

How Public Libraries Build Sustainable Communities in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

This panel presents research and scholarship, case studies, and reflective narratives that exemplify how public libraries use social capital to build communities and affect social change (Wojciechowska, 2021). Session participants will hear from the book editors and chapter authors of a book entitled *How Public Libraries Build Sustainable Communities in the 21st Century* published by Emerald in 2023. Panelists will share both national and international case studies. This panel, led by the book editors: Kaurri C. Williams-Cockfield, a Ph.D. student at the University of Alabama, and Dr. Bharat Mehra, Professor & EBSCO Endowed Chair in Social Justice in the School of Information Sciences at the University of Alabama, features speakers, discussing their chapter case studies including Dr. Lynn Connaway, Executive Director for Research at OCLC who discusses library programs designed to close the legal justice gap; Christine D'Arpa, Assistant Professor in the School of Information Sciences at Wayne State University who proposes a sustainable communities model based on four separate research projects focusing on the role library staff play in building sustainable communities; Amber Matthews, Ph.D. candidate at Western University who discusses the development of a black community public library in Canada; Dr. Yong Ju Jung, Assistant Professor in the School of Library and Information Science at the University of Oklahoma who discusses a picturebook library designed to address book culture and empower children's ecological sensitivity in South Korea; and Dr. Sarah Ryan, Associate Professor of Information Science and Director of the Law Librarianship Program at the University of North Texas who discusses the role of public libraries in the knowledge economy. These case studies situate public libraries as a backbone organization

within the community and illustrates how public libraries support the implementation of the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In 2021, Kania et al. researched the implementations of collective impact since 2011 assessing the effectiveness and ways different groups have adapted the model. The key finding from this analysis is that successful collective impact efforts must make equity the focus of their work (p. 38). Kania et. al (p. 41) identified five strategies for centering equity:

- Ground the work in data and context and target solutions
- Focus on systems change, in addition to programs and services
- Shift power within the collaborative
- Listen to and act with the community
- Build equity leadership and accountability

The correlation between public libraries and the UN SDGs is clear given that “information is a central component of sustainable development goals” (Kosciejew, 2020, p. 330). The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) direct involvement in the data gathering and planning processes for the SDGs ensured that information access was part of every SDG and was identified as the common connector between the goals (Kosciejew, 2020, p.332). In *Access and Opportunity for All: How libraries Contribute to the United Nations 2030 Agenda*, the IFLA (2019) outlines how libraries support all the SDGs by promoting literacy, providing access to information, serving as a network hub, supporting digital inclusion, encouraging research and academics, and by preserving culture and heritage.

As public awareness and advocacy for the SDGs increase, the work of public libraries in community building is receiving greater attention given that public libraries expand social capital through their program and service connections. These connections are best illustrated by correlating the voices, programs, and research of the IS community to the SDGs, and by examining the collective strategic actions needed to achieve “collective impact” (Albright et al., 2022; Collective Impact Forum, 2016; Kania et al., 2021; Library of the Future, n.d.; Lynn et. al, 2018; Paschalville Partnership, n.d.; Veccharelli, J. 2018; Williams-Cockfield, K., 2022; Wojceichowska, M. D., 2021). Table 1 provides an outline of the program agenda.

Program Agenda	
Activity	Duration
Introduction to the Project and the Panelists: Williams-Cockfield, Mehra	5 Minutes
Discussion of Selected Chapters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lynn Silipigni Connaway – “The Library Serves as an Amplifier and Connector to the Community it Serves: Building Bridges to Legal Assistance” • Christine D’Arpa – “Sustaining Ourselves, Sustaining Relationships, Sustaining Communities” • Amber Matthews – Anti-racism in Practice: The Development of a Black Community Public Library in Canada” 	40 Minutes

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yong Ju Jung – “A Small Library Making Big Changes: A Case Study of the Baramsup Library” • Sarah Ryan – “Public Libraries as Key Knowledge Infrastructure Need to Empower Communities, Promote Economic Development, and Foster Social Justice” 	
Chapter Q&A	10 Minutes
Breakout, Small Group Sessions - <i>How Does Your Work Relate to the SDGs?</i>	20 Minutes
Debrief of Breakout Sessions and Conclusion: Williams-Cockfield, Mehra	15 Minutes

Table 1: Williams, K. (2024)

By the conclusion of this panel, participants should understand how public libraries impact social change in communities and ideas for public library programming that supports the SDGs. Educators will have concrete examples that can be used as case studies in the classroom.

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ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Public Libraries; Community Engagement; Education; Libraries in the Developing World;

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Public libraries; social justice; sustainable communities; collective impact; UN sustainable development goals.

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