

## Starting small is better than not starting at all

Sustainability, reducing your carbon footprint, global warming, the climate and nature crises are big, diverse and a potentially overwhelming subjects. It can be difficult to know where to start. If this is the case, it can be challenging to take action and make changes. Whilst there is now widespread agreement on climate change and its causes, there are many changes we can all make and it can be difficult to decide what to prioritise. So, start small if you need to. There is help – local environment groups, other museums, enthusiastic and knowledgeable people who may also be volunteers, trustees or staff. Remember that as well as improving your own building or grounds you can use your collections, exhibitions, events and activities to engage your community too. The [Richard Jefferies Museum in Swindon ran a Small Change Festival in 2022](#) giving local people lots of ideas for small changes they could make to live more sustainably, it may give you some ideas.

## Project principles or aims

Deciding your green or sustainable principles at the outset of your project planning will help you to deliver a project that is more embedded and will demonstrate your commitment to visitors and participants.

Museums have told us that being open and honest about environment commitments and the journey you are taking gives your voice authenticity when discussing these issues with visitors. It provides a clear focus for everyone involved in delivering against the commitment. Some museums started their journey by making changes for a project and are now embedding these by sharing with colleagues, trustees, and volunteers. Including everyone in the commitment will help to achieve your goals. Don't be afraid to share the challenges and mistakes you make with peers, visitors, and others. This will help others to learn from your journey and encourage them to keep going when they face setbacks.

## Make a Commitment

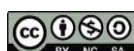
Making a commitment will help provide focus for your project, may provide external measures that you can use to measure your progress and could provide additional information, support, and networking opportunities. There are several commitments that you can make as an organisation for the whole of your museum or for a single project.

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# Resource: Top tips for green projects

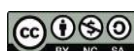
1. Zero waste - aims to send nothing to a landfill. Reduce what you need, reuse as much as you can, send little to be recycled, and compost what we cannot. This can also be referred to as a circular economy where all materials are reused reducing the need to create new. Planning is the key to a zero-waste approach. Consider everything you purchase from the perspective of how you will dispose of it when you no longer need it. Find out more here: <https://www.zerowasteweek.co.uk/>
2. Plastic free – making your project, building, refreshments, displays and events free from disposable, single-use plastics. As with zero waste, planning is the key to succeeding here. Consider your purchases and source plastic free alternatives. Find out more here: <https://www.plasticfreejuly.org/>
3. Carbon neutral – reducing your carbon footprint for a project or across the whole museum will reduce the impact you have on the environment. The first step is to attend some training to understand the process, then use a carbon calculator tool to establish a baseline of your carbon emissions. Agree a plan to reduce the carbon emissions and measure again to see how successful your plan has been. Julie's Bicycle has created a carbon calculator for use by the arts and culture sector. Their website has other information and resources: <https://juliesbicycle.com/our-work/creative-green/creative-climate-tools/>
4. Buying second-hand - museums that started with a principle of not buying new, if they could source something second hand, were surprised by how much they were able to procure free or at a large saving. Reusing second hand items significantly reduces your carbon footprint and contributes to a zero waste economy. Specialist equipment may be on offer from other museums or cultural organisations. Freecycle sites online, boot sales, local ads and sending enquiries through your local networks may produce the items you need. Be aware that this will take longer to procure than purchasing new, so recognise the need to spend more time on this element in your planning. Research advice online and remember that you are responsible for checking the safety of any items you acquire. Find out more here: <https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/technology/buying-second-hand-tech>

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# Resource: Top tips for green projects

Collections are often displayed to help visitors understand the historical, social or local context in which they were made and used. Looking at your collections to see how they can engage people on the subject of climate change, biodiversity loss, sustainable living, materials and energy can give objects a new meaning and relevance to your audiences. This new relevance of the collection to audiences was a key outcome of the Green Grants projects supported with funding from South West Museum Development in 2022; drawing in new audiences and finding new interest in the collections.

Finding local relevance in your collection helps visitors to understand that climate change has impacts for their local area. This huge global issue can feel like it is happening a long way away and is impacting others through extreme weather events. However, changes in climate are visible locally through the impact on nature and can be more clearly seen through the long lens of historical collections. Pictures of people ice skating, large annual snowfall causing school closure or images of flood or drought can be used to ask questions or to compare with images from today.

We can learn a lot from the past about sustainable living – handmade, reuse and repair. Clothes, tools, boots, furniture, sewing machines can all tell a story about making things last and present an alternative to the disposable culture that exists today. Wartime materials relating to growing your own, Victorian allotments and public parks, seed catalogues and photos can all demonstrate the reduced food miles of home-grown food.

Collections can be used to pose questions to visitors – looking at packaging over time for example can lead to questions about landfill or the large amount of time it takes for a single carrier bag to degrade and what the best packaging options may be for the future.

A chronological display of a number of objects including modern equivalents can tell visitors about the change in use of materials and/or energy sources through time.

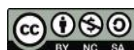
Natural history collections are now being considered with fresh eyes to see what they can tell researchers and visitors about biodiversity loss. Victorian and 20<sup>th</sup> Century collections may contain specimens that are now critically endangered or extinct. This has brought new focus and relevance to these collections, which can be presented as an important resource for research.

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## Partnerships

Local partnerships were critical to the success of the Green Grant projects in 2022 providing new audiences, additional volunteers, learning for projects and extra funding or in-kind support. Local groups in your area may include Extinction Rebellion, No Plastic, War on Waste, repair cafés, gleaning, local Wildlife Trust group, bat group etc. Partnerships can bring knowledge, a source of speakers, contributors to events and exhibitions. There is a lot of public curiosity about organisations like Extinction Rebellion, Just Stop Oil and Insulate Britain due to their disruptive tactics which give them a high media profile.

Local builders merchants, recycling and reuse groups can help provide materials or other support for your project making it more sustainable and stretching your grant money.

## Help Nature

Nature is in crisis and anything you can do to support biodiversity in your building or community will make a difference to nature in your area. Are you able to fit bird or bat boxes to your building, provide insect hotels or pollinator friendly planting in window boxes, planters, or the ground? Can you provide information about nature in your museum, through exhibitions or events? Try teaming up with a local nature group to run a joint activity making seed bombs or insect homes and raising awareness about ways to help nature.

## Measuring your impact

There are different tools you can use to measure the changes you have made, including a carbon calculator to show how much you have reduced your carbon emissions from your building, travel, purchases, and activities.

Setting a target and measuring your progress against it is a great way to report progress to visitors, partners, staff, funders and trustees. It can also make great content for social media or your local press.

For more information see the Evaluating Audience Impact resource.