

## **2023 Ontario Public Libraries Climate Benchmarking Survey Report**

### **Introduction / Background**

In the Spring of 2023, OLA's Climate Action Committee created our first climate benchmarking survey. It was intended to be a bi-annual survey to address the climate crisis as it impacts the library. It would both address how the library is currently being affected by the climate crisis, while also providing a historical document of the changes the climate crisis has on the library. As the survey was the first of its kind in Ontario, we hoped it would capture the current climate affecting the library landscape, and how libraries were responding to these challenges. It is our hope that this survey will shed light on those challenges, provide a road map forward, and celebrate the work already being done.

### **Participant Information and Methodology**

A survey was sent out via the Ontario Library Association's communication channels, including newsletters and social media, to public libraries across Ontario. We asked the CEO, Executive Director (ED), or head librarian thirty (30) questions across four (4) different categories: Collection and Waste Disposal, Emergency Management Preparation, Library Governance, and Infrastructure and Programming.

We received 47 responses across the province. This covers libraries from both rural and urban settings, who serve a wide range of population demographics. As will be discussed in our analysis and conclusion, although there were slight variations in how libraries are responding to the climate crisis, all libraries have experienced the negative impact of the climate crises.

## **Results and Analysis**

### **1. How material was disposed of**

Approximately how many physical items does your library weed from the collection per year?

- The responses range from 10 to 60,000 physical items per year, with 60,000 being an outlier
- The majority (34) of the 47 participants reportedly weed 10,000 or less physical items per year (see Table 1)
- Table 2 below further breaks down the 0 - 10,000 category highlighted in Table 1, and indicates that out of the 47 participants, 23 participants (49%) reportedly weed 1,000 or less physical items per year
- 7 participants answered unknown or left the answer box blank (see Table 1)

**Table 1: Number of Weeded Physical Items**

Number of Weeded Physical Items	Number of Responses
0 - 1,000	23
1001 - 2,000	2
2001 - 3,000	4
3001 - 4,000	0
4001 - 5,000	3
5001 - 6,000	1
6001 - 7,000	0
7001 - 8,000	0
8001 - 9,000	0
9001 - 10,000	1
Total for the range of 0 - 10,000 weeded physical items	<b>34</b>

Number of Weeded Physical Items	Number of Responses
0 - 10,000	<b>34</b>
10,001 - 20,000	4
20,001 - 30,000	1
30,001 - 40,000	0
40,001 - 50,000	0
50,001 - 60,000	1
Unknown	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>

### How does your library currently dispose of weeded books?

- The majority (89%) of the 47 participants dispose of weeded books via library-based sales
- Garbage and recycling is the second most popular way (74% of participants) to dispose of weeded books
- Through informal community partnerships is the third most popular way (36% of participants)

### How does your library dispose of CDs and DVDs?

- Similar trend compared to weeded books, library-based sales (83%), garbage and recycling (53%) and through informal community partnerships (32%) are the three most popular ways to dispose of CDs and DVDs

### How does your library dispose of computers and other electronic resources?

- Electronic waste recycling through municipal waste service (66%) is the most popular way to dispose of computers and other electronic resources while 23% are managed by the city/municipality life cycle program

### Which, if any, of the following library materials vendors do you use?

- The top four vendors are Whitehots (70%), CVS Midwest (41%), Library Bound (33%), and Library Services Centre (26%)
- 9% of the participants do not use any wholesale vendors

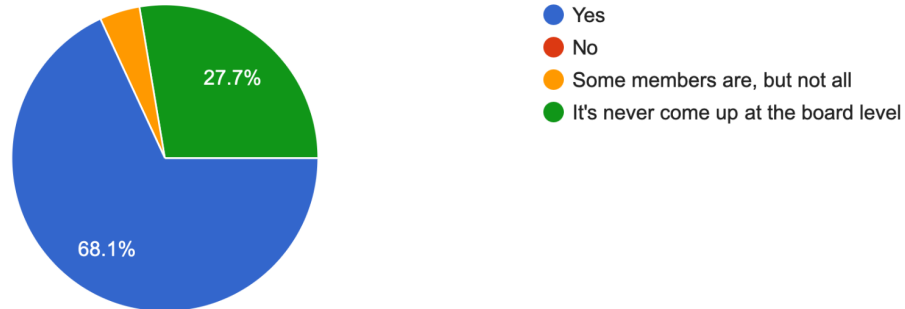
## 2. Library Governance

### Is your current library board generally supportive of climate or environmental initiatives that library staff want to take?

Response	Number of Libraries	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	32	68.1%
No	0	0%
Some members are, but not all	2	4.3%
It's never come up at the board level	13	27.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	

Is your current library board generally supportive of climate or environmental initiatives that library staff want to take?

47 responses



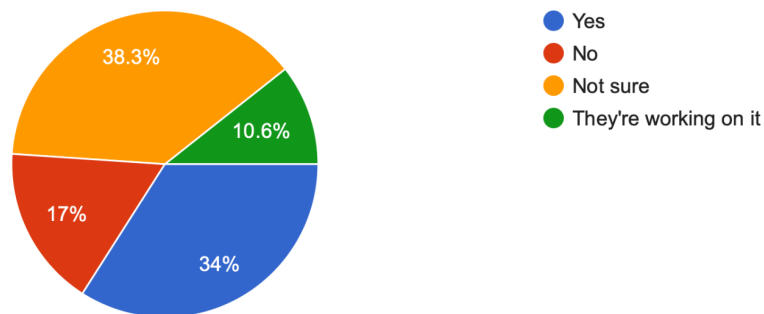
Out of 47 libraries who responded, 68.1% (32 libraries) reported that yes, their current library board was supportive, 4.3% (2 libraries) reported that some members are supportive, but not all, and 27.7% (13 libraries) reported that it has never come up at the board level.

Does your funding municipality have a formal climate action strategy?

Response	Number of Libraries	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	16	34%
No	8	17%
Not sure	18	38.3%
They're working on it	5	10.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	

Does your funding municipality have a formal climate action strategy?

47 responses



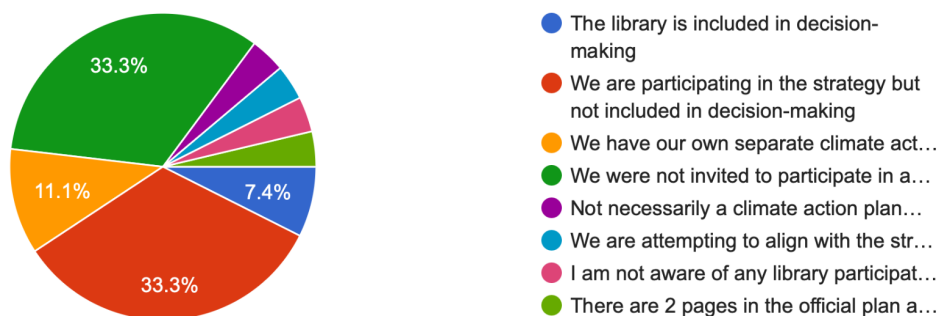
Of 47 responding libraries, 34% (16 libraries) reported that yes, their funding municipalities do have a formal climate action strategy. 17% (8 libraries) reported that no, their funding municipalities did not. 38.3% (18 libraries) were not sure, and 10.6% (5 libraries) reported that their funding municipalities are in the midst of working on a formal climate action strategy.

**If yes or if it's being worked on, is the library included?**

Response	Number of Libraries	Percentage of Respondents
The library is included in decision-making	2	7.4%
We are participating in the strategy but not included in the decision-making	9	33.3%
We have our own separate climate action strategy	3	11.1%
We were not invited to participate in any way	9	33.3%
I am not aware of any library participation	1	3.7%
We are attempting to align with the strategy but are not referenced in the plan nor were we consulted in the development of the plan	1	3.7%
There are 2 pages in the official plan around supporting sustainability but no definite climate action plan as yet and we have not been approached to participate	1	3.7%
Not necessarily a climate action plan but environmental protection and climate change is part of Township's current Strategic Plan	1	3.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	

If yes or if it's being worked on, is the library included?

27 responses



Of 27 libraries in municipalities that have a formal climate action strategy, one-third (9 libraries,

or 33.3%) were not invited to participate in any way, and similarly one third (another 9 libraries, or 33.3%) are participating in the strategy but were not involved in the decision-making. Only 2 libraries (7.4% of respondents) were involved in the decision-making. 3 libraries (11.1%) have their own separate climate action strategy.

**Does your library’s strategic plan include specific wording around climate action, the environment, and/or sustainability?**

Response	Number of Libraries	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	10	21.3%
No	10	21.3%
It will when we update it next	18	38.3%
We don’t have a strategic plan	5	10.6%
Not sure Includes some custom responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● We are currently updating our plan, but it’s too early to say what it will include</li> <li>● Not sure if it will - it is in the process of being created</li> <li>● Currently updating, unsure if this will be included</li> </ul>	4	8.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	

Does your library's strategic plan include specific wording around climate action, the environment, and/or sustainability?

47 responses



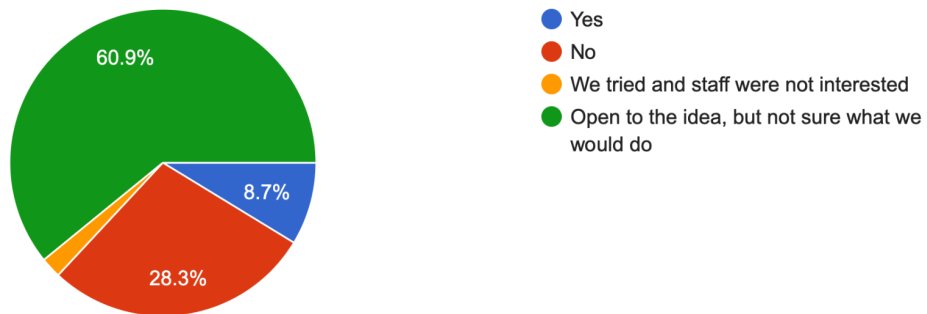
10 libraries (21.3%) reported that yes, their library’s strategic plan does include specific wording around climate action, the environment, and/or sustainability. Another 10 libraries (21.3%) reported that no, their library’s strategic plan does not include specific wording. 18 libraries (38.3%) will include specific wording when their strategic plan is updated next. 5 libraries (10.6%) reported not having a strategic plan, while 4 libraries (8.4%) were unsure if their strategic plans had specific wording, in some cases because it is currently being updated.

**Does your library provide staff with climate-related professional development opportunities?**

Response	Number of Libraries	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	4	8.7%
No	13	28.3%
We tried and staff were not interested	1	2.2%
Open to the idea, but not sure what we would do	28	60.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	

Does your library provide staff with climate-related professional development opportunities?

46 responses



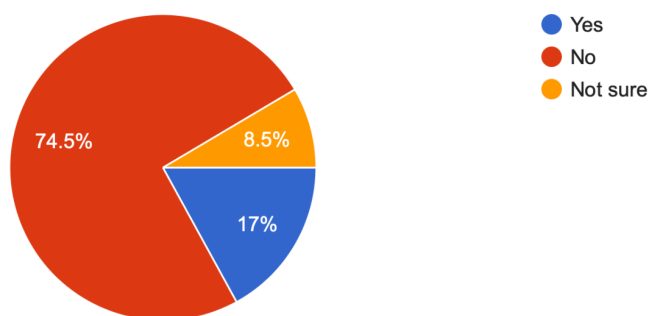
Of 46 respondents, 60.9% (28 libraries) reported that their library is open to the idea of providing staff with climate-related professional development opportunities, but they were not sure what they would do. 13 libraries (28.3%) do not currently offer these types of opportunities, while 4 libraries (8.7%) do. 1 library (2.2% of respondents) reported that they had tried to offer this type of opportunity but staff were not interested.

**To your knowledge, have any library staff indicated they are being personally affected by climate anxiety?**

Response	Number of Libraries	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	8	17%
No	35	74.5%
Not sure	4	8.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	

To your knowledge, have any library staff indicated they are being personally affected by climate anxiety?

47 responses



Out of 47 libraries, 8 libraries (17%) reported yes, that they were aware of library staff having indicated that they are being personally affected by climate anxiety, while 35 libraries (74.5%) reported no, that they were not aware of library staff being personally affected. 4 libraries (8.5%) were not sure.

### 3. infrastructure and programing

**If you have a library courier service vehicle that carries physical items between library branches, approximately how many kilometers would that vehicle (or vehicles) travel per week?**

Response	Number of Libraries	Percentage of Respondents
Less than 10 km per week	1	5.3%
Between 11 km and 50 km per week	2	10.5%
Between 51 km and 100 km	4	21.1%



per week		
Between 101 km and 200 km per week	4	21.1%
Between 201 km and 500 km per week	6	31.6%
Between 501 km and 1000 km per week	1	5.3%
More than 1000 km per week	1	5.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	

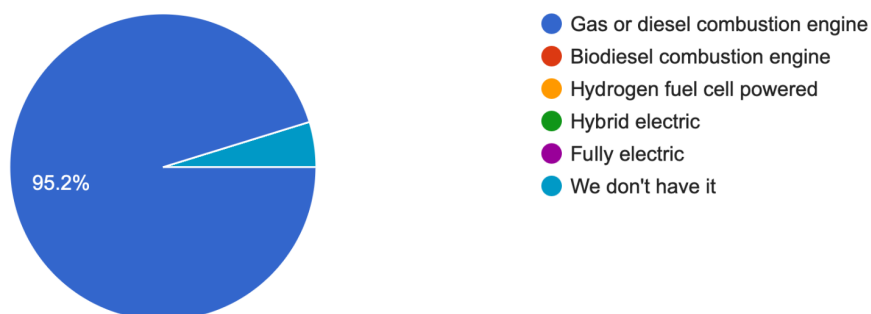
Out of 19 libraries who responded, 31.6% (6 libraries) reported having a library courier service vehicle that traveled between 201 km and 500 km per week on average; 21.1% (4 libraries) reported travel between 51 km and 100 km per week on average; and another 21.1% (4 libraries) reported travel between 101 km and 200 km per week on average. Only 1 library (5.3%) reported travel averaging more than 1000 km per week.

**Is your current library courier service vehicle:**

- Gas or diesel combustion engine
- Biodiesel combustion engine
- Hydrogen fuel cell powered
- Hybrid electric
- Fully electric
- Other?

Is your current library courier service vehicle:

21 responses



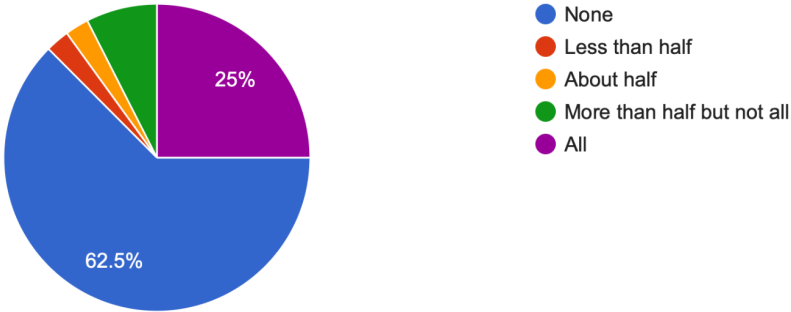
Of all of the libraries who responded to this question who have a library courier service vehicle (20 of the 21 responding libraries), all reported the vehicle having a gas or diesel combustion engine.

**How many of your library's branches are easily accessible by public transit?**

Response	Number of Libraries	Percentage of Respondents
None	25	62.5%
Less than half	1	2.5%
About half	1	2.5%
More than half but not all	3	7.5%
All	10	25%
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	

How many of your library's branches are easily accessible by public transit?

40 responses



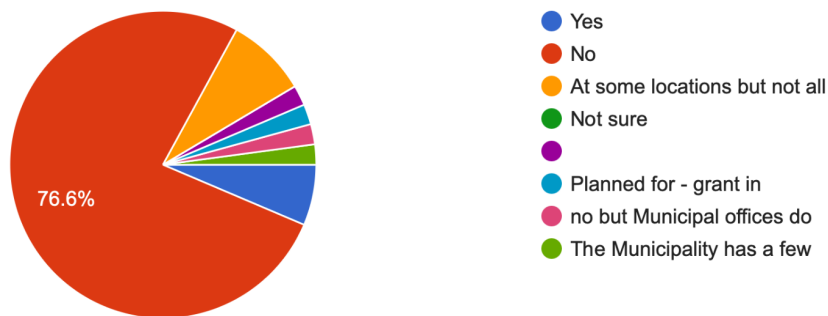
Of the 40 libraries who responded to this question, 62.5% (25 libraries) reported that none of their library's branches are easily accessible by public transit, while 25% (10 libraries) reported that all of their branches are easily accessible.

**Does your library provide electric vehicle charging stations for public use?**

Response	Number of Libraries	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	3	6.4%
At some locations but not all	4	8.5%
No	36	76.6%
Library does not but municipality does	2	4.2%
Other (including that stations are being planned)	2	4.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	

Does your library provide electric vehicle charging stations for public use?

47 responses



Of the 47 libraries who responded, 76.6% (36 libraries) reported that their library does not provide electrical vehicle charging stations for public use; 8.5% (4 libraries) reported that some library locations provide this but not all; and 6.4% (3 libraries) reported that their library does provide these stations.

**Do any of your library buildings make use of any of the following renewable energy resources:**

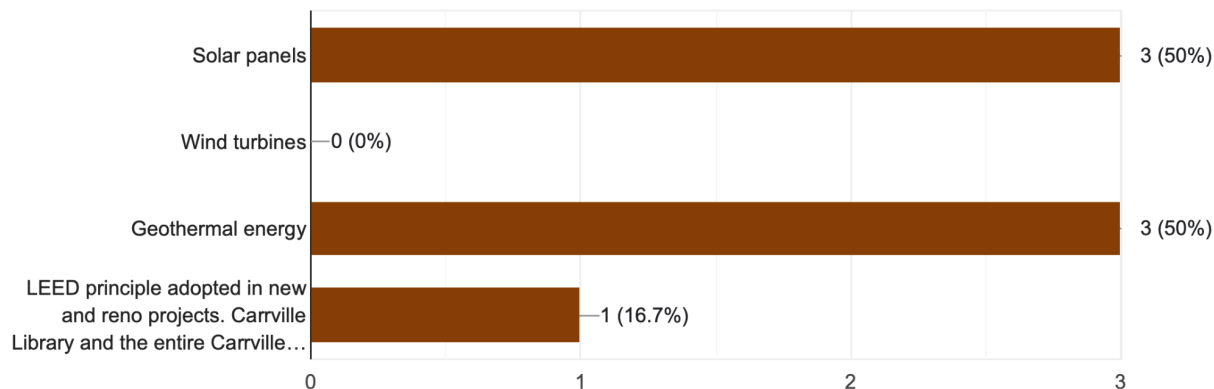
- Solar panels
- Wind turbines
- Geothermal energy
- Other?

*(Note: Multiple responses were allowed for this question.)*

Response	Number of Libraries	Percentage of Respondents
Solar panels	3	50%
Wind turbines	0	0%
Geothermal energy (including construction projects currently planned that will include geothermal energy)	4	66.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	

Do any of your library buildings make use of any of the following renewable energy resources:  
(Check all that apply)

6 responses



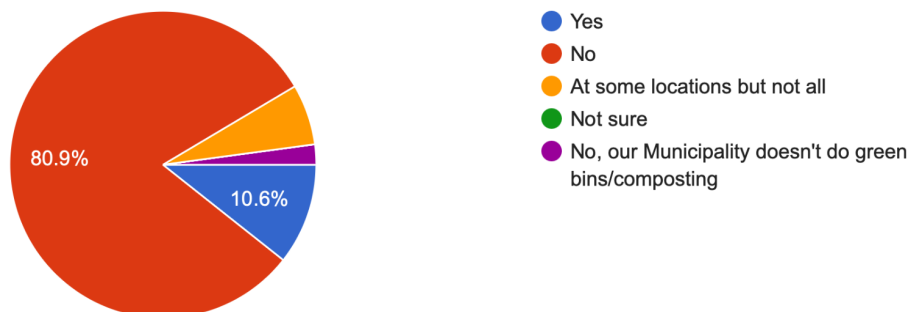
Of the 6 libraries who responded, 3 reported using solar panels and 3 reported use of geothermal energy. No libraries reported use of wind turbines.

#### Do you have green bins/composting available for public use?

Response	Number of Libraries	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	5	10.6%
No	39	83%
At some locations but not all	3	6.4%
Not sure	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	

Do you have green bins/composting available for public use?

47 responses



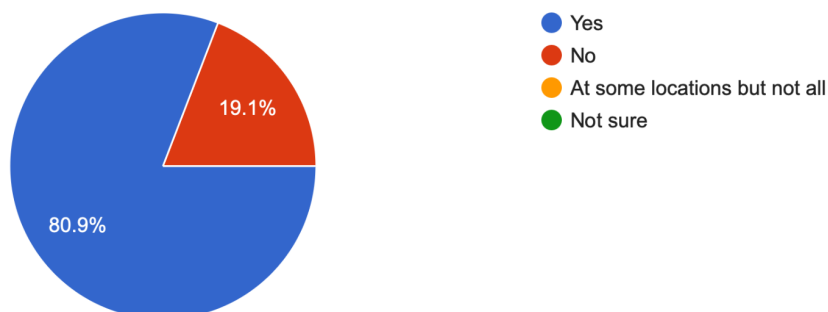
Of the 47 libraries who responded, 83% (39 libraries) reported that they do not have green bins/composting available for public use; 10.6% (5 libraries) do offer green bins/composting; and 6.4% (3 libraries) offer green bins/composting at some locations but not all.

**Do you have a blue bin or other recycling available for public use?**

Response	Number of Libraries	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	38	80.9%
No	9	19.1%
At some locations but not all	0	0%
Not sure	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	

Do you have a blue bin or other recycling available for public use?

47 responses



Of the 47 responding libraries, 38 libraries (80.9%) reported that yes, they do have a blue bin or other recycling available for public use, while 9 libraries (19.1%) reported that no, they do not.

**Do you have library programming focused on nature, the climate, or the environment, for any of the following demographics? (Check all that apply)**

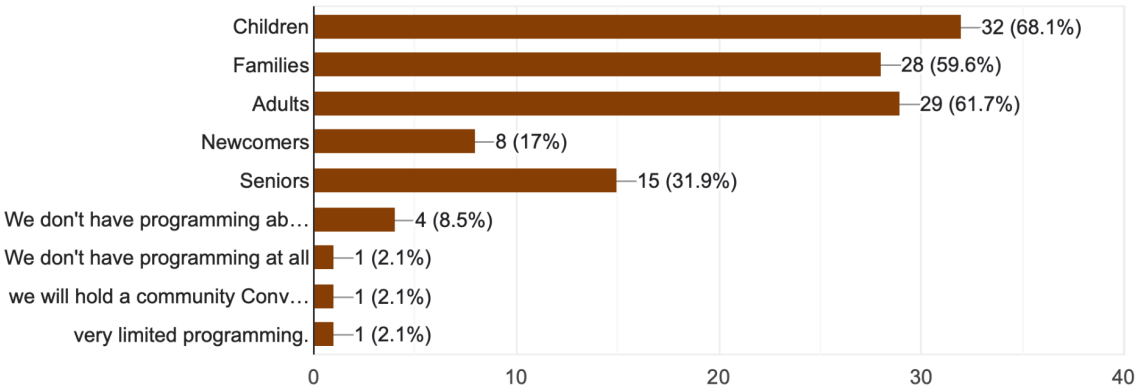
*(Note: Multiple responses were allowed for this question)*

Response	Number of Libraries	Percentage of Respondents
Children	32	68.1%
Families	28	59.6%
Adults	29	61.7%

Newcomers	8	17%
Seniors	15	31.9%
We don't have programming about nature, the climate, or the environment	4	8.5%
We don't have programming at all	1	2.1%
Programming is planned for the near future (hasn't taken place yet)	1	2.1%
We have only very limited programming	1	2.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>47 libraries responded to this question</b>	

Do you have library programming focused on nature, the climate, or the environment, for any of the following demographics? (Check all that apply)

47 responses



Of the 47 libraries who responded, the most popular demographics for library programming that focused on nature, the climate, or the environment were: children (32 libraries, or 68.1% of respondents); families (28 libraries, or 59.6%); adults (29 libraries or 61.7%); and seniors (15 libraries or 31.9%).

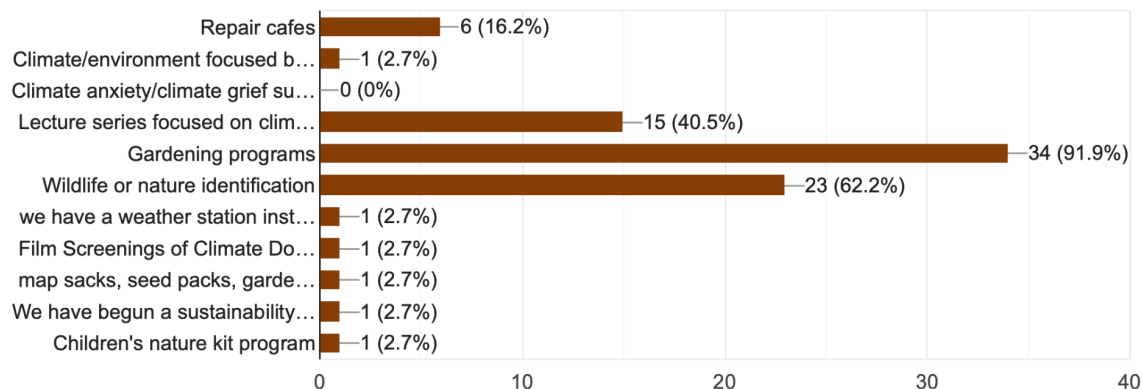
**What kinds of special climate action or sustainability programming does your library host on a regular basis (more than twice a year)? (Check all that apply.)**

*(Note: Multiple responses were allowed for this question.)*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Libraries</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
Repair cafes	6	16.2%
Climate/environment focused book clubs	1	2.7%
Climate anxiety/climate grief support groups	0	0%
Lecture series focused on climate, environment, or sustainability topics	15	40.5%
Gardening programs	35	94.6%
Wildlife or nature identification	23	62.2%
Film screenings of climate documentaries	1	2.7%
Children's nature kit program	1	2.7%
Weather station installed at a library branch, and offer related programming	1	2.7%
Just getting started, more programming to come	1	2.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>37 libraries responded to this question</b>	

## What kinds of special climate action or sustainability programming does your library host on a regular basis (more than twice a year)? (Check all that apply)

37 responses



Of the 37 libraries who responded, the most popular kinds of special climate action or sustainability programming that their libraries host on a regular basis (more than twice a year) were: gardening programmings (35 libraries or 94.6% of respondents); wildlife or nature identification (23 libraries or 62.2%); lecture series focused on climate, environment, or sustainability topics (15 libraries or 40.5%); and repair cafés (6 libraries or 16.2%).

### **Limitations and Things to improve next time**

No project is without its faults or areas of improvement, and our survey was not immune to this. There were areas that we hope to address in our future surveys, and improve upon.

The first area to be addressed is our sample size. Of the 265 public library boards, only 47 responded to our survey. This only yields a response rate of 17.74%, which doesn't adequately represent the full picture of public libraries across Ontario. It does give us a benchmark and a starting point, but to gain a full picture of how the climate crisis is affecting Public Libraries across Ontario, we need to increase response rate dramatically. This can be done either through more targeted promotion of the survey, as well as follow up from those who haven't responded yet.

From there, we need to be aware of what we can improve on specifically on the survey, and have the ability to do so, and those areas that we need to work around since we do not have control over. For example, in areas that we can control: we can be more precise in our question language, we can provide more options, and we can be more targeted in our communications for the survey dissemination. We need to be aware that we cannot control who is filling out the survey, if they receive the survey, or if there is an area in our questioning we did not account for. Recognizing first what we can and cannot control and focusing on those items we can control while being cognizant of that which we cannot will help guide our next survey.



Let's address ways that we can be controlled for in improvement of the survey, most notably, being more specific in our questions. For example, the participants were asked how they disposed of their materials, but were not asked to specify the percentage of each method of disposal. The survey results showed that 74.5% of the respondents removed their books through recycling and garbage, and 89% of the respondents removed their books through their own book sales. What we do not know is of those who responded, what the overlap of those who sold their materials and those who recycled.

Also, we do not know what the ratio of garbage to recycling is, and what the recycling process looks like. Drilling down to see what the ratio of garbage to recycling would help determine how effective their waste disposal process is. It would be too labor intensive to research each library question to find out if their municipality has the ability to recycle, or what their recycling program looks like, as not all recycling plants are created equal in how effective and environmentally friendly they are.

By expanding these options for our participants, we hope to gain further understanding of the current landscape and climate that our public library faces, to assist in the creation of better and more effective policies and procedures.

## **Next Steps**

We are taking all that we have learned and implementing them in our next survey which will be looking at specifically academic libraries. We hope to send out this survey in early 2025. We are also revamping our public library survey to send out in 2026 to see how much has changed in the public library landscape.

We hope through our findings, libraries will create policies and procedures to help in our climate action initiative. Our data has unquestionably found the negative impacts libraries are currently facing, and how little equipped they are in handling it. Some libraries are already doing amazing work in supporting their staff and programs, but others have little to no support in place to provide the proper assistance their library is currently facing. And to take a page out of David Attomborough, if we do nothing, it's only going to get worse.

By sharing what is working, celebrating the accomplishments that are already working and proven to be effective, and pushing against those practices that have led us to our current climate crisis, we hope this will lead us forward to combat against devastating climate change.