

An aerial photograph of a rugged coastline. The top half shows a dark, rocky cliffside with sparse green vegetation overlooking a small, crescent-shaped sandy beach. The bottom half shows the ocean with vibrant turquoise water and white, frothy waves crashing against large, dark, layered rock formations. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white band across the middle.

Australia Climate Impact Initiative

Founding Executive Director

Sydney, New South Wales, or Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

“There is no precedent in human history for the kinds of sweeping transformations science is calling us to make in this decade.”

- Christiana Figueres, Former Executive Secretary, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate

“The climate crisis offers us the chance to experience what very few generations in history have had the privilege of knowing: a generational mission.”

- Al Gore, Founder and Chairman, The Climate Reality Project

THE SEARCH

Amidst this decisive decade for global climate action, Australian philanthropists are taking a bold and unprecedented step to transform how philanthropy powers environmental solutions. With four percent of Australian philanthropy directed toward environmental and climate change initiatives, there remains significant opportunity and an urgent call to action for funders to make outsized impact. The moment requires an ambitious strategy to catalyse and scale environmental philanthropy, prompting the imminent creation of the **Australia Climate Impact Initiative** (working title), a first of its kind philanthropic advisory for individuals and families with high capacity and inclination to combat the climate crisis. Informed by the success of the global partner [Climate Lead](#), and launched as a high priority strategy of [Australian Environmental Grantmakers Network](#) (AEGN), this exciting new initiative is a bold step to unlock, ignite, and accelerate large-scale climate philanthropy across the country. The goal is ambitious and attainable: to catalyse at least \$1.1 billion (AUD) from philanthropy to enable outstanding environmental solutions in Australia, in the Asia-Pacific region, and around the world in the next five years.

As this groundbreaking initiative moves from concept to reality, it seeks an audacious **founding executive director** to build the organisation as momentum and urgency build for climate action. With early multi-year funding commitments in place, the support of Climate Lead and its network of supporters of influence, and strong endorsement and involvement from leading Australian philanthropists, the executive director will establish the initiative’s strategy, structure, and operations. In doing so, this leader will conceptualise, recruit, and lead a talented team and create the systems, partnerships, and culture necessary for long-term success. This leader will also personally advise and engage Australia’s most influential philanthropists, and play a central role in fostering and organising a community of Australian funders – convening, connecting, and supporting them to learn from one another, coordinate efforts, and collectively accelerate climate impact. In doing so, the executive director will inspire donors to channel giving into climate, environmental, and First Nations issues, while expanding both the scale and sophistication of philanthropic giving in Australia. The name itself – *Australia Climate Impact Initiative* –

is a placeholder only, serving as a starting point from where the executive director will launch efforts to establish the positioning and brand for this new, independent advisory service.

This is a career-defining opportunity to build a team of excellence and lead the first entity of its kind in the country with a focused mission to inspire scaled funding to the most impactful climate strategies in Australia and beyond. The ideal candidate will bring a blend of strategic acumen and operational rigour, in addition to deep experience securing major- and principal-level philanthropic gifts from high capacity individuals and families. This individual will also possess the cultural fluency to effectively navigate and translate Australia's philanthropic landscape, equipping new funders with insights and information to drive transformative solutions.



With a strong focus on climate and environmental action, the executive director will build an operation capable of providing tailored one-on-one advisory to wealthy Australian individuals and families new to this sector, helping them maximise the effectiveness and impact of their philanthropy. As a trusted adviser to high-net-worth donors, the executive director will deeply understand how benefactors operate at this level of giving in the seven- and eight-figure-plus ranges and, importantly, will devise relationship origination strategies to leverage networks, forge relationships, and spark connections to expand the circle of new philanthropists with the ability to move with urgency to meet the climate challenge. This role requires an individual who demonstrates genuine humility and a strong outcomes-orientation. They must be trustworthy and deeply credible, with the relational skills to build authentic and enduring partnerships, as well as a natural connector and guide who is capable of creating community to strengthen and expand the country's philanthropic ecosystem and contribute Australian leadership to global climate

efforts. This position is based in Sydney, New South Wales or Melbourne, Victoria. Both domestic and international travel will be necessary.

Rachel Ellenport is leading this search with Nicole Poe, Bryce Ervin, and Rebecca Lyons.

ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The founding executive director of the Australia Climate Impact Initiative will conceptualise and lead efforts to engage and guide high-capacity individuals and families, helping them channel their philanthropy for maximum climate impact. By cultivating trusted relationships and providing tailored guidance, the executive director will ensure each donor's giving achieves measurable, high-impact outcomes that are deeply meaningful and inspiring to others. The ideal candidate is a creative and strategic thinker and organisational builder who embraces innovation, values a relational approach to work, thrives on taking informed risks, and is committed to harnessing the power of philanthropy to accelerate climate action.



KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

- **Create and articulate a bold, unifying vision for the Australia Climate Impact Initiative**, setting the strategic direction for a first-of-its-kind organisation in Australia and establishing a clear pathway to catalyse large-scale climate and environmental philanthropy in the country.
- **Set and drive organisational strategy**, translating an ambitious mission into actionable priorities, a multi-year roadmap, and annual plans that reflect both the urgency and opportunity of the moment.

- **Establish five-year goals, three-year objectives, and annual key results (OKRs)** to guide the initiative's growth, effectiveness, and accountability, ensuring alignment with funders, partners, and the broader climate ecosystem.
- **Recruit, build, and guide the founding team**, defining roles, responsibilities and workflows; cultivating a high-performing, mission-driven team of excellence who are focused and aligned with the organisation's values and culture.
- **Build a strong, values-led organisational culture**, shaping norms, behaviours, and ways of working that support collaboration, innovation, curiosity, and long-term sustainability.
- **Partner closely with Climate Lead**, leveraging their global model, tools, and learnings to establish and refine the advisory offering, with similar engagement from AEGN as the organisation matures.
- **Conduct diligence on, source, and translate high-impact climate and environmental strategies** – including biodiversity conservation, climate mitigation, First Nations leadership, and sustainable food systems, land use, and agriculture – into compelling philanthropic opportunities tailored for new and emerging major donors.
- **Recruit, engage, and support key peer leaders**, including influential philanthropists who can help bring others to impactful solutions, amplifying reach and credibility through trusted networks.
- **Build and nurture meaningful relationships with high-net-worth individuals and families**, providing tailored one-on-one philanthropic advising as they enter the climate philanthropic space with confidence and achieve demonstrable outcomes.
- **Serve as a collaborative partner to the broader climate ecosystem**, including NGOs and sector leaders, ensuring the initiative's work strengthens the field, aligns with community priorities, and amplifies collective impact.



QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The founding executive director will bring many, if not most, of the following capabilities to the role.

- **An entrepreneurial mindset**, including experience building new programs, initiatives, or organisations from the ground up, or operating effectively in early-stage, highly adaptive environments. This includes demonstrating comfort with ambiguity, a bias toward action, and the ability to design and refine systems, processes, and strategies as the organisation evolves.
- **Proven ability to build strategic relationships and engage high-net-worth donors** to develop influence and impact, serving as the catalyst and facilitator for principal and transformational giving at the seven- and eight-figure-plus levels. Bring a track record of cultivating trust, understanding donor motivations, and guiding philanthropists toward ambitious, high-impact opportunities.



- **Strong analytical skills** to identify and leverage opportunities and evaluate outcomes. Ability to synthesise complex information, apply sound judgment, and use data and insights to inform strategy, decision-making, and continuous improvement.
- **Excellent leadership skills** and proven track record in building trust, confidence, and collaboration across diverse constituents. Capable of building and motivating high-performing teams, fostering

alignment around shared goals, and navigating complex environments with diplomacy and integrity.

- **Superb communication skills**, both written and verbal, including the ability to tailor messaging to a wide array of audiences. Adept at articulating compelling narratives, simplifying complex concepts, and communicating with clarity, influence, and purpose.
- **Strong cultural competency** with a demonstrated ability to listen deeply and support approaches grounded in cultural knowledge and community priorities.
- **Demonstrated capacity to work effectively work donors across the full political spectrum**, demonstrating diplomacy, discretion, and the capacity to build trust and alignment around shared goals.
- **A minimum of 15 years' experience** in donor engagement or advisory roles with high-net-worth donors.
- **A track record of success in advising, supporting, or engaging wealthy individuals and families**, including the ability to understand their values, motivations, and aspirations.
- **Ability to work both independently and collaboratively** in a fast-paced, mission-driven environment. Thrives in roles requiring initiative, adaptability, and a strong sense of personal ownership, while also contributing to a culture of teamwork, shared purpose, and continuous learning.

While by no means required, the founding executive director will also ideally have had exposure to or possess familiarity with working with First Nations leadership and/or communities to ensure a rights-based approach to developing and implementing solutions.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website:

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/australia-climate-impact-initiative/executive-director>

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This document has been prepared based on the information provided by the Australian Environmental Grantmakers Network (AEGN). The material presented in this leadership profile should be relied on for informational purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and information provided by AEGN would supersede any conflicting information in this document.

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