

The UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals

Cultivating Programs and Partnerships to Change the World

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The potential of a dynamic, maintained school and public library partnership cannot be underestimated. School librarians are in a position to encourage global involvement of their entire school community through an inspiring school library program. Public youth librarians, who often serve youth throughout the community and have existing relationships with community leaders, offer valuable partnership opportunities for their school counterparts. Together, school and public librarians can leverage their influence and expertise to create change throughout their entire community on a variety of topics and social issues. One way to harness this relationship to affect global and sustainable change is to collaborate in support of the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).

In 2015, the Member States of the UN adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a universal call to action to “end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity.”¹ Throughout the adoption process,

the UN conferred with numerous stakeholders, including the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).

Librarians as a profession have historically been at the forefront of supporting social justice; individual freedom; diversity, equity and inclusion; sustainability; and active citizenship. Libraries around the world have come out publicly endorsing the UN Agenda 2030 since its adoption, and have offered ways they plan to achieve and support its goals.

Seventeen global UN SDGs were adopted as part of this agenda. Goals such as “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” lend themselves easily to be supported by school and public library programs.² Global literature can provide a window into the experiences of citizens around the world and allow students to reflect upon their own community and their place as an individual



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within that community. Creating and cultivating partnerships and collaborations is a skillset most librarians already possess, and one that is vital to enacting global change. As stakeholders, as leaders, and as citizens, school and public youth librarians are uniquely positioned to make a large impact.

This article provides strategies for meaningful implementation of this global initiative within the school and public library setting, highlighting collaboration opportunities for school librarians and public youth librarians to work together toward a common aim of supporting the SDGs. We walk through a school year (as public libraries often tailor their programming seasonally as well, to best serve their young patrons), providing tangible ideas for collaboration and implementation each month, creating a UN SDGs calendar ready to use in a school and public library setting.

Both school and public librarians can benefit from real-world implementation examples to support a selection of SDGs, offering ways that teacher-librarians and youth services librarians can partner to encourage social responsibility in children and teens, as well as promote community—building equity, inclusivity, and sustainability. We offer a practical, hands-on toolkit that can immediately be put into practice in your community.

Yours, Mine, Ours: Supervisor Meetings

Arguably the most important part of successful implementation of SDGs in your school or public library is getting administrator and supervisor buy-in. Early on, school and public librarian partners should come together with their respective supervisors to discuss the SDGs and possible ways to support the goals. Come prepared for the meeting with planning items available from the American Library Association SDGs website or create your own draft plan for the year.³

The UN Sustainable Development website offers in-depth explanations of each of the seventeen goals.⁴ Familiarize yourself with them and consider which ones are the best fit for your community. *What is reasonable and attainable? Which initiatives are free or low-cost, and which ones will take budgetary planning? Which ones are you already doing?*

The best way to ensure supervisor buy-in is to highlight ways in which the SDGs align with the current goals of your organization. Are there any that directly relate to your district's mission, vision, and core values? Brush up on the mission and vision of your school or public library and be ready to state your case for why your plan supports these goals.

Be prepared to change your targets based on your principal's or supervisor's feedback until you come up with a plan that the entire team is excited to implement for the upcoming school year. The SDGs discussed below are a selected sample of the seventeen total goals made by the United Nations. You will select ones to match your community's values.

July: Planning Month

When you have the green light from your administrator and supervisor, brainstorm planning with your collaborating librarian. Use the template provided by the ALA or create your own SDGs library chart. Brainstorm how you can support each goal. If possible, partner with other librarians across the area for district- or region-wide implementation. Both school and public librarians should be able to create a list of successful previous collaborations to reach out to those partners again this year. Consider how to harness the energy, resources, and expertise of each community partner to best support the goals you've matched with your yearly plan.

Moving forward, ask for time at the next leadership team meeting to discuss how your colleagues can assist with implementation at your school or public library. Have your co-librarian attend the meeting with you to introduce themselves and see what connections can be made. Most of all, good luck and have fun with it!

August: Zero Hunger

The dog days of summer may mean far-flung vacations and lazy afternoons at the pool for some families, whereas others experience food insecurity during the weeks of summer without access to free and reduced breakfast and lunch. Be a part of the efforts to feed your community by volunteering to hand out meals—and books—in the weeks between summer school and the beginning of the school year.

Perhaps your district already delivers meals via school bus to various locations in the community. Hop on board with a cart of books and allow students to check-out with a mobile scanner. Other localities have successfully instituted free meals at the public library during the summer months: ask for recommendations from the ALSC online community on how to launch this practice in your area. Maybe a seed library is just the thing to jumpstart your community in creating a library or community garden where fruits and vegetables can be shared with those facing food insecurity.

August is also a good time to get organized for the school year and consider how to support the goal of zero hunger from inside your school or library walls. Consider housing a food drive bin in your library with a student-run collection effort and donate the proceeds to local organizations serving families in need in your community. Shop classes, scouting troops, or other service groups may be willing to construct a pantry for your space. Or, you or a teen volunteer could make one with a makerspace 3-D printer. If these options aren't possible, simply advertise an existing pantry.

Allowing food in the library after school, during lunch periods, or in designated areas is another option. You can also keep a sealed container of snacks at the circulation desk for youth in need. Your nonfiction section should include kid- and teen-friendly choices on farming, nutrition, and sustainability.

September: Partnerships for the Goals

September is the perfect month to publicize to your community the valuable relationship between the school and public libraries—perhaps inspiring others in your town to forge similar partnerships! School librarians can help facilitate Public Library Card Sign-up Month, highlight the library's free programs, air-conditioning, and internet access available year-round. Public librarians can leverage their relationship with their school partners to reach many more families than is possible through their contacts alone. English language learner teachers can be invited to bring their classes to tour the public library. PreK teachers could use the public library space to host a family literacy night. The possibilities are endless!

This month is also a good time to consider additional partnerships beyond the school-public library collaboration, for example, reaching out to other local government departments, such as the Department of Human Services, or to school partners like the counseling department. Invite parent groups (PTA, Padres Unidos) to learn about SDGs by hosting a parent night at the school or public library. Parents and other community members can be a great resource—request their help in locating expert speakers or organizing events. School librarians should view their students as partners in implementing the goals and ask service clubs and scouting troops for help. Public librarians similarly can offer volunteer hours for teens interested in assisting with tasks and projects.

It is ideal for school and public librarians to also build global partnerships as part of their support of the SDGs. One way to do this is by participating in the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)'s Sister Libraries for Children's and Young Adults' Reading.⁵ This program partners librarians with those in other countries to create global literacy programs celebrating each other's cultures, fostering intercultural connections among librarians and youth.

October: Reduced Inequalities

Librarians are often at the forefront of efforts to reduce inequalities through their community outreach programs, support of intellectual freedom, and access to print and electronic resources. With administrator approval, and if feasible, open the school library for evening and weekend hours. Public librarians can help staff the space to provide programming, reader's advisory, snacks, and potentially translation services. Alternatively, host a family night at the public library to demonstrate how to use the online catalog, view student checkouts, renew items, and download electronic resources (such as audiobooks and e-books) to enjoy as a family. Invite your school librarian counterpart to attend so families see a familiar face and understand that the libraries work together to provide resources, solve problems, and offer services to everyone in the community.

On the collection development front, analyze your statistics to see which demographics, grades/ages, or student groups you may

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be missing. Check your circulation statistics for gaps and invite those community groups or classes for an additional library visit. If feasible, boost your subscriptions and highlight free digital resources allowing access to high-quality multilingual resources and services outside of your library's four walls.

November: Sustainable Cities and Communities

For November, your focus can be on how to make your community inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. The first step begins in your own library—is your space safe, inclusive, and accessible, particularly for children and persons with disabilities? Invite members of underrepresented groups to tour your library and offer feedback on possible improvements. Check that bookshelves are the appropriate height for your age group, and spaced at enough distance for a wheelchair or stroller.

Work with your facilities departments and outreach committees to offer both the school and public library space for community meetings, including affordable housing workshops. Consider dedicating time to working with the local planning commission and advocate for your community's needs. Are there accessible, safe sidewalks for all members of your community to walk to your school or public library? Is the walkway to your library appropriately lit at night? What about public transportation? Often there is a transit or transportation planning committee you can contact to brainstorm ideas for how to improve shared public spaces, and therefore the quality of life for your patrons and neighbors.

Protect your community's local heritage by creating a local history collection in your school and public library. Preserve and catalog invaluable documentary heritage for future generations, such as yearbooks, letters, and literary journals. If your school has alumni groups, reach out to them to collect items of value to your school community. Both school and public librarians should promote open-access digital books platforms such as Storyweaver (<https://storyweaver.org.in>) from India, Book Dash (<https://bookdash.org/>) from South Africa, and House of Mini Picture Books (<https://www.minipicbooks.com/>) from Singapore to help archive cultures across the globe.

December: Decent Work and Economic Growth

Librarians who work with youth are uniquely positioned to help promote productive employment and decent work for all to their

patrons from a young age. If your school or library has a college and career counselor/librarian, partner with them first. If not, organize events on your own and ask community partners for assistance with staffing and expertise. Ideas include organizing a resume and mock interview workshop for kids and teens. You can invite local lawmakers, leaders, and business owners to provide constructive feedback.

The promotion of inclusive and sustainable economic growth means all children and teens should have the opportunity to prepare and train for future job markets. Partner with your district or school technology lead on the international Hour of Code to broaden participation in the field of computer science, particularly for underrepresented groups. Volunteer to write college or job reference letters for students, to assist with online applications, or act as a mentor for students looking for job or volunteer experience.

Often, career day or college representative visits take place during the school day. What if the school and public libraries collaborated on an evening “College and Career” event for students and families? Make it fun and interactive by inviting animal technicians, chefs, and firefighters. Invite guest speakers of all backgrounds and identities to highlight possible career paths.

Teenagers can be partnered with community mentors and elementary students can be paired with teens to hear about jobs and opportunities in your area. Each county or city department can staff a table to discuss career paths available in their field. These events would appeal to all youth patrons, from pre-kindergarten to college-aged.

January: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

Promoting inclusive societies and providing access to justice for all is an easy fit for school and public librarians. All patrons should feel safe when they enter your library space, regardless of their orientation. School librarians can spearhead efforts to be a No Place for Hate School, a student-led school climate improvement program from the Anti-Defamation League.⁶ Another way to be involved is to sponsor your school student government association and encourage students to develop a lifelong habit of voting.

As is customary in libraries, be sure to recognize celebratory heritage months, but also celebrate those cultures throughout the school or calendar year. Hold a “book tasting” event celebrating diverse authors and illustrators. Encourage tween participation with food items that match with each book. The UN SDG Book Club archive with a blog, suggested activities, and curated list of

books, in all six official UN languages—Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian, and Spanish—for children ages 6–12 is a great place to find global titles.⁷ Use these titles in support of peace, justice, and strong institutions.

A natural partnership between the school and public library is to host a community read. Splitting the cost of an in-demand author means twice the fun for half the price. Authors can be selected based on whatever issue, related to peace and social justice, is most relevant to your region. If the topics are controversial in your community, partner with local organizations who are skilled in this arena and could help guide difficult conversations around sensitive cultural topics.

February: Good Health and Well-Being

Post-pandemic, there is perhaps nothing more important than supporting the health and well-being of the young people we

serve. February is a good time to recognize the physical and mental strain that comes from being a child or teen in today’s world, and think of ways the school and public library can support well-being in your community. School and public librarians should be vocal supporters for the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, one of the targets of the SDG goal for good health and well-being. Volunteer to host naloxone trainings in your library space, or offer it for community meetings on health-related topics. Librarians should maintain accurate and kid-appropriate print and online resources on health-related topics.

Many jurisdictions have a social-emotional learning committee or dedicated social worker or counselor to support social-emotional learning in schools. Find ways the library can be involved in their initiatives. For example,

designate one day a week for Yoga in the Library after school, tapping on fellow teachers and other librarians to share their practice with others and guide participants each week. Children and teens alike would be delighted if their library invited a therapy dog non-profit to share books with readers, whether reluctant or avid. Teen spaces can host “Stress Less, Laugh More Week” during final exams with games and activities.

The snowy days that February brings to some parts of the country make it the perfect time to host a coffee and cocoa bar in your library space, and now is a good time to boost your collection of meditation audiobooks, or create recommended reading lists for families and young people looking for cozy picks to read and relax. Year round, libraries can offer relaxing makerspaces with activities such as puzzles, adult coloring books, create your own bookmarks, painting, and do-it-yourself (DIY) slime.

March: Gender Equality

March is Women's History Month, making it the perfect time to promote gender equality in your school and public library. Be a part of the conversation surrounding STEAM opportunities and take the lead on initiatives like Girls Who Code or creating makerspaces for all students. School librarians can ensure equal opportunities for student leadership by sponsoring student clubs for underrepresented groups. Public librarians can promote the use of public meeting spaces for girls' groups and clubs. Regularly review your library collection to remove materials that may include stereotypes or gender biases.

Hosting a joint International Women's Day event with authors, book giveaways, and prizes, is an opportunity for school and public librarians to come together in celebration of important women. You can ask attendees to identify notable women in history, share stories of important women in their lives, or even nominate themselves—or their librarian!—as an extraordinary person in their community.

Another way to ensure equality for all users is to publicly designate your library as a Safe Space for all users. This could also lead to opportunities for services and programs for non-binary, genderfluid, and other gender diverse youth.

April: Climate Action

Celebrate Earth Day (April 22) with a used clothing swap. High schools that have a Senior Prom often host tuxedo and formal dress donation drives—offer to hold this in your school or public library space to promote sustainable reusing and equitable services for all, as well as publicize your part as a leader in the community. Younger tweens and elementary-aged patrons may also enjoy taking the lead on organizing a collection of bikes, shoes, or other items, either for trading with their classmates and neighborhood friends, or for donation to a worthy cause. If there is a way for you to support the recycling and reusing of materials, sign up!

Another fantastic and easy way for school and public libraries to support the environment is to have a Seed Library available for taking, trading, and borrowing. Consider joining the Global Seed Library Census and share tips and tricks with librarians across the globe who are a part of this effort.⁸ As leaders in your community, school and public librarians can advocate for green options during library renovations. In an existing space, take advantage of windows for natural light and airflow. Keep a stash of reusable tote bags behind the circulation desk for patrons who request a bag for their books.

When replacing titles, consider if a digital version would be just as effective as a print copy. Run a recycled books art program in lieu of placing items in the trash. Save discarded poetry books for Poem in Your Pocket Day (also during April!) or DIY buttons. Art teachers both in the school building or the Parks and Recreation Department would be delighted to receive a donation of your

For More Information

- **American Library Association Task Force on United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.** Downloadable Materials. <https://www.ala.org/aboutala/ala-task-force-united-nations-2030-sustainable-development-goals>.
- United Nations' lesson plans for teaching the Sustainable Development Goals to grades 8–12. https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sdg_tg_email_updated.pdf.
- **Global Literature in Libraries Initiative (GLLI).** Suggested global/international youth books in a month's-worth (March 2021) of blog posts. <https://glli-us.org/2021/03/30/wrapup>.
- **United Nations' Climate Action Superheroes,** which includes games and downloadable activities. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/climate-action-superheroes/>.
- **Games for Change.** Game creation competition for youth inspired by the SDGs to create digital games about real-world issues impacting their communities. <https://gameforchange.org/student-challenge/>.
- **Frieda Makes a Difference: The Sustainable Development Goals and How You Too Can Make a Difference.** United Nations' free digital children's picture book about the SDGs. https://issuu.com/unpublications/docs/frieda_2018.

discarded magazines. Nonfiction resources on climate change should be up-to-date and accurate.

May: Quality Education

End-of-year final exams and state and national testing lends itself to an easy match for May—quality education. Both public and school librarians should regularly evaluate their print and online resources to ensure their collection provides inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Do websites need to be translated? Is the collection organized in a way that even a first-time library user can find what they need? Take the time during May to see your library space from a learner's eyes. This can be a great opportunity to practice systematic planning and assessment of your library.

School librarians can take the lead on informing their public librarian partners of the curricular needs. School library lessons are already aligned with state and/or national curriculum standards, and with the school-public library partnership, the learning can be extended outside of the school building. Public library afterschool programs are a natural fit for expanding on instruction that took place during in the classroom or school library: storytimes can reinforce concepts, book clubs can extend

discussions from the school day, and makerspaces promote STEM learning for students from all backgrounds.

Both school and public librarians should make an effort to participate in school- and county-wide educational committees and collaborative learning teams. A recommended practice for connecting SDGs to state and national educational standards is to walk through the curricular standards for each grade; for example, focusing on Social Studies, or whatever works best for your community, and brainstorming with your collaborative learning team about how to support each goal. The UN website also offers ready-made booklists and lesson plans. Public librarians can offer insight on additional materials or online resources or create LibGuides to aid their school counterparts.

Collection data should be compared to student achievement in specific units to analyze any gaps in the collection. School librarians can connect their evaluation goals to student data. Work with specific classes or small groups to increase student achievement where your school needs it the most. Public librarians can make their SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound) goal related to the SDGs or tied directly to education—promote lifelong learning through inquiry-based research projects, book clubs, and by establishing the library as the heart of both your school and the town.

End of Year Reflection (June/July)

Summer buzzes with activity at public libraries, presenting a prime opportunity for librarians to dive into SDG-aligned initiatives. With increased foot traffic and participation in library programs during the summer months, public librarians can leverage this momentum to continue promoting awareness and action on issues such as zero hunger and sustainability. One option is to integrate SDG themes into summer reading programs, empowering patrons of all ages to play a role in shaping a brighter, greener, and more equitable world.

References

1. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "The 17 Goals," <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.
2. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "The 17."
3. American Library Association, "ALA Task Force on United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals," <https://www.ala.org/aboutala/ala-task-force-united-nations-2030-sustainable-development-goals>.
4. United Nations, "Sustainable Development Goals," <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>.
5. International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions' Libraries for Children and Young Adults Section, "Sister

Don't forget to promote your program's results! Let the community, and your supervisors, know how your program played out. An infographic is an effective way to display the highlights of your work and also can be seamlessly shared on social media. June is a good time for school librarians to ask for an end-of-year meeting with their administrator to evaluate community progress regarding implementing the targeted SDGs; this might occur at the end of summer reading for public youth librarians.

Take notes now when your memory is fresh on what worked and what should change, so the groundwork is already laid out for the following year. Consider whether it works for your school to continue with the same plan for next year, or if you would like to reevaluate and select new goals. If there were goals brought up during your initial buy-in meeting in July that were less urgent the first year of implementing (or that required multi-year budgetary planning), discuss now what milestones you need to hit to get those bigger projects off the ground for next year. Perhaps your community would benefit from selecting one targeted goal for the next school year and would like to place all your focus there. It may work better for you if the school and public libraries alternate each year, taking turns being the lead on your community's efforts to support the SDGs. Whatever you decide, enjoy your summer knowing you've helped to make a difference in your local community and the world!

Concluding Thoughts

Throughout this article we have discussed how to find and form successful collaborative partnerships and suggested best practices for connecting SDGs to state and national educational standards. We hope this article inspires you to act as a changemaker in the greater global society, and provides a springboard for you to discern how to inspire young people, families, colleagues, and community stakeholders to see themselves as change agents in the larger community. The SDGs have a much greater chance of success if school and public youth librarians are at the forefront of promoting and supporting the universal call to action. Are you ready to join us? &

- Libraries for Children's and Young Adults' Reading," <https://www.ifla.org/g/libraries-for-children-and-ya/sister-libraries-for-children-s-and-young-adult-s-reading/>.
6. Anti-Defamation League, "No Place for Hate," <https://noplaceforhate.org/>.
 7. United Nations, "SDG Book Club," <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sdgbookclub/>.
 8. Seed Library Network, "Seed Libraries," <http://seedlibraries.weebly.com/>.