

LORD MAYOR'S CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

A COP21 deep dive into the realities of climate change inspire a climate philanthropy journey

- **Country:** Australia
- **Number of staff:** 19
- **Year of incorporation:** 1923
- **Type:** Community foundation
- **Endowment:** Yes
- **More information:** lmcf.org.au

Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation (LMCF) is an Australian community foundation that was established in 1923. Some of its earliest work includes supporting hospitals in Greater Melbourne – the country's second-most populous city – and funding metropolitan charities focused on housing and community development, among other social issues.

The Foundation addresses community issues through a combination of responsive and proactively engaged grantmaking – an approach which is no different when it comes to climate change. LMCF is responsive to community crises and demands, while also goal setting and encouraging innovation in response to climate change.

This far-reaching issue was first introduced into LMCF's strategy in 2016, after the organisation's CEO, Catherine Brown, returned from the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP21, held in Paris. While there, Brown participated in a Funders' Initiative – a delegation of philanthropic foundations led by the US Environmental Grantmakers Association and the European Climate Foundation. During their climate deep dive, the delegation heard from a range of experts, including philanthropists, individuals affected by climate disasters in different parts of the world, and political leaders, among many others.

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COP21 was a thought-provoking and inspiring experience”.

– CATHERINE BROWN, LMCF CEO

After several days of intensive learning, it became clear to Brown that climate change would impact everyone and everything – a perspective which helped to inform the LMCF’s granting strategy moving forward. Applying a climate lens to all the Foundation’s grant programmes became a strategic goal for Brown, but it did not come without its challenges. The Board’s initial reaction was mixed. While some members thought that it was enough to add climate-related projects to the portfolio, others supported Brown’s idea of applying a climate lens across all the Foundation’s grant programmes and their five impact areas (Homelessness and Affordable Housing; Environment and Sustainability; Inclusive, Sustainable Economy and Jobs; Healthy and Resilient Communities; and Generous Melbourne).

After securing Board approval, Brown hired two climate experts at the programme management level: one to work on Environment and Sustainability, and another on Health and Resilient Communities. The Foundation also invested in climate education for its staff – a key component to accelerating their climate journey. During meetings, staff would discuss the latest climate impact reports and, in their annual planning meeting, they would have in-depth discussions about the relationship between climate change and the projects that they were funding.

The investment in human resources had a profound impact on the Foundation’s work. Integrating climate change into its grantmaking approach has changed the way that LMCF selects the projects that it funds, and how it engages with funding proposals. For example, when funding affordable housing initiatives, the Foundation now requires proposals to clearly demonstrate plans to attain higher energy efficiency standards. LMCF now focuses on reducing energy-related emissions without losing sight of its primary social goal of solving the housing deficit problem in the community that it serves. In job creation-related projects, the Foundation now encourages skills development and jobs that are critical to advancing cleantech and waste management. In health-related projects, the Foundation now funds efforts to turn hospitals greener – training health professionals on the impacts of climate change on people’s health and wellbeing, and supporting projects that focus on reversing the impacts of climate change on Melbourne hotspots.

LMCF’s proactive internal process of expanding the relevance of climate in their strategic approach was fueled by the reality of the country and the increasing salience of the climate issue in Australian public debates.

Learning by facing the reality of climate change

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Nowadays, 70% of Australian citizens want serious action taken on climate change”.

– CATHERINE BROWN, LMCF CEO

Climate change has always been a controversial topic in Australia, which has led to strong swings in domestic climate politics. The country has among the highest per capita emissions in the world due to its reliance on fossil fuels for power, heating and industry and, particularly, its economic dependency on coal. In 2019, communities, where LMCF worked, experienced several severe heat waves and floods. The heat waves were especially challenging for homeless people – one of the target groups that the Foundation supports and who already face risks such as pre-existing medical conditions.

Recovery from the impact of Covid-19 has intensified debates about how to further incorporate climate resilience into LMCF’s approach. The team has collaborated with other organisations and individuals, attended talks, commissioned research, and funded conferences to support the development of ideas about how to address climate change. The Foundation has also started supporting efforts to influence climate-relevant policies and regulations, and commissioned research to better understand energy poverty, temperature-related risks, residential greenhouse gas emissions and measures to reduce them.

Shifting from reactive to proactive climate approaches

In parallel to responding to climate crises and emergencies, LMCF has also started working to show the community what a sustainable city could look like when climate change considerations are proactively taken. As a result, the Foundation has expanded its efforts to tackle climate change by encouraging solutions development and innovation, demonstrating a more hopeful, actionable and socially inclusive transition to a greener economy.

Most recently on its climate journey, LMCF has been exploring how the Foundation can create an impact beyond its programmatic approach. Since 2021, Foundation staff have been analysing possible measures to ensure that their assets are carbon neutral by 2050 with a goal of at least a 50% reduction by 2030. The Foundation is working with advisors (with connections in the United States of America, Europe, and New Zealand) to ensure

that only climate-responsible companies are included in their investment portfolio going forward. The Foundation is also greening its building and facilities and, in partnership with social enterprises, will share this more energy-efficient Impact Hub space with other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) by creating a collaborative working environment.

The journey is long, but LMCF is leveraging its assets and influence to encourage people, NGOs, companies, and investment funds to respond to the climate crisis and to find solutions to a low-carbon and more resilient Melbourne.

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