OISE Library Sustainability & Climate Action Plan 2024-26

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Summary

"As a community, academic libraries are in a position to operate as a cross-disciplinary platform for discourse and understanding of sustainable development and the climate crisis. Equally we are in a position to provide learning opportunities, skills and literacy development, build trust and connections, and to influence the future citizens, leaders, technologists, educators, scientists, etc. who need to be and will be 'steering the climate crisis ship' on a global scale in the years to come."
Appleton & Woolley (2023)

The OISE Library's Sustainability and Climate Action Plan 2024-26 takes steps to address the accelerating climate crisis from within academic libraries and the higher education context. The plan serves as a roadmap for the OISE Library. It puts forward a set of 35 action items that can be implemented locally at the OISE Library and measured over the course of June 2024 - April 2026. The plan recognizes the deep connection between sustainability efforts, climate justice, and social justice. The OISE Library's goals in developing this plan are to align with the University of Toronto's sustainability initiatives, OISE's Sustainability & Climate Action Plan, and sustainability and climate-focused initiatives with social and climate justice work. The plan outlines three key focus areas with 12 strategies and 35 specific actions to be taken over the next two years (2024-26).

Focus Area 1: Supporting teaching & learning for sustainability and climate change
This focus area includes developing and delivering information literacy programming, creating instructional resources, strengthening sustainability-focused resources and collection practices, and expanding open programming and events at the OISE Library.

Focus Area 2: Leveraging community partnerships at OISE, within UTL, and across the library sector
This focus area involves collaborating on and promoting sustainability initiatives and research at OISE, contributing to scholarship and professional initiatives related to sustainability and climate action within the Canadian academic library community, and opening channels of communication across UTL.

Focus Area 3: Improving our built environment and operations
This includes identifying existing frameworks and models for sustainability in libraries, exploring opportunities for facility and services improvements at OISE Library, and exploring opportunities related to existing and alternative equipment/supplies purchasing and collections acquisitions models for libraries.

Introduction

"The evidence is unequivocal: education saves lives and transforms lives; it is the bedrock of sustainability"
Irina Bokova, UNESCO Director General, March 19, 2015
(UNESCO, 2016)

In the face of the accelerating climate crisis, the imperative for environmental sustainability and climate action in the higher education context has become paramount (Phelan & Lumb, 2021). Sustainability is a fast-evolving movement in higher education institutions; scholars and researchers have long been leaders in climate research and advocates for action to address environmental issues. In recent years, libraries and library institutions have embraced their pivotal role in advocating for sustainability and climate resilience. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has called on libraries to actively contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDG's 17 goals provide a framework for addressing social, economic, and environmental issues across the globe, and enable us to think about how we can engage with sustainable development (UN, 2015). This broad concept of Sustainability was adopted as one of ALA's Core Values of Librarianship in 2019 (ALA, 2019 and ALA, 2020).

Additionally, it is recognized that climate change is already impacting libraries, archives, galleries, and museums around the world (see Oliver, 2021; Pasikowska-Schnass, 2023). Climate change and related outcomes such as warmer temperatures, unstable weather, rising sea levels, drought, and community displacement will undoubtedly impact institutions such as those in the GLAM sector and pose challenges in preserving physical and digital collections, buildings, users, and staff.

In Canada, the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA) has formed a [Climate Action Committee](#) as have several provincial library associations, including the [British Columbia Library Association](#) (BCLA) and the [Ontario Library Association](#) (OLA). Discussions around sustainability and climate action have begun to emerge more regularly as conference themes and in professional library associations across Canada. However, to date there is a still a need for sustained discourse among Canadian academic libraries and library staff about our roles in addressing climate change.

In 2021, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto, launched its *[Sustainability & Climate Action Plan](#)*, which signaled for the Institution "a new level of commitment to amplify the Institute's influence in teaching, research and advocacy to address the climate

crisis by embedding Sustainability and Climate Action into our curriculum and teaching, research, governance, and facilities and services". As one of the world's leading faculties of education, OISE's Sustainability & Climate Action Plan plays a unique role within climate action with a strong focus advancing environmental and sustainability education at the University of Toronto, across Ontario and Canada, and globally. The OISE plan serves as a key guide and inspiration for the OISE Library plan.

About the plan

Inspired by the leadership of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) and library colleagues, associations, and institutions around the world, we see our plan as an important first step in the contributions that the OISE Library, as one of the largest education libraries in Canada, can make to sustainability and climate initiatives that impact our institutions, our communities, and beyond. Our Sustainability & Climate Action Plan builds on work that is already underway and outlines three key Focus Areas that bring together 12 strategies and 31 specific actions that can be taken over the next two years (2024-26) to ensure that the OISE Library contributes to a path toward sustainability and act as a positive agenda of change at the University of Toronto and beyond.

Staff at the OISE Library have implemented a variety of sustainable initiatives over the years including hosting a branch of the Toronto Seed Library, participating on OISE's Climate Action Advisory Committee, developing outreach initiatives such as signage and book displays, and running various recycling initiatives. This plan aims to draw together the intention behind these initiatives and create a meaningful starting point for planning, assessment, and ongoing work in this area.

Climate and social justice

Sustainability efforts, climate justice, and social justice are deeply and inextricably connected. Research has demonstrated over and over that Indigenous, Black, and other racialized and marginalized communities are disproportionately exposed to and affected by the consequences of climate change (including droughts, water scarcity, severe fires, rising sea levels, catastrophic weather events and declining biodiversity) as well as climate policies and frameworks. As Dr. Ingrid Waldron HOPE Chair in Peace and Health in the Global Peace and Social Justice Program in the Faculty of Humanities at McMaster University, notes: "Greater exposure of BIPOC communities to climate change is due to inequitable and unjust policies, including legacies of historic and ongoing racism and colonialism." (Waldron, 2022). Black and Indigenous scholars have written about how Black ecologies and Indigenous ways of knowing offer meaningful alternatives to addressing climate change and challenge the ways that existing narratives, discussions, and phrasing such as "climate change" can obscure deep social inequities (Roane *et al.*, 2022).

The OISE Library Sustainability & Climate Action Plan aims to integrate equity and justice-centred initiatives throughout. However, we recognize that this is only a small step toward dismantling existing colonial systems in libraries. We recognize how much work there is to be done to bring together climate action and social justice in practice.

Frameworks

Despite the issues and conflicts that various "climate change" policies and frameworks can pose, we have decided to engage two frameworks in this plan: University of Toronto Libraries strategic plan: *Barrier-free access to all the right information - Strategic Plan 2020–2025* and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) As mentioned above, we recognize that such frameworks do not work toward challenging colonial structures and neither of these are without their own limitations. There have been strong critiques of the UN SDGs coming from scholars within our community and across disciplines in higher education (eg. Heleta & Bagus, 2021). However, we find value in employing these frameworks here to: (i) bring our initiatives into conversation with strategic goals outlined by the University of Toronto Libraries and (ii) align with many other higher education institutions around the world employing the SDGs to plan and describe their work.

The focus areas and actions we outline in this plan are each mapped to the goals and objectives set out in the Functional Areas and Enablers in the University of Toronto Libraries Strategic Plan. This helps provide a path between the initiatives outlined in the OISE Library Sustainability & Climate Action Plan and the University of Toronto Libraries' institutional goals. It also helps frame sustainability initiatives within the work and goals of academic library systems more generally and highlights how libraries can make unique contributions in this area. We also mapped our plan to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in order to bring the focus areas of the plan into conversation with the broader U of T community as well as other institutions, organizations, and associations national and internationally who are using the SDGs to guide their work.

Goals

The OISE Library's goals in developing our Sustainability & Climate Action Plan are to strive toward a more sustainable library by:

- Bringing the OISE Library in alignment with the University of Toronto's sustainability initiatives;
- Aligning our work with OISE's Sustainability & Climate Action Plan;
- Aligning our sustainability and climate-focused initiatives with social and climate justice work; and
- Building on existing partnerships at OISE and establish new collaborations across the University and University of Toronto Libraries;
- Developing a set of action items for the OISE Library that we can measure over the course of the June 2024 - April 2026.

Focus areas and implementation

The OISE Library's Sustainability & Climate Action Plan sets out a roadmap of strategies and actions that we can prioritize and assess over the coming two years. The three focus areas outlined below were developed with the OISE Library team, the OISE community, and all library users in mind. Progress toward the actions outlined below will be regularly shared with the OISE community and updated on the OISE Library's website.

Focus Area 1: Supporting teaching & learning for sustainability and climate change

Supporting teaching & learning through information literacy (IL) is a key area of strength at the OISE Library and represents one of the unique contributions we can make to climate action. The goal of this focus area is to expand climate-related IL programming by partnering with faculty to develop customized information literacy sessions, offering open programming, and designing resources that draw from the SDGs to support student learning throughout their academic journeys and beyond.

- UN Sustainable Development Goal 4: *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*
- University of Toronto Libraries Strategic Plan Functional Areas and Enablers: *Teaching and Learning, Collections*

Table 1. Strategies and actions for Focus Area 1

STRATEGIES	ACTIONS	STATUS
Develop and deliver information literacy programming to help prepare OISE graduate students to be educational leaders and lifelong learners	Review courses being offered at OISE in the Fall 2024 and Winter 2025 semesters to identify courses have sustainability and climate-focused topics	SUMMER 2024
	Partner with OISE faculty and instructors to develop information literacy sessions that highlight sustainability and climate justice themes to support curriculum	FALL 2024 -
	Embed principles of sustainability, equity, inclusion, and social justice into all existing information literacy sessions	FALL 2024 -
	Engage climate-focused work from leaders in the field of information literacy (including Project Information Literacy's newly launched climate study) to guide sustainability and climate-focused pedagogical practice	ONGOING
Develop, create, and promote instructional resources for faculty, instructors, students, and library users	Develop and promote a LibGuide on *Environmental and Sustainability Education* for research and study in the field of education	COMPLETED
	Identify, assess, promote, and teach research tools that support equity, social justice, sustainability, and climate-focused research (eg. Elsevier's UNSDGs mapping)	FALL 2024, FALL 2025
Strengthen sustainability and climate-focused resources and collection practices	Review OISE Library collection development policies to ensure equity, social justice, and sustainability are forefront	2024-25
	Explore how institutions and organizations can leverage OA and OERs toward equitable education, social justice, and climate action	2024-25

	Create physical displays that highlight library materials related to equity, social justice, climate action, K-12 education, and their interconnectedness	2024-25
Expand open programming and events at the OISE Library	Reach out to the Toronto Seed Library and other Seed Library branches at UTL to explore collaborative food literacy programming	SUMMER 2025
	Work with U of T Food Bank and/or U of T Food Coalition (OISE Chapter) to implement two food donation boxes this year	FALL 2024, FALL 2025
	Participate in the annual library-led Climate Action Week	FALL 2024, FALL 2025

Focus Area 2: Leveraging community partnerships (at OISE, across UTL, and library sector)

The strategies below aim to build partnerships with colleagues across OISE and the University of Toronto Libraries and collaborate on sustainability and climate-focused practices and initiatives.

- UN Sustainable Development Goal 14: *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*
- UN Sustainable Development Goal 16: *Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*
- University of Toronto Libraries Strategic Plan Functional Areas and Enablers: *People*

Table 2. Strategies and actions for Focus Area 2

STRATEGIES	ACTIONS	TIMELINES
Continue to collaborate on and promote sustainability initiatives and research at OISE	Continue as a member of OISE's Sustainability & Climate Action Network (SCAN)	ONGOING
	Highlight research and publications from OISE faculty and students in the areas of equity, reconciliation, social justice, and climate justice research (eg. on the library website, in displays, and on social media)	ONGOING
Identify and explore existing frameworks and models for sustainability that could be adopted	Explore examples from the library sector (eg. Sustainable Library Certification Program (SLCP): https://www.sustainablelibrariesinitiative.org)	2024 - 2025

at the University of Toronto Libraries (with a climate justice lens in mind)	Explore committees and strategies in place at U of T (eg. [President's Advisory Committee on the Environment, Climate Change, and Sustainability](#))	SUMMER 2024
	Seek out potential partnerships across the University of Toronto to support sustainability initiatives (eg. First Nations House, St. George Sustainability Office, SkyGarden at UofT Civil & Mineral Engineering, Trinity College rooftop garden, Hart House Student Farm Committee, UofT Tri-Campus Food Symposium, Repair Café, etc.)	SUMMER 2025
Contribute to scholarship and professional initiatives related to sustainability and climate action within the Canadian academic library community	Conduct an environmental scan of climate change and climate justice initiatives across academic libraries in Canada	2024-2025
	Share recent research on the role of Canadian academic libraries in addressing climate change (ALT Conference)	COMPLETED
	Participate in climate action initiatives already established by the [Ontario Library Association](#), [British Columbia Library Association](#), [Canadian Federation of Library Associations](#), and Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians.	ONGOING
	Membership in the newly established Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians (CAPAL) Community of Practice on climate action	SUMMER 2024 -
Open channels of communication across UTL	Reach out directly to UTL colleagues already engaged in sustainability work	SUMMER 2024
	Explore establishing a UTL CoP for sustainability and climate initiatives	SUMMER 2024
	Explore the creation of a UTL All Staff Teams channel to share sustainability and climate initiatives in action	SUMMER 2024
Engage Faculty of Information Students through UTL's Toronto Academic Libraries Internship program	Hire and host our second TALint for *Sustainability & Climate Research and Initiatives* (2024-2026)	COMPLETED

Focus Area 3: Improving our built environment and operations

In 2019, the University of Toronto launched and began implementing its [*Low-carbon Action Plan (2019-24)*](#). The plan "set a 2030 goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across our three campuses by 37 per cent from 1990 levels" (pg. 3). Following this, the University developed a more ambitious plan, the [*Climate Positive Plan*](#) (2021) which states that the University's "2050 climate positive goal will be achieved through at least 80% absolute carbon reductions on campus" (pg.9). As noted in the OISE Sustainability and Climate Action Plan, there are certainly challenges working

on energy consumption improvements in the OISE building, which was constructed in the late 1960s (OISE, p. 13). However, there are none-the-less opportunities to explore existing practices and seek out opportunities for improvements in our systems and spaces.

- UN Sustainable Development Goal 12: *Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns*
- UN Sustainable Development Goal 13: *Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*
- University of Toronto Libraries Strategic Plan Functional Areas and Enablers: *People, Collections, Spaces*

Table 3. Strategies and actions for Focus Area 3

STRATEGIES	ACTIONS	TIMELINES
Identify and explore existing frameworks and models for sustainability in libraries	Explore the Sustainable Office initiative at U of T for application in staff and public areas at the OISE Library	ongoing
	Explore implementing the Sustainable Events certification for events in the OISE Library space	FALL 2024, WINTER 2025
	Conduct a literature review to explore and better understand the carbon footprint of online information practices and services including AI, eBook lifecycles, data stewardship (see Evans, 2022, de Vries, 2023)	WINTER 2025 -
Explore opportunities for facility and services improvements at OISE Library	Conduct inventory of lights and other equipment that could benefit from motion sensors or timers in public and staff spaces	2024-25
	Explore models for conducting a waste audit of the OISE Library	SUMMER 2024
	Create a system for regular management of in-house activities such as pen recycling, battery pick-up, and clothing swap.	SUMMER 2024
Explore opportunities related to existing and alternative equipment/supplies purchasing and collections acquisitions models for libraries	Seek out sharing channels such as UofT Equipment & Supplies Exchange and prioritize repair over replacement for furniture, equipment etc.	ONGOING

	Connect with UTL procurement and acquisitions teams to learn more about vendors' climate action plans and/or offset opportunities	SUMMER 2025
	Continue to build and emphasize the relationships with local and community vendors for library collections	ONGOING
	Continue to explore procurement strategies such as the University's social procurement strategy to enrich sustainable procurement initiatives	ONGOING

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Additional Resources

- Indigenous Climate Action: https://www.indigenousclimateaction.com/
- Sustainable Libraries Initiative: https://sustainablelibrariesinitiative.org/
- Indigenous Climate Hub: https://indigenousclimatehub.ca/

- WorldCat Topic: Sustainability: https://www.worldcat.org/topics/sustainability
- American Library Association Resource Guide: ALA and Sustainability: https://libguides.ala.org/SustainableLibraries
- University of Toronto's President's Advisory Committee on the Environment, Climate Change, and Sustainability: https://sustainability.utoronto.ca/ceccs-home/
- University of Toronto's President's Advisory Committee on the Environment, Climate Change, and Sustainability 2023 Annual Report: https://ceccs.sustainability.utoronto.ca/2023-report/