



Partners for the

Future: Public Libraries
and Local Governments Creating
Sustainable Communities

Urban Libraries Council

Leaders at all levels of government, along with those in the private sector, are convening conversations and taking action to create strong, sustainable communities. *This publication is a statement on the significant role of public libraries in achieving local sustainability.*

We know that no single individual or organization can turn the tide on years of practices and policies that have brought us to near economic and environmental collapse. And, we know and are confident, that through new knowledge, practices and combined effort we can take the incremental steps necessary to gain a foothold to a sustainable future.

No matter the community in which we live and work, each day we are reminded of the vulnerability of our economy, environment and citizens. We are peppered with media stories of unusual and extreme weather patterns, natural resources battered by natural and man-made disasters, and the growing distance between the economic, educational and technological haves and have-nots in our community.

Public libraries are partners for sustainability and the local anchor for economic, environmental and equitable development of communities as they:

- Engage young children, caregivers and parents in reading readiness programs to support kindergarten success.
- Provide public access computers for under and unemployed citizens needing to submit job applications only accepted online.
- Educate the public on sustainable energy practices and techniques available for home and office.

Partners for the Future: Public Libraries and Local Governments Creating Sustainable Communities provides examples of member libraries of the Urban Libraries Council from across North America working with others in their community to build vital sustainable cities, towns and counties.

ULC members are library leaders, uniquely positioned to use their organization, knowledge resources and facilities to benefit their community's sustainability. They are dedicated to contributing to a healthy, sustainable future.



SUSAN BENTON
ULC PRESIDENT & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

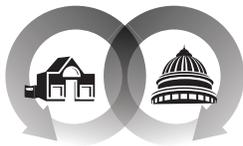
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Executive Summary

Local governments and public libraries are emerging as powerful partners in building strong, sustainable communities. Their shared commitment to economic vitality, environmental preservation, and social equity has already produced solid outcomes, leading to many opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

This report examines the relationship between local governments and public libraries in creating sustainable communities and highlights the remarkable breadth of public library programs that help local governments achieve their sustainability goals.

The research is built around the “triple bottom line” of sustainable development:

- **Economic vitality** focusing on making cities and counties economically

stronger through education, workforce development, and economic growth;

- **Environmental quality** focusing on preserving and enhancing natural resources and assets; and
- **Social Equity** to ensure that all residents have equal access to economic activity and are not exposed to environmental harm based on social class.

The findings that emerged from in-depth interviews with local officials and library directors point to both powerful existing partnerships and opportunities for deeper connections to achieve lasting results.

Actions local governments and libraries are taking together to create sustainable communities include:

- Enhancing 21st-century literacy skills to provide a foundation for long-term economic success;
- Connecting people with job opportunities and the skills they need to succeed in today’s workforce;
- Supporting and growing small businesses, which are the lifeblood of long-term

economic growth;

- Leveraging public library buildings as catalysts for downtown and neighborhood economic development;
- Reducing energy consumption in public buildings by modeling green construction and green operations and developing and testing alternative energy sources;
- Educating the public about individual environmental responsibility;
- Providing easily accessible resources for those in need—immigrants, the newly jobless, at-risk youth, and more;
- Meeting the immediate needs of the community while building long-term economic stability.

This report demonstrates how public libraries help local governments achieve sustainability goals in each of the three triple bottom line components and is intended to both celebrate successes to date and provide a roadmap for partnerships that are built to last.

The research is built around the
“TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE”
of sustainable development:



Economic vitality focusing on making cities and counties economically stronger through education, workforce development, and economic growth



Environmental quality focusing on preserving and enhancing natural resources and assets



Social Equity to ensure that all residents have equal access to economic activity and are not exposed to environmental harm based on social class

DEFINING Sustainability

“For local governments, it [sustainability] is not only about preparing for growth or trying to redevelop a vacant industrial property. It encompasses everything that a local government does—from long-term stewardship of the community to the smallest day-to-day tasks.”

INTERNATIONAL
CITY/COUNTY
MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION
WASHINGTON, DC
www.icma.org

“A sustainable community is one that is economically, environmentally, and socially healthy and resilient. **The success of a sustainable community depends on active, organized and informed citizens;** inspiring, effective, and responsive leadership; and responsible, caring, and healthy institutions, services, and businesses.”

INSTITUTE FOR
SUSTAINABLE
COMMUNITIES
MONTPELIER, VERMONT
www.iscvt.org

“Sustainability entails **meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,** by making social and economic challenges compatible with environmental responsibility.”

CITY OF
NEW HAVEN
CONNECTICUT
[www.cityofnewhaven.com/
sustainability/index.asp](http://www.cityofnewhaven.com/sustainability/index.asp)

“Community sustainability is **a philosophy and framework for decision-making**. The sustainability process involves examination of the links between economic, social, and environmental issues as they relate to basic service provision and new initiatives. When considered together, **resources can be leveraged to make the solutions more cost effective.**”

COMMUNITY
SUSTAINABILITY
PLAN

CITY OF BOULDER, COLORADO
www.bouldercolorado.gov

“Multnomah County has a strong commitment to equity in its services including public health, social services, libraries, and education. All residents of Multnomah County have the right to a sustainable and healthy environment. By expanding sustainability’s relevance to all members of the **community, regardless of race, ethnicity, income, or education level**, Multnomah County will be one step closer to being truly sustainable.”

MULTNOMAH
COUNTY
SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAM

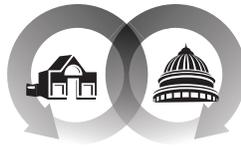
MULTNOMAH COUNTY, OREGON
www.multco.us/portal/site/MultnomahCounty

“Livability is the sum of the factors that add up to a community’s quality of life including the **built and natural environments, economic prosperity, social sustainability and equity, educational opportunity, and cultural, entertainment, and recreational possibility.**”

PARTNERS FOR
LIVABLE
COMMUNITIES
WASHINGTON, DC
www.livable.org

1

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND LIBRARIES — SUSTAINABILITY PARTNERS



“Local governments are missing an incredibly valuable resource if they aren’t working directly and regularly with the public library regardless of the official structure.”

DON MARR

CHIEF OF STAFF,
FAYETTEVILLE, ARKANSAS

Local governments are leading the way in confronting the connected economic, environmental, and social equity challenges that are essential to the long-term health and vitality of North America’s counties, cities, and towns.

Public libraries are emerging as strategic partners with their local governments in shaping and achieving sustainability goals. Libraries’ solid community connections, stature as highly-trusted public institutions, capacity to deliver programs and distribute information to large and diverse audiences,

and universal accessibility make them logical partners in what the International City/County Management Association called sustainability “the issue of our age.”¹

Local governments are broadening and deepening their commitment to sustainability

There is an increased awareness of the linkages among economic, environmental, and social equity challenges and how local governments must make decisions today with an eye toward the future. While many

local sustainability plans began with a commitment to environmental preservation, the triple bottom line is now the driving framework, with economic prosperity generally leading the way.

Actions local governments are taking to address the triple bottom line include developing comprehensive plans; creating community advisory groups to engage and inform the public; viewing sustainability as a philosophy and a decision-making process more than a government “program”; hiring full-time sustainability officers to



coordinate actions; leveraging federal funds to support sustainability strategies; and signing onto national sustainability commitments designed to raise awareness and produce collective results. For example, more than 1,000 United States mayors have signed the Mayors' Climate Protection agreement in which they commit to reducing emissions in their cities to seven percent below the 1990 levels by 2012.

Public libraries' direct engagement in local government sustainability plans vary considerably

Many library programs support local sustainability priorities whether or not the library is an active player at the local government table. Literacy programs, job skills and job seeking services, universal Internet access, environmental information, and model green practices, all provided by the library, contribute to community sustainability. When the public library is a local government department, involvement in sustainability priorities is obviously the

strongest. However, regardless of the structural relationship, connecting public library programs and capacities to local government priorities will enhance results. Not making the connection, many local officials say, is a missed opportunity.

Because local governments and libraries serve the same constituency, ensuring close program connections advances local agendas

Constituents think of their library as a reliable and trusted *public* resource. When a public library is named for the city or county in which it is located, residents assume it is a local government service. So, in cities and counties where the library is a separate organization, leveraging the identity connection to become a strategic program connection makes good political sense. Local governments have maximized those connections by using library facilities for vital public meetings, drawing on library communication and outreach capacities to connect with shared constituencies, and depending on libraries to deliver

essential services that support local priorities.

“In any county, the public library is a major part of the community infrastructure,” says Jay Fisette, chairman of the Arlington, Virginia, County Board. “People in the county identify with it.”

Successful partnerships emerge from active outreach

Structure does not determine how partnerships work—people do. In many cases, the library director must take the first step. Cleveland's Chief of Sustainability Andrew Watterson says, “I didn't think of the library as a natural home for a sustainability resource center until Felton (Felton Thomas, Jr., Director of the Cleveland Public Library) came and presented his plan. After the presentation, we all looked at each other and said, ‘Of course this is a good place.’” As a result of that outreach, the city and the public library have worked together to build the resource center to support *Sustainable Cleveland 2019*, the mayor's long-term action plan.



Nashville Public Library Director Donna Nicely says she regularly takes the first step to ensure that library programs support the mayor's priorities. For example, to support Mayor Karl Dean's interest in increased use of rapid bus transportation, Nicely made locating branches along bus routes a priority. "Libraries should consider locations based on public transportation because it makes the library more accessible to everyone and reduces the need to drive," Nicely says.

Local governments and libraries can be powerful partners in building sustainable communities

They are cut from the same public service cloth and share the same values and commitment to building strong, healthy, engaged, resilient, and sustainable communities. By working together, local governments and libraries enhance resources dedicated to achieving sustainability goals, leverage the libraries' expertise to support local priorities, and strengthen connections to their shared constituencies. Libraries have also brought corporate partners to the table. Corporations such as

Aflac, the supplemental insurance provider in Columbus, Georgia, and Covidien, the health products and services provider in New Haven, Connecticut, have helped strengthen their contributions to achieving sustainability goals.

Library Governance and Local Government Partnerships

Governance relationships between local governments and public libraries vary widely. But library and local government leaders agree governance is, but should not be, an obstacle to effective partnerships.

A recent Urban Libraries Council survey highlighted the diversity of library structures. Of the responding libraries, 32 percent were city or county departments, 19 percent were independent agencies of a city or county government with a board appointed by the city or county government, 16 percent were special taxing districts, 11 percent were non-profit organizations, and three percent were part of the school district. Another 19 percent reported other structures, including joint city-county agency, independent

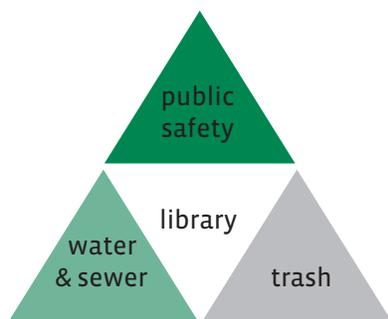
agency with both state funding and special taxing capacity, semi-independent agency, joint powers authority, and political subdivision of the state.ⁱⁱ

City Manager Rashad Young of Greensboro, North Carolina learned the value of having the library director among his department heads after working in two cities where the public libraries were independent agencies.

"This is a department I didn't have in my previous jobs. The library was there, but not part of my daily focus," Young says. "In Greensboro, I have become acutely aware of what the library means to the community—and how it contributes to improving the quality of life here. I regularly look to the library on a variety of programs, particularly around small business services and job connectivity/ job searching for local residents."

In Fayetteville, Arkansas, the public library is an independent agency governed by a Board of Trustees appointed by the Mayor, with 51 percent of its operating budget coming from the city. Nevertheless,

the library executive director participates in the mayor's weekly executive staff meetings with his appointed department heads. And the public library is considered a core local government public service.



CITY OF FAYETTEVILLE'S
CORE SERVICES

The library's position as a core service in Fayetteville evolved from sustained working relationships around local priorities and a willingness to take on new challenges. "The thing the library has been successful with is to say what are the goals of city government, what are the goals of the mayor, and this is what we can do to help you accomplish that goal," Marr says.

In University Place, Washington, a new branch of the Pierce County

Library is a key component of a town center development plan. The library system is governed by a five-member board of trustees appointed by the Pierce County executive with no direct connection to University Place—except that one of its 17 branches, the University Place Public Library, is located within the city limits. The city and the library system entered into an agreement to build the new library as one of the anchors for

"We're joined at the hip because the library and city hall are the anchors of our new town center. But it is deeper than that. Citizens see the library as a city function so it is important that I operate that way. And we benefit in many ways from their presence in the center of our downtown."

STEVE SUGGS
INTERIM CITY MANAGER,
UNIVERSITY PLACE,
WASHINGTON

the town center, in part because of its ability to draw people. "Electrons start buzzing around the library," says Interim City Manager Steve Suggs. "People connect to the library as a valuable and safe place—a resource that is not going away."

"We're joined at the hip because the library and city hall are the anchors of our new town center," Suggs says. "But it is deeper than that. Citizens see the library as a city function so it is important that I operate that way. And we benefit in many ways from their presence in the center of our downtown."

When local governments and public libraries are joined at the hip around sustainability goals, residents are more likely to be active, engaged, and informed and the opportunities for achieving results enhanced.

PUBLIC LIBRARY AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP

Seven Lessons Learned

The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) awarded nine public library grants in 2009 to strengthen the manager-librarian relationship to create and sustain change. Based on progress on the nine innovation awards, ICMA identified seven lessons learned for managers and libraries.

Be at the Table.

Library leaders belong “at the table” with other local government decision-makers involved in overall planning for community betterment and service provision.

Share Your Mission.

Libraries and other service providers in local government often have common goals and missions. Look for areas of commonality and for ways to share resources and efforts. Now is the time for innovation and risk taking.

Build Partnerships.

Partnerships strengthen programs. Effective partnerships require time and effort to establish and build, but they are worth the effort.

Appreciate Diversity.

Differing cultural norms must be understood and respected, and adjustments made as needed in program planning and execution. Flexibility and adaptability are key characteristics needed by all involved in joint ventures.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate!

Communicating with partners, stakeholders, and the larger community is important. Use communication tools that make sense for your situation and your community.

Support Champions.

Champions and advocates are important to make any program successful and sustainable. These are individuals or groups that have a clear understanding of library services and the role libraries play in the quality of life of a community.

Embrace Innovation.

Reinforcing the library’s transformational nature and having it viewed as a great place to help change people’s lives is important, especially during tough economic times. When the library is considered an engine for innovation in a community, it’s a win-win situation.

*International City/County
Management Association
March 31, 2010
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2

Economic Prosperity— Making Cities and Counties Stronger



“Brainpower is the new currency of success in the 21st century. And libraries are often cities’ best assets in building up the brainpower of the community so that we have folks who can handle the most technical jobs all over the globe.”

JULIÁN CASTRO

MAYOR, SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

Building brainpower is one way public libraries contribute to local economic development and prosperity. Public libraries also support local economic sustainability goals by:

- Providing 21st-century literacy skills from early childhood through lifelong learning;
- Helping people hone new technical skills to increase their employability, find job

- opportunities, and sharpen their application and interview skills;
- Supporting local residents during tough economic times;
- Connecting small businesses with resources that will help them grow and thrive;
- Serving as economic engines for downtown and neighborhood development by building branch libraries that attract people and additional development; and
- Being a community information hub to bring it all together.

In Wichita, Kansas, a new public library has been included in the downtown revitalization plans, helping advance economic development. The Mayor, Carl Brewer, says including the library in the downtown revitalization plans will provide a gathering place for children, students, families, and lifelong learners, as well as contributing to retail and job growth in the area.

The following sections provide details on library programs that support economic sustainability.



21st Century Literacy Skills

Calgary Public Library Chief Executive Officer Gerry Meek says libraries are “easy instruments of mass instruction cleverly described as a leisure service.” Their role in offering 21st century literacy skills, beginning with early childhood reading, is vital to the long-term economic vitality of communities. Literacy skills are closely tied to the library’s role in workforce development, nurturing small businesses, encouraging health and wellness, increasing environmental awareness, and surviving tough economic times. Among the literacy skills offered in today’s public libraries are reading, digital/technology, economic, financial, health, consumer, business, and environmental.

Early Literacy

According to the National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, quality early learning experiences for children from birth to age five pay long-term dividends, including school and employment success, stronger

families, and reduced crime. Every \$1 invested in increasing early childhood education yields \$7 in long-term social and economic benefits. ⁱⁱⁱ

“Today’s public library is a switching station—a broad, diverse, virtual resource where people go not to get something, but to be connected to the world in a different way.”

**GINNIE COOPER
CHIEF LIBRARIAN,
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
PUBLIC LIBRARY**

Libraries have stepped up to meet the need for early literacy programs by retooling their children’s reading programs to meet developmental standards and making deeper investments in early literacy training. The Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County reinvented its approach to serving children by training librarians in early childhood development skills and engaging parents

and caregivers in programs to create successful young readers. Today, children from as young as one month old through age five participate in the library’s story time programs.

Local elected leaders have also increased their personal commitment to early childhood programs to promote economic vitality.

For example, seven New Jersey cities joined with the National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education, and Families and the New Jersey State League of Municipalities to launch mayor’s book clubs designed to promote school readiness for children under age five. The book clubs—led personally by the mayors—bring together key community resources, including public libraries, to provide activities for parents, caregivers, and young readers to promote early literacy.



Sustained Reading

Public libraries are also leading the way in keeping kids focused on reading even when school is out. Research shows that children who do not read during the summer lose six to eight weeks of what they learned the previous year in school. By the end of fifth grade, students who did not read during the summer were behind their peers by an average of two years.¹⁴ Interest in library vacation reading programs has exploded in recent years as libraries create dynamic summer-long events, sometimes in partnership with private companies, to sustain reading progress.

In Georgia, the Chattahoochee Valley Libraries' summer reading program has grown from 2,500 participants in 2001 to more than 25,000 in 2010, thanks largely to corporate support from Columbus-based insurance company Aflac. As part of its civic outreach, Aflac provides financial support for dynamic events that keep young readers involved throughout the summer and generous prizes for meeting summer reading goals. Chattahoochee Valley Libraries'

Director Claudya Muller says Aflac's support came from a shared commitment to reading and education and a desire on Aflac's part to fund a program that could reach a large number of children in a significant way.

The summer reading program is part of a long-term goal among local governments in the region to reduce soaring high school dropout rates and break the multi-generational cycle of poverty in the region. "The economic future of our region lies in these children getting an education," Muller says.

Nashville Mayor Karl Dean launched a public library-school district partnership to maximize reading resources in high schools and support classroom success. *Limitless Libraries* will eventually make the libraries' 1.5 million items available in all high schools through delivery to their school library. In Nashville, improving schools and making Nashville a more livable city are Mayor Karl Dean's top priorities. "The Nashville Public Library plays a critical role in achieving these goals," Mayor Dean says.

"Nashville has a world-class public library system. Through this partnership I believe we can create world-class libraries in our schools," Dean says. High school students will also have access to 400 school-selected electronic books and access to Athena, an online database of Middle Tennessee academic library collections.

Community Reading

Public libraries also support economic sustainability by linking community reading efforts to local sustainability goals and supporting mayors' efforts to promote reading as a community value. The Hamilton Public Library in Ontario, Canada, used three books—one for adults, one for school-age children, and

"Nashville has a world-class public library system. Through this partnership I believe we can create world-class libraries in our schools"

KARL DEAN
MAYOR, NASHVILLE,
TENNESSEE



one for pre-schoolers—with the theme “one city, many stories.” The program gained widespread participation, including engaged non-readers and raised awareness about poverty as a community-wide challenge.

In Austin, Texas, the mayor’s office, public library, and University of Texas Humanities Institute join together annually to encourage residents to read an agreed-upon book and participate in conversations led by noted Austin citizens in branch libraries across the city. The program is designed to encourage reading and develop a shared community experience around key themes and issues.

Financial Literacy

Managing money, balancing checking accounts, and learning how to save for the future are essential to economic self-sufficiency, which contributes to community economic stability and prosperity. The Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County combines a parental commitment to early literacy with an effort to build financial literacy. *Baby Brilliant Goes to College* encourages parents who

“If we believe that education and lifelong learning are keys to opportunity for individuals and our entire community, no local government institution serves all those needs better than the public library.”

**JERRY E. ABRAMSON
MAYOR, LOUISVILLE,
KENTUCKY**

Long Overdue: A Fresh Look at Public and Leadership Attitudes about Libraries in the 21st Century

are investing in early literacy to start thinking about long-term savings strategies for higher education to make sure their investment pays off.

Digital Literacy

Computers and Internet connections in libraries serve multiple purposes, from reducing the digital divide to enhancing job-seeking skills to improving technology literacy. The Brooklyn Public Library combined a summer learning experience

for local teens with increasing technology literacy among teens and adults. The *Today’s Teens, Tomorrow’s Techies* program provides an eight-day advanced technology training institute for 120 youths who then become technology volunteers in library branches, further enhancing their skills and sharing their knowledge with the community. The advanced technology literacy also increases job skills for long-term employability.

Workforce Development

Libraries meet diverse workforce needs, from providing computers and Internet access to find and apply for jobs to giving the newly unemployed a way to maintain a consistent schedule and stay connected to the community. In tough economic times, the job support services offered in public libraries have become even more essential to supporting local economic goals.

A short-time snapshot of Wichita Public Library computer users found that 50 percent had used these resources for job and career purposes, including working on resumes, finding job openings, and applying for



jobs. In a one-month period, 10 percent of users system-wide and 18 percent in one branch used library computers to file for unemployment benefits.

Opportunity for All: How the American Public Benefits from Internet Access at U.S. Libraries was the first large-scale study of who uses public computers and Internet access in public libraries and was conducted by the University of Washington Information School and funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The Wichita Public Library participated in the project and found that 40 percent of respondents—an estimated 30 million people—used library computers and Internet access for employment or career purposes. Among those who said they used library computers for employment activities, 76 percent were specifically looking for jobs. ▼

“It was a moment of enlightenment,” says Wichita Public Library Director Cynthia Berner Harris. “The survey reminded us about the important opportunities a public library can

provide to people who need support during tough economic times.”

Wichita has a business librarian who is available to provide one-on-one support to job seekers such as resume writing and matching job requirements to requested skills. Both the national *Opportunity for All* study and local survey data shows some people with alternative computer and Internet access options preferred to use the library resources because of the available staff support.

“It was a moment of enlightenment. The survey reminded us about the important opportunities a public library can provide to people who need support during tough times.”

CYNTHIA BERNER HARRIS
LIBRARY DIRECTOR,
WICHITA PUBLIC LIBRARY

The library also works closely with Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas to ensure that job seekers know about the resources

at the library. The Pierce County Library in Washington has combined its job seeking services under a comprehensive program to help patrons survive a tough economy. The *Tools for Tough Economic Times* program offers help and support in finding a job, including online resources, job finder workshops, resume building advice, and enhancing skills to match job openings. It also offers resources to find housing assistance and other support services to deal with personal financial challenges, all organized in one place to make access easier during stressful times.

Small Business Development

Small businesses are the lifeblood of sustainable economic growth. One way libraries support small businesses is to aggregate the wide range of available financial training, and free services in one place to help small businesses thrive, even in a tight economy. Those aggregated resources are generally available online and, in some cases, in person. For example, the Johnson County Library in Kansas conducts an annual GovFest for Entrepreneurs



to connect small business owners with government and non-profit services in one place during one day. The approach maximizes connections in a compressed period of time, which small business owners say helps them cover a lot of territory quickly.

Small businesses can flourish and make themselves visible when they are engaged with their local libraries. The resources provided by the library expose them to industry-specific news and information as well as highlighting a sense of their community need.

An example of a small business taking advantage of the library is in Fayetteville, which is part of a joint city-public library-university partnership to test solar technology as an alternative energy source. In addition to the potential energy efficiency benefits, the project is providing the company a chance to develop its capacity and reputation in this green technology. The Fayetteville Public Library has helped spur economic development through this project to test solar technology to save energy

and position Fayetteville as a sustainability leader.

Economic Engines for Downtown and Neighborhood Development

Public library buildings are catalysts for downtown and neighborhood development. Their ability to attract people and their reputation as safe and stable community assets make them attractive additions to both downtown and neighborhood economic development efforts.

The District of Columbia Public Library's 12-branch construction program is bringing modern facilities to neighborhoods throughout the city. The Benning and Anacostia branches were welcomed enthusiastically both for the services they provide and the economic benefits they are expected to bring to their neighborhoods. A local blogger celebrated the arrival of the Anacostia Library and its economic benefits to the neighborhood this way: "Libraries are sacred. They are where young children on the wrong end of the digital divide keep pace with their more advantaged peers. It is where folks who for one

reason or another do not have their high school diploma or GED seek out information to obtain these necessary credentials. It is where community groups such as the Friends of the Anacostia Library join together to plan, organize, and make a sustainable difference in their 'hood.'" ^{vi}

Hamilton Public Library is taking advantage of an underutilized connection to a farmers market to create an economic collaboration in the city's downtown core to create new connections, both economically and programmatically through their shared location.

Community Information Hubs

Both local leaders and library directors point to the vital role of libraries as one-stop information centers. Whether it is aggregating information for small businesses online or bringing together partners to support job seeking, libraries serve as economic switching stations to connect people to the resources they need.

The Hamilton Public Library manages a comprehensive



community portal—MyHamilton.ca—that offers one-stop access to a remarkable array of community resources. According to Chief Librarian Ken Roberts, the portal brings the community together with the library like an anchor store in a big mall. Reference librarians now provide virtual service by managing sections of the portal to ensure up-to-date information. The portal provides easy access to valuable resources, establishes the library as a powerful connector, and increases traffic to websites of not-for-profits and small businesses in the community that would otherwise be hard to find.

Emerging Opportunities

Libraries are well positioned to contribute to achieving local economic sustainability goals. They deliver essential services, collect and distribute valuable information, respond to changing community needs, and support local government priorities. Strategies for strengthening outcomes include:

Engaging libraries in establishing economic sustainability goals

Libraries have such deep daily community connections that

they can get an early read on changing needs and emerging community challenges. The documented rise in computer usage to file for unemployment benefits and search for jobs in Wichita reinforced the city's need to provide workforce support services.

Drawing on the library as a research lab to support innovation

Libraries can provide research services to support local priorities, test ideas with local residents, contact other governments and libraries to look for models, and more. Local leaders need to look to the library as a resource and libraries need to welcome new opportunities to support local priorities. Nashville Library Director Donna Nicely says “I can do that” needs to be the libraries’ mantra to build their credibility as a go-to resource.

Pooling and sharing information to measure results

Where public libraries aren't part of the local government, the information they routinely collect about services provided, results achieved, and emerging needs can help local governments assess impacts and measure

results on a broader scale. Libraries can provide outcome data to the local government around specific priorities to create broader metrics to monitor progress on sustainability goals. For example, the Hartford Public Library created Hartfordinfo.org to meet community needs for comprehensive data in one place. Hartfordinfo.org is a gateway to more than 6,000 reports, articles, data sets, maps, newspaper articles, videos, census data by neighborhood, and more. The site is now used by 15,000 people monthly, averages more than one million hits per month, and is a valuable asset for local elected and appointed officials.

3

Environmental Sustainability – Creating Green Communities



“No single country or community can make a significant impact; but no significant impact can be made without every country and community doing its part.”

BEING CLIMATE SMART IN BOULDER,
CITY OF BOULDER, COLORADO

Sustainability has its roots in environmental preservation. For many local governments, the commitment to establish green goals was designed to preserve and protect the environment which in turn, broadened the sustainability focus. Local

environmental sustainability goals are built around reducing energy consumption to meet defined targets, employing green land use planning and building practices, and engaging the community in environmental sustainability efforts.

Public libraries support environmental sustainability goals by:

- Modeling green practices in building and operations;
- Serving as test centers for energy conservation innovation;



- Engaging the community in supporting local environmental goals; and
- Educating the public about environmental sustainability in general and local priorities in particular.

The following sections provide examples of how public libraries and local governments are working together to achieve environmental sustainability goals.

Modeling Green Practices

Public libraries have embraced green building and green operations, working in close partnership with local governments. As more and more governments adopt green building policies and requirements, new public libraries have become models of creative design and measurable energy savings. Green roofs, solar panels, geothermal heating systems, on-demand water heating, glazed windows, skylights, and use of recycled materials throughout buildings are becoming the norm in today's modern libraries.

Library staff involvement through environmental committees, green teams, and individual leadership focus on green operations

and connect library operations to local government energy saving practices.

What makes green building and operations in public libraries particularly valuable is their educational impact. Every visit to a green public library is a lesson learned about environmental construction and energy efficient operations. Tours of green roofs, kiosks telling the library's green story, demonstrations of how solar panels on library buildings generate energy, and visible recycling activities raise awareness about the importance of collective community action to preserve environmental resources.

Test Centers for Energy Conservation Innovation

The Fayetteville Public Library and City of Fayetteville are working together to bring solar energy to market in the region. The library is considered the city's laboratory. With a grant from the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), the Fayetteville team designed and installed 60 solar panels on the library's roof to provide power to the library using a

“The city of Fayetteville is on the cutting edge of exposing the broad role that public libraries can play in responding to community priorities. Their solar test bed project is clearly nontraditional for a library, but is important to their community.”

RON CARLEE
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER
AND DIRECTOR OF
STRATEGIC INITIATIVES,
INTERNATIONAL CITY/COUNTY
MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

commercially available inverter. As part of the research process, the library tested a highly efficient, state-of-the-art silicon converter developed by Arkansas Power Electronics International, a small local company that specializes in developing technology for electronic systems.

The project has broad sustainability goals beyond



improving energy efficiency including:

- Strengthening and broadening community partnerships around environmental sustainability goals with the library as the lynchpin;
- Contributing to a regional goal of developing a “green valley” in Northwest Arkansas by providing opportunities for local companies to develop and run new solar energy technologies and putting the library at the center of these efforts; and
- Educating the public about alternative energy sources and motivating them to consider trying new approaches to reduce their energy consumption.

“The city of Fayetteville is on the cutting edge of exposing the broad role that public libraries can play in responding to community priorities,” says Ron Carlee, ICMA chief operating officer and director of strategic initiatives. “Their solar test bed project is clearly nontraditional for a library, but is important to their community.”^{vii}

Engaging the Public in Supporting Local Environmental Goals

Many libraries have created comprehensive outreach programs designed to broaden awareness of environmental sustainability issues. Because of the diverse audiences they serve and their position as a trusted resource, libraries effectively connect the public to environmental sustainability challenges and opportunities.

For example, the Arlington Public Library in Virginia hosted a speakers’ series featuring prominent authors who addressed specific aspects of the county’s environmental sustainability agenda. With the county board chair in attendance, the standing-room-only sessions increased knowledge about sustainability and connected residents to the local government’s sustainability strategy.

The San Francisco Public Library’s “Green Stacks” is designed to increase awareness of environmental sustainability, connect residents to local priorities, and extend the local

government’s reach into underserved communities.

The program provides a one-stop environmental sustainability action center—green building, green practices, green programming, green bibliography, and a community awareness and marketing program about everything green, working in partnership with the local government environment office. Library officials are focusing particularly on ensuring that the program reaches residents in poor and underserved communities to give them access to information about healthy and sustainable lifestyle choices.

Green Stacks components include compostable plastic library cards, an interactive display that teaches eco-literacy to young children, a comprehensive website, community gardens and green roofs at two branch libraries, and comprehensive educational programs for children, teens, and adults.

Educating the Public about Environmental Responsibility

In addition to modeling, public libraries help achieve



environmental sustainability goals by educating the public about environmental awareness, responsibility, and action. Library roles in environmental sustainability education are broad, deep, ongoing, and valued. Expert speakers, special environmental sections of library websites, demonstrations of ways to build green homes, workshops on topics such as greening your life, special youth programs to introduce kids to green activities, access to tools that measure electric consumption and appliance efficiency, and even a dedicated environmental library have drawn high interest.

Environmental Library

The Greensboro Public Library has a branch that is devoted to environmental education and action, working closely with organizations through the region that are committed to environmental sustainability. The Kathleen Clay Edwards Family Branch is located in a 98-acre park that provides extensive nature, gardening, and environmental resources for children and adults. According to Environmental Resources Librarian Melanie Buckingham, the library has become a model

for environmental practice, a well-known resource throughout the state for environmental education, and a community hub for environmental information, education, and action. In addition to workshops, publications, and videos, the library offers hands-on programs on gardening, conservation, “eco-teering” through field trips and hikes, and kids’ nature days that draw on the surrounding park.

Connecting Literacy and Environmental Awareness

Jacksonville, Florida, Mayor John Peyton has connected his personal commitment to early literacy with environmental education for toddlers. The Mayor’s Book Club, whose target audience is pre-kindergarten kids, includes a “great outdoors adventure” component that focuses on conservation and the environment, encouraging members and their families to enjoy the city’s natural assets. The program includes monthly activities, educational programming at local parks, and story times hosted through a partnership between the Jacksonville Public Library and the parks department.

“Being a reliable resource on green issues is an important way to position the library as bringing value to the community and supporting environmental sustainability goals. Our educational programs about environmental sustainability convey to the community that we make a real difference in the quality of life.”

VAILEY OEHLKE
DIRECTOR OF LIBRARIES,
MULTNOMAH COUNTY

The program has added green practices to model what they are teaching, including providing a reusable tote for program materials, printing all materials locally on recycled paper, giving everyone a new book called *We’re Going Green*, and encouraging paperless online registration.^{viii}

“Being a reliable resource on green issues is an important way to position the library as bringing value to the community



and supporting environmental sustainability goals,” says Multnomah County Director of Libraries Vailey Oehlke. “Our educational programs about environmental sustainability convey to the community that we make a real difference in the quality of life.”

Emerging Opportunities

Local governments and libraries can strengthen environmental sustainability outcomes by:

Utilizing Libraries as Learning Labs

Fayetteville Chief of Staff Don Marr sees the public library as the city’s personal learning lab. The

“Working together, we can incubate new patented ideas and business partners while achieving incremental change in our energy efficiency rating,”

DON MARR
CHIEF OF STAFF
FAYETTEVILLE, ARKANSAS

solar test bed project, according to Marr, is only one example of how the library provides research capacity to support sustainability goals. “Working together, we can incubate new patented ideas and business partners while achieving incremental change in our energy efficiency rating,” Marr says. Being a successful learning lab requires a willingness on the part of libraries to take on new challenges to help advance local agendas.

Connecting Library Resources to Sustainability Goals

Books, workshops, and videos that educate the public about environmental sustainability are useful. Resources that inform residents about local goals and provide tools to engage residents in achieving those goals are even more valuable. The Cleveland Public Library created a sustainability resource center that supports the mayor’s long-term goals. Working in partnership with the mayor’s sustainability office, the library has organized resources around targets in the plan, including information about sustainability in general, green jobs, energy efficiency, new green technology, recycling, and

more with knowledgeable library staff nearby to provide direct assistance.

Including Library Staff as Resources to Community Task Forces.

Inviting library staff to participate in community task force meetings as observers, listeners, staff resources, or members will ensure that the library is aware of community directions and needs. That awareness will help the library connect its programs to local government priorities and community interests.

4 Social Equity: Ensuring Equal Access

“Libraries are among the most accessible and important public institutions that reach all populations in our community.

The outreach capability that libraries bring to the table make them a crucial partner for a successful sustainability program.”



JOHN DEStEFANO, JR

MAYOR, NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

Public libraries model social equity every day through their role as highly accessible resources for all. Their philosophy, values, and diverse programming demonstrate a deep commitment to social equity. Even more important, the public library’s stature in the community as a welcoming, safe place is

particularly valuable in supporting social equity goals. Libraries provide resources for new immigrants, newly jobless, at-risk youth, and more, at no cost, with no questions asked, and no return expected.

Public libraries support local government social equity sustainability goals by:

- Making library services easily accessible to all through strategic location of branches and use of mobile libraries;
- Delivering educational programs to ensure equal access to long-term success;



- Bridging the digital divide by providing computers, Internet connections, and technology training to anyone who needs access to those resources;
- Coordinating programs that support health and wellness; and
- Being a safe, reliable, and accessible resource for people in need.

Easily Accessible Services

Building branch libraries in neighborhoods—along public transportation routes where possible—and bringing library services to underserved neighborhoods ensures equal access to this vital community resource.

Branch libraries are important for neighborhood economic development and for community access. The presence of a neighborhood library attracts people and additional development. For many neighborhoods, the branch library is a community hub. Library directors see their facilities as part of a comprehensive system where both resources and services match community needs.

“Libraries have always been about community place, ... That need is strengthened in these tough times when people turn to their public library more than before.”

GINNIE COOPER
CHIEF LIBRARIAN,
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
PUBLIC LIBRARY

The city of Wichita broadened its community reach by locating two of its four Neighborhood City Halls next door to existing library branches. The library provided computers and Internet access in mini city halls, all with a goal of bringing public services closer to the people.

“Libraries have always been about community place,” says District of Columbia Public Library Chief Librarian Ginnie Cooper. “That need is strengthened in these tough times when people turn to their public library more than before.”

Bookmobiles further expand libraries’ reach into every part of the community by bringing books, computer resources, special health services, and more to where the people are. For example, the Chattahoochee Valley Libraries is creating a technology-based bookmobile to provide job services to people with limited access to the library branch.

Educational Programs for All

Public libraries’ commitment to education—in partnership with city and county government, school districts, and not-for-profit organizations—supports both economic and equity sustainability goals. Literacy programs help children of all ages and all economic backgrounds keep up in school to achieve better long-term outcomes. At the library, they also get help with homework, learn how to use a computer and the Internet, get support and coaching to improve reading skills, and connect with positive role models that support educational success.

The Calgary Public Library’s *It’s a Crime Not to Read* program addresses the connection



between literacy and crime. Research has shown that children in low-income communities often have both inadequate literacy skills and negative connections with police. The public library's solution is to bring kids and cops together to improve reading skills, build self-esteem, and create positive connections with law enforcement that could change lives in dramatic ways.

Working with the Calgary Police Service, the Board of Education, the Catholic School District, and Rotary Clubs, the program connects second- and third-grade students with books, reading, lifelong learning, the public library, and positive community relationships. Library staff and a police officer visit participating schools once a month, and the police officer reads aloud to the class and gets to know the children in a comfortable setting.

Technology Resources

Computers in public libraries have become lifelines for millions of people seeking access to an increasingly digital world, and the needs are great. Library technology is particularly valuable when knowledgeable

library staff are on hand to guide inexperienced users through short-term needs and teach digital literacy to enhance long-term success.

The Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County has geared its technology services to the more than 54,000 households in the county that do not have broadband Internet access. The library uses its many community partnerships, including the Ohio One Stop workforce development center, Consumer Credit Counseling, and Catholic Charities; staff outreach to neighborhood groups; and regular media messages to ensure that those most in need of technology access know what the library has to offer.

The 2010 *Opportunity for All* study pointed to the extraordinary role libraries have assumed as the Internet connector for millions of people. Nearly one-third of Americans age 14 and older—roughly 77 million people—used a public library computer or wireless network to access the Internet in 2009. Half of the nation's 14–18 year olds reported that they used a library computer

in 2009, typically to do homework.^{ix}

Library technology services are broad and growing. From information-rich websites and community portals that provide one-stop information access, to special training programs for teens to enhance their advanced technology skills, to computer skills classes for everyone from young children to seniors, to coaching for a first-time user applying for a job or unemployment benefits, and even free wireless Internet access, libraries help bridge the digital divide.

Health and Wellness

Ensuring that all residents have access to health and wellness resources is an essential building block of a sustainable community. Libraries support local government wellness goals through education programs that improve health literacy, partnerships with health care providers, and access to resources that support healthy living. The New Haven Free Public Library joined with Covidien, a provider of health products and services, to support a neighborhood



“Giving our public a sense that there are better days ahead is a big part of our sustainability mission. I want people to come to the library to find hope.”

FELTON THOMAS, JR.
LIBRARY DIRECTOR,
CLEVELAND PUBLIC LIBRARY

wellness program using the library’s Readmobile. Covidien helped equip the mobile library branch with health-related books, as well as laptops that provide online health information. The goal of the joint effort is to have a positive impact on the community’s health and wellness literacy by ensuring easy neighborhood access to information. Scott Flora, Covidien’s president of Surgical Devices division, said the partnership reflects Covidien’s sustained commitment to support community programs that help raise the level of public literacy on health and well-being.

In addition to equipping the mobile branch, Covidien’s support also helped the library expand its

health collections throughout the library system.

High rates of late-stage cancer detection prompted the Queens Library to coordinate a partnership to increase access to cancer prevention, screening, treatment, and education. Through *Queens Library HealthLink*, 16 Cancer Action Centers were created in participating public libraries, where more than 4,000 people took advantage of valuable cancer information, health education, and screening services. Programs and information are offered in Spanish, English, Korean, and Chinese in libraries, senior centers, places of worship, and public housing across the community.

A Welcoming and Safe Place

Libraries open their doors to everyone, both to provide access to specific services and to offer a welcoming and safe place.

New immigrants, the newly unemployed, and teenagers during before- and after-school hours all find useful information, informative programs, a friendly librarian, connections to neighbors, and a safe place.

Many libraries serve as informal welcome centers for new immigrants, providing language services, citizenship classes, sessions on American culture, book clubs in native languages, and orientations to community life. Library directors point to the intangible ways they contribute to ensuring social equity. “The library is a haven where people who are new to the country as well as this city feel very welcomed and safe,” says Greensboro Public Library Director Sandy Neerman.

When Hamilton Public Library found increasing numbers of new immigrants spending time in the library, it added settlement workers in scheduled shifts in five libraries to meet with new residents, welcome them to the community, and answer questions.

Library Director Carlton Sears of the Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County pointed to the optimism the library offers in a community that has endured continuing economic struggles and help break down cultural and language barriers. “When the economy is difficult, people’s value proposition in the library increases,” Sears says. “Our programs,



resources, and focus on the positives can move the community forward.”

Cleveland Public Library Director Felton Thomas, Jr. says hope is an equity goal for both the city and the library. “Giving our public a sense that there are better days ahead is a big part of our sustainability mission,” Thomas says. “I want people to come to the library to find hope.”

Greensboro Public Library Director Sandy Neerman sees the library’s connecting role as vital in supporting local equity goals: “We [libraries] are the connector for people on all economic levels,” Neerman says. “We can be a lifeline to both an at-risk child at a critical

“We [libraries] are the connector for people on all economic levels, ... We can be a lifeline to both an at-risk child at a critical time and to seniors who are looking for daily connections to the world.”

SANDY NEERMAN
LIBRARY DIRECTOR,
GREENSBORO PUBLIC LIBRARY

time and to seniors who are looking for daily connections to the world.”

Emerging Opportunities

Programs that meet specific public needs and intangibles that connect people with the community and its priorities help local governments meet their equity sustainability goals. Strategies for strengthening outcomes include:

Engaging libraries in establishing equity goals

Libraries are particularly valuable resources for assessing the needs of diverse populations and reaching people who have limited access to technology and resources within the community. Their ability to attract people, their reach into the community, and their partnerships with other community organizations can help local governments identify populations in need.

Maximizing the libraries’ stature as a safe place

People of all ages generally enjoy going to their public library. Thus it is good place for local governments to offer programs and services to reach disconnected audiences,

including offering services for immigrants, health clinics to serve special populations, and mentoring activities for at-risk youth. Some services and activities may be more successful at attracting the desired population if they are held at the public library rather than city hall.

Drawing on library programs and capacities to address equity goals

The range of programs libraries offer to the general public provide the foundation for tailored programs to meet specific equity challenges. Bringing the police department into a reading program for elementary school children adds a dimension that builds self-esteem and creates positive connections with law enforcement that could change a child’s life. Drawing on the library’s safe environment to coordinate health screening, provide language and cultural acclimation programs for new immigrants, or offer daily structure for the newly unemployed can have a major impact on many lives.



5

Sustainability Partnerships Built to Last

“The public library is a safe zone. It is apolitical, has always been there, and always will be there. That’s an incredible resource to any local leader.”

ANDREW WATTERSON
CHIEF OF SUSTAINABILITY,
OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY, CLEVELAND, OHIO

Ensuring that sustainability partnerships are built to last demands constant attention to working relationships, increased awareness of opportunities, regular information sharing, and a willingness to reach out. Local governments and libraries are indeed powerful partners, but with many opportunities

and challenges ahead of them. Sustained economic stresses, including high unemployment rates, have had a major impact on many cities and counties, so the need to build strong economic engines to sustain communities over the long-run has become even more important during the past two years.

Data shows that during tough economic times library usage increases, and the library’s value rises. The drawing power of the library, therefore, becomes an even more vital resource to local governments.



SUCCESS STRATEGIES for Local Governments Looking to Partner with Libraries

Learn about library programs and expertise

In cities and counties where the library is not part of the local government, becoming familiar with what today's library offers is particularly important. Cleveland Chief of Sustainability Andrew Watterson says that, despite his personal connection to the library, he did not think about the public library as a local government resource until the director reached out to the city with a specific proposal.

Invite the library to participate in sustainability discussions and meetings

Involvement can range from sitting in on relevant meetings to participating actively with issues when there is a defined connection. In Fayetteville, the library director participates in the mayor's weekly executive meetings even though there is no formal organizational relationship. "We want to be sure we have constant alignment between city and library priorities," says Chief of Staff Don Marr.

Connect the library to sustainability progress, results, and needs

Providing periodic updates on progress, results, and emerging needs will increase the libraries' ability to contribute to continued progress. In particular, knowledge about emerging needs will help library officials see opportunities to fill gaps.

Leverage the library's stature in the community to support sustainability priorities

Because of their deep community connections and their history as a safe place, libraries can open community doors for the local government. The library's position as a major part of the community infrastructure is an asset local governments can draw on for community outreach, and particularly for reaching underserved populations.



SUCCESS STRATEGIES for Libraries Looking to Partner with Local Governments

Reach out to the local government(s) that the library system serves to support sustainability action plans

Regardless of structure, libraries and local governments are connected. Being aware of the local government's highest priorities and getting to know key local government leaders are the foundations for a productive partnership. "Without effective partnerships with local government, libraries can become invisible and stranded community assets," says Calgary Public Library Chief Executive Officer Gerry Meek.

It is also important to be familiar with and connected to specific local government sustainability goals, targets, agreements, vision statements, programs, stakeholders, and advisory groups. Familiarity with the

priorities and the players will ensure that library programs and services are in sync with local government sustainability goals and priorities.

Demonstrate how the library can help achieve local government priorities

If the mayor or county board chairman has a special interest in early childhood development, show how the library's literacy programs address that priority. If there is an emerging interest in testing new environmental technologies, offer the library as the research center. "Insert yourself," says Nashville Public Library Director Donna Nicely. "Any of the local government's big strong goals are your goals. Tell the elected leader, 'I can do that.'"

Document success

Libraries are already transforming their community role and broadening their impact in remarkable ways. Provide regular information to

local government leaders and stakeholders that shows how the public library is supporting sustainability priorities through building economic vitality, preserving natural resources, and supporting social equity. Library program summaries and participation data will highlight current successes and create new opportunities for collaboration.

Become an advocate for the cities and counties the library serves

Actively supporting local priorities and proactively creating connections to those priorities within libraries will help the local government get vital information out to the public and raise the library's profile as a resource to the local government.



Leverage library capacities to support local sustainability goals

Many library strategic goals and programs already support local sustainability goals. For some local governments, library skills such as convening, carrying out research, distributing information to keep the public informed, and surveying the community quickly on emerging issues have proven highly valuable. Public libraries are located throughout the city and often have frontline access to the shifting demographics and economic trends occurring in neighborhoods.

Listen to the community with a sustainability ear

Libraries are sources of valuable community information to support local government sustainability planning and action based solely on the number of people who regularly

use the library. Data about program use and demand, research, services requested, informal conversations about needs and concerns, and observations about who is using the library all provide useful information to the local government.

Be a sustainability model

Green practices, awareness of economic issues and challenges in the community, and constant attention to social equity support local government sustainability priorities. The millions of people who routinely visit libraries learn about sustainability when their library is a visible, active sustainability model.

Leadership, innovation, and transformation are required to build a community that is economically, environmentally, and socially healthy.

As this report illustrates, libraries and local governments are successful and resilient partners when sustainable goals are top of mind. The key to establishing a long-term partnership is to be transparent with one another and acknowledge each other's strengths and weaknesses. Once a commitment is established and goals comprehended, along with the community's role in the endeavor, a sustainable future is real and tangible.

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Sustainable Communities

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About the Urban Libraries Council

Since 1971 the Urban Libraries Council (ULC) has worked to strengthen public libraries as an essential part of urban life. A member organization of North America's leading public library systems, ULC serves as a forum for research widely recognized and used by public and private sector leaders. Its members are thought leaders dedicated to leadership, innovation and the continuous transformation of libraries to meet community needs.

As ULC approaches its forty year anniversary, its work focuses on assisting public libraries to identify and utilize skills and strategies that match the challenges of the 21st century.

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