

HOW PUBLIC LIBRARIES BUILD
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES IN
THE 21ST CENTURY

ADVANCES IN LIBRARIANSHIP

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ADVANCES IN LIBRARIANSHIP VOLUME 53

HOW PUBLIC LIBRARIES BUILD SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

This book is dedicated to the steadfast and brave librarians of the Ukraine and to Ms Larysa Luhova, Director of the Lviv Regional Library for Children and Vice President of the Ukrainian Library Association at the time work on this publication began. Ms Luhova was selected to submit a chapter about public library ecological projects for children that were in development prior to the start of the Ukrainian War. Once the war began, Ms Luhova had to stop working on her chapter for this publication and devote her time to preserving Ukrainian culture. Our hope is that she will share this story with the library profession at some time in the future.

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SERIES EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

I am delighted to take this opportunity and introduce myself as the new Series Editor of *Advances in Librarianship* since January 2021. In this capacity, I plan to extend the series' impact via integrating a critical perspective that spotlights social justice and inclusive praxis from the shadows to become an emerging canon at the very core of who we are and what we value as legit in Library and Information Science (LIS) scholarship and practice. This strategic vision requires destabilizing of entrenched hegemonies within our privileged ranks and external communities to alleviate intersecting political, economic, social, and cultural anxieties, and power imbalances we witness today. As we move toward the quarter-century mark, we also need to effectively document such paradigmatic shifts in LIS, serving as a foundation of inspiration upon which, together in our multiple identities and diversities, we can proudly contribute to the building of a meaningful society toward a brighter future for our children to inherit.

New stimulating models reimagining (or extending) the roles for cultural memory institutions (e.g., libraries, museums, archives, schools, etc.) and the field of information are much required to develop symbolic and real infrastructures for moving us forward. We also need to better tell our stories of information activism and community mobilization in the face of overwhelming challenges to human existence, from forces of neoliberal corporatization, political ransacking, media irresponsibility, climate change, environmental degradation, pandemic dis/misinformation, etc. What do the contemporary threats of human extinction and cultural decay mean for LIS professionals, be it scholars, researchers, educators, practitioners, students, and others embedded in a variety of information settings? Not only does it require actions in the "doing" of resistance via information to decenter dysfunctional powerbrokers and their oppressions and entitled privileges. However, disseminating a forward-thinking agenda and narrative beyond our internally focused bastardized institutional bastions is equally important, as we adopt an active stance to promote fairness, justice, equity/equality, change agency, empowerment, community building, and community development.

Advances in Librarianship holds a special place in the hands, hearts, and minds of readers as a key platform to support creative ideas and practices that change and better articulate the vital contributions of libraries and the impact of information on diverse multicultural communities in a global network information society. Moving forward, my aim for the series is to engage our diverse professional communities in critical discourse that enable real transformations to occur. It is important to propel progress in shifting entrenched positionalities in LIS, while making visible content related to the "margins." Decentering canons and practices toward equity of representation, inclusivity, and progressive change will

naturally occur. Intersecting social, cultural, political, and economic upheavals in recent times demand an urgent response from the LIS professions in this regard.

I am truly honored and privileged to build on the legacy of Paul T. Jaeger, who served as Series Editor of *Advances in Librarianship* since 2013. His research helped to mobilize LIS in addressing concerns surrounding equity, diversity, and inclusion more substantially beyond past lip service, also shaping the focus of the book series. I plan to operationalize new directions for single- or multi-authored book-length explorations and edited collections by shifting focus on understudied spaces, invisible populations from the margins, and knowledge domains that have been under-researched or under-published in what we consider as high impactful venues in LIS and beyond. Examples might involve a reflective journey that established, or newly emerging LIS scholars, researchers, practitioners, and students critically reflect, assess, evaluate, and propose solutions or actions to change entrenched practices and systemic imbalanced inequities in different library and information-related settings. It might also involve decolonizing LIS publication industries in their biased Euro/Anglo-centricities with inclusion of content from geographical diversities around the world.

I am reaching out to our multiple audiences for their support toward these goals in spreading the word for proposals to new volumes in the series. Let us find our “collective voice” in the LIS professions to make us all uncomfortable as we continue to “push the buttons,” thereby, becoming stronger in our quest to further social justice and develop our humanity, human dignity, respect, and potential to the fullest.

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INTRODUCTION

Kaurri C. Williams-Cockfield and Bharat Mehra

How Public Libraries Build Sustainable Communities in the 21st Century posits that public libraries are key local institutions for developing and sustaining community partnerships that bring about social change (Mehra & Srinivasan, 2007). Kania and Kramer (2011) discuss the importance of using collective impact initiatives to bring about “large-scale social change in a community” (p. 38). In their research, the authors identify five conditions of success:

- Participants have a common understanding of the problem;
- Participants develop and engage in a shared data collection agreement;
- Participants are diverse and work together in an ongoing manner;
- A trust relationship between participants across the spectrum (nonprofit, corporations, government agencies, etc.) is developed through ongoing interactions and a recognition of the common motivation of participating entities;
- A separate entity is needed to serve as the backbone support organization to coordinate the collective aspects of the collaboration between the participating members.

Since 2011, Kania and Kramer, in partnership with other institutions, have published eight principles of practice for implementing collective impact and five strategies for centering equity within the collective impact framework. The [Collective Impact Forum \(2016\)](#), in partnership with the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions, the Forum for Youth Investment, FSG, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, Living Cities, PolicyLink, the Tamarack Institute, and United Way Worldwide, published the following eight principles of practice for collective impact:

- Design and implement the initiative with a priority placed on equity;
- Include community members in the collaborative;

- Recruit and co-create with cross-sector partners;
- Use data to continuously learn, adapt, and improve;
- Cultivate leaders with unique system leadership skills;
- Focus on program and system strategies;
- Build a culture that fosters relationships, trust, and respect across participants;
- Customize for local context.

Since 2011, Kania et al. (2021) have conducted research on the implementations of collective impact to assess the effectiveness of and the different ways that groups have adapted the model. The key finding from their analysis centers on equity and the importance of making it the central focus of collective impact efforts.

- Ground the work in data and context, and target solutions;
- Focus on systems change, in addition to programs and services;
- Shift power within the collaborative;
- Listen to and act with community;
- Build equity leadership and accountability.

Public libraries, through their mission, vision, and position in the community, play a significant part in developing community sustainability and are already strategically positioned to serve as a “backbone support organization” for collective impact initiatives (Kania & Kramer, 2011, p. 40; Mehra & Davis, 2015). However, their efforts are often unrecognized by local governments and other social justice organizations. This publication, through research, case studies, and personal narratives representing both national and international perspectives, examines the capacity of public libraries to impact social change at the community level (Mehra & Rioux, 2016). The overarching goal is to change the narrative with community stakeholders by presenting illustrative examples of how public libraries are driving community change and how these efforts align with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) outlined in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations, 2015).

The 17 UN SDGs are:

- SDG 1: To end poverty in all its forms everywhere.
- SDG 2: To end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.
- SDG 3: To ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages.
- SDG 4: To ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all.
- SDG 5: To achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
- SDG 6: To ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
- SDG 7: To ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.
- SDG 8: To promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.

- SDG 9: To build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation.
- SDG 10: To reduce inequality within and among countries.
- SDG 11: To make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.
- SDG 12: To ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
- SDG 13: To take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
- SDG 14: To conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
- SDG 15: To protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
- SDG 16: To promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.
- SDG 17: To strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development ([United Nations, 2015](#)).

This book is organized into five sections. The first section focuses on theoretical foundations and research related to community sustainability, global models and frameworks, challenges and opportunities, and historical and contemporary scholarship related to public libraries and social change. It also includes discussion on how public libraries, through resources, programs, and services, support and/or build community sustainability applying the principles of “collective impact” ([Kania & Kramer, 2011](#), p. 38). Section One [“Theoretical Foundations & Research”] includes case studies and narratives that advance SDG 17.

The remaining four sections (two to five) focus on libraries advocating for social justice, libraries mobilizing climate change, libraries promoting economic development, and libraries nurturing positive peace respectively. Section Two [“Libraries Advocating for Social Justice”] includes case studies and narratives that advance SDG 1 through SDG 5 and SDG 10 as these SDGs focus on social justice topics such as poverty, hunger, health, education, equity, and inequity. Section Three [“Libraries Mobilizing Climate Change”] includes case studies and narratives that advance SDG 6, SDG 7, SDG 12, and SDG 13 as these SDGs focus on the planet’s resources (water, energy, consumption and production, climate change). Section Four [“Libraries Promoting Economic Development”] includes case studies and narratives that advance SDG 8, SDG 9, and SDG 11 as these SDGs focus on economic growth and development, infrastructure, innovation, and safe cities. Section Five [“Libraries Nurturing Positive Peace”] includes case studies and narratives that advance SDG 16 which focuses on building peaceful, inclusive societies that are sustainable through the building of strong institutions.

Each section includes: (1) a framing of the subject content, the strategic collective actions, key concepts and terms relevant in that section, and resources and relevant organizations; (2) public library case studies where the program goals align with the chapter’s subject content; (3) reflective narratives that share individual perspectives on public libraries and the section’s subject content. The

strategic collective actions can be used to reinforce the role of public libraries as “social infrastructure” and to aid libraries in the development and/or expansion of library programs strong enough to address the “individual structural inequalities” that impact community members’ ability to reach their full potential (Mehra, 2022; Wilcox & Monobe, 2021, p. 5). The section content areas map the book chapters in relation to the UN SDGs. The 17th goal, which focuses on key partnerships, will be discussed in the narrative under the “strategic collective actions” section for Chapters 2–4. For further details about the chapters in each section, see the introductory framing brief of the five sections.

The chapters in this book were subjected to a rigorous review process consisting of analysis by the editors along with a review from professionals working in the information science field with experience in the different program content areas. The editors appreciate the generous gift of time and effort provided by the peer reviewers and extend their thanks to (alphabetically listed by last name): Brittany Baum, Florida State University; Eric Ely-Ledesma, PhD Candidate in the Information School at the University of Wisconsin – Madison; Rachel Fenningsdorf, Community Engagement Coordinator for Jackson District Library in Jackson, MI, MSIS Candidate at University of Tennessee-Knoxville; Allison Ferguson, University of Alberta; Suzanne Grossman, PhD, James Madison University; Amanda Harrison, PhD, Assistant Professor, University of Central Missouri, Department of Educational Technology and Library Science; Megan Janicki, American Library Association; Eva Hourihan Jansen, Independent Researcher/Sessional Instructor at the University of Toronto; Sarah Johnson, Cincinnati State Technical & Community College; Christopher Knapp, Youth Community Engagement Librarian with the Prince George Public Library, Prince George, BC, Canada; David Leonard, President; BPL, LIS Doctoral Candidate, Simmons University; Alicia K. Long, University of Missouri; Valerie Lookingbill, University of South Carolina; Brady Lund, PhD, Assistant Professor at University of North Texas Department of Information Science; Karen O’Leary, PhD, CEO of One Bookshelf (non-profit); Leighann Pennington, PhD, Sweet Briar College, Visiting Assistant Professor of Education; Alexander Vera, PhD Candidate, University of South Carolina iSchool; Elizabeth A Wahler, Director of UNC Charlotte School of Social Work and Founder/Owner of Beth Wahler Consulting; Joseph Winberry, PhD Candidate, the University of Tennessee; Xiaohua Awa Zhu, Associate Professor, University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Some of the reviewers agreed to be identified regarding the chapter they reviewed and have provided statements made available in the introduction to each of the five sections.

HISTORY OF THE UN SDGs AND LIBRARY AND INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS

The process to reflect, discuss, operationalize, and implement the UN SDGs began in 2021 at the RIO+20 Conference (United Nations *Conference on Sustainable Development*) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to expand on the nine

Millennium Goals adopted in 2000 to address poverty, hunger, disease, and education (United Nations, n.d.). The final 17 goals, which were created through an inclusive two-year data gathering process (panels, consultations, the *My World* survey), represented input from international organizations, educational institutions, businesses, and citizens. In 2014, the UN General Assembly Open Working Group proposed these goals in *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* which was adopted in 2015 and represents a plan of action for “people, planet and prosperity” that outlines 17 goals for sustainability along with 169 implementation targets to be met globally by 2030 (United Nations, 2015).

The correlation between public libraries and the UN SDGs is clearly given that “information is a central component of sustainable development goals” (Kosciejew, 2020, p. 330). The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions’ (IFLA) direct involvement in the data gathering and planning processes for the SDGs ensured that information access was part of every goal and identified as the common connector between the goals (Kosciejew, 2020, p. 332). IFLA (2014) developed the *Lyon Declaration on Access to Information and Development*. This declaration, which was signed by 600 global institutions and associations, made

an international commitment to the use of the United Nations post-2015 development agenda to ensure that everyone has access to, and is able to understand, use and share information that is necessary to promote sustainable development and democratic societies. (para. 3)

In *Access and Opportunity for All: How libraries contribute to the United Nations 2030 Agenda*, the IFLA (2019) outlines how libraries support all the SDGs by promoting literacy, providing access to information, serving as a network hub, supporting digital inclusion, encouraging research and academics, and by preserving culture and heritage.

In 2019, at the annual meeting for the Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T), the conference advisory committee consisting of Kendra S. Albright, Jia Tina Du, Bharat Mehra and led by President Clara Chu, invited participants to join in advancing diversity, inclusion, collective impact, ethics of care, and sustainability by connecting through a keen sense of identity, thriving, and connecting to each other and the local and global society (Mehra et al., 2019). The following 2020 ASIS&T conference focused on information professionals connecting their work (information practice, research, education, and professional development) to the UN (2015) SDGs. The conference advisory committee developed an information action brief form (IAB) to gather input on actions the information services (IS) community could undertake with respect to the implementation of the SDGs. The IAB comprises seven core elements that are key to connecting the IS community to the SDGs and to the five conditions required for “collective impact” (Albright et al., 2019).

In 2020, the OCLC Global Council began a year-long focus on the SDGs and libraries. The council, while supporting all the SDGs, narrowed their focus for this project to five of the SDGs: Quality education (SDG #4); Decent work and economic growth (SDG #8); Reduced inequalities (SDG #10); Peace, justice,

and strong institutions (SDG #16); and Partnerships for the goals (SDG #17). The council produced a series of webinars, through their *Transformative Leaders* series, designed to guide information professionals on how libraries align with the SDGs and what collective actions can be used to support community change (OCLC Global Council, 2020).

Additionally, the council conducted a survey to assess how library staff were thinking about and using the SDGs in their planning processes. The survey results were published in September 2021 (OCLC Global Council, 2021). There were 1,722 survey respondents representing 99 countries who provided input on a series of questions designed to determine their knowledge on the SDGs (54%–78%), the incorporation of the SDGs in their strategic planning processes (20%–43%), and where respondents believed libraries could have the greatest impact (SDG #4 Quality Education Activities). The top activities for public libraries for the remaining SDGs included:

job preparedness and participation in community strategic planning (SDG #8); offering services, programs, and collections to promote awareness and education around diversity, and provide employee training around equity, diversity, and inclusion (SDG #10); serve as a welcoming space in the community and promote active involvement in civic activities (SDG #16); develop strong partnerships with other libraries and librarians through associations, consortia, and collaborate with other community agencies to provide classes for the community (SDG #17). (OCLC Global Council, 2021)

Mansour (2020), in his research on how rural public libraries in Egypt “can contribute to the achieving of the SDGs,” suggests libraries can support the SDGs in the following ways:

- “Raising awareness of developmental issues covered in SDGs;
- Making an appropriate space for discussion on various developmental issues, particularly with regard to rural community development;
- Creating and designing powerful and effective library programmes to contribute to the implementation of SDGs. These include literacy programmes, especially for older persons, as well as programmes that help increase the demand to visit the library;
- Selecting suitable resources based on the development indicators raised in SDGs;
- Enhancing and providing rural libraries with appropriate collections to meet the needs of the library community, as well as understand its various issues and problems to help solve them;
- The need for the use of ICT tools for sustainability in rural public libraries is imperative to advance their services. The evolution of ICT tools and growth of electronic resources have made it possible for libraries to embrace green collections, as well as green technologies;
- Hosting local forums to enable the discussion of the challenges faced by rural communities and institutions, such as infectious diseases, which are wide-spread in the rural areas, community health, education, human rights, etc.;
- Strengthening community partnership between rural libraries and other relevant state agencies for easy understanding, exchange, and joint coordination to meet SDGs” (p. 128).

As public awareness and advocacy for the SDGs increases, the work of public libraries in community building is receiving greater attention by the community-at-large. The next step in advocating for the role of public libraries is as a “backbone support organization” for achieving local social change and for inclusion in community initiatives that address inequalities thereby changing the narrative with stakeholders (Kania & Kramer, 2011, p. 40). This connection is best illustrated by correlating the voices, programs, and research of the IS community to the SDGs, and by examining the collective strategic actions needed to achieve “collective impact” (Albright et al., 2022; Collective Impact Forum, 2016; Kania et al., 2021; Library of the Future, n.d.; Lynn et al., 2018; Paschalville Partnership, n.d.; Vecchiarelli, 2018; Williams-Cockfield, 2021; Wojceichowska, 2021).

IMPORTANCE AND APPLICATION

Public libraries are already “implicitly recognized” in the US 2030 agenda as openly accessible providers of information in all formats, technology and Internet access, information literacy skills, and as a community center for cultural exchange (Kosciejew, 2020). There are three prevalent themes in the historical and contemporary positionality of the profession. Given this recognition, the inclusion of the local public library in community level strategic planning is vital, yet public libraries are often overlooked when these planning teams are assembled given the inclusive nature of the profession and the reluctance of information professionals to engage with the community at large (Mehra, 2021). This work provides concrete examples of how public libraries, through strategic planning, community partnerships and collaboration, local and regional networking, and program development and implementation, are already impacting social change in their communities and illustrates that their efforts directly support the global goals for sustainability (United Nations, 2015).

This publication is structured around internationally recognized sustainability goals, presents public library research, narratives and initiatives using a framework that is widely recognized, and clearly illustrates the correlation between public libraries and community sustainability. It builds on the work done by IFLA (2019), the 2019 ASIS&T conference advisory committee (Mehra et al., 2019), the OCLC Global Council (2020), and Mansour (2020) by taking their research from theory and best practices to actual application. These offer a holistic perspective on how public libraries support the totality of the 17 SDGs in their own unique ways in varied settings across local communities.

The topics covered in this work include:

- How public libraries support/build community sustainability;
- Social justice issues (poverty, hunger, health and well-being, education, reduced inequalities, and gender equality);
- Climate change issues (clean water, sanitation, responsible consumption and production, and affordable and clean energy);
- Economic issues (decent work, economic growth, innovation, and infrastructure);

- Peace issues (justice, safety, strong government institutions);
- Community partnerships;
- Communicating the value of the public library;
- Changing the dialog and perspective of local government and community partners;
- Collective strategic actions that can be taken by public libraries to impact local social change.

Fig. 1 provides a visual representation of the public library – sustainable communities (PLSC) framework which brings together the following three main elements that form the foundation and spirit underlying this book: (1) select theoretical attributes of collective impact in past scholarship that are listed as “collective impact actions”; (2) relating these to the five sections (integrating the SDGs) used to organize the book; and (3) the specific keywords associated with the included chapters that illustrate case studies and perspectives of how public libraries can center the concept or equity to build sustainable communities. Future research initiatives and assessment of case study public libraries will test the applicability and relevance of the various intertwining elements of the PLSC framework.

Additionally, this publication provides context for framing future public library programs, services, resources, and research on how public libraries build sustainable communities. It also presents concrete examples of the work of public libraries in building sustainable communities, highlights both national and international perspectives, and examines the connection between public library work, local social justice issues, social change, and collective impact. The collection applies a qualitative, humanistic, constructivist, and comparative research focus, but also includes analytical and critical analysis substantiated by quantitative statistical data in the case studies.

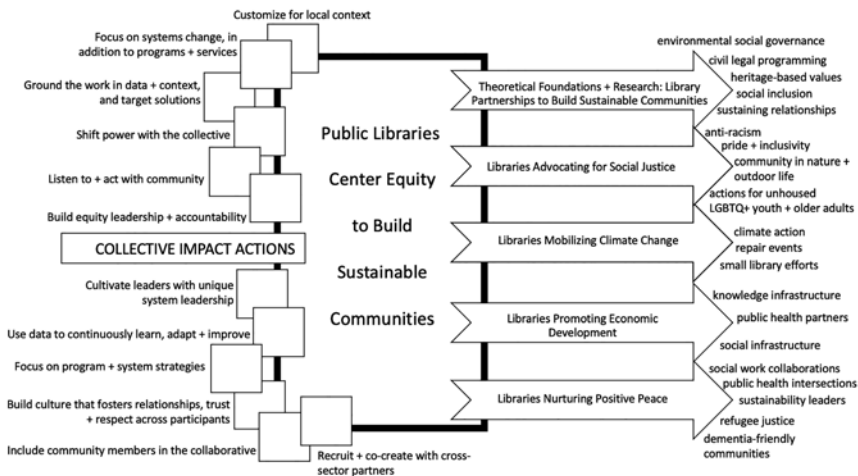


Fig. 1. The PLSC Framework That Connects Collective Impact and Public Libraries to Center Equity and Build Sustainable Communities.