

Council Committee Report Form

TO: ALA Council

RE:

- ACTION REQUESTED
- INFORMATION
- REPORT

ACTION REQUESTED BY: *(if no action, please leave blank)*

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DATE: January 3, 2022

BACKGROUND:

- ALA Council voted to create the Council Committee on Sustainability in January 2021.
- The ALA Sustainability Committee's charge is to provide the necessary leadership and monitoring of ALA strategic initiatives that will infuse the [core value of sustainability](#) throughout the policies, procedures, practices of our association and our professional activities, in collaboration with the ALA Board and President, ALA Council, ALA divisions, ALA offices and units, ALA round tables, ALA committees, ALA affiliates and ALA staff so that our association and its members contribute to the development of sustainable and resilient communities. In particular, this committee will maintain a working relationship with several ALA offices and groups to affect meaningful sustainability-related outcomes and model best practices across the association.
- The Committee roster was populated by mid-year and the group began meeting in July 2021, holding five committee meetings and two team meetings by the end of the calendar year.

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January 2022 | Council Committee on Sustainability Report

A. President Patty Wong has focused on sustainability as one of her four presidential pillars for 2021-2022. To this end, in

her inaugural speech, [she outlined this area of focus](#): “To thrive and evolve into the future, ALA must adopt the “triple bottom line” mindset of sustainability: We must embody practices that are environmentally sound, economically feasible, and socially equitable.

Planned outcomes include a basic briefing on sustainability for the field, a course to help provide the foundational knowledge necessary for library workers to think more sustainably, and a partnership with the [Sustainable Libraries Initiative](#) to open the door for public, academic, and school libraries across the country to participate in their Sustainable Library Certification Program.”



In November President Wong’s American Libraries column focused exclusively on the topic of sustainability: “Solidarity on Sustainability,” noting the urgency behind this work in the association and in the profession, **“...Climate change is a unifying issue for libraries across the globe, and we must commit to doing all we can to prepare our communities for its effects.”**

B. The Committee has gotten off to a strong start, reviewing the history, common vocabulary, and goals set for ALA in the area of sustainability by Council, ALA President Patty Wong, and the ALA Special Task Force on Sustainability. The group



has also reviewed the strategic plan of the ALA Sustainability Round Table (SustainRT) and established a working relationship with SustainRT, as you will see evidenced in Item D in this report.



The Committee reviewed the definition of sustainability used in the ALA Council Resolution for the Adoption of Sustainability as a Core Value of Librarianship, which uses the Triple Bottom Line, a concept that is best depicted by the Venn diagram shown here. To be truly sustainable, an organization must embody practices that are environmentally sound AND economically feasible AND

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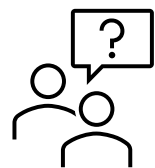
socially equitable.

[Image Source: Sustainable Libraries Initiative]

The Committee has two teams, designed to tackle the immediate goals laid out for the group by Council and President Wong:

1. Carbon Neutral Conference Planning Team: This team is pursuing the research and development of a plan in conjunction with ALA Conference Services Staff to bring to life the Council directive found in the [June 2021 Council Resolution on Carbon Neutral Conference](#) by 2025.
2. “Team Write”: This team is laying the groundwork to produce three of the deliverables outlined in President Wong’s strategic initiative related to sustainability: a briefing, a web site, and curriculum focused on sustainability. The team has created a purpose statement to guide this work:
“To educate the ALA Membership on basic concepts of sustainability such as the triple bottom line, community resilience, regenerative and collective action strategies. In a way that is useful, practical, and replicable; and celebrates the work of folks already advancing sustainability and, specifically, climate action work in the profession. So that library leaders may understand the urgency of climate action, connect with the core value of sustainability, and help to ensure our children have a livable future where they not only survive but thrive.” The team’s 2022 goals include the production of the briefing by April; and the launch of a web site along with a first draft of a curriculum by June.

C. Carbon Neutral /Carbon Offsets: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions: The Committee presents to Council foundational information from which to base future conversations at Council on the efforts towards fulfilling the June 2021 Council Resolution on Carbon Neutral Conferences. Attachment A of this report, “Carbon



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Neutral/Carbon Offset FAQ,” offers a very brief primer for those new to the conversation around carbon neutrality. It answers the following nine questions:

1. How is carbon-neutral defined? Is it different from “net zero” carbon?
2. What is a carbon footprint?
3. What is a carbon offset?
4. Is using carbon offsets just a way to assuage the guilt of creating a carbon footprint?
5. Are the offset impacts verified?
6. Response to the statement: “Carbon offset projects tend to impact communities that don’t have a strong voice.”
7. What are the primary contributors to a conference’s carbon footprint?
8. What is a carbon neutral conference?
9. Will working toward carbon neutral conferences affect ALA financially?

D. Joint Statement Issued to the ALA Committee on Education on the Inclusion of Sustainability as a Core Value of the Profession: The second resolved clause of the ALA Council [Resolution for the Adoption of Sustainability as a Core Value of Librarianship](#) states: “Evolve accreditation standards to ensure the topic of sustainability is an inherent element in library school curriculum.”



The Committee on Accreditation (CoA) is in the midst of revising the Standards and will be reaching out for comment shortly. On matters of curriculum, the CoA looks to the Committee on Education (CoE). In June, the CoE announced they are seeking feedback on newly revised ALA Core Competences. The ALA Council Committee on Sustainability and the ALA Sustainability Round Table have issued a joint statement on the inclusion of Sustainability as a Core Value of the Profession in the Core Competences to the CoE:

"ALA Council adopted the "[Resolution for the Adoption of Sustainability as a Core Value of Librarianship](#)" at the 2019 ALA Midwinter Meeting. The third resolved clause of the Resolution calls for the evolution of "...accreditation standards to ensure the topic of sustainability is an inherent element in library school curriculum." Therefore the ALA Council Committee on Sustainability is respectfully suggesting to the Committee on Education that the new core value of sustainability be addressed in the new revision of the ALA Core Competencies of Librarianship.

As a core value, sustainability is part of the foundation of modern librarianship. It helps to "define, inform, and guide our professional practice." The Core Values of Librarianship reflect the history and

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ongoing development of the profession.

As the issues of social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion are identified in their relationship to this document, so should the topic of sustainability. It is our opinion that with ALA's adoption of the triple bottom line definition of sustainability, which requires an organization or community to embody practices that are environmentally sound AND economically feasible AND socially equitable, that there are intersections throughout the competencies.

We feel it is also deserving of its own entry as a competency unto itself to help those seeking professional development, including LIS students, exposure to basic concepts such as the triple bottom line, sustainable thinking, community resilience, and regenerative design.

As all citizens of the planet contend with the impacts of climate change it is clear we must all pull together to mitigate and adapt to the consequences, as the Resolution concludes: "...the association, library profession and libraries of all types – academic, public, school and special – have the stature, energy, determination and will to build the coalitions, convene the conversations and act as the catalysts the world needs, not only today, but to inspire future generations, to take control of their future by working together to find the necessary adaptations and solutions to thrive as communities..."

We feel you have an amazing opportunity to accelerate the adoption of sustainable thinking in the profession by including it as we have described into the next iteration of the Core Competencies."

We thank the leadership of SustainRT for their partnership in this endeavor.

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Attachment B: Carbon Neutral / Carbon Offset FAQ

“Although climate change action needs to be massively increased to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement [2015 international treaty on climate change to limit global warming], the years since its entry into force have already sparked low-carbon solutions and new markets. More and more countries, regions, cities and companies are establishing carbon neutrality targets.” ([United Nations Climate Change](#)) ALA is among those organizations taking action to reach this goal.

At ALA Annual 2021, Council approved [CD53 Resolution to Achieve Carbon Neutrality for ALA Conferences](#). The ALA Council Committee on Sustainability was charged with assisting and tracking progress toward this goal. This FAQ offers a very brief primer for those new to the conversation around carbon neutrality.

1. How is carbon-neutral defined? Is it different from “net zero” carbon?

- a. The term “carbon-neutral” is sometimes used instead of net-zero, and they broadly mean the same thing. The “net” part of net-zero means we can still emit CO₂ [through the burning of fossil fuels], as long as we offset (or remove) those emissions from the atmosphere by the same amount in other places. ([Jessica Allen](#))
- b. That task of getting to carbon neutrality or net zero is also easier to accomplish when efforts are made to reduce the overall carbon emissions in the first place (less carbon to offset).

2. What is a carbon footprint?

- a. A carbon footprint is a measure of the impact our activities have on the amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) produced through the burning of fossil fuels and is expressed as a weight of CO₂ emissions produced in tonnes. ([WHO](#)). Nearly every activity we engage in generates a carbon footprint, small or large.

3. What is a carbon offset?

- a. A carbon offset is a credit for emissions reductions given to one party that can be sold to another party to compensate for its emissions. Carbon offsets are typically measured in tonnes of CO₂-equivalents and are bought and sold through international brokers, online retailers and trading platforms. ([David Suzuki Foundation](#))

4. Is using carbon offsets just a way to assuage the guilt of creating a carbon footprint?

- a. There is virtually no activity that we undertake in our personal and professional lives that does not create a carbon footprint. The only way to definitively not create a carbon footprint is to not engage in energy-intensive activities that create the footprint. Even virtual conferences need massive amounts of energy to run the technology that we all use to remotely attend

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those events. Carbon offsets provide a measurable, concrete action that addresses the climate impact of our activities.

5. Are the offset impacts verified?

- a. Yes, if third-party certified offsets are utilized, the impacts are verified by the certification process.

6. Carbon offset projects tend to impact communities that don't have a strong voice. Response?

- a. ALA has full control over what carbon offset provider and specific project(s) it utilizes to offset its conference carbon footprint. ALA can prioritize, if it chooses, projects which arise out of and substantially benefit marginalized communities. Many of the [certified projects offered by Native, A Public Benefit Corporation](#) (ALA's current carbon offset provider) are domestic projects. These domestic projects are considered to have local impact to those living in that geographic region.

7. What are the primary contributors to a conference's carbon footprint?

- a. Carbon emissions fall into three main types (Scopes 1/2/3), and responsibility for these emissions is shared by conference venues and by attendees. ([EPA](#)). Electricity, heating and air conditioning, transportation, paper and other material use are just some of the ways that events and attendees can contribute to [carbon] emissions. Carbon neutral events work to mitigate the use of emitted carbon ([University of New Brunswick](#)). The three **primary** areas that make up an event's carbon footprint are: attendee travel (air, train, car), food, materials and venue energy with travel making up more than 75% of the total ([MeetGreen](#)). Choosing more sustainable transportation alternatives once at the conference site (walking/biking/public transit) can help reduce individual impact in a small way.

8. What is a carbon neutral conference?

- a. This can be best achieved through a hierarchy of actions that include aggressive reduction of energy consumption [including by attendees prior/during/after the event], followed by conversion to low or no impact energy sources, and finally through carbon offsets for the energy use that can't be eliminated. ([NREL](#))

9. Will working toward carbon neutral conferences affect ALA financially?

- a. Figuring out ways to reduce conference-related carbon emissions, including paying for carbon offsets for any conference-related carbon emissions that are not eliminated through other measures (e.g. using less carbon intensive modes of transportation getting to or during conference) is a cost of doing conferences sustainability and responsibly. ALA has already

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chosen to begin the move toward carbon neutral conferencing by paying to partially offsetting carbon emissions for Annual/Midwinter/LibLearnX for several years (since Midwinter 2020). ALA has the same options when it comes to covering this cost that they do for any other cost they take on.