

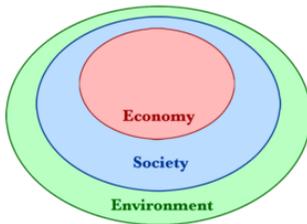
NEFLIN Annual Meeting 2011 – Green Libraries and Sustainability – Round Table

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What is Sustainability?

The most popular definition of sustainability can be traced to a 1987 UN conference. It defined sustainable development as “**development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs**”(WECD, 1987) [1]

This requires the reconciliation of environmental, social and economic demands - the "three pillars" of sustainability.



A diagram indicating the relationship between the three pillars of sustainability suggesting that both economy and society are constrained by environmental limits. [2]

How is Sustainability Relevant to Libraries?

Libraries are key institutions in community learning efforts. As such they must respond to the needs of the communities they serve.

Libraries are information, intellectual and community hubs – community being used here as any group sharing common characteristics and perceived as distinct in some respect (town, city, county, university, special group). Libraries serve all members of the community regardless of socioeconomic status, gender, political views, race, religion, or any other differentiating characteristics within the group.

One of the central themes of the Libraries’ mission is to preserve knowledge. Programming, availability of resources (books, digital, movies, music, computers...), speakers, exhibits – all need to work together to create a dynamic community space. This space must reflect the concerns, needs and realities of the community, as well as spark curiosity, questioning and dialog.

The great challenges of today are **climate change**, **growing social inequality** and our **shrinking resource base**.

To remain relevant and vital, libraries must respond to these challenges in the way they operate, as well as in the programming and services they offer. Libraries can become hubs of learning to address these challenges by initiating and leading collaborative efforts with other groups, units, and organizations within their communities.

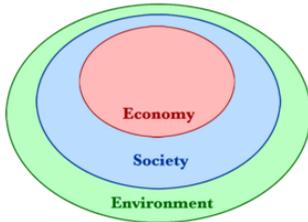
Because of their unique role, their altruistic mission and, public and pedagogical nature, no organization/unit is better suited to bring communities together in this way.

[1] United Nations General Assembly (1987) [Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future](#). Transmitted to the General Assembly as an Annex to document A/42/427 - Development and International Co-operation: Environment.

[2] Scott Cato, M. (2009). *Green Economics*. London: Earthscan, pp. 36–37. ISBN 9781844075713

Green Libraries

Green focuses on the first step in addressing sustainability issues by reducing our environmental impact.



Reducing consumption

Reusing

Recycling

Building ([LEED Certification – Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design](#))

Site

Water Efficiency

Energy & Atmosphere

Materials and Resources

Indoor Environmental Quality

Why?

Public bodies have a duty to lead

Libraries are key institutions in community learning efforts

Right thing to do in response to our shrinking renewable resources

Creates a healthier space for everyone

An urgent need where we can teach by example

Some Examples:

Public Awareness, Education & Collections

- Design posters to promote recycling in the library and at home
- Purchase and showcase materials on sustainability topics
- Include environmental links on your website
- Start an Energy Meter lending program - <http://www.myclearwater.com/cpl/includes/pdf/energymetersavailable.pdf>
- Offer workshops that deal with environmental topics such as ‘energy saving tips’, ‘backyard gardening and composting’, ‘safe cleaning products for your home’
- Start a nature club at your library - http://www.awarewhistler.org/?page_id=12
- Start a book club on environmental topics inviting staff, students, faculty and community members

Buildings

Energy Conservation

- Light activated switches
- Public computers automatically shut down at closing
- Use power strips and turn off equipment when not in use
- Movement activated lights
- Energy efficient light bulbs

Water Conservation

- Low flow toilets
- Minimal landscape watering – use native plants
- Put aerators on faucets

Construction

- Follow LEED certification guidelines

Operations

Office Supplies and Printing

- Think before you Ink
- Programmed double sided printing
- Paper with a high post-consumer content
- Dispose of old equipment in a safe manner

Cleaning & Chemical Products

- Use environmentally friendly cleaning products – people notice
- Use a pest control company that only utilizes safe products

Events, Meetings and Workshops

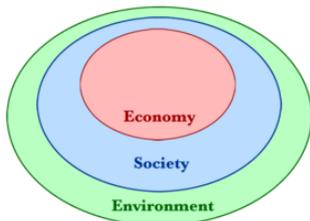
- Use local produce or sustainability minded caterers
- Use paper or cloth tablecloths (never plastic)
- Use glass or ceramic platters
- Never use Styrofoam
- Use paper cups, plates, bowls, preferably compostable (not plastic)
- Use china or compostable utensils, or only offer finger foods

Disposing of unwanted books

- Create a sustainable process for disposing of unwanted books

Green Libraries and Sustainability

Greening your library is only the beginning of engaging in sustainability.



Economic and Civic engagement are also integral to the role of libraries in creating sustainable communities and educating for sustainability.

Creating resilience in our communities – resilience to climate change, to political shifts, to economic downturns

Why?

Communities need sustainability leadership

Libraries provide independent thinking and are available to everyone

These are the most pressing issues our communities face

Libraries are experts at finding resources and information

Libraries are in a unique place to create collaborations across campus and in communities

Some examples:

Public Awareness, Education & Collections

- Offer workshops and programming that deal with sustainability topics such as ‘civic involvement’, ‘voluntary simplicity’, ‘health clinics/screenings’
- Start a seed lending library - <http://www.sfseedlibrary.org/home>
- Start a tool lending library - <http://www.oaklandlibrary.org/branches/temtl.htm>
- Start a book club on sustainable topics inviting staff, students, faculty and community members - <http://www.cityofpensacola.com/library/page.asp?pid=18841>
- Provide services to the homeless - http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2010-12-13-libraries13_ST_N.htm

- Show movies on current issues followed by a discussion
- Build collections on tolerance, equity and the history of all local populations, sustainable business practices, sustainable agriculture, sustainable development, smart growth, environmental justice
- Develop displays existing materials that highlight the 3 pillars of sustainability
- For universities and colleges – become involved in sustainability curriculum development – take the lead don't just wait to be asked

Partnerships

- Create innovative partnerships to develop resilience in our communities – both physical (gardening/composting; reading; bike repair) and learned (understanding climate change; economic development; agriculture; health; education)
- Assist people in connecting with sustainability related services in the community
- Showcase local sustainable businesses and events
- Host programs that spotlight community equity issues, such as trainings to address racism, bullying, pay equity, hunger
- For universities and colleges – create partnerships with other colleges, the office of sustainability, museums etc... to engage in curriculum development for sustainability
- For universities and colleges – work with student government and student groups to support their efforts and collaborate on sustainability efforts
- For universities and colleges – collaborate with faculty and student groups to host exhibits on sustainability topics in support of sustainability curriculum

Buildings

- Provide outdoor space as part of the library
- Offer facilities for groups that are addressing local equity issues
- Provide public telephones
- Create group study spaces for collaborative efforts

How to get started

- Form a green team or sustainability team (employees, maintenance/housekeeping, board members, library users, municipal recycling coordinator...)
- Adopt a vision statement
- Get the word out – newsletter, bulletin boards, staff meetings
- Set some initial goals
- Identify environmental improvement or sustainability opportunities/projects
- Implement projects – start with low hanging fruit first then grow your efforts
- Track your progress
- Celebrate and publicize your successes

Sample vision statement

The green team is committed to promoting an awareness of environmental and sustainability issues amongst staff and patrons. Projects will focus on both green efforts and civic engagement. The green team will solicit input from board members, patrons, community members, and staff. We welcome any suggestions that would help us to make the Library a greener and more sustainable place for all.