

TO: ALA Executive Board
RE: Special Task Force on Sustainability

ACTION REQUESTED/INFORMATION/REPORT:

- Review of a progress report from the ALA Special Task Force on Sustainability
- Reaction, advice and guidance requested

ACTION REQUESTED BY:

Rebekkah Smith Aldrich & Rene Tanner, Co-Chairs of the ALA Special Task Force on Sustainability

CONTACT PERSON:

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DRAFT OF MOTION:

DATE: February 3, 2018

BACKGROUND:

In 2017 the ALA Executive Board chartered a “Special Task Force on Sustainability. *The Special ALA Task Force on Sustainability has been charged to develop a white paper that describes **areas of focus and recommendations** for the ALA Executive Board to increase the adoption and implementation of sustainable practices by the **Association, the profession, libraries and the communities** they serve. (The ALA Executive Board is asking for a final report by the 2018 New Orleans conference.) TF discussion should include the following:*

- *How the Association may provide leadership and serve as a model for sustainability 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.*

Attachments: *Midwinter 2018: Report of the ALA Special Task Force on Sustainability*

Report of the ALA Special Task Force on Sustainability | Midwinter Conference 2018

Submitted by Rebekkah Smith Aldrich & Rene Tanner, Co-Chairs

The ALA Special Task Force on Sustainability has been working diligently since October 2017 to fulfill the charge given to them by the ALA Executive Board:

*The Special ALA Task Force on Sustainability is charged to develop a white paper that describes **areas of focus and recommendations** for the ALA Executive Board to increase the adoption and implementation of sustainable practices by the **Association, the profession, libraries and the communities** they serve. (The ALA Executive Board is asking for a final report by the 2018 New Orleans conference.) TF discussion should include the following:*

- *How the Association may provide leadership and serve as a model for sustainability 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.*

To this end the group has met six times since October 2017 and has established a bi-weekly meeting schedule through June 2018. The task force members began by outlining a process for their work, reviewing the literature and identifying guiding principles for our work.

We have worked to ensure all task force members have a common body of knowledge in addition to their individual expertise. To that end a collaboratively developed **recommended reading list** was created. The list includes the ALA Resolution on the Importance of Sustainable Libraries; the UN Sustainable Development Goals; the *American Libraries* web series on Sustainability; *Library Journal's* column on Sustainability; IFLA's work to promote libraries within the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) most recent Assessment Reports; the work of the New York Library Association's Sustainability Initiative; ALA's Libraries Transforming Communities and Turning Outward resources, as well as a dozen other articles, reports and case studies from the field. It is important to the co-chairs to **acknowledge the work that has come before the creation of our task force** and to build on the strengths of what is already happening in our field and beyond.

The task force members agreed that our first task was to **define what we mean when we use the term "sustainability"** and, by consensus, 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.*

Through our initial meetings, **guiding principles** for the work of the task force have emerged and been captured to shape the work ahead:

- *In the face of mounting disruption in our world, we choose to use an aspirational and future focused tone for our work*
- *We will help stakeholders in the world of libraries understand the urgency around the issue of sustainability*
- *We are committed to providing evidence-based information about climate change and the impacts of climate change; we will strive to avoid the politicization of the topic of sustainability*
- *We will ensure the connection of our work with ALA's Center for the Future of Libraries identified trends of [Resilience](#) and [Collective Impact](#)*
- *We will work to present ideas in an accessible and approachable way, as to avoid overwhelming our audience by the work that is necessary in our association, profession and libraries*

The task force has engaged in brainstorming activities around two questions, one designed to help create a vision for the future, the second to begin the work to help translate that vision into action:

1. *What does it look like if libraries are successful in helping to create sustainable, resilient, regenerative communities?*
2. *What needs to happen, that is not already happening, to support the Association, profession and libraries realize this vision?*

Emerging from these discussions we have identified **three themes** that will inform further research and the design of recommendations that are ultimately put forth from the task force:

- **Libraries as Inspiration/Catalyst**
 - *Libraries Lead the Way*
 - *Model: sustainable/resilient/generative facility design; sustainable building operations & grounds; the celebration of diversity, inclusion and equity through internal practices (e.g. recruitment, hiring, benefits);*
 - *Educate: provision of proactive education/collections/programs on topics related to the Triple Bottom Line (environment, economics, social equity);*
 - *Innovate: creation of tools, technologies and programs to help other industries operate sustainably; facilitate their community's sharing economy*
- **Libraries as Conveners**
 - *Libraries Activate Communities*
 - *Surface Shared Solutions: moving from debate to dialogue to deliberation (Libraries Transform)*
 - *Life, Liberty & the Pursuit of Happiness: focus on community happiness and self-sufficiency*
 - *Visionary Partnerships: seek out partnerships that will result in collective impact teams*
- **Libraries Contribute to Community Resilience**
 - *At the Table: Libraries actively participate in resiliency/disaster preparedness planning/recovery efforts for their library and their community*
 - *Social Cohesion: Focus on creating a community in which people respect, understand and empathize with one another.*

We feel that the work ahead of us is to **connect with our peers** to:

- test perceptions about sustainability in the context of association, profession and libraries
- identify ideas for the future; best practices; and exemplars

To that end, we propose an **outreach campaign** to the ALA membership in the form of a membership-wide “**Perceptions Survey**” and a series of **online forums** to gather the best thinking of the collective mind that is ALA.

We thank the ALA Executive Board for their foresight in convening this task force and appreciate any **guidance or advice** you may have as we proceed into the second half of the work of the task force.

Task Force Members:

Rebekkah Smith Aldrich (Mid-Hudson Library System) (Co-Chair)

Monika Antonelli (Minnesota State University)

Sara Dallas (Southern Adirondack Library System)

Adrian K. Ho (University of Kentucky Libraries)

Traci Engel Lesneski (MSR, MN)

Margaret Sullivan (Margaret Sullivan Studio, NY)

Rene M. Tanner (Arizona State University) (Co-Chair)

Margaret Woodruff (Charlotte Library, VT)

Christian Zabriskie (Urban Libraries Unite, NY)

Staff Liaison: Mary Ghikas, Executive Director