



THE CLIMATE MUSEUM: A PLATFORM FOR CULTURAL LEADERSHIP ON CLIMATE AND A PRIORITY FOR NEW YORK CITY

“The Climate Museum is clearly a leader in the movement that might just save us from ourselves.”

—Tom H., visitor to Climate Museum exhibition Taking Action, Governors Island, 2019. Quoted in J. Newell, “Climate museums: powering action,” Museum Management and Curatorship, Oct. 2020.

The Climate Museum is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit currently scaling out to a permanent year-round presence in New York City. The Museum’s mission is to inspire action on the climate crisis with programming across the arts and sciences that deepens understanding, builds connections, and advances just solutions. In its public programming to date, the Museum has created an activist cultural approach to community engagement with climate, recognizing that most Americans are worried about the climate crisis but unsure how to take meaningful action. Its free, publicly accessible exhibitions, art installations, advocacy tools, events, youth programs, and more have touched tens of thousands of visitors and received extensive recognition, broadening the climate movement with an emphasis on justice, equity, and inclusion.

[The New York Times](#); [The New Yorker](#); [The Atlantic](#); [The Washington Post](#); [Exhibition](#).

New York City’s next Administration should adopt the Museum’s expansion into year-round space as a key priority for New Yorkers and the world. The Climate Museum will play a meaningful role in New York City’s post-pandemic cultural revitalization and enrich the City’s global climate leadership. In the Museum’s work throughout the City, time and time again, its team has witnessed the public’s remarkable appetite for, and response to, climate programming. The Museum’s experience with both significant commissions and community-based arts projects confirms that arts and cultural programming offers an essential lens for the challenges we face, and supports open dialogue about even the most difficult subjects—including the existential threat posed by the climate emergency and its relationship to deep systems of racial hierarchy.

New York City’s extraordinary diversity across the five boroughs, its resonant but realistic humanity—suffering no fools gladly—and its bracing, truth-seeking creative sector are thoroughly interdependent. While the pandemic has put the vibrancy of the cultural sector and the people of New York under enormous pressure, it offers important lessons as well. The Climate Museum will serve as a source of both creative energy and emotional connection as New York recovers and learns from the deep wounds of the pandemic. Going forward, it will be a valuable amenity affording community members and tourists alike opportunities to be inspired and galvanized by climate arts, science, and dialogue.

To meet the needs of New Yorkers and to lead internationally, our next Mayor must adopt and move beyond a whole-of-government approach to the climate crisis. It is necessary but not sufficient to implement a central, consistent focus on climate progress and justice at the policy level. As a city we must also pioneer and model a whole-of-culture approach.

The climate crisis is a multi-faceted menace to New York City, already impacting public health, infrastructure, and equity. Addressing it successfully will require profound ambition, perseverance, creativity, and community-mindedness; the elevation of both global and community dialogues on all matters climate-inflected; and significant shifts in societal norms. Policy alone will not suffice; we also need a cultural shift.

The creation of a culture for collective action on climate—the mission of the Climate Museum—is essential to this difficult and transformative work, as a range of climate leaders including United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres have noted. The Museum, in partnership with other leading cultural, civic, and activist organizations, aims to support the multitude of equity-focused climate policies needed now and into the future by our city, and our world. Together, we will build community, catalyze climate awareness and engagement, and inspire action. Together, we will bend the odds toward success.

The Museum’s staff has witnessed first-hand the strong, intensifying public appetite for activist cultural programming on climate; we likewise know that we and our allies and partners are ready to step up; and we have already collaborated closely with the Mayor’s Office of Climate Policy and Programs, the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, and the New York City Department of Education’s Office of Sustainability, co-presenting major programs in each case. We have operated seasonal space on Governors Island, working hand in hand with the team there, and intend to maintain that footprint even as we move toward a year-round, subway-accessible location. We look forward to deepening our work with the City and its partners, and to continuing to expand, captivate, and activate our audiences.

In short, the Climate Museum can be a critical part of a whole-of-culture approach.



The Museum's local and global relationships position it to activate the key transformational powers of the cultural sector: popularity and trust. The Climate Museum has been privileged to partner with a multitude of diverse New York City organizations, including several citywide policy agencies, nationally recognized environmental justice organizations such as the POINT CDC, scientific consortia at Columbia University's Earth Institute such as the Urban Climate Change Research Network, and community-based youth arts programs such as YUCA Arts. The Museum has proudly presented:

- Art installations with attendant community partnerships and programming in the Far Rockaways, the South Bronx, Staten Island's North Shore, the West Village, and many other locations;
- Workshops and talks in every borough with a range of participants and audiences;
- Citywide, interdisciplinary youth leadership programs and a host of school visits and tours;
- A robust menu of online presentations focusing principally on climate and inequality and featuring local and national leaders in journalism, community advocacy, and policy;
- ...and much more.

The Museum's programs have a profound impact on its constituencies:

“ How the Climate Museum changed my life: We committed. Day by day we've multiplied our actions, replacing our despair with determination.

Karen M., Visitor, Climate Museum's Taking Action

“ The Museum engages critical issues of climate justice, boosting the public's awareness of the connections between climate change and social equity.

Eddie Bautista, Director, NYC Environmental Justice Alliance

“ Climate Speaks has been the single most influential aspect in my life as an environmentally concerned citizen and student.

Eliza S., Performer, Climate Museum's Climate Speaks 2019

The Climate Museum has also served as a compass within the growing global movement to integrate climate programming into the work of museums and the cultural sector. Its staff are routinely invited to present at convenings around the world, playing an active role in important, emerging coalitions. Currently the Museum is spearheading an international programmatic collaboration representing museums on every continent and inviting interactive participation by their constituencies. These cultural sector relationships, and the popular networks and community connections they enhance, can advance and deepen New York City's role as a global frontrunner on climate policy.

We urge mayoral candidates to commit to establishing and elevating the first climate-dedicated museum in the United States for New Yorkers and our city's visitors from all over the world. As the intensification of the climate crisis becomes apparent to more and more of us, it has never been more urgent, or more feasible, for New York City to lead on both climate and culture in this new way. The Climate Museum space, whether it is an adaptive reuse of an existing building or part of a new construction, will serve as a state-of-the-art exhibition and social hub welcoming local, national, and global communities to diverse, truthful, and galvanizing climate programs built on our prior successes: a model of accessible sustainability and civic engagement. This initiative will be a point of pride and a shining legacy, an embodiment of our determination and our capacity to inspire each other and the world.