

Safe & Sustainable Media Arts & Film Practice Empowering Wood Buffalo Artists as Environmental Changemakers

Arts Council Wood Buffalo (ACWB) & SCALE-LeSAUT 2026

1. Why Sustainability in Media Arts Looks Different in the North

Media arts production in northern and remote regions operates within distinct realities:

- Long travel distances to location sites
- Air travel dependency
- Winter road risk
- Seasonal wildfire smoke
- Diesel generators for remote shoots
- Limited rental houses and local equipment
- High freight costs
- Limited recycling and hazardous waste services
- Energy-intensive post-production infrastructure

Film and media are often perceived as immaterial.

They are not.

Media production involves:

- Travel
- Energy-intensive equipment
- Data storage infrastructure
- Set construction
- Batteries and rare metals
- Catering and hospitality
- Festival freight and screening logistics

Mobility and energy use are the primary climate drivers.

2. Pre-Production: Where Most Impact Is Determined

The majority of environmental impact is locked in before filming begins.

Key decisions include:

- Location distance
- Crew size
- Equipment weight
- Accommodation logistics
- Shooting schedule
- Generator use
- Catering plans

Embed Sustainability at Concept Stage

Ask:

- Can locations be geographically clustered?
- Can local crew be hired?
- Can remote collaboration reduce travel?
- Can natural light reduce lighting loads?
- Can schedule compression reduce energy use?
- Is scale proportionate to budget and purpose?

Sustainability in film begins with planning discipline.

Further reading

- [Gallery Climate Coalition – Resources for Screen Industry](#)

3. Travel & Mobility

Travel often represents the largest portion of emissions in film production.

Primary sources:

- Flights
- Diesel trucks and vans
- Crew commuting
- Freight shipping
- Accommodation heating

Reduce Travel Impact

- Hire locally where possible
- Combine multiple shoot days per trip
- Avoid back-and-forth travel
- Use train or bus for regional travel
- Minimize crew size
- Limit unnecessary scouting trips

Long-distance travel should be purposeful, not habitual.

Further reading

- [Gallery Climate Coalition – Travel Guidance](#)

4. Slow Production & Residency Models

Like slow touring in music, media arts can adopt slower, clustered production models.

Slow Production Principles

- Longer stays, fewer trips
- Regional shooting clusters
- Integrated community engagement
- Multi-project site visits
- Hybrid remote/post collaboration

Extended residencies reduce repetitive travel and strengthen relationships with place.

Speed increases emissions.

Time can reduce them.

Further reading

- [albert – Carbon Calculator & Certification Toolkit \(BAFTA\)](#)

5. Equipment & Energy Use

Film equipment is energy intensive:

- Lighting rigs
- Camera systems
- Generators



- Data servers
- Post-production workstations

Lower-Impact Strategies

- Use LED lighting systems
- Maximize natural light
- Turn off idle monitors and gear
- Use shore power instead of generators where available
- Share rental equipment regionally
- Avoid unnecessary redundancy in backup gear

In remote locations, generator use is common.
Minimizing runtime significantly reduces emissions.

Further reading

- [Natural Resources Canada – Energy Efficiency for Small Business](#)

6. Batteries & Electronic Waste

Media production relies on lithium batteries, cables, and electronics.

Impacts include:

- Rare mineral extraction
- Battery degradation
- E-waste accumulation
- Toxic disposal risks

Sustainable Practices

- Extend battery life through proper charging cycles
- Store batteries appropriately
- Use rechargeable systems
- Repair cables instead of replacing
- Dispose of e-waste through certified programs

Never discard batteries in household waste.

Further reading

- [Environment & Climate Change Canada – Managing Electronic & Hazardous Waste](#)

- [e-Stewards – Find a Certified Electronics Recycler](#)

Resource

- [Environment and Climate Change Canada – Managing Electronic Waste](#)

7. Data Storage & Digital Footprint

Digital media has physical infrastructure impacts:

- Energy-intensive data centres
- Cloud storage emissions
- High-resolution file duplication
- Long-term archiving

Reduce Digital Energy Use

- Avoid unnecessary file duplication
- Compress working files where appropriate
- Archive efficiently
- Delete unused footage
- Consolidate drives
- Use energy-efficient storage systems

Cloud storage is not invisible.

Data has material impact.

Further reading

- [Greenpeace – Clicking Clean: Who is Winning the Race to Build a Green Internet?](#)

8. Set Construction & Production Design

Narrative and experimental film often involves temporary builds.

Impacts include:

- Lumber waste
- Solvent-based paints
- MDF off-gassing
- Single-use props
- Large disposal loads



Lower-Impact Design

- Design for disassembly
- Use mechanical fasteners instead of adhesives
- Source reclaimed materials
- Share scenic inventory between productions
- Minimize single-use builds
- Plan strike for reuse, not landfill

Strike should not mean disposal.

Further reading

- [SCALE-LeSAUT – SAGE: Sustainable Arts & Green Ecosystems Toolkit](#)

9. Makeup, Wardrobe & Props

Production departments use:

- Synthetic fabrics
- Fast-fashion purchases
- Chemical-based makeup
- Disposable items

Sustainable Alternatives

- Rent or borrow wardrobe
- Prioritize natural fibres
- Use low-toxicity makeup
- Maintain regional prop inventories
- Repair instead of replace
- Avoid excessive duplication

Reuse reduces both emissions and budget strain.

10. Catering & Hospitality

Film sets generate substantial food waste.

Impacts include:

- Disposable service ware
- Imported food

- Over-ordering
- Meat-heavy menus

Lower-Impact Catering

- Reusable dishware
- Vegetarian-forward options
- Accurate attendance estimates
- Local sourcing where possible
- Compost coordination

Hospitality is part of the production footprint.

Further reading

- [Love Food Hate Waste Canada – Reducing Food Waste on Set](#)

11. Festivals & Screening Infrastructure

Film festivals and media exhibitions involve:

- Travel for artists and audiences
- Freight for projection equipment
- Temporary staging
- High electricity loads

Reduce Impact

- Cluster screenings geographically
- Invite regional artists
- Use digital delivery instead of shipping drives
- Encourage local audiences
- Offer hybrid access when appropriate

Screening models influence travel patterns.

Further reading

- [Gallery Climate Coalition – Festivals & Events Guidance](#)

12. Smoke, Environmental Conditions & Health

Northern shoots increasingly face wildfire smoke and extreme weather.

Consider:

- Monitoring Air Quality Index (AQI)
- Limiting prolonged outdoor exposure
- Adjusting shoot schedules
- Providing respirators when necessary
- Offering rest periods during poor air quality

Worker health is environmental sustainability.

Further reading

- [Alberta Air Quality Health Index \(AQHI\)](#)
- [Health Canada – Wildfire Smoke and Your Health](#)

13. Indigenous Land & Cultural Accountability

Northern media production often takes place on Indigenous land.

Responsible practice includes:

- Cultural protocol and consent
- Community consultation
- Ethical storytelling
- Revenue-sharing when appropriate
- Avoiding extractive narratives

Environmental sustainability must include relational accountability.

14. Institutional & Organisational Practice

Media arts organisations and production companies can:

- Track travel distances
- Include sustainability clauses in production briefs
- Develop green production checklists
- Share equipment regionally
- Provide crew training
- Document environmental learning

Policy formalizes practice.

Further reading

- [Gallery Climate Coalition – Our Tools \(Carbon Calculator\)](#)
- [albert – Carbon Calculator & Certification Toolkit \(BAFTA\)](#)

15. Scale & Intention

Not every project requires maximum resolution, maximum crew, maximum gear.

Questions to consider:

- Is the scale aligned with the story?
- Can the crew size be reduced?
- Is this location essential?
- Can post-production be streamlined?
- Is travel proportionate to outcome?

Scale is a climate decision.

Closing

Safe and sustainable media arts practice in northern and remote regions is not about eliminating mobility or ambition.

It is about:

- Reducing unnecessary travel
- Designing production intentionally
- Managing energy use
- Extending equipment lifespan
- Reducing waste
- Protecting crew health
- Working in relationship with land and community

Film is collaborative.

Sustainability must be built into that collaboration.