



Libraries & Sustainability

Programs and Practices
for Community Impact

edited by RENÉ TANNER, ADRIAN K. HO,
MONIKA ANTONELLI, *and* REBEKKAH SMITH ALDRICH

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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, positioned diagonally across the page. The leaves are simple, rounded shapes, and the stem is a thin, curved line.

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.

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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

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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