All Together...How? Building Capacity & Commitment for Change

Rebekkah Smith Aldrich
Mid-Hudson Library System, Poughkeepsie, United States of America.
rsmith@midhudson.org

Matthew Bollerman
Hauppauge Public Library, Hauppauge, United States of America.
matthew@hauppaugelibrary.org

Abstract

Changing the mindset of a profession needs a strategy: deliberate choices to do things differently, building on our unique strengths for a specific outcome. The New York Library Association's Sustainability Initiative has set out to do just that and has employed techniques to accelerate its success to help professionals, institutions and communities adopt the concept of "sustainable thinking." This paper explores the beliefs, philosophies and guiding principles that accelerated the work of this initiative that are replicable for wider adoption of sustainability work in our profession.

Keywords: sustainability ; change management ; leadership.

In less than five years the New York Library Association (NYLA) has sparked new thinking and momentum by creating ground-breaking tools to help libraries be sustainability leaders in their communities, campuses and schools far beyond the borders of New York State. By elevating the profile of the library profession's commitment to the "triple bottom line" - the nexus of environmental sustainability, social responsibility and economic stewardship - through a strategic approach, this project has inspired dozens of libraries to change the way they govern and operate their libraries and has sparked new thinking for thousands. In addition, the New York Library Association's influence on the topic of sustainable libraries has changed the narrative at the national level, inspiring the Council of the American Library Association (ALA) to adopt sustainability as a "Core Value of Librarianship" and to "*Evolve*

accreditation standards to ensure the topic of sustainability in an inherent element in library school curriculum."[1]

In 2018 the Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Scientists of the United Nations issued a special report,[2] written and edited by 91 scientists from 40 countries who analyzed more than 6,000 scientific studies, which found that the immediate consequences of climate change are far more dire than originally predicted, calling for a transformation of the world economy at a speed and scale that has "no documented historic precedent" using the fundamental connections embedded in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.[3]

The urgency surrounding the need for adaptation in the face of climate change has never been greater. Transforming the way people of all walks of life, - from every corner of the world, from every profession - think about sustainability is the grand challenge of our time. This issue is enormous, encompassing the global community. This work can feel overwhelming, something insurmountable that surely someone else is thinking about.

Taking personal responsibility to work on this issue from your own sphere of influence is all we can do. In New York we mobilized the New York Library Association, "the voice of the library community," to amplify a call to action, helping librarians, trustees and Friends Groups of libraries understand their responsibility to work on changing their world view to become leaders in their communities on the topic.

To do this we employed several concepts and techniques that greatly enhanced our chances of success to transform thinking and spur action. The very first was a three-phase framework posited by Christoph Lueneburger and Daniel Goleman, in their 2010 article for MIT Sloan's Management Review "*The Change Leadership Sustainability Demands*."[4] Their approach acknowledges that you cannot superimpose or mandate a core value of sustainability, you must influence, partner and lead the way forward, creating a tribe of followers who believe, as you do, that sustainability is a core value of an institution or profession.

Lueneburger and Goleman note that your process should move your institution from being
unconsciously reactive --> consciously reactive --> consciously proactive --> unconsciously proactive
They posit that each phase requires different organizational capabilities and leadership competencies.

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[1] Resolution for the Adoption of Sustainability as a Core Value of Librarianship, American Library Association (2019) https://bit.ly/2D6xqXd

[2] Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5° C, https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/

[3] Sustainable Development Goals, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300

[4] Christoph Lueneburger and Daniel Goleman, "The Change Leadership Sustainability Demands," MIT Sloan Management Review 51, no. 4 (Summer 2010).

Phase 1: Making the Case for Change

This phase is about building understanding and buy-in. The sustainability leader needs to make a "clear and compelling case for change." Take a moment to analyze your own understanding of the topic of sustainability. You may be the type of person who has followed sustainability issues for years and "lives green" personally. Or maybe you've sought out conference sessions that focus on sustainability, joined the Environment, Sustainability and Libraries Special Interest Group (ENSULIB) or have been saving up ideas for green-themed programming. At the very least you are reading this paper to learn more about sustainability and libraries which likely puts you ahead of most people in your organization. In all new endeavors in our libraries we have to remember to bring people along with us to our current level of comprehension on the topic before we attempt to move forward. When people in your organization don't understand why you are pursuing something it creates a lag between their comprehension and participation which slows down an effort or completely frustrates it.

In this phase, the library sustainability leader must be good at collaborating and influencing others to create an evolution of how people think about this topic. The goal is to help others transition from thinking of this as a "go green" initiative with distinct boundaries (start/end; specific service, program or policy) to a holistic understanding of the importance of infusing sustainability throughout all we do. Once you have reached a new level of cognition on the topic as an organization you can begin to have productive conversations about what it will look like for your organization to take this new world view in all it does - a pretty tall order. It's not like the new summer reading program theme or a new policy, we're talking about something that should influence every aspect of library operations, programming and messaging.

To this end we began with education of the governing body of the New York Library Association, influencing them to take ownership of their role as leaders in our profession to make a difference on the topic of sustainability. In February of 2014 this body passed a "*Resolution on the Importance of Sustainable Libraries*,"[5] kicking off our organization's commitment to sustainability. This paved the way for fundraising to fund a retreat of NYLA members who were committed and interested to explore the issues surrounding librarians work on the topic which was held in 2015. At this retreat the group debated the very definition of "sustainability," explored how libraries can best position themselves as leaders in their communities on the topic and leverage their unique attributes to the local and global communities' right to thrive, bounce back from disruption and serve as a regenerative force. What became clear is that we needed to start at the very beginning with the retreat participants.

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[5] Resolution on the Importance of Sustainable Libraries, New York Library Association, 2014, https://www.nyla.org/max/4DCGI/cms/review.html?Action=CMS_Document&DocID=1031&MenuKey=SI

[Figure 1: Matthew Bollerman & Rebekkah Smith Aldrich, Co-Founders, Sustainability Initiative of the New York Library Association]

Utilizing a framework called "Levels of Thought," a concept borrowed from the work of Carol Sanford, author of *The Responsible Entrepreneur* and *The Regenerative Business*, we created a framework that helps to develop an integrative process that increases the chance that the results of the whole will align with the communities' values.

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Beliefs - How we believe "things work"
Philosophies - Our approach
Principles - Guides to action
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Concept
Strategies
Design (most projects start here)
----------------------
Audit
Evaluate
Maintain
```
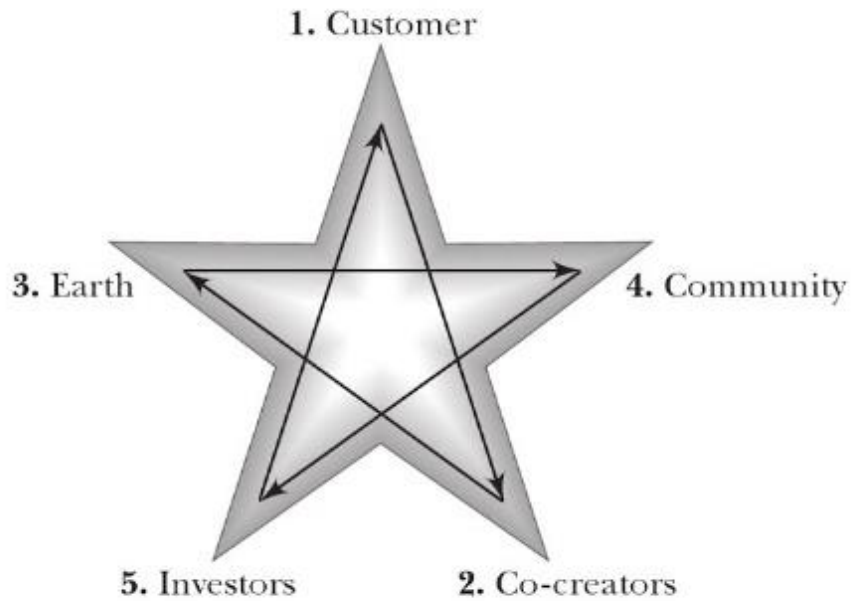
[Figure 2: Carol Sanford's Levels of Thought]

To do this we must first agree on our beliefs, philosophies and guiding principles. At first, we agreed that our goal was vital, visible and viable libraries that were working toward a 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

We then explored a variety of constructs and found the group responded well to a design thinking model that helped us reconcile what we felt were competing energies: "The Stakeholder Pentad Framework," another concept found in Carol Sanford's work.
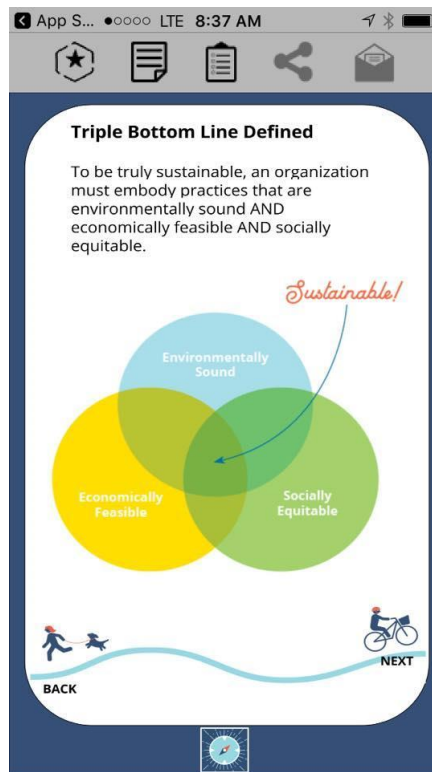
[Figure 3: The Stakeholder Pentad Framework by Carol Sanford]

"Pentad" is a term borrowed from ancient Greek geometry to represent a multidimensional figure with five dynamic and interactive aspects that move in tandem and can only be understood in terms of their relationship. The Pentad identifies five windows through which libraries view their activities and represent a library's key stakeholders and how they can become systematically integrated – representing one interconnected system. Two key attributes of this concept that resonated with our group:

    A) Earth is one of our stakeholders; and
    B) We need to balance the needs of our stakeholders.

This heightened understanding of systems thinking greatly informed the work of the group. As the influential naturalist and conservationist John Muir famously said, "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe." Nothing exists in a vacuum. That idea was at first overwhelming to our group but then elevated our thinking. We agreed to a holistic approach, one that both a) expands the focus from the library as an institution to the local and global community and b) expands the focus from a traditional environmental stewardship approach to sustainability but one that addressed whole systems thinking – a process of understanding how things/parts/systems behave, interact with their environments and influence each other. To that end we ultimately came to consensus on three things:

    1) We adopted the "triple bottom line" framework of sustainability to guide our work:
        To be truly sustainable, an organization or community must embody practices that are environmentally sound AND economically feasible AND socially equitable.

[Figure 4: Triple Bottom Line framework as displayed in the NYLA Roadmap to Sustainability mobile app]

This framework aligns with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, an inclusive, integrated framework of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that span economic, environmental and social development.

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,[6] 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. A metaphor provided by retreat participant explained 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 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

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[6] Library Bill of Rights, American Library Association, http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill

community aspirations and priorities.

2) We defined a phrase used in the resolution, "sustainable thinking": *Sustainable thinking aligns a library's core values[7] 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.*

3) We created a purpose statement for our working group:
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.

These three organizing actions served as foundational pieces that solidified our capacity to think in a common way to ensure that when we separated into teams we were all using the same beliefs, philosophies and guiding principles to shape the work. During subsequent meetings of the committee we found we referred back to these again and again as we moved into the second tier of Sanford's level of thought: developing concepts, strategies and designing products to help us carry out our purpose.

At the end of this phase, if done right, Lueneburger and Goleman, authors of "*The Change Leadership Sustainability Demands*," predict that sustainability will "emerge as a powerful mandate that is pervasive throughout the organization." In our experience, once this phase is complete others in the organization have taken strong ownership of the topic and become sustainability leaders in their own right, an important guidepost to look for in order to see when it is time to move on to the next phase.

Phase 2: Translating Vision Into Action

We had made the case to our group and better yet, our group could now make the case to their peers. We had a vision for the work that needed to be done and it was time to translate that vision into action. At this point we were engaged in a meta iteration of Lueneburger and Goleman's three-phase approach as we were modeling the three phases with the group at the retreat while also asking the group to design around the three phases for their peers. We were using the momentum built through phase one, making the case, to effect change, real change, not just words about change, but action. The same needed to happen through our work for our peers.

Lueneburger and Goleman's second phase, "Translating Vision Into Action," is the phase in which you are moving from consciously reactive (this happened so now we'll do this) to consciously proactive (let's do this and get ahead of that). Our group identified four project areas, to fall under an umbrella of the newly formed NYLA Sustainability Initiative (NYLA-SI), that we felt would help our peers throughout the NYLA adopt a sustainable thinking mindset:
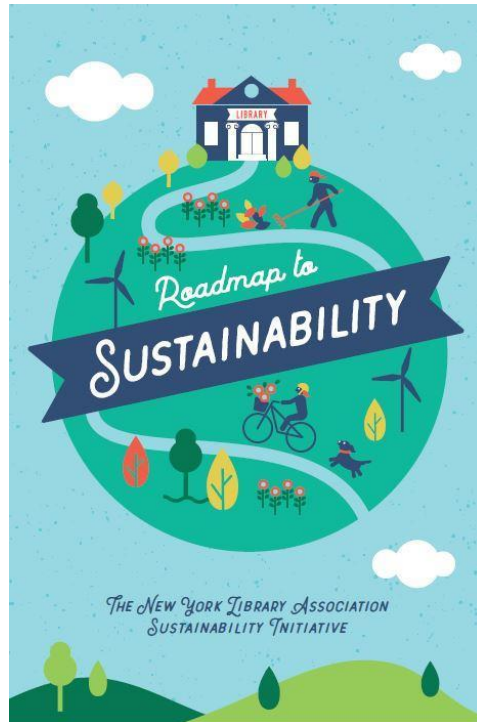
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[7] Core Values of Librarianship, American Library Association,
http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/corevalues

A) Marketing the Cause (originally "Making the Case"): developing resources to help library leaders make the case to their various stakeholders that sustainable libraries are essential to the vitality of the communities they serve.
B) Roadmap: develop a toolkit to help a library leader answer the question of "How do I start?"
C) Sustainable Library Certification Program (originally "Benchmarking"): create of a framework to incentivize and measure library sustainability
D) Community Change Agents (originally "Empowering Agents of Change"): identify and empower like-minded leaders through training and education

Some of the key ideas embedded here that we felt would sincerely translate our vision into action by our peers included:

- Education about the triple bottom line framework of sustainability;
- Case studies that exemplify sustainable thinking in action in New York's libraries;
- Professional development opportunities that would introduce the basics and provide headspace for participants to come to the same level of understanding our retreat participants experienced;
- Tools that would help leaders gather their thinking so they could become well-spoken themselves to inspire others in their institution;
- Partnerships with non-library organizations such as the Westchester Business Council, University at Albany, Capira Technologies, LLC, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA);
- A methodical approach to addressing the triple bottom line in libraries to help a library leader systematically bring sustainable thinking to life in their organization; and
- An elevated understanding of the concept of "collective impact," as defined by the American Library Association's Center for the Future of Libraries: "*In the face of limited resources and persistent, big social issues (hunger, poverty, violence, education, health, public safety, the environment), organizations from different sectors are adopting common agendas to combat issues within their communities.*"[8]

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[8] "Collective Impact," Center for the Future of Libraries, an initiative of the American Library Association, http://www.ala.org/tools/future/trends/collectiveimpact

[Figure 5: Roadmap to Sustainability, New York Library Association Sustainability Initiative]

As our teams formed and a committee structure was formally created by NYLA Council to oversee the work of the NYLA-SI we committed ourselves to a "co-creator" model, combining the theories of distributed and transformational leadership. Our philosophy was that no one person had all the answers and to work on a topic as large as sustainability we needed to respect the wisdom of all, celebrating the leadership talent and capability of our peers. Our emphasis was on *interdependent* interaction and practice rather than individual and *independent* actions, this shared, collective leadership practice built capacity for change and improvement. This form of leadership required high levels of trust, transparency and mutual respect. Transformational leadership is a long-term oriented philosophy that has been found to increase commitment, self-confidence and team member satisfaction.[9] In the article "*Transformational leader behaviors and their effects on followers' trust in leader, satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behaviors,*" written by Philip Podsakoff, Scott MacKenzie, Robert Moorman and Richard Fetter for The Leadership Quarterly, six dimensions of transformational leadership were identified:

1. Role model
2. Future vision
3. Individual support
4. Promotion of group goals
5. Intellectual stimulation
6. High performance expectation

In our co-creator model we agreed to a fast-paced, decentralized team structure that relied on an a high-level of personal accountability among co-creators. We met bi-weekly for an hour with at least one member from each team to receive progress reports and for the co-chairs to report out as well. A spirit of iteration was embraced and a feedback loop structure was

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[9] Podsakoff, Philip M.; MacKenzie, Scott B.; Moorman, Robert H.; Fetter, Richard (June 1990). "Transformational leader behaviors and their effects on followers' trust in leader, satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behaviors". The Leadership Quarterly. **1** (2): 107–142.

employed to that end. Feedback from other teams was mandatory for all individual team projects before moving to a pilot phase that would engage stakeholders beyond the committee. Target goals and deadlines for deliverables were decided on at the top level and then teams used their own determination and skill set to deliver projects on time. The frequent meetings allowed teams to share their progress and challenges and provided for a group environment to hash out challenges and find solutions. Rather than an obstacle getting stuck in a team we created a safe environment for teams to share where they were stuck, when they had identified a need for additional resources – whether that be time, more volunteers, or funding. Clear reporting after each team meeting helped those not on the call stay abreast of teams' progress and tasks and deadlines that impacted all members of the committee.

[Figure 6 & 7: Members of the NYLA-SI]

As a result of this focused approach our teams produced:
● 52 Sustainability Spotlights
● A monthly enewsleter
● The Roadmap to Sustainability (in print and a mobile app version)
● A ground-breaking, industry first certification program for public libraries, academic libraries and school librarians
● A year-long professional development experience that helps library leaders work with community leaders to employ collective impact strategies to tackle a community problem.

- The first statewide read, held in March 2019, where all New Yorkers were encouraged to read the same title and come together to discuss it at their local library. We choose the book *Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming* edited by Paul Hawken and tied it to the Northwest Earth Institute's EcoChallenge (https://ecochallenge.org/) to translate vision into action locally.

For more information about these products and programs please visit http://www.nyla.org/sustainability

Each of the deliverables has been met with excitement by our peers in the New York Library Association and beyond. We have been invited around the world to speak to thousands of our peers about sustainability, we have thirty-two (32) public libraries enrolled in our certification program (two have been certified already!) which addresses twelve categories – seven environmental-centric and five library-centric categories; we are in our fourth printing of the Roadmap to Sustainability; we have hundreds of library professionals from around the globe subscribed to our enewsletter; and we have graduated the first four teams from our Community Change Agent program. This was all accomplished in less than five years. Sustainability is a calling card of the New York Library Association and we are expanding beyond our state's borders.

Phase III: Expanding Boundaries

Lueneburger and Goleman's third phase has an organization continuously raising the bar on sustainability initiatives and leveraging sustainability to create competitive advantage. As a sustainability leader, in this phase you need to focus on identifying and evaluating long-term sustainability trends, seeking new opportunities and working to position the library to benefit from them. The goal is to embed sustainability in the library's DNA, just like financial accountability or intellectual freedom, the library should be unconsciously proactive about it. "It's just the way we do things here," should be the answer when asked why you do something sustainably.

To this end we have spearheaded this same process at the national level with one of the NYLA-SI founders co-leading the effort:
- In 2015 the American Library Association (ALA) passed a "*Resolution on the Importance of Sustainable Libraries*,"[10];
- In 2017 the Executive Board of ALA formed a Special Task Force on Sustainability;
- In 2018 the task force issued a final report[11] with fifty-two (52) recommendations related to how the Association may provide leadership and serve as a model for sustainable practices more broadly in the profession; how the Association may provide leadership in the adoption of sustainability practices in libraries; and how libraries may provide leadership and serve as a model for sustainability in the communities they serve.

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[10] "ALA Council passes resolution on sustainable libraries," American Library Association, 7.13.2015, http://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2015/07/ala-council-passes-resolution-sustainable-libraries

[11] Report of the ALA Special Task Force on Sustainability, 2018, http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/governance/ExecutiveBoard/ebd5_4_Task%20Force%20on%20Sustainability_Final%20Report_6.2018.pdf

- In 2019 the American Library Association passed a "Resolution for the Adoption of Sustainability as a Core Value of Librarianship,"[12] which resolved to define sustainability using the "triple bottom line" conceptual framework, adopt sustainability, using that definition, as a core value of librarianship, and to "evolve accreditation standards to ensure the topic of sustainability is an inherent element in library school curriculum." In this same year the Executive Board also upgraded their job description for the ALA Executive Director to include language related to the importance of leadership on the topic of sustainability.

The case has been made at ALA. Next up? Translating vision into action and expanding boundaries. Other states and associations in the United States are not waiting: The Vermont Library Association adopted their own Resolution on the Importance of Sustainable Libraries as has the American Association of Law Libraries. The New Jersey State Library is partnering with the NYLA-SI and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to debut "Preparedness Ambassador" training for library leaders in New York and New Jersey during National Emergency Preparedness Month in September 2019 in acknowledgement of the critical role libraries play in community resilience.

Conclusion

To accelerate the change in thinking required to help the communities that we serve to adapt in the future we all face due to climate change libraries need to become catalysts, models for running sustainable organizations that prioritize community sustainability and resilience. To do this will require systematic approaches to educating library leaders and shifting organizational culture. Utilizing techniques such as embedding a core value of sustainability in our institutions, utilizing transformational leadership theory, designing and implementing programs, services, partnerships and messaging using the "levels of thought concept," and understanding that embracing our role as sustainability leaders is not only good for the planet but provides libraries with a competitive advantage can expedite the adoption of the critical thinking that needs to occur to enable our communities and our profession to thrive.

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[12] Resolution for the Adoption of Sustainability as a Core Value of Librarianship, American Library Association 2019, http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/governance/council/council_documents/2019_ms_council_docs/ALA%20CD%2037%20RESOLUTION%20FOR%20THE%20ADOPTION%20OF%20SUSTAINABILITY%20AS%20A%20CORE%20VALUE%20OF%20LIBRARIANSHIP_Final1182019.pdf

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