The children's department, in collaboration with Sustainable Saratoga and the Children's Museum at Saratoga, created the program "Whiz, Bang, Pop: Adventures in Science" to make sustainable science fun and accessible. Our local bike nonprofit, Bikeatoga, worked with the library to install a Fix-It Bike Repair station on the route of the future Greenbelt connector, a multiuse trail to safely connect sidewalks, new and existing trails and parks around the city. These repair tools were discovered by more riders when the city created a temporary pop-up redesign of the street adjacent to our property to test plans for our city's Greenbelt loop initiative, which would allow for alternative transportation around the city by bike or foot. We are fortunate to be able to work with organizations who share the library's values and help us promote sustainable actions and services to the community.

LISA G. KROPP: Our newly formed, staff-led sustainability team began exploring ways the library could embrace more sustainable actions. One example was the expansion of our community library garden that was maintained by our custodial staff. A seed lending library was started, and local residents donated seeds and starter plants to the expanded library garden. Over the last three growing seasons, the library has been able to donate over 200 pounds of produce directly to community members, and to the local chapter of the Long Island Cares food pantry. The Kiwanis and Key Club members also volunteered in the garden, weeding and helping with the end of year cleanup.

Fairly quickly, the bonds made with these partnerships brought the library into the spotlight in a more positive way. The public viewed the library as a first stop when looking for solutions or answers to community-driven issues. This allowed us to work in earnest on the benchmarks that focused on financial and social equity at the same time that the library board further committed itself to sustainable practices by working to add solar panels to the roof, doubling the size of our community garden, and replacing any remaining fluorescent lights with LED fixtures both in and outside of the building.

The Board also began moving forward with a revised building renovation plan, which the community supported and passed by public referendum in October 2019, allowing us to fully incorporate sustainability and partnerships into our new plans. We realized that by achieving the SLCP certification in November 2019 and making the long-term health and well-being of the community part of the library's "why" statement, we were in a strong place to continue to grow our sustainability efforts through our programs and services. Since we began incorporating sustainable thinking and practices into the library, we have been thrilled to see the Village of Lindenhurst also adopt sustainable practices by conducting a walkability study of the downtown area, creating dedicated bike lanes, and pledging to put solar panels on village buildings and electric vehicle charging stations throughout the village. We partner regularly with the village's environmental consultant and offer creek cleaning programs twice a year with volunteers fanning out across the community to different sections of our local creek that feeds into the Great South Bay, to keep garbage out of our waterways.

Sustainability after Certification

JILL DAVIS: The certification process provided us with a whole new way to look at just about everything we do. From policy writing and staffing to building use/design and programming the decisions we make are always with our commitment to sustainable practices in the forefront. When starting our E-ZPass retail program we looked at this with our sustainable lens and noted that by encouraging the use of E-ZPass, we would be helping to cut down on idling times and fuel consumption at toll booths, thus helping to reduce emissions. We applied for and were trained to become a passport processing agency, accepting passport applications for the Department of State. We thought it would just be a well-received service for our community, but in the two-and-a-half years we have been doing it we have generated revenue of over \$30,000. This revenue helps to secure our financial sustainability. There are always going to be ways we never thought of when we started this process that will move the HHFL forward in our commitment and vision to being a leader in sustainability.

JENNIFER FERRISS: The management team at Saratoga continues to discuss the triple bottom line in decision making while their emergency business plan is in effect due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. The children's librarians

have completed a diversity audit of the collection, and the library is in the beginning stages of gathering information from the community for our next round of strategic planning, with a focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). The events of the past several months have convinced us that EDI work is more important than ever for community resilience, and that achieving these aspirations requires decisive action. In July 2020, the board passed a racial and social justice policy to codify our commitment.²

LISA G. KROPP: After achieving certification at Lindenhurst, the library had an easier “sell” of more sustainable concepts. For example, as part of the certification requirements, the board passed a sustainability policy.³ That policy made the idea of adding solar panels and electric vehicle chargers (slated to be installed in 2021 during other building construction), much more procedural instead of a strong sales pitch. It was viewed as a necessity, because of the library’s commitment to sustainable practices, instead of a “want.” Although the cost of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification wasn’t something we felt was attainable in the scaled back renovation and expansion, the board and staff made sure the architects valued sustainable thinking, and incorporated sustainability into the new design. This ranges from electric vehicle charging stations, solar lights for the overflow parking lot, automatic lights, and faucet fixtures.

Our board of trustees is also taking a look at EDI work and has built it into our current strategic plan for 2020–2023. This three-year document will further shape the library’s sustainability work, as well as broaden its scope to reach and represent all areas of our community. A Conversation Café that began in person before COVID-19 hit pivoted to an online format to keep those community members looking for a place to practice their English-speaking skills together. Over the winter, a participant joined the online café from Japan because a contact in Lindenhurst told her about it. Small things like that example, which are big things to the people looking for them, are the motivation of our work now: to be inclusive and open to all community members.

The Impact of the Pandemic on Sustainable Thinking

Even during the pandemic, the mindset shift achieved through the certification program is evident at all three libraries. Earth Day events in 2020 were virtual or self-directed because of libraries being physically closed for a period of time.

Staff from Saratoga and Lindenhurst participated in the Earth Day eco-challenge while working from home.⁴ The challenge provided education and action steps that focused on 100 solutions for global warming that individuals could take based on the book *Drawdown*. Our stories below show how our libraries were able to hold onto the mind shift created through the certification process and expand upon it, even while the pandemic might have shifted our priorities.

JILL DAVIS: With the intensity of 2020 one would think that the sustainability efforts at the HHFL would have slowed down, and in some areas that is true. The time spent working from home, and then having limited access to the building, by both staff and patrons, gave us the time we needed to move toward a new way of providing services to our community. These services are certainly more “green” and sustainable, yet they still fulfill the needs of our patrons. HHFL’s quarterly newsletter is no longer printed and mailed (something we wanted to do for years, but community pushback had previously prevented). Instead, we post all of our programs to our website. We have beefed up our social media posts, and we are all now able to assist patrons with attendance at virtual programs. (Think of the greenhouse emissions not being produced by travel!) In order to reduce building occupancy, we have patrons use the library by appointment. This allows staff to provide more personal services. Although we certainly miss the days of boasting about program attendance and seeing our building alive with patrons, HHFL, like so many libraries, found a way to adapt, move forward, and remain vital to our community during these unique times.

JENNIFER FERRISS: At Saratoga Springs, for example, a small group of employees that are not on the green team created a compost plan for when COVID-19 restrictions are gone and the library can get back to hosting in-person programs with food. They also came up with a plan for staff to learn how to safely compost in the staff lounge kitchen after lunch and dinner breaks. Another group at the library came up with a list of things staff could do to offset the increased use and cost of cleaning supplies and personal protection equipment.

LISA G. KROPP: Our library saw staff that participated in the eco-challenge create new virtual programs for patrons, such as an environmental film festival and discussions. When we reopened the building in June 2020, more staff participated in walking or biking to work during the warmer weather, because of the eco-challenge, further showing a shift in mindset toward more

available at alastore.ala.org

sustainable practices becoming embedded into everyday life. We partnered with one of the main food banks on Long Island—LI Cares—to house food and pet food donation bins in the library’s lobby. Even with being physically closed for a quarter of the year, the community donated 1,305 pounds of food to LI Cares through the library’s donation bins. Although the building was closed because of COVID-19, all late fees were waived. Now, I’m proud to say the board of trustees voted to permanently eliminate late fees as part of their commitment to financial equity, beginning in January 2021.

Like Saratoga Springs and Hendrick Hudson, we struggle with the amount of personal protective equipment (PPE) and disposable cleaning products that entered our building. The sustainability team is exploring different recycling programs for items like nitrile gloves, and the library purchased washable cloth masks for each employee, to encourage their use over single-use masks.

Making a Difference

Ultimately, there is still much that can be done, even by libraries that have achieved certification or have taken the first steps toward it. Our three libraries are adding new programs and services because of the work and lessons learned during the certification process. Examples of new programs or services added to benefit our three communities include:

- Social work interns via a partnership with Stony Brook University (Lindenhurst Memorial Library [LIND])
- Food pantry assistance via library gardens and food drives (LIND)
- Repair cafés to combat our “throwaway” culture ([LIND] and Saratoga Springs Public Library [SSPL])
- Passport agency acceptance site (Hendrick Hudson Free Library [HHFL])
- E-ZPass auto toll system sold for cars (HHFL)
- Fundraising/grant opportunities (HHFL), (LIND), and (SSPL)

We are all committed to using our successes with the SLCP to let our communities know both what we have done and how we will continue to make a difference. Whether it’s continuing to look for ways to reduce costs and greenhouse emissions, designing programs that educate and entertain, creating partnerships in the most unlikely places, or finding new sources of income, we have to keep stepping up to the challenge. Libraries have always been leaders, and if thinking about

sustainability carries on long after the three of us leave our institutions, then our libraries have been successful in shifting mindsets to embed sustainable practices.

NOTES

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For Review Only

A

Abridged Dewey Decimal Classification and Relative Index (Dewey), 59
 academic libraries, sustainability
 scholarship in, 28
 advertising and promotion for events, 65, 78
 Aldrich, Rebekkah Smith, xii, 127
 American Library Association (ALA)
 Council Committee on Sustainability, x
 fair use online resources, 135
 Pandemic Prevention and Preparedness, 19
 Programming Librarian blog, 88
 antiracist and antioppressive sustainability
 work in libraries, methods of moving
 toward, 113–114
 antiracist work as sustainability work, 115
 Antonelli, Monika, ix, 127
 appreciative inquiry and community-based
 librarianship, 120–121
 asset-based community building, 119–121
 Association for Library and Information
 Science Education (ALISE), 118
 Association of College and Research
 Libraries (ACRL), 135
 attendee travel, event planning and, 66

B

backbone of community, library as, 122
 behavior change, developing strategies to
 minimize barriers to, 31–33
 best practices for library buildings and
 sustainability, 47–48
 big picture, seeing the, 130
 BIPOC voices, need for, 113–114. *See also*
 racism and sustainability
 Bollerman, Matthew, ix
 book delivery, Carnegie Library (Eureka
 Springs) partnership for, 59–60

book sales, modeling sustainable choices
 and, 93
 Boomerang Bag sewing bees, 82–83, 84
 Brown, Jennifer, 109
 Buckland, Michael K., 117
 budgets
 institutional oppression and, 111–112
 raising money for programs, examples of
 creativity in, 54
 for repair events, 77–78
 utilities and, 57
 buildings and sustainability. *See* library
 buildings and sustainability
 Bunker, Andrea, 39

C

carbon reduction as component contributing
 to sustainable facility design, 40
 Carnegie Library (Eureka Springs)
 book delivery, partnership for, 59–60
 COVID-19 pandemic and, 60–61
 disposables, transition from using, 52, 53
 energy consumption, reduction of, 57
 outreach, use of, 59
 plant use in, 58
 raising money for programs, examples of
 creativity in, 54
 seed library, use of, 53
 Styrofoam cups and plastic lids, finding
 alternatives to use of, 57–58
 waste items, examples of reducing, 56
 CD Recycling Center of America, 56
 change, creative use of and response to,
 60–61
 Charney, Madeleine, 87
 circles of care, community-based
 librarianship and, 121–122
 cleanup after repair events, 79

- Climate Action To-Go Kits, use of, 103
- climate change, event planning and, 64–65
- climate justice, event planning and, 64
- Clotildes, Larissa M., 87
- coaches for repair events, recruiting, 78
- Cohen, Brian, 27
- collections, modeling sustainable choices and, 91–93
- commitment, community-based social marketing and, 31
- common language, community-based librarianship and, 122
- communication
 - community-based social marketing and, 32
 - event planning, communication and promotion for, 65–66
 - as strategy in waste reduction and diversion, 32–33
- community-based librarianship
 - appreciative inquiry, 120–121
 - asset-based community building, 119–121
 - backbone of community, library as, 122
 - circles of care and, 121–122
 - common language and, 122
 - community informatics, 117–119
 - connectors, librarians as, 122
 - engagement, elements of community, 121–122
 - evolution of librarianship, 118–119
 - information defined, 117
 - LIS education and training, building competencies in, 124
 - stakeholder relationships and, 122
 - Transforming Libraries into Community Anchors in Rural Texas (TLCART) [grant project], 122–124
 - whole-person librarianship and, 121
- community-based social marketing
 - barriers, developing strategies to minimize, 31–33
 - barriers and benefits of target population, identifying perceived, 30–31
 - behavior to be changed, selection of, 29–30
 - broad-scale implementation and evaluation, 34
 - commitment and, 31
 - communication and, 32
 - convenience and, 32
 - incentives and, 31
 - overview, 29
 - pilot event, use of, 33–34
 - prompts and, 32
 - social diffusion and, 32
 - social norms and, 31–32
 - strategies to overcome barriers, developing, 31–33
 - success of, 34–35
- community connections through sustainability at the Greater Victoria Public Library
 - Climate Action To-Go Kits, use of, 103
 - Community-Inspired Service Model, 97–98
 - conversations with the community on ways to live sustainably, 100–102
 - COVID-19 pandemic and, 103–104
 - library overview, 97
 - partnerships and, 103–104
 - Repair Café and, 102
 - Victoria Seed Library, 98–99
- community informatics, community-based librarianship and, 117–119
- Community-Inspired Service Model at the Greater Victoria Public Library, 97–98
- community markets, modeling sustainable choices and, 91
- community member, library visitor as, 132
- connecting to people around us to promote well-being, 138
- connectors, librarians as, 122
- Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP), 20–21, 24
- convenience, community-based social marketing and, 32
- Conversations for a One Planet Region, 101
- conversations with the community on ways to live sustainably, 100–102
- Cooperrider, David L., 120
- copyright and fair use, 135
- cosponsors for repair events, finding, 77
- Council Committee on Sustainability (American Library Association), x
- Council of State Archivists Pocket Response Plan (PReP), 21
- COVID-19 pandemic
 - Carnegie Library (Eureka Springs) and, 60–61
 - community connections through sustainability at the Greater Victoria Public Library and, 103–104
 - disaster response and recovery and, 18–19
 - event planning and, 69

- Hendrick Hudson Free Library (HHFL)
and impact of, 13
- Lindenhurst Memorial Library and
impact of, 13–14
- Saratoga Springs Public Library (SSPL)
and impact of, 13
- Wellness and Sustainability Committee
at Z. Smith Reynolds Library, Wake
Forest University and, 35
- Crayola ColorCycle program, 56
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé, 108
- critical assessment and disaster response
and recovery, 17
- customer, library visitor as, 132
- D**
- David, E. J. R., 108
- Davis, Jill, 3–13
- De Boer, Jordyn, 82
- deep energy retrofit at Stevens Memorial
Library (case study)
HVAC system solutions, 42–43
overview, 41
quantifying the energy issue, 42
sealing and weatherizing the building,
42
- Derthick, Annie O., 108
- design components for sustainability.
See facility design components for
sustainability
- Digital Right to Repair Coalition, 76
- Disaster Information Management Research
Center, 21
- disaster response and recovery
after disaster, tools for, 20, 22–23
Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP),
20–21, 24
- Council of State Archivists Pocket
Response Plan (PReP), 21
- COVID-19 pandemic and, 18–19
- critical assessment, 17
- before disaster, tools for, 20–22
- Hurricane Sandy and, 21
- Incident Action Plan (IAP), 20, 22–23, 24
- Librarians as Community Preparedness
Facilitators Tabletop Exercises, 20,
22, 24
- Librarians' Disaster Recovery and
Community Resiliency Toolkit, 19–20
- new tools for, 20–21
- overview, 17, 24
- prioritization, 17–18
- A Seat at the Table discussion document,
20, 21, 24
- situational awareness and, 17–18
- traditional disaster plans, 18, 24
- discarded materials, modeling sustainable
choices and, 93
- disposables, transition from using, 52, 53
- diverse leaders, need for, 113–114
- diversity, using and valuing, 58–59
- Dorling Kindersley and sustainability, 92
- doughnut economics and libraries
being active in our bodies to promote
well-being, 138
connecting to people around us to
promote well-being, 138
copyright and fair use, 135
funded research, open access to, 134–135
giving to others to promote well-being,
138–139
human nature, shaping, 132
knowledge commons and, 134–136
makerspaces and, 135–136
mindset shift and, 136–139
noticing the world to promote well-being,
138
nudge policies and, 133–134
open educational resources and, 136
overview of doughnut economics, 127–129
personal values, list of ten basic, 133
repair events and, 132
shifts in economic persona
from calculating to approximating,
133–134
from dominant to dependent, 134
from fixed preferences to fluid values,
133
from isolated to interdependent, 133
from self-interest to socially reciprocating,
132–133
skills learning to promote well-being, 138
terminology and, 132
tool libraries and, 132
transition to a twenty-first century
economy
big picture, seeing the, 130
buildings, evaluation and design of,
131
goal, changing the, 130
human nature, nurturing, 131
overview, 130
redistribution of information, 131
services, reprioritizing, 131

transition to a twenty-first century economy (*cont'd*)
 systems redesigned and developed to respond to evolving needs, 131
 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and, 129–130
 well-being, acts promoting, 138–139
Doughnut Economics (Raworth), 128

E

Earth Day activities, 12–13, 103
 economic persona shifts
 from calculating to approximating, 133–134
 from dominant to dependent, 134
 from fixed preferences to fluid values, 133
 from isolated to interdependent, 133
 from self-interest to socially reciprocating, 132–133
 economics, doughnut. *See* doughnut economics and libraries
 educational program allowing patrons to tour library's sustainable features at Woburn Public Library (case study), 48
 electrification as component contributing to sustainable facility design, 40
 Eller, Jeff, 27
 Elzi, Erin, 107
 energy
 catching and storing, 53
 as component contributing to sustainable facility design, 40
 consumption, reduction of, 57
 retrofit at Stevens Memorial Library. *See* deep energy retrofit at Stevens Memorial Library (case study)
 energy use intensity (EUI), 40, 47
 engagement, elements of community, 121–122
 environmental gentrification, 110
 environmental racism, 112–113, 114, 115
 environmental stewardship, event planning and, 64
 environmentally and fiscally responsible strategies for resource use as component contributing to sustainable facility design, 41
 Equity, Diversion, and Inclusion (EDI) and sustainability, 112
 Ettarh, Fobazi, 110

event planning
 attendee travel and, 66
 climate change and, 64–65
 climate justice and, 64
 communication and promotion of, 65–66
 COVID-19 pandemic and, 69
 environmental stewardship and, 64
 fiscal responsibility and, 64
 food and catering and, 66–67
 giveaways and, 67–68
 ground rules, setting, 68
 online, planning events, 69–70
 reasons to conduct sustainable, 63–65
 recycling and, 67
 social equity and, 64
 vendors and, 67–68
 waste and, 67
 evolution of librarianship, 118–119

F

facility design components for sustainability
 building as educational resource, 40
 carbon reduction, 40
 design for people and community, 40
 electrification, 40
 energy, 40
 environmentally and fiscally responsible strategies for resource use, 41
 human wellness design, 41
 indoor air, 40
 indoor lighting, 40
 standards for sustainable design, 40
 water, 40
 fair use, copyright and, 135
 Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), 17, 22–23
 feedback, acceptance of, 54–55
 Ferretti, Jennifer A., 109
 Ferriss, Jennifer, 3–13
 fiscal responsibility, event planning and, 64
 fix-it events. *See* repair events
 food and catering, event planning and, 66–67
 Four I's of Oppression and sustainability
 ideological oppression, 109–110
 institutional oppression, 110–112
 internalized oppression, 112–113
 interpersonal oppression, 112, 114
 overview, 108–109
 funded research, open access to, 134–135

G

giveaways, event planning and, 67–68

giving to others to promote well-being, 138–139

Going Green: Implementing Sustainable Strategies in Libraries around the World (Hauke, Charney, and Sahavirta), 87

Goodsett, Mandi, 63

Greater Victoria Public Library community connections through sustainability

- Climate Action To-Go Kits, use of, 103
- Community-Inspired Service Model, 97–98
- conversations with the community on ways to live sustainably, 100–102
- COVID-19 pandemic and, 103–104
- library overview, 97
- partnerships and, 103–104
- Repair Café and, 102
- Victoria Seed Library, 98–99

Green Business Partnership (GBP), 5–6

green space and modeling sustainable choices, 90–91

greeters used in repair events, 79

Griffis, Gabrielle, 75

Griffith, April, 51

ground rules for events, setting, 68

Gurstein, Michael, 118

H

HarperCollins Canada and sustainability, 92

Hathcock, April, 108

Hendrick Hudson Free Library (HHFL) [case study]

- awards won by, 8
- COVID-19 pandemic, impact of, 13
- decision to pursue certification, 5–6
- highlights of project, 9
- internal buy-in with stakeholders, building, 7
- new programs and services added by, 14
- overview, 4
- partnerships, 9
- sustainability after certification, 11
- working towards certification, 8

Ho, Adrian K., ix, 127

Holmgren, David, 52

Honma, Todd, 109

human nature

- nurturing, 131
- shaping, 132

human wellness design as component contributing to sustainable facility design, 41

Hurricane Sandy, disaster response and recovery and, 21

HVAC system solutions and deep energy retrofit at Stevens Memorial Library (case study), 42–43

I

ideological oppression, 109–110

iFixit's Pro Tech Toolkit, 77

incentives, community-based social marketing and, 31

Incident Action Plan (IAP), 20, 22–23, 24

including others in your plans, usefulness of, 57–58

indoor air as component contributing to sustainable facility design, 40

indoor air quality (IAQ), 40

indoor lighting as component contributing to sustainable facility design, 40

information defined, 117

institutional oppression, 110–112

“Interior Landscape Plants for Indoor Air Pollution Abatement” (NASA), 58

internalized oppression, 112–113

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), 129–130

interpersonal oppression, 112, 114

Ip, Lan Ying, 39

J

Jeng, Ling Hwey, 117

K

Kaufman, Amanda Foster, 27

Kendi, Ibram X., 109

knowledge commons, doughnut economics and libraries and, 134–136

Kolbert, Elizabeth, 7

Kretzmann, John P., 120, 123

Kropp, Lisa G., 3–14

L

lamps as most repaired item at repair events, 79

language, community-based librarianship and common, 122

Lankes, R. David, 119

LEED certification and twenty-first century addition to historic library at Woburn Public Library (case study), 44

Leung, Sofia, 109

- Librarians as Community Preparedness Facilitators Tabletop Exercises, 20, 22, 24
 - Librarians' Disaster Recovery and Community Resiliency Toolkit, 19–20
 - Library and Information Science (LIS) education, 118, 124
 - library buildings and sustainability
 - best practices, 47–48
 - components contributing to facility design
 - building as educational resource, 40
 - carbon reduction, 40
 - design for people and community, 40
 - electrification, 40
 - energy, 40
 - environmentally and fiscally responsible strategies for resource use, 41
 - human wellness design, 41
 - indoor air, 40
 - indoor lighting, 40
 - standards for sustainable design, 40
 - water, 40
 - deep energy retrofit at Stevens Memorial Library (case study)
 - HVAC system solutions, 42–43
 - overview, 41
 - quantifying the energy issue, 42
 - sealing and weatherizing the building, 42
 - defining sustainability for buildings, 40–41
 - lessons learned, 47–48
 - new urban library with rooftop solar photovoltaic panels - Medford Public Library (case study)
 - overview, 46
 - upgrading and meeting sustainability goals, 46–47
 - overview, 39–40
 - transition to a twenty-first century economy and evaluation and design of buildings, 131
 - twenty-first century addition to historic library at Woburn Public Library (case study)
 - connecting new addition to historic structure, 44–45
 - educational program allowing patrons to tour library's sustainable features, 48
 - LEED certification, 44
 - materials used in new addition, 45
 - overview, 43–44
 - sustainable attributes of historic structure, 44
 - lighting as component contributing to sustainable facility design, 40
 - lighting power density (LPD), 40
 - Lindenhurst Memorial Library (case study)
 - COVID-19 pandemic, impact of, 13–14
 - decision to pursue certification, 6
 - highlights of project, 10–11
 - internal buy-in with stakeholders, building, 7–8
 - new programs and services added by, 14
 - overview, 5
 - partnerships, 10–11
 - sustainability after certification, 12
 - working towards certification, 9
- M**
- Ma, Aiyang, 97
 - makerspaces, doughnut economics and libraries and, 135–136
 - “making do” mindset, 59
 - marketing, community-based social. *See* community-based social marketing
 - McKenzie-Mohr, Doug, 29, 31
 - McKnight, John L., 120, 123
 - Medford Public Library and new solar photovoltaic panels, 46–47
 - meetings for running repair events, 78
 - Méndez-Brady, Marisa, 109
 - Mezzaros, Evan, 63
 - mindset shift, doughnut economics and libraries and, 136–139
 - modeling sustainable choices
 - book sales and, 93
 - collections and, 91–93
 - community markets and, 91
 - green space, 90–91
 - materials that have been discarded and, 93
 - non-traditional items added to collections, 93
 - overview, 88
 - partnerships and, 89
 - programs, 89–90
 - public outdoor spaces and, 91
 - publishers' sustainability statements, familiarizing yourself with, 92
 - space and, 90–91
 - Mollison, Bill, 52

N

- new addition to historic structure,
 - connecting at Woburn Public Library (case study), 44–45
- New Jersey State Library, 19
- new skills learned at repair events, 80–81
- New York Library Association (NYLA), ix
- NLM (US National Library of Medicine), 21
- non-traditional items added to collections,
 - modeling sustainable choices and, 93
- noticing the world to promote well-being, 138
- nudge policies, doughnut economics and libraries and, 133–134

O

- Okun, Tema, 110
- old books, creating art with, 82
- online, planning events, 69–70
- online resources for repair events at libraries, 84
- open educational resources, doughnut economics and libraries and, 136
- oppression and sustainability. *See* Four I's of Oppression and sustainability
- organic waste collection program, 28
- OSTP (US Office of Science and Technology Policy), 135
- outreach, use of, 59

P

- Pandemic of COVID-19. *See* COVID-19 pandemic
- Pandemic Prevention and Preparedness* (ALA), 19
- partnerships
 - community connections through sustainability at the Greater Victoria Public Library and, 103–104
 - Hendrick Hudson Free Library (HHFL) and, 9
 - Lindenhurst Memorial Library and, 10–11
 - modeling sustainable choices and, 89
 - permaculture in small and rural libraries and, 59–60
 - Saratoga Springs Public Library (SSPL) and, 9–10
- pattern to detail, designing from, 56–57
- Penguin Random House and sustainability, 92
- permaculture defined, 52

- permaculture in small and rural libraries
 - change, creative use of and response to, 60–61
 - diversity, using and valuing, 58–59
 - energy, catching and storing, 53
 - feedback, acceptance of, 54–55
 - fix-it programs, use of, 56
 - including others in your plans, usefulness of, 57–58
 - “making do” mindset and, 59
 - observation and interaction, 52–53
 - outreach, use of, 59
 - partnerships and, 59–60
 - pattern to detail, designing from, 56–57
 - renewable resources and services, using and valuing, 55–56
 - repair cafes, use of, 56
 - self-regulation, applying, 54–55
 - slow solutions, use of, 58
 - small changes, use of, 58
 - waste items, reducing, 56
 - yield, obtaining a, 53–54
 - personal values, list of ten basic, 133
 - physical activity to promote well-being, 138
 - pilot event, community-based social marketing use of, 33–34
 - plant use in Carnegie Library (Eureka Springs), 58
 - plastic lids and Styrofoam cups, finding alternatives to use of, 57–58
 - political stance of libraries, 114
 - Postma, Martine, 75, 102
 - Potts, Tania, 82
 - prioritization and disaster response and recovery, 17–18
 - Pro Tech Toolkit, 77
 - Programming Librarian* blog (ALA), 88
 - programs and modeling sustainable choices, 89–90
 - promotion and advertising for events, 65, 78
 - prompts, community-based social marketing and, 32
 - Public Domain Day, 135
 - public outdoor spaces, modeling sustainable choices and, 91
 - publishers' sustainability statements, familiarizing yourself with, 92
- R**
- racism and sustainability
 - antiracist work as sustainability work, 115
 - BIPOC voices, need for, 113–114

- racism and sustainability (*cont'd*)
- diverse leaders, need for, 113–114
 - Four I's of Oppression and
 - ideological oppression, 109–110
 - institutional oppression, 110–112
 - internalized oppression, 112–113
 - interpersonal oppression, 112, 114
 - overview, 108–109
 - moving toward antiracist and
 - antioppressive sustainability work in libraries, methods of, 113–114
 - overview, 107–108
 - political stance of libraries and, 114
 - raising money for programs, examples of creativity in, 54
 - Raworth, Kate, 127–129, 130, 132, 133, 134–136, 138
 - recycling, event planning and, 67
 - redistribution of information and transition to a twenty-first century economy, 131
 - reframing of every aspect of work of library professionals as opportunity to make and model sustainable choices. *See* modeling sustainable choices
 - renewable energy certificates (RECs), 55
 - renewable resources and services, using and valuing, 55–56
 - repair events at libraries
 - defined, 75
 - doughnut economics and, 132
 - at Greater Victoria Public Library, 102
 - items brought to, 79
 - lamp repair, 79
 - new skills, learning, 80–81
 - online resources for, 84
 - overview, 75–76
 - permaculture in small and rural libraries and, 56
 - Repair Café at the Greater Victoria Public Library, 102
 - right to repair movement, 76–77
 - running repair events
 - advertising for, 78
 - budget for, 77–78
 - cleanup after, 79
 - coaches for, recruiting, 78
 - cosponsors, finding, 77
 - greeters, use of, 79
 - meetings for, 78
 - overview, 77–79
 - social media postings of event after, 79
 - space for, 77
 - tools, inventory of, 78
 - welcoming space, creating a, 78–79
 - safety issues for certain items, 80
 - special parts, need for, 79–80
 - tool libraries, 81–82, 84
 - visible mending, 81
 - what to expect at, 79–80
 - zero waste inspired programs and, 82–84
 - Right to Repair Association, 76
 - Roszak, Theodore, 117
 - Rowan, Jennifer, 97
 - rural and small libraries
 - disposables, transition from using, 52
 - overview, 51
 - permaculture in. *See* permaculture in small and rural libraries
- S**
- safety issues for certain items at repair events, 80
 - Saratoga Springs Public Library (SSPL) [case study]
 - COVID-19 pandemic, impact of, 13
 - decision to pursue certification, 6
 - highlights of project, 9–10
 - internal buy-in with stakeholders, building, 7
 - new programs and services added by, 14
 - overview, 5
 - partnerships, 9–10
 - sustainability after certification, 11–12
 - working towards certification, 8–9
 - Scholastic and sustainability, 92
 - Schwartz, Shalom, 133
 - SDGs (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals), 129–130
 - sealing and weatherizing the building, 42
 - A Seat at the Table discussion document, 20, 21, 24
 - seed libraries, 53, 98–99
 - self-interest to socially reciprocating, shifts in economic persona from, 132–133
 - services, reprioritizing, 131
 - Sharkey, Karen, 97
 - situational awareness and disaster response and recovery, 17–18
 - The Sixth Extinction* (Kolbert), 7
 - skills learning to promote well-being, 138
 - slow solutions, use of, 58
 - small and rural libraries
 - disposables, transition from using, 52
 - overview, 51

- permaculture in. *See* permaculture in small and rural libraries
- small changes, use of, 58
- social diffusion, community-based social marketing and, 32
- social equity, event planning and, 64
- social marketing, community-based. *See* community-based social marketing
- social media postings of repair events, 79
- social norms, community-based social marketing and, 31–32
- solar photovoltaic panels at Medford Public Library (case study), 46–47
- space
 - modeling sustainable choices and, 90–91
 - for running repair events, 77
- special parts at repair events, need for, 79–80
- stakeholder relationships, community-based librarianship and, 122
- standards for sustainable design as component contributing to sustainable facility design, 40
- Stara, Lauren, 39
- Stephens, Jennie, 113
- Stevens Memorial Library (case study). *See* deep energy retrofit at Stevens Memorial Library (case study)
- Stricker, Michele P., 17
- Styrofoam cups and plastic lids, finding alternatives to use of, 57–58
- Sunstein, Cass, 133
- Sustainable Libraries Certification Program, ix, x
- Sustainable Libraries Initiative (SLI)
 - formation of, ix
 - overview, 3
- Sustainable Library Certification Program (SLCP)
 - Hendrick Hudson Free Library (HHFL) [case study]
 - awards won by, 8
 - COVID-19 pandemic, impact of, 13
 - decision to pursue certification, 5–6
 - highlights of project, 9
 - internal buy-in with stakeholders, building, 7
 - new programs and services added by, 14
 - overview, 4
 - partnerships, 9
 - sustainability after certification, 11
 - working towards certification, 8
 - Lindenhurst Memorial Library (case study)
 - COVID-19 pandemic, impact of, 13–14
 - decision to pursue certification, 6
 - highlights of project, 10–11
 - internal buy-in with stakeholders, building, 7–8
 - new programs and services added by, 14
 - overview, 5
 - partnerships, 10–11
 - sustainability after certification, 12
 - working towards certification, 9
 - overview, 3
 - Saratoga Springs Public Library (SSPL) [case study]
 - COVID-19 pandemic, impact of, 13
 - decision to pursue certification, 6
 - highlights of project, 9–10
 - internal buy-in with stakeholders, building, 7
 - new programs and services added by, 14
 - overview, 5
 - partnerships, 9–10
 - sustainability after certification, 11–12
 - working towards certification, 8–9
 - sustainable thinking, 3
 - Sustainable Thinking: Ensuring Your Library's Future in an Uncertain World* (Aldrich), xi
 - The Sustainable Library's Cookbook* (Pun and Shaffer), 28
 - swap programs, use of, 82
 - systems redesigned and developed to respond to evolving needs, 131
- T**
 - take-make-use-restore cycle, 136
 - Tanner, René, ix, 127
 - TerraCycle, 56
 - Texas Woman's University School of Library and Information Studies (TWU SLIS), 122
 - Thaler, Richard, 133
 - tool libraries, 81–82, 84, 132
 - traditional disaster plans, 18, 24
 - Transforming Libraries into Community Anchors in Rural Texas (TLCART) [grant project], 122–124

- transition to a twenty-first century economy
 big picture, seeing the, 130
 buildings, evaluation and design of, 131
 goal, changing the, 130
 human nature, nurturing, 131
 overview, 130
 redistribution of information, 131
 services, reprioritizing, 131
 systems redesigned and developed to
 respond to evolving needs, 131
- travel, event planning and attendee, 66
- triple bottom line definition of
 sustainability, x-xi, 3, 5-6, 11, 63-64
- Tuitt, Frank, 108
- twenty-first century addition to historic
 library at Woburn Public Library (case
 study)
 connecting new addition to historic
 structure, 44-45
 educational program allowing patrons to
 tour library's sustainable features,
 48
 LEED certification, 44
 materials used in new addition, 45
 overview, 43-44
 sustainable attributes of historic
 structure, 44
- U**
- UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science,
 135
- United Nations Sustainable Development
 Goals (SDGs), 129-130
- upgrading and meeting sustainability goals,
 46-47
- Urban Learning Garden at Central Branch
 Library, 99
- urban library with rooftop solar photovoltaic
 panels - Medford Public Library (case
 study), 46-47
 overview, 46
 upgrading and meeting sustainability
 goals, 46-47
- US National Library of Medicine (NLM), 21
- US Office of Science and Technology Policy
 (OSTP), 135
- V**
- variable air volume (VAV), 47
 variable refrigerant flow (VRF), 47
 vendors, event planning and, 67-68
 Victoria Seed Library, 98-99
- visible mending, 81
 vocational awe, 110
- W**
- Wake Forest Office of Sustainability, 27, 29
- Warburg, Tamar, 39
- waste, event planning and, 67
- waste items, examples of reducing, 56
- water as component contributing to
 sustainable facility design, 40
- weatherizing and sealing buildings, 42
- well-being, acts promoting, 138-139
- whole-person librarianship, 121
- Williams, Laura, 52
- Woburn Public Library (case study). *See*
 twenty-first century addition to
 historic library at Woburn Public
 Library (case study)
- Z**
- Z. Smith Reynolds Library, Wake Forest
 University (case study)
 community-based social marketing, use of
 barriers, developing strategies to min-
 imize, 31-33
 barriers and benefits of target popula-
 tion, identifying perceived, 30-31
 behavior to be changed, selection of,
 29-30
 broad-scale implementation and eval-
 uation, 34
 overview, 29
 pilot event, use of, 33-34
 success of, 34-35
- organic waste collection program, 28
 overview, 27
- Wellness and Sustainability Committee
 COVID-19 pandemic and, 35
 formation of, 27
 issues, identifying, 28
 resources used by, 28
 social diffusion as strategy in waste
 reduction and diversion, 33
 social norms as strategy in waste
 reduction and diversion, 33
 waste reduction and diversion as goal
 of, 28-29
- zero waste inspired programs
 Boomerang Bag sewing bees, 82-83, 84
 old books, creating art with, 82
 repair events at libraries and, 82-84
 swap programs, use of, 82