

Planning for sustainability

Articulating efforts toward the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Sustainability is a vital component of the new San Diego State University (SDSU) Library strategic plan, especially in Goal 2: Resilience: Designed to Thrive.¹ This goal details how the University Library will promote sustainable practices, including but not limited to the establishment and enhancement of resource-sharing, open access, and shared storage agreements. The University Library is also planning to establish and further develop campus and community partnerships to determine how we can contribute to our university and city sustainability initiatives. To effectively reach the goals detailed in the strategic plan, it is necessary to understand what sustainability initiatives we are already participating in. Therefore I reviewed how the SDSU Library contributes to sustainability initiatives and presented this information as part of a new physical poster exhibit, “SDSU Inspires Action: U.N. Sustainable Development Goals on Display,”² that will be on display for a year. The poster exhibit highlights research, teaching, and library contributions to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) in San Diego and the greater San Diego region, including initiatives reflecting the university’s place along the US-Mexico border, and features work completed by SDSU’s Metabolism of Cities Living Lab. This exhibit has provided an opportunity to reflect on the work we have been doing in the library, articulate it, and map it to the UN SDGs. This review of current practice within the context of our strategic plan provides a baseline for understanding our strengths and determining the direction of our future endeavors to support sustainability in libraries.

For the exhibit, I included up to three main areas where we are working toward each of the 17 goals outside of what would be considered traditional library work. The work being carried out is not limited to only these, but for the purposes of the exhibit, only a maximum of three areas were chosen. The posters in the exhibit briefly highlight how the SDSU Library and other libraries in our community focus on solutions to the challenges highlighted by the UN SDGs and, where appropriate, include QR codes to other relevant websites or research guides with more information.

Why is this important?

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has stated that libraries are fundamental for achieving the goals of the UN Sustainable Development agenda.³ Understanding the importance of this and the roles that libraries have in their communities, the American Library Association (ALA) introduced sustainability as a core value in 2019.⁴ Therefore, as librarians, working toward these goals should be embedded

Sarah K. Tribelhorn is sciences librarian at the San Diego State University Library, email: stribelhorn@sdsu.edu.

in everything we do. However, this generally does not seem to be happening in academic libraries,⁵ and there is limited awareness of the UN SDGs among members of the Americas Regional Council (AMER) based on a study by the OCLC Global Council in 2020.⁶ Preliminary research in our library for this project determined this work is happening, but not intentionally based on the UN SDGs, and needs to be clearly articulated.

Mapping SDSU library work to the UN SDGs

To understand the complexities of sustainability, I attended several webinars, book clubs, and workshops on the topic, as well as completing the Sustainable Librarianship: Core Competencies and Practices eLearning course through ALA. The ALA International Relations Round Table (IRRT) hosted one of the workshops, presented by Carmel O’Sullivan and Emilia Bell from the University of Southern Queensland, on how reflective practice in their library was used for storytelling and showing the impact of their work through the UN SDG framework.⁷ This workshop inspired me to reach out to all library employees, including staff and faculty, to better understand their jobs using an internal questionnaire. The questionnaire collected feedback on employee job titles, brief job descriptions, and details on what employees considered their most important tasks or projects.

In addition to the questionnaire, I analyzed the library website⁸ to find additional information pertinent to the UN SDGs. Using this information, I mapped the work being carried out to the 17 UN SDGs and then created posters for each goal, highlighting snapshots of the work being done. The posters were developed using Canva,⁹ an online graphic design tool, based on the color themes of SDGs, and were printed in color on 22 x 28-inch poster board and displayed in poster stands in the SDSU Library in Research Services. There was also a summary poster and two additional posters illustrating the UN SDGs in English and Spanish.

Examples of how we are effectively working toward the UN SDGs

All posters in the library exhibit have a similar layout with up to three examples of the work we are doing that match the different goals to highlight how we are effectively working toward the UN SDG framework. For example, figure 1 illustrates the work toward Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities.¹⁰ To reduce inequalities in our community of students, faculty, and staff, we fully support and advocate for open access through publishing and resources. This promotes



Figure 1. Poster illustrating how the SDSU Library is working toward Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities of the UN SDGs.

equitable access to scholarship, making publishing and participating in scholarly communication more affordable, ultimately supporting student success. We are also working toward intentional collection development for previously underserved communities and are ensuring that we have well-organized and managed content that supports diversity, equity, inclusivity, and accessibility.

Another area where considerable work is being done is for Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals (figure 2), where we are collaborating with other academic libraries, as well as public libraries in the San Diego region, as part of the Circuit library consortium. One initiative we are pursuing as part of this partnership is a campaign against health misinformation that includes a toolkit¹¹ for use by libraries promoting health information literacy instruction.¹² These are some examples of work being done toward each of the goals, and how they are being visualized in a way to start conversations and bring awareness to the UN SDGs. For more information on our work for each goal, visit our exhibit website.¹³



Figure 2. Poster illustrating how the SDSU Library is working toward Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals of the UN SDGs.

Outcomes and impact

The exhibit challenges our community of students, staff, faculty, and visitors to critically think how they can contribute to achieving the goals and brings awareness to the UN SDGs and the work already being done in the SDSU Library to accomplish the goals. Direct results of this work led to the establishment of a library “Green Team,” the pursuit of the Sustainable Libraries Initiative Certification for our library in the near future, and the ability to be a leader in this work in academic libraries locally and nationally.

Next steps

This exhibit was a catalyst for us to analyze and articulate where we are meeting the UN SDGs and has established a baseline for us to further work toward these goals. Now we clearly understand how to reflect on the work we are doing within the UN SDG framework and where to focus our future efforts. We plan on continuing these efforts with a more in-depth survey of work in our library and the libraries of our local partners and community to map our work to the UN SDGs intentionally and more extensively. ♪

Notes

1. “Transcending Borders: The San Diego State University Library Strategic Plan, 2022–2025,” San Diego State University Library, accessed February 24, 2023, <https://library.sdsu.edu/about-us/strategic-plan>.
2. “Think Globally—Act Locally: The UN Sustainable Development Goals at SDSU,” San Diego State University Library, February 20, 2023, <https://library.sdsu.edu/exhibits/sustainability/>.
3. “Libraries, Development and the United Nations 2030 Agenda,” International Federation of Library Associations and Institution, March 2020, <https://www.ifla.org/libraries-development>.
4. “Core Values of Librarianship,” American Library Association, 2019, <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/corevalues>.
5. Sarah K. Tribelhorn, “Preliminary Investigation of Sustainability Awareness and Activities Among Academic Libraries in the United States,” *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 49, no. 3 (2023): 102661 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2022.10266>.
6. “United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Study 2021: Findings from the 2020 OCLC Global Council Survey,” OCLC Global Council, September 2021, https://www.oclc.org/content/dam/research/publications/2021/216896-WWAE_SDG-Summary-Report-Global-Council.pdf.
7. Carmel O’Sullivan and Emilia Bell, “Use of Reflective Practice as a Tool for Storytelling and Demonstrating Impact Through the Framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals” (presentation, IRRT Webinar, October 12, 2022), <https://www.ala.org/rt/irrt/initiatives>.
8. “SDSU University Library,” San Diego State University Library, accessed on February 21, 2023, <https://library.sdsu.edu/>.
9. Canva homepage, <https://www.canva.com/>.
10. All posters are available on the Internet Archive at <https://archive.org/details/un-sdg-sdsu-posters-2/mode/2up>.
11. “Library Toolkit for Addressing Health Misinformation,” San Diego Health Information Partnership, February 10, 2023, <https://libguides.sdsu.edu/library-toolkit-addressing-health-misinformation>.
12. “Libraries Primed to Play Integral Role in Preventing the Spread of Health Misinformation,” University of California San Diego, accessed February 21, 2023, <https://today.ucsd.edu/story/libraries-primed-to-play-integral-role-in-preventing-the-spread-of-health-misinformation>.
13. “Think Globally—Act Locally.”