

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 20 different museums for their efforts. The 2020 recipients:
 - The [Spurlock Museum of World Cultures in Urbana, IL](#) (Existing Facility category) for its ambitious yet realistic approach, directing their resources toward meeting the goal of creating a carbon-neutral campus by 2050. By implementing a methodical retro-commissioning program to evaluate systems performance, followed by LED lighting upgrades, the institution effectively demonstrates that rigorous analyses, coupled with innovative funding and resource allocation, ultimately pay off in significant reductions in energy use and carbon emissions.

"Environmental Sustainability and Museums" - continued:

- The [National Nordic Museum](#) in Seattle, WA (New Construction category) for a project that successfully integrates museum planning and design with an extensive program of sustainability measures, to create architecture that both evokes its cultural history and responds to its current site. The Museum also exceeded its own goal of LEED Silver to achieve LEED Gold certification.
- The [Mystic Seaport Museum](#) in Mystic, CT (Special Award of Merit) for its accomplishments in eliminating single-use plastic on its entire 19-acre site. The jury was impressed by the institution's comprehensive approach: the attention paid to inculcating behavior change; addressing cost challenges; data collection and analysis; and the detailed documentation of its process.
- The [Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens](#) in Pittsburgh, PA (Programming Award) for its incredibly successful program, "Make the Switch at Phipps: Green Power Drive." Following extensive surveys to gauge their visitors' views on climate change, Phipps partnered with Green Mountain Energy to conduct on-site education that allowed visitors to switch their home electricity to green power on the spot in exchange for a free membership to Phipps. To date, over 5,000 homes have switched to green power, proving this model could be successfully implemented and scaled across a wide variety of cultural institutions.

Climate Heritage Network

In November 2020, the American Alliance of Museums joined the [Climate Heritage Network](#) (CHN). CHN is a voluntary, mutual support network of arts, culture and heritage organizations committed to aiding their communities in tackling climate change and achieving the ambitions of the Paris Agreement. Network members include:

- Arts, culture, and heritage units of government at all levels
- Indigenous Peoples' governments, representative bodies, and organizations
- Site management agencies
- NGOs and other organizations
- Universities and research organizations
- Design firms, artists, and other businesses

The focus of the network is providing support to organizations from jurisdictions that have made concrete climate action pledges, such as those in the Under 2 Coalition and the [Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy](#).