CLIMATE JUSTICE: THE NARRATIVE SHIFT

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A REPORT BY THE SOLUTIONS PROJECT

APRIL 2026

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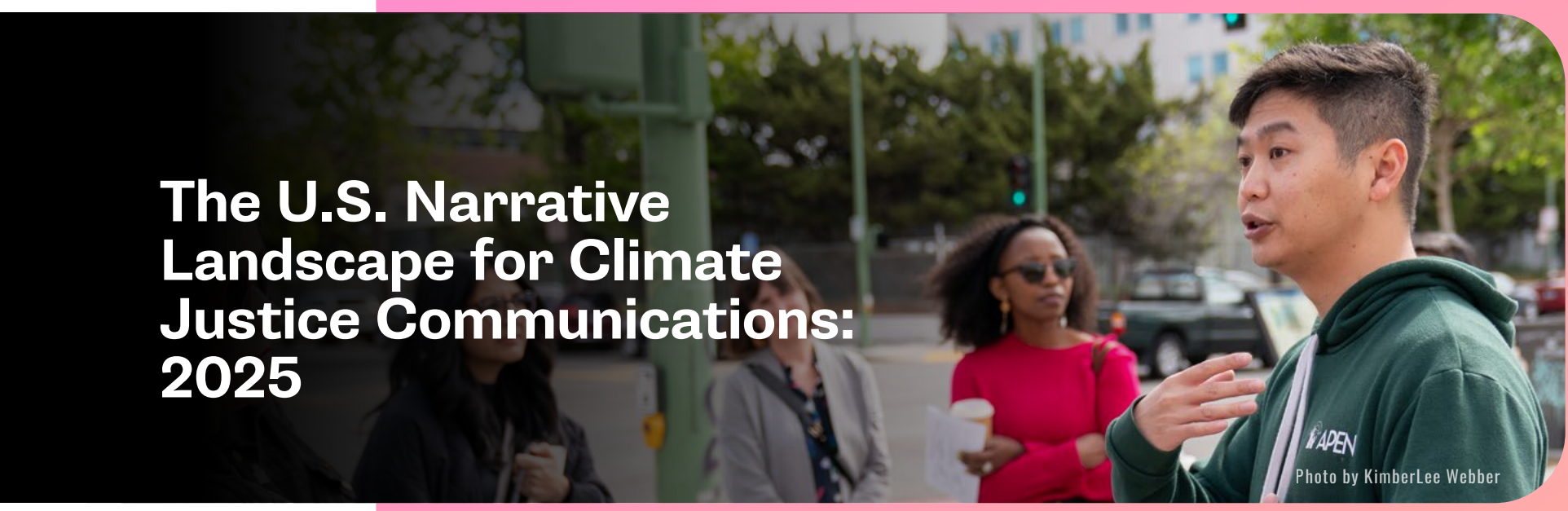

Photo by KimberLee Webber

The U.S. Narrative Landscape for Climate Justice Communications: 2025

PRODUCED BY THE SOLUTIONS PROJECT

The Solutions Project (TSP) is a national non-profit organization that accelerates climate action by centering the solutions, voices, and power of frontline communities to create a just and equitable world where everyone has clean air, water, energy, and land.

Learn more www.thesolutionsproject.org

How We Approached the Research and This Report

To recalibrate our narrative strategy in a post-2024 electoral context, The Solutions Project (TSP) sought to learn from a range of experts across the climate justice movement, broader narrative change practitioners, and narrative impact researchers. In addition to strategic insights, we also sought to explore what climate narrative investments could make the biggest difference in catalyzing climate engagement, action and understanding—both in the current moment and in the next 5 years. This report focuses on findings from those in-depth stakeholder conversations[1], backed up with recent relevant research and data, to provide a clear picture of the current and potential future narrative landscape for U.S. climate and climate justice communications. In doing so, we hope to provide actionable insights for anyone working to advance US climate communications, especially with a justice lens.

REPORT STRUCTURE

We have organized this report for practical utility and sharing key insights into the key challenges and opportunities for the US climate communications field. It concludes with specific recommendations for climate and climate justice communicators. The Challenges section diagnoses climate communications barriers—fragmented media, exclusive language, resource constraints, and audience despair. The Opportunities section transforms these same conditions into strategic possibilities—new platforms, authentic voices, hope-based messaging, and coalition-building. Where topics —like disaster moments and community storytelling —present both challenges and opportunities, we signpost clearly which threads will return. We include *Quick Tips* throughout for easy reference.

Photo by Lunar Haus

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The Solutions Project interviewed 50 climate and communications experts from grassroots organizations in frontline communities, national and global communications strategists, academic researchers, and media professionals. Together, these voices paint a complex picture of a field grappling with enormous challenges. They also reveal a field united in recognizing the need for narrative change in the climate space, with surprising alignment in both priority strategies and key questions they are wrestling with: How do we reach beyond the choir? What language resonates with non-activist audiences without compromising our values? How do we balance urgency with hope? And how do we center the voices and leadership of those most impacted by climate injustice while building the broad coalitions necessary for transformative change?

The interviews and focus group synthesis also reveals alignment between personal experiences organizing neighbors, producing or pitching stories, and analyzing data and recent literature about audience targeting, media ecosystems, and effective strategies for climate communications. This summary offers a preliminary report of actionable insights for climate communicators and narrative strategists.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Breaking the Echo Chamber: Climate Justice Narratives for Broad Audiences

Climate communicators find themselves in what one practitioner aptly described as an “all new ball game.” Fueled by many factors—but especially the 2024 change in US administration—the U.S. media landscape, political environment, and information ecosystem have fundamentally transformed. The “narrative ocean”[2] for climate communications has been disrupted with shifting currents that require new navigation strategies while maintaining a shared horizon of justice and transformation.

The current state is stark: climate and climate justice communications exist largely within an echo chamber, struggling to reach and resonate beyond those already converted. Although more people recognize (for example) climate’s role in accelerating extreme weather events and align on key values, the climate movement still lacks the broad influence and mobilization routes needed to achieve real change. Yet comprehensive polling shows the opportunity is there: Americans demonstrate strong concern about climate change and growing support for government action.[3] The climate movement and its allies have the opportunity to bridge the gap between climate concern and climate action.

Climate communicators face genuine barriers: fragmented media, exclusive language, well-resourced opposition spreading misinformation, and audiences experiencing despair rather than hope or empowerment. Yet this research reveals something powerful: remarkable alignment among practitioners on both the challenges and the high-potential strategies to address them.

The answer is NOT to avoid talking about climate—it’s to talk about it differently. By connecting climate to what people already care about—affordability, health, jobs, community safety and well-being—we can build the broad coalition this moment demands. This report charts that path. There is genuine public hunger for climate engagement, and approaches like relational organizing, trusted local messengers, and authentic social media voices—from weathercasters to community creators—offer promising new pathways to reach audiences well beyond the existing climate choir. Shifting to a “climate opportunities” lens—one that offers bite-sized, positive visions of what a better world looks like—has strong potential to break through the doom narrative and generate the hope and agency needed to move people from concern to action. Climate disasters, while devastating, also represent a prime moment to build understanding and connect personal experiences to broader climate solutions, particularly when frontline and community voices are centered to tell those stories. Finally, platforms like podcasts, TikTok, and newsletters represent largely untapped territory for climate communications, where organic, trusted voices are already building audiences and sparking conversations that formal climate organizations can learn from and strategically amplify.

Diagnosing the Core Challenges

A Fragmented and Saturated Media Environment

Throughout our interviews, practitioners described how traditional media and institutional gatekeepers, such as editors/executives, have diminished power while algorithmic social media platforms are now dominant. In this environment, creating compelling content is essential—many of those interviewed rallied the climate communications field to "flood the zone" with "actually good" content, meaning content that is accessible, engaging and holds the potential for virality. However, content production alone is insufficient. An additional challenge is getting noticed in a crowded information space. Organic reach is low without paid investment, and attention is hard to grab. Over half (53%) of Americans get their news from social media,[4] while trust in traditional news outlets has plummeted.[5] This fragmentation creates both barriers and possibilities. In this section, we focus on the barriers for climate communicators—including low organic reach, algorithmic gatekeeping and "opposition" advantages. (The strategic possibilities of leveraging this same ecosystem are explored later in this report).

The researchers we interviewed shared that climate change remains largely absent from mainstream entertainment, despite the medium's proven power to shift public attitudes. One analysis of 37,000 TV and film scripts found that less than 3% mentioned climate-related keywords, and only 0.6% explicitly referenced "climate change."[6] Even when scripts depicted extreme weather events, only 10% drew explicit connections to climate change. As one media researcher noted, when climate does appear, "it tends to be a one-off kind of mention, throwaway line, not necessarily a more in-depth storyline." Communications practitioners shared that the US's fractured and saturated information ecosystem makes compelling climate storytelling challenging: climate content is too often excessively "educational", fatalistic, or "preachy" rather than entertaining, lacking the basic storytelling elements that make audiences want to watch.

These challenges are further compounded by the reality that climate communicators face significant barriers in reaching audiences through a media ecosystem currently tilted toward right wing and climate denial narratives. This structural barrier is validated by secondary research: Media Matters found 82% of popular online shows are right-leaning, with nine of the ten largest shows also right-leaning.[7]

One practitioner interviewed described the stasis of advocacy communications in this context: "We're stuck in the sort of old mental model of political communications from decades ago, which had to do with the ability to force people to watch stuff. And that just doesn't happen anymore."

In contrast, our interviewees elevated the success of well-funded right-wing media companies and organizations like Prager U and Turning Point USA, both of which "flood the zone" across media channels with a high volume of climate denialist content. These groups are now scaling such messages even further through official government partnerships,[8] school chapters[9] and public school curricula. Many believe that acceleration of content that is so strongly hostile to climate action through such sources is creating greater hurdles to get climate messaging to a wider audience. The path forward to address these challenges is explored in the Opportunities section later in the report.

QUICK TIPS

- **Maintain presence across multiple and new platforms**
  Choosing the ones that match the audiences you most want to reach. For example, if you're trying to reach young people then choose the platforms they use.
- **Don't abandon traditional news media** (Radio, Print, TV) which still reach key demographics, especially policy decision makers.
- **Find independent news partners**
  With many journalists moving to newsletters (e.g. Substack), independent media is a valuable space for in-depth storytelling and expert interviews. There are some great social justice- and climate-themed new outlets in these spaces that climate communicators should consider.
- **Expand Entertainment**
  Engage creators in the entertainment realm who want to learn how to incorporate climate themes better in their works. Build real connections with the issue. Move away from traditional climate stereotypes.

"We're stuck in the old mental model of political communications from decades ago, which had to do with the ability to force people to watch stuff. And that just doesn't happen anymore."

The Elitism and Weaponization of Climate Justice Language

> *"Climate change is unfair. While it harms people from all walks of life, the groups and nations that bear the least responsibility for causing climate change are disproportionately burdened with its impacts...The goals of climate justice are to reduce these unequal harms of climate change, produce equitable benefits from climate solutions, and include affected communities in the decision-making process." - Yale Program on Climate Change Communications*[10]

Our primary research indicates that the climate justice movement has created its own dialect that often excludes rather than welcomes new audiences, making it difficult to reach beyond those already fluent in climate discourse. As one deeply rooted climate justice movement communicator reflected: "Who knows what the hell the Just Transition is?" This is especially dispiriting for climate communicators as research shows once "climate justice" is explained, more than 50% of Americans strongly support it![10]

Focus groups and interviews also described how climate communicators have made climate feel disconnected from daily lives—from people's emotions, families and immediate concerns. The class dimension compounds this: much of the climate field's language creates barriers through assumed knowledge, cultural references, and policy frameworks that require strong interest and/or educational privilege to parse.

As one grassroots leader reflected: "The movement is made up of a lot of folks that have had the benefits of a college education...we are being elitists and we are being exclusionary in our messaging and in our language." Other people interviewed acknowledged the problem: "Climate has ended up getting captured by something that's more elite and feels more know-it-all."

Further exacerbating the challenge of alienating language is the political weaponization of terms that once carried technical or aspirational meaning—for example, "just transition," "climate justice," and "DEI". This creates a double bind: using technical language risks alienating broader audiences who encounter these terms through hostile framing, yet abandoning it risks losing analytical clarity and the hard-won frameworks communities have developed. It is clear that climate communicators need to speak in very different languages across different public audience segments, as well as in philanthropy and movement spaces. There are also significant potential communications wins in gravitating to simpler and more accessible language writ large.

QUICK TIPS

- **Simplify and make accessible:** Work to simplify language about climate action so it is more accessible to all, avoiding 'insider' language and framing (only use with audiences who understand them, especially to convey tactical insights).
- **Adopt audience-specific messaging strategies:** Listen to and test messaging with target audiences.
- **Connect with everyday life issues:** Link environmental issues to immediate health impacts (asthma, heat illness, water quality) and economic benefits (jobs, lower energy costs, local wealth building).
- **Frame climate messaging through values people already hold:** Family, health, fairness, community, faith, place.

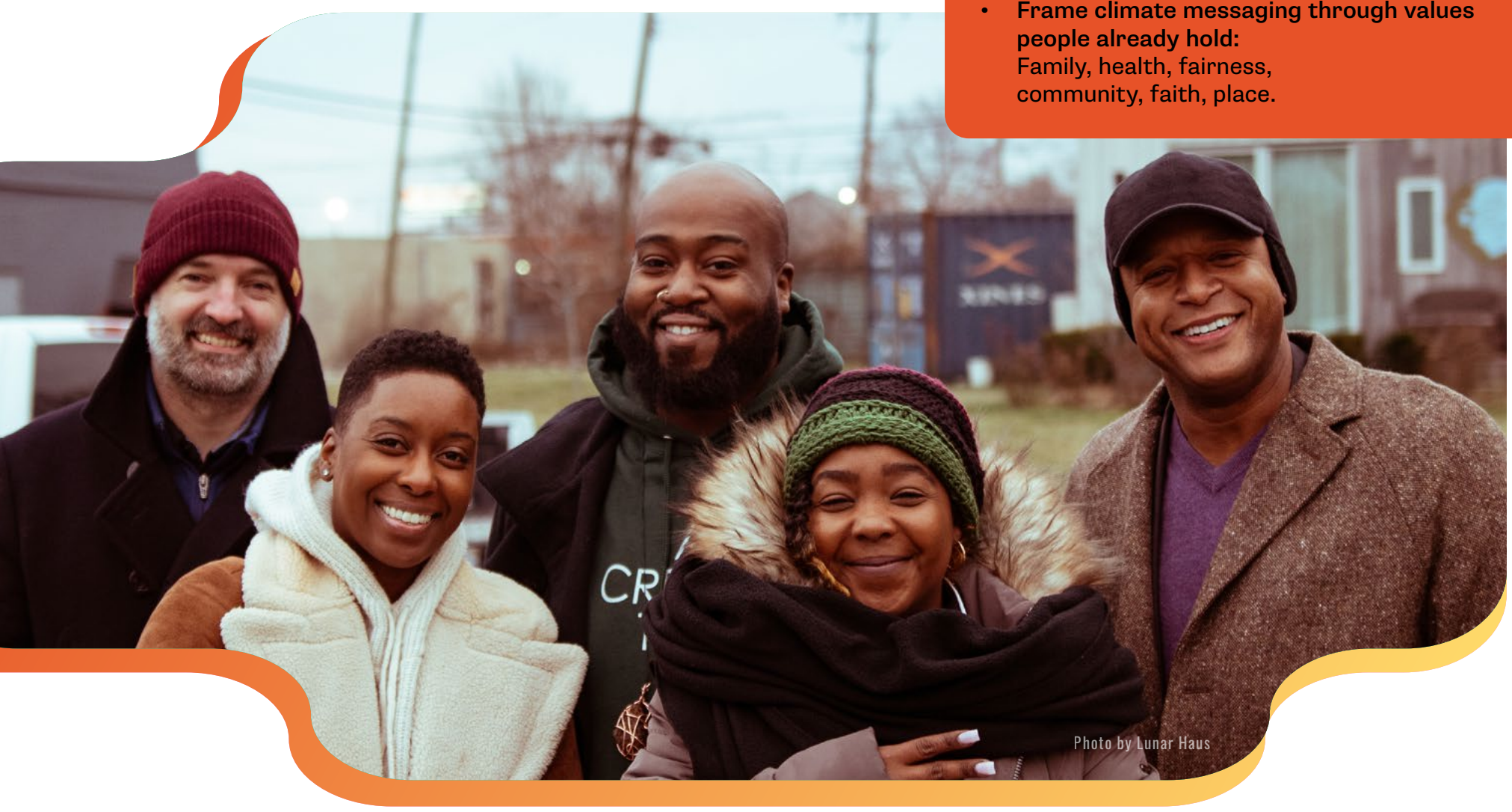

Photo by Lunar Haus

The Myth of “The Public” and of One Single “Movable Middle”

A critical insight emerged repeatedly in our stakeholder interviews and secondary research: there is the idea of a monolithic “public” rarely holds true. It is increasingly hard to reach a single “movable middle”. Different audiences require radically different approaches, and to build a winning constituency in support of climate action, we must bring together multiple audiences through very different messages, tactics, and channels (see above). Making climate messaging ‘popular’ requires engaging with multiple audiences, many of whom have divergent interests, motivations and needs. Understanding these differentiated needs is crucial—the Opportunities section details specific high-potential constituencies and how climate communications might reach them.

Messaging that may resonate with philanthropy and movement advocates—detailed policy, scientific framing, justice-explicit language—may fall flat with other persuadable audiences who may be more motivated by climate messaging connected to immediate concerns, by entertainment-driven frames or through trusted local voices in familiar language. This need for differentiation applies across constituencies with a propensity to support climate action: the committed, already-engaged base already, values-aligned audiences eager to join, and skeptics (not of human-caused climate change, but of their ability to solve it).

As one researcher explained:

> *“There’s a slice of public audiences where it’s impossible to get a climate message in front of them consistently and credibly because of their media diet. There are other segments who aren’t currently reached by or aligned with us, but whose diet offers an easy way to get climate narratives in.”*

This insight has profound implications for climate communications infrastructure. Organizations face pressure to develop “one message” or “the frame” that works universally—but such approaches can sometimes fail because they optimize for no one. The challenge isn’t just intellectual (understanding audiences are different) but operational: we heard from many of those interviewed that most organizations lack capacity to develop, test, and deploy multiple tailored approaches simultaneously. Many shared that funders often want simple, scalable solutions rather than complex, segmented strategies. The result is lowest-common-denominator messaging that reaches few audiences effectively.

QUICK TIPS

- **Offer guidelines and guardrails:** Create broad parameters that preserve core values while allowing for customization. Build scaffolding that supports diverse approaches rather than mandates. Create toolkits with adaptable templates, not rigid scripts.
- **The “Hiding the Broccoli” approach:** Meet people where they are with what they care about, then show the climate connection—not the other way around.
- **Use the “Quilt Square” coalition model:** Building large-scale change requires very specific quilt squares of multiple audiences, where different messengers own different squares and can launch simultaneously but with tailored content.

Photo by Keri Oberly for The Years Project

Making climate messaging ‘popular’ requires engaging with multiple audiences, many of whom have divergent interests, motivations and needs.”

Community-level Climate Communication Capacity Gaps

Community and grassroots level climate communications capacity remains severely under-resourced despite its strategic importance. As practitioners explained, strategic communications is "often treated as an expense rather than investment, as a nice-to-have rather than essential." The consequences are concrete: inability to sustain campaigns beyond one-off actions, no or limited video production capacity, lack of paid media budgets for culturally specific channels, and insufficient staffing. One grassroots communicator put it simply: "I already have the running list in my head of the next two positions to be hired for...if I had a bunch more money."

Resource constraints compound coordination challenges. Without effective capacity to maintain relationships, organizations duplicate efforts, dilute messaging, and miss collective impact opportunities. Conversely, the constraints facing grassroots organizations mean that too often national campaigns are disconnected from local organizing and policy advocacy priorities.

A climate communications practitioner emphasized that effective coordination requires "participating in networked coalition, in networked narrative opportunities"—sharing best practices so frontline groups can learn from each other, and building networks that can lift up new and compelling stories. Yet such coordination must enable rather than constrain, preserving space for local innovation and community leadership rather than imposing top-down control. As one strategist captured it, the goal is: "coordinated flexibility—enough alignment to amplify collective impact without constraining organizations' ability to follow their communities' priorities and adapt to local contexts." The strategic power of these community voices—when properly resourced—is explored in the Opportunities section below.

QUICK TIPS

- **Build relationships and listen:** Let communities define their communications priorities and strategies. Avoid parachuting in, using stories and then leaving without sustained engagement.
- **Provide capacity resources and support:** Where possible fund for communications staff positions, infrastructure, equipment, advertising, and sustained support beyond campaigns.
- **Fund local creators:** When looking for photographers, videographers, and artists, hire those already part of communities who know the context and relationships. Pay community storytellers fairly for their work and expertise.

Audience Sentiment: Despair, Disempowerment, and Disconnection

Climate communicators face a challenging emotional landscape in anticipating and navigating audience emotions on the subject of climate change. Interviewees described how constant disaster coverage—"apocalyptic floods and once-in-a-generation storms that are now every month"—can overwhelm rather than mobilize audiences, creating a drumbeat of crisis that feeds paralysis instead of action.

This sense of powerlessness isn't accidental. For decades, fossil fuel corporations have deliberately cultivated individualist narratives that obscure corporate responsibility and undermine collective action. As one researcher reflected: "People just feel absolutely powerless over it.[11] Even people who know climate change is happening have no sense of what they can actually do about it that will be effective."

Climate anxiety runs particularly high among youth,[12] with one practitioner noting that "fatalism and doomerism" compete with activism for young people's attention and energy.

QUICK TIPS

- **Make the path to action clear:** Steer away from purely disaster or apocalyptic framing on climate. Provide concrete, achievable actions that connect individual participation to collective change. (See Hope as Strategic Imperative in Opportunities section)
- **Showcase positive cultural relevance:** Lean into climate stories and communications approaches that audiences find 'fun', intriguing or innovative.
- **Balance crisis with possibility:** Acknowledge real challenges while emphasizing what's achievable. Too much optimism can be felt as out of touch with reality.

Photo by Javier Colon

Seeing the Opportunities

The same conditions that create barriers to climate communicators also have the potential to create strategic openings. Fragmented media enables targeted audience engagement. Algorithmic platforms, while reducing organic reach, allow precise community connections. The under-resourced grassroots sector, when properly supported, becomes the movement's most powerful communications asset. This section explores how to transform climate communications challenges into strategic opportunities.

A Ready, Winning Constituency

Understanding there is no monolithic "public" (as detailed in Challenges), the question becomes: which specific audiences show highest engagement potential on climate action? The practitioners and researchers we interviewed indicated that there is a ready constituency spanning multiple audience groups. This constituency shows demonstrated interest and propensity to act, but it remains fragmented and under-engaged. As one interviewed researcher emphasized:

> *The vast majority of Americans are concerned about climate change, but they don't necessarily vote that way. They don't name it as a top priority issue, even though they're fully convinced that climate change is happening [and] that it's man made.*

This climate mobilization gap is validated by external research—the most frequent barrier preventing registered voters from contacting government officials about climate is that no one has ever asked them to do it, yet over half of Americans (51%) would sign a climate petition if asked by someone they like and respect.[13]

In terms of demographic audience segmentation, women and girls were elevated by several interviewees as highly responsive on climate. One narrative impact researcher was direct: "It was worth spending money on women and not worth spending money on men" for climate mobilization. This researcher noted how women, especially Black and Latina women "keep showing up" and are "much more responsive and receptive," demonstrating sustained engagement rather than just initial interest. Secondary research by the Environmental Voter Project accentuates and validates this perspective: "If almost two thirds of climate voters are women, then all of us need to get better at embracing women's wisdom and leadership skills."[14]

Researchers participating in our interviews and focus groups also named communities of color as demonstrating high climate engagement potential. Secondary research shows 60 million Americans as "Climate Alarmed" and "Climate Concerned" with majorities in communities of color, especially among women of color, and even more specifically young women of color.[15] Diving deeper into the demographic-based audience research, Latinos show the highest climate concern across all demographics (64% "Alarmed" or "Concerned"),[16] Black voters in battleground states prioritize climate as an electoral issue at 58%,[17] Indigenous communities support climate protection at 89% (yet half report never being contacted),[18] and 84% of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders agree climate change is real and human-caused.[19]

QUICK TIPS

- **Find shared opponents, as well as shared solutions:** Provide practical framing around fighting back together against those who profit from climate change at the expense of communities. Don't just show what you're fighting against, show what you're fighting for.
- **Don't lecture - invite and enable:** Create a tone shift and meet people through issues they already care about. For example:
  - **Not:**"You should care about climate change"
  - **Instead:** "Join us in fighting for [a thing they care about]"
- **Make the ask with clear, concrete actions:** Create low-barrier actions that people believe will make a difference on climate. We need to shift from information to activation. Good considerations for making an ask: relevance, feasibility, timelines, perceived impact, measurability.

Beyond demographics, Harmony Labs' values-based segmentation reveals strategic entry points for climate communicators: audiences seeking transformative collective action, and those motivated by personal autonomy who can be reached through frames emphasizing freedom from corporate monopolies.[20]

What emerged across our conversations was recognition that diverse audiences need culturally resonant entry points into the same pro-climate action coalition. A narrative researcher explained that audiences defined by values rather than demographics can find common ground through shared opponents—for example, corporate monopolies or utility companies rigging the system—even when they frame solutions differently. Building collective support for climate action, practitioners emphasized, often requires meeting people through issues they already care about—jobs, health, affordability, protecting families—and connecting those concerns to climate solutions through messengers they already trust. More on those audience-resonant channels and messages follows below.

The Power of Authentic Community Climate Storytellers

A consistent opportunity finding, elevated across focus groups and interviews, is that personal stories and solutions from people who are directly impacted by climate change, told in their own words, is a powerful and effective communications approach.

Identifying and supporting trusted voices within communities can create more authentic and effective communications. "The most impactful, persuasive messengers are typically people who are in their own community, who look like them, who share their lived experiences, who are just regular people that don't need to be highly credentialed," one researcher explained. Critically, their research found relatability drives persuasive power more than demographic matching or geographic specificity.

This played out in practice: a story about a grandmother fighting petrochemical pollution in her neighborhood became one content creator's most successful national piece—"an emotionally vulnerable, engaging person, a grandma, unexpected. It had urgency. It had high stakes. It had a tangible action that audiences could help with"—demonstrating how personal stakes create entry points into complex policy issues. From a press perspective, lots of producers and journalists are looking for heroes to showcase and real life stories to attach to broader issues.

QUICK TIPS

- **Identify trusted voices already in community networks:** For example, faith leaders, union organizers, parents groups, cultural leaders or healthcare workers who can help identify and access human stories that speak to the impact of climate change.
- **Cede control and trust community wisdom:** Trust community judgment on what's appropriate to share. Accept imperfection—raw and authentic over polished and scripted. The shift to authentic community stories isn't just better communications—it's redistributing power and resources to those most impacted.

Getting in the Game: Cultivating the Digital Ecosystem and New Platforms

The same fragmented media ecosystem that creates reach and trust challenges (detailed above in Challenges section) also opens strategic possibilities for climate communication. Social media and search algorithms, while reducing organic reach, also enable targeted audience engagement. Podcasters, live-streamers, and independent creators can build loyal and segmented followings outside traditional media structures, which climate communicators can leverage via targeted partnerships.

TikTok, Reddit, Instagram, YouTube, and emerging platforms offer channels to reach specific audiences, particularly young people, in places where they already spend time. One practitioner expressed exasperation at the regularly heard refrain in left of center communications circles post election that we need a "Joe Rogan of the Left." To him it wasn't about finding the one content creator to help galvanize audiences, but more about relevance: "Why were we not in the spaces where conversations have been happening?" From across the interviews, we heard climate communicators and progressives have largely ceded these spaces.

QUICK TIPS

- **Don't stretch yourself too thin:** You don't have to try out all platforms with your own brand account. Choose which ones are best for your strategy.
- **Support the creator ecosystem:** Rather than only building your own channels, invest in the broader ecosystem with influencers and creators already reaching target audiences.
- **Embrace a culture of experimentation:** Create space to test and learn rather than expecting perfect execution from the start. The movement needs more organizations willing to try creative strategies, measure what works, and share learnings.

Some participants also noted the power of online gaming. One participant described gaming as "among the most pervasive and profitable media industries compared to all the other film, TV, and music industries combined." He shared that streaming became popular, "because people were already on gaming platforms, so they could now convert to watching their favorite player live-stream. They're talking about the issues while playing the newest game."

When asked about media channels that meet this moment, several of those interviewed saw podcasts as a critical and influential medium for reaching audiences, particularly for complex issues that benefit from long-form discussion. It was noted that climate change deniers and "the right" have been more successful to date at leveraging this platform than progressive movements.

The shift to digital platforms creates a strategic opportunity: audiences consume content passively while multitasking, which means climate messages can reach people who would never seek out climate content directly. By embedding climate narratives within entertainment, sports commentary, lifestyle content, or other topics people already follow, communicators can bypass resistance and reach audiences through trusted voices they've chosen to follow. As one researcher explained, this 'side dish' approach—where values are woven into content rather than being the main course—can allow climate messages to travel further and resonate more deeply than overt climate advocacy.

Photo by Climate Group

This shows the potential of working with podcasters, digital content producers, micro-influencers, and live-streamers who reach target audiences even if they've never covered climate before. Building authentic partnerships so they can 'hide the broccoli' of climate content requires communicators to recognize that "the best ones are not going to be people who are climate warriors" but rather those with "an odd combination of points of view" who can reach across divides. As one practitioner interviewed shared:

> *"The messenger is almost more important than the message at this point. How do we identify and support culture-first creators already aligned with our values—those organic voices—while encouraging that ecosystem to grow naturally without feeling forced or inauthentic?"*

It also means increasing the amount of channel and audience-specific content. One practitioner bluntly stated: "People get their news from social media, Reddit included. The failure to flood the zone in the same way that conservatives have is a failure." One strategist explained the same money spent on a full-page New York Times ad "can flood YouTube for like a day or two. Everyone on YouTube will

see it." The path to tipping point scale isn't a single massive audience or channel or even medium—it's aggregating "the very specific quilt squares of multiple audiences" reached through trusted voices on platforms where they congregate.

The opportunity lies not just in organizations building their own social media presence, but in a broader ecosystem of aligned creators and voices. As one practitioner explained:

> *"There's a lot of folks who want to work with creators and give them a script and hand them what to say and then they just come across as inauthentic. It comes across as an ad. Part of building this infrastructure for the long haul means investing in people and letting them tell the story in the way that works for their audience."*

This approach signals the potential for engagement with micro-influencers—creators with smaller but highly engaged followings who audiences already trust for recommendations. One practitioner interviewed, who partners with the second-largest influencer agency in the country, explained the strategic advantage:

> *"There's just so much more positive feedback from paying a small amount to a bunch of micro influencers to talk about an issue in really thoughtful and really creative ways than there is trying to land X, Y, Z celebrity again."*

Secondary research confirms this shift—while audiences may scroll past many celebrity messages, they may engage more meaningfully when trusted micro-influencers connect social issues such as climate change to content their followers already value.[21] Celebrities still play a significant role in mass engagement, though one practitioner clarified that they need to be educated on the issues. Similarly, partnering with third-party validators like doctors, firefighters, or other community experts who can speak to how climate impacts personal health and local well-being may help reach audiences beyond the climate movement's existing base.

Another specific segment opportunity emerged repeatedly: Spanish-language media and creators.

> *"There is an interest and an appetite with Spanish language media that doesn't exist with English media. Spanish language media love stories about climate change and they love elevating it. And our community watches Spanish TV and they are reading Spanish newspapers. The viewership is larger. Because it's Spanish, [climate communicators and philanthropy] just neglect it."*

Beyond national Spanish-language media, many interviewed shared how local ethnic media matters: "You're at the supermarket, you're at the bodega, you're at the laundromat. What are you reading? You're reading the local newspaper." This means identifying influencers and creators already reaching target audiences, providing them resources and information, compensating them fairly, and amplifying their works. We need to meet audiences where they are rather than demanding they come to traditional news channels.

Culture-first Tactics

Multiple conversations highlighted the power of culture—art, music, creative campaigns— to shift climate narratives in ways traditional advocacy cannot. Practitioners described how artists and cultural workers can imagine and make tangible the world climate activists and movements seek to create. They can help people feel and experience possibility rather than just intellectually understand it. Arts, music, comedy, and entertainment-embedded content is memorable, cutting through polarization and information overload.

Hollywood and popular entertainment platforms, specifically, represent untapped potential for climate narrative breakthrough, with one stakeholder interviewed emphasizing that:

> *"Given the hero worship, celebrity worship that our country still continues to engage in... movies are always going to be popular, entertainment is always going to be popular. That's a natural massive scale to reach folks."*

One key insight from our focus group of practitioners is that effective climate storytelling requires embedding climate naturally rather than heavy-handedly, "To talk about climate [so it] just naturally comes up as if you would talk about your favorite foods or your favorite TV shows."

Emerging opportunities span multiple entertainment sectors—subscriber streaming platforms like Netflix and Apple TV where audiences already spend time, sports and music that have the "ability to cut through," and partnerships with celebrities and influencers who can "pierce through in a way that we can't", especially if equipped to lift local narratives and solutions. While celebrity and Hollywood entertainment was de-emphasized in our focus groups and interviews in recognition of the growth in a far wider spectrum of venues and creators, there is recognition of the power of celebrity influence and powerful examples of climate or justice storytelling in music (Billie Eilish) and movies (The Lost Bus and Sinners).

Beyond screens, stakeholders emphasized the untapped power of in-person experiential activations as essential sites for climate narrative shift. Five years post-pandemic, communities are hungry for opportunities to "meet, get organized, grieve in a world that's very tough" through festivals, music events, and built environments that demonstrate climate solutions in practice. One strategist urged climate communicators to think beyond "national attention moments" to "world attention moments"—the Olympics, the World Cup, the Super Bowl, and major sporting and music festivals —where "people are able to come together at scale" and could experience what sustainable futures might actually feel and look like. Rather than viewing these just as promotional opportunities, the vision is for immersive spaces that tangibly demonstrate the benefits of climate action: "This is what life could be like." One powerful example in museums is the recent Encoded intervention at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

As one interviewee noted, culture-first and immersive approaches require investment in infrastructure (meaning the durable capacity, resources, tools and relationships that sustain activists' and movements' work). "The reason people aren't talking about climate is because funders haven't invested in cultural climate infrastructure." The opportunity lies in creating experiences that bypass ideological debate entirely, allowing people to feel alternative possibilities:

> *"Forget trying to combat denialism with facts because they have their own set of facts and realities. But if you can make someone feel like, oh, there's a different way that we could be living, then... you're pulling them into a different conversation."*

QUICK TIPS

- **Build cultural support tools first:** Create pathways for artists to engage meaningfully, including trainings for creatives on climate and ways to work with frontline communities. Invest in long-term artist partnerships, not one-off projects or transactional endorsements.
- **Embed climate naturally:** Start with what people already care about - their favorite animals, camping spot, weekend plans. Use symbols people already love.
- **Create immersive experiences to feel the future:** Create spaces at festivals/events that demonstrate climate solutions in practice. Let people experience what clean energy, community resilience, and green space actually feels like.
- **Work with artists across multiple disciplines:** musicians, filmmakers, street artists, comedians, fashion designers, etc. Start with small pilots in specific genres - don't try to do everything at once.
- **Consider the next step:** Think about how audiences are invited to continue engagement after these moments, ensuring inspiration translates into sustained participation rather than one-off exposure.

Disaster Moments as Moments for Attention, Empathy, and Action

Climate disasters present a critical paradox: they create powerful attention windows for climate messaging, yet advocates have been reluctant to use them. As one researcher explained:

> *"When a disaster happens that is very close—it's a window to connect safety, quality of life, and the things that regular Americans value to climate change. We have not felt that it's appropriate to make that connection. Everyone's like, now's not the time. This is thoughts and prayers time."*

This reluctance leaves a vacuum climate deniers eagerly fill. When the 2021 Texas winter storm caused electricity failures, renewable energy opponents immediately blamed solar and wind—false claims that spread widely before climate advocates responded.[22] As FrameWorks Institute research reveals: "When progressive voices leave a vacuum, then it's filled by the extreme right who tell them who to blame."[23]

Yet disasters, approached thoughtfully, can also allow for breakthroughs in understanding because they make abstract processes tangible through explicit lived experiences. The key is honoring loss first, then connecting disaster stories to solutions and community resilience. As one practitioner emphasized: "There's a window of attention after something relevant or connected to a climate event happens when we should be talking about it". Let's connect the dots from fossil fuels to hurricanes to neighbors helping neighbors in recovery to people winning concrete improvements. Journalists interviewed for this report indicated the values of leading with human impact stories in climate disasters at the initial moment, and then following with causation and climate connections. This can be more effective than starting with climate science.

QUICK TIPS

- **Prepare rapid response materials in advance:**
  Create pre-approved templates, fact sheets, and spokesperson talking points that can be quickly customized when disasters occur, so you're ready to fill the vacuum before opposition narratives stick.
- **Build a "before, during, after" narrative arc:**
  Establish ongoing communications that connect the dots across the disaster timeline. This sustained storytelling prevents disasters from being seen as isolated incidents.
- **Lead with grief and solidarity, then pivot to agency:**
  Honor the loss and share information to meet immediate needs, then transition to stories of community response and concrete actions people can take.

Everyday Human Climate Stories

The importance of responsible climate disaster storytelling illustrates a broader principle that applies across all climate communications: the power of specificity. Naming individuals in identifiable places whose experiences create emotional connection makes complex issues immediately understandable. One participant discussed how stories rooted in common human experiences—childhood, family, community—can bridge divides. The messenger doesn't need to be identical to the audience; they just need to intersect with something the audience recognizes in their own life. One key implication is that climate needs to be filtered through human experience to land emotionally, not presented as a scientific or planetary issue.

One grassroots organizer described this approach in practice:

> *"We don't lead with climate change [when communicating with our community]. We lead with the pollution their kids are breathing, the flooding on their street, the electric bills they can't pay. Then we show them the solar installation down the block, the community garden that manages stormwater, the neighbors who organized and won."*

This grounding in lived reality makes climate solutions feel achievable and part of everyday life. The humanization of both climate impact and climate solutions stories emerged as critical to breaking through doom-focused climate coverage. Rather than leaving the concept of climate change or environmental justice as abstract or distant, effective communications might (for example) show families thriving near clean energy installations versus suffering adjacent to polluting facilities. As one practitioner emphasized, climate communicators must, "stop speaking hypothetically and show the practical impact of things." Multiple stakeholders stressed that visual human storytelling through videos and testimonials proved far more effective than text-heavy communications, particularly for reaching audiences on social media platforms.

Another strategist emphasized the importance of patience in this work: “Take people to the polluted site, show the solar installation, film the community meeting. Let people see and feel rather than just reading about it.” This investment in showing lived reality—not just describing it—creates the emotional connection and tangible understanding that moves audiences from passive concern to active engagement.

As one narrative practitioner noted, these “bite-sized visions”—concrete, tangible improvements people can see in their daily lives—make the future feel achievable by making the present better. When audiences can visit a community solar project, meet neighbors who organized to stop a polluting facility, or experience what climate-aligned infrastructure actually feels like, the transformation stops being theoretical and becomes imaginable, desirable, and worth fighting for.

Intersectionality as Strategy, Not Compromise or Side-bar

From across the interviews, it was clear that connecting climate to other social issues isn’t dilution—it’s meeting people in the reality of their lives. Researchers interviewed noted that housing, healthcare, jobs, racial justice, immigration, and climate change are often inseparable issues for communities experiencing them simultaneously. Climate communications that reflect this interconnection often resonate more deeply and can help build a broad, but diverse audience climate action constituency. As grassroots climate communicators repeatedly emphasized, they need to discuss “real issues that people can resonate with.”

Meeting people “where they are” relies on what one practitioner described as interconnected storytelling that begins with what people care most about or what they come to that media channel, venue, or influencer to learn about.

QUICK TIPS

- **Use “connecting the dots” language:** Don’t assume people see the connections—make them explicit.
- **Apply the language guidance from Challenges section:** Lead with material concerns audiences already care about, using accessible language, then reveal climate connections.
- **Show integrated organizing:** Don’t just talk about connections—show campaigns winning on multiple issues simultaneously. For example, a solar installation creates jobs, cuts bills, and reduces pollution, while protecting the climate.

> *“We need to advance with interconnected storytelling, because climate’s interconnected with all of the issues people care about. So how do we win on climate—the bigger goal? By talking in small ways about how whatever they care about is interconnected. We have to do everything, everywhere, all at once to solve the climate crisis, unfortunately. But I think there are ways we can do it and really draw more people in, quickly, if we connect the dots and create partnerships across messengers, across movements.”*

“We need to advance interconnected storytelling because climate’s interconnected with all of the issues people care about.

One example of this is how environmental health values were used as an entry point for activation is the Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) movement:

> *“People in the MAHA movement care about food, water, and air—these issues are so interconnected. Our worldview is obviously very different, but it demonstrates a way to be intentional. MAHA mobilized audiences by connecting health to lifestyle and political choices without leading with climate.”*

While explicit climate terminology can trigger resistance for some audiences, intersectional entry points solve this by meeting people through issues they already prioritize, then revealing climate connections organically.

Effective public-facing climate communications start with people’s immediate concerns—not climate terminology—then connect those concerns to climate solutions.

Practitioners interviewed demonstrated this approach in action. One South Carolina organizer explained their work and communications with daycare centers:

> *“We’re working with the daycare centers to do air quality monitoring inside of the facilities, give them air purifiers, teach them how to create an eco-friendly environment for the children…and each child care facility receives $1,000.”*

By addressing parents' immediate concerns about their children's health, the organization builds climate literacy without ever leading with "climate."

Similarly, when Florida organizers responded to the Everglades ICE detention camp, they connected environmental protection to the issues communities already cared about: "It was critical to highlight the Indigenous sovereignty of the Miccosukee tribe which resides on the land, and the human rights violations against immigrants"—alongside threats to wetlands and water supply. The climate impacts resonated because they were woven into a story about justice issues people already understood.

In both cases, climate justice organizations led with the issues communities cared about most, then revealed the climate connections—demonstrating how to build power even when explicit climate messaging faces barriers.

This creates multiple entry points for climate to be discussed even in contexts where leading with "climate" would trigger resistance. And it reflects the lived reality of frontline communities for whom climate is never separate from the other challenges they face.

Hope as Strategic Imperative

Addressing the despair and powerlessness described in the Challenges section requires more than acknowledging problems—it demands hope paired with concrete action pathways. In a moment stakeholders described as one of rising despair and cynicism, particularly among young people facing climate anxiety, hope-based communications that pair honest assessment with real possibility are both powerful and effective. As one practitioner emphasized: "Hope is sticky and helpful right now to combat some of the doomerism that can come up when you're just seeing all these stories of disaster." This isn't naive optimism—it's grounded hope that acknowledges challenges while emphasizing agency, collective power, and demonstrated wins. Multiple climate communications practitioners emphasized providing concrete engagement pathways. One practitioner noted:

> *"One thing that's just been really helpful across the board is providing concrete steps for our calls to action, like how to engage legislators. [For example] we've hosted boot camps on how to engage your elected official on a political issue you care about. How can you do it? What's the easy way? What are the levers for change? People are told often to call your decision maker, but it's an intense step to take. So often people need coaching and a little bit of support, and you have to provide it in a multitude of areas."*

QUICK TIPS

- **Lead with solutions, not doom:** Catastrophizing creates paralysis and alienation. Instead, showcase what's already working—community solar projects, green job programs, neighborhoods organizing successfully.
- **Document and amplify concrete wins:** Make sure there's multimedia content, databases of wins or other hubs of information about actual wins.
- **Connect to ancestral wisdom and historical precedent:** Connect current struggles to historical movements that succeeded. Frame as "we've overcome before, we can overcome again."

A polling firm interviewed shared a related point in measuring agency and hope:

> *"We're asking people to rate on a scale of 0 to 10, how much power they feel they have to impact change in their community. The biggest threat [is] people sitting out elections entirely because they don't believe their actions matter. This metric predicts engagement more reliably than awareness or concern."*

"The biggest threat [is] people sitting out elections entirely because they don't believe their actions matter.

This metric matters because it shifts evaluation from awareness to activation. Traditional climate communications often measure success through awareness metrics—did they learn about climate change? But high awareness coupled with low agency creates apathy, not action. Measuring people's sense of power provides a leading indicator: audiences who feel they can impact change—who demonstrate hope—are far more likely to take action, even if their climate knowledge is limited.

Multiple stakeholders referenced Zohran Mamdani's campaign for NYC Mayor as an example of how hope-based messaging works in practice to empower social justice motivated, ready constituencies: his platform centered on everyday affordability issues, named "villains" clearly, and made everyday New Yorkers—not the candidate—the protagonists of change. Another success story elevated in the interviews was that of a smalltown election candidate who emphasized that

"we can make the future better by making the present better." This connects to the "bite-sized visions" described in the previous section—concrete, tangible improvements people can see and feel in their daily lives, from affordable housing to public transportation, with climate messages authentically woven throughout.

> *"What gives me hope is the climate futurism, the hopeful narratives, the ancestral narratives to remind us that this is not so unfamiliar territory, that we can draw from wisdom that other generations before us have done and gleaned."*

The task is connecting that visionary future to the winnable fights happening today.

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Photo by The Solutions Project

Conclusion: Our Shared Path Forward

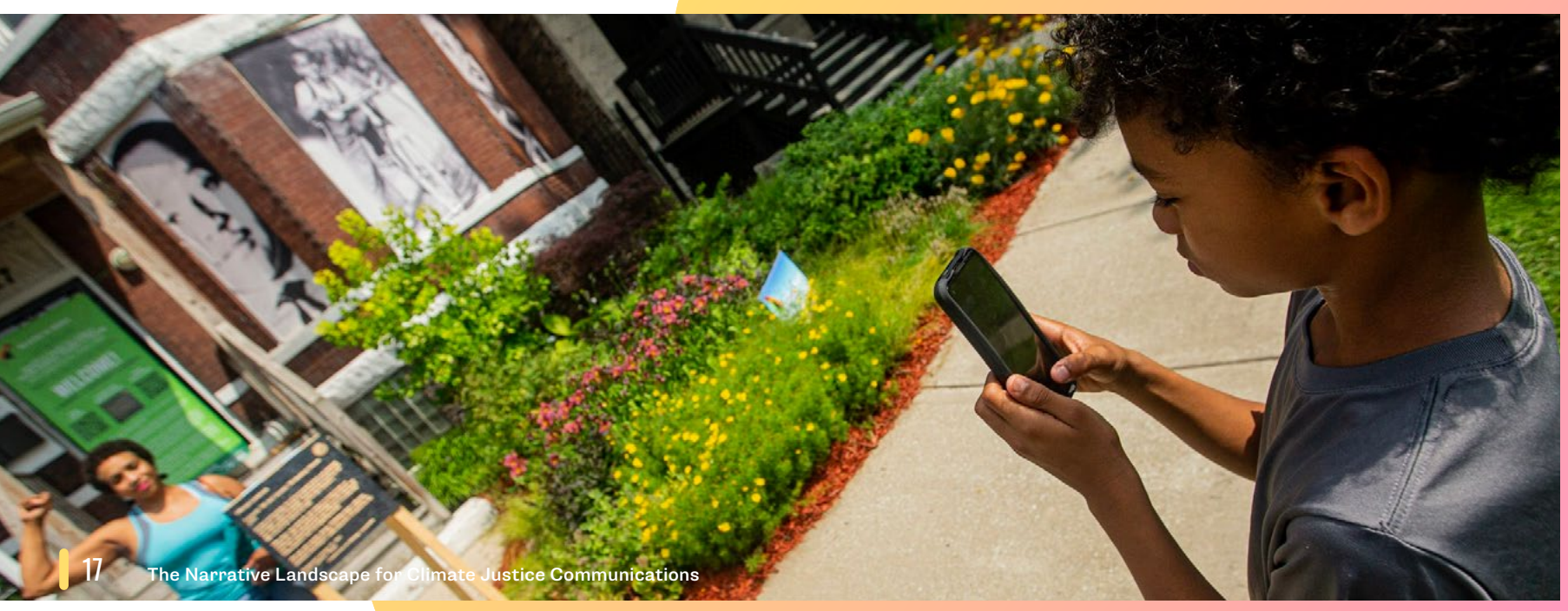
The wide breadth of practitioners, researchers, and movement leaders interviewed for this report share remarkable alignment on both the stakes for reconceptualizing our climate communications approach in the U.S., and the potential power of climate movements and advocates to change dominant climate narratives. We understand the climate crisis is real and urgent; the opposition is well-resourced and coordinated; and the political and media landscape presents genuine barriers. Yet, we also see communities organizing, winning victories, building power, and demonstrating that transformation is possible—often with a fraction of the resources flowing to forces working to deny climate change and undermine climate action.

The path forward requires strategic investment in what works including local-level infrastructure that enables authentic community voices to reach scale. We need to invest in the creator and influencer ecosystems already reaching key target audiences, including Spanish-language influencers, micro-creators in social media, gaming and live-streaming spaces, and podcasters. We must build the cultural infrastructure and connections that can allow artists, entertainers, the media, and cultural workers to embed climate naturally into content people already love—whether online, in music, cinema, or local community events and art installations. We must be ready to invest in relationship-centered work and in community storytellers rather than in extractive models to source stories.

Most critically, we must embrace the full complexity of coalition-building this moment demands. We can't assume that a robust and enduring climate constituency will emerge from a single perfect message or frame—it will likely be built through many culturally resonant entry points that meet diverse audiences through issues they already care about, messengers they already trust, on platforms where they already spend time. This requires funders to resource coordinated flexibility: funding multiple simultaneous approaches tailored to different audiences while built on consistent values. Such an approach can fuel more innovative and diverse climate communications and campaigns and build toward new visions of hope for the future. The current moment demands that climate communicators center such hope alongside concrete climate action pathways, transforming moments of climate challenge, disaster and risk into learning and activation opportunities and demonstrations of community power. We need to lead with the bite-sized climate engagement opportunities that make transformation feel achievable.

The 60 million Americans already alarmed or concerned about climate aren't waiting for the perfect message—they're waiting to be met, asked, resourced, and given the chance to lead.

Will you join us in making that possible?



End Notes

1 6 focus groups with 31 people plus 19 individual interviews; see Appendix

2 Pop Culture Collaborative

3 The percentage of Americans who are either Alarmed or Concerned has increased from 40% in 2013 to 56% in 2023 (+16 percentage points). A large majority (around 72%) of Americans believe global warming is happening. Majorities support regulating carbon pollution (74%) and transitioning to clean energy (65% by 2050), as shown in the Yale Climate Opinion Maps with George Mason University.

4 Pew Research

5 Gallup

6 Good Energy Project

7 Media Matters


Photo by Lunar Haus

8 Education Week

9 Texas Tribune

10 Yale Program on Climate Change Communication

11 FrameWorks Institute

12 The Lancet

13 Yale Program on Climate Change Communications

14 Environmental Voter Project

15 Yale Program on Climate Change Communications

16 George Mason University

17 HIT Strategies

18 First Nations Development Institute

19 AAPI Data and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research

20 Harmony Labs

21 Edelman Trust Barometer

22 PBS News

23 FrameWorks Institute

Photo by Bond Studio

APPENDIX

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Two journalists interviewed requested to do so anonymously

Five staff from The Solutions Project

Total Participants:

50 individuals across 6 focus groups and 19 interviews

Focus Groups:

The Solutions Project Staff (July 22, 2025)

Grantees & Movement Partners Focus Group (July 29, 2025)

Practitioner Focus Groups (August 14 and August 21, 2025)

Researcher Focus Groups (August 13 and August 22, 2025)

Interview Period:

July-September 2025

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