

Climate + Sustainability Plan

2025-2030



This work takes place on unceded, traditional and ancestral territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish) and səłilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples, where Emily Carr University of Art + Design is located in Vancouver, Canada.

Skwácháys, the area around our campus, is also the home of many plant and animal beings, such as eelgrass, seaweeds and mollusks who once thrived in the now-drained intertidal zone.

Practicing humility, gratitude and respect for Host Nations, relatives, neighbours and all beings is central to our work.

Introduction

Emily Carr University's Strategic Plan 2024-2030 describes a key commitment to "sustainable and ecological practices" and outlines a key objective to "act sustainably and respond in a meaningful way to the climate crisis and habitat degradation". The University Strategic Plan outlines in its Objectives the scope of work ahead and lists a Climate Action Plan as a Key Performance Indicator for Priority #4 – Stewarding Places and Spaces.

This Climate + Sustainability Plan (CSP) was developed in parallel with the University's Strategic Plan 2024-2030 as an accompanying plan intended to more comprehensively address our mandate for institutional climate and sustainability action, reflecting the scale, urgency and complexity of environmental justice work.

The following document represents the work of many people who have generously offered their concerns, hopes, time, and diverse ideas for how we might further the intersectional goals of sustainability, social justice, ecological literacy and climate action within our complex community at Emily Carr University of Art + Design. The document represents a living holistic plan for action that reaches across the university, its student body, faculty and staff, its curriculum, the many communities are embedded within, and the lands we occupy and are situated on.

The 2025-30 Climate + Sustainability Plan emerged through consultation and dialogue with faculty, staff, and students. It reflects the priorities of ECU's community for climate and sustainability related action within an art and design university of excellence. It provides a framework for how the University can move forward in this time of climate emergency, habitat degradation and biodiversity loss. The Plan identifies 5 themes to address these challenges, each theme with a list of Actions identified by the ECU community.

The Plan aims to increase our community's capacity for engaging with the climate emergency, building sustainability, social justice and ecological literacy.

Context

In the fall of 2019, an ad hoc committee was formed with the goal of defining the university's response to the climate crisis. This committee reviewed initiatives from various ECU groups over the past decade including the Sustainability Working Group, the 180° Sustainability Group, Creatives with Intent and the Emily Carr Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability (DESI Lab). They also reviewed the metrics and reporting necessary to maintain our building's LEED status. The Emily Carr community has generated significant resources on sustainability and ecological literacy over the past decade.

The ad hoc committee recommended that a Climate Action Task Force (CATF) be struck to formalize this work. This included formulating new strategies, policies and practices to support a university-wide commitment to address the climate crisis.

The CATF approached this collaboratively and sought to engage the Emily Carr community through formal and informal engagement, such as faculty, student, and staff surveys, town halls, expert interviews, conversations, and meetings. This work and a CATF research report into a selection of Canadian universities climate plans led to the review of current approaches and the development of recommendations. Additional workshops were held to build on the work of the sub-committees and generate next steps from the recommendations. Following these workshops, 150+ recommended actions were synthesized into the Themes, Actions, and Implementation Strategies in this document.

Themes

This plan has been organized into five Themes.

1. Cultivate Ecological Education
2. Investment, Commitment, & Accountability
3. Elevate Indigenous Ways of Knowing
4. Empower Community Sustainability
5. Materiality, Waste & Emissions

Within each theme there are defined Recommended Actions, broken down into steps towards implementation. The Recommended Actions were determined by the CATF and in discussion with community members. The Actions are forward looking and act as indicators of success, as a way for the community to measure progress.

1. Cultivate Ecological Education

We are committed to making the existing sustainability curriculum more accessible, expanding ecological curricular pathways, and building internal capacity for teaching and modeling ecological literacy.

Recommended Actions

Support enhancement of Foundation program and orientation to include knowledge and practice about climate and sustainability.

Create a mnemonic (CLIM, ECOL, LAND, SUST) to cross-list current courses that address climate change, ecological, land-based and sustainable practices.

Support integration of decolonization, indigenization, and anti-colonial practices into curriculum and pedagogy.

Support development of Ecological Practice minors within multiple Faculties.

Clarify ‘program area’ pathways that address climate change, ecological, land-based, and sustainable practices.

Support the creation of immersive and flexible learning experiences to include ecological and land-based methods.

Pathways forward

- field schools, workshops and alternate learning formats to promote ecological literacy and values.
- outdoor spaces on campus, including Wilson Plaza, landscaping beds, and balcony spaces for outdoor teaching.
- professional development opportunities for faculty and staff on ecological literacy, land-based knowledge and pedagogy, sustainability, and ecological and social justice issues.
- document and disseminate associated curriculum and research initiatives at Emily Carr
- support opportunities for faculty to build curriculum initiatives in climate change, ecological, land-based, and sustainable practices.
- Support interdisciplinary, peer-to-peer connections across faculties and areas.

Support the development of an interdisciplinary graduate program dedicated to climate change, ecological, land-based and sustainable practices

2. Investment, Commitment, & Accountability

We are committed to addressing the climate crisis by aligning our efforts with resources and strategic priorities. We are building mechanisms for accountability and transparency.

Recommended Actions

Integrate sustainability into the university identity by placing and ensuring ecological ideals are part of policies, plans and strategies, including the ECU Strategic Plan, the ECU Strategic Research Plan, ECU Governance Statement, and fundraising strategies.

Work with University Advancement to cultivate resources in support of research grants for faculty to address climate change, ecological, land-based and sustainable practices.

Seek resources and funding opportunities to expand the number of undergraduate awards for student work on climate change, and ecological, land-based and sustainable practices.

Explore feasibility of establishing an Office of Sustainability and/or Fund a sustainability coordinator position to advance climate and sustainability action.

Explore feasibility of divesting institutional financial investments from fossil fuels.

3. Embrace Indigenous Ways of Knowing

Emily Carr University is situated on the unceded lands of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples, as well as the displaced habitat of numerous species. Through consultation, collaboration, and continued learning with Indigenous partners and local Coast Salish Communities to respectfully ensure their input, we seek to integrate Indigenous ways of knowing and being throughout our sustainability work. We work to restore relationships with ecosystems we displace.

Recommended Actions

Support initiatives led by Aboriginal Gathering Place (AGP) to connect with the living land where ECU is situated.

Pathways forward

- Create signage recognizing the Indigenous territories the campus is situated upon; signage that references the land, directions, access points to the campus, Indigenous knowledge about points and histories throughout the grounds, information about the totem gateways.
- Share land-based knowledge through workshops and field trips, creating opportunities to extend teaching beyond the classroom and into the land when relevant.

Affirm and support Indigenous knowledge and traditions.

Pathways forward

- Invite traditional and cultural modes of knowledge sharing through fostering cultural oral knowledge-sharing traditions and a culture of storytelling.
- Expand witnessing practices at AGP events.
- Maintain commitment to fairly compensate Indigenous knowledge holders for their work.
- Work with relevant partners to recommend Increasing ecological richness of ECU campus habitats through incorporating more diverse native species plantings.
- Highlight planting of native plant species on campus and connect this to curriculum and campus community/activities.
- Create a system for use of garden beds and planters to ensure continuity of use by community (including those on the 2nd and 4th floors).
- Review landscape maintenance practices and make changes to increase biodiversity and habitat.
- Support culturally appropriate documentation and archiving of knowledge from guest speakers, workshop leaders, and other events centering Indigenous knowledge and traditions, in alignment with OCAP principles as relevant

Re-contextualize our institutional activities with an awareness of our ecology.

Pathways forward

- Highlight curricular and public program opportunities to learn about hydrology, ecology, land history across spheres of staff, students and faculty.
- Identify places in our planning, policy, and community efforts that consider more-than-human stakeholders (or places where those considerations are missing).

Enhance the livability of our campus.

Pathways forward

- Introduce and expand spaces of respite from noise or artificial light. Purchase more plants for common areas.

Collaborate with and actively seek ways to expand inclusion.

Pathways forward

- Form joint projects and partnerships with Indigenous community members.
- Proactively invite and welcome Indigenous community members into campus space.

4. Empower Community Sustainability

We are committed to supporting the creation, cultivation, and sharing of resources and space with our community including our geographical neighbours, host nations, local organizations, and native flora and fauna. By engaging our community and the public in our sustainability actions, we magnify the impact of our work.

Recommended Actions

Develop an internal-facing system to communicate building emissions information to ECU Community and enhance transparency around campus operations.

Pathways forward

- Collect existing operational analytics to generate a shareable report on emissions for internal use.
- Develop an internal workflow to share regular updates on sustainability webpage.

Develop a public web page to share ECU sustainability initiatives and communicate existing and ongoing efforts towards the goal of transparency and integrating sustainability as an important part of university identity.

Pathways forward

- Centralize information about sustainability at ECU on a single webpage, including links to courses, programs, initiatives, events and news stories. Have a sustainability tab visible on the ECU homepage so that information is easily accessible.
- Develop a glossary of terms for sustainability and ecological literacy to be included on the website.
- Explore opportunities for communicating sustainability efforts that align with broader national or international best practices (e.g. the UN Race to Zero campaign)

Increase communication, signage and visibility of sustainability initiatives.

Pathways forward

- Introduce a general sustainability cork board in a central area, including notices of events, outreach for collaboration, swaps, etc.
- Work with Communications + Marketing to share information on events, initiatives, materials etc. and collaborations on climate and sustainability projects
- Devote a higher percentage of stories to sustainability-related news.
- Increase awareness of sustainability initiatives on campus through workshops, speaker series, alumni talks, signage, film series, postering, and QR codes that link to information about these programs.
- Implement public-facing energy-use information, using data already collected, on display screens around school.

Develop inventory of past and ongoing initiatives at ECU.

Pathways forward

- Continued stewardship of the library's sustainability Lib-guide by adding current ECU initiatives, events, and reports.

Support a culture of care at ECU, integrating climate-focused skills and knowledge throughout campus life.

Pathways forward

- Work with students to offer climate anxiety support through workshops and wellness.
- Build a mentoring program between undergrads and graduate students working on climate change, ecological, land-based and sustainable practices.
- Facilitate community learning through thematic townhalls and workshops.

Make sustainable, ethical and local food available for community.

Pathways forward

- Create a sustainable food options guide.
- Research and provide a list of sustainable event catering for campus and community events.
- Explore feasibility of acquiring lendable containers to replace single-use containers.
- Work collaboratively with campus food providers to encourage and communicate sustainable eating, increasing proportion of plant-based items and/or removing meat options.
- Communicate information about food sources and percentages of plant-based items on the cafeteria menu.

Map and foster grassroots activities and initiatives.

Pathways forward

- Support swaps, repair clubs, exchanges and other share- repair-reuse activities on campus. Support a central, user-friendly interface on the ECU website to connect ECU community members.
- Host gardening and foraging clubs oriented to a mix of staff and students.
- Provide information about local organizations related to sustainability.
- Model a Sustainability Challenge for staff after the Wellness Challenge run by HR.
- Participate in worldwide initiatives such as 'Plastic Free July'.

Collaborate with broader community of sustainability.

Pathways forward

- Explore opportunities to host sustainability-related community groups to use the indoor or outdoor space at ECU for meetups, membership recruitment events, farmer's markets, urban agriculture.
- Encourage faculty and staff to develop research partnerships and programs related to

sustainability. For example, partner with a sustainable organization and apply for a (Mitacs) grant to do design work for the company, or Shumka Centre programs.

- Work with Shumka Centre to mobilize contacts/interactions with local organizations and build relationships.

Become a space for neighbourhood resiliency.

Pathways forward

- Explore partnerships to increase accessibility for community-driven events
- Offer building space (such as the Library or Theatre) as a cooling center for community members/public during extreme heat events, including at night if necessary.

5. Materiality, Waste & Emissions

As an art and design institution, material usage is essential to both our operations and curriculum. We are committed to adopting innovative sustainable material practices in our teaching and research. While Emily Carr University has minimized direct emissions on our Great Northern Way campus, indirect emissions need to be accounted for as we work towards eliminating greenhouse gas emissions.

Recommended Actions

Explore creating a centralized materials exchange or recycling hub that is integrated with curriculum.

Pathways forward

- Support faculty and staff to develop opportunities to streamline recycling and re-use of materials between areas where that currently happens in an ad-hoc way
- Consider the possibility of including materials exchange and re-use in curriculum/assignments to promote working in a circular economy.
- Develop the materials exchange to be a coordinated effort – make it simple/automated to minimize barriers (through an app, buy nothing group).
- Explore feasibility of Integrating materials re-use and exchange into existing services such as the Tool Checkout and Shops.

Encourage the incorporation of waste diversion practices and education into curriculum and studio work.

Increase awareness of studio waste, especially the “art objects to garbage pipeline.”

Pathways forward

- Support faculty and staff in developing communications about waste at ECU that can be included in prompts, studio/shop orientations and assignments,
- Encourage students and faculty explore waste and recycling information so students can see the streams of where materials can end up.
- Include curricular project requirements to address endpoint /waste plan of art and design objects.
- Investigate alternatives to fabrication practices that are not reversible.
- Develop comprehensive procurement strategy with aim to promote sustainable and ethical procurement, including database of preferred post-consumer products, circular economy partnerships and local procurement options.
- Consider system changes such as how financial services can support purchasing used goods.
- Expand partnerships with vendors specializing in post-consumer products.

Examine opportunities to transition toward more sustainable material practices that are less toxic, materially intensive, wasteful, and/or support alternative patterns of use.

Pathways forward

- Engage Material Matters lab to learn about best practices in developing eco-materials culture.
- Support land-based approaches to material making and use.
- Support harm-reduced practices for material use.
- Implement materials audit through Technical Services.
- Research best practices and cutting-edge standards.
- Connect initiatives to critical, social, behaviour, and transition change research on alternatives to consumption.

Evaluate indirect emissions from Information Technology Services to identify opportunities for reduction.

Pathways forward

- Encourage use of sustainable data storage and cloud providers in new licensing opportunities.
- Employ best practices for electronic waste disposal.
- Evaluate current data needs and explore opportunities for records management to avoid impacts of storing unused/unnecessary digital records.
- Evaluate computing purchases for sustainable manufacturing and energy-saving criteria.
- Explore feasibility of changing print vendor to include a shift to alternative ink and paper products, such as vegetable ink and paper made from sugar cane by-product, a printer ecosystem with fewer printers, paper usage reports showing numbers in number of trees saved.

Support development of plastics reduction action plan for campus life.

Pathways forward

- Reduce or eliminate many of the single use or disposable plastic products and provide alternative practices and circular use systems for food and drink on campus. Including storage, collection, and washing stations.
- Recognize the scale of plastics use and its role in the contamination of every ecosystem and biological system on earth and the need to develop substantial action across campus and in our design practices

Limit electricity use as much as possible on campus.

Pathways forward

- Identify worst “energy offenders” e.g., photo lights, kettles.
- Develop educational campaign for the ECU community, encouraging staff, students, and faculty to unplug equipment and appliances when not in use.

Explore process for quantifying Scope 3 indirect emissions.

Pathways forward

- If feasible, conduct Greenhouse Gas Corporate Standard Protocol analysis.
- Establish goal to develop emissions analysis across departments.

* According to monthly ECU recycling reports, the biggest campus contributor to landfill is discarded or abandoned art objects made up of multiple items that can’t be dismantled.

Indicators of Success

Our Climate + Sustainability Plan will guide our activities and allow us to evaluate our progress through the review of the Action items within each theme.

Indicators of Emily Carr’s climate action and sustainability impact and evolution will be seen across:

- Robust participation of faculty, students, and staff
- Indigenous-led initiatives
- Collaborations with community partners and other institutions
- Visibility of climate action and sustainability activities on a local, national and international scale
- Institutional investment in advancing Recommended Actions

Planning and Approval

The 2025-30 Climate and Sustainability Plan (CSSP) was written in consultation with a broad cross-section of faculty, staff, administration and students, and developed under the leadership of the Climate Action Task Force co-chaired by faculty from DDM and Art, and staff.

Our CSP was approved by the President’s Executive Committee in spring 2025 and will serve as a guiding document ensuring continued refinement and alignment with Emily Carr community over the next 5 years.