



SDG 13 focuses on the urgent need for a global response to climate change and a reduction in the greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) that cause it.



COMMUNITY
FOUNDATIONS
OF CANADA

**The Learning
Institute**

Many community foundations are exploring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within their planning, granting, convening, Vital Signs and more. This Fact Sheet is part of a series that focuses on specific SDGs to engage and inspire community foundations of all sizes to deepen their work around these goals.

What is this approach?

The [targets of SDG 13](#) call us to meet our climate commitments, reduce our GHGs, strengthen our resilience to climate disasters, integrate climate change measures into our planning and strategies, and develop our capacity for climate change mitigation and adaptation. Failing to do so will result in dangerous climate change, with severe impacts from extreme temperatures, rising sea levels, collapsing ecosystems, severe threats to water and food security, massive human migration and the loss of millions of lives ([source](#)). We are already starting to see many of these impacts, including in our own backyards in Canada. Despite the challenges, the world is not on track to keeping temperatures below 2°C ([source](#)), and philanthropy can play a much larger role with less than 1% of foundation grants dedicated to SDG 13 globally ([source](#)).

WORDS YOU SHOULD KNOW

The Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement is the international commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and avoid dangerous climate change by keeping global warming below 2°C and ideally below 1.5°C. Many countries have gone further and committed to becoming net-zero economies where any GHG emissions are balanced by the emissions absorbed from the atmosphere.

— [A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT AND A HEALTHY ECONOMY](#)

Canada's approach to SDG 13 is spelled out in the [Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change](#) (PCF). The PCF is designed to reduce Canada's greenhouse gas emissions by 30% below 2005 levels by 2030. In 2020, the Government of Canada released its [Healthy Environment and a Healthy Economy](#) plan, which provides a roadmap for realizing the PCF and achieving Canada's SDG 13 targets.

The Plan includes five main action areas:

1. Energy efficiency in homes and buildings.
2. Lower-emission transportation options.
3. Increased price on carbon pollution.
4. Support for the decarbonization of Canadian industry.
5. Planting of trees and the increased preservation of natural spaces.

Underlying the Pan-Canadian Framework is the Government of Canada's commitment to strengthen collaboration with Indigenous peoples, based on recognition of rights, respect, cooperation and partnership. The Government of Canada is committed to ensuring that Indigenous peoples are real partners in Canada's transition to a lower-carbon economy and in building resilience.

— [CANADA VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW 2018](#)

The impacts of climate change will not be felt equally across Canada, and approaches to SDG 13 at the community scale must take into account climate justice. Climate justice acknowledges that the impacts of climate change intersect with race, gender, class, age and geographic location, leading to some groups being more impacted by climate change and marginalized by the projects and policies that aim to address it. Climate justice requires us to take these differences into account so that climate action reduces inequality rather than amplifying it.

Community scale approaches to SDG 13 include:

- Educating the public and raising awareness.
- Planting trees and conserving nature.
- Reducing waste and promoting zero-waste options.
- Monitoring community GHG emissions.
- Increasing public transport and cycling options.
- Switching to renewable energy and electric vehicles.
- Growing more local food.
- Increasing energy efficiency in homes and offices.
- Planning and preparing for extreme weather conditions.
- Supporting the transition to jobs in industries with low or no GHG emissions.

The approaches are diverse, but Canadian communities recognize the urgency of climate action, with 506 Canadian municipalities declaring climate emergencies ([source](#)). Chances are you are already living in one of these communities.

As the climate crisis deepens, foundations and other actors in the philanthropic sector worldwide are identifying climate change as an immediate priority requiring bold action. With current and impending climate catastrophes, growing inequalities and increasing greenhouse gas emissions, the climate crisis is an existential threat to our species and the planet.

— [PAN-CANADIAN FRAMEWORK ON CLEAN GROWTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE](#)

**Why is it important for grantmakers?**

Climate change threatens to roll back decades of progress made by community foundations. Despite bold ambition, Canada is not on track to meet its GHG reduction targets and is one of the largest emitters of greenhouse gases per capita in the world. Municipal governments have influence over, or directly control, 50% of Canada's GHG emissions ([source](#)), and nearly 200 community foundations are located in a municipality that has declared a climate emergency. Cities and towns are where the impacts of climate change will be felt, and 88% of Canadians are already being adversely affected by climate change with 56% significantly affected ([source](#)). At the same time, climate action remains one of the most underfunded areas by foundations in Canada ([source](#)). There is clearly an important role for local grantmakers to support community climate action and progress on SDG 13.

Many grantmakers and community foundations are already responding to the challenge of climate change. [Unflood Ontario](#) brings together 12 community foundations and a wide network of supporters and partners to address the risk of flooding caused by global warming and the climate crisis, including through green infrastructure and community flood reduction actions. The Ottawa Community Foundation (OCF) is a partner for the Low Carbon Cities Canada network, with the goal of removing barriers to new technologies, policies and financial tools that reduce carbon emissions. As part of this initiative, OCF is incubating the [Ottawa Climate Action Fund](#) to catalyze and scale low-carbon solutions. London Community Foundation and Kitchener Waterloo Community Foundation are looking to measure their carbon footprints, and CFC is working with Foundant to offset greenhouse gas emissions ([source](#)). Canadian grantmakers have also partnered to create the [Clean Economy Fund](#) and the [Low Carbon Funders Group](#), and CFC is participating in a research project to advance the role of foundations in supporting climate action ([source](#)).

At the same time, investing in SDG 13 can provide “co-benefits” that support the work of community foundations by addressing multiple social, environmental and economic challenges. In 2019, the Centre Wellington Community Foundation partnered in the Green Legacy Program and planted 24,000 trees in Wellington County. Tree planting has been shown to deliver multiple co-benefits (see box text below), including improving child health, absorbing air pollution and reducing the risk from natural disasters as well as absorbing GHGs. The Green Legacy Program has now planted 2 million trees and has been recognized by the United Nations for their contribution to fighting climate change.

In Quebec, the Eenou-Eeyou Community Foundation has a strong focus on preserving and protecting the Boreal forest, which mitigates climate change, while also protecting native animals and honouring the cultural connections that the community has to these lands. Hamilton Community Foundation has been supporting bike transport, which reduces emissions, improves community health and fitness, and reduces traffic congestion. A key grant in 2016 helped the

Hamilton Bike Share leverage matching funds and expand its network, which has now reached 800 bikes, proving a climate-friendly transport option for the city. Northern communities are most affected by climate change, and CFC has partnered the Eco-Iqaluit project in Nunavut. This youth-led project harnesses the potential co-benefits of solar energy to lower GHG emissions while addressing multiple community challenges in Iqaluit (the capital city of Nunavut), including high energy costs, food insecurity and dependence on fossil fuels.

WORDS YOU SHOULD KNOW

Multisolving

Finding solutions rooted in justice that reduce fossil fuel use and produce co-benefits in health, resilience and well-being.

— BUILDING CANADA'S LOW CARBON FUTURE

The Multisolving Power of Trees

Just by planting a tree, you can help solve multiple problems and make your community a better place to live:

- Each tree absorbs 45 to 90 kilograms of CO₂.
- Trees make hot days cooler and reduce your energy bill.
- Having a view of trees outside your hospital window will shorten a hospital stay.
- Asthma rates fall when children have more trees in their neighbourhood.
- Trees reduce wind and water damage from storms.
- Having just 10 trees on your block will make you feel seven years younger.
- Urban forests absorb tens of thousands of tonnes of air pollution every year.

— MULTISOLVING INSTITUTE

The COVID-19 pandemic has created the opportunity to bring multiple co-benefits together through a green and just recovery — an economic recovery that is in line with Canada’s climate change targets, our commitment to reconciliation, equity and fairness, and the need to address pressing social and environmental issues; a recovery that supports climate justice and prioritizes those most affected by climate change in the transition to a net-zero economy. A just and green recovery could create 3.9 million construction jobs by 2050, restore our natural environment and improve the health of communities across Canada ([source](#)). Cities and towns will play a key role in this transition, and 428 Canadian municipalities have already developed local climate change action plans through the [Partners for Climate Protection](#) program. Important opportunities exist for grantmakers to fill gaps in climate action, convene for a just and green transition, and invest strategically to advance progress on SDG 13 ([source](#)).

In Canada, a just transition includes support for workers and communities affected by climate change and the decline of the fossil fuels industry, embedding equity and fairness in climate policies by considering how they (and climate change) affect populations differently (e.g., low-income, racialized, rural vs. urban) and working with and empowering Indigenous communities, respecting their rights and territories.

— [BUILDING CANADA’S LOW CARBON FUTURE](#)



Common principles to get started

There are many opportunities for community foundations to support action on SDG 13 from funding grassroots projects and supporting [local climate change action plans](#) to pooling funds with other grantmakers and participating in national climate change coalitions. With any approach, an intersectional lens means that we should strive for climate justice and make sure we are supporting those most affected by climate change. The integrated nature of the SDGs also means that we will not be able to achieve SDG 13 unless we support progress across all of the goals. For Community Foundations of Canada, gender equality and climate action are inseparable. The impact of climate change is greater for women, girls, two-spirit people and gender-diverse people, while involving these groups can accelerate climate action. For example, lifting women out of poverty has been linked to reductions in GHGs, while women leaders are more likely to support action on climate change ([source](#)).

01 Learn and understand

- Develop your climate competency and stay up to date on the latest trends and models for climate change emissions, risks and solutions in your region or city. To get started, check out the links to the [Canadian Centre for Climate Services](#) and the [Climate Atlas of Canada](#) at the end of this document.
- Use Vital Signs reporting to gather SDG 13 data and track climate change actions and impacts in your community.
- Host Vital Conversations to understand how community members are being affected differently, and identify climate justice priorities.
- Connect with local climate experts and community organizations, and learn more about the solutions and challenges they are working on.
- Learn how other Canadian communities are tackling climate change by visiting the website of [Partners for Climate Protection](#).

With a focus on immediate funding areas, funders might miss climate-related threats that could undermine their efforts or fail to see opportunities to create co-benefits. Funders need to develop the tools to take a broader view of their social impact grantmaking and apply a climate lens when planning their giving strategies.

— [FUNDING THE FUTURE](#)

02 Apply an SDG 13 lens to your work

- Analyze how the effects of climate change could impact your current programming and identify potential risks for your organization’s long-term strategies and goals ([Canadian Centre for Climate Services](#) and the [Climate Atlas of Canada](#)).
- Explore how funding climate action in your community could generate co-benefits for existing programming that advance progress across your foundation’s goals. Visit Climate Interactive’s [Multisolving](#) website for different co-benefit case studies.
- Analyze how current granting can incentivize low-emission activities, such as green construction, zero-waste catering or electric vehicle rental, or provide offsets, such as tree planting, for high-emission activities. Visit the David Suzuki Foundation for more information on [GHG offsetting](#).
- Monitor your foundation’s GHG emissions and reduce your climate footprint through adjusting your travel and procurement policies. Envirocentre’s [toolkit](#) has tips on how to measure and reduce your organization’s GHG emissions.

03 Strategic grantmaking

- Use your grantmaking to support your community’s [local climate change action plan](#), and identify your role in Canada’s national plan.
- Identify funding gaps in local climate action, for example nature-based solutions such as tree planting receive only 2% of climate funds ([source](#)).
- Invest in innovative climate solutions. Dedicate funding to climate actions and a just and green transition, such as the creation of the [Ottawa Climate Action Fund](#).
- Focus funding on initiatives that support — and ideally are led by — the community members who will be most affected by climate change. An example is CFC’s partnership with the youth-led [Eco-Iqaluit project](#) in Nunavut.
- Foundations can play a strategic role by providing seed and start-up funds for new climate solutions, such as Hamilton Community Foundation’s [support for bike sharing](#).
- Use data and community consultations to find your climate focus: What kinds of emissions will you target? What geographic areas will you focus on? Which populations? Which SDG 13 funding gaps will you address?



Nature-based solutions for climate harness the power of nature to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and also help us adapt to the impacts of climate change. They are win-win solutions that involve protecting, restoring and sustainably managing ecosystems to address society’s challenges and promote human well-being.

— [WWF](#)

04 Lead and collaborate

- Develop a bold vision for climate action in your community, and integrate it into your foundation's strategic planning and organizational priorities.
- Raise awareness of climate change issues you have identified in the community, advocate for local action, and celebrate local climate solutions.
- Engage your partners and encourage their leadership in SDG 13 activities.
- Encourage your municipality to join the [Partners for Climate Protection](#) and to develop a [local climate change action plan](#) (if they have not already).
- Build and support cross-sector partnerships for SDG 13 and climate justice. The impacts of climate change are too complex to tackle alone, and foundations can benefit from collaborating on projects and pooling resources. See the [Unflood Ontario](#) initiative that brings together 12 community foundations.
- Join existing national networks and coalitions for action on SDG 13, including the [Clean Economy Fund](#), [Low Carbon Funders](#) and [Low Carbon Cities Canada](#).
- Push for political action and policy change through advocacy work, meeting with local politicians and public engagement campaigns. See the work of the [Seattle Foundation](#) and their support for climate justice.

Climate Change Guide: A Summary of the Five Steps

Step 1: How much can I give and over what time frame?

Step 2: What type of emissions will I target?

Step 3: What change-making approach will I target?

Step 4: Which community organizations are aligned with my funding strategy?

Step 5: How can I work with other funders to grow the social and economic movement for change?

— [AEGN CLIMATE GUIDE](#)

Resource list

What Every Foundation Can Do About the Climate Crisis

- A short 3-page primer on how foundations can take action on climate change.
- Four ways that foundations can begin their engagement with climate change.

Building Canada's Low Carbon Future: Opportunities for the Philanthropic Sector

- Pages 10–29 provide examples of opportunities for philanthropy to support climate action with a focus on levers for systems change in Canada.
- Pages 29–37 give recommendations and list tools for enabling climate action.

Foundations and Climate Action: Exploratory Research

- Pages 16–26 provide an overview of how Canadian and international foundations are approaching climate action, including divergent and common strategies.
- Pages 27–44 contain case studies of individual foundations and their work on climate change, including several examples from Canada.

Funding the Future: How the Climate Crisis Intersects with Your Giving

- An 84-page report that focuses on the intersections between climate change and other philanthropic funding areas.
- Pages 13–67 cover examples of how climate change intersects with public health, disadvantaged groups, education, nature conversation, justice and democracy.
- Pages 68–71 summarize good practices for engaging with climate change.

Funding Through a Climate Lens: How Can Funders Strategically Respond to Climate Change?

- A webpage that provides a brief introduction to working with a climate lens for grantmaking, including four steps for adopting a climate lens.

Multisolving: One Action, Many Benefits

- A detailed online guide that introduces multisolving as a technique for developing community solutions rooted in justice that reduce fossil fuel use and produce co-benefits in health, resilience and well-being.
- Includes multisolving tools, webinars and visual resources.
- Case studies of multisolving projects and COVID-19 recovery strategies.

Canadian Centre for Climate Services

- A government website set up to help Canadians understand, and become more resilient to, climate change.
- A library of Canadian climate change reports and guides, including how to assess climate vulnerability in your community.
- Climate data and maps for regions and communities across Canada.
- A free help desk where you call and get help from experts on how to access and use climate data and information.

Climate Atlas of Canada

- An interactive map that allows you to explore the different impacts of changing climate across Canada.
- Climate change impact reports for specific Canadian regions and cities.