



Duke Carbon Offsets Initiative

Questions to Guide Offset Program Development



**Duke Carbon
Offsets Initiative**
DUKE UNIVERSITY

sustainability.duke.edu/offsets

1) Institutional Priorities

- a) **Why does your institution want to pursue offset projects?**
 - a. Does your institution have a climate goal?
 - a. What are its reasons for setting climate goals?
 - b. Does it view offsets as a necessity or an extra?
 - b. Does your institution consider any of the following to be main drivers for pursuing offsets?
 - a. Community engagement
 - b. Education
 - c. Research
 - d. Climate Impact
 - e. Impending climate goals
 - f. Financial gain
- b) **What is your institution trying to offset?**
 - a. Boundaries (campus energy use, air travel, study abroad...etc)?
 - a. What scopes are included within your goals?
 - b. Have certain categories proved difficult to decrease emissions internally? (ex. Air travel)
 - b. Does your institution keep a GHG inventory?
 - a. What is your institution's carbon footprint?
 - b. How many offsets do you anticipate requiring?
 - c. Do you include things like land use changes or tree cutting/planting?
 - c. What is your institution's timeline?
- c) **How will your institution achieve emissions reductions?**
 - a. How feasible are on-campus emissions reductions?
 - b. Will your institution be able to achieve its neutrality goal (if it has one) through emissions reductions alone?
 - a. How big of a role will offset purchases play in achieving climate neutrality?

2) Offset Program Priorities

- a) **Proactive versus reactive**
 - a. Will your program define what happens on campus (creating new research opportunities, shifting priorities, building new partnerships, etc.), or will your program be defined by the existing campus projects (assisting current research efforts, building upon existing relationships, etc.)?
- b) **Innovative project methods**
 - a. Is innovative offset research and development an important part of your institution's climate action plan?
 - b. Is there a certain subset of offset project types that is particularly appealing or of interest to your institution?
 - a. How risk tolerant is your institution?
 - i. Are you willing to accept additional risks of project failure when pursuing innovative project development?
- c) **Location of project?**
 - a. What does local mean to your institution?
 - a. Is operating within a local setting important to your institution?
 - b. Are there locations your institution prefers not to establish offset projects?
 - c. Would your institution consider international projects?
 - i. Are domestic projects or international projects of higher priority?
- d) **Co-benefits**
 - a. How does your institution define different co-benefits?
 - b. What are the co-benefits that you envision projects will generate?
 - c. Which are most important? Why?
- e) **Project design/development**
 - a. What makes your project additional?
 - b. What is your \$-per-offset willingness to pay?

- a. Is this a set amount or does this vary based on co-benefits, project type, etc?
- b. What is your maximum willingness to pay?
- c. How are project risks evaluated and managed through your offset program?
- d. Is scaling/replicating the project beyond your institution important?
 - a. If so, how will you define success of scaling/replicating?
- e. Is it important to register your offsets with an existing registry?
 - a. Which registries are you comfortable with to verify your carbon offset project?
- f. Are there existing protocols that fit the projects you are envisioning?
 - a. (Check CAR, ACR, CDM, and VCS)
- g. Is there risk of double-counting involved in the project?
 - a. What other stakeholders are involved?
 - b. Which of these stakeholders might claim the emissions reductions?
 - c. Which emission scope will this project count towards?

3) Educational Opportunities

- a) What educational opportunities can you incorporate?**
 - i) Visit Offsetnetwork.org for examples of educational opportunities provided by offset projects to date
- b) Does your institution have specific education priorities/strengths?**
 - i) Is there existing research that can tie back to offset projects?
 - ii) Are there faculty members interested in offset work?
 - iii) Are there departments whose work can be extended to offset project development (e.g. forestry department's work extended to develop tree-planting carbon sequestration projects)?
 - iv) Are there student organizations on campus interested in leading or supporting offset efforts?
- c) What current curriculum/classes can you plug into?**
 - i) Are there independent studies that can be directed to researching offset projects?
 - ii) Do you anticipate any future classes/curriculum that could benefit from offset projects?
 - (1) Are these classes at risk within the life of an offset project?
- d) Are there work-study programs that can sponsor students to research offset projects?**

4) Institutional Structure

- a) Is there an existing sustainability or offset office in your institution?**
 - i) If yes...
 - a. Which department does the office live under?
 - b. Who does the office report to?
 - c. What are the rules that the office must adhere to?
 - d. Is the office more connected to the academic side of the institution or the administration side?
 - e. What is the office's comfort level with risk?
 - ii) If no...
 - a. What barriers exist internally to creating an office?
 - b. Who are sustainability allies within your institution?
 - c. How will you strategically approach office creation?
 - a. Are there opportunities to work with other local schools to create a joint offset program?

5) Available Resources

a) Funding

- i) Do you have a confirmed funding source? If no...
 - (1) Does your school allocate budget for sustainability related initiatives? Are there school grants that you can apply for?
 - (2) Are there any private foundations that are willing to fund offset projects?
 - (3) Are there government programs that sponsor educational initiatives on sustainability?
- ii) Where does your funding come from currently?
- iii) Are there any existing programs with funding models that the carbon offsets program can be modeled on?
Examples of funding sources: air travel tax, student funding routes, annual budget items, grants, revolving loan funds, etc.

b) Staff

- a. Does your institution have the staff to monitor and facilitate verification for projects over long life-spans? What about innovative projects that will likely require additional work?

c) Faculty

- a. Do you plan on engaging faculty in the research, design, implementation, and evaluation of the project? If so, how?
- b. Who are the current or prospective faculty that may be interested?

d) Student

- a. Do you plan on engaging students in the research, design, implementation, and evaluation of the project? If so, how?
- b. How will you identify and connect to the students you intend to engage?

e) Community

- a. What project opportunities exist in your area? What is the landscape? What industries are nearby?
- b. What local relevant companies or organizations does the institution interact with? Do these entities have a reliable staff? Are they financially stable and well established?

6) Stakeholders

a) Partners

- a. What barriers exist externally? (especially when you are considering building a project partnership within nearby communities)
- b. Does your institution have exclusivity contracts with existing partners or internal policies that may facilitate or limit future partnerships in any way?
- c. Has your institution engaged in sustainability projects with partners in the past?
 - a. Can those partners be engaged again in an offset context?

b) Registries

- a. Will you strive to impact the broader offset market through your projects and project experiences?
 - a. If yes, how?

c) Academic community

- a. Are you considering collaborating with other academic institutions for your project?
- b. If yes, do you have preexisting partner institutions that also have climate change goals?
- c. Are there other institutions that exist locally and may be interested in partnering?

d) Community

- a. How does your project impact your academic community's public relations and partnerships with the local community?
- b. Will your project seek to involve the local community in some way?
 - a. If so, do they need basic information about what an offset is before being engaged?