

# Funder Commitment on Climate Change - one year on (5 minute read)

Published: 15 December 2020

Written by: Philee Ang-Chen, Grants Assistant

In December 2019, John Ellerman Foundation signed the [Funder Commitment on Climate Change](#). At its heart, this is a commitment by 50 UK charitable foundations, who have all agreed that regardless of their charitable mission and field of expertise, we can and must play our part in addressing the climate emergency.

I joined the Foundation in September 2019 as Grants Assistant through the Charityworks Graduate Scheme. Part of the scheme involved undertaking a research project that would benefit the host organisation. The Foundation's journey with the Funder Commitment seemed to coincide well with my own time here, and so I decided to base my research project on exploring the ways in which we could deliver each aspect of the Funder Commitment. Those that sign up commit to the following six things: to educate and learn; to commit resources; to integrate the commitment in all that we do; to steward our investments for a post-carbon future; to decarbonise our operations and to report on progress. This blog is one of the ways in which we are reporting on our progress, one year later.

I began my research before the March lockdown. My first steps were to get involved in the group set up for signatories to the Funder Commitment and to join meetings with them, as well as attending various workshops and climate related events outside of this group.

The Funder Commitment was set up by Nick Perks, and he has been such an incredible resource and support to not just me, but other colleagues at the Foundation too, since we signed up. More recently, Nick has handed over the management and oversight of the Funder Commitment to the Association of Charitable Foundations, which is great news and really reiterates just how much this is something that **all** UK charitable foundations should consider signing up to!

As part of my research, I also carried out in depth interviews with colleagues and our Trustees too. John Ellerman Foundation supports the arts, social action and environment through our grant-making, and so, as you can imagine, there's much by way of in-house expertise to draw upon too, including Hugh Raven – an environmentalist and Chair of various environmental NGOs, including the Environmental Funders Network (EFN), and Matthew Whittell, who has specialist experience in climate change mitigation in both the public and private sector.

My research has really improved my own understanding of climate change, the Funder Commitment and the role of funders in all of this, as well as enabling me to connect with other organisations also working on delivering the Funder Commitment. Despite the differences in size, structure and funding areas of the various signatories to the Funder Commitment, each of us shares the same goal, to use our influence to tackle climate change, from the work that we fund to the way that we operate.

The pandemic somewhat curtailed the ambition of my project, as the organisation juggled new and hitherto unplanned for priorities. However, having worked on the Funder Commitment these last few months there is much that I am pleased to report that we are doing. And, happily, we have plenty of ideas about what we can and must do next.

At a Board level, we have assigned a lead Trustee, Tufyal Choudhury, to the Funder Commitment, and operationally, I work alongside Matthew Whittell, our Head of Finance and Resources, and

Sufina Ahmad, our Director, to ensure we are delivering against the Funder Commitment. We report to the board on our progress annually – although we may report more frequently going forward.

Prior to signing the Funder Commitment, the Foundation had already started to address our direct and indirect contribution to the climate emergency and to mitigate its consequences, for example our small office space has been powered entirely by renewable electricity for some years and we have a longstanding history of making grants in the environment.

Since signing the Funder Commitment, we have made a concerted effort to ensure that we are actively engaging with and learning from climate related events, networks and organisations. We have analysed the carbon footprint of our investments to understand how we could improve its environmental impact. We have also developed a new investment policy which, inter alia:

- Makes our investment policy public for the first time
- Acknowledges the importance of transparency and accountability
- Explicitly sets out our ambition to manage our endowment in support of our organisational aim to advance the wellbeing of people, society and the natural world
- States that we will be proactive in our engagement with our fund managers on environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues
- Seeks to work in partnership with our stakeholders and peers to leverage our capacity to assist in transforming systems and institutions for managing endowments
- Encourages our fund managers to invest so as to support the just transition to net zero carbon.

In terms of our grant-making portfolio, 16 of our 53 current environmental grants relate to climate change, which equates to £1.5m of our current spend. This interest in climate change is now specifically referred to in our Funding Guidelines which were updated in September 2020. Our dedicated team of staff and trustees frequently attend seminars and events organised or promoted by the Environmental Funders Network (EFN), Greenpeace UK, Peers for the Planet, Client Earth and others. We also contribute to the Climate Funders Group, which is co-convened by EFN and the Climate Change Collaboration. We invited Richard Black from the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit (ECIU) to speak at our March Board Meeting and hope to continue our journey to educate and learn by inviting more experts to speak at our meetings in the future.

Despite our progress and what we have achieved so far, we were aware that we had only just started down this road. With this in mind, next year, we intend to invest in Carbon Literacy Training for staff and trustees and continue to fund more grants that address climate change. We hope to continue to play an active role in the networks linked to the Funder Commitment and are very keen to share our progress openly with others. With the enthusiasm of the team - our staff, trustees and grantees, we look forward to what we will be able to achieve through this as a medium sized charitable foundation in responding to the climate emergency at this crucial time.