



13 CLIMATE ACTION



Moderation Team
Diane Orihel
Kyla Tienhaara

SDG 13: Take action to combat climate change and its impacts

Event Description

On **June 21, 2021**, Queen's University hosted its first [17 Rooms](#) event, which brought together Queen's faculty, students, and staff to identify next steps for advancing the [UN Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) at the university.

Participants were divided into 17 virtual rooms, one per SDG, and asked to identify actions **that Queen's University could take in the following 12 to 18 months to advance their specific goal.**

Rooms participants were also asked to identify:

- The most important issues related to their SDG that Queen's should address,
- Connections and common themes amongst these issues,
- How their SDG connects with reconciliation/conciliation, decolonization, and Indigenization,
- How their SDG connects with other SDGs.

Each room had two hours to brainstorm ideas before presenting their recommended actions to all participants. Following the event, each room's moderation team authored a summary report.

Room Participants

Petra Fachinger	Diane Orihel (Moderator)
Megan Fleming	Jon Pharoah
Robert Kiley	Kyla Tienhaara (Moderator)
Kaitlin McDonald	Graham Whitelaw
Jeremy Milloy	Tianshu Yin
Steven Moore	

Preamble

The Rationale

When asked about why Queen's needs to take climate action, Dr. Patrick Deane, Principal and Vice Chancellor of Queen's University, provided a principled response. Principal Deane affirmed that **climate change is a fundamental issue of our time**, and that we, as individuals, have an obligation to do what we can, but also that it is the role of academic institutions to attend to the big issues of our time.

He acknowledged that acting on climate change will raise our institutional profile, pointing out that we need a high profile to have influence. We would add to this a sense of urgency: as we write, the West Coast of Canada is experiencing a "heat dome" that has shattered all previous temperature records for the entire country. The climate emergency can no longer be considered a problem for future generations, it is with us now. We must, therefore, be both swift and bold in our response.

The Approach

The moderators challenged the participants to come up with one idea for how Queen's University can advance climate action – in the next year or so.

Participants were asked to think big, bold, and outside the box as they completed a form (Appendix 1) in advance of the event, as well as prepared a 2-minute elevator pitch to deliver at the live event. During the live event, each participant had an equal opportunity to deliver their elevator pitch, followed by a group discussion.

The Ideas

We received 11 responses from participants prior to the live event. Additionally, ideas emerged organically from the discussions.

The first idea is a critical one that applies across the board: all climate change actions explored and adopted by Queen's University need to proceed **through fair consultation and engagement with Indigenous communities** in a process based on shared trust, accountability, and reciprocity.

Another overarching theme that came out of the discussions is **the lack of transparency and effective communication** from Queen's about its current approach to climate action. Participants shared that they were unclear how well Queen's was doing in achieving the targets laid out in the 2016 Climate Action Plan,

when these targets might be updated, or what offices in the university were responsible and accountable for implementing the plan. Transparency was also a major concern in the discussion about divestment, as detailed further below.

In addition to these broad issues, we heard ideas on ways to **reduce Queen’s carbon footprint**: offering carbon literacy training, promoting local/virtual conferences, setting up a solar co-op, creating a car-free campus, establishing a climate change grant program, and divesting from fossil fuels.

Ideas were presented on ways to **bridge the university with the local Kingston community**: creating a knowledge panel to contribute to the City of Kingston’s Climate Leadership Plan, sharing climate-related resources, initiatives, and events with the Kingston community (Obbema), creating a hydrogen village for Kingston, and promoting cities as leaders for building a carbon-neutral society.

Actions Summary

Room 13 brought together 11 individuals from across Queen’s University to discuss approaches to addressing SDG 13. The group identified four areas for action that stood out to the moderators for their high impact and their feasibility within the next 12-18 months.

The moderators reiterate the imperative that any action taken by Queen’s must have meaningful engagement with Indigenous partners and should be conducted with full transparency.

Action 1: Establish a diverse knowledge panel of Queen’s faculty to review and comment on the City of Kingston’s “Draft Climate Leadership Plan”

<p>Action Description</p>	<p>The City of Kingston will publish its draft Climate Leadership Plan this Fall and will be engaging in public consultations. A panel of Queen’s faculty experts should review and comment on the plan.</p>
<p>Problem Statement</p>	<p>Given the importance of Queen’s in the Kingston community and economy and the role that it can play in achieving the City’s climate change objectives, as well as the expertise that faculty have on climate change science and policy, it would be beneficial for both the City and for Queen’s to engage meaningfully with the draft Climate Leadership Plan.</p>

	<p>Importantly, this panel should draw on expertise across the SDGs to ensure that Kingston's Climate Leadership Plan delivers on other goals in addition to SDG 13.</p> <p>The draft Climate Leadership Plan is scheduled to be posted on the City's Get Involved webpage in mid- September for public review and comment, and a public open house will also be held in mid- to late- September.</p>
Resources Required	Staff to organize a diverse panel of faculty (over the summer) that are prepared to read and respond to the draft plan in the Fall.

Action 2: Create a Car-Free Campus

Action Description	To eliminate all non-essential vehicle traffic on campus and convert existing parking spaces to beneficial uses such as: low-cost and energy efficient housing for students, green spaces (that enhance biodiversity - no lawns please!), secure bicycle storage, outdoor classrooms, and community gardens.
Problem Statement	<p>Transportation has become the biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Ontario. Vehicles cause local air pollution, which is harmful to our health.</p> <p>While encouraging the uptake of electric vehicles is an important part of a climate change strategy, substantial amounts of energy and resources are required to produce electric vehicles, and many of these resources are sourced from environmentally harmful and socially detrimental extractives projects in countries in the Global South.</p> <p>A transition to a green economy requires a move away from personal car ownership towards a model that is centered on active transportation and reliable and affordable public transportation, supplemented by car sharing options.</p>

<p>Resources Required</p>	<p>Queen’s is already serviced by a number of rapid buses (and Kingston is moving towards electric buses) but it would be important to work with the City to ensure a smooth transition to a car-free campus.</p> <p>A task force involving relevant staff from both Queen’s and the City should be established as a first step. There are many campuses across Canada (e.g., the University of British Columbia) and around the world that have gone car-free.</p>
----------------------------------	---

Action 3: Educate all Queen’s staff, students, and faculty on “carbon literacy”

<p>Action Description</p>	<p>Carbon literacy is “an awareness of the carbon dioxide costs and impacts of everyday activities, and the ability and motivation to reduce emissions, on an individual, community and organizational basis” (https://carbonliteracy.com).</p> <p>We propose that all students, staff, and faculty take a short course on carbon literacy.</p>
<p>Problem Statement</p>	<p>Research indicates that even though Canadians are concerned about climate change, many do not understand some of the basic elements of climate science, the impacts for Canada, or the scale of changes required to mitigate dangerous warming.</p>
<p>Resources Required</p>	<p>Free toolkits/course materials are available from the Carbon Literacy Project in the UK - but these would need to be adapted for the Canadian context by a group of climate science and policy experts at Queen’s. The course could be delivered as a series of online modules, or in person periodically throughout the year (or a hybrid of the two). If in person, there would need to be space made available and funding for a facilitator. If online, there would need to be funding for the initial set-up of the course.</p>

Action 4: Become a leader on climate action by divesting from fossil fuels

<p>Action Description</p>	<p>The Queen’s Investment Committee should provide an update on the commitments made by the Board of Trustees in March 2020.</p>
----------------------------------	--

They should respond to the following three questions:

1. What has the Investment Committee achieved on the promise to reduce the carbon intensity of the Endowment Funds?
2. Who will be making the decision on what targets to aim for and how to measure carbon intensity and when will a decision be made?
3. The position of Queen's is to hold fossil fuel stock to exercise leverage - what has Queen's actively done to leverage fossil fuel companies to change their business plan and abandon fossil fuels?

The Queen's community should then be invited to provide feedback to the Committee on the progress that has been made.

This should be the beginning of a meaningful process of engagement on this issue that acknowledges that a significant number of students and faculty feel ignored and alienated by the approach that has been taken by Queen's thus far.

Problem Statement

There was support expressed from participants in the room for Queen's to divest from fossil fuels.

Major Canadian universities like UBC and Waterloo have recently committed to divestment, following the lead set by prominent universities in the UK and the US.

Furthermore, Blackrock - the world's largest investment house - recently created a comprehensive study of three divestment strategies. Their conclusion was unambiguous: all three divestment pathways would have outperformed standard performance benchmarks over the past five years.

We have now entered a win-win situation in which decisive climate action is both ethically necessary and the fiscally prudent option. The performance gap between divested and non-divested portfolios will continue to widen. The US government has now pledged to reduce emissions by 50% (relative to 2005 levels) by 2030, while the Canadian government is aiming for a 40-45% cut.

	<p>Such policies continue to shift market value away from carbon intensive industries and increase the risk of stranded assets.</p> <p>While Queen’s has promised to engage with companies it invests in, it provides no evidence of results for such engagement and continues to hold shares in Enbridge (currently trying to build a pipeline through Minnesota that would violate the treaty rights of Anishinaabe nations in its path); TC Energy (proponent of the controversial Keystone XL pipeline that President Biden cancelled on his first day in office); and multiple oil firms that have been excluded from the Norwegian Government Pension fund owing to “unacceptable greenhouse gas emissions.”</p> <p>Beyond the fiscal and ethical arguments for divestment from fossil fuels, failing to divest would undoubtedly have negative consequences for the university’s image and reputation. Being viewed as a laggard on climate action would tarnish the university’s national and international profile – especially now that a precedent has been set by other Canadian universities. Civil disobedience by Queen’s students, staff, and/or faculty to protest the failure to divest from fossil fuels would be an embarrassment best avoided.</p> <p>As a first step toward more meaningful action on this issue, Queen’s needs to be transparent about what it is doing to fulfil the commitments that it has made to reduce the carbon intensity of the endowment portfolio and to engage with fossil fuel companies that it invests in. There should be a process in place for this approach to be evaluated and reconsidered, if it proves to be insufficient to meet the expectations of the community.</p>
<p>Resources Required</p>	<p>This action should not require any new resources, just a willingness from Queen’s to be transparent and engage with the students, staff and faculty who are concerned about this issue.</p>

Appendix 1: Participant Form

17 Rooms Session on SDG13 Climate Action

Moderators: Kyla Tienhaara and Diane Orihel

What is your role? To come up with one amazing idea for how Queen's University can advance climate action – in the next year or so. Think big. Think bold. Think outside the box.

What do you need to do? Two things. First, tell us (the moderators) your idea – use the form below. Second, come prepared to the 17 Rooms live session on June 21st to give an elevator pitch (maximum 2 minutes; no slides) about your idea.



What is your name?
What is your amazing idea? (maximum 50 words)
Which SDG13 target(s) does your idea advance (type "X" to all that apply): <input type="checkbox"/> Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries (13.1) <input type="checkbox"/> Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning (13.2) <input type="checkbox"/> Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning (13.3) <input type="checkbox"/> none of the above targets apply to my idea for climate action
Which area(s) of the university does your idea apply to (type "X" to all that apply): <input type="checkbox"/> Research <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching <input type="checkbox"/> Service <input type="checkbox"/> none of the above apply to my idea for climate action
Do you have any questions or comments for the moderators? (optional)

Please return this form to Kyla Tienhaara (kyla.tienhaara@queensu.ca) and Diane Orihel (diane.orihel@queensu.ca) by **Friday, June 18th at 12 noon.**