

Planetary Limits Academic Network (PLAN) 2023 Annual Report

Background and Mission

PLAN was initiated in 2021 by Ben McCall, Melody LeHew, Tom Love, David Murphy, and Tom Murphy. These five co-authored a PLAN “launch” paper called [*Modernity is incompatible with planetary limits: Developing a PLAN for the future*](#).

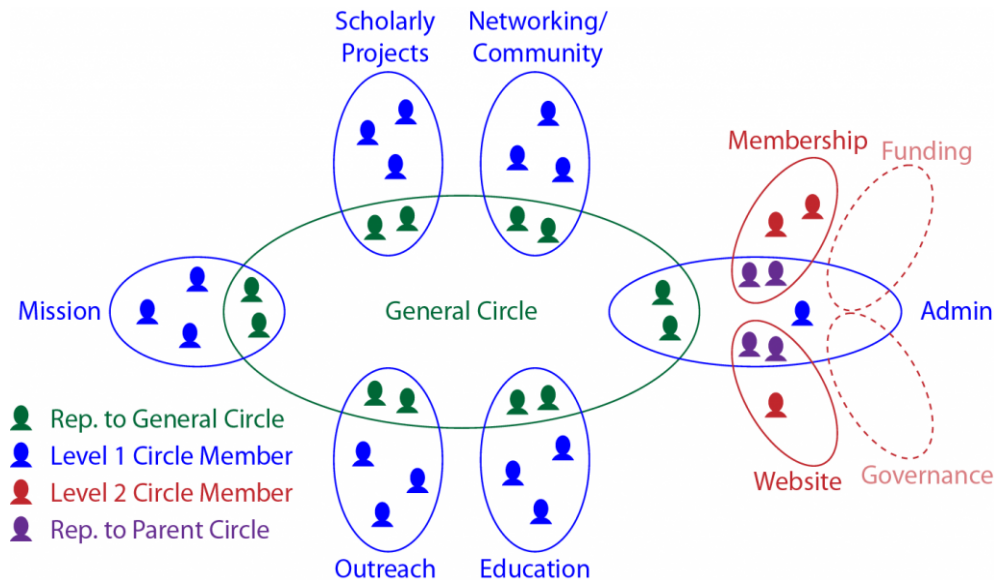
PLAN’s mission is to raise awareness about critical systemic challenges facing the human endeavor in this century by building a network of scholars across disciplines. The goal is to collectively foster a radically interdisciplinary approach to creating viable responses grounded in an understanding that continued economic growth is incompatible with planetary limits.

A touchstone for PLAN is a set of [foundational principles](#), which are not carved in stone, but at present reflect the network’s starting point relatively well:

1. Humans are a part of nature, not apart from nature.
2. Non-renewable materials cannot be harvested indefinitely on a finite planet.
3. The ability of Earth’s ecosystems to assimilate pollution without consequences is finite.
4. Energy throughput is essential to all human activities, including the economy.
5. Technology is a tool for deploying, not creating energy.
6. Fossil fuel combustion is the primary cause of ongoing global climate change.
7. Exponential growth, whether of physical or economic form, must eventually cease.
8. Today’s choices can simultaneously create problems for and deprive resources from future generations.
9. Human behavior is consciously and unconsciously shaped by mental models of culture that, while mutable, impose barriers to change.
10. Apparent success for a few generations during a massive draw-down of finite resources says little about chances for long-term success.

Organizational Structure and Governance

In early 2022, PLAN adopted sociocracy, a form of distributed governance de-emphasizing hierarchy and central control. Small groups of PLAN members meet regularly online to pursue activities relevant to their 'circle', as in the diagram below.



Circle Reports

Mission Circle

The Mission Circle's aim is to "Preserve, evolve, and provide strategic guidance in advancing PLAN's mission and aims." In practice, this means maintaining awareness of the efforts of other PLAN circles to make sure they are compatible with the overall intent of PLAN. The 10 [Foundational Principles](#) offer guidance. Acknowledging that these principles may be imperfect or incomplete, the Mission Circle evaluates how well the principles capture the evolving viewpoints and perspectives within PLAN from across the disciplines represented in PLAN.

As an example, a common theme emerged from different fields in many of the PLAN Seminars: the artificial separation of humans from the rest of nature is an ontological disconnect from which many problems emerge. This echoes the first of PLAN's Foundational Principles—that humans are a part of nature, not apart from nature. The

seminars exposed various ways that this separation hurts the entire community of life, including, of course, humans.

The Mission Circle makes sure that public-facing elements on the PLAN website are consistent with the broad set of perspectives represented within the network.

Scholarly Projects Circle

The aim of the Scholarly Projects Circle is to facilitate scholarly efforts to advance understanding of the challenges of living within planetary limits, to map the landscape of feasible responses for addressing these challenges, and to discern pathways for appropriate systemic changes. Facilitation may include identifying research themes for funders and scholars, organizing workshops and conference sessions, editing special issues, planning research proposals, and encouraging the co-authoring of publications by PLAN members.

Over the past year the Circle developed a proposal to Cambridge University Press for an edited volume on planetary limits to be co-authored by PLAN members, with at least two authors for each chapter. It is now under contract, and the chapters are under development. We are writing this book because we see a gap in what is available for teaching, learning, and talking about planetary limits.

Potential future plans include developing an epistemological framework to establish the validity of knowledge generated through transdisciplinary PLAN-related scholarship; a working group to develop a material/energy blindness survey; establish a reading/discussion group for seminal literature; a special journal issue with articles focused on planetary limits; and a template for potential research projects if people wish to share their ideas other PLAN members.

Networking Circle

The Networking Circle fosters networking within the PLAN membership. Over the past year we held a series of weekly Gather Town happy hour events. We found that Gather Town enhanced mingling; however, a survey of members showed they would prefer more focused, themed gatherings, especially seminars.

In response to this feedback, we launched a seminar series starting in October 2022: monthly meetings structured around presentations by people from a variety of disciplines (humanities, engineering, physical sciences, social sciences) followed by a discussion one week later.

In July, 2023, we experimented with a new format: advance reading of a paper and discussion with the author. Looking ahead, we intend to continue the monthly seminars and continue exploring ways to bring in the wider, less engaged members of the PLAN community.

Outreach Circle

The aim of the Outreach Circle is to construct external communications for academic and general audiences, and to facilitate media relations, op-eds, podcasts, blogs, videos, and public talks.

In 2022 we compiled a list of resources on aspects of planetary limits including books, journal articles, blogs, websites, etc. These became the foundation for the interactive [Resource Library](#) on the PLAN website. Members can add and rate relevant resources of all media types. Anonymized results are available to the public. We also contributed questions to a PLAN Member survey about messaging and metaphors that will help guide future outreach efforts and alert us to potential contributors.

We are currently working on several types of outreach designed for members, subscribers and the general public.

1. A blog series featuring PLAN Members' personal journeys to starting to understand the implications of planetary limits. The first invited blogs are by the founders of PLAN.
2. A "bite-size blog" series with each post centered on a single nugget (data point, graph, statistic, factoid, etc.) that anchors our understanding of planetary limits and/or how we might respond.
3. Short (1–2 minute) videos paired with the bite-size blog posts as an alternate/complementary format.

PLAN members will be invited to contribute to these series.

Education Circle

The aim of the Education Circle is to facilitate all forms of learning that may lead to a better understanding and integration of PLAN's Foundational Principles, both within and outside the organization.

The Circle has three main activities planned for 2023:

1. **Onboarding curriculum:** How to bring PLAN Members to a common, broad appreciation of the many entangled elements of the meta-crisis. We have explored a pilot version of the curriculum and will be refining the content/format in

the coming year. Longer term, we may seek to export the “course” to the general public in some asynchronous form.

2. **Webinar:** We are considering a two-hour webinar aimed at higher-ed faculty, as a means to better connect to a community of scholars interested in planetary limits. The format is to be determined—whether a few long segments or shorter modules with quizzes, combined with occasional synchronous group discussions.
3. **Instructional Support:** Given PLAN’s diverse disciplinary makeup, we are in a strong position to help instructors prepare for broad, integrative course offerings by: collating resources/references/materials to inform syllabi; professional development around topics, including consultation and coaching; and discussion sessions around chapters of the PLAN edited volume (led by the authors).