



## INSIGHTS

### A Handful Of Highlights From Climate Week 2023: Crossing The Rubicon From Planning To Accelerated Action

October 3, 2023

The 15th annual [Climate Week NYC](#) was hosted by the Climate Group from Sept. 17-24 in partnership with the United Nations (U.N.) General Assembly. Long before then, the world was on notice that things were going to be different this year.

[NASA recently announced](#) that the summer of 2023 was Earth's hottest since global records were first kept in 1880. There is a substantial likelihood that 2023 will be the hottest year on record. This global rise in temperatures has been fueled by worldwide increases in greenhouse gas emissions. More apparent than in years past, in 2023 these changes have led to an increase in the intensity and frequency of [extreme weather events](#), such as forest fires, hurricanes, heat waves, floods, droughts, and storms.

Climate Week coincided with the U.N.'s General Assembly, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Summit, and Climate Ambition Summit. The U.N.'s message on climate change was dire – the world is far behind on progress toward sustainable development goals, we are running out of time, and immediate action is needed to course correct and accelerate transformation to decarbonization and net zero.

While the theme of Climate Week this year, “We Can. We Will,” was upbeat, the tone was equally grim. As Helen Clarkson, CEO of the Climate Group stated in her [opening remarks](#), “the planet keeps tapping us on the shoulder: ‘You’re not going fast enough ... you’re Just. Not. Going. Fast enough.’”

In past years, the consistent lament (stated in many different ways) has

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been over the failure to turn climate rhetoric into action. A lot of lofty commitments have been made to meet the U.N.'s sustainable development goals (SDGs) and achieve net zero, but there has been little real progress.

Coming into Climate Week this year, however, recent developments have set the stage to move from planning to results. Among the most impactful of these developments in the U.S.: Funds have started to flow from the Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and are being invested in decarbonization and energy efficiency projects [large and small](#), along with [clean energy infrastructure](#), and a national network of [clean hydrogen hubs](#). The European Union is following a similar path with its [Green Deal Industrial Plan](#) and proposed [Net-Zero Industry Act](#) (NZIA) to scale up EU manufacturing of key carbon neutral technologies to facilitate the clean-energy transition.

In parallel with these investments, this past year there has been significant movement toward uniform global [sustainability](#), [climate](#), and [nature-related](#) disclosure frameworks that provide mechanisms for consistent measurement of progress.

### **Notable Announcements During Climate Week 2023**

Against that backdrop, there were a number of big announcements during Climate Week that build on these developments and – perhaps to the surprise of some – show real promise of picking up the pace toward reaching climate goals. These included announcements of the availability of billions more public and private dollars to fund climate pollution and emission reductions in the U.S. and developing countries. Additionally, the U.S. Department of the Treasury issued new guidance on best practices for financial institutions that have made net-zero commitments. That release was accompanied by an announcement of substantial private support to help financial institutions develop and execute those commitments and to facilitate deployment of private capital to address the impacts of climate change.

Perhaps most notable, and having the most potential to assure the future of clean energy and climate resilience, the U.S. [announced the launch](#) of the American Climate Corps that will train and put 20,000 young Americans to work on conservation projects, implementing energy efficient technologies, and advancing environmental justice.

### **United Nations' Call for Immediate Transformative Action to Meet SDGs Loomed Over Events**

The U.N. Sustainable Development Goals Summit, convened by the president of the General Assembly, took place on Sept 18-19. The summit was preceded by release of the [2023 Global Sustainable Development Report](#) (GSDR), which concluded that insufficient progress has been made to achieve the SDGs by 2030. The [GSDR 2023's key messages](#) highlighted the shortcomings and need to integrate “the SDGs into core decision-making processes, financing mechanisms prioritizing SDG attainment, and strong mechanisms for accountability.”

They also put a spotlight on the GSDR's call to action for U.N. member countries to implement science driven transformation frameworks, build

capacity, and coordinate their efforts to accelerate action to timely achieve SDGs.

At the [U.N. Climate Ambition Summit](#), convened immediately after the SDG Summit, U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres issued a [blunt warning](#) and reinforced the call to action, saying:

Our focus here is on climate solutions – and our task is urgent.

Humanity has opened the gates of hell.

Horrendous heat is having horrendous effects.

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Climate action is dwarfed by the scale of the challenge.

If nothing changes we are heading towards a 2.8 degree temperature rise – towards a dangerous and unstable world.

But the future is not fixed.

It is for leaders like you to write it.

We can still limit the rise in global temperature to 1.5 degrees. We can still build a world of clear air, green jobs, and affordable clean power for all.

## **U.S. Announces Availability of \$4.6 Billion in Competitive Grants to Cut Climate Pollution**

On Sept. 20, in conjunction with Climate Week, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was among those that answered the call when it launched two new Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) competitions totaling [\\$4.6 billion as part of the investing in America Agenda](#). The grants will be used to fund state, local, and tribal programs and policies that cut climate pollution, advance environmental justice, and deploy solutions to accelerate America's clean energy transition.

Pursuant to an [earlier competition](#), approximately \$250 million in CPRG planning grant funding has already been or is expected to be awarded to support development of climate action plans for 46 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico; 79 of the country's most populous metropolitan statistical areas; more than 200 tribes; and four U.S. territories. The first deliverable due under the CPRG planning grants is a Priority Climate Action Plan (PCAP) that must be submitted to the EPA by March 1, 2024.

The Sept. 20 [Notice of Funding Opportunity](#) (NOFO) for the first new competition allocates up to \$4.3 billion for CPRG implementation grants. Only those lead organizations that timely submit their PCAPs will be eligible to participate in this first competition. The second competition offers up to an additional \$300 million for CPRG implementation grants just for eligible tribes and territories. Grant applications are due by April 1, 2024.

According to the NOFO, these CPRG implementation grants are intended to enable eligible applicants to achieve the following goals:

1. Implement ambitious measures that will achieve significant

- cumulative GHG reductions by 2030 and beyond
2. Pursue measures that will achieve substantial community benefits (such as reduction of criteria air pollutants (CAPs) and hazardous air pollutants (HAPs)), particularly in low-income and disadvantaged communities
  3. Complement other funding sources to maximize these GHG reductions and community benefits
  4. Pursue innovative policies and programs that are replicable and can be “scaled up” across multiple jurisdictions.

The EPA has estimated it will award approximately 30 to 115 implementation grants across five tiers ranging between \$2 million and \$500 million under this competition, and anticipates awards will be made in October 2024.

## **U.S. Treasury Rolled Out Voluntary Guidance on Net Zero Financing and Investment**

One of the surprises during Climate Week was the Treasury Department publication of its [Principles for Net-Zero Financing & Investment](#). This set of nine voluntary principles, announced by Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen during a Sept. 18 speech in New York, highlight emerging best practices for financial institutions that have made net-zero commitments:

“The Principles establish that financial institution net-zero commitments should be in line with limiting the increase in the global average temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius. They affirm that financial institutions that have made these commitments should develop transition plans with clear practices, targets, and metrics. And that they should support their clients and portfolio companies in adopting their own transition plans.”

The principles are intended to mobilize private sector capital to address the physical and economic effects of climate change and meet anticipated increasing demands for “technologies, products, and services that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, support a clean energy future, and help adapt to a changing climate across all sectors.”

According to the Treasury Department’s [overview](#), the principles focus on private financial institutions’ Scope 3 financed and facilitated greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (i.e. from value chains), which are typically the largest type of emissions for financial institutions. They also underscore the need for financial institutions to be transparent, create robust governance processes to provide oversight of implementation of their commitments, and account for environmental justice and environmental impacts.

## **Substantial Private and Public-Private Financial Support to Meet National and International Decarbonization and Net Zero Commitments**

Over the years, announcements of major public and private commitments to reduce emissions and combat climate change have become the norm during Climate Week. What was different this year was that a number of the substantial private and public-private financial commitments went far beyond just the talk. Rather, they were focused on enabling key stakeholders to achieve those commitments and move the needle to

reduce emissions, prevent further climate change, and repair the damage.

### **A number of private initiatives to support financial institutions' net-zero commitments were announced.**

Alongside release of the Principles, the Treasury Department applauded announcements of supporting initiatives by a number of nonprofits, including a [\\$340 million commitment](#) over the next three years by a coalition of leading philanthropic organizations to support “the continued development of research, data availability, and technical resources intended to help financial institutions develop and execute robust, voluntary net-zero commitments.”

Other key announcements of programs to inform, develop, and implement the financial sector's transition to net-zero emission were made by the [Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero](#), the Rocky Mountain Institute [Center for Climate Aligned Finance](#), and the [Partnership for Carbon Accounting Financials](#).

### **Bloomberg announced an additional \$500 million investment to replace fossil fuels with renewable energy.**

During the Climate Ambition Summit, former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who is currently the U.N. Special Envoy on Climate Ambition and Solutions, announced that he would double down on Bloomberg Philanthropies' original \$500 million investment in the Beyond Carbon campaign in 2019 with an [additional \\$500 million to help end fossil fuels and usher in a new era of clean energy in the United States](#). The additional funding will support the Beyond Carbon's 2030 goals: to “finish the job on coal” and “shut down every last U.S. coal plant;” cut gas plant capacity in half and stop construction of new plants, and; increase U.S. clean energy four-fold.

**The Rockefeller Foundation announced an additional \$1 billion investment over five years to advance the global climate transition.** [The Rockefeller Foundation's Sept. 15 billion dollar commitment](#) will fund a [new climate strategy](#) to help transform what it calls the four systems that are essential to the well-being of people and the planet: energy, agriculture, health, and finance. The strategy has two central pillars, to “bring the world together to address climate change in a more concerted manner and seize the climate transition's opportunities and benefits for the billions of people who have historically been denied them.” The foundation plans to identify and scale the most promising climate solutions, and operate and invest in new ways (including support for “big bettors”) that will meet a science-based net zero target.

**The Energy Transition Accelerator (ETA) and the World Bank announced a strategic collaboration to scale up clean energy finance to support just, accelerated energy transitions in developing countries.** [ETA is a public-private partnership](#) of the U.S. Department of State, the Bezos Earth Fund, and The Rockefeller Foundation formed in November 2022 to help accelerate developing countries' transition from fossil fuels to clean energy with innovative jurisdictional-scale carbon crediting. The World Bank's new [Scaling Climate Action by Lowering Emissions](#) initiative supports developing countries in developing power sector policies and carbon market infrastructure needed to generate real emissions reductions.

[This collaboration](#), which was first announced during Climate Week, “will



enable developing countries to be directly rewarded for verified emissions reductions from a pool of payments committed by public and private sector contributors.” Private sector companies and institutions will be enlisted to commit now to pay for verified reductions in power sector emissions developing countries that will be delivered as high-integrity carbon credits.

## U.S. Launches ‘American Climate Corps’

On Sept. 20, the White House announced executive action to [launch the American Climate Corps](#) to “mobilize a new, diverse generation of more than 20,000 young Americans – putting them to work conserving and restoring our lands and waters, bolstering community resilience, deploying clean energy, implementing energy efficient technologies, and advancing environmental justice, all while creating pathways to high-quality, good-paying clean energy and climate resilience jobs in the public and private sectors after they complete their paid training program.”

The plan is modelled after the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), created as part of President Roosevelt’s New Deal that put America back to work during the Great Depression in the 1930s.

The American Climate Corps is an interagency partnership between AmeriCorps, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Departments of Labor, Interior, Agriculture, and Energy. AmeriCorps, the federal agency for national service, will serve as the hub for the American Climate Corps.

One of the American Climate Corps’ first projects, paralleling the CCC’s initial tree-planting initiative, will be the establishment of a new [AmeriCorps NCCC Forest Corps](#) that will deploy young people across America “to conserve national forests and grasslands, mitigate risks of wildfires in high-risk regions, and support reforestation efforts and wildfire crisis response.” The first cohort of this five-year \$15 million partnership between AmeriCorps and the U.S. Forest Service will begin service in the summer of 2024.

[Five states that announced their own state-level climate corps during Climate Week](#) – Arizona, Maryland, Minnesota, North Carolina and Utah – will team up with California’s Volunteers, and will work as implementing collaborators of the American Climate Corps. The state-level climate corps are supported through a public-private partnership between philanthropy and AmeriCorps.

This program offers the prospect of educating and meaningfully employing a skilled workforce today to support the U.S. clean energy goals and objectives, while building the base needed to assure that those efforts can be maintained and sustained in the future.

## Takeaways

Notwithstanding the grave concerns about the lack of sufficient progress toward climate goals, there were high aspirations for Climate Week and the U.N.’s General Assembly, Sustainable Development Goals Summit, and Climate Ambition Summit.

Together, these interconnected events generated tremendous momentum

toward a number of key climate objectives, including: keeping climate and achieving net zero at the top of the agenda; establishing new frontiers in policy to incentivize and strengthen investment in green manufacturing and finance; accelerating a rapid and just fossil-fuel phase out and replacement with clean energy, and; restoring, conserving and protecting biodiversity.

More importantly, it appears that as a result of recent policy advances, substantial public and private investments, collaboration on uniform standards, and funding to train a new generation for clean energy jobs, stakeholders may finally be crossing the Rubicon. There was a palpable shift from talk and planning to action on concrete steps that will mitigate climate impacts, bolster resilience, and accelerate progress toward sustainable development goals and the 1.5 degrees target of the Paris Agreement.