

NYLA Sustainability Initiative White Paper

Introduction

In February 2014 the Council of the New York Library Association passed the *Resolution on the Importance of Sustainable Libraries*¹ in recognition of the essential nature of libraries and the need for libraries to be proactively planning for a vibrant future both for themselves and for their communities. In order to be sustainable, libraries need to partner in community conversations about resiliency and climate change. The resolution included the stabilization and reduction of long-term energy costs, an increase in the support for the library in the community and new sources of funding as components of *sustainable thinking*:

"... Resolved, that the New York Library Association enthusiastically encourages activities by its membership – and itself - to be proactive in their application of sustainable thinking in the areas of their facilities, operations, policy, technology, programming and partnerships."

But what does *sustainable thinking* look like? What activities would a library engage in to achieve this ideal? How would a library know if they were successful in this endeavor?

Sustainable, Resilient, Regenerative: A Strategy for the Future of New York's Libraries

NYLA Sustainability Initiative Retreat

To help find the answers to these questions and define a potential path a retreat was planned. Five sponsors stepped forward to underwrite an event at which library leaders from around the state could convene to discuss what it would look like for NYLA to move forward in a way that was true to the 2014 resolution:

- Leadership & Management Section of the New York Library Association (LAMS)
- Public Library Section of the New York Library Association (PLS)
- Public Library Systems Directors Organization (PULISDO)
- Suffolk Cooperative Library System
- Suffolk County Library Association

Retreat conveners envisioned an event in which those in attendance would be "co-creators" in defining *sustainable thinking* for the New York library community. A call for applicants was issued for the retreat in the spring of 2015:

Announcement of the retreat:

Libraries are increasingly faced with economic challenges, environmental uncertainty and disruptive obstacles to fulfilling our mission to provide equitable access to library services. How will New York Libraries respond?

In 2014, the NYLA Council passed their Resolution on the Importance of Sustainable Libraries - recognizing the need to promote the important role libraries can play in larger community conversations about resiliency, climate change and a sustainable future for the communities that we serve. But what does this actually look like? What does it look like when libraries make "sustainable decisions"? What activities will promote "sustainable thinking" in libraries?

NYLA will be providing a select group of New York's library leaders with the time and space to articulate the way libraries will adapt to our changing world through our "Sustainability Initiative Retreat" where we will become

¹ http://www.nyla.org/max/4DCGI/cms/review.html?Action=CMS_Document&DocID=1031&MenuKey=news

co-creators in shaping strategies that ensure our libraries remain vital, are able to rebound from disruption and provide on-going value to the communities they serve.

More than 30 leaders applied. However, funding for the retreat, at that time, only allowed for 20 participants. As more donations were received the group grew to 24. Applicants were chosen for their articulation of the tenets of sustainability, their previous sustainability-related project experience and to ensure as many types of libraries were represented as possible. A list of the retreat co-creators is available in the Appendices.

Prior to the event co-creators prepared by reading a selection of resources² provided by the conveners and watching the Sustainable Thinking Mini-course, a recorded, condensed version of a workshop offered around the state over the past year. The co-creators also engaged in two activities: one, to personally define how libraries are already sustainable and two, to research examples of how libraries behave in sustainable, resilient and regenerative ways (their examples are provided in the appendices).

At the retreat, held at the Carey Institute for Global Good in Rensselaerville, NY, September 21-22, 2015, co-creators confirmed the purpose of the retreat:

*To provide the **time and space** to articulate the **alignment** of core values with the potential role for libraries to play as **sustainability leaders** in their communities;*

*In a way that invites each participant as a **co-creator**;*

*So that our institutions **remain vital, rebound from disruption and provide ongoing value** to the communities they serve.*

The group then worked to come to consensus on:

- **Our shared goal:** "vital, visible and viable libraries"
- **Core Values:**
 - Access
 - Democracy
 - Education & Literacy
 - Community
 - Intellectual Freedom
 - Stewardship
 - Adaptability

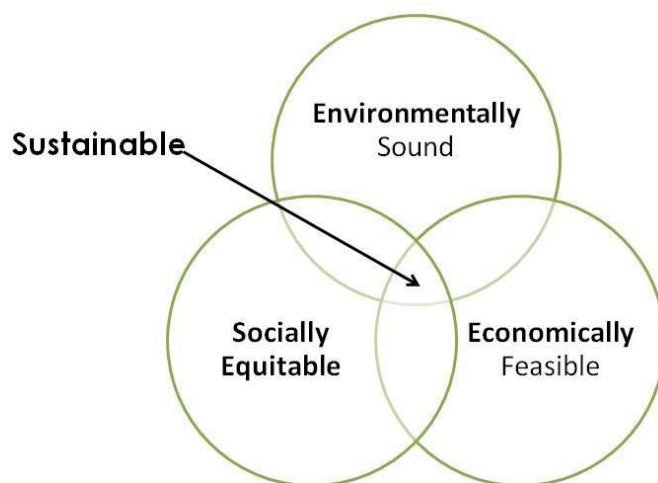
Conceptual Hierarchy (used to define both a library's and a community's desired state):

- Sustainable: to endure
- Resilient: to bounce back after disruption
- Regenerative: to bring new, energetic life; revive
- Whole Systems Thinking: a process of understanding how things/parts/systems behave, interact with their environments and influence each other.

Definition and understanding of the Triple Bottom Line and how it applies to a library and a community:

² http://www.nyla.org/max/4DCGI/cms/review.html?Action=CMS_Document&DocID=1564&MenuKey=career

Triple Bottom Line



Discussing the Triple Bottom Line assisted the group's understanding as to why we would focus particular attention on the environmental "leg" of this **"three-legged" stool** that defines sustainability. In order for something (a product, policy, institution or community) to be truly sustainable it must address all three "legs" of the stool (the environment, economics and social equity.) The group's discussion encompassed an acknowledgement that the philosophy of the American public library, well articulated in the Library Bill of Rights, speaks inherently to a library's role to ensure community members are treated in socially equitable ways. However, it was noted that the concept of **"justice"** needs to be added to this leg as it is not enough to offer something equitably, it also needs to be suited to the individual's needs. (The metaphor provided by co-creator Erica Freudenberger to explain the difference: it would be equitable if we all had shoes, it would be justice if we all had shoes that fit.) The group then discussed the variety of ways libraries speak to the economic feasibility of a community: shared access to entertainment, education and culture; facilitation of a local sharing economy - providing opportunities for communities to pool their resources so that all may have access to more than anyone could have individually; as well as workforce development efforts. The group came to the consensus that there is weakness in a library's ability to holistically approach the environmental aspect of sustainability - noting lags in library facility operations, construction approaches, programs and partnerships as well as community engagement to ensure a library is truly aligning their resources with community aspirations and priorities.

Defining "Sustainable Thinking"

Through the consensus conversations related to our core beliefs, the Triple Bottom Line and the conceptual hierarchy for libraries and communities the group began to seek a brief description of what "sustainable thinking" means for libraries.

To this end, we propose the following definition of "sustainable thinking":

Sustainable thinking aligns a library's core values and resources with the local and global community's right to endure, bounce back from disruption and to thrive by bringing new and energetic life to fruition through choices made in all areas of library operations and outreach.

Recommendations

To support and enhance the New York library community's ability to think sustainably the co-creators have agreed the NYLA Sustainability Initiative should continue and provide the following purpose statement and strategies to bring "sustainable thinking" to life through NYLA for the libraries of New York:

Initiative Purpose Statement [draft]:

To create leadership and provide tools to mobilize libraries to think sustainably.

In a way that builds awareness and consensus, inspiring action in the library community to own their role as sustainability leaders

So that communities thrive, bounce back from disruption and are infused with new and better life for everyone.

To fulfill this purpose the following recommendations are made:

- 1. Formation of a NYLA Sustainable Thinking Committee** to oversee and carry out the work identified by the co-creators at the retreat (see second recommendation) as well as serve an advisory role to NYLA on their own operational decision making to think more sustainably (see third recommendation).
- 2. Authorization and support of the five recommended Project Teams** (full descriptions and anticipated outcomes for each can be found in the appendices) which are devoted to the following strategies:
 - *An Environmental Scan* to inform initiative activities
 - *Tools for Making the Case for Sustainable Thinking*
 - *A Benchmarking* program to incentivize and measure sustainability efforts in libraries
 - *Creation of a Roadmap* resource to help libraries get started on a path to sustainability and continue on
 - *Development of an Empowering Agents of Change* program to inspire sustainability leadership in New York's libraries

We envision a three-year phased approach to the work defined by the project teams:

- Phase 1: Research and Development with a target launch of developed resources at the 2016 NYLA Conference
 - Phase 2: Implementation of initiatives and tools
 - Phase 3: Refinement and Evaluation
 - Next Steps: Escalation/Elevation of work products
- 3. While outside of the scope of the retreat's work, we feel it makes sense to recommend the consideration of NYLA's own role in fulfilling the intent of the resolution (operationally, at conference, etc.) in order to best serve as a model to NYLA members.**

Conclusion

"NYLA leads, educates, and advocates for the advancement of the New York library community."

-NYLA Mission Statement

NYLA has an opportunity to fulfill its mission in a unique way through the NYLA Sustainability Initiative, deepening a commitment made in 2014 with the passage of the NYLA Resolution on the Importance of Sustainable Libraries. A bold step into the future that can empower the library community in new and interesting ways that will truly pay dividends for years to come. As we seek ways in which a library can engage more fully with the community it serves, so should NYLA seek stronger ties with its membership. Providing value, improving library leaders' capacity and generating good things for the people of New York is a wonderful legacy for NYLA Council to pursue through this initiative.

We respectfully provide you with this white paper to assist in the advancement of New York's libraries.

Appendix

1. New York Library Association *Resolution on the Importance of Sustainable Libraries*
2. NYLA Sustainability Initiative Retreat Co-Creators
3. Examples of library actions in the categories of sustainable, resilient, regenerative and whole systems thinking generated by retreat co-creators
4. Project Team Initial Proposals
 - a. Environmental Scan
 - b. Making the Case for Sustainable Thinking
 - c. Benchmarking
 - d. Roadmap
 - e. Empowering Agents of Change

Appendix 1**New York Library Association's Resolution on the Importance of Sustainable Libraries**

Whereas, libraries are essential to the communities they serve; and

Whereas, library leaders have a mandate to ensure future access to economical library services; and

Whereas, libraries that demonstrate good stewardship of the resources entrusted to them can build their base of support in their communities which leads to sustainable funding; and

Whereas, the scientific community has clearly communicated that current trends in climate change are of great concern to all; and

Whereas, the people who work in our libraries and access services in our facilities deserve a healthy environment in which to do so; and

Whereas, libraries who demonstrate leadership in making sustainable decisions that help to positively address climate change, respect natural resources and create healthy indoor and outdoor environments will stabilize and reduce their long-term energy costs, increase the support for the library in their community; and reveal new sources of funding; therefore be it

Resolved, that the New York Library Association, on behalf of its members, recognizes the important role libraries can play in larger community conversations about resiliency, climate change, and a sustainable future; and be it further

Resolved, that the New York Library Association enthusiastically encourages activities by its membership – and itself - to be proactive in their application of sustainable thinking in the areas of their facilities, operations, policy, technology, programming and partnerships.

Adopted by NYLA Council, February 6, 2014

Appendix 2**NYLA Sustainability Initiative Retreat Co-Creators**

September 21-22, 2015 | Carey Center for Global Good, Rensselaerville, NY

Conveners

- **Rebekkah Smith Aldrich**, Coordinator for Library Sustainability, Mid-Hudson Library System
- **Matthew Bollerman**, Director, Hauppauge Public Library and Past NYLA President
- **Jeremy Johannesen**, Executive Director, New York Library Association

Co-Creators

- **David Bradford**, Potsdam Public Library, Potsdam, NY
- **Victor Canseco**, Sandpebble Builders, Southampton, NY
- **Mary Lou Carolan**, Wallkill Public Library, Wallkill, NY
- **Megan Coder**, SUNY New Paltz - New Paltz, NY
- **Casey Conlin**, Pawling Free Library - Pawling, NY
- **Susan Currie**, Tompkins County Public Library, Ithaca, NY
- **Jill Davis**, Hendrick Hudson Free Library, Montrose, NY
- **Claudia Depkin**, Haverstraw King's Daughters Public Library, Garnerville, NY
- **Deborah Emerson**, Central NY Library Resources Council, Syracuse, NY
- **Jesse Feiler**, Plattsburgh Public Library, Plattsburgh, NY
- **Erica Freudenberger**, Red Hook Public Library, Red Hook, NY
- **Margo Gustina**, Southern Tier Library System, Painted Post, NY
- **Geoffrey Kirkpatrick**, Bethlehem Public Library, Delmar, NY
- **Stephen Maher**, New York University School of Medicine, New York, NY
- **Lisa Matte**, Jervis Public Library, Rome, NY
- **Kate McCaffrey**, Northern Onondaga Public Library, Cicero, NY
- **Rebecca Miller**, Library Journal and Floyd Memorial Library, Greenport, NY
- **Richard Naylor**, Leadership & Management Section, New York Library Association
- **Sarah Potwin**, Lagrange Association Library, Poughkeepsie, NY
- **Roger Reyes**, Suffolk Cooperative Library System, Bellport, NY
- **Todd Schlitt**, West Islip Library, West Islip, NY
- **Tim Wiles**, Guilderland Public Library, Guilderland, NY
- **Dana Lee Willbanks**, New York Library Association, Guilderland, NY
- **Judith Wines**, RCS Community Library, Ravena, NY

Appendix 3

Examples of sustainable, resilient, regenerative actions by libraries as well as what whole systems thinking can look like. [Source: Retreat Co-Creators]

Sustainable <i>to endure</i>	Resilient <i>to bounce back</i>	Regenerative <i>to bring new energetic life</i>	Whole System Thinking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placemaking; Library is a place that people want to be; that people value and care for • Leadership development • Affordable facility operations (energy conservation, maintenance); LEED • Recycling; waste management • Programming examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Recycling Day ○ CSA pick up ○ Health Literacy ○ Job Seeker assistance • Public vote on the library's tax levy • Staff wellness • Affordable access to ebooks/epub • Non-traditional collections/sharing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Library Farm (NOPL) ○ Tool Lending • Equal access to information, education and entertainment, in all its many forms, for all people of the community that the library serve • Community Engagement - a visible library; "Turning Outwards" • Physical accessibility of the library • Go where people already are • Transliteracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Continuity planning (aka disaster planning) • Library as convener to develop/discover community-based solutions • Solar power; net-zero energy; micro-grids • Whole building generators • Native landscaping; rooftop gardens • Community gardening • Strategic, collaborative planning • Organizational / change management • Flexible space/floor plan • Hire for flexibility and openness to learning; cross-trained staff • Trend spotting • Continuous improvement cycle; responsive to changing community needs/priorities • Civic Engagement • Strategic Partnerships with municipal leaders and first responders • Programming examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ DIY Repair ○ Financial literacy ○ Cultural inclusivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facility meets Living Building Challenge • Programming / Partnership examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ STEM; Makerspace; fab lab ○ Human Library/Teacher for a skill ○ Outside the Lines Week; out-of-the ordinary programming ○ Open Government Data ○ Books to Action ○ Pop-Up Libraries • Business and innovation incubation • Entrepreneurial activities by the library • Responsive collection development (and weeding) policy • Part of the tourism and economic development conversation • "Participatory community experience(s)" (ex Idea Box) • Pedal powered charging stations • "Make the community feel good about itself" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability infused within library's strategic plan • Policy, for example <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ HHFL Environmental Policy ○ Green Building Operations ○ Climate Smart Pledge ○ Environmentally Preferable Purchasing • Commitment to sustainability built-in to job descriptions and evaluation • Collaborate rather than compete with other libraries • To make our goal not just a thriving library but a thriving community using the Triple Bottom Line

Appendix 4

Project Team Initial Proposals

- a. Environmental Scan
- b. Making the Case for Sustainable Thinking
- c. Benchmarking
- d. Roadmap
- e. Empowering Agents of Change

a. Environmental Scan to support the NYLA Sustainability Initiative

Statement of Purpose:

Increase the capacity of the Sustainability Initiative co-creators by doing and sharing research on the state of Sustainability, Resiliency, and Regenerative policies, practices, and plans on a local, statewide, nationwide and global scale.

Outputs:

- Provide an informed overview of the research to the Sustainability Initiative
- Feed information, tools, exemplars, as well as potential threats to other Sustainability Initiative sub-committees
- Generate a curated directory of individuals for partnership/alliance/information

Next steps:

Look everywhere for work that we (co-creators) can adapt and adopt (ie. the research).

- Use this form as a collection tool: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1p-b9YjXK7RZcTWKPrYTTyAECNAhO-BiNAow3EvzPybl/viewform>
- Identify the work of others in this sphere
- Identify connections with alliance organizations and corporations

Longevity:

Further steps

- Gap analysis of the environmental scan identifying missing resource areas by type of resource, type of target audience, or type of organization engaged in the work
- Schedule for updates, as well as link and contact checks
- Recommendations for outreach based on the research for sharing with co-creators with diverse priorities

Subcommittee research priorities distribution

All participants will investigate their own localities for exemplars and trends. Additionally:

Hyperlocal scan – Todd

State – Richard

Federal/Global NGO/ Foundations – Rebecca

Corporations – Margo

Academia (k-12 & higher ed) – David

Additional roles

Task & timeline management – Richard

Sharing/Pathfinder tool construct - Margo

b. Making the Case for Sustainable Thinking

Statement of Work

- Develop a resources that will help library leaders make the case to their various stakeholders that sustainable libraries are essential to the vitality of the communities they serve.

Potential Output

- Drawing on the Roadmap and Environmental Scan resources, develop:
 - Written documents in cooperation with the Sustainability Initiative's Train the Trainer which include:
 - Talking points and short scripts to help library leaders communicate the importance of sustainable libraries to different stakeholders (trustees, staff, friends, library users, non-users, and municipal leaders)
 - An ongoing conversation about sustainable thinking in libraries including:
 - Short examples drawn from the Roadmap and Environmental Scan resources which highlight exciting examples of sustainable thinking and lead people to these resources

Logical Next Steps

- Identify the audience of library leaders to which the Talking Points are directed using tools from the Train the Trainer work
 - Identify the audiences to which these library leaders will be making the case
- Draw case studies from the Roadmap and Environmental Scan resources
- Develop Talking Points to communicate the essential work of the Sustainability Initiative to members of NYLA

Longevity Plan

- Keep the conversation going and increase visibility and awareness for sustainable thinking by sharing information and examples in NYLA's *News You Can Use!* and other outlets
- Co-chairs: Casey Conlin and Claudia Depkin
- Members: Megan Coder and Susan Currie

c. Benchmarking Work Group

Group Members: Geoff Kirkpatrick, Jill Davis, Sarah Potwin, Roger Reyes, Judith Wines, Debby Emerson

Statement of Work: Create a framework to incentivize and measure library sustainability.

Anticipated Outcomes/Outputs:

- Resolution – committee will come up with proposed wording; libraries will be asked to adopt or opt-in
- List of benchmarks
- Certification program

Next Steps:

- Environmental scan of existing benchmarks from other libraries and other types of organizations
- Environmental scan of existing resolutions that we might use as a model for ours
- Environmental scan to identify any existing certification programs
- Develop our list of benchmarks
- Develop language for a sample resolution
- Develop list of benchmarks

Longevity Plan:

- Geoff Kirkpatrick to serve as Chair during first year
- Jill Davis to serve as Vice-Chair and take over as Chair in second year
- Roger Reyes to serve as Chair in third year
- Each group member will do research on existing benchmarks, policy statements and certification programs and will submit their top choice in each category to Geoff by October 15.
- Group will communicate via conference call.

Other Discussion:

We need to see what benchmarks have already been set by other institutions.

Our certification program would be run through the NYLA office. It could include both “must do” items and optional items that would lead to a higher certification level. Libraries could select one item from the list of benchmarks to work on each year. The first step would be for the library to pass a sustainability resolution based on the language our group creates (or they could develop their own language). Next, the library would get the list of benchmarks or actions they could take. We noted that many libraries may already be doing many of the things on the list – it will vary from library to library. We weren’t sure how we would take this into account when developing the certification program.

d. Sustainability Roadmap Working Group

Statement of work: To answer the question, *How Do I Start?*

Potential Outcomes / Outputs:

- Develop Toolkits consisting of,
 - Self-Assessment Questionnaires
 - In concept a self-identified member of the library community (staff, librarian, director, trustee, board member) would complete a self-assessment and, based on their answers, receive a road map and suggested resource material. For example,
 - Dear Staff at ABC Library,

 - Based on your assessment you are interested in environmental sustainability projects. Consider the following case studies, programming, and contacts from libraries and other organizations who have accomplished similar projects.

Example of a Sustainability Assessment Tool:

<https://sustaintool.org/>

(this tool is registered under a Creative-Commons License and is free to adapt)

- Attached PDF version to [Roadmap Group](#)

Road maps

Collections of resource material

Case Studies,

samples of Policies, Programming

Identified experts (w/n the library community & beyond)

Logical Next Steps:

- Collect what we have
 - Case Studies,
 - samples of Policies, Programming
 - Identified experts
 - Self-Assessment Questionnaires
- And fill in the gaps

Project "Longevity Plan"

- Keep the Toolkits up to date
- Create a reporting mechanism to share results with other libraries and the community

e. Empowering Agents of Change Working Group

Statement of Work:

- Identify and empower like-minded leaders through training & education.

Potential outcomes:

- More leaders
- Thinking more systemically; understanding the library as part of a larger ecosystem/community
- Leaders will learn active listening skills
- Embrace dissent
- Learn to facilitate community discussions
- Pattern recognition in community discussions
- Teach concept of triple bottom line and relation to patterns
- Partner w NYLA to offer more training opportunities.

Logical Next Steps:

- Encourage NYLA sections to incorporate sustainability into mission statements
- Add sustainability class to NYLA Leadership Academy (turns out, this may already be happening)
- Leaders interested in sustainability issues could convene at NYLA (10 a.m. Friday @ NYLA conference)
- Recruit potential leaders at NYLA conference
- Hold decentralized training opportunities throughout the state
- Develop training concepts
- Creation of Facebook page for Sustainability Initiative retreaters to continue conversation, deepen work

Longevity Plan:

- NYLA meetups
- Facebook group
- Regional interactions
- NYLA conference sessions & CE

Chair & co-chair: Not determined; Tim Wiles (allegedly) not available. Erica and Mary Lou could be talked into it (will involve promises of risotto...). And Victor should be involved.