

Environmental Sustainability and Museums

Background

- Museums are considered one of the most trustworthy sources of information in America, and as such are excellent entry points for conversations, both community-oriented and internal, on the topics of our times. Museums are valuable resources for understanding environment and climate issues, and partners for achieving environmental sustainability goals. They have a distinctive ability to engage the public and the media with data, images, and knowledge.
- Museum facilities and invaluable collections are at risk from the effects of climate change, including sea level rise, flooding, wildfires and severe weather. Museums' structural and financial sustainability can be significantly strained by natural disasters spurred by climate change and museums need access to local, state, and federal disaster relief planning and recovery funding. In addition, museums consider environmental trends when developing risk management policies, finding sites for new buildings, landscaping the grounds, and investing in, and raising funds for, environmental sustainability.

The American Alliance of Museums' Environment and Climate Network

- The American Alliance of Museums' [Environment and Climate Network](#) is a collaborative and pro-active community working to establish museums as leaders in environmental stewardship and sustainability, and climate action.
- A museum's role in the community includes being a resource for information and building awareness of issues that impact our world today. The Environment and Climate Network's focus is to explore and articulate environmentally sustainable practices. By setting a strong example through education and their own operational practices, museums can catalyze a potential triple net effect that encompasses economic, social, and environmental issues, internally and externally.
- The [Sustainability Excellence Awards](#) provide an opportunity to share sustainability stories and encourage museums to develop and educate visitors about green practices. First presented in 2014, the awards recognize sustainability efforts in facilities, programming, and exhibits in both large and small institutions. In the last five years, the award program has recognized 21 museums across 12 US states. The 2019 museum recipients:
 - The [Buffalo Bill Center of the West](#) in Cody, WY (Existing Facility category) for its proactive approach to a complex retrofit of its outdated mechanical and lighting systems to enhance their energy efficiency. The institution demonstrated the value of master planning, Energy Star usage, and undertaking practical sustainable preservation goals.
 - The [Museum of the American Revolution](#) in Philadelphia, PA (New Construction category) for earning USGBC LEED Gold certification and demonstrating an overall commitment to sustainable design despite challenging site conditions. The precedent-setting new museum conserves energy, limits waste, and reduces operational costs and carbon footprint.



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- The [Charles H. Wright Museum](#) and [Michigan Science Center](#) in Detroit, MI (Programming category) for their collaboration on people-centered programs that engaged the museums and their community in a dialogue on sustainability. The programs worked to shift from a self-described “culture of waste” towards a holistic, institution-wide culture of environmentalism.
- The [Roseville Utility Exploration Center](#) in Roseville, CA (Programming category honorable mention) for its *Home for the Holidays* exhibit and scavenger hunt. By establishing clear goals and using visitor feedback to track impact, this program exemplified how a small, narrowly-focused visitor center can serve its community.