

Task Force on Carbon Removal and Offsets Summary Report

The University of Southern California (USC) is committed to achieving climate neutrality by 2025. USC cannot achieve this ambitious goal without utilizing carbon offsets. To create a carbon offset strategy that makes genuine contributions to carbon emission reductions, and aligns with USC's values, the Task Force on Carbon Removal and Offsets recommends that USC should:

1. Maintain its commitment to prioritize the reduction of internal emissions, using carbon offsets as a last resort for emissions that cannot be directly eliminated. The number of offset credits should continue to decrease, with progress shown through annual public reporting of total offset investments.
2. Ensure that PAVER standards for offset projects are highly likely to be fulfilled, meaning projects are Permanent, Additional, Verifiable, Enforceable, and Real.
3. Build a diverse portfolio of offsets, rather than focusing on a single project or project type. Prospective projects should be prioritized based on the evaluative criteria of equity and environmental justice, co-benefits, and avoidance of co-negatives. Co-benefits include reduction of pollution, improvement of health, improvement of the environment near project sites, opportunities to involve the USC community, partnerships and external funding potential, and business and household savings.
4. Give special consideration to offsets projects that benefit the South and East Los Angeles community, either through the purchase of pre-existing projects or the co-development of novel projects with community input.
5. Partner with external subject matter experts to perform due diligence of prospective carbon offset projects and ensure recommendations are satisfied.
6. Convene a working group organized by the Office of Sustainability once climate neutrality is first achieved, and as needed thereafter, to review previous offset investments and to ensure recommendations remain current in an evolving voluntary offset market.

By leveraging these recommendations, USC will be well-positioned to make informed and impactful choices in the development of its carbon offset program, and avoid the reputational risks associated with carbon offset projects that do not meet the Task Force's evaluative criteria.

See the Task Force on Carbon Removal and Offsets Final Report for further details on the above recommendations, including peer benchmarking, evaluative criteria, project types, and key considerations.