



Funding focus areas

Date: February 2026

Introduction

The Climatics was established to fund impactful non profit organisations contributing to addressing climate change in Aotearoa. This document is intended to support grant seekers to understand The Climatics' focus areas and the rationale behind why we have chosen them.

A growing body of evidence demonstrates that systemic approaches that target the underlying drivers of emissions can achieve far greater impact per dollar invested in direct delivery climate charities.¹ The Climatics focus on "people power levers" is our articulation of the systemic approaches that sit most squarely in the realm where charity organisations are best suited work (and therefore for philanthropy to support).²

Four focus areas

We have chosen four "people powered levers" as the focus areas of the fund:

1. Elevate the story
2. Build the movement
3. Transform the politics
4. Support Māori-led action

¹ Research from Stanford Social Innovation Review found that the Sunrise Movement averted approximately 5 tons of CO2 per dollar spent, and Extinction Rebellion UK averted 13 tons of CO2 per £ spent on advocacy, outperforming top-rated direct climate charities by factors of 6x and 12x respectively.

² This does not mean other approaches have no place, but we are looking specifically at where pooling small philanthropic donations can contribute to the largest emission reductions.

Note: these are not mutually exclusive - many organisations deploy several of these strategies simultaneously.

Background: The philosophy behind the fund

The initiating impulse for The Climatics was to help people have the most impact with their donations. We therefore need to first have clarity on what we mean by that.

What's the problem we're trying to solve? Reducing New Zealand's net GHG emissions

This might sound obvious, but it bears stating explicitly: the purpose of The Climatics is to reduce New Zealand's net greenhouse gas emissions and further climate justice. However, this doesn't sit in a silo. The sources of emissions cut across basically every facet of our lives and our social, political and economic systems; our carbon sinks are bound up with our complex and highly biodiverse ecosystems; the solutions available to us can either have positive co-benefits or negative trade offs. These will all be considered. However, since climate is the focus of the fund, we're putting reducing New Zealand's net emissions and climate justice as the primary outcomes we want to contribute to.

What role can philanthropy play in this? Being an enabler

Philanthropy is an enabler. Organisations are already working on this problem, we want to be in service of their work and the broader ecosystem they operate in. Specifically, we're looking to support the types of work uniquely suited to civil society organisations,³ work that can increase the effectiveness of those organisations, and work that enables the ecosystem to have impact greater than the sum of its parts. That means this fund is focused on systemic approaches, not direct delivery. All else being equal, we would prioritise areas that are currently under-funded.

What is the best place to focus? Where donations of \$20-40k can be meaningful

The size of our grants each round is expected to be between \$20-35k. This will be unrestricted funding, and given the nature of our fundraising model, it has to be a one-off donation. We will therefore be selecting organisations where this size of grant can have a meaningful difference, and where they have the capacity to use it. We would not be the first funding an organisation receives, as we need to provide a strong rationale to our donors as to why we believe them to be able to use the funds. We also do not anticipate funding organisations with an annual budget above \$1M.

³ Call them what you will - charities, non-profit organisations, trusts: we mean organisations that are in service of the public good.

The four focus areas: levers for systemic change

Focus 1: Elevate the Story

Overview: Narrative strategy represents one of the highest-leverage interventions in any system.⁴ For climate action, academic research demonstrates a range of narrative approaches has an impact on public opinion, political discourse, and policy outcomes in ways that create cascading emission reductions. However, simply focusing on awareness raising or the impacts of climate disruption is not effective.

Recommendation: We're looking for narrative approaches that can show a clear line to emission reductions. This includes (but is not limited to) increasing agency, support for specific solution sets, and tactical campaigns targeting decision makers. For example, 'better life' framing, making progress visible, dispelling the 'silent majority' effect, leaning into the co-benefits and / or economic gains of climate solutions, 'trusted messenger' strategies.

Definition: Narrative refers to the stories that we tell ourselves about the world and our place in it. They don't just inform, they create the emotional and intellectual conditions necessary for policy adoption, for investment, for behavioral change at scale, and more. Narratives are formed by everything we hear and see as well as our embodied experiences of physical spaces and more. Narrative is formed by media and pop culture; by the conversations we have with our friends and co-workers; by our experience of the cities and places we inhabit. They are fluid - they ebb and flow over time - and they are multiple.

How it works: Research consistently shows that narrative change precedes policy change. When it comes to climate, narratives, rather than information per se, play a decisive role in motivating or demotivating climate action (Chapman et al. 2017; Fløttum and Gjerstad 2017; Hulme 2009; Moser 2010). These insights are not new to the vested interests who benefit from the high emissions status quo: fossil fuel and industrial agriculture companies have invested heavily in perpetuating disinformation and discourses of delay globally. It works to their benefit when people disengage, and disempowering belief sets are easy to trigger.⁵ Inviting people into the story of climate change is better achieved through the frame of a better life and of agency. There is a rich and growing body of work and research on this. For example, Climate Barometer (UK) research showed that people care about climate (64%), underestimate how much others do (44%) and, importantly, that MPs underestimate support for a range of green policies, often even more dramatically. These 'perception gaps' have real consequences and stoke inertia and fatalism. Showing real, tangible progress is an effective strategy for persuading people on green policies: it builds agency. Research by Potential Energy (US) found that "leading with love" is

⁴ See the seminal work by Donella Meadows on leverage points for more on this:
<https://donellameadows.org/archives/leverage-points-places-to-intervene-in-a-system/>

⁵ For more on this topic, see this 2025 episode of the investigative journalism podcast, Drilled on "[Climate Obstruction](#)" and the 2020 paper "[Discourse of Climate Delay](#)" in Cambridge University's Global Sustainability journal.

the most effective narrative frame to increase support for climate policy, across the political spectrum, globally.⁶

What it looks like: Strategies for shaping narrative cover a wide range of activities that includes tactical targeting (e.g. Cambridge Analytica, or closing perception gap for MPs about support for green policies), comms campaigns to shift deeper mental models (e.g. the 2025 DOC “Always Be Naturing” campaign), tested messenger approaches (e.g. the US-based Science Moms), pop-culture (e.g. Don’t Look Up, Coldplay profiling of ClientEarth at their Wimbledon concert), collective imagination (e.g. The Antidote in the UK, or Rob Hopkins’ work) and journalism.

What it isn’t: ‘Awareness raising’ and ‘shock and awe’ approaches are insufficient. They have succeeded in getting the majority of people to know climate change exists and to be various levels of concerned, but have not translated into widespread action or support for policies.

⁶ Their research has unearthed other useful insights. See this report as a good resource: <https://potentialenergycoalition.org/later-is-too-late-global-report/> or this one for their updated 2026 climate communications recommendations: <https://potentialenergycoalition.org/2026-climate-change-communicators-guide-five-key-shifts/>

Focus 2: Build the Movement

Overview: Research indicates that movement building might be the most cost-effective way to see progress on climate change. Organised communities can win policy changes that create emissions reductions far greater than what would be achieved by spending the same money on direct interventions. The increasing cost of living means that where climate solutions are not meaningfully, materially making people's lives better they will not get support. Movement building can refer to building breadth of support and depth of support. Both are needed.

Recommendation: While we support movement building that grows numbers, we prioritise approaches that deepen support. In particular, we look for approaches that mobilise people in ways that bring communities in to shape the solutions so their needs are met (particularly those who are at the pointy end of the cost of living pressures, and those who disproportionately experience the impacts of climate change). Without this, climate solutions risk feeling like something imposed on struggling communities rather than something they help design.

Definition: Movements build power within communities so that people can influence decision makers according to their own needs, rather than directing them towards a predetermined output. This can achieve long-term social and political impact. Movement building is a process of organising people and communities to work toward a shared vision or cause. It can involve educating people about an issue, developing shared goals and strategies, and mobilising collective action to influence powerful decision-makers and bring about systemic change. Movement building specifically focuses on developing the relationships, shared narrative, and strategic coordination for creating lasting systemic change rather than discrete organisational or policy wins.

How it works: Movements create systemic change in several ways. The main drive is meaningfully building power, activating people who otherwise would not have done anything. They also shift public opinion as movements raise awareness, and can shift political conversation and media framing. For example research shows climate concern increased in the UK after Extinction Rebellion protests. In addition, Belgian research found exposure to protests affected policymakers' beliefs. Movements activate people by building their agency and giving them direct opportunities to act. For example, supporting people to make submissions to influence policy, or by mobilising constituencies to influence voting behavior.

What it looks like:

- **Base Diversification:** Moving beyond traditional environmental constituencies to engage communities most affected by climate impacts: Māori and Pasifika communities, low-income households facing energy poverty, farmers adapting to climate risks, workers in transition industries etc. This includes community-centered organising that starts with people's immediate concerns and connects them to climate solutions.
- **Leadership Development:** Building distributed leadership across communities through training programs, mentorship networks, and leadership pipelines that ensure sustained

capacity for long-term change rather than dependence on a few key individuals or organisations.

- Cross-sector Alliance Building: Developing partnerships between environmental, social justice, economic, indigenous rights, and faith-based organisations around shared values and complementary goals, recognising that climate change intersects with multiple social issues.

What it isn't: Professional networks. Movement building differs fundamentally from networking or bi-lateral organisational coordination. Networks are loose connections between organisations that share information and sometimes collaborate.

Focus 3: Transform Politics

Overview: People consistently report high expectations that the government acts on climate change. However, it is often relegated to a 'left' or 'green' issue. "Transforming the politics" refers to building cross-partisan support for specific climate policies and broad coalition building as well as holding elected officials accountable for the commitments they have made. Research shows that cross-partisan approaches create more durable, scalable, and effective climate policies than partisan alternatives. There is well-funded opposition to climate solutions (e.g. Atlas Network-affiliated local organisations) that is gaining ground and the polarisation seen globally has also been nurtured in Aotearoa.

Recommendation: With an election scheduled for November 2026, there is a window of opportunity to build political support for climate solutions that goes beyond being a left- and green-issue.

Definition: This includes building cross-partisan support for climate policies and creating broad coalitions that can sustain climate action across electoral cycles. For example, independent policy advice provided by think tanks or research institutions, building relationships across party lines, supporting electoral work that prioritises climate-informed candidates, and creating / supporting accountability mechanisms that make climate action politically advantageous regardless of which party holds power.

How it works: Political transformation creates exponential rather than linear impact. While direct delivery approaches scale through resource allocation, political transformation scales through institutional change that redirects existing resources.^{7,8} Cross-partisan climate policies show greater resilience across political transitions. Unlike purely partisan climate policies that face repeal threats during political transitions, cross-partisan approaches create the political foundation for sustained implementation. US-based research shows that bills expanding choice consistently out-performed bills restricting choice consistently across partisan contexts. This finding suggests that climate policy design that focuses on creating opportunities rather than imposing restrictions is more likely to win cross-partisan support and achieve greater political durability.

What it looks like: Policy research that provides evidence base for climate action across ideological perspectives coupled with strategic dissemination; electoral work including candidate

⁷ The University of Exeter's "super-leverage points" research identified that three targeted political interventions could trigger cascading decarbonization across 70% of global emissions through self-reinforcing feedback loops.

⁸ Research from Science analyzing 1,500 climate policies across 41 countries found that only 63 achieved large emission reductions (0.6-1.8 billion tonnes CO₂), with successful interventions characterised by policy combinations rather than single instruments. These super-leverage points—electric vehicle mandates, green ammonia mandates, and plant-based protein procurement—demonstrate how strategic political transformation can create tipping cascades where crossing one leverage point increases the chances of crossing others, creating exponential system-wide change that no direct delivery approach could match. [Climate Policies that Achieved Major Emissions Reductions: Global evidence from two decades](#), Science, 2024

recruitment, training, and support; business and industry engagement to demonstrate economic benefits of and advocate for climate action; climate litigation; spotlighting demonstrator projects that provide evidence for practical, replicable solutions; accountability mechanisms like climate scorecards and voter guides; relationship building between climate advocates and political actors across the spectrum.

What it isn't: Partisan political campaigning, single-issue advocacy that ignores broader political dynamics, or approaches that create political polarisation around climate issues.

Focus 4: Support Māori-led Action

Overview: While climate change has historically been conceptualised through a Pākehā worldview, deprioritising traditional wisdom and ways of knowing, there is increasing recognition of Māori climate leadership.⁹ In Aotearoa, this recognition extends across both solutions that could be considered by-Māori for-Māori, and by-Māori for-all, and covers mitigation, adaptation and emergency response. However, philanthropy as a sector does not have a good track record in supporting Māori-led and kaupapa-Māori organisations or initiatives. This means Aotearoa's climate response is not realising the immense benefits that come from Māori-led solutions, and Māori continue to be disadvantaged in accessing resources.

Recommendation: Supporting Māori-led climate action represents both a justice imperative and a strategic effectiveness choice, with substantial research demonstrating that indigenous-led climate solutions achieve more holistic, sustainable, and effective outcomes than top-down approaches.

Definition: Supporting Māori-led climate action means resourcing Māori communities, iwi, hapū, and organisations to implement climate solutions on their own terms, guided by mātauranga Māori and principles of kaitiakitanga. This recognises Māori as rights-holders with inherent authority over their territories and resources, while acknowledging that climate change impacts Māori disproportionately despite their minimal contribution to historical emissions.

How it works: Māori-led approaches create leverage effects through holistic integration, addressing multiple challenges simultaneously rather than treating climate change as an isolated issue. Te Ao Māori worldview recognises interconnectedness between climate, ecosystems, and human societies, enabling solutions that deliver multiple co-benefits. Local legitimacy and cultural alignment create higher implementation success rates and long-term sustainability.¹⁰ Traditional governance systems provide accountability mechanisms often missing in top-down approaches, while mātauranga Māori offers long-term ecological perspectives and adaptive strategies that complement Western science.

What it looks like: Iwi-led land and marine management that integrates traditional practices with climate adaptation; restoration projects guided by mātauranga Māori; Māori-controlled carbon farming and biodiversity projects; traditional food systems that reduce fossil fuel

⁹ More broadly, global research provides overwhelming evidence for indigenous climate solutions and indigenous peoples' effectiveness as stewards of the majority of the world's biodiversity. World Bank research found that while making up less than 5% of the population, Indigenous Peoples manage global lands containing ~80% of remaining biodiversity. When they hold secure land rights, territories show "lower rates of deforestation, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, better biodiversity protection." In addition, the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report included 1,356 references to Indigenous Peoples, recognizing five key contribution areas: resilience of social-ecological systems, risk reduction through traditional knowledge, enhanced local adaptation, climate justice, and sustainable food and water systems supporting biodiversity.

¹⁰ Statistics NZ (2022) provides quantified evidence: over half of Māori authorities, compared with a third of all New Zealand businesses, took actions in response to climate change in the last two years, demonstrating higher climate action engagement rates among Māori-led organizations.

dependence; Māori renewable energy projects on iwi-owned lands; climate education programs that center indigenous knowledge; Māori climate leadership in international forums; research partnerships that combine mātauranga Māori with climate science; emergency response systems that integrate traditional and contemporary approaches.

What it isn't: Tokenistic consultation or advisory roles; imposing Western climate frameworks on Māori communities; treating Māori as vulnerable populations rather than leaders with solutions; extractive research that benefits non-Māori organisations.

Conclusions

Cross-Cutting Evidence for Systemic Interventions

Higher leverage ratios create cascading effects and multiplier impacts. Research on social tipping points shows that systemic interventions, such as movement building, building bipartisan support for climate solutions, and shifting social norms, are "orders of magnitude less" expensive than traditional interventions like subsidies or trainings, while creating disproportionate system-wide changes once tipping points are reached.

Sustainable impact through self-reinforcing dynamics persists beyond initial intervention periods. Unlike direct delivery which requires ongoing funding and maintenance, successful systemic interventions create ongoing benefits.

Addressing root causes targets underlying drivers rather than symptoms. Research from Nature Climate Change shows "radical interventions" addressing root drivers are "preventative, effective and systemic" while conventional approaches are "not ambitious enough to prevent large-scale irreversible loss."¹¹

Why The Climatics will focus on these levers for change

For The Climatics, this research forms the rationale for prioritising systemic change approaches over direct delivery and for the four specific focus areas. Based on this, we believe that strategic investment in narrative strategy, movement building, political transformation, and Māori-led action can create the conditions for rapid, large-scale emissions reductions that exceed what direct interventions could achieve.

The climate crisis demands interventions that can create change at unprecedented speed and scale. While direct delivery approaches provide valuable proof-of-concept and immediate impacts, the research overwhelmingly shows that systemic change approaches offer the leverage necessary to transform the economic, political, and social systems driving emissions at the pace and scale required.

New Zealand's unique position - with strong Māori leadership, democratic institutions, and pride in te taiao - creates exceptional opportunities for systemic interventions to achieve transformative impact. The evidence suggests that strategic philanthropy focused on these four focus areas can catalyse the systemic changes necessary to achieve New Zealand's climate goals while creating models that inspire global transformation.

¹¹ ["Radical Interventions for Climate Impacted Systems"](#), Nature, 2021. This paper names the following as the deep root causes: "capitalism and materialism, asymmetrical power relations and lock-in of exploitative and extractive systems" with a latter mention of colonisation and other forms of domination-paradigms.