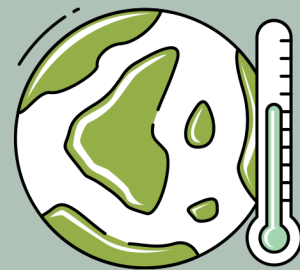


Navigating Uncertainty: Libraries & the Climate Crisis

A briefing prepared for British Columbia Library Association's
Climate Action Committee



What is the role of the library and information professionals in responding to the climate crisis?

As information professionals, we recognize that the climate crisis is a complex, present, and ongoing threat to our communities. We know that immediate and urgent action is required to mitigate the impacts of a warming planet on all lifeforms. However, determining the responsibilities and appropriate actions for the diversity of libraries and librarians facing such a daunting and politically fraught crisis, is far less clear.

This briefing highlights several, often-intersecting areas where library and information professionals and institutions are well positioned to take action. It also articulates challenges, tensions, and ongoing questions.

Foster Community Resiliency

Resilient communities are **aware of their interwoven connection to each other and share a common interest in each other's survival**. Recent research suggests that social infrastructure—physical infrastructure that supports and encourages social connection—is a significant factor in helping people endure a range of crises (Klinenberg, 2018). Social infrastructure supports civic life, builds social capital, and supports social networks within communities; and libraries of all types are well positioned to be strong examples of social infrastructure.

Build Partnerships

Addressing the climate crisis is complex and requires action across sectors. The most impactful changes we will make will be **bottom-up, grassroots interventions** that come directly from community needs and interests. Community-led approaches to library work focused on listening and reciprocity lend themselves well to working collaboratively and effectively across differences.

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“...when people are in serious trouble they want to go to a place that's familiar and comfortable, where they are likely to find neighbours and friends.”
(Klinenberg, 2018)

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Libraries as Green Spaces

Libraries can **lead by example** in how we respect and interact with the land and spaces we inhabit. Our spaces can function as exhibits of innovative green building design that patrons can implement in their own homes and spaces. Examples of this might include native plant community gardens, water bottle fill stations, energy consumption monitors, and other small energy-saving swaps.

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“Community resilience emerges through complex social relations with different individuals and groups having different capacities and opportunities to respond to change.” (Fazey, 2018)

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Embrace Climate Justice

Climate change is not equitable.

Different groups and individuals have varying capacities to respond to change, and the worst effects (e.g., extreme temperatures) are far more difficult to face by those already marginalized. If we want to avoid exasperating existing inequities, our efforts to respond to the climate crisis need to incorporate considerations of climate justice.

Programming for Climate Literacy

A climate literate community is a community that understands the impacts of the climate crisis and is capable of critically examining their environmental impact within a broader social, economic, and political context. Library programming and services that are geared at helping our communities share and learn more about the climate crisis is an important role we play in promoting climate literacy. Additionally, information professionals have a unique skillset vital to dissipating misinformation and disinformation on environmental and social issues. **Transforming societal norms and expectations in order to deal with this existential crisis requires local, climate literate, agents of change.**

Reduce Consumerism

A focus on reducing consumerism is crucial for libraries looking to make a substantive impact. The development of collections and programming that **offer alternatives to current consumption and disposal practices** can support our efforts to reduce consumerism. In addition, these collections and events can support our role as community connectors and partnership builders.

Imagining Futures

Libraries role as community sites of knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing, learning, connection and care make them an ideal leader in our collective response to the climate crisis. To fully step into these roles will require reflective and transformational change as we know that the future will not look like the present. As individuals and as institutions, **we need to start preparing for turbulent times** defined by social, economic, and political precarity, ecological decline, and increasing levels of inequality.

This unpredictable, rapid change will require sacrifice and result in shifts in our ways of life and doing things. In the face of these changes, we have the opportunity to support our communities in imagining a new future and new, positive ways of being in the world. If we act proactively and start now in building a new way of being in the world as an institution, and as professionals we have the opportunity to build something different but ultimately better than what we presently have.

Underlying Tensions

In our efforts to build and foster resiliency within our communities we risk framing crisis through rose-colored glasses. Many communities that have experienced ongoing, persistent crisis as a result of colonialism, racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, etc. did not have the choice of developing resiliency. The opportunity to learn from communities who thrive despite ongoing crisis is present and enticing. However, the conversations we have surrounding crisis and resiliency require a careful reflection of differences in experience, privilege, and position.

Climate justice research reveals that systemic racism, sexism, homophobia, colonialism, etc. are intertwined with the climate crisis, including within our own institutions. As we advocate for the survival of living beings on the planet, **we must be reflective and determined in addressing the harms presently inflicted at our own hands.**

Challenging Questions

How do we support our communities in imagining alternative futures?

How do we support and make space for recognizing grief as ways of life shift dramatically?

How do we build strong social networks built to withstand turbulence?

What does it look like to cultivate a culture of care in our communities?

References & Recommendations for Inspiration

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