

Letters to the Earth Report for Gulbenkian Foundation and The Climate Coalition, June 2022

Delivering grassroots public engagement through Letters to the Earth

The team behind Letters to the Earth has created and successfully trialed a bespoke workshop to engage communities on their relationship to the climate and ecological emergency. Through dialogue and creative prompts people are invited to share their hopes, fears and visions for the future and to write their own letter – to or from the Earth, other species, a person in a position of power, or future or past generations. People are invited to give voice to what matters to them most, and consider perspectives other than theirs, and other than human.

*Over the 6 months between September 2021 – February 2022, the project team **will facilitate workshops for 10 communities across the UK**. Over half of these will be co-hosted with cultural organisations yet to Declare, so as to support the growth of the declaring movement and the development of regional CDE hubs, and at least 4 will follow ‘the road to COP’ taken by artists walking a Pilgrimage from London to Glasgow before November. Audiences of the cultural organisations and artists and their associated networks will be invited to attend each workshop, inviting people to meet perhaps for the first time, to connect emotionally and imaginatively in response to the crisis, and to craft messages for a better relationship with the Earth and for the changes they wish to see.*

These messages will go towards a mass collective art-work that will be delivered at COP26 and will live on via the Letters to the Earth campaign.

This work will,

- *Foster deeper connections with nature and within local communities*
- *Increase the inclusion of marginalised and less engaged groups in the climate conversation*
- *Empower people across society to have a voice in the face of the worsening the climate and ecological crisis*
- *Extend and showcase the power of culture to contribute to a more regenerative future*
- *Support the development of CDE Regional Hubs*

Gulbenkian Grant awarded: £6900

3 Workshops, ‘on the road’ to COP26, September – November 2021:

1. Rawtenstall, Rossendale - 27th September, Great Big Green Week

In collaboration with The Climate Coalition, this was designed to engage the ‘hard to reach’ Conservative constituency of MP Jake Berry (who’s track record on climate includes signing a letter supporting the Cumbria coal mine), and connect with the cultural audiences of novelist Anna Hope, who grew up in the area and is a co-founder of Letters to the Earth. Written letters were enveloped and taken to COP26 to be delivered.

Attendees: 2*

*Due to such a low turnout we decided to cancel other workshops planned in the following ‘hard to reach’ and ‘less engaged’ constituencies of Spelthorne, Uxbridge, Reading and Richmond. Key learning was the time pressure in the run up to COP26 didn’t allow for a full

publicity run and we decided the better strategy for workshops would be to partner with pre-existing groups. (Street activations for example wouldn't require pre-bookings). The Climate Coalition agreed to continue funding workshops postponed for 2022.

2. Listening to the Land Pilgrims, Clitheroe, Lancashire – 28th September

A workshop for the group of artists and campaigners walking from London to Glasgow, through which they could share their experiences of walking the country and their visions for a better way of relating with the wider natural world.

Attendees: 20

[Photos.](#)

Outcome: Messages from the written letters contributed to a sewn tapestry of 'voices of the land' that featured as part of the Pilgrim's performance in the Green Zone.



3. "Icehub", Glasgow November 7th 2021

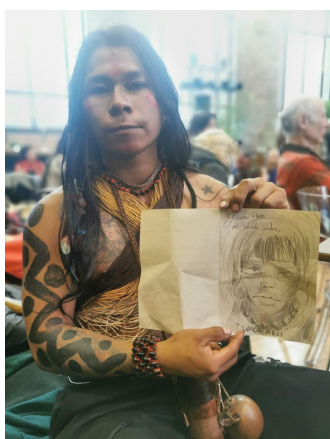
In collaboration with Vivobarefoot, Grounded and La Minga, Letters to the Earth held a workshop for indigenous leaders and activists at the 'House of Original Nations' in Glasgow at COP26 through which we facilitated story-sharing between indigenous peoples and the wider public. The event was live-streamed.

Attendees: 80

[Photos.](#)

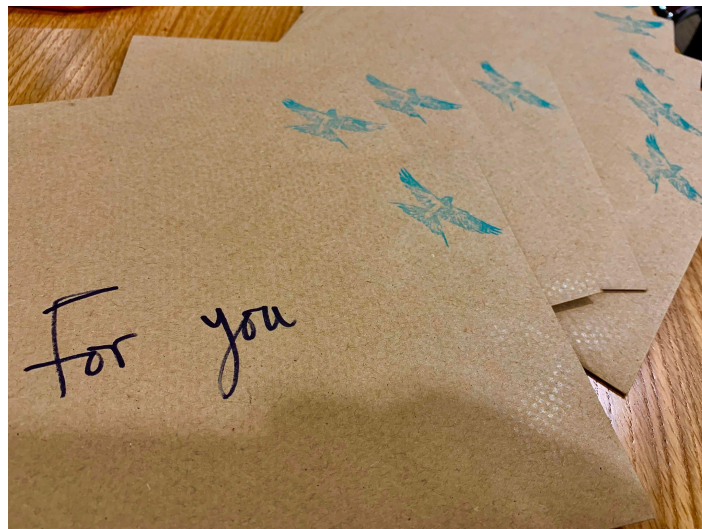
[Trailer.](#)

Outcome: Continued collaboration with Vivobarefoot and Earthrise Studios to amplify messages from indigenous and global south voices in the run up to COP27. Funding secured from Earth Rising Foundation (USA) to enable LTTE to do this. Further partnerships being explored (Flourishing Diversity; Climate Justice and Just Transition Donors Collaborative Impatience Ltd)



“Collective art-work” delivered at COP26:

Since the launch of the Letters to the Earth campaign in February 2019, over 2,000 letters have been submitted. Since the Letters to the Earth COP26 campaign was launched in June 2021 there were an additional 450 letters submitted – via the website, on email, in the post or via workshops. During COP26, 3000 copies of different Letters were handed out in envelopes, using recycled paper and vegetable ink, to move and inspire people to take a moment of personal connection with the Earth and the planetary crisis and then write and share their own Letter in response. Letters were handed out to key delegates, activists, citizens, business and indigenous leaders within the Blue and Green Zone and at public events; they were read across events hosted by WWF, Project Everyone at Goals House, 5x15 hosted by Brian Eno, Vivobarefoot and the Climate Vulnerable Forum at Scottish Power.



Letters from CEOs of leading BCorps businesses including Steve Waygood of Aviva UK, notables such as Vivienne Westwood, Laura Whitmore and Ben Okri and indigenous leaders were turned into social media graphics and short videos and from 25th October were shared on the Letters to the Earth social media platforms and newsletters.

See COP26 round-up newsletter [here](#)



Outcome: Partnership and donation secured with Aviva to run a workshop for the International Platform for Climate Finance during London Climate Action Week to build a media story around their Letters in support of the financial transition.

Snapshot of social media engagement from 25th October – 30th December 2021:

Instagram:

+4,767% increase on accounts reached

+326% increase on accounts engaged

Twitter:

3.5K impressions per day

Full social media report [here](#).

Press round up [here](#).

2022 Workshops (7):

1. Bigbury Net Zero Conference, Burgh Island, February 21st

We co-facilitated a daylong Assembly organised by [Bigbury Net Zero](#) for South Devon landowners, businesses, homeowners and visitors to share ideas and begin collaborations towards a rapid transition to net zero emissions. We facilitated creative exercises for the group to get to know each other and write & share their Letters.



Attendees: 60

[Photos.](#)

[Trailer.](#)

Outcomes:

- Funding granted to Letters to the Earth from Devon Climate Emergency Fund to collaborate with Devon Wildlife Trust to bring Letters to the Earth to schools across South Hams from September 2021
- Letter from CEO of Devon Wildlife Trust to be filmed and published and CEO of Carbon Savy published on their channels, see [Twitter](#)

Testimonials:

'More motivated than ever to continue to help encourage positive change at grassroots level towards a better future for all. Thank you for a brilliant experience'

- Gary Joliffe, CEO Till the Coast is Clear

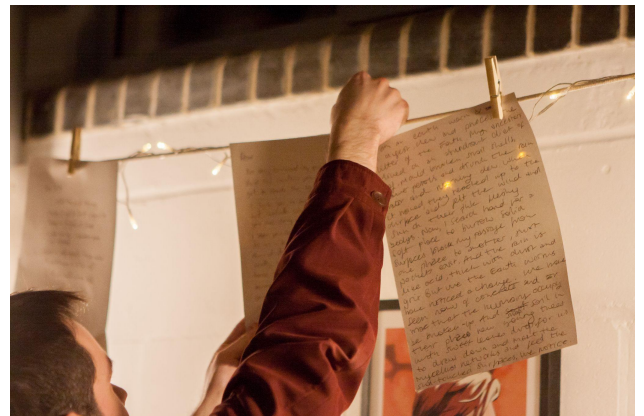
'Biggest inspiration. Moving. Taken heart from all the letters heard. Thank you.'

'Proves how art and culture are great media for communication and connection'

- Jonathan Smith - CEO Carbon Toolkit

2. Thursday 17th March 7.30 - 9.30pm - Norwich Arts Centre (launching CDE East of England)

Led by the Declaration of Emergency from Norwich Arts Centre, this evening included the opportunity to hear from local climate and nature projects and artists, and to make a temporary exhibition of Letters in the venue. Joined by special guest **Rupert Read**, contributing author of *Letters to the Earth*, former spokesperson for Extinction Rebellion and co-founder of the Green Activists Network, GreensCAN.



Attendees: 14 (28 booked) + stall holders

[Photos.](#)

[Trailer.](#)

Outcome: Invitation for CDE and Letters to the Earth to hold a letter writing station at Norwich Festival's MANIFESTO event 13th May (paid) - see twitter [post](#) capturing the event here.

Testimonials:

'Inspired'

'A great chance to get together, led with gentle and experienced leadership'

'It will make you uncomfortable, but it's worth it, and you will feel rejuvenated and ready to act!'

'If you need space to process and reflect, write a Letter to the Earth!'

'Enjoyed the creativity of the workshop'

'It was much more enjoyable than I thought it would be'

'I enjoyed the gentle exploration'

'A supportive, non-threatening way to engage'

'Writing a letter was surprising, good, cathartic'

'Wonderful to connect and prompt thinking and further action'

What people said they're taking away:

'Hope. Meeting others and connecting with others brings hope'

'Encouraged and inspired to do more'

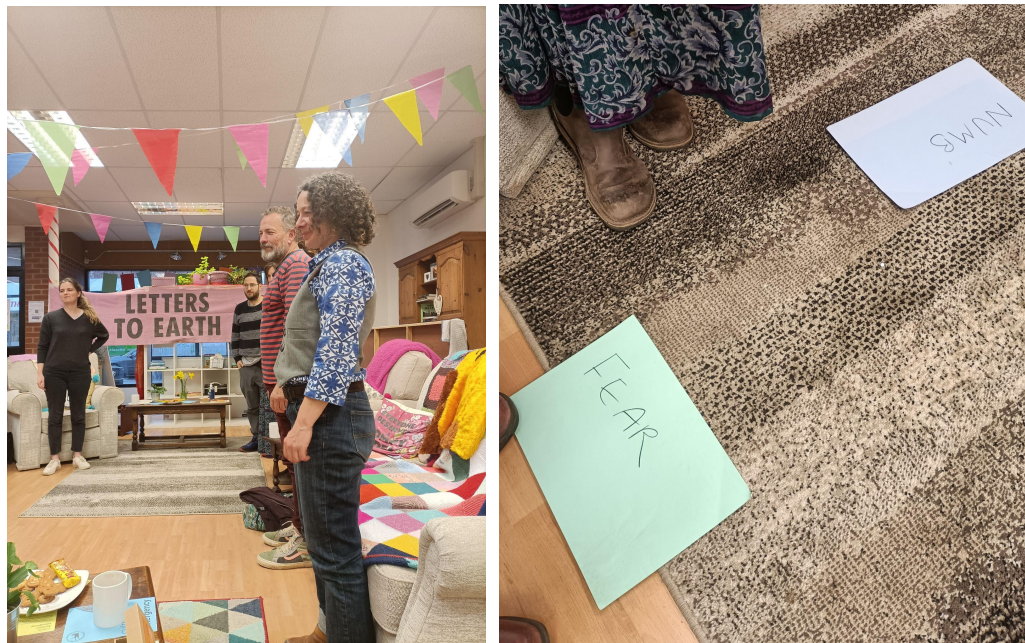
'It's always very comforting to meet others who care about this'

'Different points of view/aspects that I had not considered about the Emergency'

Fuller debrief on this event [here](#).

3. Thursday 24th March 5.30 - 7pm - Hastings Common Room (CDE South East of England)

A free Letters to the Earth workshop for all ages, followed by a Transition Town Hastings Food for Thought pot luck supper.



Attendees: 9

Photos.

Outcome: Potential to explore the connection of themes within the letters with National Refugee week 20-26th June, theme 'Healing'. Letters being a part of this in some way?

4. Friday 1st April - Ushaw Historic House, Durham (CDE North East)

Letters to the Earth and the CDE North East Hub offered a joint session at a two-day 'Celebration of Creativity' ticketed festival hosted by Create North in Ushaw, a centre of contemporary creative practice.



6. Saturday 11th June 1 - 5pm - Salisbury International Arts Festival (CDE South West)

Two outdoor workshops facilitated for audience members and youth activist panelists at a day long event at Salisbury Arts Centre called 'Kitchen Island Conversations'. Organised by SHIFT's young Associate Artists, a programme giving young people a platform to be seen and heard and part-funded by the organisation and in partnership with Culture Declares (South West).



Attendees: 12

Photos (to come)

Outcomes: The letters stayed with the participants as opposed to feeding into the writing process of the 24 hour play. But there is interest in theatrical possibilities, especially led by young people

7. Sunday 12th June 1.30 - 6.30pm - Roundhouse, Last Word Festival (a Declarer)

A workshop for young artists starting with an open dialogue with artist-activists poet Zena Edwards and rapper/gardener Ian Solamon-Katawall talking about their relationship to the climate crisis as working class people of colour. Part-funded by the organisation. An invite-only performance was presented of the young people's letters and writing from the day, as part of a first exploration of how Letters to the Earth can be turned into a stage production. There was positive feedback on the singing and movement exploration.



Audience feedback:

"The whole of the performance was breath-taking. The way each of the artists collaborated as one. That's what the world should be about."

"Beautifully written and read. Great to hear these spoken out loud"

"I would love to see this in every institution in the country"

"Loved the mixture of styles, voices and perspectives"

Attending participant young people: 10 (16 signed up)

[Photos.](#)

Outcome: Roundhouse confirmed partnering on developing Letters to the Earth for the stage: a flagship production made/led by young artists and a matching adaptable performance score that any group globally can use to create their own version for presentation/performance - taking people on a deeper and longer process of engaging with the climate and ecological emergency through educational and creative means in community. National Theatre have offered development support.

Offer from The Great Imagining to co-host LTTE and young people from the Roundhouse at the Festival of Education, July 7/8th to showcase the impact of the workshop on young people.

Analysis: What Next / Key Learnings –

Letters to the Earth is a creative participatory **campaign** with global reach, which launched in the spring of 2019 alongside and in collaboration with Culture Declares Emergency. This funding facilitated the delivery of a **project** within the campaign's organisation.

Did we achieve our objectives with this funding?

'These messages will go towards a mass collective art-work that will be delivered at COP26'

- This was difficult to achieve with limited time-frames and without clear understanding of how the CDE community could be involved in it. No such large-scale coordinated 'collective artwork' was made, apart from the tapestry of voices by Listening to the Land, in which our Letters and messages featured. However, the simple act of printing and delivering letters was hugely successful and was an intimate magical experience for people to receive a letter from someone in the world. This continues to be a core activity: i.e. letters in envelopes have been sent and given to delegates at Bonn and Davos in 2022 via partners on the ground. Conversations on what a mass collective art-work did take place however and included: commissioning a visual artist to make a large mosaic artwork showcasing diverse messages; a feature-length documentary following a wide range of diverse letter-writers in their landscapes; an online gallery of letters, building on [this](#) on our website.

'These messages will live on via the Letters to the Earth campaign.'

- This meant living on in the media landscape of the LTTE campaign: our website, social media, youtube (via short videos) and in international press and media. This

did happen as far as our capacity and resources allowed, though the campaign is at risk of not continuing to make people's messages visible for the lack of core funding. LTTE has all the potential to be a significant media campaign/story-teller/narrative shifter, yet it requires funding to realise its ambition.

'This work...

will foster deeper connections with nature and within local communities'

- The workshop is proven to do so, and our testimonials express that

increase the inclusion of marginalised and less engaged groups in the climate conversation'

- Our work especially with Dolphin Centre in Birmingham, and the Roundhouse achieved this to great success. In fact, a key learning here is that marginalised groups **are** engaged, they just may not be as fully educated on the subject. There's something here about the need for more Truth Telling, and we recognise that the LTTE community workshop resources can do more of this, as our educational resources already do.

empower people across society to have a voice in the face of the worsening the climate and ecological crisis'

- The workshop is proven to do so, and our testimonials express that. What is needed however is greater showcase of people's Letters after the workshop - ie in digital space, public space, press etc - so that people's voices are validated and platformed in the public realm, giving them confidence in their continued journey of climate action. It particularly empowered young people by helping them articulate their ideas and strengthen their voice and leadership.

extend and showcase the power of culture to contribute to a more regenerative future'

- Not only did we achieve this for this project and the showcase was seen by millions (inside and outside of the cultural sector) thanks to our notable celebrity and business partners, but Letters to the Earth has a successful track record of doing specifically this, especially in its publication of an award-winning book published in the US and UK. Up to 15,000 copies have been sold since 2019 - acting as a central asset to the campaign reaching a diverse audience. There is so much potential here for the book to be translated and published in other countries; for places to publish their own version of a LTTE book; or even for a second book, particularly focussing on climate vulnerable voices. Culture Declares is a named author of the hardback and the book directs people to follow CDE's platforms. Conversations r.e. a film and stage adaptation of the book/campaign have been underway for over a year. A discussion needs to be had as to how much CDE wants to show more 'ownership' of this cultural product and use it for its own vision, mission and strategic aims.

support the development of CDE Regional Hubs'

- This was achieved for 5 out of 9 existing regional hubs. The events were most impactful when the regional hubs were able to allocate some of their own CDE funding to support their coordination of the activity, or when declarer organisations part-funded the activity.

What else did we discover?

- When hosted at cultural organisations, the majority of audiences still were 'climate oriented' - and there was a lower turn-out rate than hoped for. We can further explore how to reach the less engaged/aware - ie street activations.
- There are a number of different models available for LTTE: it can work in diff settings: community-centres, cultural organisations, climate groups; for individuals and hubs.
- Simple letter writing station set-ups and open mics reading from the book works well and is easy for anyone to implement, without a facilitated workshop. (See additional event at Central St Martins [here](#))
- It was particularly powerful when connecting different people in dialogue with each other to share stories across cultures. Ie the indigenous workshop at COP26.
- The workshop is an embodiment of 'regenerative culture', showing the power of being in slow dialogue processes with each other and dreaming of alternative ways of being.
- The workshop facilitation requires sensitivity and confidence/experience. It has been very carefully designed over an iterative process with various partners' input and is proven to uncover a culture of care, connectivity and courage. Wish to explore how people can be 'trained' up to facilitate this for their own communities.
- The need for a legacy beyond the workshop/creation of Letters. People want to know what happens to their Letter after writing it. There is desire for greater public visibility - ie via exhibitions, films, performances, social media.
- People continue to write and submit their Letters via the website and email and postbox. There is a felt responsibility in this.
- The workshop worked best and had greater attendance when it was produced for an already-existing group and/or in collaboration with an organisation
- For some the words flowed; occasionally there were individuals for whom there was difficulty in writing the letters (ie if dyslexic). We can explore creating 'letters' in other means or there could be a writer in residence who captures what is said; or writing warm up activities could help people get into it
- There is interest from declarers in how this cultural campaign can support the changing education system ie via Our Shared World (surely classified as central to what we understand as 'culture'). Letters to the Earth has already been doing some of this work outside of CDE.

What we can explore with CDE for future development:

Following a review of the relationship of the LTTE campaign with/within CDE, the following feels ripe for discussion - all of which requires either core funding or project funding;

- Public artworks and activations of the Letters across different regions (project)
- Digital amplification / ongoing media campaign of the Letters for global reach (core)
- How CDE can be a part of the theatrical development and / or dissemination of the score for performance (project)
- How CDE wishes to embed LTTE's resources and book for the CDE community to be aware of and use as a key asset in their declaration journey (core/funding not required)
- How CDE can support facilitator training of the workshop for climate-cultural leaders (especially the young) to be empowered (project)

- Does the workshop want to be offered to every declared organisation for free to support the vision, mission and values of the movement? (project)
- Does it align with CDE's own VMV to support LTTE's mission of delivering the workshop going into other sectors beyond culture? (project)

Next step: what are the aims and outcomes CDE wants to achieve with Letters to the Earth, and what are the activities to do that?

CDE's Vision

That the cultural sector is a leading contributor in creating a regenerative future that protects the planet and sustains everyone, everywhere.

CDE's Mission

To grow, support and mobilise a movement of declarers in the UK cultural sector, and inspire and work with others internationally.

CDE's Values

Our values are underpinned by truth-telling, action-taking and justice-seeking.

LTTE in particular resonates with these CDE values:

- Culture connects, inspires and determines our values, frames and behaviours; therefore, a transformation of society has to be pioneered by cultural generators.
- Every organisation and individual from any field within or outside the cultural sector has responsibility as a cultural generator. We welcome all allies.
- We commit to eliminating all forms of oppression from all aspects of our work and seek to create an environment where we dismantle attitudes and biases that hinder positive relationships and progress in our work.
- We value the diversity of all lived experiences and cultural perspectives. We recognise that our strategies and actions must draw on the wisdom of everyone

Regarding CDE's Story of Change, Letters to Earth exemplifies how those working in arts and culture can use the simple and effective creative campaign tool to 'extend and showcase the power of culture to raise alarm, stop harm, change systems and regenerate Earth.' And 'concerned and affected public and activists are empowered by declarers to use the power of arts & culture (ie LTTE) to create a sustainable future'. By being involved themselves in the LTTE campaign as contributing writers, power holders 'will advocate for the value of culture as key to creating a sustainable future for all.'

*NB the LTTE is undergoing its own strategic review over the summer 2022.