

Sustainability Roadmap

May 2024

Prepared by CIS Abroad's Green Flags Committee

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Introduction to CIS Abroad

CIS Abroad is a leader in study and intern abroad programs, and since 2000, has provided more than 25,000 US college students with the best value in education abroad. CIS Abroad considers affordability, academic relevance, cultural immersion, support, and is boldly committed to providing the highest quality service to students, their families, and their home institutions as a trusted partner in education abroad.

We strongly believe that we are contributing to a better world and a brighter future through the work that we do every day. The mission of CIS Abroad is to create a more connected and compassionate world, where everyone can achieve their potential, by providing innovative education programs that broaden academic perspectives, promote global awareness, and encourage personal development while laying the foundation for participants to become engaged world citizens.

The Unique Ingredients of CIS Abroad

Our Mission

We provide U.S. university students with the best value in education abroad, considering affordability, academic relevance, cultural immersion, and support. We are boldly committed to providing the highest quality service to students, their families, and their home institutions as a trusted education partner.

Our Values

- **PASSION.** We believe in the power of education abroad.
- **CULTURAL CURIOSITY.** We believe cultural differences should be appreciated, and try our best to walk humbly, learn, and listen.
- **FUN.** We believe that work and play are not mutually exclusive. We love what we do, so have fun doing it.
- **CHANGE & GROWTH.** We embrace change and smart growth and understand that you can't have one without the other. We stay flexible and adaptable.
- **TRUST.** We've got your back. And you've got ours.

Our People

- Have a personal approach
- Go the extra mile
- Believe in their work
- Are strongly committed to creating a better world through what we do - one student at a time

Our Leadership

- Independently owned and operated by international educators
- Connected to our values and driven by our mission
- Grounded in a firm belief in the power of the work that we do

Sustainable Leadership Case Study: CIS Abroad

Prepared by Maria Lorenzo, Associate Consultant at the Institute for Sustainable Leadership

- In 2023 CIS Abroad was evaluated using the 23 evidence-based Sustainable Leadership practices. This was done on a 1-5 scale from "locust," performance, leaning away from Sustainable Leadership, to "honeybee," leaning towards high-performing and resilient Sustainable Leadership practices
- The main takeaways:
 - 20 practices were ranked like a "honeybee" company (rated 4-5)
 - 3 practices were ranked neutral (rated 3)
 - No practices were ranked "locust" (rated 1-2)
- The top three honeybee performing practices were:
 - Ethics and Virtues
 - Strong Shared Purpose & Vision
 - Enabling Culture

"Through its endeavours, CIS Abroad's vision empowers both its staff and clients to work toward a better and more cohesive world, appreciating diversity in people and places as an asset. The company relies on feedback from clients and employs a variety of channels for employee communication to continually enhance its role as a forward-thinking honeybee enterprise." - Maria Lorenzo

Key Terms

Sustainability

Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (As defined by UN Brundtland Commission, 1987). It is usually considered to have environmental, economic, and social dimensions.

“Sustainability is the long-term maintenance and enhancement of human well-being within finite planetary resources.” (From the FORUM, and as defined by the United Kingdom Houses of Parliament Office of Science and Technology)

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

A shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests. (United Nations)

International Education (IE)

A field that advances learning and scholarship; builds understanding and respect among different peoples; and enhances constructive leadership in the global community. NAFSA and its members believe that international education is fundamental to fostering peace, security, and well-being. [\(As described by NAFSA\)](#). IE is devoted to increasing student mobility globally. Study Abroad is a subset of IE.

Climate Justice

Recognizes the disproportionate impacts of climate change on low-income communities and communities of color around the world, the people and places least responsible for the problem. It seeks solutions that address the root causes of climate change and in doing so, simultaneously address a broad range of social, racial, and environmental injustices. [\(As defined by the University of California Center for Climate Justice\)](#)

Green Campus

CIS Abroad highlights our international partners’ commitments to sustainability and climate action by tagging their programs as a “Green Campus.” Our partners and on-site staff have showcased their commitment toward building a sustainable future, including, but not limited to establishing net zero goals, conducting academic research, and championing energy and environmental conservation. Details on our top six [green campus programs](#) can be found here.

Changing and Growing toward a More Sustainable Future

The connection between human health and the health of our planet has never been more evident. I'm proud to join other international education organizations in raising awareness and committing to actions that lessen our impact on the world's ecosystems. The issue of climate change and its harmful effects can feel overwhelming and make us turn away. But if every institution or organization commits to a few proactive steps forward, the cumulative effect of these actions can truly make a difference. Join us!

-Kris Holloway, President & CEO, CIS Abroad

Over the years, CIS Abroad staff have expressed a desire to move in the direction of greener practices. In 2008, CIS Abroad was the [first provider to offer carbon offsetting of student flights](#) as part of the program price. In 2013, CIS Abroad saw that carbon offsetting was not a way to educate students about the environmental issues of their host countries, so they signed an agreement with [Earth Deeds where donations were given to organizations](#) within the students' program locations. Students were also given opportunities to volunteer in these or similar organizations. Earth Deeds assisted CIS Abroad with measuring students' ecological impact, supporting sustainability projects, and becoming carbon conscious.

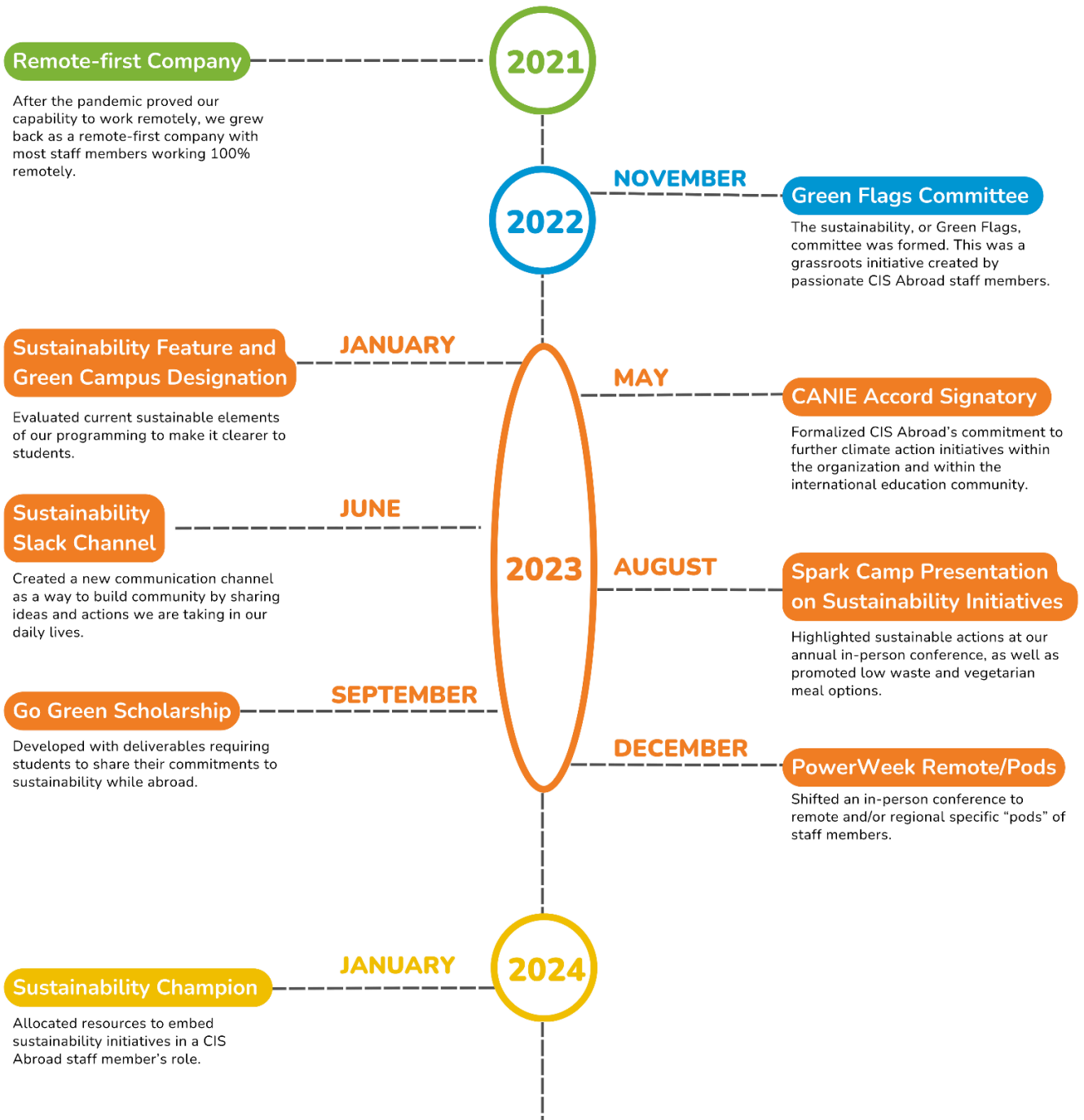
Between 2019 and 2022 we massively reduced the amount of print materials we use. Also, in 2020 CIS Abroad committed to hiring and sustaining a 'remote-first' workforce, drastically reducing carbon emissions caused by daily commuting to the physical office in Western, MA. While these actions reduced CIS Abroad's carbon footprint, they were not connected to a larger, more thorough, green initiative within the organization.

Today, CIS Abroad continues its leadership in sustainability within the field of international education. Inspired by the greener practices of partners around the world such as Spain's drastic reduction in food waste and single use plastic to smart showers in Florence that 'grade' students' water usage, we are charging forward with a new plan. What could we learn from best practices in climate action around the world? What could our institutional partners abroad teach us?

CIS Abroad is proud of its core values, and this includes "change and growth." Understanding that businesses must evolve to make a positive impact for future generations, in November 2022 CIS Abroad brought together six staff members to create a sustainability committee. The members of the committee, internally known as the Green Flags Committee, span a range of CIS Abroad teams, aiding our scope of understanding for potential actions and growth. It is this committee and other dedicated CIS Abroad staff that have pushed forward significant growth in sustainable action.

Past Achievements

While the purpose of this document is to share CIS Abroad’s plans and goals for the future, it is worth noting the achievements of the last few years.



WHAT'S NEXT?!

CANIE Accord Commitments & Plans for the Future

As of May 2023, CIS Abroad is a signatory of the CANIE Accord. CANIE, or the Climate Action Network for International Educators, is a volunteer grassroots initiative formed by international education practitioners from around the world who see the need for the international education sector to step up and act on climate change, and which serves as a platform to bring the sector together to act as a catalyst for action. ([CANIE.org](https://canie.org))

The CANIE Accords themselves are a tool designed to strengthen and accelerate the international education sector's commitment to climate action. CIS Abroad agreed to 10 out of 70 commitments to jumpstart our action in this area. By becoming signatories to the accord, CIS Abroad joins a community of other universities, associations, and program providers in international education who are committed to action in response to the climate crisis. Below are CIS Abroad's current commitments:

Article 4 #2 - Advocate for accelerated climate action within signatory's own org

Actions to Date ▾

- February 2023 - Created a Sustainability Slack channel to create a community where we share ideas and actions taken in our personal lives as well as share examples of sustainability in the field.
- August 2023 - Presented at Spark Camp (CIS Abroad's annual in-person all-company retreat) and hosted a brainstorming session to get staff thinking of individual actions they are taking for sustainability and climate action.
- The ongoing work of the Sustainability committee keeping the topic in staff members line of sight.
- Created a [searchable "Sustainability" feature](#) on our website with the ability to tag programs and specific coursework. Ability to pull data to show how many students are using this feature.

Roadmap for the Future ▾

- Share monthly challenges via our CIS Abroad Slack channel. Examples include hang-drying your laundry for a week, eat vegetarian for a week, learn where you are getting your energy from, etc.
- Host a book club with an intersectional book to get staff interested in the topic.
- Encourage carbon literacy and other SDG / climate action training and coursework for staff. Utilize CIS Abroad or other professional development funding where available.

Article 4 #6 - Publish a climate action plan within 12 mo of signing the accord

Actions to Date ▾

- DONE!

Roadmap for the Future ▾

- The Climate Action Plan will be an iterative document sharing progress and future goals for the company
- It will serve as an annual evaluation of progress on CANIE Accord Commitments and other actions.
- We will assess and evaluate our CANIE Accord Commitments and see what additional growth we have achieved and/or wish to achieve.

Article 6 #30 Replace physical meetings with online ones when possible

Actions to Date ▾

- University Relations staff have adjusted their strategy to make better use of virtual meetings, email journeys, and the study abroad advisor portal. This has cut down on the frequency of campus visits, allowing the visits to be less frequent and more strategic in nature.
- In 2023, Power Week, an annual company-wide retreat was organized primarily virtually and where possible, strategic “pods” of staff members connected in person based on their region.

Roadmap for the Future ▾

- Work with members of the CIS Abroad University Relations team to publish a white paper on creating a more sustainable travel strategy, taking into account all the reasons for such a choice including monetary cost, the carbon cost, and the impact on staff members lives.
- Quantify the difference in University Relations meeting strategy and how it has cut back on travel from pre-pandemic to now to understand how our emissions have decreased.

Article 7 #45 Collaborate globally on data collection and surveys relating to climate action in international education

Actions to Date ▾

- We now have a dedicated staff member who is in charge of survey data collection and responding to calls for participation on sustainability, climate action, and the UN SDGs.
- Joined SECUSS-L Listserv and monitor calls to action for data collection.

- Developed a survey for our overseas partner institutions to assess their campus sustainability efforts and created a rubric that led to our “Green Campus” designation.

Roadmap for the Future ▾

- Be proactive in participation of data collection and research relating to sustainability, climate action and the SDGs within the sphere of international education.
- Develop a survey for student participants to understand their views on sustainability, climate change, climate action, and the SDGs and how they relate to their experience and future.

Article 7 #46 Implement flexible and equitable work from home options

Actions to Date ▾

- Remote work began during the pandemic when it was a necessity. Up until that point, the preference had been to hire administrative staff in Western MA, except for University Relations staff who were regionally based. When the time came to grow our staff back in 2021, we decided to reduce the size of the physical office in Western MA and hire staff across the US and around the world knowing that they would be 100% remote.
- In line with that, we allow the Western MA-based staff to choose to work remotely or from the home office.
- Created virtual gatherings and technological SOPs to ensure that company culture remains strong while more than 50% of staff are fully remote.

Roadmap for the Future ▾

- Become leaders and educators in the field on the possibilities of remote work.
- Collaborate with partner universities who have a remote work policy to publish a white paper on how to implement a remote-first or remote-flexible policy.

Article 7 #47 - Replace printing and shipping marketing materials with digital

Actions to Date ▾

- Since 2012 - A concentrated effort has been made to use the highest content of recycled materials possible for the program catalog.
- 2019 - Began early efforts to reduce the quantity of printed materials.
- 2022 - Discontinued our 100+ page program catalog and published our first “Lookbook” and “Financial Info” brochures, approximately 20 pages in total.
- From AY 2018/19 to AY 2022/23 - print materials were reduced by 85%.
- 2023 - The Lookbook, our largest print order, was printed on FSC-certified recycled paper using 50% hydroelectricity and vegetable-based inks.

Roadmap for the Future ▾

- The marketing team is going to continue reducing print materials when possible and use QR codes even more than they already do.
- Replace paper transcripts with digital ones.
- Make our on-site materials digital (marketing, informational flyers, student handbooks).

Article 7 #57 - When catering use plant-based/ locally sourced/ eliminate single plastics

Actions to Date ▾

- A member of the Green Flags committee was a member of the planning committee for Spark Camp, an in-person, all company week-long retreat.
 - Many veggie-heavy options with meat as an “add on” were provided.
 - Make your own vegetarian dinner in teams.
 - Snacks were purchased in bulk as opposed to previous individually wrapped packages.
 - Encouraged the use of plates, silverware, and cups as well as the dishwasher instead of single-use plastics.
 - Staff member brought in cloth napkins and washed nightly as opposed to using paper products.
 - Encouraged composting for any food waste - a staff member brought it home at the end of the week.

Roadmap for the Future ▾

- Evaluate onsite meals and excursions to determine if and how this is already being done. From there, expand this initiative to more thoughtfully and intentionally offer more vegetarian, healthy, and sustainable options, create partnerships with local producers and farmers, and decrease the use of plastics and food waste.
- Replicate previous Spark Camp initiatives such as elimination of single use plastics, disposables, and products with excessive packaging and push for more vegetarian options.
- Prioritize plant-based, farm-to-table meals when planning the 2024 Site Director conference
- Consider Forum and NAFSA conferences and how staff could implement and share this initiative at receptions, events, meetings, and meals with partners.
- Share initiatives and ideas with a wider audience.

Article 4 #7 - Promote and commemorate Signatory’s commitment to this Accord.

Actions to Date ▾

- May 2023 - Spotlight presentation at All Hands Meeting after signing
- June 2023 - CANIE Spotlight on CIS Abroad on LinkedIn
- July 2023 - Added CANIE Signatory branding to staff email signatures
- August 2023 - Presentation to staff at annual in-person retreat
- September 2023 - Staff members shared out at conferences and university meetings about CANIE and the Accords
- October 2023 - Shared out the CANIE Student Board Member position via LinkedIn
- November 2023 - Presentation at LCI Veritas conference about CIS Abroad's commitments and future goals

Roadmap for the Future ▾

- Continue to present at annual CIS Abroad conferences on current CANIE Accord commitment updates (Spark Camp, Power Week, Site Director Conference).
- Publish our action plan in May 2024 and share as we make changes and progress over the coming years.
- Share our actions and progress with partner universities, both domestic and overseas during meetings or site visits.

Article 8 #3 Encourage and support personnel to take advantage of climate action events resources provided by CANIE and other organizations;**Actions to Date** ▾

- January 2024 - Designated staff member who will track opportunities in the field and share with CIS staff via Slack channels.
- Shared CANIE webinar with university partners for those interested in climate action
- Asked staff to share resources and events that relate to sustainability, climate action, and the SDGs.

Roadmap for the Future ▾

- Have members of the Green Flags committee take turns attending CANIE events.
- Create an incentive for staff to take part in events and webinars.
- Weekly email from CEO - include opportunities when they arise.

Article 8 #4 Make proprietary resources (e.g. articles, white papers and conference sessions) freely available to all in the sector when they pertain to climate action in international education.**Actions to Date** ▾

Roadmap for the Future ▾

- Any white papers published by CIS Abroad will be openly available to all. Please see Article #7 #45 for two surveys with associated data that will be turned into white papers.
- Launch a “What we are currently reading” section on our Sustainability webpage.
- Propose at least one session annually on the top of sustainability in international education.

Aligning CIS Abroad with the SDGs

The UN Sustainable Development Goals are a globally recognized roadmap to achieving peace and prosperity amongst both human beings and the planet we inhabit. The intention of these goals is mirrored in the belief that international education fosters peace, security, and wellbeing ([NAFSA](#)). In 2021, this parallel was recognized by one of the top governing bodies of international education, the Forum on Education Abroad, with the publication [Advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Through Education Abroad](#).

To further support the integration of the SDGs into our work in international education, it is becoming clear that our Gen Z students place huge emphasis on social and environmental responsibility. Research published in May 2021 by [The Times Higher Education](#) presented students’ interest in sustainability. Their findings show:



QS University Rankings conducted a student survey on sustainability in 2023 and their findings show significant priority placed on the topic and the actions of universities.



Mapping Project

CIS Abroad is deeply committed to the vision the SDGs foresee for the future and plans to utilize them as a guide for our future work.

Over the course of the next year, CIS Abroad is prioritizing a project of mapping the organization to the SDGs so we can build a foundation upon which to implement strategies and initiatives with intention. The first phase of this process will include evaluating CIS Abroad's current operations in the following two areas:

1. Assess key functions of CIS Abroad and how we currently align with the 17 SDGs. These key functions include
 - a. People & Culture/Administrative Operations
 - b. Finance
 - c. Marketing
 - d. Outreach & Advising
 - e. Partnerships
 - f. Enrollment
 - g. On-site Delivery
 - h. Academics
 - i. Innovation/Research & Development
2. Assess our on-site programming and how the elements of our program design align with the 17 SDGs. We will focus first on how to increase visibility and engagement with the international partners who already meet our Green Campus criteria.
 - a. Program development
 - b. Pre-Departure and on-site orientation
 - c. Academics
 - d. Overseas partner institution initiatives
 - e. Co-curricular activities

The second phase of this project will include an assessment of where we can grow and how we can better align CIS Abroad's key functions and on-site programming to the SDGs.

Roadmap to the Future

So, how does the company plan to enact change? CIS Abroad recognizes several challenging aspects of making a positive impact in the realm of climate action while working in the field of international education.

First, international education inherently encompasses and encourages international travel, which will not change.

The three-year plan will provide an action plan for practical and feasible initiatives:

Year 1: Calendar year 2024

- ❖ Quarter 3:
 - Evaluate current alignment with the UN SDGs and explore new possibilities and areas for growth
 - Work with the CEO to review the Institute of Sustainable Leadership Report to identify a path forward for continuing and strengthening our honey bee status.
- ❖ Quarter 4:
 - Develop and launch a Sustainability Micro-credential
 - Determine what SDGs CIS Abroad will prioritize
 - Deliver a survey to the Advisory Board to ask about Sustainability and how important it is to them in choosing with whom they work.

Year 2: Calendar year 2025

- ❖ Quarter 1:
 - Explore our Green Campuses as a resource and collaborator, how can we do more together?
 - Review Action Plan - how have our goals and initiatives evolved and what have we accomplished in the last year?
- ❖ Quarter 2:
 - Revisit CANIE Accords Commitments - could we be doing more?
 - Work with teams to understand how our operations and programming currently align with the SDGs and where we can continue to grow
- ❖ Quarter 3:
 - Continue to develop our Sustainability Micro-credential for additional audiences, drawing on feedback from a first cohort as well as university partners.
- ❖ Quarter 4:

- Publish white paper on CIS Abroad's remote-first policy and how other organizations in the field could implement a similar policy.

Year 3: Calendar year 2026

- ❖ Quarter 1:
 - Reevaluate our ability to calculate and track emissions. Are the resources available for this to become a priority?
 - Review Action Plan - how have our goals and initiatives evolved and what have we accomplished in the last year?
- ❖ Quarter 2:
 - Do an environmental audit, and research on CIS Abroad's CO2 emissions - establishing a baseline of emissions.
- ❖ Quarter 3:
 - Do company carbon literacy training.
- ❖ Quarter 4:
 - Set and publish goals for the next three years to reduce emissions.

This plan is viewed as one iteration of many to come in a long-term commitment to climate action and sustainability at CIS Abroad.

Conclusion

In summary, CIS Abroad acknowledges that there are many steps to take on the journey to creating a safe and healthy world for future generations. This Sustainability Roadmap is a first step at acknowledging and planning for the larger actions and specific initiatives to come. This plan offers a transparent look at CIS Abroad's intention over the next few years while we begin the critical conversations that will help us build a solid foundation within the organization. CIS Abroad sees international education - despite the inherent contribution to carbon emissions - as a promising and valuable path to creating empathetic global citizens who understand the responsibility we have to others and to our planet. CIS Abroad is excited about this opportunity to open hearts and minds to a shifting world where we hold a higher accountability and responsibility to the environment.