

## SustainRT candidate statements

Vote in the ALA elections on March 11 - April 3, 2024

### Sarah Tribelhorn, coordinator-elect

#### **ALA SustainRT Coordinator Elect Bio**

I am excited to be a candidate for the position of Coordinator-Elect of the ALA Sustainability Round Table. My passion for sustainability and my work as a sciences librarian have allowed me to use my voice and experience for this valuable and important work in sustainability and in libraries. My journey with library sustainability began with joining the SustainRT as an LIS student. Based on what I learned through SustainRT, I became interested in sustainability in academic libraries, and researched what it looked like in various academic libraries across North America. That spark ignited a fire within me, leading me to pursue sustainability initiatives within my own library, including mapping the work we are doing as an academic library to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, certification through the Sustainable Libraries Initiative, and the development of sustainability policies in our library, with an actionable plan. For SustainRT, I bring my experience of fostering new sustainability initiatives within my library, developing community partnerships in my county, and leadership from my role as Co-Chair on the SustainRT Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee as well as founder and Chair of my library's Sustainability Committee. I believe that together, we can continue the foundational work of the SustainRT and make libraries champions of sustainability.

#### **What do you want to focus on if elected as SustainRT coordinator-elect?**

As SustainRT coordinator-elect I would like to focus on providing support for the new strategic plan to ensure that all committees fully understand what it is that they would like to accomplish in relation to the plan, and provide the necessary support and direction for all SustainRT committees to accomplish the goals in the plan. Ultimately, I would love sustainability to be part of all library's missions without a second thought! (I know, I can dream!)

#### **What is one sustainability accomplishment you are proud of?**

The establishment of a 'sustainability movement' within my library, resulting in our enrollment and participation in the Sustainable Libraries Initiative Certification Program for academic libraries, the development of a library sustainability policy, and mapping what we do to the UN SDGs. This has resulted in many different partnerships, within the library, on campus with different organizations and student groups, and county-wide, with collaborations between our academic, county, and public libraries.

#### **What do you see as a sustainability challenge in libraries?**

Sustainability within libraries is often limited or initiated by a few passionate individuals, and I see one of the biggest challenges is to ensure these efforts are maintained. This requires buy-in from all stakeholders, and a continual drive with a clearly defined plan and policies to support the efforts.

**Is there anything else you wish to share with SustainRT members about your candidacy?**

I am “all in” on sustainability in libraries, and feel strongly about our central role in our communities to enhance our efforts in sustainability collaboratively, so we are not reinventing the wheel, but supporting each other in our initiatives to gain and maintain momentum in this movement.

**Angie Price, secretary**

**What is one sustainability accomplishment you are proud of?**

I have always been interested in the intersection of sustainability and libraries in my career. When I worked for the Memphis Public Library system, I was part of our Recycling Committee/ Green Team there. We were able to coordinate with the city to acquire and stock standardized recycling vessels across 18 branches, as well as the 5 floors of our central location building; in addition, we coordinated services required for the pickup and maintenance of the materials and the containers.

Later in my career, I was fortunate to be accepted to a library leadership program, which ran for over 6 months and invested in accepted staff to develop leadership skills throughout the program. As part of that program, I developed a final proposal and presentation for the entire library system which included suggestions for sustainability policies, programs, practices, and partners in the community moving forward. A number of initiatives were able to move forward after the program (which took the collaboration and creativity of multiple people across the libraries and their communities), including the building of a community garden, the incorporation of science and conservation-based programming for kids, teens, and adults, the exploration of new recycling possibilities, and new partners that we could consider for building relationships and goals in the community. Programming included science and nature-based programming for children, energy conservation programs for adults, and technology programs for teens. These goals were tied into the library and City strategic goals as well: the goals included reaching beyond their walls to build creative partnerships that made a difference in people’s lives and to help move the library to a leadership role in the public space.

**What do you see as a sustainability challenge in libraries?**

The ALA calls for sustainability in libraries to be “environmentally sound, economically feasible, and socially equitable”; of the three, I think that “economically feasible” can be one of the most difficult to achieve. Libraries throughout the country have faced funding and budget cuts, and

making decisions regarding basic services a library offers can sometimes push sustainability further down the priority list (or remove it completely). A lot of libraries and systems must truly think creatively to incorporate sustainability practices, policies, and initiatives into their strategic goals. For instance, increasing energy efficiency in older buildings and spaces that may not have the money to replace or fully renovate requires much more thought and planning than in some newer and shinier places that have the benefit of green architecture built into their edifices from the start.

Fortunately, there are many resources now that libraries can utilize to work sustainability into their culture. The Sustainability Round Table is one such resource, and provides links, events, ideas, incentives, and more for librarians to access and use for free in building their sustainability practices.

**What is one sustainability project or initiative spearheaded by a library that you wish you had thought of first and why?**

The [Campus Race to Zero Waste](#) is a fantastic program that academic libraries (and universities in general) can utilize to motivate the entire campus to reduce their waste and increase their reuse of items so that they do not go into the garbage. Waste reduction and diversion are so incredibly important to prevent more items from being sent to landfills where they can stagnate for years, decades, or centuries. The MSU library used a similar plan through a campaign called [Zero Waste Mania](#) to vastly increase its recycle and reuse rates on campus, resulting in far fewer items being sent to the landfill.

I only recently discovered this program and plan to bring it to the attention of our sustainability committee here to talk about possibilities for the future.

**Is there anything else you wish to share with SustainRT members about your candidacy?**

I would just like to share that I am feeling very hopeful in my second career stint in libraries, and I want to do everything that I can to maximize the good I put out into the world through my profession, particularly in the sustainability and conservation arena. I was a public librarian for nearly seven years and then left the profession for a while - around five years. I have only returned to the profession recently, in 2023, as an academic science librarian, and I have never been happier in my work. In many ways, I am finally able to fully incorporate all my interests, degrees, and experience now into a more focused vision for the future. I pledge to serve the Sustainability Round Table and all those that it serves to the best of my ability; I believe strongly in its mission and goals, and hope to inspire others to do so as well.

Kacper Jarecki, treasurer

**What is one sustainability accomplishment you are proud of?**

In 2020, Sarah Gluck and I organized a SustainRT bicycle ride from NY to Philadelphia to attend the LibLearnX conference! It was so much fun and we stopped by a few libraries on the way. All the library staff we met were so supportive and gave us snacks and a place to relax. I even took a nap in the staff lounge of one library! After that, we also organized a bicycle ride for the DC 37 Climate Justice Committee! I also helped co-found the Combating Racism webinar series for the New York Library Association and we recently completed the third annual session!

**What do you see as a sustainability challenge in libraries?**

Racism is one of the most horrible things in our country today. How can we unite to fight to protect the planet when groups of people are systematically put down and denied opportunities for advancement because of their skin color or background? Sustainability includes social equity, and libraries have a great opportunity to bring people together by offering a safe environment where everyone is welcome! Libraries are ideal places to share stories and create friendships! Libraries also can offer opportunities for education, job advancement, and the creation of strong communities.

**What is one sustainability project or initiative spearheaded by a library that you wish you had thought of first and why?**

Plogging started in Sweden in 2016 by Erik Ahlström. Plogging is a fun concept: picking up trash while running! Plogging is a great opportunity to exercise, spend time outdoors, while also combating plastic pollution!

**Is there anything else you wish to share with SustainRT members about your candidacy?**

I know first-hand how awful the consequences of global warming and extreme weather can be! In 2012, my library was destroyed by Superstorm Sandy when I was the manager of the Seaside Library in the Rockaways. I lost my library, but some people lost their cars, their homes, and even their lives! We need to fight to save libraries and the whole world by promoting sustainability.

## **Shalini Ramachandran, member-at-large**

**What is one sustainability accomplishment you are proud of?**

Prior to becoming a librarian, I was a college writing instructor. During this time, I developed courses focused on climate change, food justice, and environmental racism. I am now an academic STEM librarian and have continued my commitment to sustainability through collection development, library instruction, and workplace organizing.

With a deep-rooted commitment to sustainability and a passion for creating transformative change through education, I am excited to share an accomplishment that aligns with both these

values. As a lecturer in the Warren College Writing Program at UCSD, I developed and taught an Academic Argumentation course centered on Climate Change and Policy. This course was designed for first-year students, aiming to equip them with the necessary tools to engage thoughtfully and effectively with the complex debates surrounding climate policy.

As part of the course development, I crafted the course syllabus, curated pertinent readings, and formulated engaging writing prompts. I also guided three teaching assistants in delivering the course and also taught two sections each quarter. In doing so, I had the opportunity to directly impact the sustainability and climate policy knowledge of a diverse group of students.

What inspired me was witnessing my students' ability to articulate their visions for effective climate policy through their writing. Through analysis and thoughtful discourse, they became acquainted with the intricacies of climate policy debates, drawing from the proceedings of various United Nations' Conferences of the Parties (COPs) and international agreements.

Going forward, I would like to develop additional library instruction focused on climate policy. I strongly believe librarians have a significant role to play in disseminating sustainability literacy. Targeting policy research can be a valuable addition to the library instruction repertoire on sustainability, as some of the most wide-ranging and impactful environmental measures occur through policy, whether at the regional, state, national, or global levels. If students feel empowered by knowledge and critical thinking skills, they can become agents of change, ready to advocate for a more sustainable future.

If elected, I am eager to bring this same passion and expertise in sustainability instruction to SustainRT, working collaboratively to further advance sustainability education and other initiatives within our public and academic libraries and beyond.

### **What do you see as a sustainability challenge in libraries?**

Libraries face sustainability challenges at the operational level, in terms of building construction and design, management of facilities and library materials, and sustainable wages and work-life balance for library staff. Libraries, as disseminators of environmental literacy and sustainability initiatives also have a variety of challenges, including lack of autonomy, inadequate funding for sustainability-focused library goals, and a lack of staff trained in sustainable librarianship practices.

One sustainability challenge I would like to see addressed, both within libraries and, more broadly, in the environmental movement, is the historical exclusion of communities of color and communities of the Global South from environmental decision making.

Climate activist Elizabeth Yeampierre observes a profound connection between the battles against climate change and racial inequality, emphasizing that the shift towards a low-carbon future is linked to issues such as labor rights, land management, and social justice. She critiques the mainstream environmental movement, suggesting that it was primarily shaped by

individuals concerned with conservation and preserving natural habitats, yet overlooked the concerns of black communities.

The library I work at sits at the edge of the environmentally threatened Ballona wetlands, which was also a sacred site for the original stewards of the region, the Gabrielino-Tongva. In 2004, while the neighborhood of Playa Vista was being developed on the wetlands, the construction led to the disturbance of the remains of over 1,000 indigenous people. A significant portion of these remains was eventually reinterred nearby. In my sustainability work within my library, I find it crucial to acknowledge this recent traumatic history and foreground the preservation and continuity of indigenous knowledge and practices.

The most recent developments in sustainability practices within libraries recognize environmental racism and environmental colonialism, but more work can be done to center these issues. If elected to SustainRT, I would make it a priority to collaborate with members to develop inclusive and innovative sustainability instruction, programming, and outreach and also amplify the voices of library workers of color in sustainability conversations.

**What is one sustainability project or initiative spearheaded by a library that you wish you had thought of first and why?**

The dwindling population of pollinators, including bees, butterflies, and other insects, is a major area of concern, worldwide. Libraries have created awareness around the issue through education, seed giveaways, and other programming. These educational and programming initiatives are excellent, but I have also felt that more project-based approaches around plant and animal conservation, while requiring more funding and support, could be valuable as well.

I was, therefore, impressed by the project undertaken in 2023 by the Platt Library, a branch of the Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL) as part of LAPL's Teens Leading Change initiative. A key goal of the project was to educate the local community, spread knowledge, and promote conservation of endangered pollinators.

Actions completed by the Teens Leading Change initiative at the Platt Library included:

- Brought awareness to dwindling pollinator species vital to the ecosystem.
- Hosted professional presentations from local subject-matter experts.
- Planned a culminating goal: Building a pollinator garden filled with native plants. The steps toward completing this goal included:
  - Planning the garden.
  - Finalizing the list of plants. Designing the layout of the garden area and taking measurements. Calling local nurseries to check inventory and started ordering plants.
- Planned to incorporate a small rock garden into the design:
  - Utilized assistance of the public by hosting a rock painting event.
  - Painted example rocks to showcase the event day.

I strongly support community engagement in sustainability initiatives, but I had not had the opportunity to develop a project that was as hands-on as the Platt garden project. The project provides a blueprint for other such community projects to succeed. Two reasons I think project-based programs should be part of library sustainability are:

1. Goal oriented projects can make a true difference, inspire younger generations, and engage the community positively.
2. The end result, a pollinator garden in this example, is a long-term environmental asset to the community.

**Is there anything else you wish to share with SustainRT members about your candidacy?**

As an advocate for sustainability in libraries and a firm believer in the power of collective action to drive positive change, I am committed to advancing SustainRT's mission of promoting sustainability within library systems. The slow pace of implementation of climate goals in communities is frustrating, but there are many exciting developments in the sustainability sphere, including the United Nations Sustainable Development (SD) Goals that provide roadmaps for libraries to establish and lead robust sustainability practices.

I also believe that building a resilient community of climate-aware library workers is essential for the work of sustainable libraries to advance and endure. I am pleased that the Resilient Activist group is rolling out a reimagined Climate Cafe, as space for library workers and the community to connect to discuss climate actions and the negative impacts, material and psychological, of climate change.

If elected, I pledge to support SustainRT in the following ways:

**Advocacy and Outreach:** I will actively advocate for the integration of sustainable practices into library operations, services, and programming. This includes raising awareness about the importance of sustainability among library professionals, stakeholders, and the broader community, and championing initiatives that align with the UN's SD Goals.

**Education and Training:** I will work to provide educational resources, training opportunities, and professional development programs to empower library staff with the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to incorporate sustainability principles into their work. This may include webinars, workshops, and conferences focused on topics such as green building design, energy efficiency, waste reduction, and environmental justice.

**Partnerships and Collaboration:** I will seek to foster partnerships and collaboration with other organizations, agencies, and stakeholders that share our commitment to sustainability. By leveraging collective expertise, resources, and networks, we can amplify our impact, exchange best practices, and drive innovation in sustainable library practices.

**Policy and Advocacy:** I will work to advocate for policies and initiatives at the local, state, and national levels that promote sustainability in libraries. This may involve engaging with policymakers, participating in advocacy campaigns, and supporting legislation that addresses environmental issues, social equity, and economic resilience.

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** I will support efforts to monitor and evaluate the progress of sustainability initiatives within library systems, track key performance indicators, and assess the impact of our collective efforts on environmental, social, and economic sustainability. This data-driven approach will enable us to identify areas for improvement, celebrate successes, and demonstrate the value of sustainability in libraries.

In conclusion, I am deeply committed to advancing sustainability in libraries and am eager to contribute my time, energy, and expertise to support SustainRT in achieving its goals. Together, we can build a more sustainable future for our libraries, our communities, and our planet.

Thank you for considering my candidacy. I look forward to the opportunity to serve as a member-at-large and work collaboratively with all of you to make a meaningful difference.

Sincerely,

Shalini Ramachandran

Janet Salazar, member-at-large

**What is one sustainability accomplishment you are proud of?**

I know it is just a small thing, but I am proud that our library does not use plastic bags. We only use paper bags for customer holds, take home kits, or if someone requests a bag. We work closely with Plastic Free QAC, a local non-profit, to do programming around the harm that single use plastics are doing to our planet. We already recycle our electronics, papers, cans, bottles, etc. Our newly expanded branch has electric vehicle charging stations.

**What do you see as a sustainability challenge in libraries?**

I think our biggest challenge right now is changing the mindset of what we need to hand out as swag for outreach events and what we need to have as incentives for summer reading. I am happy to see that many libraries are moving away from handing out little plastic toys or other plastic items that get thrown away an hour after they are taken home. The more we can do this, the better. Also, our library vehicles should be moving toward more environmentally friendly models.



**What is one sustainability project or initiative spearheaded by a library that you wish you had thought of first and why?**

I wish I would have purchased an electric vehicle for our mobile library. At the time I was supporting a local business and that sustains our local economy, but I should have held out for an electric vehicle.

**Is there anything else you wish to share with SustainRT members about your candidacy?**

Sustainability is something all libraries should include in their strategic plans, facilities master plans, programming, collections, procedures, and policies. I will use my time to move libraries toward a more sustainable future. We can be a case study for best practices in sustainability for public buildings and programs. I look forward to helping the round table with initiatives and projects.

**Kim Sigle, member-at-large**

**What is one sustainability accomplishment you are proud of?**

I am very proud of starting a gardening club at the elementary school where I served as the librarian. I loved seeing their wonder as they made connections between the things we grew and the food we ate. The connections went beyond the raised beds in our courtyard. We were able to visit the high school culinary program as a club activity. The high school students demonstrated how to prepare and use locally grown foods and my students were able to not only visit the school they would eventually attend, but also make and taste things. The club also shared produce (ours + gleanings from the local farmers' market), recipes, and measuring cups at an evening event with families to encourage using cooking together as a literacy activity. It was so exciting to hear my Guatemalan and Somalian families, who prior to this evening hadn't engaged with one another, talking together about the best ways to prepare eggplant or how best to use ghost peppers.

**What do you see as a sustainability challenge in libraries?**

Education and funding-

Bringing sustainability programming and instruction to library patrons can be a challenge. In school libraries, although we know that making learning relevant with hands-on, real-world connections is the best way to teach, there never seems to be enough time during the school day. Elementary librarians often only have 30 minutes for a lesson and checkout with their classes and problem-based sustainability instruction is not always possible. Scheduling sustainability programs in the evening at public libraries requires staffing, space, materials, and a way for participants to get there. It also requires marketing and awareness.

Additionally, upgrades to make the buildings housing libraries more green are expensive. So many entities are competing for taxpayer dollars and the local governments may not consider it a top priority.

**What is one sustainability project or initiative spearheaded by a library that you wish you had thought of first and why?**

I realize that recycling is a very small part of what we need to do to be more sustainable, but hosting upcycling events is a great way to open discussions about consumption and waste. Low-tech maker spaces should be in every library. I especially love upcycling book discards. There are so many things to do with library books that are no longer being circulated—black-out poetry, origami and other folding projects, making bookmarks, boxes, purses, and other accessories, etc.

Make and take events are a great way to bring people in to the library space and begin discussions about environmental stewardship.

**Is there anything else you wish to share with SustainRT members about your candidacy?**

I think my experience as a children's librarian will be an asset to SustainRT. I've worked in schools for the past 15 years, so my focus is very much on the youngest patrons who use library services. I think helping them understand the environmental impact of their actions is vital. They are the ones who will grow up and make decisions about our world and their beliefs and attitudes about nature are just starting to form. Not only is learning outside good for social emotional growth and academic achievement, but having young library users engage in sustainability initiatives will help them build the knowledge and skills they will need to address complex environmental issues we will face in the future.