

Policy Name	Environmental Policy
Source	Oxfam Canada
Responsibility	Policy Committee of the Oxfam Canada Board of Directors
First approved by the OCA Board of Directors	2011
Last update / revision	February 2022
Next review date	2025

BACKGROUND

Though the climate crisis is global, there is deep injustice and inequality in its impacts. Poor communities are the least responsible for emissions, but they suffer the greatest effects and have the least ability to adapt. Women and girls typically have less capacity and resources than men and boys to prepare for and adapt to climate change, and they have to assume more care responsibilities – which are made more burdensome because of climate change, and, consequently, leave them with less time to adapt to these changes. Given this context, Oxfam Canada (OCA) recognizes the need to walk the talk when it comes to climate justice.

PURPOSE

OCA is committed to achieving net zero emissions in our operations by 2050 in line with the *Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act*. As a member of the Oxfam Confederation, Oxfam Canada is also a signatory to the [Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations](#), which commits us to rapidly reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

This policy details OCA’s intentions for climate action within our operations. Subsequent iterations of the policy will reflect OCA’s ambition to extend our commitment to climate justice beyond operations, to our programs and advocacy work as well.

This policy is intended to demonstrate a pathway towards a resilient and net-zero energy and carbon future in all aspects of OCA’s work, and an enhanced level of stewardship with respect to other impacts of our operations on the environment. The pathway will identify current benchmarks, a methodology and metrics to reduce energy and carbon dependence, a cost framework and schedule to achieve net-zero. This pathway will focus as much on ‘how’ we do things as ‘what’ we do, in line with the OCA Feminist Principles (including our commitment to do no harm) and the Oxfam values of accountability, inclusiveness and empowerment.

SCOPE

The scope of this policy is OCA’s organizational practices, in particular in relation to OCA’s office infrastructure, commuting and work-related travel. While this policy could inform decisions related to environmental stewardship in the context of OCA projects, it is not designed to provide detailed guidance on the design and implementation of these projects.

OCA is committed to creating regular learning opportunities and allocating the resources required to implement this policy and build environmental awareness and sustainability into its organizational culture and practices.

The Board Policy Committee may need to review and update this policy before the next formal review date in 2025. The current iteration of the policy has been drafted in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic. For the past two years, many of OCA’s operations have been

reduced: all staff have been working from home, there has been no work-related travel, the OCA headquarter building has been virtually vacant, and we have organized no in-person events. In this context, OCA's carbon footprint has been significantly reduced and it has therefore proved challenging to establish meaningful baselines. OCA is also reflecting on its future needs in terms of its headquarter building in Ottawa. This policy should be reviewed as OCA resumes its in-person operations over the next few years.

ACCOUNTABILITY

- The **Board Policy Committee** ensures oversight and conducts regular reviews of this policy.
- The **Director of Finance & Operations** is responsible for ensuring overall implementation of this policy. They will prepare and present an annual implementation report to the Board Policy Committee.
- OCA will set up a standing **Environmental Stewardship Committee** which includes representation from all OCA departments. The Director of Finance & Operations will chair the committee. The committee will work with all OCA departments to form annual implementation plans. Each department will annually assess progress, identify emerging needs and priorities, and prepare a new set of action points, as appropriate. These assessments will inform the annual implementation report presented to the Board Policy Committee.

REDUCING OXFAM CANADA'S CARBON FOOTPRINT

1. **Commuting and local travel**

OCA commits to ensuring a timely transition to net-zero carbon and energy. This will require careful planning regarding the long-term location of the OCA headquarter office in Ottawa to ensure convenient access to public transit as well as the use of greater ride-sharing, and access to charging stations to encourage the use of electric vehicles. OCA will not subsidize private office parking for staff and visitor use.

2. **Travel**

Travel is the largest part of Oxfam Canada's environmental footprint. OCA commits to reducing the environmental impacts of work-related travel through the following methods:

- The Senior Management Team will set annual carbon reduction targets to reduce OCA's travel footprint. In the context of the OCA 2021-2025 Strategic Plan, we have committed to reducing OCA staff air-travel carbon emissions by 50% by 2025 (from FY2019 baseline).
- The Senior Management Team will use a "travel checklist" to guide the approval of all work-related travel. The checklist will help determine whether proposed work-related travel can be deemed "essential" in light of our carbon reduction commitments.
- Staff will calculate emissions created by work-related travel and record this in each travel request. The total will then be calculated semi-annually.

The Board of Directors commits to reconsidering its longstanding trend of holding two in-person Board meetings in Ottawa per year. This includes a commitment to facilitating virtual participation at all in-person meetings.

3. **Procurement**

OCA will consider environmental impact when procuring all supplies, including, but not limited to cleaning, printing, office supplies, advocacy materials, and promotional materials. The

Environmental Stewardship Committee will work with relevant staff to develop guiding principles for procurement, including a Procurement Checklist.

4. Infrastructure

OCA commits to ensuring a timely transition to net-zero carbon and energy related to its headquarter office in Ottawa. Whether in the current building at 39 McArthur Avenue, or in a new office space, OCA commits to reducing its carbon footprint within a timeframe to be established.

- Should OCA remain at 39 McArthur Avenue, we commit to a pathway towards a deep retrofit of the building.
- Should OCA choose to relocate, any selected office space should be chosen with a high environmental pedigree or the potential to retrofit to high-performance standards. Senior Management Team and the Board will refer to the “Building Checklist Considerations” developed by the Environmental Stewardship Committee.

Office space that is owned by Oxfam Canada should aim to be third-party certified under one of the following classifications: Net-Zero Building Certification by the Canadian Green Building Council or Passive House Certified by Passive House Canada. Rental space should aim to have LEED Gold Certification as a minimum or have the potential to work with the landlord to undertake net-zero retrofits as above.

Net-Zero Carbon space should also track the embodied carbon content of all construction and operational materials. This can be achieved through assessment programs such as Embodied Carbon positive certification through the Endeavour Centre. Maintenance and cleaning materials should similarly be certified as carbon and toxin free.

CARBON EMISSION TRACKING

OCA commits to establishing a schedule to reach benchmarks along the way to zero-carbon. This schedule will be reviewed every three years.

The Environmental Stewardship Committee will monitor the carbon footprint of OCA to meet the annual carbon reduction targets set by the Senior Management Team.

For the initial phase of this policy (FY23-25), we will only measure OCA’s carbon footprint in terms of emissions created by work-related travel. This data will be included in the implementation report presented to the Board Policy Committee.

During this initial phase, OCA will establish benchmark metrics for the other three categories covered by this policy (commuting and local travel, procurement and infrastructure). The baseline for these metrics will be FY2019.

CARBON OFFSETS

Only after all efforts have been implemented to reduce carbon and energy in the above categories (commuting, travel, procurement and infrastructure) will OCA consider carbon offsets. OCA commits to determine and provide payment for the offsets on an annual basis starting in FY2025.

DEFINITIONS

Environmental stewardship refers to the responsibility for environmental quality shared by all those whose actions affect the environment, reflected as both a value and a practice by individuals, companies, communities, and government organizations. Positive stewardship behavior demonstrates acceptance of this responsibility through the continuous improvement of environmental performance to achieve measurable results and sustainable outcomes

Carbon footprint is the total amount of greenhouse gases produced to directly and indirectly support human activities, usually expressed in equivalent tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂).

Accountability is the process by which Oxfam develops balanced, respectful relationships with diverse stakeholders, enabling them to hold us to account for the commitments we make, the decisions we take and the impact we have. Social accountability refers to our primary relationships, the commitment to the communities and people we seek to benefit, and the partners and allies with whom we work. It forms the foundation of our accountability to all other stakeholders.