

Duke Climate Commitment

2030 Strategy

Three-Year Plan 2025-2028

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A MOMENT TO LEAD, A MISSION TO UNITE

There are rare moments in the life of a university when the full strength of its purpose—to pursue truth, to foster leaders, to serve the common good—is illuminated with sharper urgency and hope. Today, the Duke Climate Commitment stands as one of those defining moments. It reflects an institution-wide resolve: not simply to understand the climate challenge, but to meet it with knowledge, partnership, and transformative action. At Duke, we accept the reality that climate change is not a distant risk, but a challenge that touches every discipline, community, and life today. Our Commitment is more than a set of goals; it is a profound expression of who we are and what we value. It is a promise to ourselves, to our partners in Durham and beyond, and to future generations that Duke will lead boldly, creatively, and inclusively in shaping a sustainable, resilient world. Our passion, innovation, and impact come from many hands and hearts. I want to thank every student, faculty member, staff colleague, alumnus, and friend for fueling this mission—with your time, your vision, and your readiness to act. Thank you to our local, regional, and global partners for walking with us in purposeful collaboration. And thank you to the many leaders—on the Climate Commitment Advisory Council, in the Office of Climate and Sustainability, on the Campaign Advocates Board, and throughout our campus, health system and at Duke Kunshan University and Duke-NUS in Singapore—who have built and now guide our bold path forward. The ambitions we lay out in this Three-Year Plan are the product of years of dialogue, reflection, and commitment. And they are powered by Duke's unique strengths: a faculty whose excellence and creativity in climate research stretch from ocean science to health and finance; students whose energy and curiosity demand action; staff whose expertise keeps our momentum real; and partners whose wisdom grounds our impact where it matters most. We know the work ahead will not be easy, nor will it ever be truly finished. But the case for action is inescapable—and the opportunity before us is historic. We are reimagining climate and sustainability education so that every Duke graduate is prepared, not just to understand, but to lead. We are deepening our research and engagement, investing in signature areas and novel collaborations that seek breakthrough solutions. We are making sustainability a lived, daily reality—on campus and across operations. And we are showing what it means to listen to, work with, and uplift the communities of which we are a part. Our strength comes from our shared resolve: that climate change is the challenge of our time, and that together, we can shape a future that is safer and brighter for all. Our vision is audacious, our action urgent—and it calls on everyone at Duke to bring their talents, their creativity, and their courage to the table. This is our invitation, our charge, and our shared journey. Thank you for believing in Duke's Climate Commitment and for your role—large or small—in this essential work. Join us as we move forward, together, shaping not only what Duke will become, but what the world can be.

With gratitude,

Toddi Steelman

Vice President and Vice Provost for Climate and Sustainability

OVERVIEW OF THREE-YEAR PLAN AND PURPOSE

This three-year plan defines the vision and sets forth actionable goals for the Duke Climate Commitment across five interconnected pillars—Education, Research, External Engagement, Sustainable Operations and Community Partnerships.

Education: Empowering Climate Leaders of Tomorrow Duke’s vision for education is rooted in the belief that every learner, regardless of discipline, should graduate with the knowledge, tools and confidence to address climate and sustainability challenges in their personal and professional lives. This strategy affirms Duke’s intent to become a destination for climate and sustainability education—offering immersive, interdisciplinary, and experiential learning opportunities that equip students, staff, faculty and alumni to lead. By fostering a culture of curiosity, lifelong stewardship and agency, Duke is preparing its community to translate climate understanding into meaningful action.

Research Innovation: Advancing Knowledge and Solutions At the heart of Duke’s climate strategy is a commitment to research that advances discovery and shapes solutions. With recognized leadership in Climate Finance and Policy, Climate and Health, and Oceans, Duke will continue to invest in these strengths while expanding into more areas. The university will foster broad participation across disciplines and roles, ensuring a thriving and inclusive research ecosystem. Duke’s climate research will generate real-world impact, improving lives and communities, informing policy and shaping a sustainable economy.

External Engagement: Convening for Collective Impact Duke understands that lasting climate solutions require collaboration beyond the university. As a convener, Duke will foster partnerships across public, private and nonprofit sectors—locally, nationally and globally. By hosting critical conversations, seeding collaborative initiatives and attracting expert partners, Duke will extend the influence of its climate work and demonstrate the powerful societal role higher education can play. Through these connections, the university will amplify its research, deepen its relevance and catalyze broader systems change.

Sustainable Operations: Living Our Values Operational excellence is fundamental to Duke's credibility and leadership in climate action. Achieving net-zero emissions, including across the Duke Health System, by 2050 is a cornerstone of this commitment. However, sustainability at Duke goes further. Through the development and implementation of a Climate and Sustainable Operations Plan for Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions, the university is embedding sustainability into its infrastructure, procurement, food systems, transportation and land management. Duke will model strategies for overcoming the collective action problems that can inhibit climate response. These efforts will make sustainability a visible, everyday experience for the campus community.

Community Partnerships: Working Together, Thriving Together Duke's commitment extends deeply into the communities that surround and support it. By working for, with and in community, Duke aims to co-create a healthier, more equitable Durham and North Carolina. These partnerships are central to Duke's vision, ensuring that climate and sustainability strategies uplift communities, improve quality of life and reinforce mutual resilience. Whether addressing food security, energy efficiency, transportation or housing, Duke's Climate Commitment will be built with neighbors.

EDUCATION INTEGRATION

Education Integration Vision

Climate change is a global problem; it requires cooperation across borders, cultures, and generations. While climate change is a challenge too big for individuals alone, it becomes solvable when communities, institutions, and nations work together. Duke will train and empower the next generation of climate leaders including students, staff, faculty and alumni to demonstrate how collaboration transforms anxiety into agency and links personal choices to systemic solutions. Duke aims for every student to graduate with climate and sustainability fluency and a sense of agency and hope to implement positive climate and sustainability action, regardless of their academic program of study. The vision for climate and sustainability fluency is that learners at all levels choose Duke at least in part because of the interdisciplinary, experiential, applied and immersive opportunities available to actively engage in climate and sustainability.

Education Integration Goals

01 Foster knowledge and skills by making high-quality climate and sustainability education widespread and accessible across all of Duke.

02 Cultivate curiosity about climate and sustainability by advancing innovative, experiential teaching and learning.

03 Empower lifelong climate stewardship at Duke and beyond by orienting this learning toward career and personal relevance.

Education Integration Strategies » Maximize reach to student populations by embedding interdisciplinary, intersectional content across core, first-year and large enrollment courses and programs, beginning in Trinity and pilot schools (Pratt, Sanford, and Nursing). » Support instructor learning and development by providing workshops, consultations, and teaching resources to encourage integration of climate and sustainability into their curricula. » Enhance informal learning for students, staff and faculty by linking education with daily campus life and operations, demonstrating relevance to real-world decisions and environments. » Make learning communal, fun and immersive through real-world opportunities by expanding existing co-curricular and extracurricular programs that provide field-based, community-engaged, and problem-based learning opportunities. » Engage nontraditional voices and disciplines in education by creating collaborative projects that foster systems thinking, historical awareness, ethical reflection, and inclusive storytelling. » Strengthen lifelong learning for alumni by leveraging connections with alumni to provide mentorship and networking, professional development and educational opportunities. » Center climate narratives to build learners' awareness of climate change's relevance to their lives and urgency to act – inviting learners to share stories of how they've been impacted by or acted on climate, and how these actions have shaped their sense of purpose and self-efficacy.

RESEARCH INNOVATION

Research Innovation Vision

Duke will engage in meaningful research that advances discovery, as well as mitigates, responds to, and adapts to climate change. We will maintain and promote our established excellence in climate and health, oceans, and finance and policy, while investing in new areas spanning the breadth of academic exploration – from the humanities and social sciences to the natural and physical sciences, from engineering to medicine – encouraging both disciplinary depth and interdisciplinary creativity in the service of discovery and translation to enhance our climate, sustainability, societies and environment.

Research Innovation Goals

01 Become a globally recognized thought and action leader in three areas—Climate Finance and Policy, Climate and Health, and Oceans—where Duke has distinctive advantages.

02 Grow new areas where Duke has made investments in demonstrated strengths—Environmental and Climate Justice, Climate and Community Resilience, and Climate Science, Technology and Policy.

03 Continue to create opportunities across Duke for widespread participation and inclusion in climate and sustainability research to build a vibrant and well-connected research community that fosters collaboration, knowledge sharing, and impactful outcomes.

Research Innovation Strategies » Foster interdisciplinary collaboration and “Blue Sky” thinking that can lead to breakthrough solutions to climate change. » Enhance humanities, social sciences and fine arts scholars’ engagement in climate and sustainability research. » Support early-career faculty and postdoctoral researchers to bring new energy and perspectives to climate and sustainability research. » Evaluate and enhance climate and sustainability seed grant programs to ensure they meet the needs of strategic research priorities. » Strengthen external collaboration and diversify external research funding sources to include new industry and private-sector partners. » Develop a climate and sustainability research inventory and dashboard to foster future collaborations.

EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT FOR IMPACT

External Engagement for Impact Vision

Duke will be a sought-out convener, known for purposeful partnerships for positive societal impact to address climate and sustainability challenges. Duke will demonstrate how universities fulfill and maintain the promise of higher education as a neutral host where conversations, collaboration and partnerships of consequence across sectors of society and the political spectrum can take place. Duke will be known as a convener of record in national and international arenas for several key signature events that will continually draw experts and decision makers into the forum while surfacing priorities for applied research that can inform policy. Through this work, Duke will attract corporate, NGO, alumni, philanthropic, decision makers and research partners to join in the work of the Duke Climate Commitment and meaningfully engage with the communities working with Duke.

External Engagement for Impact Goals

01 Bring more experts and organizations to Duke to build long-term partnerships for impact.

02 Leverage Duke's climate expertise beyond the university.

03 Increase and gain more recognition for Duke's climate expertise and societal impact.

04 Seed new research and programmatic collaborations in partnership with outside experts, industry partners, and thought leaders.

External Engagement for Impact Strategies

» Provide a vision for a new Climate Engagement Exchange that will support faculty, staff and students in expanding engagement activity at Duke. Conduct necessary background research and develop an implementation plan in partnership with Duke leadership. Support development of concept notes and communications materials regarding the Exchange. » Engage with Duke leadership and faculty, staff and students to advise on the design, setup and implementation of the Climate Engagement Exchange and its programs and areas for collaboration. » Identify and engage new partners, for collaborative opportunities, funding commitments and other resources to support the Exchange's priorities. » Bring top thought leaders to Duke University to serve as fellows who share insights and expertise, sparking discussion and action to advance climate solutions as a part of the Climate Leaders in Residence program. » Continue to develop significant Climate Collaboration Symposia, on-campus convenings designed to accelerate climate solutions by developing new collaborations among Duke scholars and external partners. » Showcase Duke's climate work by participating in national and international convenings including the United Nations Climate Change Conference (i.e. COP), New York Climate Week and a wide variety of conferences.

SUSTAINABLE OPERATIONS

Sustainable Operations Vision

Duke will be a bold and visible example of living, working, and practicing Climate Commitment values. Sustainability and decarbonization will be demonstrated as primary concerns in all university decision making from leadership to students. Duke aims to achieve net-zero carbon emissions inclusive of the Duke University Health System by 2050. Duke also strives to demonstrate sustainable campus operations including enhancing alternative transportation, working towards a zero-waste and circular economy, and encouraging sustainable procurement practices, sustainable food systems, water conservation and sustainable land management.

Sustainable Operations Goals

01 Develop a 2050 net zero scope 1 and 2 emissions reduction plan for campus utilities and infrastructure, campus energy use and renewable energy.

02 Implement the 2050 net zero scope 1 and 2 emissions reduction plan.

03 Develop the scope 3 emissions reduction and sustainable operations plan for waste, transportation, procurement, food, water, buildings and natural spaces.

04 Implement the scope 3 emissions reduction and sustainable operations plan.

05 Develop and implement a Duke University Health System climate and sustainability strategy.

Operations Strategies » Establish foundations for 2050 net-zero emissions goal including adopting a new scope 1 and 2 emissions baseline, updating emission boundaries, and determining the appropriate external reporting organization. » Finalize campus energy model to inform 5-year interim GHG reduction targets in scope 1 & 2 through 2050. » Establish a new process to measure and communicate progress towards the scope 1 and 2 net zero plan and re-evaluate plan at 5-year intervals. » Implement energy reduction strategies for campus utilities such as transitioning from steam to hot water, capturing and using waste heat and electrifying heat-generating utilities. » Implement energy reduction strategies in campus buildings such as installing LED lighting and controls, replacing inefficient air handlers, adjusting temperature setpoints and reducing leaks in ductwork and building envelopes. » Develop Duke University's renewable energy procurement strategy, which includes a feasibility study for on-campus solar development, the launch of Duke's utility-scale offsite solar project, and continuous evaluation of new renewable energy procurement opportunities. » Establish scope 3 emission reduction goals and identify priorities in sustainable operations categories in collaboration with campus stakeholders. » Expand Duke's institutional capacity for leadership and execution of sustainable operations priorities. » Develop education and engagement tools for campus community involvement in sustainable operations efforts. » Establish a Duke University Health System sustainability program office. » Engage with experts across the country such as Practice Greenhealth and the Association of Academic Medical Centers for health-system climate and sustainability best practices. » Develop a climate pledge, long-term sustainability roadmap, and Climate Action Plan for Duke University Health System.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Community Partnerships Vision

Duke will draw on its strengths as a university and as a committed community partner to co-create a more sustainable and healthier place to work and live. Duke is committed to authentic, purposeful partnerships—particularly in Durham, the region, and across North Carolina—grounded in an understanding of community needs. By weaving community partnerships through all the pillars of the Climate Commitment and also integrating the work the Office of Climate and Sustainability (OCS) with that of the Office of Duke Community Affairs (DCA), Duke will create synergies between its strategic objectives in sustainability and DCA's commitment to community empowerment.

Community Partnership Goals

01 Deepen and further define strategic working relationships between the Office of Climate and Sustainability and Duke Community Affairs to incorporate and prioritize climate, sustainability, and environmental justice goals in Duke's community engagement mission.

02 Find opportunities for alignment with climate and sustainability efforts within Duke's evolving Strategic Community Impact Plan.

03 Identify opportunities to infuse effective, community-engaged research principles within climate and sustainability research priorities across Duke.

04 Amplify and showcase Duke's climate and sustainability community partnership work.

05 Create opportunities to gather broader community input on Climate Commitment strategic planning.

06 Seek opportunities for collaboration on Duke and local community priorities including food security, public transportation and residential energy efficiency.

Community Partnership Strategies » Complete an inventory of ongoing climate and sustainability community engagement projects to improve awareness. » Establish metrics to evaluate the success of Duke's integration of community partnerships and sustainability initiatives. » Establish clear OCS link to Duke's Center for Community Engagement and Partnership Platform to enable communications and alignment with Duke's climate goals. » Identify 2-3 key local community partners to establish more formalized collaboration. Gather feedback working with the partners towards clear joint goals and documented progress. » Clarify boundaries and alignments between overlapping concepts including community, community partnerships, community engagement, external engagement, and community-engaged scholarship and research.

TOWARDS 2030 - A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY AND A LONG-TERM VISION

While this plan offers a structured pathway for the next three years, its spirit is intentionally open and adaptive. The strategies outlined in this plan are just a sample of the expansive work happening across our campus and community. Duke understands that solutions will emerge not only from formal initiatives, but from grassroots efforts, unexpected collaborations and the creativity of people. Every school, unit and individual will have a role. The Climate Commitment invites the entire Duke community to lead, to innovate and to act. This strategy is both an invitation and a test. It asks us to reflect on how we teach, how we learn, how we operate and how we engage with one another and the world. Success will require courage, collaboration, experimentation and continuous learning. But above all, it will require belief—in the power of higher education to make a difference, in the potential of collective action and in the urgent need for climate leadership. Together, we will help define what it means to be a truly climate-committed university. And together, we will work to ensure that the world we pass on is safer, more secure and more resilient for all.

DUKE CLIMATE COMMITMENT

Duke University aims to be recognized globally as a leading, innovative institution driving meaningful and sustainable action on climate change—making this mission central to our identity.

Through the Duke Climate Commitment, launched in 2022, we are mobilizing our entire university and health system across five pillars: education, research, external engagement, campus operations, and community partnerships. Every school, institute, and office at Duke is engaged, transcending disciplinary boundaries and forging partnerships within Durham and worldwide to build a safer, more resilient, and abundant future for all. The Climate Commitment's mission is to empower Duke's greatest resource—its people—demonstrating how higher education can lead on climate action. By fostering interdisciplinary research, pioneering sustainable operations, advancing climate education, engaging externally to foster impact and collaborating authentically with our partners and communities, Duke strives to deliver systemic institutional change while preparing and inspiring the next generation of climate leaders.

CLIMATE COMMITMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Climate Commitment Advisory Council (CCAC) serves as an advisory body to Duke's Executive Leadership Group (President, Provost, EVP for Health Affairs, and the EVP) and is guided by four expert subcommittees for the purpose of driving forward the vision articulated in the Duke Climate and Sustainability Strategy 2030.

The CCAC is led by Vice President and Vice Provost for Climate and Sustainability at Duke, Toddi Steelman, and co-vice chairs Tavey Capps, Executive Director of Climate and Sustainability, and Brian Murray, Director of the Nicholas Institute for Energy, Environment & Sustainability. The CCAC is comprised of faculty, staff and students whose responsibilities, interests and expertise are aligned with the five pillars of Duke's mission—education, research, external engagement for impact, sustainable operations, and community partnerships. This work is also consistent with President Price's Strategic Vision, Toward our Second Century.

THANK YOU

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