

Reducing Environmental Impact in Public Programming

August 2025

Art Fund_ THE HERDS the DESIGN MUSEUM



This resource is an outcome of Art Fund's collaboration with THE HERDS. Art Fund supported 44 museums, galleries and historic houses across the UK to deliver activities inspired by THE HERDS' global journey. Museums have delivered workshops and events, from puppet-making to nature walks, and invited their local communities to come together to explore, learn about and appreciate local nature and the challenges it faces due to the climate crisis.

Audiences are worried about the climate crisis and looking to cultural organisations for guidance ([Act Green 2024 Benchmark report](#)), and museum curators are trusted voices, ranking as the sixth most trusted profession in the UK ([Ipsos Veracity Index 2024](#)). Museums, galleries and historic houses are therefore uniquely positioned to engage the public and inspire action through their programming, collections, and outreach.

With [the Design Museum](#), we have created this practical guide to environmental responsibility for museum learning professionals. Whether you are exploring new ways of working for the first time, or already have systems in place, we hope these ideas will support you on your journey.

Every job is a climate job. Your example will inspire others.

THE HERDS

A project to inspire

THE HERDS is public art and climate action on an unprecedented scale. Between April - August 2025, herds of life-size puppet animals created in renewable and recyclable materials journeyed 12,000 miles through Africa and Europe, gaining new species and crashing into civilisation in major cities, warning of environmental disaster. THE HERDS is a project by The Walk Productions.

THE
HERDS

THE
WALK
PRODUCTIONS



This tool is divided into three main sections, with a fourth section listing useful resources.

You don't need to read everything in order, just click on the link most relevant to your project.

1. [Embedding a 'green first' approach](#)
2. [Developing a project](#)
3. [Communicating with participants](#)
4. [Resources](#)



1. Embedding a 'green first' approach

This section asks:

- How can you avoid environmental responsibility being an add-on?
- How can you be an agent for change?
- How can you agree an appropriate vocabulary?
- How can you support colleagues and visitors with climate anxiety?



Large-scale cardboard puppet on grass with schoolchild © Y Pethau Bychain 2025

How can you avoid environmental responsibility being an add-on?

Embed a 'green first' approach from the start of your project. Ensure expectations are communicated clearly with colleagues and other stakeholders.

Actions

- Include a line on environmental responsibility in job descriptions and forward job plans.
- Consider investing in staff training that can be rolled out cross-departmentally, to develop confidence and skills.
- Ensure environmental responsibility is a standing agenda point in project meetings.
- Update your briefs for contractors and freelancers to align expectations – this could just be a sentence explaining that environmental responsibility is a priority or including a link to your organisational environmental policy.
- Review progress regularly and in wash-up meetings.
- Gather and share data to input into museum-wide carbon calculators and waste management plans.
- Keep an empty chair in meetings to remind everyone that the decisions you make will impact future generations and the planet.

Resources

Training:

- In 2024, Bridget McKenzie, founder of Climate Museum UK launched a new course entitled [Earth Talk](#).
- In spring 2025, Julie's Bicycle launched a [Creative Climate E-Learning course](#) for NPOs and IPSOs.
- The Carbon Literacy Project have a day-long peer-to-peer [Museums course](#). Why not encourage your team to become trainers and deliver Carbon Literacy training to their colleagues?

Data gathering:

- Gallery Climate Coalition [carbon calculator](#).
- [Sustainability Tools in Cultural Heritage calculator](#).

How can you be an agent for change?

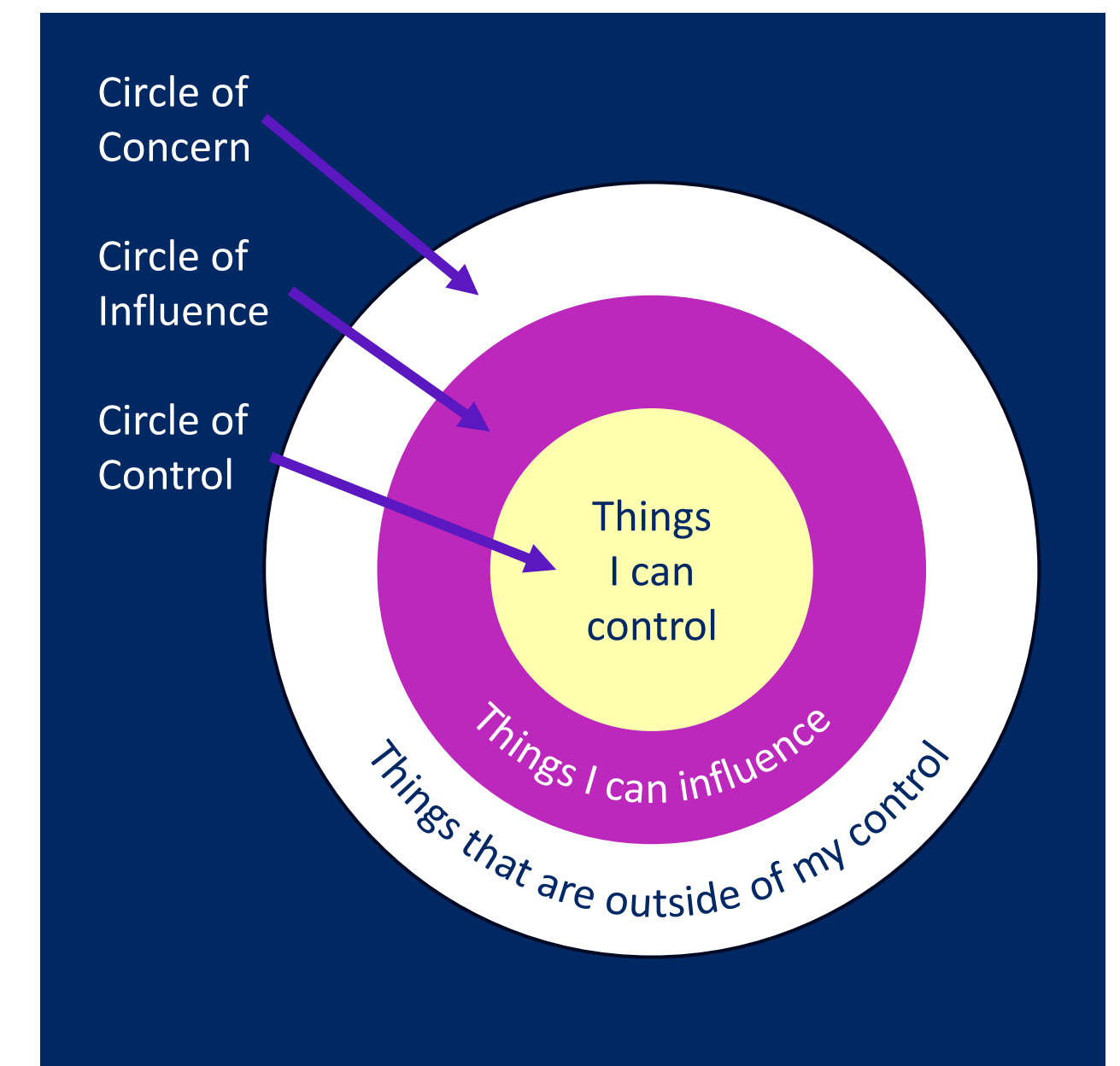
Remember that resources are finite, so use your time and energy wisely.

Actions

- Invite colleagues to familiarise themselves with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. These are a useful reference point when developing new projects.
- Support your team to put training into practice and provide suitable tools for their work.
- Weave climate action into all workshops, regardless of the topic, by promoting responsible consumption. For example, you can explain the provenance of materials used or explore sustainable alternatives within techniques you are teaching or the context of the activity.

Resources

- [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#).



How can you agree the most appropriate vocabulary?

Agreeing the preferred terminology and tone around the climate crisis with staff and freelancers can help build confidence.

It also ensures clear and consistent communication with visitors.

Actions

- Think about your participants – what terminology will make sense to them and resonate most clearly? This will vary by audience and by project. If you are collaborating with other organisations or community groups, involve them in these conversations.
- Share your organisation's policy/style guide (if you have one) with freelancers in advance. If they prefer different terminology, take the time to discuss this and find common ground.
- Organise a discussion with the delivery team to agree on vocabulary before creating any new resources.
- If you don't have a policy, and are working with freelancers who have specialist knowledge, consider asking them to develop one as part of their deliverables.

Resources

- You can find a helpful glossary of climate related terms [here](#).
- Explore resources to help think you about audience expectations and how to reach different groups of people (for example [MHM Eco Mindsets](#)).
- Look at the work of Climate Outreach, a UK based charity focused exclusively on public engagement with climate change – you can [sign up to their newsletter](#) to keep up to date with their activities.

How can you support colleagues and visitors with climate anxiety?

Always be mindful that the reality of the climate crisis might feel overwhelming.

Actions

- Think seriously about how the climate crisis impacts people's wellbeing and mental health; engage with and share the many resources available online.
- Use QR codes or posters to signpost resources for parents and carers, to help them to appropriately answer questions from children and young people.

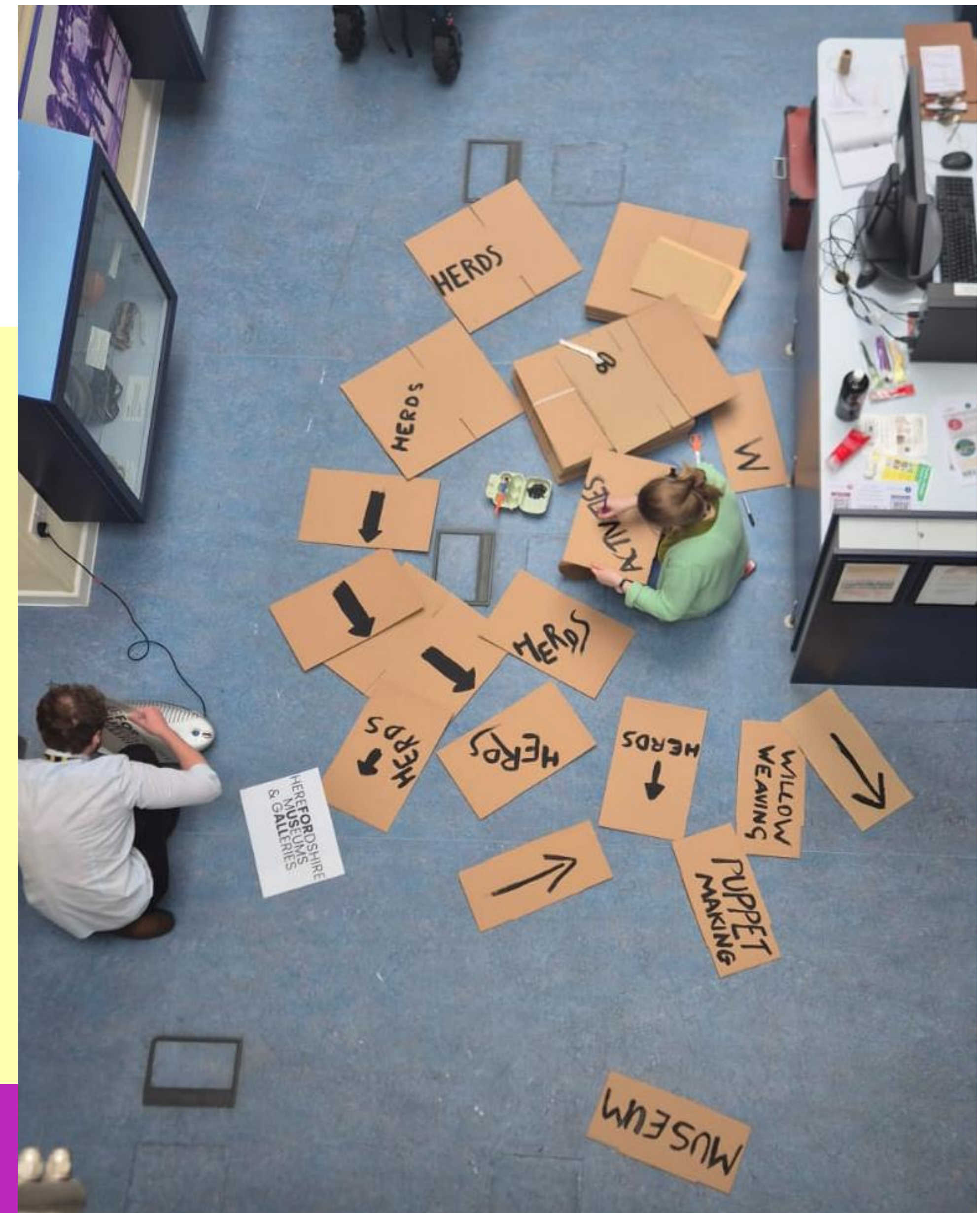
Resources

- There are many articles, YouTube talks and podcasts available online.
- Headspace, the Mindfulness App and [website](#) has many helpful resources from short talks to courses and meditations which can help manage anxiety.
- Greenpeace [guide](#) to talking to kids about climate change.
- Climate Psychology Alliance has a range of resources on their [website](#).

2. Developing a project

This section asks:

- How can you make reducing environmental impact a shared responsibility?
- Who can you work with to expand your knowledge and reach?
- How can your programme encourage participants to learn and be agents for change?
- What materials should you use, and where should you procure them?
- How can you support participants who have made something in a workshop to dispose of it responsibly?



THE HERDS activities for the Three Counties Show
© Herefordshire Museums & Galleries 2025

How can you make reducing environmental impact a shared responsibility?

Ensure that all documents and policies reflect a clear commitment to environmental responsibility.

Actions

- Ensure your environmental values are clearly articulated in agreement templates, freelance contracts, and onboarding documents.
- Consider including an environmental scoring matrix when selecting contractors and suppliers.
- Incorporate climate-related clauses in documents, outlining environmental policies, and explicitly stating your organisation's standards. This will ensure that everyone understands and aligns with your priorities.
- Work with specialist facilitators who prioritise delivering their services and activities in the most environmentally responsible way possible.
- Learn from them and embed their approaches into future projects.

Resources

- If you need guidance, reach out to networks and borrow templates from other organisations. Be willing to share your own successful wording.
- Join up with others in the sector through collaborative networks such as the [Natural History Museum's Fixing Our Broken Planet Community of Practice](#), or [Seeds for Action's Connect & Co-Work Sessions](#).

Who can you work with to expand your knowledge and reach?

Combine creativity, sustainability and community involvement as a model of communicating hope, sharing knowledge, and encouraging action.

Actions

- Consider partnering with other organisations to expand your reach without increasing your environmental impact.
- Partnerships could be developed with: wildlife organisations, local gardens, activists, litter picking volunteers, young farmers etc. These groups may not have considered working with arts, crafts, performance or collections as ways to communicate their mission and bring people on board. By collaborating on shared projects, you can create opportunities to learn from each other and play to each others' strengths.
- Consider hosting activities at one another's venues – taking activities to audiences can reduce participant travel.
- Build a local network to share resources and develop expertise.

Resources

- Climate Just: [Benefits of working in partnership](#).
- Museum Development South West: [Framework for working in partnership](#).
- [Climate Museum UK](#).
- The Exhibitions Group: [Collaborations and Partnerships](#).

How can your programme encourage participants to learn and be agents for change?

Share reliable, age-appropriate climate resources through your programme. This can create a ripple effect.

Actions

- Track your project against the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
- Use museum activity such as your exhibitions programme to focus on key issues relating to the climate crisis.
- Provide links to partner organisations for audiences to get involved in climate action. Create activities and opportunities within your programmes for these groups to advocate for the work they do.
- Create spaces for participants and visitors to share their knowledge and suggestions with one another.
- 'Validate. Elevate. Create.' Ensure facilitators focus on active hope by validating feelings, elevating discussions and encouraging people to create solutions to the challenges of the day.

Resources

- [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#).
- [*Dive In! Protecting Our Ocean*](#) exhibition at St Andrew's Museum invited visitors to consider how their actions impact what happens in the ocean and encouraged them to take action:
 - [Case Study: Creating interpretation with intent](#).
 - [Shifting visitor behaviour](#).

What materials should you use, and where should you procure them?

When developing a programme, consider if you need to make anything new. If so, choose your materials carefully and prioritise reuse and recycling.

Actions

Use what you have

- Purposefully develop activities that use existing materials.
- Crowd source existing materials from the participants or colleagues.
- Ask other departments (e.g. Estates, Exhibitions, Events teams) for leftovers.
- Source materials from local circular economy hubs.
- Sign up to a local scrap store.

If you need to buy new, think about

- How the materials are made:
 - Are they sustainable and/or plant based?
 - Prioritise products with organic components farmed without artificial fertilisers and pesticides.
- Where are you buying your materials from:
 - Prioritise using locally sourced materials.
 - Avoid last-minute online purchases and consolidate into larger orders.
- Who is making the products:
 - Select product manufacturers who actively maintain or enhance the social and economic wellbeing of their workforce.

Try to avoid

- Single-use plastics and disposables.
- Glue, tape or materials that will prevent recycling.
- Materials that are delivered in excessive packaging.
- Materials that are fabricated far away.
- Materials that cannot be recycled at home.

During the activities

- Explain where materials come from and how to avoid waste.
- Encourage participants to take care of equipment so that it lasts longer.
- Demonstrate ways of making the most of materials, e.g. avoiding unused paint drying out or repurposing leftovers creatively.

What materials should you use, and where should you procure them?

Resources

- [Carbon calculators](#) can help assess materials during the early stages of a project.
- [Guide to Green Workshop](#), published by The Puppet & Its Double Theatre, provides helpful tips on how to reduce the environmental impact of props and puppet production, including design, purchases, performance and retirement.
- Make use of circular economy hubs, reuse sites and local scrap stores:
 - [Circular Arts Network \(CAN\)](#) a circular economy tool created to support the arts.
 - [MuseoCycle](#): a network of museum professionals engaged in material reuse.
 - [Museum Freecycle UK](#).
 - Read more at Museums Galleries Scotland: [Circular Economy for Museums](#).
 - Renee Materials: [Circular Material Hubs](#).
 - [Set Swap Cycle](#) group on Facebook.
 - Source materials from local scrap stores ([Reuseful UK Scrapstore Directory](#)).
- Visit your local authority's website to ensure materials can be recycled.

How do you support participants who have made something in a workshop to dispose of it responsibly?

Encourage visitors to think about the lifecycle of materials they use and offer practical suggestions for disposal.

Actions

- Consider using storytelling techniques within your workshop to encourage reuse and care for an object.
- Indicate how items can be played with at home or used for a functional purpose.
- Be clear about how visitors can dispose of the object at the end of its life:
 - Share instructions on how to dismantle and include a demonstration.
 - Signpost how to recycle at home (in line with your local authority processes and guidelines).
- Lead by example: Demonstrate in the workshop space how you organise and separate out leftover materials so that they can be reused for future activities or donated responsibly.
- Store unused materials in an organised, clearly labelled manner to ensure they can be easily reused in future workshops or events and if relevant, keep asset registers up to date.

Resources

- [Guide to Green Workshop](#), published by The Puppet & Its Double Theatre, provides a guide to 'Retiring' creations (p.76-79).

3. Communicating with participants

This section asks:

- How do you connect and communicate with audiences who have different levels of awareness?



Children and adults processing with Save the Hedgehogs sign © Grace Springer / Chapter

How do you connect and communicate with audiences who have different levels of awareness?

When interpreting climate-related issues, how we communicate is as important as the content.

Ground your messaging in your organisation's expertise and be honest about what you do and don't know.

Actions

- Effective interpretation should empower as well as inform, offering visitors a sense of agency in addressing the climate crisis.
- Draw on your organisation's expertise and reputation – what sets you apart/what are you recognised for?
- Avoid jargon, misleading terms, guilt and direct criticism of visitor behaviours.
- Communicate uncertainty where facts are not known – you don't need to have all the answers
- Translate data into digestible facts and audience-friendly language (e.g. compare CO2e emissions reduction to number of cups of tea boiled or average annual energy for x homes).
- Where possible display data visually.
- Share what your organisation is doing and invite visitors to think about their role in the climate crisis.

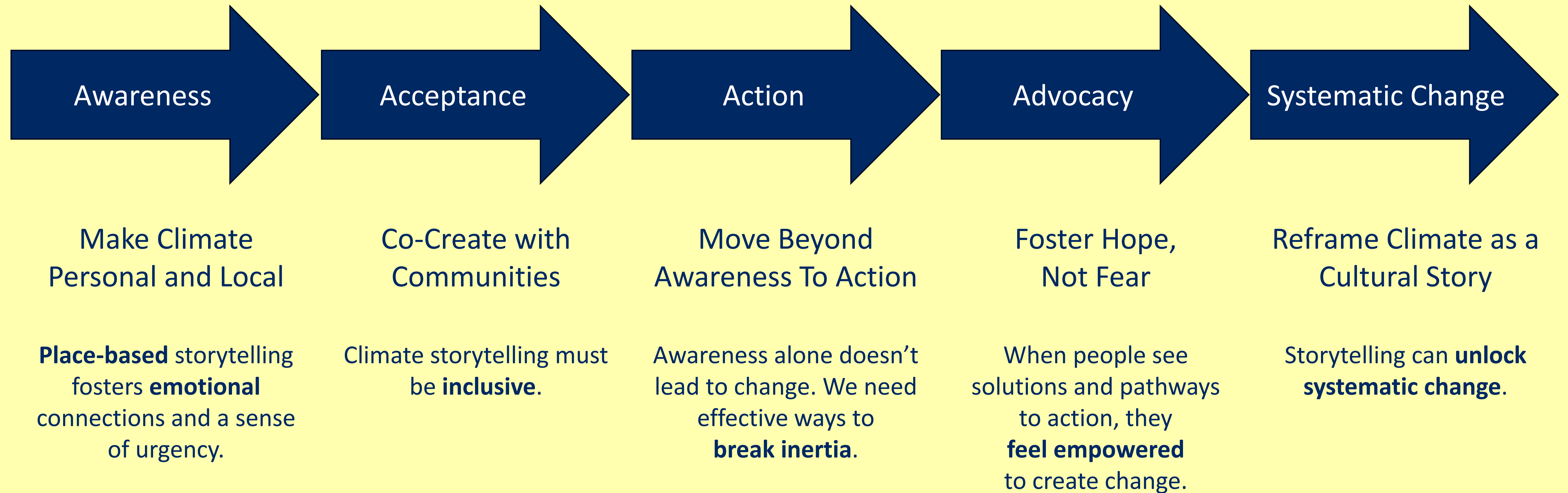
Resources

- The EAST framework can help support new behaviours - make it Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely. You can find the research [here](#).
- Explore resources to help think you about audience expectations and how to reach different groups of people (for example [MHM Eco Mindsets](#)).

Guiding Principles for Effective Climate Interpretation

Courtesy of Anna Ravenscroft, 2025

3. Communicating with participants and visitors



4. Resources

The following pages list useful resources so you can find out more.

Behavioural science and public engagement

- [Behavioural insights team](#)
 - [EAST](#) framework
 - [Environmental](#) resources and case studies
- [Climate Outreach](#)
- [Coglode Research: The 25% Rule](#)
- [The Jubilee Centre for character and virtue](#) (University of Birmingham):
 - [Civic Character and Engagement Research](#)
 - [A Habit of Service: Factors that sustain service in young people](#)
- [Youth Action Resources](#)



Close up activity sheet and poms
© Mari Fford Hay Castle

Cultural sector research

- Act Green benchmark reports [2023](#) and [2024](#)
- [Morris Hargreaves McIntyre Insights Eco Mindsets segmentation](#)

General

- [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#)
- Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership: [Sustainability glossary](#)
- [Climate Outreach](#), a UK based charity focused exclusively on public engagement with climate change
- [Museums and the Climate Crisis](#), edited by Nick Merriman
- [How Bad Are The Bananas?: The Carbon Footprint of Everything](#) by Mike Berners-Lee
- [Low Cost/No Cost Tips for Sustainability in Cultural Heritage](#) by Lorraine Finch

Museum specific networks and resources

- [Circular Arts Network \(CAN\)](#) a circular economy tool created to support the arts
- [Climate Museum UK](#)
- the Design Museum: [Working to make change](#)
- [Julie's Bicycle Resources](#)
- [MuseoCycle](#): a network of museum professionals engaged in material reuse
- Museums Association
 - [Museums for climate justice](#)
 - [Climate resources bank](#)
- [Museum Freecycle UK](#)
- Museums Galleries Scotland: [Circular Economy for Museums](#)
- Renee Materials: [Circular Material Hubs](#)
- [Seeds for Action's Connect & Co-Work Sessions](#)
- [Set Swap Cycle](#) group on Facebook
- The Exhibitions Group: [Environmental Responsibility Hub](#)
- The Natural History Museum's [Fixing Our Broken Planet Community of Practice](#)
- [We Are Museums](#) (Climate Action Community)

Podcasts

- [Imagining Otherwise: Climate Stories for an Unwritten Future](#) (run by charity Climate Adapted Pathways for Education). Across five episodes, the series explores how the arts, ethics, and school leadership can help us strengthen our sense of place and belonging as we navigate the challenges of climate change in our everyday lives.
- [Outrage + Optimism](#) co-hosted by Christiana Figueres and Tom Rivett-Carnac who oversaw the landmark Paris Agreement on climate change, and co-founder of Climate Week, Paul Dickinson.
- [BBC Rethink Climate podcast](#)

Support for educational leadership

- [Climate Adapted Pathways for Education](#) is a charity that brings together researchers, educators, schools, and partners across the UK who are working to change today's education for tomorrow's climate.

THE HERDS educational resources

- [Let the Wildness In](#) is THE HERDS' dynamic education programme, designed to connect young minds with the wonders of nature and the urgent need for climate action. Covering six diverse habitats, this interactive learning experience takes young people on a journey through the world's ecosystems - exploring the wildlife, challenges, and conservation efforts shaping our planet.

Training

- The Carbon Literacy Project [Museums course](#) (contact them for a list of trainers)
- Julie's Bicycle: [Creative Climate E-Learning course](#) for NPOs and IPSOs
- [Earth Talk](#) course, developed by Bridget McKenzie, founder of Climate Museum UK

Wellbeing resources

- Resources for young people:
 - Greenpeace: [How to talk with kids about climate change](#)
 - Climate Psychology Alliance [resources](#)
- General:
 - Headspace [App](#) and [website](#)
 - [CALM App](#):
 - [How to deal with climate change anxiety: 7 mindful tips you need](#)
 - [Eco-anxiety: 5 tips to help you cope with climate anxiety](#)

Workshop resources

- Sustainable puppet production guide - [A guide to green workshop](#)
- Sustainability Tools in Cultural Heritage (STiCH) materials [carbon calculator](#)
- [Reuseful UK Scrapstore Directory](#)



‘If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito’

Proverb

Thank you

Many thanks to THE HERDS, and the 44 participating museums, galleries, historic houses, their local partners and communities who collaborated on this project.

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the Design Museum

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We would also like to thank interpretation specialist Anna Ravenscroft for her Guiding Principles, featured on page 18.