

Climate Justice: The Interdependence of Sustainability and Equity, and How Libraries Can Act as Hubs for Both

Nick Demske (aka “Library Nick”)





What is Climate Justice?

“It begins with the idea that the adverse impacts of a warming climate are not felt equitably among people.”

–Daisy Simmons via Yale Climate Connections

Environmentalism vs Environmental Justice vs Climate Justice

Why Libraries?









Enviro/ Climate Justice Examples

“According to the American Public Health Association (APHA), communities of color are more likely to experience pre-existing health conditions and poor living conditions than their white counterparts. And a lack of power and representation in political and economic systems makes it difficult for these communities to build climate resilience, or the ability to prepare and respond to extreme events that occur due to climate change.

–Kelly Anne Smith, Forbes, June 2021



City of Racine:

-78,000 people (200K in entire county)

-Municipality is chronically underfunded

-high poverty and unemployment

-Majority BIPOC (white, black and Latinx)





WE ARE THE MONSTERS

Thanks to this Rooted Place
is so Perfectly human Shaped
AS We Stand on the Banks of this
The Greatest of Lakes













Racine Public Library

- \$4.3M Budget (lost \$250K of city funding from pre-covid)
- ~68 staff members
- 1 branch, 1 bookmobile
- 137K person service area
- does not even meet the “basic” criteria for the Wisconsin Library Standards







Racine's Environmental Activism Landscape

- Robust and active!
- Sierra Club, Citizens Climate Lobby, Clean Power Coalition, Alliance for the Great Lakes, Root River Environmental and Education Center, UW Extension Outreach, Zero Waste Efforts, Gateway Technical College's Annual Eco-Fest, Faith Community Efforts, Greening Greater Racine, Racine Urban Garden Network, Eco-Justice Center
- Overwhelmingly white
- middle class/upper middle class +
- mostly older/retired




Resilient Communities; Libraries Respond to Climate Change Grant

- Provided by ALA, with funding from philanthropists Andrew and Carol Phelps
- Grant Application–Summer/Fall 2020
- Grant Execution–Winter/Spring 2021




Resilient Communities; Libraries Respond to Climate Change Grant (What & How)

- Partnered with Environmental and Sustainability Officer in Mayor's Office (Cara Pratt)
- Proposed doing 3 programs for the grant
- 1 Virtual film discussion
- 2 Community input sessions
 - Racine Equitable Climate Action Plan
- Goals: identify and foster up young, diverse activists to be climate leaders and shift the environmental activist ecosystem in Racine so it better reflects the demographics of the community



Resilient Communities; Libraries Respond to Climate Change Grant (logistics)

- Awarded to 25 public and academic libraries nationwide
 - \$1,000 grant
 - Access to a suite of free programming resources about the climate crisis
 - Access and license to screen several films about the climate crisis
 - designated these libraries as the first in the nation to be recognized as “climate hubs”



Resilient Communities; Libraries Respond to Climate Change Grant (logistics)

- 51 other libraries given \$500 grants to support programs that address climate change
 - shout out Wisconsin

FIRE & FLOOD

QUEER RESILIENCE IN THE ERA OF CLIMATE CHANGE



Queer Ecojustice Project & Out for Sustainability
www.queerproject.org/firefloodfilm

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION



MARCH 24TH, 6:00 PM

WHAT'S IN OUR FUTURE?



IT'S UP TO YOU.



CONVERSACIÓN COMUNITARIA



29 DE ABRIL, 6:00 PM

¿QUÉ NOS ESPERA EN EL FUTURO?



DEPENDE DE USTED.





Left to right: Casey McIntosh, Carl Fields, Fabi Maldonado and Nick Demske
Citizens Climate Lobby Annual Conference, Capitol Building, June 2019



Resilient Communities; Libraries Respond to Climate Change Grant (Results)

- Largest gathering of black community members to discuss climate/environmental problems and solutions ever in Racine
- Largest gathering of Latinx and Spanish-speaking community members to discuss climate/environmental problems and solutions ever in Racine
- reinvested entirety of \$1K grant directly into our community (participant stipends, facilitator and translator payments and community partner stipends)
- Raised profile of the Racine Public Library locally and nationally (in small ways)



Resilient Communities; Libraries Respond to Climate Change Grant (Publicity)

- **Yale Climate Connections (4/21):**
“How Libraries Are Improving Climate Literacy in Their Communities”
- **Programming Librarian.org (8/21):**
“A Community Engagement Revolution: How Paying Program Participants Can Make Your Library More Equitable”
(Interview with Hannah Arata, ALA Public Programs Office)
- **ALA Annual Conference (6/22):**
“Climate Justice; Creating Sustainability Programming with EDI in Mind”
- **Wild Wisconsin Winter Web Conference (today!!!!!!)**



Photo Credit: Meghan Giesecker



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ALA Annual
CONFERENCE & EXHIBITION

WASHINGTON DC

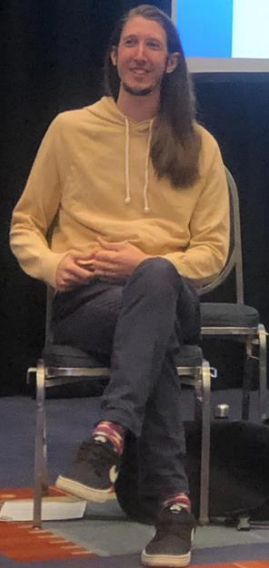
JUNE 23-28, 2022

Climate Justice:

Creating sustainability programming
with EDI in mind

Nick Demske, Bea Echeverría, and Kristina Gómez;
moderated by Mia Henry

ALA AmericanLibraryAss





Conclusion

- Equity & Sustainability are interdependent and libraries **MUST** lead on these issues for and with their communities
- People should be paid for their labor, expertise and lived experience. Institutions need to budget line items for what they want. If what we want is to desegregate the environmental activism landscape of our community, then we need to invest real dollars in that and see it reflected in budget line items



- The primary goal of library programming should be to benefit and impact the community in meaningful ways and ultimately change it for the better. This can be done most effectively in partnership with other community players, and not through self-motivated programming that is just “trying to get more people in the building,” etc.

- ANY LIBRARY OR LIBRARIAN CAN DO ANY OF THESE THINGS, if the will, persistence and passion are there to see it through.



Contact Info

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Thank You!