

BiblioGreen

RESIDENCES

FOR SUSTAINABLE LIBRARIES



**SUSTAINABLE LIBRARY
GUIDEBOOK**

IMPRESSUM

BiblioGreen Sustainable Library Guidebook

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BIBLIOGREEN SUSTAINABLE LIBRARY GUIDEBOOK

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INTRODUCTION AND KEY CONCEPTS

The [BiblioGreen Residency Project](#) (2025) was a collaborative initiative involving ten libraries across Europe (Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Greece, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Turkey, and Ukraine), aimed at developing sustainable “green library” practices and transforming libraries into hubs of ecological awareness. Library professionals partnered with sustainability experts to pilot creative ideas that strengthen libraries as vibrant spaces for environmental responsibility and social change. This guidebook distills the insights from BiblioGreen into a practical resource for library leaders, staff, and stakeholders who wish to “green” their libraries. The target audience includes public and academic librarians, library managers, and community partners interested in integrating sustainability into library operations and services.

KEY CONCEPTS

Sustainability: Sustainability means meeting today’s needs without limiting the ability of future generations to meet theirs. In libraries, this translates to balancing environmental, social, and economic decisions in everyday operations and services.

Green Library: A [green \(or sustainable\) library](#) minimizes its environmental footprint while maximizing community benefit through sustainable design, energy-efficient operations, waste reduction, and programs that promote environmental awareness. Green libraries operate from core ethical values such as *care and responsibility* (acting as stewards of community and planet), *equity and intergenerational justice* (ensuring sustainability benefits everyone today and tomorrow), *transparency and accountability* (openly sharing goals, data, and progress), *resilience and adaptability* (preparing for environmental and social change), and *solidarity and partnership* (collaborating across sectors and communities).

Circular Economy: The [circular economy](#) concept emphasizes reusing, repairing, and recycling instead of throwing things away. Libraries adopt this model through activities like tool or seed lending, repair workshops, swap events, and other initiatives that keep materials in use longer.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The United Nations’ [17 Sustainable Development Goals](#) provide a global framework for sustainable development, and libraries support them by offering inclusive spaces, information access, and community programs. Linking library projects to relevant SDGs like climate action, responsible consumption, or sustainable communities helps give these initiatives broader impact and visibility.

GREENING YOUR LIBRARY: STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

Greening your library is a continuous cycle of assessing, planning, acting, and evaluating. This summary outlines the core actions at each stage and provides a streamlined roadmap for getting started.

1. Establish Your Baseline

Begin by understanding where your library stands today.

- **Review existing practices:** Assess current policies, operations, and any sustainability efforts already in place.
- **Engage your team:** Form a green committee that represents different departments and can champion sustainability.
- **Know your community and potential partners:** Identify key patron groups, local environmental priorities, and organizations to collaborate with.
- **Understand external requirements:** Check relevant municipal, institutional, or national sustainability standards and opportunities.
- **Gather baseline data:** Collect figures on energy and water use, waste, recycling, material consumption, or any other environmental impacts.

Outcome: A clear picture of your starting point and the main opportunities for improvement.

2. Plan Your Sustainability Path

Use your baseline to set direction and define achievable steps.

- **Set a vision and measurable goals:** Define what a green library looks like for you and set specific targets (e.g., “Reduce energy use by 30% in two years”).
- **Prioritize focus areas:** Identify the most important needs and the easiest early wins.
- **Brainstorm solutions:** Generate ideas—from operational changes to new programs, policies, or partnerships.
- **Select and structure initiatives:** Evaluate options based on impact, feasibility, cost, and community relevance. Draft a clear action plan with tasks, responsibilities, timelines, and success indicators.
- **Prepare your team and resources:** Clarify roles, secure leadership support, identify needed skills, and build partnerships.

Outcome: A realistic, tailored sustainability plan that guides your next steps.

3. Implement Your Projects

Put your plan into action while keeping staff and the community engaged.

- **Break projects into tasks** and assign responsibilities with clear deadlines.
- **Manage challenges** through simple risk assessment and flexible adaptation.
- **Use existing resources:** Draw on staff expertise, repurpose materials, and partner with local groups.
- **Communicate and involve stakeholders:** Train staff, inform patrons, share progress, and invite feedback.
- **Use tools for efficiency:** Basic checklists, shared documents, and milestone calendars help keep momentum on track.

Outcome: Sustainable practices become part of daily operations and community life.

4. Measure, Learn, and Improve

Evaluate to understand what worked and what needs adjusting.

- **Measure what matters:** Revisit your goals and collect data on outputs (activities completed) and outcomes (actual environmental or community impact).
- **Compare to your baseline** to understand progress, successes, and gaps.
- **Share your results** with staff, leadership, partners, and the public to build support and celebrate achievements.
- **Reflect and adapt:** Identify lessons learned and areas for refinement.
- **Start the next cycle:** Update your plan, set new goals, or scale successful initiatives.

Outcome: A culture of continuous improvement and renewed motivation to advance sustainability.

Remember: It's a Circular Journey

Greening your library is not a one-off project but an ongoing loop of improvement. Each cycle strengthens your environmental performance, staff engagement, partnerships, and community impact. Over time, sustainability becomes embedded in your library's identity, culture, and services.

Key Points to Remember

Think beyond One-Off Actions

- One-time workshops or single green upgrades create awareness but not lasting change.
- Turn successful pilots into recurring or connected programs.
- Aim for a clear, consistent "green thread" across activities.

Integrate Sustainability across the Library

- Align programs with internal operations (procurement, waste, energy).
- Create a basic sustainability policy or plan to coordinate efforts.
- Use small audits (energy, waste, staff practices) to guide decisions.

Build Partnerships & Community Engagement

- Collaborate early with NGOs, schools, local experts, or city campaigns.
- Offer activities for different ages and community groups.
- Design programs that invite people back repeatedly, not just once.

Think Long-Term and Grow over Time

- Start simple, build momentum, and expand what works.
- Track outcomes (even small ones) to celebrate progress and refine plans.
- Gradually evolve from isolated actions toward a connected, year-round sustainability culture.

BEST PRACTICES FROM BIBLIOGREEN LIBRARIES

Inspiration and transferrable ideas for libraries beginning or expanding sustainability work.

Library	What they did	Why it worked	How to adopt it
Avetik Isahakyan Central Library Armenia	Created a structured series of “Green Events” tailored to children, teenagers, and librarians, combining reading sessions, discussions, and hands-on upcycling workshops. Ran staff surveys, held focus groups, and produced a set of recommendations that now guide their long-term vision, emphasizing digital tools, green champions, NGO partnerships, and quick, visible sustainability wins.	Combines community programming with internal capacity building and strategic planning.	Start with 2–3 themed workshops for different age groups; run a simple staff sustainability survey; appoint “green champions.”
University Library Sarajevo Bosnia & Herzegovina	Developed a highly participatory model, anchoring their work in workshops, working groups, and a Sustainability Action Day. Their standout innovation, “Tools-to-Go,” provided gardening kits to schools, creating community replication of green practices, complemented by a seed library and a new in-house Sustainability Space that keeps the topic alive year-round.	Extends sustainability impact beyond the library by giving communities tools to act.	Create simple take-home kits (gardening, repair, zero-waste); set up a seed library; dedicate a small corner as a sustainability hub.
Akaki Tsereteli State University Library, Kutaisi Georgia	Held three separate theme days: one on waste management, one on fast fashion, and one on children’s environmental activities, introducing patrons to different sustainability angles.	Flexible formats with clear, easy-to-understand focus points.	Run 2–3 thematic days per year (e.g., waste, water, fashion); then unify them under an annual “Green Month.”
Municipal Library of Chania Greece	Created a vegetable garden outside the library and partnered with an environmental organization to use an educational toolkit (Food4Schools) to involve local students in growing food, integrating hands-on gardening with learning sessions.	Integrates a hands-on garden with structured environmental education, showing how outdoor learning, partnerships, and curriculum-aligned tools can turn a library into an active site for experiential sustainability learning.	Start a small vegetable garden; collaborate with a local environmental organization; join national or city-wide eco-days.

<p>Hieronim Łopaciński Library, Lublin Poland</p>	<p>Ran a “Library in Motion” circular week, combining lectures, skill-sharing workshops, a fashion swap, and debates, building on the event’s success by forming partnerships to continue similar events throughout the year.</p>	<p>Combines diverse circular-economy activities into a single event and extends the impact by forming partnerships that make circular programming an ongoing part of library life.</p>	<p>Host a week/weekend of reuse (repair café + swap); partner with designers/tailors; expand to weekly or monthly circular events.</p>
<p>German Cultural Center Library, Sibiu Romania</p>	<p>Hosted economic sustainability workshops, an art exhibition, and community nature walks, attracting diverse groups (some for gardening, others for recycling, etc.), producing a reading list on sustainability, local partnerships connections, and shelves made from recycled materials.</p>	<p>Engages different audiences with diverse activities; builds small, lasting legacies.</p>	<p>Combine art and environment workshops; build a small recycled-material shelf; publish a sustainability reading list with recurring additions.</p>
<p>Čačak City Library Serbia</p>	<p>Engaged youth in a glass recycling project by running a “Glass Reborn” workshop, engaging teenagers in an in-depth, creative environmental activity.</p>	<p>Focused creative program that makes sustainability tangible for young people.</p>	<p>Run a single-material creative workshop (glass, paper, plastic) with a local artist targeted to a specific community group.</p>
<p>Old Town Library Bratislava Slovakia</p>	<p>Collaborated with a community garden initiative to address urban heat and ecological education, reflecting a local need for green space awareness.</p>	<p>Partnership-based planning ensures future resilience and local relevance.</p>	<p>Partner with a community garden or urban greening group; hold a climate-resilience workshop.</p>
<p>Odessa National Library Ukraine</p>	<p>Conducted an environmental audit of its operations and introduced green procurement and event policies based on that data. Also introduced “eco-trends” activities (like reducing plastic and upcycling fabric), including setting up an exhibition which presented alternatives to plastic items.</p>	<p>Policy-level changes paired with public education for systemwide impact.</p>	<p>Adopt greener purchasing rules; host an exhibition on sustainable alternatives; host a “reduce plastic” workshop.</p>

RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

[The Green Library Website](#) - IFLA (ENSULIB): A comprehensive introduction to Green Libraries on the IFLA website including checklists, tools, guidelines, and a bibliography.

- [Tools for Green Libraries](#): offers resources and best practice examples for how to implement sustainability strategies in libraries.
- [Guidelines for Green Libraries](#): a publication providing a comprehensive framework for developing, managing, and evaluating green and sustainable libraries across diverse contexts.
- [Green Library Checklist](#): A checklist tool covering categories like energy, water, materials, services, and community engagement. Libraries can use it as a quick audit to ensure they have considered all aspects. For example, it prompts you to check if you have a collection development policy for sustainability literature, if you measure your water usage, if you have partnerships with environmental orgs, etc.

[Sustainable Libraries Initiative](#) (SLI): A comprehensive certification program providing libraries with a step-by-step roadmap to become more sustainable. By joining, libraries access resources, mentoring, and a community of practice, and can earn certification as a Sustainable Library. This is highly actionable - essentially a structured way to implement many of the ideas discussed in this guidebook. Even if you don't pursue formal certification, the SLI's publicly available resources (action checklists, benchmarks) are very helpful for self-assessment and planning.

[LibrarIN Toolkit](#): A comprehensive toolkit designed to support library staff and policymakers in advancing social innovation within European libraries, offering resources at the policy, library, and academic levels. The toolkit consists of a library policy tracker, a what-works database, and a repository of academic work on value co-creation and social innovation in the library sector.

[Common Waste - Common Libraries](#): A Goethe-Institut project preceding BiblioGreen, where libraries in the Western Balkans collaborated on waste reduction in libraries. Case studies from that project (e.g. the University of Sarajevo Library eliminated single-use plastics and created educational exhibits on waste) paved the way for BiblioGreen. Reading about these can spark program ideas and show the evolution of library sustainability efforts over time.

[Montreal's Bibliothèque du Bois  - Green Building Award](#): A case study of a public library that achieved LEED Platinum, illustrating green architecture in practice. The article details features like geothermal heating, solar orientation, and a biodiversity-rich site design. It demonstrates how environmental sustainability can be built into library infrastructure in an urban context (useful if planning a renovation or new building).

