Sustainability as a Core Value  
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As we think about the future of our libraries and how we, as library leaders, help to make a difference in the lives of our neighbors, we must confront the realities of climate change. No corner of the world will be left untouched by climate change. In 2019, The Lancet Countdown report, a widely respected publication in the medical community, noted that “The life of every child born today will be profoundly affected by climate change. Without accelerated intervention, this new era will come to define the health of people at every stage of their lives.”

Not-so-coincidentally, also in 2019 (and reconfirmed in 2024), the American Library Association named Sustainability a core value of the profession, joining the ranks of “access,” “intellectual freedom and privacy,” and the “public good” as key values to hold dear as we do our work. This step was taken to acknowledge that societal efforts to respond to climate change have not expanded at the scale needed to avoid substantial damage to the economy, environment, and human health over the coming decades. The organization also acknowledged the 6,000 scientific studies that found the immediate consequences of climate change are far more dire than originally predicted, calling for the transformation of the world economy at a speed and scale that has “no documented historic precedent.”

In the face of such serious predictions, we are all called upon to do what we can from our personal sphere of influence.

“Every job is a climate job,” a phrase coined by Drawdown Labs Director Jamie Beck Alexander, asks us each to recognize the influence we have in our role, industry, or the level we serve at in an organization. For example, library trustees are the ultimate authority over the library’s strategic plan, budget and policy making. Each of these three areas of governance can be leveraged to not only ensure your library is sustainable, thriving into the future, but that your library is contributing to co-creating communities that are also sustainable, resilience, and regenerative. Library workers get to make decisions large and small depending on their role at the library – from program materials to landscape choices to recycling at the library to how we dispose of things we buy… there are hundreds of decisions made every day that allow us to think through how our values are reflected in the choices we make.

Both the American Library Association and the Sustainable Libraries Initiative use the “triple bottom line” definition of sustainability which can serve as a framework to shift your mindset as you make decisions at the board table:
Source: Sustainable Libraries Initiative

As you make decisions consider not just how much it may cost but what will the outcome of your decision be? The goal is to find balance in our decision making among the three elements of the triple bottom line: economic feasibility, environmental stewardship, and social equity.

As you proceed with making decisions on behalf of your community, here are a selection of questions to yourself. Are the choices your board is making:

- Resulting in treating library workers, library patrons, and community members with dignity, empathy and respect?
- Considering the natural resources of our world?
- Celebrating localism and invest in the local economy?
- Creating healthy indoor and outdoor environments?
- Respecting the taxpayers investment in the library?

These questions do not always stand alone, they need to be overlaid to get to the balance the intersection of the three areas of the triple bottom line asks us to work towards.

Inspired to learn more? Sign up today for your FREE 1-year membership to the Sustainable Libraries Initiative, a member benefit brought to you by your library association.

To access your free membership:

1. Go to the SLI web site: [https://www.sustainablelibrariesinitiative.org](https://www.sustainablelibrariesinitiative.org)
2. Click on “Participate” → “SLI Membership”
3. Choose the membership type and fill out the membership form
4. When you get to “How did you hear about us?” select “Other” and enter that you are a member of a participating library association in the Notes Field to wave the membership fee.

To access the discounts of the Sustainable Library Certification Program, reach out to sliadmin@suffolknet.org for information and details.