

2025

ANNUAL
REPORT



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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

We knew the results of last year's election would have consequences, but what we didn't know was how direct and acute the attacks on higher education would be. The new administration launched an all-out federal assault on the higher education sector - from research funding to administrative practices to academic freedom. When combined with the expected anti-climate and anti-DEI positions, this wasn't a year of headwinds; it was a whirlwind of chaos designed to confuse, divide, and destroy much of what has made US higher education a model for the world.

Additionally, 2025 marked the final year of our three-year strategic plan, which was anchored in the idea of "Diversify to Unify". The more recent accomplishments that resulted from this strategy are included in this report. As with the end of any planning cycle, there isn't a hard stop when a plan is done and a hard start for the next one to begin. Throughout 2025, we've been reviewing the assumptions that shaped our strategy and have begun to craft new ideas based on the relevant lessons, successes, and context we see.

In response to both external and internal considerations, we're concluding that

the critical importance of unity cannot be overstated. There are so many forces currently pulling the sector apart. And from the last strategy, we learned that diversifying is relatively easy, but unifying afterward is challenging. In our programming, communications, use of data, and partnerships, we see ourselves as a unifier of the sector's climate efforts and believe that this value and focus can eventually be manifest across the sector as a whole.

During moments of total disruption to a system, some folks have an easier time with the art of the possible. This past year demonstrated that we can still find successes in working out our mission, even as we anticipate a future that is different than what we could have imagined last year. I hope you find some of these examples helpful, and we look forward to pushing into the unification years ahead.

As always, we're deeply grateful for your partnership and support,



Tim Carter
President





1 | MOBILIZING
THE HIGHER
EDUCATION SECTOR

POLICY/ADVOCACY

Second Nature's work to accelerate climate action in higher education has spanned five U.S. presidential administrations, facing various headwinds and tailwinds throughout this time. One thing has remained constant: the higher education sector plays a vital role in helping society overcome the challenges caused by climate change.

Elections have consequences. In January 2025, a presidential executive order mandated the US's **withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement**, and by July, the EPA had proposed to **rescind the 2009 Greenhouse Gas Endangerment Finding** (that greenhouse gases endanger public health). In tandem with these climate backtracks, the higher education sector has confronted unprecedented challenges, ranging from funding cutbacks to targeted scrutiny on diversity and equity initiatives at institutions.

Climate action and sustainability work in the higher education sector were specifically targeted, and Second Nature was nimble and responsive to sectoral needs. In 2025, **we expanded our policy team to include a Climate Policy Manager and a Climate Policy Fellow** to support this work.

2025 KEY POLICY/ADVOCACY INITIATIVES

COALITION-BASED ADVOCACY ON H.R.1

As the Congressional budget reconciliation process made national headlines in 2025, Second Nature worked closely with key coalitions to protect the vital Direct (Elective) Pay tax credits in the **Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)**. Working closely with the **Alliance on Climate and Tax (ACT)**, **America Is All In (AIAI)**, **Invest in Our Future (IOF)**, and other groups, Second Nature provided advocacy guidance to institutions in key Congressional districts nationwide to preserve these clean energy tax credits.

**AMERICA IS
ALL IN**

IRA COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Second Nature bridged the gap between higher education institutions and the **Inflation Reduction Act's** potential for accelerating clean energy solutions. After months of member and sector feedback and engagement, we launched the **IRA Community of Practice (CoP)**. The CoP included campuses and service providers exploring project opportunities under the IRA and similar federal funding provisions (IIJA and BIL). The group met monthly to learn and share insights on technical assistance for project assessment, application, and funding using these federal incentive programs. The IRA CoP will transition to the **Policy, Action, and Climate Engagement (PACE)** working group in 2026.



POLICY/ADVOCACY RESOURCES

CLIMATE POLICY WEBINAR SERIES

Second Nature in partnership with the **American Council on Education (ACE)**, launched a new series of webinars—*Charting Opportunities and Challenges in Higher Education's Climate Action Journey*—tailored to help campus leaders, sustainability staff, and climate advocates anticipate challenges and identify opportunities to lead in this rapidly shifting policy landscape. The webinar series will continue in 2026.

[Learn more here.](#)

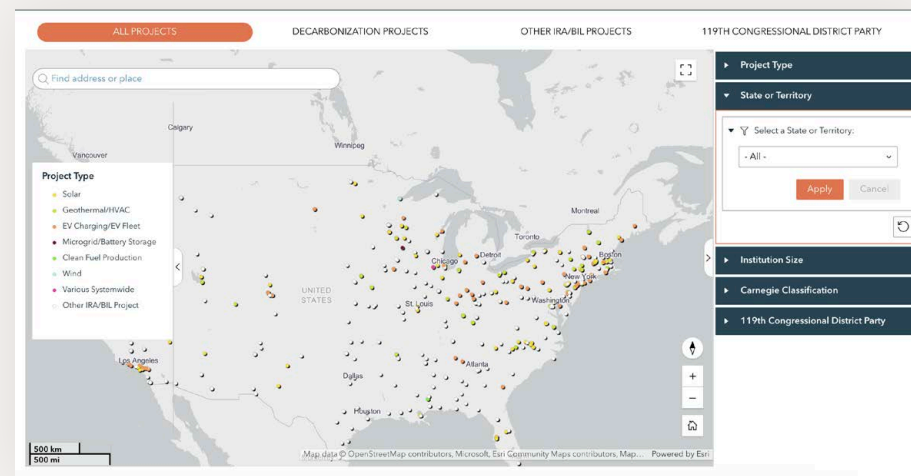


HIGHER EDUCATION CLEAN ENERGY PROJECTS MAP

Developed by Second Nature as part of our policy and advocacy efforts, the following map views display over 700 clean energy projects across higher education institutions nationwide. The vast majority of projects showcased here are from 2021 onwards, and, to the best of our knowledge, could have qualified for, or used, the **Elective Pay provision (IRA)**. They show a cross-section of the sector's leadership's volume, scale, and diversity in creating impactful climate solutions.

We hope this map tool can serve as a resource for higher education sustainability professionals to make the case for continued investment in climate action projects, attract new funding streams for these types of projects, and support clean energy advocacy efforts at the federal, state, and local levels.

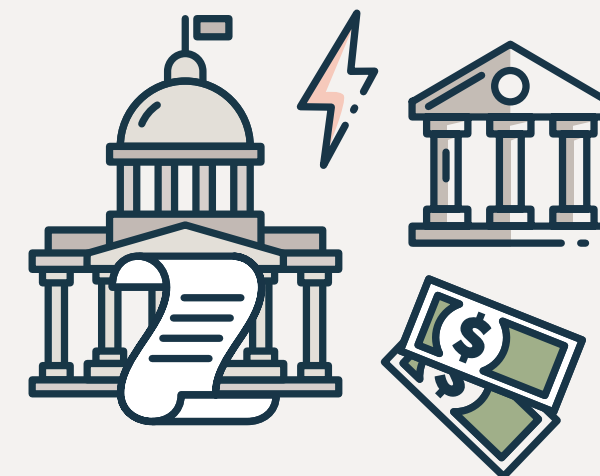
[View the map here.](#)



STATEMENTS AND OTHER RESOURCES

- [Higher Education's Role in Strengthening U.S. Climate Actions](#)
- [Second Nature Opposes Efforts to Undermine Established Science](#)
- [Senate Passes Budget Bill that will Stifle U.S. Innovation](#)
- [Federal Clean Energy Policy Explainer](#)
- [\\$1 Billion in DOE Projects Cancellations Leave Universities in Limbo](#)

Higher education institutions are powerful catalysts for equitable climate action. Second Nature continues to support campuses in responding to climate policies at the federal and state levels, especially during pivotal moments for clean energy and public investments.



THE 2025 HIGHER EDUCATION CLIMATE LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

380+
Attendees

Over 380 higher education professionals gathered in Washington, D.C., February 2-4, 2025, for Second Nature's annual Higher Education Climate Leadership Summit. The event, which took place a few blocks from the White House, provided a welcome contrast to the barrage of presidential executive orders that deprioritized clean energy solutions and proposed to slash federal funding for key climate programs, such as those in the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA),

which provided critical support for the higher education sector's efforts to accelerate impactful climate action.

The 2025 Summit created a much-needed and timely space to garner the sector's collective and complementary strengths, resources, and expertise, celebrate examples of impactful and equitable climate action, and challenge our sector to practice rigorous honesty to address the challenges that will continue to unfold in the months and years ahead.

While federal rollbacks of climate programs and the broader political landscape were topics of discussion at the 2025 Summit, the prevailing "climate" was a call to action for changemakers in higher education.

The programming, plenaries, and peer-to-peer discussions surfaced the urgent need for aggressively expanding the very definition of climate action, calling the sector to engage in subnational advocacy to defend and protect the work already accomplished and continue what remains to be done to create clean-energy solutions to safeguard our planet and our communities (especially those disproportionately impacted by climate change and toxic pollution).

This call to action was clearly and passionately articulated by the speakers in the opening plenary, a panel of committed student climate activist leaders in the closing plenary, and throughout the Summit.



THE 2025 HIGHER EDUCATION CLIMATE LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

As part of the effort to celebrate impactful climate action across the sector, Second Nature's inaugural **Climate Luminary Honors** recognized six member institutions at the 2025 Summit for their exemplary climate action efforts across six distinct categories: decarbonization, justice, community, workforce, research, and climate resilience.



2025 WINNERS

- DECARBONIZATION** - Carleton College
- JUSTICE** - Emory University
- COMMUNITY** - University of Pittsburgh
- WORKFORCE** - Central Community College
- RESEARCH** - University of Toronto
- CLIMATE RESILIENCE** - Warren Wilson College

THE 2025 HIGHER EDUCATION CLIMATE LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

"Throughout the entire Summit, I felt a sense of solidarity and hopefulness. It was also a great networking opportunity."

- 2025 Summit Attendee

"For this Summit, the timing was perfect for everyone who is facing uncertainty, opposition, or obstacles. Being part of a comfortable crowd of long-time friends and new friends gave a lot of us a sense of togetherness and community that we really needed to be reenergized."

- 2025 Summit Attendee

"I thought that the sessions were well-organized and insightful."

- 2025 Summit Attendee

Sponsors and Partners

Thank you to our sponsors and partners for supporting the 2025 Higher Education Climate Leadership Summit.

Intentional Endowments Network

AMERICA IS ALL IN



ECOSYSTEM



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SASAKI



BRAILS FORD DUNLAVEY



FAS FEDERATION OF AMERICAN SCIENTISTS



Global Council for Science and the Environment



Resin



COP30

At COP30, the United States' climate story was defined by subnational leadership—across state and local governments and fields including higher education, health care, business, and culture. **Second Nature** was there, representing the higher education sector, elevating the role of colleges and universities in advancing climate solutions.

A key takeaway from COP30 was that subnational entities of all types, **not just subnational governments**, are showing up for the US. In UN parlance, “subnational” refers specifically to the governments that exist below the national level. But there is another type of subnational actor: sectors such as health care, higher education, business, cultural institutions, etc., that exist in every country “below” the national level. When considering subnational climate action and climate solutions, it’s vital that all these subnational entities – governmental and non-governmental – are recognized as important players. They don’t all do the same thing, but they are all important if we are to align efforts at the necessary speed and scale.

The subnational action narrative at COP30, particularly in the US during a time when the national government is working against climate solutions, was an important one to tell. Despite political headwinds and less public attention, higher education’s climate work remains robust, with hundreds of active projects nationwide and strong public support. COP30 also underscored a simple truth: many climate solutions are all around us, if we move beyond narrow narratives, surface under-appreciated resources, and meet the work with curiosity, humility, and openness to what’s already within reach.

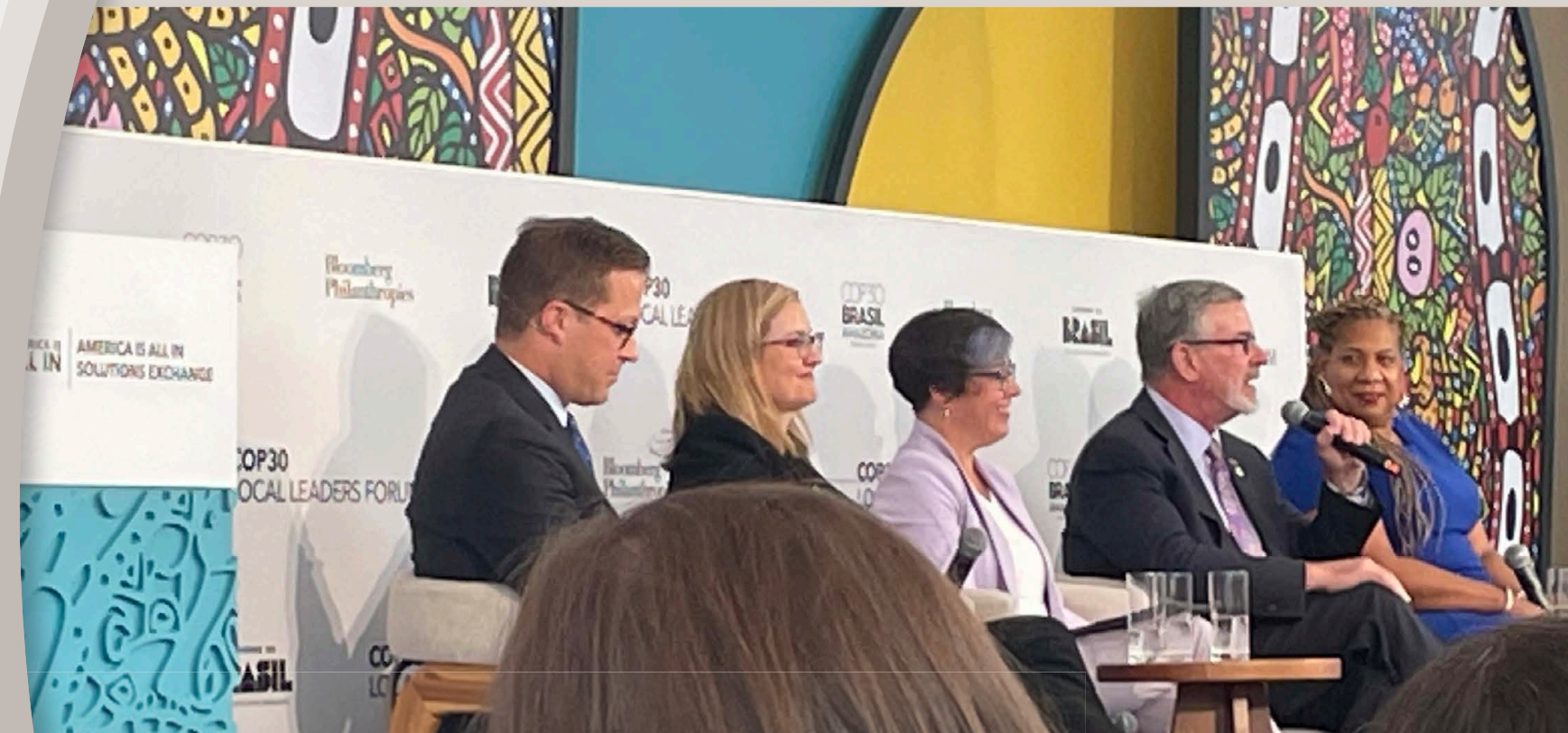
Key COP30 Higher Education Pavillion Events:

- *Education for Empowerment: Shaping the Next Generation of Climate Innovators*
- *Driving solutions through partnerships between higher education and the US government: Aligning congressional priorities with local capacity*

Official UNFCCC Side Event:

- *Higher Education as a Critical Global Partner for Enabling and Accelerating Climate Action*

COP30 BRASIL AMAZÔNIA BELÉM 2025



LETTER FROM SELECT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS SENT TO THE COP30 PRESIDENCY



Belem, November 14, 2025

His Excellency
Ambassador Andre Aranha Correa do Lago
President of COP30

Subject: Commitment of the Higher Education Sector to
Urban Climate Action

Your Excellency,

On behalf of global higher-education leaders and networks, we respectfully request your attention to the urban and subnational agenda in the decisions and outcomes of COP30.

As the world gathers in the Amazonian city of Belém to respond to the Presidency's call for *mutirão* - a collective effort towards accelerated and urgent action on climate and strengthened multilateral cooperation for implementation - the urban and subnational agenda has never been more critical.

Ten years after Paris, progress is being made, yet cities continue to be major sources of greenhouse gases and continue to bear the brunt of climate impacts. The forthcoming IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Cities underscores the importance of dedicated attention and assessment of action opportunities at this level. Additionally, according to the 2025 NDC synthesis, progress on climate action is increasing, yet urgent and critical gaps in implementation remain.

It is essential these implementation gaps are filled as rapidly as possible. We believe there is a vital role for both subnational cooperation and academic collaboration to create urban solutions at necessary speed and scale.

Higher-education institutions are working alongside local and regional governments to advance evidence-based, accelerated, and inclusive climate action and leadership. As our letter of 14 February 2025 highlighted, higher-education institutions act as anchors within their communities - facilitating multi-sector dialogue, driving research and innovation, strengthening capacity, delivering education, and partnering directly with cities and regions. Through these

efforts, our institutions help equip subnational actors with the knowledge, evidence, and tools required to deliver effective and equitable climate action.

Our position reaffirms both the 14 November 2025 letter from the Brazilian State Governors, calling for the urban and subnational agendas to be fully reflected in the final COP30 decisions, and the 30 October letter from the COP30 Special Envoy for Urban Solutions, ICLEI, UCLG, C40, GCoM, and the LGMA Constituency, urging that subnational integration be established as a meaningful legacy of COP30.

We submit that COP30 must leave a clear and durable legacy for cities, regions, and the subnational climate agenda. As a global coalition of higher-education leaders, we stand ready to contribute our knowledge, expertise, and partnerships to support this essential endeavor.

Respectfully,

Kristy Faccer - Co-convenor, Higher Education Climate Network of Networks (NoN), Director, University of Toronto

Stephen Davison - Co-convenor, Higher Education Climate Network of Networks (NoN), Executive Director, University of Cambridge

Charlotte Bonner, Chief Executive Officer, EAUC

Timothy Carter - President, Second Nature

Sara-Anne Comel, Director, Université Côte D'Azur

Kirsten Dunlop, Chief Executive Director, Climate KIC

Tristan McCowan, Lead, Climate-U Network, University of College London

Victoria Smith, Executive Director, International Sustainable Campus Network (ISCN)

Paola Visconti, Global Fellow, ISCN Latin American Chapter, Tecnológico de Monterrey

SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION: How Truckee Meadows Community College Turned a Year of Focus Into a Lasting Legacy

On any given day at Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC), a student might pause along the 1.25-mile campus trail to read one of the new interpretive signs about Great Basin ecology, or a group of children might release pollinators into the campus garden. These moments reflect the heartbeat of a college where sustainability is not just an initiative but a defining part of campus life.

In 2022, TMCC launched a “Year of Sustainability,” launching a movement that continues to transform its culture, infrastructure, and educational approach. “We should and can have a major impact,” said faculty leader Cecilia Vigil. “That’s why we implemented the Year of Sustainability.” The urgency of climate action and the responsibility of higher education to lead by example made this focus both timely and essential.

At the heart of the initiative was a commitment to intergenerational equity and ecological stewardship. In 2024, the year’s central theme, Civic Engagement, encouraged students, faculty, and staff to view sustainability as a shared responsibility that extends from campus to the global stage.

Embedding Sustainability Across Campus

From infrastructure to academics, sustainability became a unifying thread. TMCC invested in wind and solar energy, expanded water-saving systems, and installed hydration stations that activate only when used. Electric vehicle charging stations and public transportation access provided greener commuting options. The college also maintained its Bee Campus USA designation, fostering pollinator habitats, reducing pesticide use, and weaving pollinator conservation into coursework.

Academically, sustainability reached every corner of the curriculum. Through the Faculty for Radical Empowerment and Enlightenment (FREE) program, professors explored new ways to integrate environmental literacy into teaching. Professional development workshops and cross-campus collaboration ensured that sustainability was not confined to





science labs but extended into the humanities, arts, and social sciences.

Civic Engagement in Action

Workshops trained students and faculty to participate in governance at local, national, and even planetary levels. A civic engagement panel brought together representatives from the Reno government, TMCC administrators, and students for a dialogue. Faculty also connected with regional climate activists at Reno-area climate confabs, strengthening TMCC's ties to the broader community.

Student and Community Leadership

Students played a leading role in sustainability projects. They collected and recycled bottle caps with the Shane McConkey Foundation, while the pollinator garden became part of the Northern Nevada Pollinator Garden Tour. The interpretive trail signs brought environmental education directly to the campus community and visitors alike.

Earth Day: A Culminating Celebration

The year's efforts came together during TMCC's Earth Day celebration, the college's second-largest annual event after commencement. More than 40 campus and community organizations participated in a day of music, children's theater, environmental justice sit-ins, pollinator releases, and hands-on projects. The City of Reno even proclaimed the day "TMCC Earth Day," underscoring the college's regional impact.





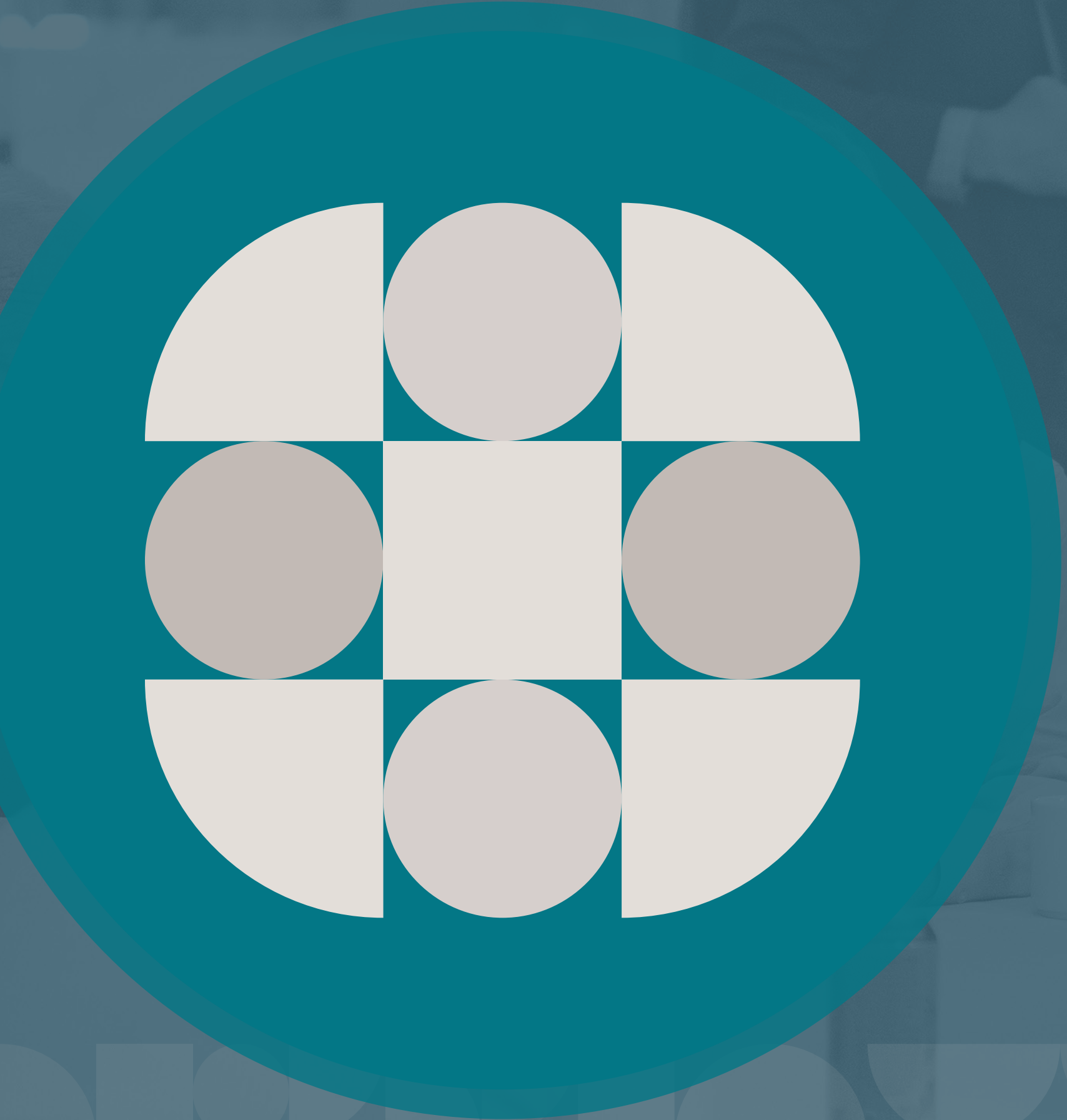
A Sustainable Culture That Lasts

To date, TMCC has launched more than 230 initiatives. These changes embedded sustainability into departmental operations and daily campus life. "Sustainability is infused throughout our operations," said TMCC President Jeffrey Alexander. "Our Year of Sustainability was a terrific way to celebrate our efforts and recommit to this important work."

That momentum continues through the Sustainability Champions Committee, which hosts workshops, develops curriculum, and connects TMCC with the Reno-Tahoe community. As committee chair Roger Putman explains, "Faculty, staff, administration, and students are working together to bring environmental literacy and sustainable living into most aspects of campus life."

The Year of Sustainability proved that sustainability at TMCC is not a moment but a movement, one that prepares students to become tomorrow's leaders, scientists, and professionals. True sustainability is sustained action, and TMCC has shown what it means to lead by example.





2 | SUPPORTING
OUR NETWORK

MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

After Second Nature's 2024 Audience Listening Project, our team synthesized themes from our conversations to inform our work in 2025 and beyond. We entered this year with a better understanding of how climate action happens in our network, spanning operational decarbonization, community engagement, research, and teaching.

We uncovered the central internal and external challenges our members face in making meaningful progress, including funding, capacity, and leadership gaps, as well as political obstacles, systemic injustice, climate anxiety, and extreme weather events.



In 2025, Second Nature initiated prototype ideas to support our members in meeting the challenges they face through our programming and support:

- Improved **onboarding practices** for members, and more careful attention to role turnover and **member relationship management**
- Improved **communication and transparency** about our services, and increased accessibility to Second Nature across institutional roles and departments
- Exploration of **new pro bono** categories to leverage cross-sector expertise to meet our member challenges, including technical planning, community relations, financial advising, and student engagement.
- **Additional working groups** to respond to member needs, including the revival of the Community Colleges Community of Practice, a quarterly new members networking group, and the expansion of our Intersectional Climate Action Leaders group to include more minority serving institutions and more professionals serving those institutions.
- **Diversified educational resources**, including technical assistance on Scope 2 reporting, new data synthesis from SIMAP, and increased offerings for academics pursuing climate action through research and teaching.



WORKING GROUPS & INITIATIVES

The Offsets Advisory Council

This group meets monthly to discuss leading-edge topics in carbon offsets, from technical deep dives into project types (e.g., biochar, cookstoves, and



ODS destruction) to project vetting, ex-ante and multi-year agreements, and procurement strategies. The first two years of this group's meetings were instrumental in the January 2025 publication of Second Nature's [Carbon Markets & Offsets Guidance](#),

which has been cited by members as indispensable in the development of campus offset strategy development, leading to the procurement of high-integrity carbon offsets.

Carbon Pricing Working Group

The Carbon Pricing Working Group consists of campus leaders who meet bi-monthly to discuss strategy, support, and best practices for implementing internal carbon pricing and the social cost of carbon on college and university campuses. In 2025, the working group researched U.S. state-mandated carbon prices, supported one another in developing or revising individual institutional carbon-pricing approaches, and assisted in drafting Second Nature's [Carbon Pricing Recommendations for Higher Education, 2025-2030](#).

Intersectional Climate Action Leaders Working Group (ICAL)

The ICAL working group is comprised of leaders of color who are invested in supporting the nation's minority-serving institutions (MSIs). With staffing transitions and a rethinking of strategy, ICAL's mission was revised to more substantively explore the distinctiveness of MSIs' climate action and to connect ICAL more closely with Second Nature programming. ICAL meets once a month to discuss current events and coordinate efforts for select content at the Higher Education Climate Leadership Summit.

Community College Community of Practice

The Community College Community of Practice (CoP) was reconvened in 2025 and meets monthly. The CoP's structure is open. Participants can listen, share, and/or come with questions or situations they are navigating to seek support from their peers. Topics explored include transportation/commuting data collection and tracking methods, budgeting/financing climate and sustainability initiatives, Local/State Climate Initiatives, and procurement strategies.



WORKING GROUPS & INITIATIVES

Commitments 3.0 Working Group

Second Nature staff met with various member constituencies that could be affected by potential changes to guidance (e.g., those who use biomass and carbon-neutral schools). Second Nature staff compiled and drafted a more comprehensive version of the Milestone Program and collected essential feedback.

Climate Justice Working Group

The Climate Justice Working Group met every month from January to July. Main topics were responses and support for federal policy changes, and the creation of a Presidential Anticipation document identifying the administration's actions on DEIAJ and climate in higher education, as well as solutions for moving forward.

Academic Leaders Alliance

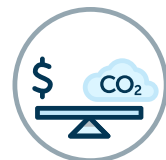
The Academic Leaders Alliance met monthly and, in May, began a series of facilitated discussions on how campus-wide inter/transdisciplinary climate and sustainability initiatives (e.g., institutes, centers, offices, programs, colleges) were funded, managed, and built. The group used a case-study approach to the discussions, in which a single institution shared the story of its initiative. The group asked questions and proposed ideas for the institution. Six cases were discussed, and a synthesis document was produced that summarized the key insights.



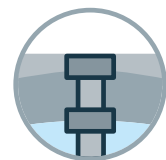
SOLUTIONS CENTER

Solutions Center identifies more than 36 carbon and energy reducing activities to support campus climate action goals. The objective of the Solutions Center is to help campuses review more quickly the solutions available and to help build a presentation for decision makers to be able to assess and prioritize decisions faster in order to accelerate climate action. Additions to Solutions Center in 2025 include:

- New solution added to the Solutions Center included **"Oil Well Plugging"**
- Additional Solutions Center Provider added to include **Well Done Foundation**



Carbon Offsets



Oil Well Plugging

Oil Well Plugging



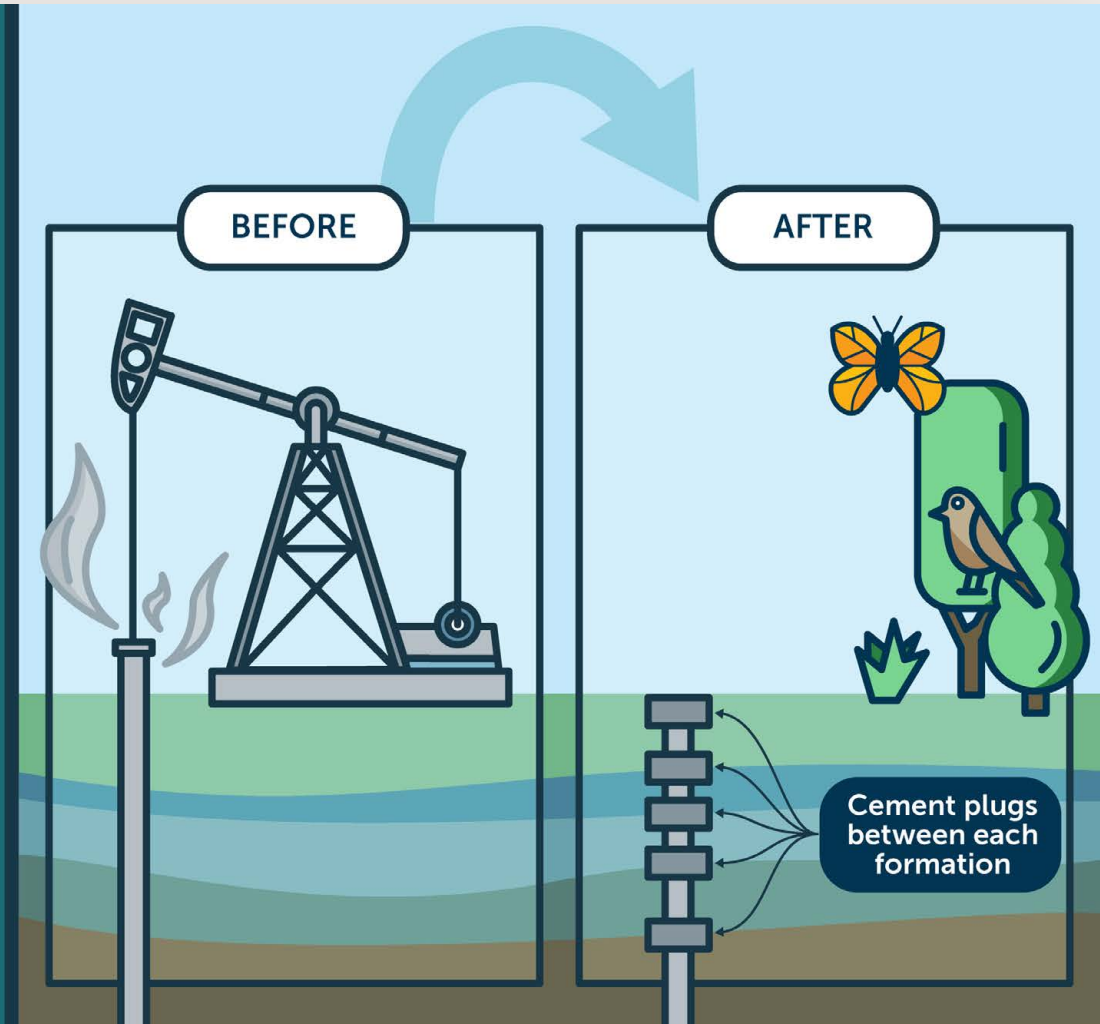
REDUCING HARMFUL METHANE IMPROVES HUMAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH



AN IMMEDIATE AND PERMANENT IMPACT



RESTORATION OF THE LAND TO ITS PRIOR STATE PROVIDES HABITAT, AND INCREASES BIODIVERSITY



PARTNERSHIPS

2025 Partners



WEBINARS

14
Webinars

SECOND NATURE HOSTED 14 WEBINARS IN 2025, INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:

- Engaging Alumni in Your Climate Action
- Engaging Community with Your Climate Action Planning
- Updating Your Climate Action Plan
- Bridging Academics and Communities: Advancing Climate Action Through University-Local Partnerships
- The Value of Networks in Accelerating Climate Action
- Navigating Uncertainty: Creating Financing Strategies for Renewable Energy Projects
- From Hurdles to Highlights: Navigating Carbon Offsets at Small Colleges
- Prepare for COP30 with the University Climate Change Coalition (UC3)
- Key Issues to Watch at COP30
- GreenerU's No Cost Building Decarbonization Assessment Lunch & Learn
- Communicating Climate Research in an Uncertain Climate
- Next Generation Grid Decarbonization: High-Impact Renewable Electricity Procurement for Higher Education
- Looking Ahead: What's Next for Campus Climate Leadership
- The Higher Education Clean Energy Projects Map: Lessons from 2021 Onwards

WEBINAR:  

Looking Ahead: What's Next for Campus Climate Leadership

November 18, 2025 | 2:00-3:00 p.m. ET

[WATCH NOW](#)

WEBINAR:  

The Higher Education Clean Energy Projects Map: Lessons from 2021 Onwards

December 11, 2025 | 2:00-3:00 p.m. ET

[WATCH NOW](#)

Speakers:

 Dr. Monique Guillory President Dillard University	 Kimberly Reeves Executive Director Center for Sustainability Agnes Scott College	 Megan Litke Director of Sustainability American University	 Lily Strehlow Sustainability Coordinator University of Wisconsin (Eau Claire)	 Theo Daniels Climate Policy Manager Second Nature	 Bari Samad Director of Communications Second Nature
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WEBINAR:  

Next Generation Grid Decarbonization: High-Impact Renewable Electricity Procurement for Higher Education

WEBINAR:

Navigating Uncertainty: Creative Financing Strategies for Renewable Energy Projects

April 30, 2025

Presented by:   

WEBINAR: **KEY ISSUES TO WATCH AT COP30**



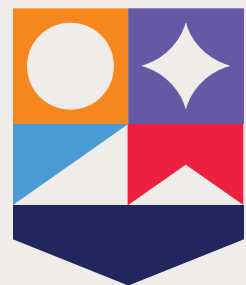


PLAYING FOR THE PLANET:

How Bow Valley College is Using Games to Build Climate Resilience

What if the future of your city were a board game, and the stakes were real? At Bow Valley College in Calgary, that question sparked action. This summer, the College introduced **The Adaptation Game (TAG)**, a serious, story-driven tabletop game, to campus, inviting players to simulate how their community might adapt over the next decade to climate-related shocks such as floods, wildfires, or heatwaves.

TAG is as much about building connections as it is about planning: "It's more of a platform for a community conversation," not just entertainment, said one participant. The game transforms abstract global risks into local, narrative-driven scenarios, making climate change more human, tangible, and actionable. As one player summarized: "Woah, this is like real life stuff but we can do it from a safe space."



**Bow Valley
College**





On June 10, as part of a full-day “Climate Futures Game Jam,” over 75 students, faculty, and community members experienced TAG alongside creative game prototyping. In the morning, participants played TAG itself, an immersive, facilitated tabletop roleplaying session that brings systems thinking and roleplay to life.

Geoff Evamy-Hill, Applied Research Associate in serious games, reflected on what makes TAG compelling:

“The most important aspect of TAG is in its ability to build a real sense of agency and community amongst participants... Roleplay elements help people to see the consequences of their adaptations in changing circumstances.”

He added, “A game does not need to be perfectly realistic, but believable and immersive... making concepts stick, decisions matter, and outcomes feel powerful.”

After a compelling moment during gameplay, Amy Spark, Climate Specialist, recounted:

“A participant (a hiker) realized their fitness meant they could check on vulnerable neighbours during heatwaves by going door to door. They shared this with their hiking community, who responded positively. It reinforced that through games and conversations, people can discover unique ways to play their role in a crisis.”

The afternoon Game Jam exploded with innovation. Six interdisciplinary teams developed game prototypes that explored themes such





as wildfire response and food insecurity, ranging from dice-based tabletop games to collaborative digital platforms. Kern Babb, an Applied Research intern with a background in emergency management, framed his facilitation around the disaster management cycle, which includes preparation, mitigation, response, and recovery. He saw participants build a sense of agency and belonging: the experience “exposed participants to an environment where they became decision-makers,” he explained.

Nic Cross, another intern whose background is in mental health and peer support, added that TAG provides emotional grounding amid climate uncertainty:

“Games like TAG can give people a safe space to explore big... issues like climate change. That safety allows them to process emotions while staying engaged. You see people leaning in, asking questions, even laughing while working through serious scenarios.”

These insights reflect TAG’s core design values, created by its Australian founders at Amble Studios, which emphasize inclusivity, storytelling, community building, and reducing climate anxiety.

As climate threats intensify, Bow Valley College’s TAG initiative demonstrates an inventive path forward. Through play, people not only learn, they connect, build confidence, and take action. At Bow Valley College, climate resilience isn’t just taught. It’s played, prototyped, and put into action.





3 | GROWING AND DIVERSIFYING OUR NETWORK

CLIMATE LEADERSHIP NETWORK AFFILIATE MEMBERSHIP

The Climate Leadership Network Affiliate membership presents an opportunity to expand the growing network of institutions working on a range of climate solutions, including operational decarbonization, climate justice, community engagement, workforce development, and climate research.

The Affiliate membership seeks to broaden and diversify the institutions and individuals involved in climate action by bringing them into the Climate Leadership Network. It provides a streamlined pathway to joining the Climate Leadership Network's collective impact by eliminating the barrier of making a formal, public institutional commitment to climate action.

[Learn more about becoming an Affiliate member of the Climate Leadership Network.](#)

In 2025, Second Nature welcomed 8 institutions as Affiliate members to our growing network.



UNIVERSITY CLIMATE COALITION (UC3)



The [University Climate Change Coalition \(UC3\)](#) is a Second Nature initiative that connects 25 of the world's leading research universities committed to accelerating climate action on campus, in communities, and globally.

2025 has been a reinforcing year for UC3, as the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and the reversal of landmark climate policy and research findings have reminded us of the original impetus and call to action for the coalition more than ten years ago.

In 2025, UC3:

- Reviewed and updated internal governance procedures to strengthen the coalition's efficiency, impact, and effectiveness
- Convened a committee of members to begin drafting a new strategic plan for the next 5 years of UC3's work
- Welcomed two new members to the coalition: The University of Virginia and Pennsylvania State University, bringing our membership to 25 institutions.
- Launched a member-led community of practice to explore the distinctive opportunities of research-intensive universities in building, managing, and scaling Campus as Lab models across the North American continent.
- Continued facilitating working groups for our members, which explored zero waste initiatives, innovations at the intersection of climate and healthcare, supply chain sustainability, implementing equity in climate action, and more.
- Produced a public webinar: *Communicating Climate Research in an Uncertain Climate*
- Designed an international student research challenge focused on transdisciplinary climate solutions, led by member institution Tec de Monterrey, for piloting in academic year 2026-27
- Led global climate action discussions at COP30, including a United Nations side event, facilitated network support for a higher education Pavilion, and led engagement sessions for students, faculty, and staff attending COP30.

UC³

New Members
IN 2025



PennState.

UNIVERSITY CLIMATE COALITION (UC3)

Significant climate action efforts at UC3 campuses in 2025 included:

- The **University of Michigan** continued to support fellow UC3 member universities in building or improving campus-wide sustainability culture assessments.
- The **University of Colorado at Boulder** became the host institution for the new Carnegie Elective Classification in Sustainability
- **Tec de Monterrey** welcomed researchers from other UC3 member institutions to Monterrey, Mexico for a climate research Summit, and will be supporting the national academic consultation for Mexico's next National Determined Contribution under the Paris Agreement.
- 9 of 10 campuses in the **University of California system** are committed to significant emissions reductions over the next 5-10 years, through decarbonization plans aligned with the increased climate ambitions the UC announced last year.
- The **University of Toronto** began implementing Project LEAP, which will reduce the university's emissions impact by 50% by 2027.



COOL DOWN P-TOWN: Building Climate Resilience Through Community Science and Action

In Portsmouth, Virginia, extreme heat isn't just a weather issue; it's a matter of environmental justice. With limited tree cover, expansive concrete surfaces, and high rates of poverty and chronic health conditions, the city is facing a mounting climate crisis that hits hardest in its most vulnerable neighborhoods. However, a collaborative effort led by Virginia Wesleyan University (VWU) and the Center for Sustainable Communities (CSC) is working to change that, block by block, tree by tree.

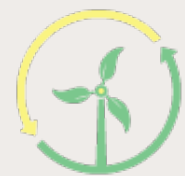
A CITY AT RISK

Portsmouth ranks high on the Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) at 0.84, well above Virginia's average of 0.39 and the national average of 0.58, highlighting the disproportionate climate burden placed on its residents. These vulnerabilities concentrate in formerly redlined areas and majority-black

neighborhoods where infrastructure and health disparities intersect with the growing threat of extreme heat.

"Portsmouth is significantly less affluent than neighboring cities like Virginia Beach," said Garry Harris, Executive Director of CSC and co-lead of the project. "You see it in the heat. Wealthier areas have trees. Poorer areas have concrete."

Backed by funding from the Virginia Department of Forestry's Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program, the "Cool Down P-Town" initiative takes a community-first approach to heat resilience, combining community science, public education, and long-term policy change.



**CENTER for
SUSTAINABLE
COMMUNITIES**



CLIMATE ACTION STORY



Naming the campaign Cool Down P-Town was a strategic move. “We designed ‘Cool Down P-Town’ to be approachable and empowering,” Harris explained. “The phrase itself avoids technical jargon and immediately connects with residents.” Instead of complex scientific terms, the approachable phrase quickly caught on and opened doors to deeper community conversations about heat, tree cover, and climate action.

MAPPING THE HEAT

In the summer of 2024, volunteers fanned out across Portsmouth to collect real-time temperature and humidity data using equipment provided by CAPA Strategies. This community science effort followed a proven model for identifying urban heat islands. It yielded striking results: temperature differences of up to 9°F were recorded within a day, with the hottest zones aligning with low-income, low-tree-cover neighborhoods.

While a complete analysis of Portsmouth’s data is ongoing, preliminary findings from Virginia Beach, a nearby city previously studied by VWU, showed a clear pattern: areas with higher populations of people of color and low-income communities experienced significantly higher temperatures. Early data from Portsmouth is expected to confirm similar trends, reinforcing the systemic nature of environmental inequity.

The data collection effort also created hands-on learning opportunities for students. Several VWU undergraduates and one graduate student, majoring in related focuses like Earth and Environmental Sciences, Environmental Studies, and Education, participated in the project.

“ This project allowed me to apply skills from my Intro to GIS course while also developing new techniques and a deeper understanding of the program’s applications. Geospatial information is a powerful tool for understanding the environmental challenges we face—and from that understanding, we can begin to address them. I plan to carry these skills forward into my master’s studies in Environmental Systems Sciences and Climate & Environmental Monitoring. More than anything, I appreciated the opportunity to work with meaningful data and contribute to something bigger than myself.”

– Elizabeth Smeltzer,
Senior Environmental Studies major, VWU

Portsmouth Heat Watch maps show thousands of temperature data points collected by volunteers (left) and the resulting area-wide model (right), which reveals significant heat disparities across the city.





FROM DATA TO ACTION

The data didn't just stay in spreadsheets; it came to life in a town hall at New Bethel Baptist Church, a trusted community space now serving as a Resilience Hub. More than 40 residents and community partners gathered for a gallery walk of the heat maps and an open mic session, where personal stories gave weight to the numbers. "So many people shared experiences that they closed out the session," Harris said. "It showed just how much this issue matters."

Four trees were planted at the church that day, a symbolic but tangible start to a broader plan. Over the next year, the project will remove asphalt and plant native and fruit-bearing trees in neighborhoods identified as high-risk using a combination of heat and demographic data, including metrics from the EPA's EJScreen and the White House Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool.

JUSTICE-DRIVEN, COMMUNITY-LED

By layering heat mapping data with indicators like poverty, asthma rates, and transportation access, VWU and CSC ensure that resources go where they're needed most. The effort is grounded in a philosophy Harris calls "just science," a model that blends scientific rigor with a deep commitment to racial and climate justice.

The town hall wasn't just a meeting; it was the kickoff of a movement. Residents voiced the need for better housing insulation, updated air conditioning, and more green space,





concerns that are now shaping the project's next steps. VWU students are developing lesson plans on urban heat islands and green infrastructure for local schools, while CSC is preparing policy recommendations for city officials.

"As a university rooted in service and sustainability, we're proud to stand at the intersection of research and action—where data drives change and community voices shape the future," said VWU President Scott D. Miller. "This is what it means to put our values to work."

GROWING LONG-TERM RESILIENCE

The long-term vision for Cool Down P-Town is expansive. In addition to its immediate goals, like mitigating extreme heat through green infrastructure, the project lays the groundwork for systemic change. The Resilience Hub at New Bethel Baptist Church will eventually serve dual roles: a shelter with solar and better systems during heat emergencies, and a year-round community center offering food access, job training, and transportation assistance.

The project also plans to institutionalize tree protection policies, incentivize canopy expansion through zoning reform, and model Portsmouth's resilience work after cities like Atlanta, which boasts a 47% tree canopy. CSC recently rebranded and

expanded its outreach and mitigation efforts as "Trees Across Portsmouth," better amplifying and immediately connecting the need for residents to engage in long-term resilience through tree and shrub planting and related efforts.

Partnerships with Starbase Victory and the Elizabeth River Project ensure ongoing support and educational outreach. At the same time, other collaborations signal a growing national interest in replicating the model elsewhere.

A COOLER, FAIRER FUTURE

Cool Down P-Town isn't just a catchy slogan, it's a community-led blueprint for climate justice. By centering science in the hands of citizens and solutions in the voices of residents, Portsmouth is transforming its heat crisis into an opportunity for empowerment.

As Harris put it, "This is about more than just temperature. It's about who gets to thrive in the face of a changing climate."





4 | BUILDING NETWORK CAPACITY



CATALYST GRANTS

Eight Colleges and Universities Receive up to \$5,000 in Catalyst Grants from Second Nature to Accelerate Campus Climate Action

Second Nature proudly announces the recipients of its **sixth round of Catalyst Grants**. These unrestricted grants, awarding up to \$5,000 to eight higher education institutions, are designed to serve as the “spark” that jumpstarts or strengthens campus climate action projects that reduce emissions, build resilience, and advance environmental justice.

The Catalyst Grants provide financial support to Climate Leadership Network member institutions leading innovative sustainability and climate initiatives. The program continues to ensure that at least one grant is awarded to a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) or Tribal Institution, and at least one to a Community College.



2025 Catalyst Grant Recipients:



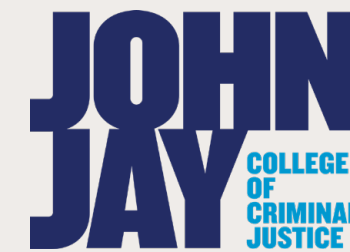
SAVANNAH STATE UNIVERSITY
(Savannah, GA)

Savannah State University will create a Clean Energy Policy Simulation Lab that gives MPA, Marine Science, and interested undergraduate students hands-on experience analyzing energy and climate policies using real-world datasets and interactive tools. Integrated into existing courses, the Lab will build students' analytical and policy skills while delivering actionable insights on clean energy and resilience to the community.



CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE
(Northridge, CA)

CSUN will create a Sustainability Micro-Certification Program featuring ten short online courses and hands-on activities to build climate literacy across the CSU system. Supported by a Catalyst Grant, the program will draw on academic and industry expertise and culminate in a sustainability event. The result will be a scalable, resume-building model that other institutions can replicate.



JOHN JAY COLLEGE – CUNY
(New York, NY)

John Jay College will use Catalyst Grant funding to support student participation in global climate events such as LCOY and COP30 and to strengthen related training and coursework. The grant will also fund post-COP outreach, including public forums and presentations to NYC officials. Overall, the project empowers frontline youth to bring global climate insights back to their communities.



MESA COMMUNITY COLLEGE
A MARICOPA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

MESA COMMUNITY COLLEGE
(Mesa, AZ)

Mesa Community College's Learning Greenhouse & Community Garden offers hands-on STEM and sustainability education using climate-resilient practices and drought-tolerant plants. Students run experiments and engage the community through pollinator and seed programs that boost local food security and climate resilience. Upgrades like low-flow irrigation and an on-site mulcher will expand learning and research opportunities.

Continued on the next page...



SUNY CORTLAND
(Cortland, NY)

SUNY Cortland seeks to expand its partnership with Cortland ReUse by providing seed funding to support the nonprofit’s mission and hiring an intern to advance the university’s Scope 3 greenhouse gas emissions accounting. The project will strengthen waste reduction, promote the circular economy, and create educational opportunities while measuring and demonstrating the broader environmental impact of Cortland ReUse on the campus and local community.



TEXAS SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

TEXAS SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY
(Houston, TX)

Texas Southern University’s Bullard Center for Environmental and Climate Justice proposes a campus CERT program to train undergraduate students in disaster preparedness and response. The program will equip students—many of whom are unfamiliar with Houston’s hazards—with the skills and knowledge needed to stay safe and support their community during emergencies.



XAVIER UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA
(New Orleans, LA)

Xavier University of Louisiana’s “Grow Local, Restore Coastal” initiative will expand its native plant propagation and education program through greenhouse upgrades, student training, and community engagement. The project will strengthen ecological restoration, promote climate resilience, and provide students with hands-on opportunities while hosting workshops and plant giveaways that benefit both the campus and local neighborhoods.

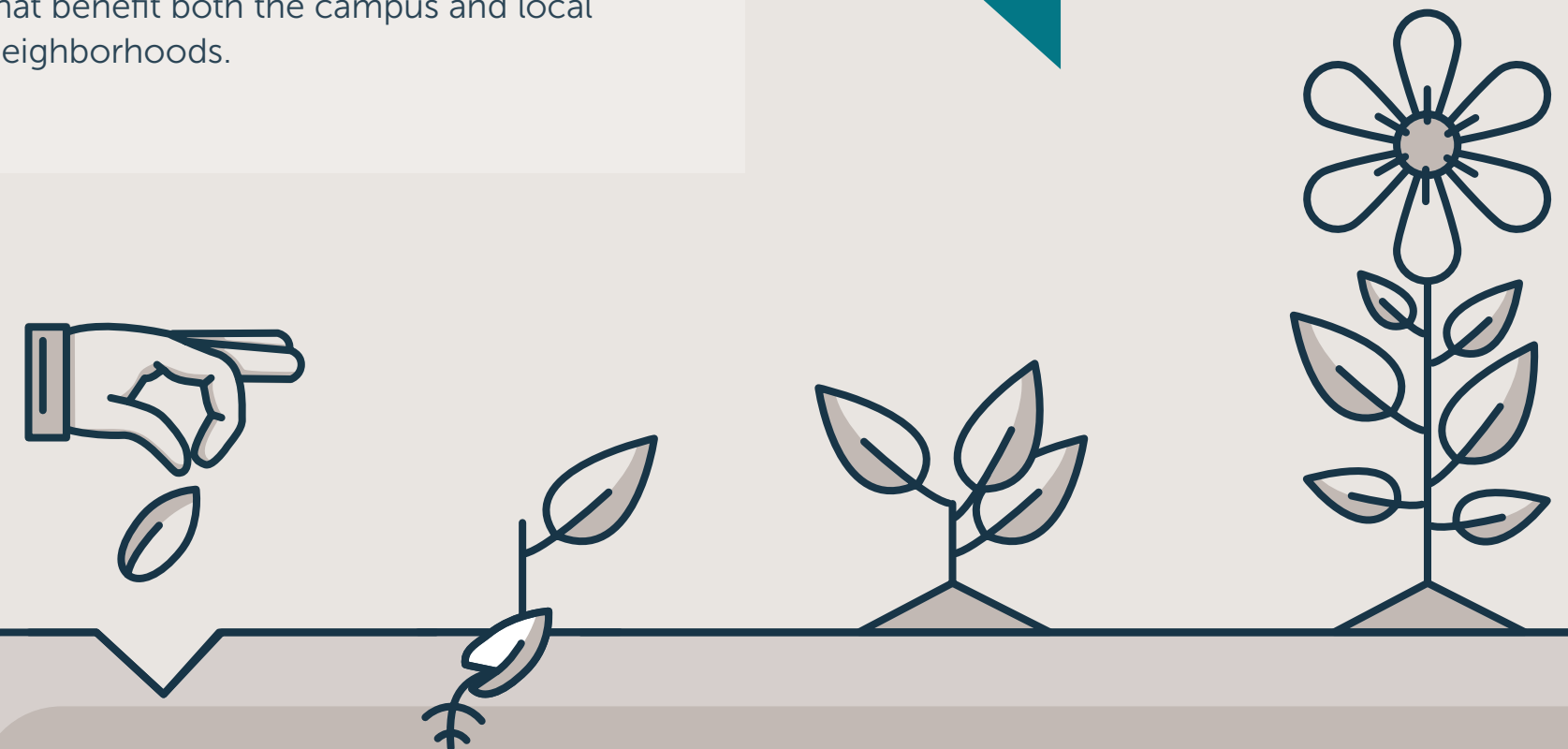
“Through our annual Catalyst Grants initiative, we’re able to empower colleges and universities to launch or scale projects that create meaningful, lasting climate impact. This year’s recipients represent a diverse group of institutions tackling the urgent need to decarbonize, increase resilience, and advance equity within their communities. Their creativity and commitment continue to drive higher education’s leadership in addressing the climate crisis.”

Tim Carter, President of Second Nature



UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, PEMBROKE
(Pembroke, NC)

This project will convert lignin, a widely available industrial byproduct, into sustainable porous carbons for green-chemistry catalysts and clean energy storage, reducing waste and emissions. Catalyst Grant funding will support pyrolysis experiments and student-led research, providing hands-on training in advanced materials and clean energy technologies while advancing scalable climate solutions.



PRO BONO CONSULTING

Seven Higher Education Institutions Awarded Pro Bono Consulting Services Valued at \$25,000 Each

Second Nature is pleased to announce the seven institutions selected to receive pro bono consulting services as part of the fifth round of its Pro Bono Consulting opportunity. This initiative, offered exclusively to Climate Leadership Network member institutions, provides technical support to accelerate campus climate action efforts. The consulting firms generously providing their expertise for this initiative include **Brailsford & Dunlavey, Coho, and Ever-Green Energy.**

The selected institutions and their proposed projects demonstrate a strong commitment to climate action, sustainability, and resilience on campus and beyond. Each institution will receive specialized consulting from our expert partners to support their initiatives in decarbonization, climate resilience planning, greenhouse gas reduction strategies, and more.

The Pro Bono Consulting initiative has provided tailored climate action guidance to numerous higher education institutions, supporting them in achieving their carbon neutrality and climate resilience goals. Through this initiative, Second Nature continues to equip colleges and universities with the resources they need to lead in climate action and create positive environmental impacts within their communities.

2025 Pro Bono Consulting Awardees:



FURMAN UNIVERSITY
(Greenville, SC)

Furman's new strategic plan, FUTURE Focused, recommits the university to sustainability leadership on campus and in the community. Through this initiative, Coho will provide a clear and actionable roadmap for transitioning to renewable power within the next five years, allowing Furman to meet its goal of a 60% net carbon footprint reduction by 2030.

"When tackling complex sustainability challenges, we recognize the value and expanded capacity that external experts can provide. Sourcing renewable electricity is a critical part of Furman's carbon neutrality journey, and we are grateful to have Coho's expertise to guide us." – Elizabeth Davis, President, Furman University



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN
(Champaign, IL)

The university will collaborate with Coho to explore effective and financially feasible pathways to reach its sustainability goals by studying clean energy technologies, analyzing their potential impact on emissions, and identifying the best combination of technologies for future use.

"We are excited to partner with Coho to reach our ambitious climate goals. This collaboration aligns with our comprehensive strategies in the Illinois Climate Action Plan (iCAP) to develop and implement a clear pathway for the university to become carbon neutral and build resilience to climate change." – Lowa Mwilambwe, Interim Vice Chancellor for Administration and Operations



University of Wisconsin
Stevens Point

STEVENS POINT • MARSHFIELD • WAUSAU
UNIVERSITY OF
WISCONSIN-STEVENS
POINT
(Stevens Point, WI)

Partnering with Coho climate advisors, UW-Stevens Point will conduct an energy study to define decarbonization options for its updated Carbon Neutrality Plan. The study will inform and support the drafting of the university's Climate Action and Resilience Plan, set to begin in Summer 2025 and finalize in Spring 2026.

"This award fits into UW-Stevens Point's decades-long commitment to innovative sustainable practices. We are grateful for the opportunity to ensure a more sustainable future for our communities." – Pratima Gandhi, vice chancellor for Finance and Administration.

Continued on the next page...



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
(Madison, WI)

Brailsford & Dunlavey will support the university in identifying pathways to reduce emissions associated with purchased goods and services (Scope 3 emissions), which are key to UW-Madison’s target of Net Zero emissions by 2048. The project will ideally offer insights applicable across the broader higher education sector.

“Collaborating with Brailsford & Dunlavey and Second Nature presents a unique opportunity to develop strategies to meet one of the more complex components of our ambitious environmental sustainability goals.” – Missy Nergard, Director of Institutional Sustainability



PENN STATE UNIVERSITY
(University Park, PA)

Through its partnership with Ever-Green Energy, Penn State Harrisburg will revisit and enhance its 2020 Biomass Study. This effort will build on the university’s long-standing progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and accelerate its sustainability goals.

“This initiative strengthens our commitment to integrating sustainability into campus operations, research, and student experiences while fostering impactful partnerships.” – David Callejo Pérez, Chancellor and Dean, Penn State Harrisburg



NC STATE UNIVERSITY
(Raleigh, NC)

With technical assistance from Brailsford & Dunlavey, NC State will refine its strategies, evaluate new approaches, and develop a data-driven roadmap for reducing emissions on its growing campus.

“NC State is grateful for the support of Second Nature’s Pro Bono Consulting and looks forward to partnering with Brailsford & Dunlavey to explore innovative and sustainable solutions that will enhance campus efficiency and stewardship while also providing impactful opportunities for applied learning.” – Carla Davis, Director of the University Sustainability Office



MACALESTER
MACALESTER COLLEGE
(St Paul, MN)

Brailsford & Dunlavey will assist the college in drafting a climate action plan that outlines a technically and financially feasible roadmap toward an equitable, carbon-free future aligned with Macalester’s education and research mission.

“We look forward to outlining an ambitious and innovative new plan that engages campus stakeholders, reflects Macalester College’s core values, and outlines a path towards decarbonization and climate resilience.” – Megan Butler, Sustainability Director

About the Consulting Firms:



Brailsford & Dunlavey (B&D) – is a national development advisory and program management firm dedicated to serving public agencies, professional sports organizations, educational institutions, and nonprofit clients. With comprehensive in-house planning and implementation capabilities, B&D helps clients advance sustainability initiatives through data-driven strategies and innovative solutions.

“Higher education plays a vital role in mitigating the climate crisis through innovative operational advancements combined with expansive, solutions-based academic programming. As a business community partner, we look forward to advancing initiatives to address the planet’s most pressing issue.” – Dave Karlsgodt, Head of B&D’s Energy and Sustainability Practice Group



Coho, an ERM Group Company – is a trusted energy, climate, and water advisor that partners with impact-oriented clients to develop actionable strategies, implement tailored solutions, and optimize performance over time. Coho specializes in renewable energy procurement, decarbonization planning, and sustainability strategy development.

“Coho is proud to support the decarbonization of higher education in the United States. Second Nature and its member campuses are wonderful partners, and we look forward to a new round of high-impact projects” – Gary Farha, President of Coho, an ERM Group Company.



Ever-Green Energy – works across sectors to advance and operate energy systems with a commitment to financial and environmental stewardship. As an innovative utility system operator, Ever-Green Energy offers expertise in energy infrastructure planning and optimization.

“Ever-Green Energy continues to see higher education institutions leading the way in embracing innovative, efficient, and sustainable heating and cooling system technologies. We are proud to provide tangible steps toward their goals of increasing capacity and reducing emissions.” – Luke Gaalswyk, President and CEO of Ever-Green Energy

GREENERU PRO BONO RECIPIENTS

Second Nature and GreenerU Partner to Offer Free Building Decarbonization Assessments to New England Campuses

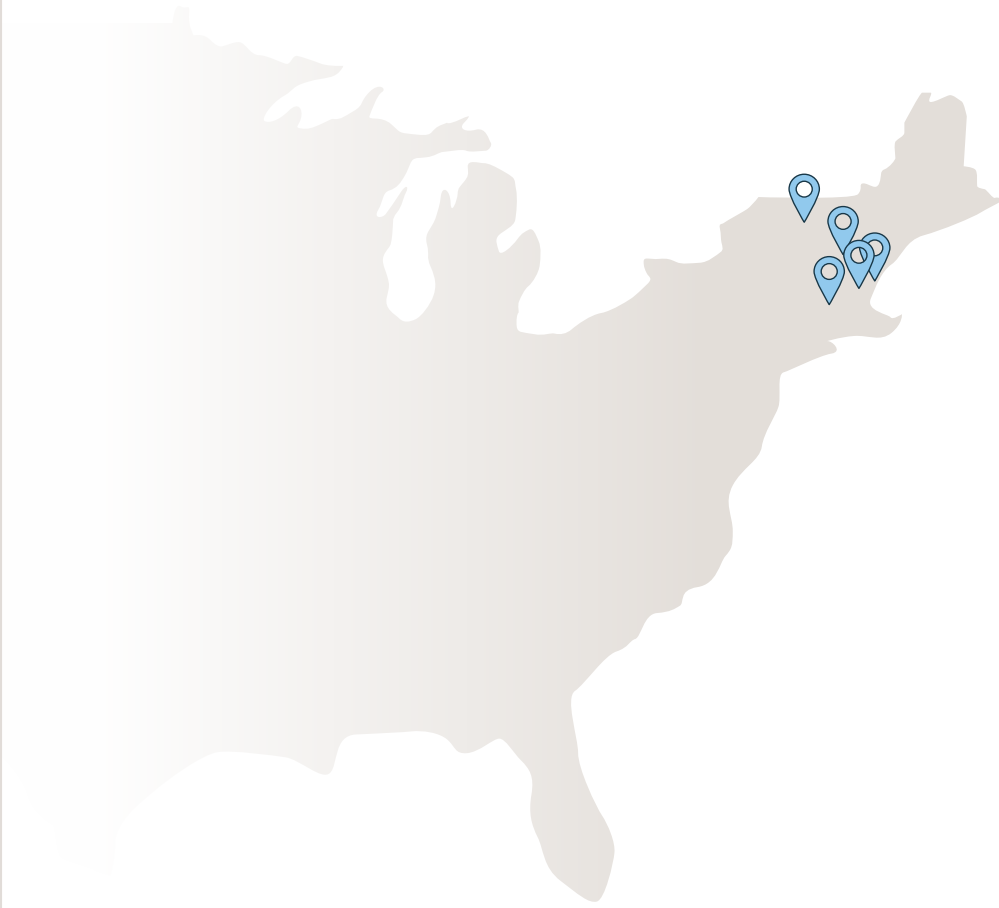
Second Nature is excited to announce the recipients of its first **Zero-Cost Building Decarbonization Assessment** in partnership with GreenerU. This initiative offers selected New England campuses a zero-cost, building-level decarbonization assessment valued at \$10,000.

The program is designed to help colleges and universities advance campus decarbonization efforts by providing a comprehensive evaluation of energy use and infrastructure. Five campuses were selected to receive a customized “zero-over-time” plan for one building. A zero-over-time plan is a strategic roadmap for gradually achieving net-zero carbon emissions over a period of time. Each plan evaluates the building’s current energy use and systems, identifies energy conservation and electrification measures, and provides a roadmap to achieve building-level decarbonization goals.

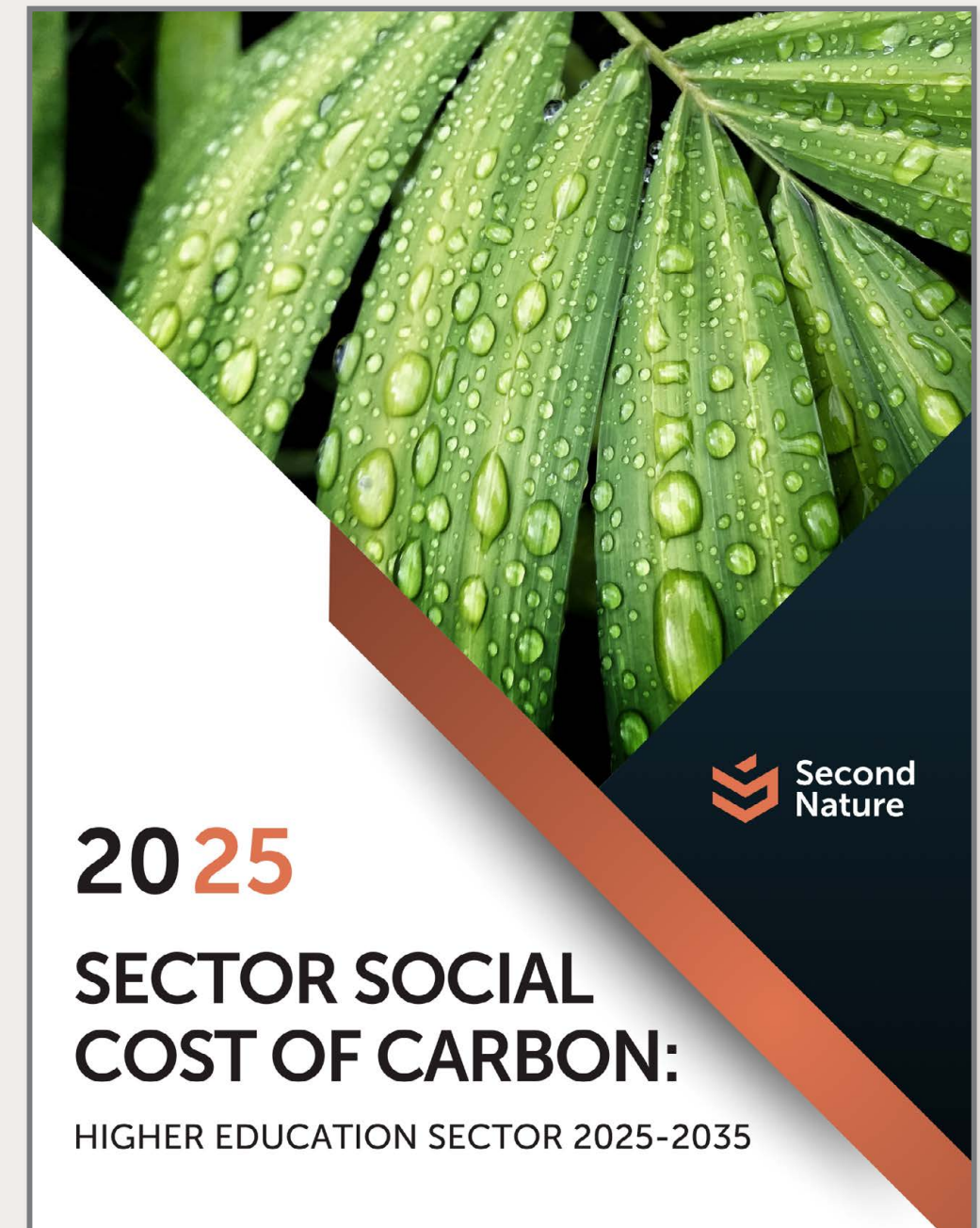
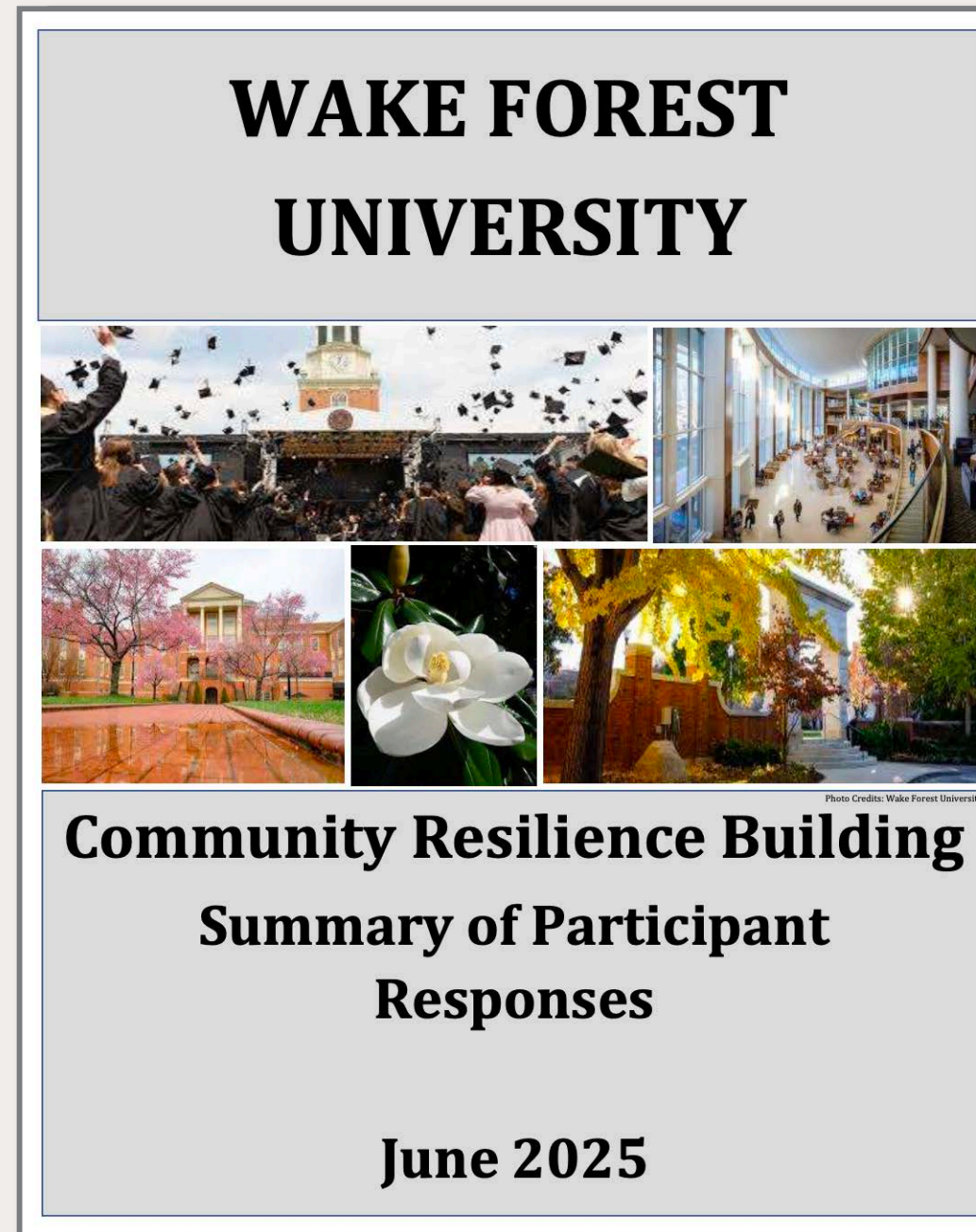
Each selected campus receives a detailed report that is theirs to keep, including estimated costs, available incentives, projected cost savings, and total cost of ownership to guide future investments.



Recipients of the 2025 Zero-Cost Building Decarbonization Assessment:



WHITE PAPERS OR OTHER PUBLICATIONS



WHO WE ARE - STAFF*



Timothy Carter
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Crystal Chissell
Senior Advisor



Theo Daniels
Climate Policy
Manager



Sydney DuBose
Climate Justice Fellow



Bridget Flynn
Climate Programs
Senior Manager



**Joelle
Geisler-Haley**
Senior Manager of
Administration & Operations



Meredith Leigh
Climate Programs
Senior Manager



**Katherine
Mac-Holmes**
DEIAJ Associate



Michele Madia
Senior Director of
Climate Programs



Steve Muzzy
Climate Programs
Senior Manager



Bari Samad
Director of Communications
and Marketing



Cami Sockow
Climate Programs Manager



Chelsey Tabet
Marketing and
Communications Manager



Samantha Thomas
Climate Program Manager,
Data and Evaluation



David Vasquez
Climate Programs
Associate



Juliana Vidal
Climate Policy Fellow

INTERNS

Phoebe Tebbs, Allegheny Intern
Anna Westbrook, Allegheny Intern

*worked for Second Nature during calendar year 2025

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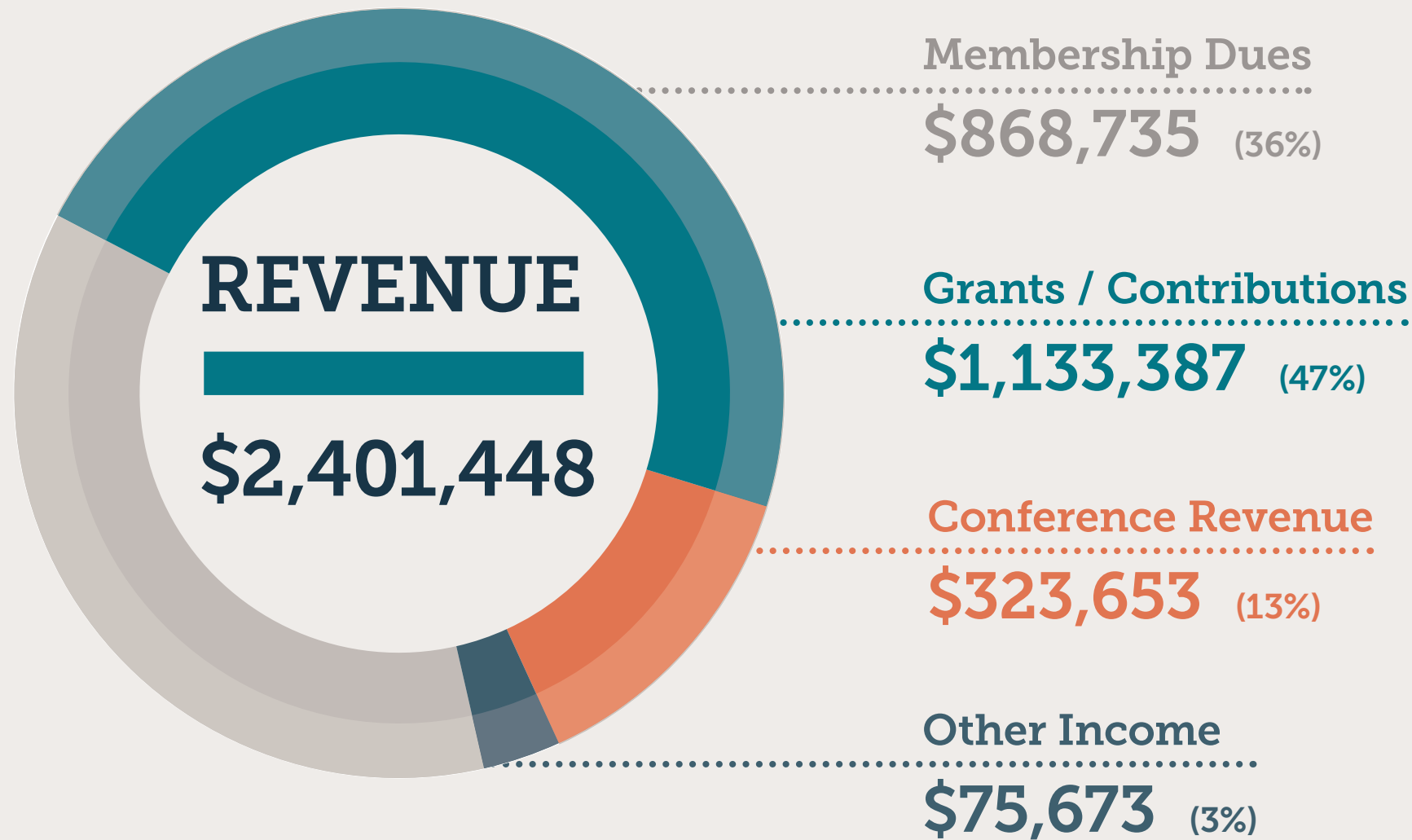


Nathaniel Smith
Founder and Chief Equity Officer
of the Partnership
for Southern Equity



Terri Taylor
Strategy Director for
Innovation and Discovery
at Lumina Foundation

BY THE NUMBERS



Program Development

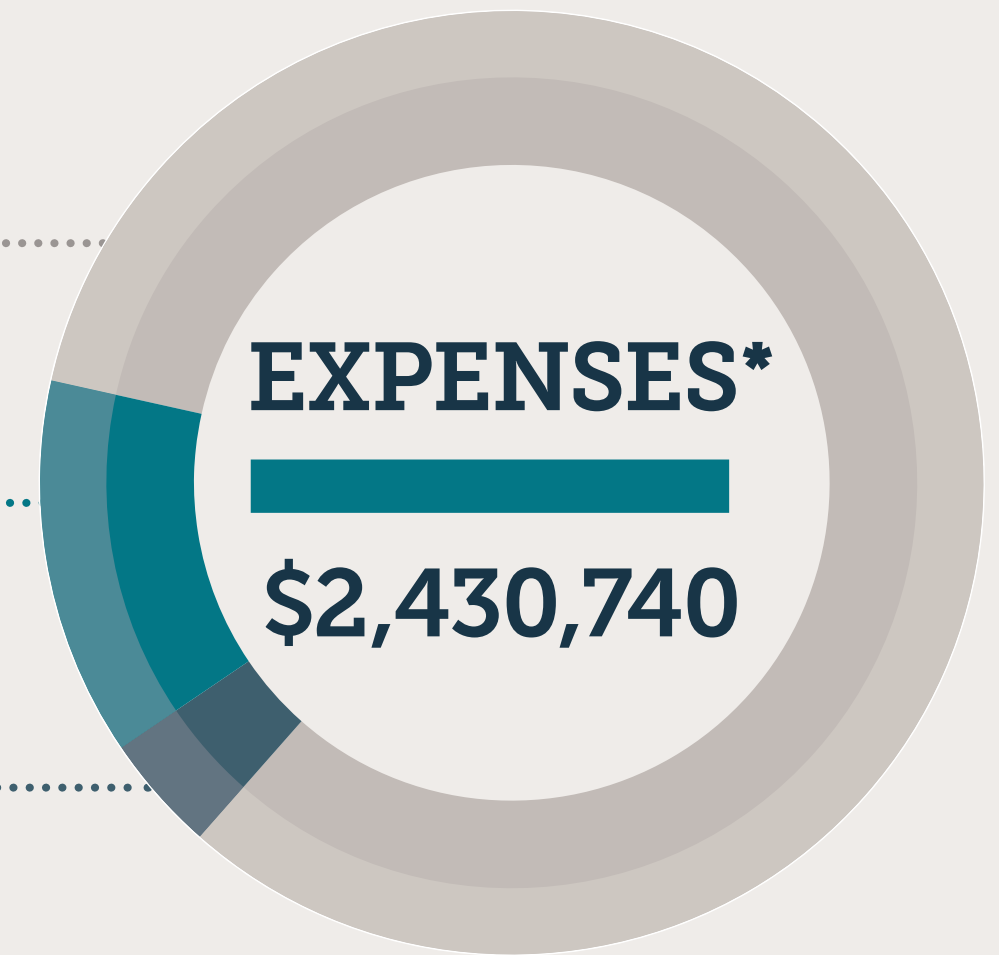
\$ 2,017,514 (83%)

Management / General

\$315,996 (13%)

Fundraising

\$97,230 (4%)



*FY23 - FY25 includes planned spend-down of budget surplus

**Second Nature is committed to accelerating climate action in,
and through, higher education.**

We do this by mobilizing a diverse array of higher education institutions to act on bold climate commitments, to scale campus climate initiatives, and to create innovative climate solutions. We align, amplify, and bridge the sector's efforts with other global leaders to advance urgent climate priorities.

secondnature.org



160 Alewife Brook Pkwy #1182
Cambridge, MA 02138
617.722.0036
info@secondnature.org

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