

Sustainability Committee

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Approved by AASLH Council

Name: Sustainability Committee

Purpose: Support AASLH and cultural heritage institutions adopt continuous improvement on sustainability (including climate change and its environmental, social and economic causes and impacts) as a governing approach to our work.

The Sustainability Committee will:

- Shepherd the development and recommendation of standards, best practices, and ethical statements in the area of sustainability based on current understanding for the operation of, and community roles of, historical organizations and AASLH;
- Facilitate the acceptance and adoption of a set of “Principles” (included below) that include defining “sustainability” as encompassing not only environmental and climate issues but also issues of diversity, equity, access and inclusion into AASLH policies, programs, and memberships;
- Advise the AASLH Council, staff, and committees on all matters related to sustainability;
- Identify ways to support front-line member organizations in experimenting with, assessing and sharing insights into how heritage organizations can best contribute to meaningful cultural change within communities.

Structure:

Committee participation/commitment:

See AASLH By-Laws, Article VIII. Committees, Section 2. Composition of Standing Committees, paragraph 2.1 Standing Committee Chairs and Members; Terms.

Committee membership numbers:

The committee shall consist of at least four members, including the committee chair. It is recommended that at least one member of the committee represent a discipline outside of the heritage sector with a demonstrated commitment to sustainability and climate response.

Committee Meetings:

See AASLH By-Laws, Article VIII. Committees, Section 2. Composition of Standing Committees, paragraph 2.3 Standing Committee Meetings.

Committee Minutes and procedures:

See AASLH By-Laws, Article VIII. Committees, Section 2. Composition of Standing Committees, paragraph 2.4 Standing Committee Minutes.

Recommended Goals

Those listed below were developed by the Task Force and are recommendations to a permanent Committee. Selections and additions remain within the purview of the Committee and its Chair.

1. Continuously reduce the direct negative impacts (i.e. greenhouse gas emissions, materials and waste, etc.) and assess the positive impacts of AASLH activities (emissions reductions, and land, water and cultural stewardship);
 - a. Reduce direct negative impacts of meetings and professional development with an emphasis on the annual conference;
 - i. Identify initial sustainability approaches for the 2021 and futures conferences;
 - ii. Document and share resources for increasing sustainability.
2. Be an active educational resource to help members reduce their environmental impact;
 - a. Share practices so that the field and AASLH membership can help reduce heritage community's impact on the environment;
 - i. Promote the use of existing platforms (such as the AASLH blog) to catalyze member reflection, dialogue and action related to fostering a culture of sustainability;
 - ii. Strengthen dialogic platforms as a real-time resource for members;
 - b. Encourage and facilitate promising impact-oriented ideas and action in the field
 - i. Identify and promote existing exemplars of members having impact on both the inward-facing and outward-facing responses to sustainability;
 - ii. Support front-line experimentation and impact-oriented innovation to create and spread new approaches to addressing climate change and other sustainability issues.
3. Advise Council and other heritage sector leaders on response or action regarding national and international news or events on sustainability and climate efforts related to the cultural heritage sector;
 - a. Establish strategic alliances within and outside of the field to inform the membership (*examples below*);
 - b. Provide rapid response support team for public and professional issues;
 - c. Build and sustain field-wide understanding of current and emerging practice and concerns.
4. Shepherd the development and recommendation of standards, best practices, and ethical statements in the area of sustainability based on current understanding for the operation of, and community roles of, historical organizations and AASLH;
 - a. Fund a Sustaining Heritage planning conference (at Pocantico) for Council members, thought leaders and emerging leaders to co-create short and long-term changes and guidance for the field built on the experience of the Climate Heritage Network & ICOMOS (Int'l) and AAM, APGA, & We Are Still In (USA);

- b. To help AASLH staff integrate sustainability and climate thinking into appropriate projects and funding applications.

Principles

We recognize that AASLH and its member institutions represent the broadest possible cross-section of heritage organizations, and that our approach must engage and support each of these. Ten key principles underpin our recommendations:

1. “Sustainability” encompasses Environment and Climate issues, as well as issues of Equity and Diversity. These four aspects are interrelated within the structure and process of culture. Building environmental and climate work into the work of the profession can and should follow a parallel approach to building diversity, equity, access and inclusion into the work of the profession. Both are systems concepts that require new awareness, knowledge, skills, and action across the board.
2. “Sustainability” exists when there is a balance to how our collective social, economic and environmental systems interact. Human activity has knocked this global equilibrium so that many parts of our world are now threatened. Among the most prominent symptoms is climate change which is increasing economic and social inequities while threatening to make the planet uninhabitable by humans in the near future. Striving for a sustainable future requires working at local levels, while keeping an eye on the global health of environmental, economic and social systems.
3. We make progress using a combination of values and knowledge. Sustainability is driven by identified, shared values, whether organizational- or community-based; knowledge is a tool, not a goal. Organizations may define their scope of sustainability differently, and we know that scope will expand with experience. Defining/redefining “sustainability” is not our purpose.
4. Systems thinking is imperative. Heritage organizations are not stand-alone entities. Like the ecosystem, we strive to preserve within the larger biosphere, our organizations exist in a larger system of community and society. Successful sustainable approaches incorporate:
 - a. The people – staff, volunteers, patrons, and others – who embody our institutional culture and both enable (and present challenges) to sustainable behaviors;
 - b. The structures and their components that house and shape the environments where we carry out our stewardship mission for physical history;
 - c. The communities, small or large, where we live and interact – we are well-versed in preserving our past, but sustainability is about preserving our future.
5. Sustainability is a process – not a project. A project has a clear end – to choose sustainability is a commitment to the long-game, recognition that we must continuously seek improvement. Each organization will have a different starting point based on identified needs, opportunities, and desired impacts.
6. There is no “one-size fits all” solution. Every individual, institution and community will start from a different point. Some will require an initial assessment to identify a starting point;

others will be able to build on already successful internal or external activities; some may choose a community the size of a neighborhood and others may choose a national or international reach.

7. Professional associations (really no one person or organization) should not do this work independently. For reasons of efficiency and quality, the allied professions will do more and do better if they work together to advance the field.

8. Transparency and communication are paramount. As we assess and measure and research impacts, we must use the discoveries to learn as organizations and communities broaden and accelerate change.

9. Start now; learn as we go. The key is to start right away, right where we are. Any action, as long as it is value-driven, trumps inaction, and small successes can lead to greater ones when pursuing continuous improvement. Experimentation enables cultural organizations to explore new ways of innovating public programs and partnerships that can generate meaningful improvements in both environmental and equity-based areas. Our organizations have a long tradition of learning from one another, and our strength lies in our engagement with our communities.

10. Our special value is the relevance of history. Cultural heritage resources help societies understand the past and adapt for the future. By facilitating those stories and fostering humanities-based solutions we can help to:

- a. Plan for cultural impact;
- b. Identify community needs and opportunities;
- c. Generate reflection, assessments, and shared insights that help to refine our practices and processes.

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