applied



Positive Impact Report

22|23

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This 2022/23 Positive Impact Report has been prepared by Applied Information Group as part of the process for applying for B Corp certification in early 2024.

It provides an insight into the approach used to deliver projects by our team and the impact these have had in serving the people and places in which we work.

The document references the B Corp framework as a means to measure our impact. Alongside various other changes we have made to the business as part of this process, we are committed to providing an update on our impact on an annual basis.

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Our mission is to help millions of people make smarter decisions that benefit individuals, society and the environment.

Our clients most often come to us needing help with how people orient and navigate spaces. We call this wayfinding. Typically these clients are place, city or transport system operators and managers – and they have been tasked with ensuring that thousands of people can move through busy spaces easily, productively and with certainty.

Since our inception in 2003 we have been occupied with the problem of how to encourage people of all abilities and backgrounds to walk, cycle and use public transport more often. These more sustainable modes of transport help transform places into thriving communities.

Whilst the concept is simple, the process of implementing a wayfinding system to support this change in behaviour is often complex. It requires sustainable, long term solutions that take into account the needs of multiple stakeholders and that can evolve as the environment changes and expands.

About us

An inclusive & sustainable focus

For a small design consultancy, we have a big impact.
We provide tangible, implementable solutions to complex, long term problems; solutions that have real impact and are replicated globally.

There are two primary areas in which we help our clients improve their impact on both their beneficiaries and the environment. Through an inclusive design approach that ensures we design for everyone. And through implementing systems that support sustainable modes of transport such as walking, cycling and public transport as alternatives to driving.

We do this not only for our more purpose-driven clients such as city authorities, universities, charities, cultural institutions and public transport agencies – we also help our corporate clients improve their social and environmental impact in this way.

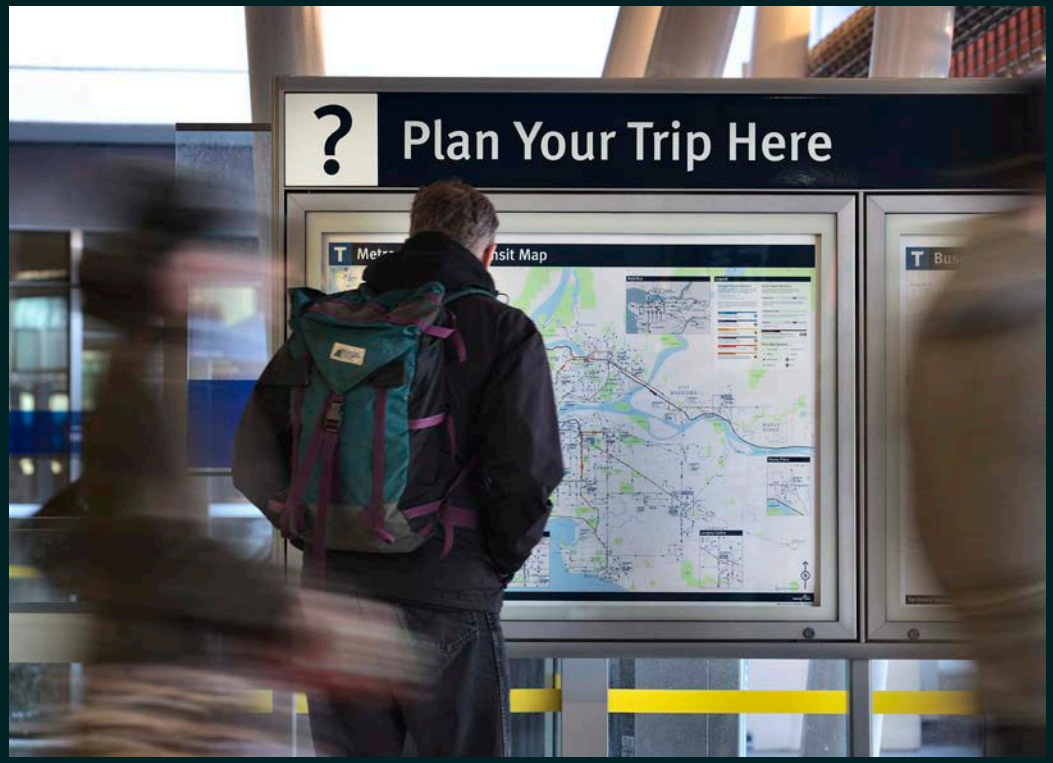
Here we highlight two key projects that demonstrate our inclusive design approach in the context of wayfinding for sustainable transport.

Uniting trains and buses into one seamless network

Vancouver region's transit agency, TransLink, enlisted our help to connect the various transit modes in the minds of the public. To do this, we devised a complete overhaul of the availability and coherence of information. This helped people make sense of key intermodal connections across the region and see previously separate services as a 'network'.

With transport choices in the region being traditionally focussed around the use of motor vehicles, improving the public perception and experience when using the network has enabled sustainable transport modes to become a viable choice. This supports the long-term aims for behaviour change and the impacts this will deliver.

The network was unified with a new transit symbol and visual identity, making the system a standard-setter in North America.



We improved riders' ability to make onward connections by

69%

TransLink found that 'Walking from Here' maps and 'Buses from Here' maps at the exits of rail stations led customers to report a 69 percent improvement in their ability to find onward connections.

Taylor Nelson Sofres (TNS) 2010

About us

An inclusive & sustainable focus

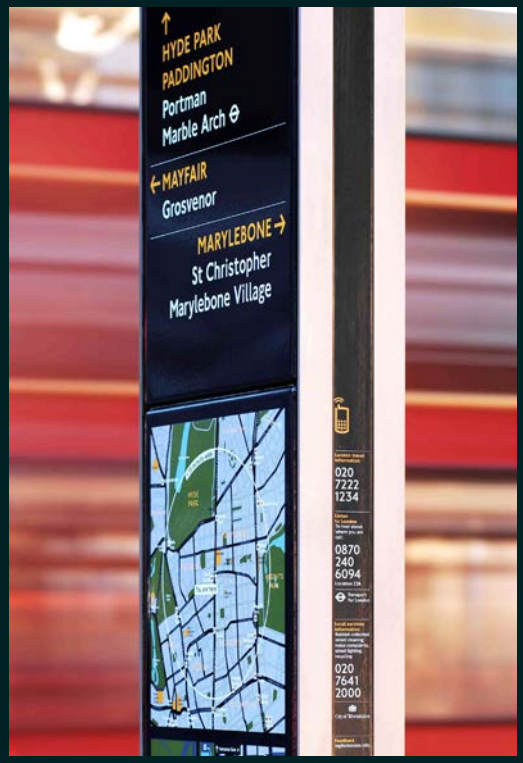
Pioneering work to get people walking

Transport for London (TfL) came to us with a problem: 'We want to make London more walkable'. And out of this came Legible London – a seminal project in the history of city wayfinding. It established a global best practice and has influenced the last two decades of city wayfinding systems, largely defining the sign typologies, content criteria, information architecture and graphic cues used by many subsequent city systems.

In addition to its impact on public awareness, its real innovation has been as a catalyst to integrate wayfinding across the city and its many jurisdictional boundaries. It was built on a programme of extensive stakeholder consultation, based on core logics.

The system has been extensively tested and reviewed and has more proven impact than any other wayfinding system.







62%

of respondents stated they would walk more because of Legible London information

Buchanan Consultants, 2008

+5%

TfL found that Legible London is behind the measurable increases in walkability and a 5 percent increase in walking

Steer, 2010

9 in 10

people are satisfied with Legible London's ease of use

Buchanan Consultants, 2008

About us

Positive outcomes of our projects

Our work generates social, environmental, and economic impact for our clients whilst serving the broadest spectrum of needs and abilities.

Many of the projects we deliver are for purpose-driven clients such as city authorities, universities, not-for-profit healthcare, charities, cultural institutions, and public transport agencies.

And all of our clients, whether private or public sector, serve underserved populations to a greater or lesser degree, because all of the places we design systems for must cater to a wide range of accessibility needs, socio-economic statuses or cultural/ethnic backgrounds. This is why an inclusive design approach, that ensures we design for everyone, is central to our work.

As part of our approach to delivering a project, we directly and formally engage stakeholders in understanding their desires and needs. We see this as a fundamental part of our design process in order to ensure that the solutions are both relevant and will be supported in the long term by our clients.

We encourage our clients to measure near-term outcomes of our solutions – to determine whether they are meeting the requirements we set out to meet, and to test and validate our thinking.

We survey beneficiaries to better understand the outcomes created for them and to understand what has been more or less effective. This can be through hands-on user testing during development stages or through creating more formal pilot test projects.

We also recommend independent review and evaluation processes. These typically take the form of both pre- and post-pilot evaluation to test the efficacy of the proposed solutions and provide before and after comparisons. The results can help to build a business case for further investment – something that is especially important with our public sector clients where public money is involved.

Measuring and managing the results, outcomes and impact of our service is important to us.

Our projects contribute to positive social, economic, and environmental outcomes, including:

- Social inclusion through accessible information and spaces
- Improved community connectivity
- Enhanced health and wellness, promoting walking and cycling
- Reduced stress and fewer instances of people getting lost
- Lower greenhouse gas emissions due to reduced car travel
- Increased access to employment opportunities through improved public transit information
- Economic growth through increased foot traffic to businesses

About us

Positive outcomes of our projects

We also take a partnership approach with our clients. We build relationships based on open, transparent and regular communication, which helps ensure an in-depth understanding of the needs of the organisation, the brief and the relevance of the solution we propose and implement.

An example of this is our ongoing relationship with Princeton University. From the outset of the project we carefully assessed the brief and the organisations' overall goals, ensuring that we were mutually aligned in approach and fundamental values. This allowed us to collaborate effectively to create impactful solutions. The most recent of these has been the development of a digital mapping system to guide students, visitors and faculty around the growing campus. A key driver for this project was to provide detailed routing for anyone with accessibility needs. Recent testing has provided us with both positive validation on the solutions developed as well as useful insights into improvements and enhancements that can be built into future updates.

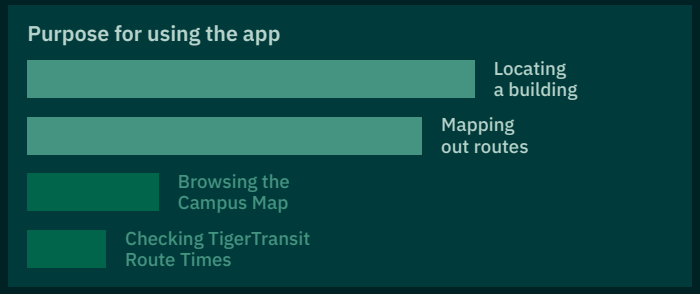
CSAT Score of the app

4.5/5

The first release of the Princeton Campus Map app received a Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT) of 4.5 out of 5, indicating that 90 percent of participants were highly satisfied with the app.



The team was stationed on-site at Princeton University's Frist Campus Center, where we were able to speak to a wide range of students, staff and faculty members on campus.



We found that the vast majority of app users predominantly used it to locate buildings, as well as to plot routes to and from these buildings. These findings will help us see where we may focus future improvements to the app that will be most value-adding to users.

"We selected Applied for their understanding of user behavior. Some designers prioritize aesthetics, while firms like Applied concentrate on user experience, behavior, and information systems. They are adept collaborators."

Ron McCoy, University Architect at Princeton University

About us

Ensuring we design for everyone

Concern for the needs of people is at the heart of how we tackle all our projects – we are curious by nature and always take a user-centred, questioning approach.

We never assume we know all the answers before we have started a project. Over time we have devised innovative approaches, methods and tools – these help us better appreciate and understand the needs and wants of the wide range of people who will use the systems we design.

To inform our approaches and methods we also draw on secondary research from industry and academic experts. This helps to further inform our design process and ensures that we are delivering relevant solutions that are grounded in logic and research. A recent collaboration with a professor of neuroscience at UCL has helped inform our wider understanding of how people behave in certain circumstances or environments. These insights feed directly into our thinking across multiple projects.

Our inclusive approach to design is embedded in our processes and centres around designing for the 'People Spectrum'. We acknowledge that each person has unique abilities and needs, including:

- People with mobility challenges
- People with neurodiverse challenges
- People with visual impairments
- People experiencing stress or anxiety
- People sensitive to light or sound
- People not feeling well

These conditions may be temporary, permanent, or situational. We also consider protected characteristics within the People Spectrum, such as age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity.

37.5% of the global population lives with some form of disability, according to the World Health Organisation.

The following pages explain more about some of the research, development and testing methods that we utilise on projects, using our project for the city of Madrid as an example. These methods help to ensure that what we design will work for its intended audience – and if testing proves it does not then we start again.

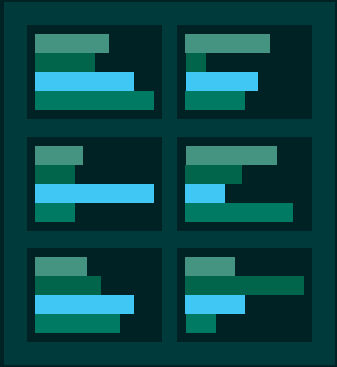
We also highlight the diverse team we have built that enables us to deliver the most appropriate solutions across a broad range of disciplines, for an increasingly varied set of users.

About us

Ensuring we design for everyone

Our methods and tools

Traditional approaches to describing people's abilities and experiences often rely on stereotypes, which can reinforce an artificial divide between those we design for and those needing additional support. We recognised the need to redefine language and perceptions regarding abilities. For the City of Madrid's pedestrian wayfinding system, named *Leer Madrid*, we developed three pioneering techniques aimed at increasing accessibility for underserved groups, as well as adapting our approach to stakeholder engagement to gain valuable insights and promote cross-pollination of ideas:



Abilities spectrum

The four-way Abilities Spectrum maps different user types in terms of physical, cognitive, financial and social ability. Understanding the range of user abilities helps us consider how wayfinding can support each user type.



Diversity cube

The Diversity Cube makes use of the Rubik's Cube as a metaphor to demonstrate that users are not monolithic – instead, users have different combinations of abilities (cognitive, physical, language, knowledge, etc.). We can use this to consider more realistic user profiles without bias.



Compensation circle

The Compensation Circle comprises three sectors – personal capacity, environmental capacity, and wayfinding support. It demonstrates how, based on personal and environmental factors, wayfinding (in varying degrees) can give users equitable access to and experience of the public realm.





Stakeholder consultation & user testing

Stakeholder consultation sessions give us space to generate more constructive discussions between users and gather richer feedback. For the *Leer Madrid* pedestrian wayfinding system, we grouped stakeholders of mixed abilities, characteristics and interests together. This created an environment in which users could engage with varying perspectives and reach consensus – or if no consensus could be found, then identify that a design solution is needed. Testing the design solutions throughout the development process further supported the approach of ensuring we found the right solutions for the diverse audience.

About us

Ensuring we design for everyone



A diverse group of experts

We recognise the importance of diverse representation amongst our team, and how a varied range of skill sets and specialisms underpin how we solve problems. We have a purposefully diverse group of experts of different backgrounds which gives us perspectives on problems and issues that are frequently overlooked, and allows us to challenge assumptions robustly.

We have a collaborative approach both internally amongst our team as well as externally with our clients. We mirror and speak the same technical language as our clients, strengthening our ability to collaborate, engage, and develop integrated solutions beyond the traditional scope of wayfinding projects.

Our team comprises experts in architecture, urban design, transport planning, engineering, permitting and codes, crowd dynamics, GIS, spatial analysis, graphic and information design, product and industrial design, project management, research, environmental psychology, designing for inclusion, cartography, user interaction design, digital design, and operational and experience design.

Achieving diversity of representation in our workforce is an ongoing and expanding process, and something we commit to continually working on as we carry on tackling increasingly complex and varied projects.

Our journey to B Corp

"We recognise that since our inception as a business, we have naturally incorporated social and environmental value into the heart of the work we do. Pursuing B Corp certification has provided us with a framework to measure and document our existing impact, and help us identify where we can do even better in future."

Gemma Colbert
CSR Lead at Applied

What is B Corp?

B Corp certification distinguishes a business as a leader in global sustainability, showcasing dedication to rigorous social and environmental standards, accountability, and transparency. It is a recognised mark of excellence for companies committed to making a positive impact beyond profit.

Our journey to B Corp

Why B Corp is important to us

B Corp assesses our social and environmental performance across five key areas – Governance, Workers, Community, Environment and Customers.

Going through the process to become B Corp certified has helped us identify that we impact a range of stakeholders:

- Our customers
- Our employees
- The environment
- The people who use our systems
- Our community

We are beginning our journey of identifying and tracking our impact on all of our stakeholders, understanding what is most important to them, and reporting on these metrics.

At this initial stage of the process we have identified clear impacts on two key stakeholder groups – our **employees** and our **customers**. In future we plan to identify and measure our impact beyond these groups, considering the wider community and the places in which we operate, the industry and its supply chains that we are part of, as well as the wider environment.

Speaking to both our employees and our customers and hearing what is important to them, we have identified the following focus areas. These focus areas form both part of the work we are already doing as well as giving us targets to focus on going forward. The B Corp framework can help guide us through that process.

Important to employees

- Learning and development (introduced individual training budget)
- Professional development (developed and rolled out the Performance Management Framework)
- Employee retention
- Diversity and inclusion
- B Corp accreditation

Important to customers

- Accessible and equitable information
- Inclusive design
- Sustainable and maintainable systems
- Better performing assets
- Helping our clients achieve net-zero
- Clients' D&I targets
- B Corp accreditation

A framework for measuring our impact

The B Corp structure provides a framework for mapping and measuring our impact, gauging our performance and helping us maximise outcomes across the business. It will help us achieve structured and quantifiable improvements in the future.

On the following pages we have captured the positive impact we've made as individuals, teams and as a business, across the areas of Governance, Workers, Community, Environment, and Customers. At the end of this report we set out our goals for the future.

The B Corp structure

Governance

Evaluation of mission statement and business goals.

Consideration of how decision-making aligns with social and environmental values.

Workers

Inspection of employee treatment, along with compensation, benefits, training, ownership, and management opportunities.

Community

Assessment of the company's impact on local and global communities, including the effects of supplier and distributor relationships.

Environment

Analysis of the company's operations and its impact on the environment.

Review of practices related to waste, energy, and resource usage.

Customers

Exploration of how business products or services provided affect customers, including attention to customer feedback and engagement strategies.

A framework for measuring our impact

Governance

The following measures ensure our business operations align with our social and environmental goals now and into the future.

1 Mission lock

As an independent business, we have updated our corporate governing documents and completed the B Corp legal amendment. This requires consideration of all stakeholders in our decision-making and ensures social or environmental performance is a part of decision-making over time, regardless of company ownership.

2 Social and environmental decision-making

We have included a commitment to our environmental and social goals in all our job descriptions and we hold internal training sessions related to these goals.

3 Objective governance

We engage non-owner directors at board level for unbiased decision-making.

The multiple between the highest and lowest compensated full-time worker at Applied is

3.7×

4 Strategic decision-making

We hold monthly management meetings to realign strategies and meet company objectives.

5 Transparency & accountability

We prioritise open communication with employees, sharing key updates and metrics regularly.

6 Feedback-driven

We actively solicit and integrate stakeholder feedback into our strategies and operations.

7 Open reporting

We bi-annually share financial performance internally and have committed to releasing an annual impact report.

8 Policy update

We conduct regular policy audits to ensure relevance and raise awareness amongst employees.

A framework for measuring our impact

Workers

Our business success is dependent upon the strength of our teams.
We have the following structures in place to provide a work environment where employees are valued, and their contributions are recognised and rewarded.

1 Flexible work options

We offer hybrid schedules, adjustable start-times, and part-time contracts.

2 Career development

We introduced a new external training budget which is decided and defined by employees.

We supported sabbatical leave and lateral moves within the organisation to promote well-being and enable career ambitions to be realised.

3 Skill enhancement

We hold regular internal creative reviews and implemented a new skills matrix to help guide training and professional development.

4 Employee engagement

We have introduced annual staff surveys to monitor learning and satisfaction.

5 Competitive salaries

We annually review wages, ensuring at least inflationary increases.

100%

of full-time employees at Applied are paid the Individual Living Wage and Family Living Wage

6 Global assembly

We hold an annual gathering of all international employees.

7 Employee benefits

We provide ‘Death in Service’ benefits.

We ensure all employees have access to private health plans over and above minimum requirements. This supports everyday medical needs including dental and optical and includes access to counselling services.

9.1%

of Applied’s employees have been promoted internally

8 Staff development and mentoring

We conduct annual performance reviews and 1-2-1 appraisals aligned with our corporate mission which includes 360 degree feedback. Our new management structure allows for improved mentoring as well as defined performance indicators.

A framework for measuring our impact

Community

We are committed to driving positive change and creating opportunities in our local community as well as our wider industry. In service to this we have undertaken the following:

1 Industry committees and panel discussions

Our Associate and Planning Director Simon Hillier provided expertise to advance standards for the BSI. He was part of the committee for B/559 Design for Accessible & Inclusive Environments.

Our Founding Partner Tim Fendley spoke at a number of events discussing the creation of legible, walkable and connected cities.

2 Volunteer initiatives

We have established an internal social committee to promote community days.

Total volunteer hours

316

3 Supply chain management

We are committed to supply chain integrity and have distributed supplier questionnaires to assess and continuously monitor our suppliers' social and environmental impact going forward.

4 Diversity & inclusion

Our recruitment process includes an 'anonymous CV' approach. This redacts identifying information to help focus on the skills and qualifications of potential candidates, reducing the risk of biased assessment.

37.5%

of Applied's workforce* identify as individuals from racial or ethnic minorities

5 D&I data and reporting

We collect and analyse demographic data through anonymous employee surveys to help us take effective steps to improve the diversity of our workforce.

In the past two years, Applied has transitioned

4 interns

into full-time employees

6 Nurturing industry talent

We provide full-paid three-month internships, and transitioned four interns to permanent roles in the past two years.

Alex Ganczarski and Chloe Ball from our design team visited the University of Reading to provide mentorship to upcoming graduates.

We hosted studio taster days for university students, showcasing daily operations.

Design Director George Sidaoui lectures regularly at Central Saint Martins.

7 Webinar Sponsorship

We sponsored the Town and Country Planning Association's 20-minute neighbourhood webinar featuring speakers from our team.

*Figure is based on total survey respondents

A framework for measuring our impact

Environment

Our impact on the environment includes both the spaces we operate from and the systems and products we design for our clients. We are committed to improving how we operate to reduce our impact and have begun to do this in the following ways:

1 Environmental management system

We have worked with Green Small Business to adopt an Environmental Management System (EMS) and are delighted to have been certified.

2 Carbon footprint

We have successfully measured and recorded our scope 1 & 2 emissions and we aim to reduce the carbon emissions of our leased premises by 5 percent.

3 Sustainable travel

Our sustainable travel policy limits air travel where possible, and encourages sustainable commuting through active travel. The ‘Cycle-to-Work’ scheme is available to all UK staff.

4 Energy efficiency

We have leveraged the systems in our office space to maximise energy efficiency. These include energy star appliances, automatic sleep modes, occupancy sensors and programmable thermostats.

5 Hybrid work model

We have minimised in-person meetings and adopted hybrid working to enable staff to commute only when needed.

6 E-waste management

We have partnered with Envirowaste for ethical electronic disposals and ensured everyone is aware of recycling guidelines.

The Applied head office in London is supported by

71%

renewable energy sources

7 Paperless operations

We have implemented a digital-first back-office approach.

8 Carbon offsetting

We offset 100 percent of all scope 1 and 2 emissions through carbon offsetting projects endorsed by EcologiZero.

A framework for measuring our impact

Customers

Managing the positive impact and value we create for our customers is important to us. We dedicate resources to ensuring close collaboration and feedback mechanisms with all our customers and embed this value-creation into our business model in the following ways:

1 Partnership Approach

Our customers are actively involved in every phase of the project, ranging from research through to implementation. We take a partnership approach and seek to maintain long term relationships for continuous improvements.

2 Maintainable Systems

We have formal procedures to incorporate customer testing and feedback into the design process and ensure we deliver a sustainable system that is easily maintainable long into the future.

3 Customer Feedback

We closely monitor customer satisfaction through a dedicated account management team, and share customer feedback internally to ensure continuous improvement.

4 Product Design

We work with our customers to recommend responsible suppliers, low impact materials and manufacturing processes.

5 Underserved Beneficiaries

The end beneficiaries of a successful wayfinding system will always have a multitude of needs and abilities. We review the mission and goals of all our customer organisations to ensure we meet the needs of any underserved beneficiaries identified.

6 Capacity Building

We provide training and guidance to our customer organisations on how best to meet accessibility needs and we engage with the underserved beneficiaries to ensure their perspective is incorporated into our designs.

Continuing our commitment

We have set out our future commitments based around the five areas of the B Corp structure, for both the short and long term.

This gives us an opportunity to plan for achievable outcomes that will be reviewed, updated and reported on each year.

	Short term We aim to implement these in the next 2 years	Long term We aim to implement these in the next 5 years
Governance	– Move from a general commitment to the environment in our job descriptions to the inclusion of specific responsibilities for key people to deliver our social and environmental performance targets	– Implement a formal social and environmental training programme for all employees
Workers	– Improve our employee satisfaction score from less than 65 percent to more than 75 percent – Improve our employee attrition rate from 15 departed employees to less than 10 in the fiscal year	– Provide a separate private space within our new offices for employees to use for purposes such as breastfeeding or praying
Community	– Allocate each employee a paid day off to volunteer with a charity of their choice – Donate to an employee nominated charity that positively impacts the local community in which our headquarters is based – Continue to conduct demographic data surveys to ensure we can measure and improve our diversity and inclusion targets	– Increase the number of managers who identify as women from 27 percent to 40 percent
Environment	– Move from 71 percent to 100 percent renewable energy electricity tariff for the London head office – Formally appoint an internal lead on environmental sustainability, responsible for driving environmental improvement across the organisation – Adopt a data retention policy to reduce emissions from cloud computing	– Measure scope 3 emissions as well as scope 1 and 2 emissions – Reduce the carbon emissions of our leased premises by 5 percent year-on-year
Customers	– Create a dedicated channel for customer feedback, independent of the project delivery team – Implement more formal processes for documenting and summarising user testing results data during the project life cycle	– Improve the response rate from client sustainability surveys from 5 percent to 20 percent

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For more information on this report, or for other enquiries about how Applied can help you create positive impact through the transport systems, cities, campuses and places you manage, please get in touch.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Gemma Colbert
CSR Lead at Applied

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Image credits

Cover image © Aramis León

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Diversity Cube visualisation
by Avanti Studio

Citations

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