

Climate Action and Museums

Request

- Increase funding for the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act's Sec. 40541 [Energy Efficiency Materials Pilot Program for Nonprofits](#) — a \$50 million pilot program to award grants for energy-efficiency materials upgrades to buildings owned and operated by 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, including museums.
- Increase funding for other museum eligible grant programs, such as the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Climate Smart Program and to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) specifically to support climate change work in museums, including facility adaptations and resiliency work, as well as exhibits and programs.
- Include museums as named community partners and as eligible nonprofit organizations in legislation for energy and climate funding opportunities and education initiatives.

Talking Points

- As trusted sources of information, museums are well-placed in their communities to be local centers of climate change education and mitigation efforts. Museums can assist government programs and initiatives when provided with accompanying government support.
- Museums, the vast majority of which are 501(c)(3) nonprofits, rarely benefit from tax incentive programs for increasing site sustainability. Grants and forgivable loans are more useful sources of government funding to support museums' sustainability goals.

Museums can help advance carbon neutrality and respond to the impacts of climate change:

- Museums are considered one of the [most trustworthy](#) sources of information in America, and as such are excellent entry points for climate conversations, both community-oriented and internal.
- As educational institutions, museums are valuable engines for understanding environment and climate issues. They have a distinct ability to engage the public and the media with data, images, and context for knowledge-building.
- Museums are research hubs, and have contributed to climate change research across a variety of areas, including mining historical data in journals, archives, and natural history collections, and conducting current citizen science research, such as urban heat zones and ecology, rain/water gauges, and bird migration patterns.
- Museums are valuable pilot sites for experimental technologies through operations and exhibits. This may be comparative wind-powered generators, test gardens, and green building designs such as living roofs, passive solar heating, rainwater catchment, and more.

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- Museums are essential community infrastructure and local partners for achieving environmental sustainability goals. They are connected to their fellow nonprofits, educational systems, and local businesses, and can model green practices to inspire and collaborate with their communities to help reach desired outcomes.

Museums are uniquely impacted by climate change:

- 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.
- 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.
- IMLS currently funds some climate change efforts in the field, including the Culture Over Carbon project, which is a research grant allowing museums to measure their greenhouse gas emissions and energy consumption, as well as the efficacy of sustainability initiatives. This project will provide solid data to aid the field and encourage wide adoption of green museum practices, which will require additional funds for implementation.

Further Information:

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. See the [2021 award recipients](#).

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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.