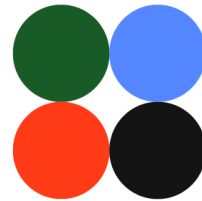


**Independent
Media Arts
Alliance des arts
médiatiques
indépendants**



Climate Justice and the Media Arts

FINAL REPORT

Climate Justice and the Media Arts

Completed March 2025

Contextualizing Climate Justice

This project consists of preliminary research - including a needs assessment, environmental scan and community consultation - to find out what the media arts community needs in order to address the climate emergency in their work, and what role the Independent Media Arts Alliance (IMAA) can play to support them. The climate crisis is already here, and its impacts have been unevenly distributed in alignment with systems oppression, displacing harm onto the communities least responsible for it, in favor of preserving the comfort and security of the privileged classes (Ahuja, 373)¹. To align with IMAA's commitment to anti-oppression principles, as outlined in the Basis of Unity (BoU) and IMAA's core principles, any engagement with issues around climate must be non-hierarchical and be done through anti-oppression, disability justice, and anti-racist frameworks.

Climate justice accounts for "the structural inequalities which lie behind – and risk being reinforced by – climate change" (Baltà Portolés et al, 8). However, for many "environmental devastation is a lived reality rather than a matter of philosophical speculation or apocalyptic foreboding" (Rowan, 2). Climate crisis is often viewed in the context of long-term planning and futurity, without acknowledging that "imperialism, and ongoing (settler) colonialism have been ending worlds for as long as they have been in existence" (Yussof, 1). Any approach to addressing the climate crisis in the media arts must be grounded in this knowledge, and must center the perspectives of those most impacted.

This project works towards incorporating climate justice as a framework into our work (IMAA and the Media Arts sector at large) as a step to determining what conditions will allow us not just to envision, but to enact, a more just and thriving world.

Community Consultations and Needs Assessment

A series of consultation meetings were held to engage with community members and partners on the intersection of the media arts and climate justice. Participants identified a number of concerns for the sector and made recommendations for future action. Below are summaries of the recommendations made at each consultation.

¹ Citations are used throughout this report, not to distance responsibility of the statements from IMAA, but rather to demonstrate that the facts stated are widely established and scientifically grounded.

Climate Justice Roundtable

As a first step to engage the media arts community, a roundtable discussion was held, in partnership with Sectoral Climate Arts Leadership for the Emergency (SCALE), at IMAA's National Media Arts Gathering on June 11, 2024, in Halifax. The discussion was facilitated by Annette Hegel (SCALE) and Lindsey Wilson (IMAA), with contributions from invited local artists Colleen MacIssac and Kathleen Dorian. The discussion was structured around four points:

- Framing Climate Justice and the Arts
- Assessing Organisational Readiness
- Co-creating Approaches
- Committing to Action

The discussion emphasized the importance of climate action in the media arts sector and touched on a number of issues in need of further research and consideration. Among them concerns about the environmental impacts of digital tools, data storage and transfer, as well as discussions around sustainable practices and waste reduction in film production, events, and festivals.

Recommendations and Insights:

- There is a need for a repository of resources and toolkits around sustainability practices for artists and organisations (including in areas of film production, festival organization, data storage and file transfer, use of equipment and digital tools, and energy consumption related to facilities).
- Research and consultation would be useful to understand how the climate emergency is impacting the media arts community and what support is needed.
- The development of profiles/case studies of successful examples of organisations implementing sustainable practices and infrastructure such as obtaining solar arrays or becoming energy self-sufficient.
- Advocacy is needed to ensure the availability of adequate funding and resources supporting artists and organizations to adopt sustainable practices and climate mitigation strategies in their work.

National Indigenous Media Arts Coalition (NIMAC) Consultation

This consultation consisted of a conversation with Jennifer Smith, National Director of NIMAC. The discussion touched on the ways NIMAC's members were currently engaging with climate in their work, what would be needed to ensure that Indigenous perspectives are foregrounded in climate justice work within the scope of media arts, and how IMAA and NIMAC could work collaboratively.

Recommendations and Insights:

- o So called sustainable practices – like resource and equipment sharing, limiting power usage, re-use and repair of equipment – are already widely used among indigenous media artists out of necessity and limited access.
- o As a community driven organization, any work taken on must be initiated and/or supported by the community at large. Discussion around this issue with Indigenous media artists would be most successfully done collaboratively and through work of Indigenous artists and activists who engage with water sovereignty, resource extraction, and the reclamation of land-based practices.
- o IMAA and NIMAC could work collaboratively to activate a conversation around climate and the media arts, centering the perspectives of Indigenous media artists, activists, and cultural experts on issues like resource extraction.
- o A focus on land-based practices, lifeways, and water sovereignty, with the development of a longer-term plan to amplify indigenous voices, over individual consumer decisions would better engage community members and re-center the conversation away from white-settler calls for action that reinforce colonial power dynamics.

Equity Diversity and Inclusion Committee Consultation

This consultation consisted of a short presentation to IMAA's Equity Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) committee about the project with an opportunity to provide feedback on the direction of the project, as well as their own insights on the intersection of climate and the media arts. Participants included Yun-Jou Chang, Eli Hirtle, Eusebio Lopez-Aguilar, and Barbora Racevičiūtė.

Recommendations and Insights:

- o Involvement of the EDI committee in this work is recommended to ensure alignment of any resulting policies, partnerships, or materials with the BoU and with IMAA's commitment to anti-oppression principles in our work.
- o IMAA can use reports to CCA and other granting bodies as part of advocacy work in that they provide an opportunity to document and raise concerns from the community.
- o Amplifying and supporting existing work in the community around climate justice would likely be a more efficient use of IMAA's resources and capacity.
- o In the context of the erasure of anti-oppression work and language in the current political and institutional landscape, it will be important to ensure the continued prioritization of equity.
- o There is a need for critical reflection and education on the use of digital tools like AI, given the use of energy and water associated with their development and use.
- o Right to repair, resource sharing, tool libraries, and DIY models are valuable tools, but do not entirely replace the need for new equipment. Systemic issues such as legislation that makes it illegal to repair or alter devices, as well as planned obsolescence, make equipment acquisitions necessary for many artists and organizations.

SCALE Consultation

This consultation consisted of a conversation with Annette Hegel, Organizational Development and Network Lead. at SCALE. The discussion centered on what is needed to encourage climate action in the media arts, and what IMAA's role in this work could look like.

Recommendations and Insights:

- o Systems change is needed in order to foster resiliency for the climate crisis.
- o Advocating for programs to address precarious working conditions in the sector like UBI for artists (and others) can support the conditions that will allow for further action.
- o Leadership could look like modelling stepping out of colonial systems and handing over the reigns and the resources. This kind of resource reprioritization could include encouraging institutions/organizations with access to funds to share rather than simply protect their own interests.

- o There is a need to continue work fostering cooperation and collaboration across IMAA's membership and the independent media arts sector at large to build solidarity and encourage resource sharing across organizations.
- o Many projects currently underway are happening in isolation, information and resources are not being shared, and funders are allowing for the duplication of work rather than facilitating collaboration across recipients.
- o Framing the work in terms of repair, recovery, adaptation, and resilience rather than sustainability is more realistic given that sustaining the status quo is no longer tenable.
- o The creation of additional toolkits would not be the best use of IMAA's capacity or resources, which could be better used to advocate for the structural changes needed to encourage media arts organizations to adapt their operations.

Needs Identified:

- o Accessible knowledge, tools, and resources to support organizations to adopt more sustainable practices and adapt to the impacts of the climate crisis.
- o Adequate funding and resources to support the adoption of these practices for artists and organizations.
- o Proportionate expectations from funders that account for the increased demand placed upon organizations when new requirements for sustainability are implemented.
- o Funding criteria that allow for organizations to produce less in order to increase sustainability, without the threat of losing stability in the long-term.
- o Community engagement and collaboration, with an emphasis on valuing and amplifying equity-deserving voices.
- o Long-term collaboration with Indigenous media artists and activists to amplify critical discussions about sovereignty, resource extraction, and land-based practices.
- o Collaboration and knowledge sharing to build solidarity and networks of mutual support.

Research and Environmental Scan:

Preliminary research was conducted to determine what existing resources and work may be relevant to the media arts sector in addressing climate justice.

Existing resources at the intersection of media arts and climate justice:

- o Many resources available for industry professionals in film and television: Green Production Guide, Ontario Green Screen, The Reel Green – Creative BC.
- o Centre for Sustainable Practice in the Arts / Creative Green Tools Canada: carbon footprint measurement tool for arts organizations.
- o Julie’s Bicycle: Creative Climate Justice Hub – UK Based organization whose work the Creative Green Tools was adapted from.
- o Cultural Adaptations Toolkit: a workbook for thinking through organizational planning in relation to climate change.
- o SCALE: a hub for advocacy, resources, and collective action around climate justice through the arts. Working towards a national strategy for the arts addressing the climate emergency.

Conversations across the arts sector:

- o Risk mitigation, adaptation, and preparation for increased extreme weather events have been a major concern and focus, as evidenced in the MASS culture ASO convening on Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies for the Arts. Regional reports presented by members at IMAA’s 2023 and 2024 AGMs, also highlighted the impacts of extreme weather events on their organizations and communities, from hurricanes to wildfires.
- o The role of the arts in imagining more equitable futures is well established in conversations about climate action (Nelson, 207). These conversations are helpful to promote community engagement and knowledge sharing, and as starting points for further action.

Gaps here include limited applicability to smaller scale independent productions, festivals, and distributors, as well as barriers to use in terms of organizational capacity and knowledge. The impacts of new media and digital technologies beyond film are not addressed in as much detail in these resources. Issues around the impacts of supply chains, resource extraction and the global impacts of technologies like generative AI need more attention.

Understanding our own implication in the violent extraction of resources and exportation of harm that characterize global capitalism requires a critical reflection on our ways of working as media arts organizations and practitioners (Angus 198). Simply opting out is rarely an option when our ways of working, connecting, and resisting are all powered by the same technologies whose production and use necessitate the depletion of the earth’s capacity to sustain life, human or

otherwise (Nelson, 187). Narratives that present climate collapse as simply a “a crisis of overconsumption [rather] than a problem of enclosure or of the racialized divisions of carbon privilege and waste effects [...]” risk reinforcing narratives of scarcity and security (Ahuja,368). Simply reducing energy and material usage will not address the broader systemic issues that perpetuate the climate crisis and its impacts.

Concerns for the Media Arts Sector:

The varied ways of working and different types of organizations within the independent media arts sector is such that any broad recommendations risk having limited applicability across IMAA’s membership. Additional research, resources, and knowledge sharing will be needed to address these specific concerns in the media arts. Some specific concerns to consider in future work include:

- o Waste reduction, and energy usage related to facilities, events and production.
- o Environmental impact of equipment, with consideration for acquisitions, disposal, repair and maintenance.
- o Needs are likely to be varied across different organizational structures including production centers, distributors, presenters, festivals and others. Tailored approaches to climate action will be required to meet these needs and promote effective action.
- o Environmental impacts of digital tools, computing, and file storage and transfer.
- o Lack of resources and community engagement on the issue of climate given the overall sense of uncertainty for the sector’s future.
- o Divestment from funding sources and corporations whose work is implicated in violent resource extraction and environmental degradation.
- o Existing inequity within the media arts sector: while work continues to be done to dismantle white supremacy and all forms of injustice, climate action needs to support this work and avoid maintaining or exacerbating existing systems of oppression.

Conclusion and Next Steps:

The complexity of the work to be done is evident in the tension between individual (or even small organizational) decisions and practices, and the broader systemic and global forces of racial and colonial violence that perpetuate the climate emergency. Impacts and attempts at solutions are simultaneously hyper-local and planetary, short and long-term. IMAA's approach to the work of climate justice must be based in community and anti-oppression frameworks.

As noted in the consultation with NIMAC, a community-driven approach will be key. The interconnected nature of climate work can be leveraged here to engage the community, by activating the conversation through work already being done within the community. The work of climate justice is already being done in our communities, sometimes under another name. Work within the media arts community centered around anti-oppression principles, is already in line with climate justice, for example IMAA and NIMAC's adoption of PACBI. By directing energy and support towards existing work, IMAA can leverage its network and membership to enact and embody its core principles of community, sustainability, and anti-oppression. Continued collaboration with NIMAC to ensure that Indigenous perspectives are centred, would also align with IMAA's commitment to honoring materially upholding solidarity with Indigenous sovereignty across Turtle Island.

Partnering with SCALE could increase capacity for cross-disciplinary resource sharing. IMAA's perspective on the particular issues facing the media arts community would be essential to ensure that media arts organizations and practitioners perspectives are considered in this work.

Given IMAA's stated commitment to "working against a climate of austerity" it will be important to ensure that our work toward climate justice be rooted in community and principles of mutual aid. This approach can be understood as "collective coordination to meet each other's needs, usually from an awareness that the systems in place are not going to meet them" (Spade, 7). In the face of shifting political and funding landscapes, this work is ever more vital. In parallel to raising awareness, sharing knowledge and fostering community connection, it will be important to consider how the sector can employ a mutual aid approach to become more resilient to coming changes, and to support the work that must be done in the face of increasingly precarious circumstances.

Under capitalism, the work of anti-oppression, and consequently climate justice, is always under threat. Viewed from another angle, "the violence of neoliberalism is necessary to break through

mutual aid to the extent that mutual aid is intrinsic to humankind [...] cooperation is the zero-degree, cheapest coexistence mode, something you rely on when all else fails.” (Morton, 174). Despite the structural factors impeding solidarity and collective care, it is important to find opportunities to share resources in ways that counter the inequitable distribution of power in our sector and beyond.

Advocacy remains an important avenue to effect change. Continued communication of sectoral needs to federal and provincial funding bodies is a necessary component to ensuring that any action taken by the sector will not exacerbate existing inequities. The ephemeral nature of funding priorities makes it untenable to structure climate action around compliance with the requirements of government and public funders. It should be done for the mutual benefit of our interconnected communities, regardless of its alignment with the requirements and goals of the institutions and government bodies that fund our work.

Recommended next steps fall under three streams of action:

Activating and Amplifying Climate Justice Work in the Sector	Building Mutual Networks of Support, Solidarity and Knowledge Sharing	Advocating for a Resilient Sector
1. Identify and amplify existing projects, resources, and opportunities relevant to climate justice in the media arts community. a. Consult with IMAA team about adding specific resources to IMAASource. b. Identify resources that could be shared through IMAA’s social media.	1. Continue work with the Resource Access Network, to support access to shared equipment for artists and reduce waste and overconsumption.	1. Continue advocacy for adequate funding to support organizations and artists impacted by the climate crisis.

c. Plan additional Discord conversations highlighting climate justice related work being done by member organisations.	2. Work in collaboration with members and artists to develop plans for mutual support in times of crisis, by connecting with organizations previously impacted by extreme weather events like hurricanes, flooding, and wildfires.	2. Work with funders to ensure flexibility in requirements to account for the variety of organizational structures and needs across the media arts, and to ensure that expectations for climate mitigation and adaptation requirements align with organizational capacity and available funding.
2. Collaborate with NIMAC to engage community and build solidarity with Indigenous media artists.	3. Facilitate resource re-distribution and sharing within the community to support equity deserving organizations and artists.	3. Incorporate climate justice language into the Guiding Principles of IMAA's Fee Schedule. This could include recommending additional funds be made available to support artists to use less fossil fuels in travel and shipping, as well as incentives and recommendations to consider the environmental impact of digital tools like AI and cloud storage when planning for exhibitions.

By building parallel networks of support, and activating community, in tandem with continued advocacy for sectoral sustainability, IMAA can help create the conditions and structures needed to support climate action in media arts. This action will in turn support the resilience of the sector, its members, and their communities.

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