

BCLA

CLIMATE ACTION STATEMENT:

Essential Climate Justice
Responsibilities in the
Library Sector



This statement presents calls to action and recommendations led and informed by members of the British Columbia Library Association and BC libraries on how libraries, associations, and LIS institutions can act on the BCLA Climate Emergency Declaration¹ and other climate change commitments and responsibilities.

We need decisive action now to avert climate catastrophe. And for that we need solidarity. Saving this and future generations is a common responsibility.

(UN SECRETARY GENERAL ANTÓNIO GUTERRES)

A Call to Action

Emissions reductions are not on track to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees and a “whole-of-society” approach is needed to make progress.² In 2023, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released the last part of its AR6 report which states:



Climate change is a threat to human well-being and planetary health. There is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all....The choices and actions implemented in this decade will have impacts now and for thousands of years³

Canada is heating by 2-3 times the global average and even at the lowest emissions scenario, by 2050 Canada is expected to be 2°C hotter than the average temperature we experienced in the years 1986-2005.⁴ **Every increase in temperature has significant impacts on human health and biodiversity.**

¹ BCLA. (2020). [Climate Emergency Declaration](#).

² UN IPCC. (2023). [AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023](#).

³ UN IPCC. (2023). [AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023](#).

⁴ Natural Resources Canada. (2019). [Canada's Changing Climate Report](#).

In BC, many libraries, library workers, and communities have already been severely impacted. While many impacts have been felt for years, such as declining local biodiversity and glacial melt, recently we've also seen increasingly frequent climate emergency events with more immediate and severe impacts on our communities. In 2021, 619 British Columbians died in just one week from extreme heat.⁵ A few months later, two atmospheric rivers led to the deaths of five people and caused mass flooding of the former Sumas Lake region, landslides, and extensive destruction of infrastructure and communities.⁶ In recent years, BC has experienced the worst wildfire seasons in at least the last hundred years. The most destructive year by far was 2023, with at least 2,217 fires, 25,000 square kilometres burned, more than 400 buildings destroyed, tens of thousands of people evacuated, and the deaths of six firefighters.⁷ We have also lost multiple BC libraries to wildfire in just the last few years. Climate change will continue to get worse as will the impacts experienced by people in British Columbia.

Decisive action is essential. In a report emphasizing the need for clear action within the health and medicine sector, the Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change makes clear that action is necessary to protect human lives: "As converging crises further threaten the world's life-supporting systems, rapid, decisive, and coherent intersectoral action is essential to protect human health from the hazards of the rapidly changing climate."⁸

Justice & Rights

In BC, we are already experiencing obvious and devastating impacts from climate change, and we know that those impacts exacerbate existing inequalities and injustices.

Climate change is a threat multiplier that disproportionately impacts vulnerable and marginalized communities, many of whom bear the least responsibility for causing climate change. Environmental racism in decision making makes these impacts even worse. Indigenous peoples and communities across the region have experienced the devastation of climate change, including increased risks to health, safety, culture and identity, as well as destruction of sacred resources and traditional lands and waters. Indigenous knowledge and practices, and long-standing efforts to reduce ecosystem devastation, are an essential part of the necessary response.^{9,10}



A whole-of-society approach to addressing climate change means not only that everyone is needed in working towards climate change solutions, but also that everyone needs to be involved in decision making to ensure solutions also address existing inequalities and injustices. As the IPCC states, "Carefully designed climate action can generate significant benefits and can help to minimize disruptions by taking a whole-of-society approach informed by local context... **Those most affected by climate impacts should be involved in crafting solutions.**"¹¹

5 BC Coroners Service. (2022). [Extreme Heat and Human Mortality: A Review of Heat-Related Death in B.C. in Summer 2021.](#)

6 Government of BC. (2023). [Clean BC: Impacts of Climate Change.](#)

7 CBC News. (2023). [2023 is now Officially the Most Expensive, Most Destructive Wildfire Season on Record in BC.](#)

8 Romanello, M. et al. (2022). [The 2022 Report of the Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change: Health at the Mercy of Fossil Fuels.](#) The Lancet.

9 First Nations Leadership Council. (2022). [BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan.](#)

10 Natural Resources Canada. (2022). [Health in a Changing Climate.](#)

11 UN Climate Change Conference. (2023). [Synthesis Report of the Technical Dialogue of the First Global Stocktake.](#)



Increasing Risks and Impacts

Each year communities are overwhelmed by the need to prepare for and respond to crises related to climate change. For many communities, libraries offer crucial support. Reports like the Government of BC's Preliminary Strategic Climate Risk Assessment can help libraries identify risks,¹² but many risks are increasing more quickly than predicted. One example is the rapid increase in severe wildfires, which has hit BC decades earlier than previously expected.¹³

In order to prepare for these increased risks, we need emergency planning and supports for library workers, communities, and collections, as well as investments in adaptation and preparation. We must also drastically reduce fossil fuel emissions and biodiversity loss since we cannot adapt to a continually escalating crisis.

CORE PRIORITIES FOR CLIMATE ACTION AND ADVOCACY

1. Ensure climate actions are grounded by justice, equity, and rights.

Communities who are most harmed by climate change have also contributed the least to climate change. They are also more likely to be excluded from decision making and the benefits from solutions. It is crucial to prioritize processes and solutions that centre justice, equity, rights, and the needs of communities. Equity and the implementation of Indigenous rights are at the core of real climate action.

2. Enact transformative mitigation efforts to protect and strengthen ecosystems, and eliminate the production and use of fossil fuels.

These actions should also include effective efforts to reduce pollution, resource use, waste, etc. while ensuring rigorous, transformative changes to address the crucial issues of fossil fuel emissions and biodiversity loss. The climate crisis is a fossil fuel crisis. Mitigation efforts create stability and make adaptation and preparation possible.

3. Strengthen community adaptation and preparation efforts.

Adaptation and preparation efforts that address climate risks and impacts are crucial for the health, safety, and resilience of communities, particularly for communities and individuals who are most severely impacted.

12. Government of BC. (2019). *Preliminary Strategic Risk Assessment Report*.

13. Owen, Brenna. (2023). "B.C.'s Wildfire Crisis Arrived Decades Earlier than Experts Forecast." CBC News.



Library Climate Action

In 2020, BCLA members passed the Climate Emergency Declaration resolution and **climate action became a formal priority of the Association**. Climate action intersects with many of BCLA's priorities and values, and as we'll see below, many core library services. Perhaps the most important point is that climate action in libraries is essential to support communities and ensure a future where everyone can thrive. **Now EVERY job is a climate job.**

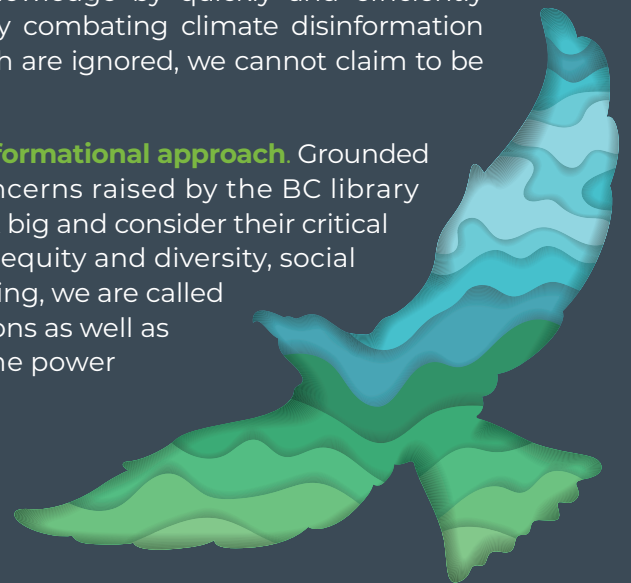


The role of libraries and other information and cultural organizations is particularly well positioned for meaningful action because we support communities, encourage inquiry, provide information, build connections, and offer art and resources that **help people envision a thriving future.**

Transforming Communities

Libraries act in relationship between their communities and cultural knowledge. Climate change threatens the continuity of both. If there is no community, for whom is the knowledge kept? If cultural knowledge is threatened or destroyed, what are the effects on the community? Because climate change poses an existential risk, we are required to fundamentally reorient our work and organizations. Rather than go halfway and ask 'how might the profession or institution be made sustainable?', we are called upon to transform libraries in order to effectively support those communities and care for cultural knowledge by quickly and efficiently reducing our own climate-changing emissions and by combating climate disinformation in our communities. If any of these avenues of approach are ignored, we cannot claim to be effectively addressing climate change in our sector.

We present below a framework to accomplish this **transformational approach**. Grounded in BCLA's organizational values and informed by concerns raised by the BC library community, this framework challenges libraries to think big and consider their critical role in their own communities. Applying the values of equity and diversity, social responsibility, and especially creativity and critical thinking, we are called upon to adapt existing solutions to our own organizations as well as create new and innovative transformations through the power of collective action.



Finding Our Way: Building a Bridge from Research to Implementation

The Calls to Action for Libraries and Library Organizations listed below are based on feedback and ideas from the BCLA community. These actions are informed by the best climate change evidence, as well as declarations, plans, and targets from multiple levels of government. Underpinning these actions are the many ways in which libraries positively contribute to climate solutions, as well as the opportunities that climate actions provide to address the multiple challenges our communities face.

There are many evidence-based assessments, commitments, plans, policies, declarations, and legislation available that can help to inform climate action and we have referenced a number of these key resources in this statement. Many libraries may already have a municipal or institutional climate plan or assessment available.

The following CALLS TO ACTION identify where, within our work, we have opportunities to fulfill our responsibilities to the land, our communities, and future generations.



Libraries' roles 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.

(MCKELLE HANSEN, NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY: LIBRARIES AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS)

CALLS TO ACTION FOR LIBRARIES AND LIBRARY ORGANIZATIONS

1

ADVOCATE FOR CLIMATE ACTION AT THE SCALE THAT IS NECESSARY.

Advocate for greater action from governments and policy makers. Bring the perspectives of libraries to these conversations and decisions, including library involvement in building community resilience, education, and emergency support for climate change impacts and disasters.

2

SUPPORT JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOLUTIONS BASED IN SOCIAL JUSTICE.

Develop, enable, initiate, support, and prioritize efforts informed by Indigenous rights and sovereignty, and initiatives led by People of Colour, Indigenous communities, and Historically, Persistently, and Systemically Marginalized peoples. Support and contribute to just and inclusive climate solutions that work towards dismantling barriers and inequalities.

3

DEMONSTRATE INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP ON CLIMATE CHANGE.

Lead within libraries and the wider library sector and advocate for transformational change. Create and strengthen positions and responsibilities related to climate justice and support library workers who contribute to this work. Support a culture of engagement, mobilization, and advocacy on climate action.

Acknowledge the negative contributions libraries have made to climate change and its underlying causes - colonialism, capitalism, and inequality - and support actions that use an equity lens. Also, communicate the crucial roles libraries play in short-term climate emergency responses; long-term community resilience, education, and empowerment; and the positive ways in which libraries mitigate climate change.



4

EMBED CLIMATE JUSTICE INTO LIBRARY POLICIES AND PLANS.

Establish climate justice based standards and frameworks that will guide library institutions and organizations, and fulfill these commitments. Embed climate justice in strategic frameworks, policies, and operational practices throughout the organization such as investment, procurement, development and planning, health and safety, programming, etc. Ensure libraries have forward thinking climate emergency preparedness plans that take into account increasing risks.

5

INCREASE CLIMATE EMERGENCY EDUCATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING FOR LEARNERS AND EMPLOYEES IN THE LIBRARY SECTOR.

Increase education and capacity within the library sector. Integrate climate emergency education into library and information studies programs and professional experience placements. Expand climate emergency professional development, learning, and training opportunities for employees.

6

WORK WITH GOVERNMENTS AND BROADER INSTITUTIONS.

Coordinate with local governments and parent institutions on climate action initiatives. Ensure libraries are included in local government and institutional plans and efforts. Provide reporting on progress and communicate the roles of libraries in climate action. Advocate for funding to facilitate this work.

7

PARTNER WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS.

Increase resilience in organizations and communities by strengthening connections and relationships. Partner with local organizations and groups and provide support. Facilitate sharing of climate justice knowledge and expertise that is important for the community.



8

SUPPORT AND BUILD COMMUNITY RESILIENCE THROUGH PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.

Build community capacity, health, and resilience through library services, collections, and programs, helping communities to prepare, adapt and come together in response to the climate emergency. Act as a centre for inquiry, information, discussion, community building, civic engagement, and modelling of climate action. Recognize the core role of libraries in providing access to collections, including spaces, objects, supplies, and other non-traditional collections, and further support library and community efforts to expand this sharing model.

9

STRENGTHEN OUR ROLE IN PROVIDING ACCESS TO CLIMATE EMERGENCY INFORMATION, COUNTERING MISINFORMATION, AND SUPPORTING RESEARCH AND EDUCATION.

Provide access to rigorous, robust, and accurate information, data, collections, and reference services to support inquiry, learning, and decision making related to the climate emergency. Increase access to information and learning that will help communities mitigate, prepare, and adapt to climate change. Lead in countering misinformation and disinformation and expand information, media, and science literacy skills. Help communities imagine what change and the future will look like through accurate information, discussion, and works of the imagination. Support research and learning that addresses gaps in knowledge such as local climate solutions and impacts on underserved communities.

10

ACCELERATE AND STRENGTHEN CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION EFFORTS TO MAKE LIBRARY SERVICES AND OPERATIONS SUSTAINABLE.

Prioritize urgent and transformative reductions in fossil fuel use. Other actions include improving sustainability criteria for investments and divesting from fossil fuels, increasing biodiversity, minimizing resource use and waste, and decreasing energy use. Assess environmental impact through audits and benchmarking and measure progress. Create support materials, guidelines, and decision making frameworks that will help achieve these objectives.

A desire to increase British Columbia's resilience to the myriad threats of severe and ongoing climate events must become the norm for all forms of decision-making. Every community, institution, organization, and individual holds a responsibility to reduce our climate risks and help others. **In particular, climate action speaks to the core responsibilities and values of libraries, as well as the potential of libraries to be part of the solution.**

WE RECOGNIZE THAT OUR CHOICES MATTER.

Every degree matters,
every year matters,
every choice matters.

(UN IPCC)

Work is easier when shared.

In BC and beyond, many libraries are already doing this work. Let's work together! Make connections, find inspiration, and access and share resources here:

- [BCLA Priorities: Climate Action](#)
- [BCLA Climate Action Committee online forum](#)
- [Climate Action Week: Libraries and Communities Acting Together](#)
- [Library Toolshed](#)

Find more information and resources here:

- [Library Climate Action Resources](#)
- [Climate Background Resources](#)

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