



**GAP YEAR**  
ASSOCIATION

# CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

## 2023 - 2026

Adopted by GYA's Board of Directors on July 26, 2023



Written By

**GYA's Sustainability Committee**

2023 Co-Chairs: Ryan Allen & Daniel Ponce-Taylor

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



<b>2</b>	<b> </b>	<b>Climate Action Mission &amp; Vision</b>
<b>3-4</b>	<b> </b>	<b>Leadership &amp; Influencing</b>
<b>5</b>	<b> </b>	<b>Travel</b>
<b>6-7</b>	<b> </b>	<b>Emissions &amp; Reduction</b>
<b>8-9</b>	<b> </b>	<b>Facilities &amp; Operations</b>
<b>10-11</b>	<b> </b>	<b>Climate Education</b>
<b>12</b>	<b> </b>	<b>Transparency &amp; Reporting</b>
<b>13</b>	<b> </b>	<b>Resources</b>

# ABOUT US

**The Gap Year Association (GYA)** is the Standards Development Organization (SDO) for gap year education as recognised by the U.S. Department of Justice and Federal Trade Commission. GYA is a 501(c)3 nonprofit member association working to coordinate the growing gap year movement through standards development, research, providing resources and professional development, and expanding accessibility.

**GYA's Sustainability Committee** promotes awareness of—and actions to address—the gap year field's ecological, cultural, and economic impacts. The committee accomplishes this mission by assisting in the development of sustainability-related Standards of Accreditation, and by creating resources to help GYA members and members of the general public achieve their own sustainability goals.

## CLIMATE ACTION MISSION & VISION

**We Envision** a future where those involved in experiential education account for their greenhouse gas emissions and take immediate and meaningful actions to reduce their impact on the environment.

**We Affirm** that gap year education is fundamental to fostering understanding and respect among different peoples in order to transcend borders, cultures, and languages to solve global problems.

**We Recognize** that the climate crisis poses an acute threat to the economy, nature, and society.

**We Acknowledge** the role of the gap year field in contributing to the climate crisis and, therefore, its position as a likely decarbonization leader.

**We Take Full Account** that organizations are in different stages of implementing actions to mitigate the effects of climate change and that commitments and actions are taking place at various levels.

**We Wish to Emphasize** that climate solutions must advance justice, equity, and human rights.

**We Acknowledge** that transitioning the Gap Year Association to net zero emissions will be challenging and will require re-evaluation of business and financial models.

# LEADERSHIP & INFLUENCING

---

Through the Gap Year Association's leadership and influencing within the field of gap year education, we commit to the following:

## COLLABORATE WITH STAKEHOLDERS

We commit to greater levels of collaboration with other stakeholders in experiential education to forge a coordinated approach to accelerate climate action.

In this respect, our goals for 2023-2024 are to:

**1. Become a signatory of the CANIE (Climate Action Network for International Education) Accord.**

**2. Offer open resources on climate action to program providers, students and consultants in the gap year industry such as climate action plan templates and professional development opportunities.**

## Develop Programming to Increase Resilience to the Effects of Climate Change

We commit to developing our relationships with grassroots climate action projects domestically and internationally with the goal of fostering programming within our field that increase resilience to the effects of climate change.

1. GYA's leadership team based in Missoula, Montana will work with local organizations across a range of ecological projects aimed at insetting greenhouse gas emissions and restoring habitat.

2. GYA will work with members (Program Providers) to collaborate on international ecological projects aimed at insetting greenhouse gas emissions associated with the running of the Gap Year Association's affairs (operations, travel and conferencing) and restoring habitat.

3. GYA will provide a range of open resources aimed at developing climate resilient programming available to program providers, consultants and students. Examples include: Sustainability forums open to GYA members, green conferencing travel tips and resources, online resources for calculating greenhouse gas emissions associated with programming, example greenhouse gas emissions insetting projects, etc.





## Embedding climate action into organizational mission

The Gap Year Association's strategies, policies and framework includes official strategic documents addressing climate action. In this respect we commit to the following:

1. The Gap Year Association's guiding principles identify sustainability as a priority within gap year education.
2. Implementing our climate action plan is an organizational priority included within GYA's 2024-2026 Strategic Plan, approved and adopted by GYA's Board of Directors in 2023.

## FINANCIAL SERVICES

We commit to continuing to ensure that the financial services availed by the Gap Year Association do not fund fossil fuel industry and prioritize climate action in their own operations.

1. In this respect, we will continue to bank with Beneficial State Bank, headquartered in Portland, Oregon.
2. We will encourage members to investigate their financial services climate action stance and whether or not they fund the fossil fuel industry.



# TRAVEL

---

## REDUCE UNNECESSARY TRAVEL

A key component of the Gap Year Association's climate action plan is the reduction of unnecessary travel. In this respect we pledge to:

1. Plan our physical meetings based on need and give preference to remote professional development. For example, our monthly professional development forums and Virtual Summit each fall.
2. Moving to an 18-month in-person conference cycle is a primary goal for 2023/2024 to reduce unnecessary travel peripherally created by the Gap Year Association.

## Introduce Climate-Conscious Travel Policies

Where travel and in-person meeting is essential, the Gap Year Association pledges to introduce climate conscious travel policies.

As the GYA is primarily a remotely run association with members spread globally, climate-conscious travel will be mainly concerning our bi-annual in-person conference. Therefore, we shall:

1. Provide climate conscious travel resources for conference attendees that include carpooling resources, public transportation resources and other resources identified by the Conference Committee and Sustainability Committee.
2. Fly Economy: When travelling by air is necessary, fly economy class or the least carbon-intensive mode. Most airlines now publish flight emissions along with basic flight information.

# EMISSIONS ACCOUNTING & REDUCTION

---

## ESTABLISH A GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS BASELINE

Establishing a baseline figure of CO2 tonnes per annum produced directly by the Gap Year Association is essential to measuring our greenhouse gas emission reduction.

1. We will begin this process by analyzing the GHGs emitted by GYA staff flights and the flights associated with attending our in-person events (bi-annual conference).
2. Our baseline GHG gives us a figure to work off for future reduction goals and in-setting projects.

## Commit to a Year-on-Year GHG Emission Decrease

The Gap Year Association commits to make efforts to immediately reduce our greenhouse gas emissions in 2023/2024. We will achieve this by taking the following steps:

1. Moving from a 12-month in-person conference cycle to an 18-month conference cycle.
2. Using companies with progressive climate stances for future procurement.
3. Hosting more remote professional development opportunities for members.

## Prioritize Renewable Energy

The Gap Year Association commits to using and supporting the production of 'green' and renewable energy for future conferences and in person events.

1. The GYA will prioritize conference providers who can offer renewable energy on their premises.



## In-Setting Projects

Where unable to eliminate or reduce our GHG emissions, the Gap Year Association pledges to work with GHG insetting projects whose carbon capture is equal to or greater than our measurable GHG emissions, making the GYA a 'net-Zero' organization by the end of 2024. In this respect, we will:

1. Work with gap year program providers who will pledge to inset (through measurable ecological restoration such as tree planting, wetland rehabilitation, coral reef seeding, etc.) the GYA's GHG emissions.
2. The short term goal for the GYA's insetting projects is to account for/measure all flight and travel related GHGs for 2023-2024 and work with partner programs to inset the equivalent amount through projects such as tree planting.
3. The medium term goal is to develop a network of program providers within the GYA who can offer a range of insetting projects that can be used to inset our larger GHG footprint on conference years.



## CARBON CREDIT PROJECTS

Where insetting is absolutely not possible, the Gap Year Association may use carbon credit projects as an alternative. In this respect, the GYA pledges to:

1. Identify reputable Carbon Credit Projects.
2. Commit to not using carbon credit projects as a substitute for decarbonization measures nor as justification for delaying emissions reductions.
3. Follow up on carbon credit projects to ensure they deliver and regularly revise carbon credit strategy as best practices evolve.



# FACILITIES & OPERATIONS

## ORGANIZATIONAL ACTION TEAM

GYA will utilize its committees and the Board of Directors to achieve our climate action goals and ensure that we are continually striving for more ambitious goals.

We recognize the need that climate action is in at least one person's position description within the GYA and therefore intend:

1. That the Sustainability Committee Chair(s) shall be the formally recognized 'point of contact' for climate action within the GYA.
2. That one of the primary goals of the Sustainability Committee is to ensure that the GYA's climate action plan is being acted upon and continually revised/updated to keep up with best practices.
3. That the Sustainability Committee works closely with the Board of Directors and co-committees to collaborate on climate action within the GYA.

## Replace Printing and Shipping Marketing Materials with Digital Marketing Technologies

The reduction of print material and shift to online marketing will reduce our ecological footprint. In this respect, we intend to:

1. Reduce and simplify our print material to only essential items.
2. Digitize the GYA's marketing materials wherever possible.

## Encourage Other International Education Stakeholders to Take Climate Action

As a professional members organization, the Gap Year Association is well positioned to encourage members, non-members and other international education associations/organizations to take climate action. We intend to encourage our colleagues to take climate action by:

1. Becoming a signatory of the CANIE Accord.
2. Promoting the CANIE Accord on GYA website, in the GYA's online resources and through our members forum and professional development opportunities.
3. To provide free, online climate action resources such as draft climate action plans, green travel guides and green conferencing guides.
4. To mentor and collaborate with our colleagues in the international education field to help develop climate action plans.



## Include Climate Action Criteria in the Contract & Procurement Process

The Gap Year Association pledges to consider suppliers' climate strategies when sourcing third party goods and services. This applies, but is not limited to the following areas:

1. Conference Providers: When selecting a venue for future GYA conference, the Conference Committee and the Sustainability Committee will work together to ensure that venue has climate action values and plans that align with the GYA's. For example, hotels that operate using renewable energy will be given preference for future conference locations.
2. Catering: When selecting catering options the GYA will strive to select locally produced goods from a provider or providers whose climate action values and plans align with the GYA's.

## Emission Reduction Projects with Partners

Where greenhouse gas emissions cannot be reduced, the Gap Year Association will work with, and in some cases invest in, emission reducing projects with partners. We intend to utilize the following projects:

1. Greenhouse gas insetting projects with GYA member program providers. This includes ecologically restorative projects such as re-forestation, coral reef rehabilitation/planting, wetland rehabilitation, etc.
2. Where insetting projects are being undertaken on behalf of the GYA, the partner sponsoring the project must pledge that the additional work undertaken on behalf of the GYA is in addition to current insetting projects.
3. Where insetting projects are being undertaken on behalf of the GYA, the sponsoring partner shall quantify the impact of their project in CO2 tonnes.
4. When insetting projects are not available, the GYA may invest in verified GHG reducing projects through Gold Standard.

# CLIMATE EDUCATION

---

It is the belief of the Gap Year Association that all globally mobile students should be aware of the impact that travel has on climate and what can be done to mitigate emissions.

As a collection of experiential educators operating across the globe, it is our responsibility to ensure that climate education is incorporated into both the professional development opportunities for GYA members and into the standards and accreditation process for accredited program providers.

## INSERT CLIMATE LITERACY MODULES INTO PROGRAMMING

1. Climate literacy shall be consistently incorporated into professional development opportunities for GYA members, with resources made available through the GYA to support members in their own climate action goals.
2. Climate literacy, to an extent to be determined by the Standards and Accreditation Committee will be incorporated into the Standards and Accreditation process for program providers.

## Share Climate Action Goals

In an effort to encourage others to take action and highlight the efforts of the Gap Year Association, the GYA will:

1. Incorporate our climate action projects into our marketing and social media.
2. Publish our Climate Action Plan on GYA's website
3. Create and share template Climate Action Plans for Gap Year Program Providers available to all programs.
4. Highlight member sponsored insetting projects on the GYA's website and social media channels.



## Network with Other Professionals Involved in Climate Action

To stay abreast with best practices and current events regarding climate action, the Gap Year Association will network with other professional organizations and individuals involved in climate action. This may include, but is not limited to:

1. Attending events and talks locally/online to represent the GYA and the Gap Year movement in climate action.
2. Developing our professional relationship with CANIE and other climate organizations.
3. Inviting members of climate organizations as guest speakers at GYA events.



## Include a Climate Action Stream Within Scholarship Programs

To reward students taking climate action and further lower the barriers to entry, the Gap Year Association will develop a climate action scholarship stream.

1. A climate action scholarship will be developed by the GYA and piloted in 2024-2026. Click [HERE](#) to contribute to this scholarship fund.
2. The GYA will encourage members to create climate action scholarships within their own organizations.



# TRANSPARENCY & REPORTING

---

## ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSPARENCY

The Gap Year Association commits to a transparent and honest portrayal of our climate action plan progress to the public through:

1. Accurate portrayal of our climate action goals, projects and undertakings in our reporting, advertising and marketing, including but not limited to our website, social media etc.

## Reporting

We recognize that our climate action commitments must be regularly revisited and reported on to ensure progression. We pledge that all reporting is as accurate as possible given our organizational resources. We therefore commit to:

1. Publish an annual climate action report monitoring the progress of the action plans laid out in this document.
2. Make our climate action report available to the general public through our website.

## HOPE

As a network of inspired individuals who value travel, adventure, education and mentoring the next generation, the Gap Year Association pledges to lead with hope (and follow up with action) when addressing climate action.

Our underlying message is that there are actions that individuals and companies can take to make a difference while still enjoying and providing international educational travel.

# Resources



**[CANIE: Climate Action Network for International Education](#)**

**[GYA Sustainability Committee](#)**

**[Carbon Calculator](#)**

**[Gold Standard for Carbon Off-Setting Projects](#)**

**[Carry Institute Summary](#)**

**[The Argument Against Carbon Offsetting](#)**

**[Guide to Carbon Insetting](#)**

**[Society for Ecological Restoration: For current projects globally](#)**