

AVINA FOUNDATION

Embracing the challenge of becoming carbon neutral

- **Country:** Panama
- **Number of staff:** 76
- **Year of incorporation:** 1994
- **Type:** Regranting foundation
- **Endowment:** No
- **More information:** avina.net

The Avina Foundation (Fundación Avina) was founded in 1994 by Swiss entrepreneur Stephan Schmidheiny to contribute to sustainable development in Latin America. During three decades of work, the Foundation has donated USD 454 million in grants that supported over 10 000 initiatives led by local allies¹.

The Foundation fosters collaborative processes that are designed to change systems, which inspired it to develop CollaborAction². This practical guidebook systematises over twenty years of philanthropic work on promoting social change and long-term sustainability through local, regional, and global processes of collaboration with diverse actors in the Global South. Since knowledge sharing and collaboration is at the core of Avina's work, the Foundation has gathered a resource library³ containing several publications about its partners and their work. It has recently expanded its work to the African continent and supports initiatives in Asia and the Middle East.

¹Relatório Anual 2021, Fundación Avina, 2022

<https://www.avina.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Relatorio-Anual-Avina-2021-POR-.pdf>

²"CollaborAction - A practical guide to promoting sustainability", Fundación Avina,

<https://biblioteca.avina.net/biblioteca/collaboraction-a-practical-guide-to-promoting-sustainability/>

³Biblioteca Avina <https://biblioteca.avina.net/biblioteca/>

The Foundation's programmatic approach is based on three pillars, encompassing the urgent need to advance systemic changes globally: climate action, democratic innovation, and a just and regenerative economy. Climate change has been one of Avina's programmatic priorities since the early 2000s when it started working with partners on the conservation of the Amazon biome. Since then, the Foundation has gradually expanded its climate contribution by promoting circular economy models, fostering energy transition and supporting climate adaptation in cities, water and food security and the livelihoods of people and communities.

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“We wanted climate change to be transversely considered in each programme's strategy.”

— JULIANA STROBEL, PROGRAMME MANAGER AT AVINA FOUNDATION

Examples of the Foundation's climate-related work range from supporting national governments' implementation of their climate commitments through the NDC Partnership and the Green Climate Fund Readiness Programme, to fostering multi-stakeholder collaborations which is a key element of Avina's work. Other examples include co-building Impulsouth⁴ – an alliance of organisations working collaboratively to increase knowledge and capacities on climate action in developing countries; the Andes Resilientes⁵ – a regional collaboration scheme to enhance capacities and services for climate resilience in the Andes region; and Nanum Mujeres Conectadas⁶ which is based on a partnership with the private sector to increase the resilience of rural women from isolated communities in the Gran Chaco region (Argentina, Bolivia, and Paraguay) through targeted access to the internet, climate information (including an early warning system), and economic opportunities that help diversify livelihoods.

Despite a long trajectory in the climate space and some ad hoc actions such as offsetting the carbon emissions of its meetings and acknowledging its low levels of emissions in relation to the global mitigation efforts needed, Avina adopted the belief that every ton of emissions matters and, in 2019, embraced the challenge of decarbonising its operations.

⁴ Impulsouth, <https://impulsouth.org/about-us/>

⁵ Andes Resilientes al Cambio Climático, <https://andesresilientes.org/>

⁶ Nanum Mujeres Conectadas, <https://mujeresnanum.org/en/home/>

Preparing an institutional decarbonisation strategy

In 2019, Avina published a Climate Emergency Declaration⁷ and committed to achieving carbon neutrality in its operations and projects by 2025. The Foundation team developed a step-by-step institutional strategy to build internal conditions to reach this goal.

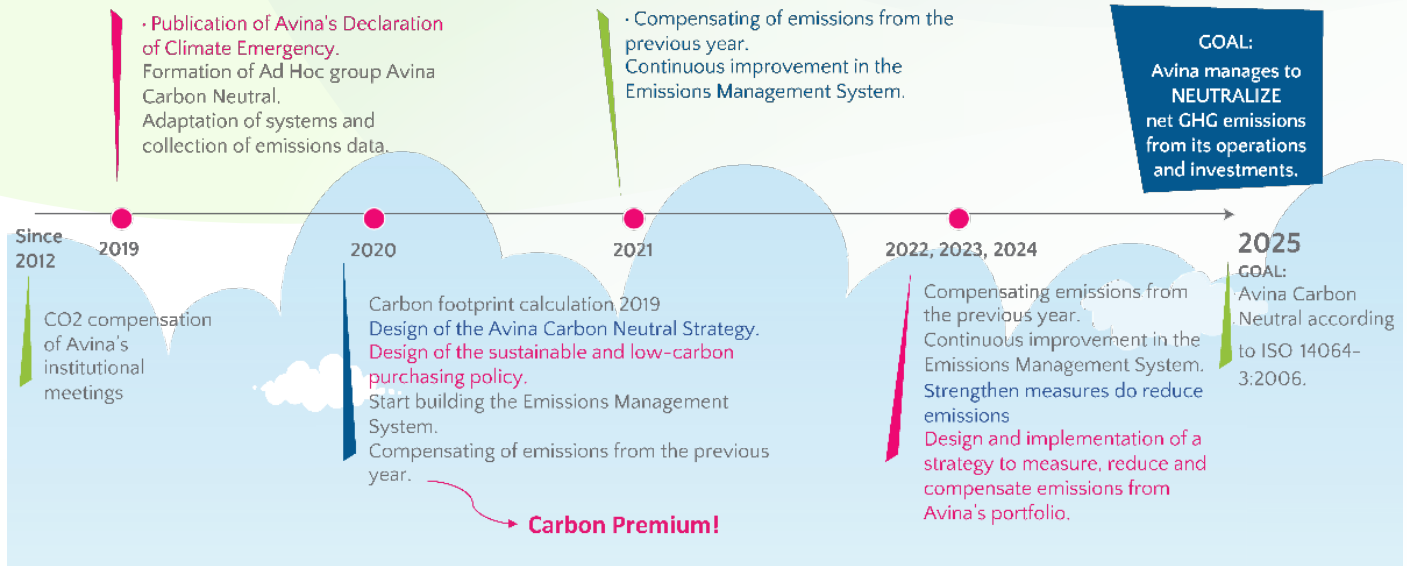


IMAGE SOURCE: AVINA'S INTERNAL DOCUMENT

Avina's senior management championed this process from the beginning. Considering the number of changes required to achieve carbon neutrality, support from the Foundation's chief executive officer and the chief operating officer was fundamental to creating awareness among all employees and partners.

The first step was to measure Avina's greenhouse gas emissions for 2019 to establish a baseline. The Foundation had a total of 413.54 tCO₂eq⁸ which, by comparison, is similar to the yearly emissions of 100 cars⁹. Avina's

⁷“Es ahora: Fundación Avina se suma a la Declaración de Emergencia Climática”, Fundación Avina, <https://www.avina.net/es-ahora-fundacion-avina-se-suma-a-la-declaracion-de-emergencia-climatica/>

⁸A carbon dioxide equivalent or CO₂ equivalent, abbreviated as CO₂-eq is a metric measure used to compare the emissions from various greenhouse gases on the basis of their global-warming potential (GWP), by converting amounts of other gases to the equivalent amount of carbon dioxide with the same global warming potential.

Glossary: Carbon dioxide equivalent, Eurostat, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Carbon_dioxide_equivalent

⁹According to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the average car in the United States emits approximately 4.6 metric tons of CO₂eq per year. This value is based on the assumption that the car drives 11,500 miles per year, which is the average distance driven by a car in the USA, and uses gasoline as fuel.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions from a Typical Passenger Vehicle, US EPA, <https://www.epa.gov/greenvehicles/greenhouse-gas-emissions-typical-passenger-vehicle>

primary source of carbon emissions, as in most philanthropies, was flight-related. The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the implementation of measures that were already planned for an organisation that works across 19 countries: encouraging collaborators to adopt home offices as a default; reducing office spaces and air travel, without compromising relationships with local allies; and updating purchasing policies to favour low-carbon products and services. During 2020, at the height of the pandemic, Avina's emissions decreased to 93.58 tCO₂eq. In 2021, Avina emitted the equivalent of 105.14 tCO₂eq – 75% less than the 2019 baseline. This reduction was highly influenced by the pandemic but, as travel normalises, the Foundation is determined to maintain significant reductions through changes in travel practices. Emissions that cannot be reduced are compensated. In partnership with Instituto de Conservação e Desenvolvimento Sustentável do Amazonas¹⁰, Avina offset 2019–2021 emissions by reforesting the Brazilian Amazon, compensating 630.27 tCO₂eq.

Fostering buy-in from staff and collaborators

A central challenge of the Foundation's institutional strategy was how to increase staff engagement in a process which demands more data generation, restricts people's daily behaviour and creates more work. The key to solving this challenge was to help people feel and know that they are making progress and are part of bigger efforts. As its main instrument to foster buy-in, Avina built an emissions management system that is open to its staff and can be used as a tool to inspire sustainable habits and behaviour changes that are aligned with a lower carbon footprint.

The system, while not complex software, is robust and constantly being improved. Based on spreadsheets and systematic data management, the Foundation continues to add more layers of information. The current focus is to add data about avoided carbon emissions as well as Scope 3¹¹ emissions from its portfolio of grantees, which is one of the most challenging aspects on the path to becoming a carbon-neutral organisation. Calculating Avina's value chain emissions demands a more comprehensive methodology which has yet to be designed and will require even more engagement with local partners and suppliers. The strategy to further encourage

¹⁰ "Fundación Avina partners with Idesam's Carbon Neutral Program", Fundación Avina,
<https://www.avina.net/en/fundacion-avina-partners-with-idesams-carbon-neutral-program/>

¹¹ Scope 1, 2 and 3 is a way of categorising the different kinds of carbon emissions an organisation emits in its own operations, and in its wider value chain. Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions.

Scope 3 Frequently Asked Questions, Greenhouse Gas Protocol, 2022,
https://ghgprotocol.org/sites/default/files/standards_supporting/Scope%203%20Detailed%20FAQ.pdf

collaborators to track emissions is still in progress, but Avina knows that adding to the workload will not automatically achieve buy-in and that other incentives will need to be created.

For the Avina Foundation, climate coherence means that climate action begins at home. Measuring, reducing and compensating for CO2 emissions is an opportunity to be part of the solution and to motivate others to join this climate journey.

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