

**PLACE, POWER & POSSIBILITY:**  
A Climate + Migrant Justice Guide Series

# Narrative Guide

at the

# Climate-Migration Nexus



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This guide series is co-published with  
The Solutions Project and Just Solutions.

The following organizations also informed  
the series:

- APEN
- PODER
- WeCount!
- Catalyst Miami
- PUSH Buffalo
- Justice for Migrant Families

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## OVERVIEW

# It is time to move from narratives rooted in crisis language and threat framing toward a justice-based approach.

This guide intends to equip communicators, advocates, and storytellers with emerging community-tested and research-backed strategies to reframe narratives around climate change and migrant justice, with the aim of shifting public discourse from fear and division toward solidarity and collective action.

### Making This Shift:

- ✓ Affirms that migration is often a form of climate adaptation
- ✓ Centers the humanity and agency of people on the move
- ✓ Can expose actors profiting from border militarization
- ✓ Paints an irresistible future where communities can welcome newcomers with dignity while building climate-resilient infrastructure and social supports that allow everyone to thrive

# OVERVIEW

**This guide is part of  
The Solutions Project's  
Place, Power & Possibility:  
A Climate + Migrant  
Justice Guide Series**

These guides advance integrated strategies across community governance, policy advocacy, and narrative change.

Each guide speaks to a distinct set of strategies and audiences while contributing to a shared vision of climate resilience rooted in equity and community power.

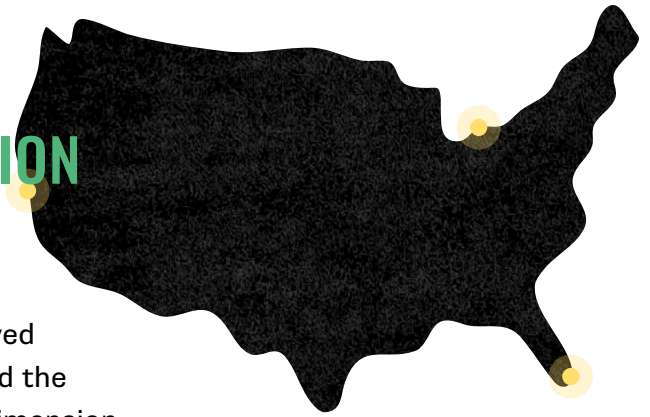


This guide is shaped by existing narrative and messaging research that has been released by other organizations, as well as by interviews with six community-based organizations that are part of the Climate + Migrant Justice cohort led by The Solutions Project. They are actively working at the intersections of these issues, have been organizing for climate justice in immigrant communities for years, and are based in Buffalo, NY; Miami, FL; and the San Francisco-Bay Area, CA.

This guide examines narratives around migration in various forms. Through place-based discussions, it dives deep into specific migration experiences across three cities with a focus on cross-border immigration, long-term immigrant communities, as well as refugee/asylum seeking communities. The literature review also considers narratives around those compelled to migrate due to the climate crisis. It is important to note that migrant experiences and contests are highly differentiated, and the climate crisis intersects with those experiences in varying ways. It is critical that narrative strategies reflect the distinct experiences of those involved. While significant connectivity bonds these stories together, there is also often a necessity to differentiate.

## INTRODUCTION

# PEOPLE, PLACE, AND POWER: REFRAMING CLIMATE AND MIGRATION



### City-Specific Narratives and Organizing

The narrative strategies in this guide are grounded in the lived realities of three distinct cities – Buffalo, NY; Miami, FL; and the San Francisco Bay Area, CA – each representing a unique dimension of the climate and migration intersection. The conversations held with organizers reveal something that no policy brief can fully capture: The intersection of climate and migration is not an abstraction – it is already unfolding in deeply local, human ways, and the communities living it are far ahead of the broader public narrative.

Through focus groups with six community-based organizations at the heart of this work, The Solutions Project identified place-specific dynamics that shape how communities experience, communicate, and create care. In Miami –a city simultaneously threatened by rising seas and stringent immigration policies and rhetoric –Catalyst Miami and WeCount! have found that direct, personal connection is a reliable way to shift narratives, anchoring organizing in the stories of neighbors and families. In Buffalo, framed as a “welcoming community” with a long, layered history of arrival, PUSH Buffalo and Justice for Migrant Families are weaving together the stories of Congolese and Ecuadorian newcomers with those of Indigenous people, Black descendants of the Great Migration, and multi-generational immigrant families. These stories build a cross-racial solidarity rooted in resilience and shared futures. And in the Bay Area, a resilient community facing compounding pressures of gentrification and climate precarity, APEN and PODER emphasize collective resistance. They are lifting up immigrant and refugee communities as the architects of their own solutions. Together, these three cities offer a powerful, place-based foundation for understanding what narrative change looks like when it is built from the ground up. Across all three cities, one insight rang clear: The stories that shift people are not statistics or crisis projections, but the visceral, specific, human ones – a neighbor detained, a roof that needs fixing, a community that already knows how to create home in the face of upheaval. What these cities teach us, collectively, is that the climate and migration movements are not parallel tracks waiting to converge. They are already one story, being lived right now by the same people.

The following organizations have been a part of this engagement:

Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN)  
Oakland, CA

PODER  
San Francisco, CA

WeCount!  
Miami, FL

Catalyst Miami  
Miami, FL

PUSH Buffalo  
Buffalo, NY

Justice for Migrant Families  
Buffalo, NY

These are key narrative insights based on ongoing efforts from these groups actively involved at the intersection of climate and migration.

# EFFECTIVE PLACE-BASED NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

Insights from Buffalo NY, Miami FL and Bay Area, CA

Strategies

Gaps & Challenges

What's Needed

## How Are These Grassroots Groups Effectively Shifting Narratives Around Climate And Migration?

### MIAMI (Catalyst Miami and WeCount!)

#### Center Immigrant Knowledge as Solutions, Not Just Problems

One staff member shared a concrete example: Bringing Colombian community members to commissioner meetings as expert speakers to demonstrate that advanced waste management systems *are* possible, because they'd lived it. WeCount! added the framing of immigrants as "second responders" to climate disasters. The narrative strategy is to position immigrants as active holders of climate solutions – mutual aid systems, reconstruction expertise – rather than victims or burdens.

#### Direct Connection as the Most Powerful Tool

WeCount! emphasized that "the only thing that [they] have heard that shifts any kind of narrative is the direct connection." The visceral impact of seeing mothers and working families detained—"that was my neighbor" – has been most effective at shifting perspectives in general organizing. The personal, local connection breaks through abstraction. The organization noted facts alone don't work because people can be "faced with facts and still not challenge their perspective of the world." However, WeCount! mentioned how people are already "tapped out emotionally" – even those who deeply care about climate and immigration – and that

"getting inundated with stories is just not helpful." The distinction WeCount! draws was important: Direct connection works when it moves people toward action, not just awareness. What people want is not more narrative, but results – something concrete to do.

#### Maintaining Strong Immigrant Identity Across Generations

Miami organizers noted that immigrant identity remains "very much still tied" regardless of generation. People actively identify as "Bahamian or Haitian" across multiple generations, alongside multiple other identities including "Black" and "American," making shared identity a powerful organizing principle.

## BAY AREA (APEN and PODER)

### Emphasize Stories of Collective Resistance, Not Just Problems

APEN emphasized showing “stories of people collectively resisting and building something different successfully.” In places like Richmond and Wilmington in Southern CA, community organizers don’t need to convince people Chevron\* is bad – they need to show “it’s possible to do something about it.” \*Note: Chevron’s refinery in Richmond, CA has a long history of causing local pollution and health issues.

### Define a Clear Protagonist and Antagonist

The most successful campaigns have a “clear protagonist and opposition.” This clarity helps people understand the problem and who they’re fighting alongside.

### Use Hyperlocal “Neighbor” Language

Using language like “protecting our neighbors” creates belonging that transcends immigration status. “Regardless of how you got here, you live on the same block. And we protect each other.” This hyperlocal framing creates solidarity across differences.

### Leverage Peer-to-Peer Trust Networks

Information is most trusted when it comes “directly from someone else in their community, ideally someone who is their age or a little bit older.” They train community members to train others on “know-your-rights” information. PODER also has community trainers called promotoros that educate local neighbors about health and climate issues.



## BUFFALO, NY (PUSH Buffalo and Justice for Migrant Families)

### Create Welcoming Spaces with Cultural Practices

PUSH Buffalo described opening previously closed membership meetings and “offering food” as a key tactic. The organization creates platforms for people to share their own stories directly. Both organizations stressed that welcoming isn’t just symbolic – it involves resourcing one another, connecting people to services, and building deep relationships across immigration status lines. PUSH Buffalo described it as a simultaneous “public and private message.” Organizers and community members are “publicly” creating safer spaces, while “privately” having the relationships and connections to actually shelter and protect people when needed.

### Connect Migration Stories Across Time

Justice for Migrant Families highlighted the power of connecting Congolese and Ecuadorian community stories with those of Indigenous people and multi-generational Buffalo residents. This includes Black descendants of the Great Migration from the South and descendants from Ireland, Germany, or Italy who have maintained cultural identities in Buffalo that can strengthen cross-racial solidarity. This creates “resilience and hope” that “allows us to dream more and to ideate about what solutions can be.”

### Making Invisible Connections Visible

Justice for Migrant Families emphasized that climate and migration are “so tightly woven” that the challenge is helping people “unpick all of the threaded knots” to see root causes, particularly around oil extraction in places like Congo and Ecuador. Sometimes extra public education is needed to help people connect the dots on issues and understand how they are rooted in capitalist extraction. One specific example is the way the U.S. and other powers enter countries, extract resources, and create the instability that then forces people to move. She described this as “interwoven,” with extraction at the source.





## GAPS AND CHALLENGES

### **The Climate-Migration Connection Still Isn't Landing with Communities Themselves**

All organizations across the three cities described versions of the same gap: even people directly displaced by climate conditions don't identify their migration as climate-related. In Miami, WeCount! said that most community members “don't make the connection between I'm migrating for climate.” They identify their own migration as economic or political, even when drought or hurricanes were the underlying drivers. In Buffalo, JFMF described how Ecuadorian Indigenous community members whose land was made unlivable don't unpack the climate-related root causes of their migration journeys. They just say “I'm Ecuadorian” and put their head down.

### **The Broader Narrative Ecosystem is Dominated by Negative Framing of Migration— and There's No Counter-Infrastructure**

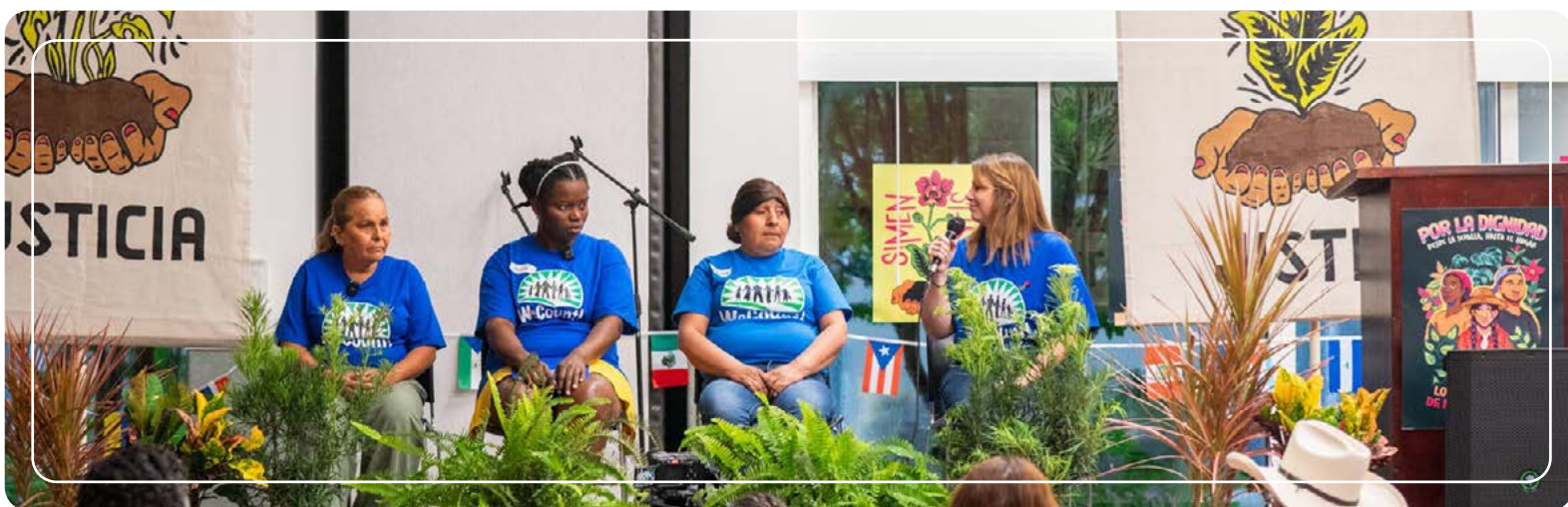
WeCount! in Miami named this directly: “The other side's narrative tactics are working...the fearmongering.” Flashy deportation imagery, raids, the Everglades Concentration Camp – those who oppose immigration are setting the terms. In the Bay Area, APEN identified something even more structural: The communications infrastructure to reach immigrant and refugee communities has been “decimated.” Corporate-owned media is full of misinformation; trusted community channels barely exist. “We can develop all the amazing messaging we want and it's not very useful if it doesn't reach people.” And many of the communities they're trying to reach are “really hard to reach through comms channels.”

## Government Failure Has Created Deep Distrust That Bleeds Into the Climate Conversation

In Miami, WeCount! pointed to a “long trajectory of corruption, misuse of funds, overuse of promises” on climate infrastructure (city projects aimed at mitigating climate change or providing adaptations). For example, a transit expansion promised over a decade-and-a-half ago still hasn’t materialized. That broken trust makes it hard to mobilize people around climate solutions when the institutions promising those solutions have repeatedly failed. In the Bay Area, APEN gave a concrete example of state disaster response that was completely disconnected from community reality. Emergency shelters placed 20 minutes away from communities where most people don’t own cars. That’s why APEN has been building community resilience hubs – places people already know and trust like youth centers, schools, libraries, and places of worship. These spaces can now support communities through disasters. The state “wouldn’t have known what was needed if people weren’t already filling in the gaps themselves.” The challenge isn’t just messaging – it’s that the government is an unreliable actor whose interventions often reinforce, rather than reduce harm.

## The Climate and Immigrant Justice Movements Haven’t Fully Found Each Other Yet – and The Narrative Intersection is Challenging

A quieter but real challenge across all three cities is that climate justice and immigrant justice still largely operate as separate ecosystems, even within organizations that work on both issues. In Buffalo, the connections are viscerally real. For example, climate fueled extreme winter storms are decimating people’s roofs. The best roofers are Ecuadorians living in Buffalo. However, the ability to fix people’s roofs is limited because of threats of ICE. This exasperating conundrum has not been developed into a coherent narrative yet. PUSH Buffalo described wanting to develop that storytelling “over time.” The intersection is felt and lived, but not yet consistently named or communicated in a way that builds broader solidarity.



# WHAT'S NEEDED

These gaps point directly to what needs to be built. Across all three cities, organizers named **five consistent priorities** for strengthening narrative work at the intersection of climate and migration:

1

## **Trusted, Community-Owned Communications Infrastructure – Not Just Better Messaging**

The most structural need named across the transcripts came from APEN in the Bay Area: “We can develop all the amazing messaging we want and it’s not very useful if it doesn’t reach people.” The problem isn’t necessarily narrative quality – it’s distribution. Much corporate-owned media is full of misinformation, trusted community channels have been decimated, and many immigrant and refugee communities are nearly impossible to reach through conventional communications. What is needed is investment in community-controlled communications infrastructure. Local creators, WhatsApp, text networks, and peer-to-peer channels can help bridge the gap.

2

## **Stories That Move People Toward Action, Not Just Awareness**

In Miami, Catalyst Miami was direct: People are “tapped out emotionally” and “getting inundated with stories is just not helpful.” What’s missing is the pairing of the story with a clear next step. WeCount! framed the aspiration: narratives that connect climate, housing, healthcare, and migration as one system and show that “we currently have the resources and tools to make a difference today.” In Buffalo, PUSH Buffalo named a specific need: developing storytelling around why people chose to invest their lives in Buffalo’s climate future – not the harm narrative, but the transformation narrative. That storytelling infrastructure doesn’t yet exist and needs to be built intentionally.

3

## **Narrative That Connects The Climate and Immigrant Justice Movements**

All three cities are doing climate justice work and immigrant justice work, but the connective messaging and narrative tissue between them is underdeveloped. This gap showed up differently in each city, but the underlying pattern was consistent: Organizations are living the intersection every day in their work, yet the language and narrative frames that would make that intersection legible to the public – and even to their own members – haven’t fully been built. In Miami, Catalyst Miami flagged a specific narrative gap: The story of Florida going underwater and what domestic climate migration will look like for native-born Americans “isn’t being had enough.” Additionally, that conversation could be a bridge between communities who don’t yet see themselves as part of the same story.

## 4

## Platforms and Spaces for Communities To Do Their Own Visioning – Not Just Crisis Response

In the Bay Area, PODER described a future-focused process that asked community members: Who are your people? What do you need to build? What do you need to interrupt? PODER said it was “overwhelmingly fruitful” and that staff “really appreciated the opportunity,” but noted “people aren’t used to hearing those questions.” The hunger for that kind of visioning space exists, but it’s rare. In Buffalo, PUSH Buffalo described this in practice through food programs and open membership meetings. The organization identified a visioning space as something that needs to grow and be resourced, not just sustained at its current scale. The need is for spaces where communities can “dream forward” on issues including migration and climate and not just respond to crises. These spaces must also generate the stories that feed broader narrative campaigns.

## 5

## Careful Framing That Affirms Migration Without Accidentally Reinforcing the Idea That It Needs to be Fixed or Stopped.

This came up most explicitly in Miami. Catalyst Miami described wrestling with how to connect climate and migration without implying “that if we fix the climate crisis, there won’t be immigration” – or, that immigration is somehow a problem to solve. WeCount’s dream message was simple: “Migration is part of human nature. We have always migrated.” What’s needed is a narrative that holds both truths simultaneously – that climate is making displacement more urgent and unjust, and that migration itself is not the problem. That framing is still being worked out in practice, and organizers said they need more space to develop it without being rushed into campaign-ready language before the thinking is done.



# LITERATURE REVIEW

Several organizations have done commendable work pulling together insights and narrative strategies.

These key resources inform this guide:

**A Core Narrative for Immigration Messaging**  
The Opportunity Agenda

**Remain. Migrate. Return. What Hurricane Katrina Teaches Us About Climate Migration**  
Taproot Earth

**Climate-Migrant Justice Solidarity Communications Toolkit**  
National Partnership for New Americans

**2025 Narrative Guide for Immigrant Futures**  
Narrative Initiative

**A Future for All of Us**  
The Butterfly Lab

**Countering Dangerous Narratives in Dangerous Times**  
Climate and Migration Coalition (UK)

## MAJOR THEMES

**Values-driven messaging over fear-based narratives** is the most dominant theme. The guides consistently emphasize leading with shared values like community, dignity, belonging, and interdependence rather than responding to threat-based framing. These reports warn that fear or threat-based language about migrants fleeing climate disasters can inadvertently delay meaningful action and falsely position militarized borders as a necessary security measure. Communicators should avoid crisis language like “mass migration,” “waves,” or “surge.” Instead, communicators should frame migration as a climate adaptation and solution, while asserting human rights. National Partnership for New Americans (NPNA) suggests a three-part structure: lead with shared identity and values, name the “villains” who profit from division

(fossil fuel companies, private prison corporations, border security industry), and offer concrete visions for a better future.

The impetus to continue fighting for worker protections even as political barriers increase is a matter of literal survival for workers, and a vivid example of where climate and migrant justice converge. One construction worker dies every four days in Florida. Amidst rising heat exacerbated by climate change, agricultural workers - most of them immigrants - are up to 35 times more likely to die of heat-related illnesses than the general population. Meaningful enforcement of key occupational safety and health rules is virtually non-existent, leading to occupational accidents, illnesses, and injuries.

### **Personal Stories Create Empathy While Statistics Create Fear**

NPNA suggests that “personal stories of climate displaced people create empathy,”<sup>1</sup> while “statistics and unreliable predictions of future migration create fear.” Narrative testing shows that messages focused on future predictions drive audiences toward anti-migrant policies. The literature further suggests that condensing people’s individual lives into numbers – particularly large numbers – is a form of dehumanisation and othering. The storytelling guidance emphasizes joy and agency over only depicting harm, using people-first language, and having immigrants tell their own stories rather than being “spoken for.”

### **Emphasize And Build Solidarity Between Climate and Migrant Justice Movements**

There is a need to build solidarity across frontline communities facing threats from both the climate crisis and law enforcement as an essential strategy to countering authoritarianism. Climate change is accelerating all major forms of global displacement, making migrant justice an essential part of climate justice. Many people currently seeking safety in the US have faced climate impacts in their countries of origin. The

rise of far-right forces presents challenges, and some climate advocates are tempted to argue climate action can help control migration. However, the literature review warns this approach is strategically and morally flawed. Instead, defeating authoritarianism requires

“  
**Defeating authoritarianism requires deep solidarity that articulates just how interwoven our struggles and shared interest is.**

– NPNA Climate-Migrant Justice Solidarity Communications Toolkit

### **Narrative Power and Cultural Change as Key Strategies**

Cultural change precedes social change, and narrative drives policy.

“  
**Narrative power is the ability to change the norms and rules our society lives by.**

– Narrative power defined by Rashad Robinson, Butterfly Lab Year One Findings + Narrative Toolkit

The goal is not merely to shift dominant narratives but to win tangible policy results. For example, making pro-immigrant values feel like common sense to a majority and then defending that ground. Achieving this requires narrative immersion – people encountering aligned stories from multiple sources, forms, and messengers across time. This is something no single campaign or message can accomplish alone. Climate and migrant justice movements therefore need shared narrative networks to align organizations across different issues and constituencies, and robust ecosystems of collaborators working across short- and long-term timelines. Artists and cultural workers are a particularly underused resource in this effort, and funders are urged to invest in artist-led projects and create dedicated spaces for experimentation, because breakthrough narrative work requires the freedom to take creative risks.

<sup>1</sup> NPNA Climate-Migrant Justice Solidarity Communications Toolkit

# SUGGESTED MESSAGING PRINCIPLES

These guidelines are for **communicators, storytellers, educators, organizers, journalists,** and **anyone** working at the intersection of climate and migrant justice. They draw on the research literature and the direct experiences of our cohort partners in Buffalo, Miami, and the Bay Area.



## Use People-First Language That Emphasizes Humanity, Relationships, and Agency

Labels like “migrants,” “refugees,” or “asylum seekers” reduce complex people to bureaucratic categories. Instead, use familial language – fathers, mothers, neighbors, community members – and language that centers courage and agency. Say “people making brave choices to rebuild their lives,” not “people fleeing.” Name who is responsible for the conditions people are fleeing, rather than letting the harm appear to have no author.

- ✓ “Our neighbors are making brave choices to find safety and rebuild their lives after losing so much because of conflict created by [name of responsible party].”
- ✗ “Refugees are fleeing violence.”

## Never Repeat Harmful Frames, Even To Negate Them

When you repeat a myth to refute it, audiences remember the myth. Avoid phrases like “no human being is illegal,” “not a security threat,” or “not a criminal” – all of which reinforce the very frames you’re trying to dismantle. Assert the positive instead.

- ✓ “Families have the right to seek asylum – it is the foundation of human dignity.”
- ✗ “It is NOT illegal to seek asylum.”

## Lead with Values, Not Policy Details

People respond to what they care about deeply – dignity, community, shared responsibility, opportunity – more than to policy mechanics or economic arguments. Transactional framing (“immigrants contribute \$X to GDP”) reinforces the burden frame.

Connect any policy to the values it upholds and the future it creates. Communicators should still make necessary call to actions to drive policy changes.

- ✓ “We deserve communities where everyone can live without fear and families stay together. Call your representative to reform Section 287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act.”
- ✗ “We need to reform Section 287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act.”

## Avoid Crisis Language That Feeds Threat Narratives

Terms like “mass migration,” “waves,” “surge,” “flood,” and “border crisis” dehumanize people by depicting them as natural disasters and push audiences toward authoritarian responses. Use specific, human-centered language instead.

- ✓ “As climate impacts intensify, more families will need support to adapt, whether they stay or move.”
- ✗ “The climate crisis will trigger unprecedented waves of mass migration.”

## Frame Migration as a Solution and a Form of Climate Adaptation

Migration is not a problem to be prevented – it is a legitimate human response to changing conditions, and one community has always practiced. Our cohort and the broader literature consistently confirm that framing climate action as a tool for “preventing migration” is both morally wrong and strategically harmful.

- ✓ “Climate resilience means supporting communities to adapt where they are AND creating safe pathways for those who need to move.”
- ✗ “We need climate action to prevent mass migration.”

## Assert Human Rights – Don't Debate Them

Rather than defending against attacks, assert what's right. Lead with rights declarations, not rebuttals. Note that in authoritarian contexts, rights-based frameworks alone have limits – as our cohort partners in Buffalo and Miami have experienced firsthand. Grounding rights in concrete, local values and relationships matters.

- ✓ “Every person deserves dignity and safety, regardless of where they were born.”
- ✗ “Seeking asylum is not illegal, and immigrants are not criminals.”

## Use an Active Voice to Name who is Responsible

Passive constructions obscure accountability and leave a vacuum the opposition fills with scapegoats. Name the politicians, corporations, and industries making harmful choices (the fossil fuel companies that caused the climate crisis, the private contractors profiting from detention, the officials choosing to separate families).

- ✓ “This administration has chosen to separate families. A policy that serves no one except private detention contractors.”
- ✗ “Families are being separated at the border.”

## Universalize Movement as a Human Experience – Carefully

Connect migration to universal human experience. However, avoid “this could happen to you” framing, which provokes self-preservation rather than solidarity. It also obscures the deep inequalities that make some communities far more vulnerable than others.

- ✓ “Throughout human history, people have moved to find safety and opportunity – it's how our ancestors built the communities we cherish today.”
- ✗ “You could be a refugee too if climate change gets bad enough.”

## Tell Personal Stories. Avoid Large Numbers.

Statistics and future projections create fear. Personal stories create empathy. Large numbers are also a form of dehumanization. When the Miami cohort talks about what actually shifts people's views, it comes back to this every time: “The only thing we've heard that shifts any kind of narrative is the direct connection.” If data is needed, wrap it in values-based framing – never lead with it.

- ✓ “Beatriz, a mother of two young boys, and her family faced an impossible choice when rising sea levels made their town unlivable...”
- ✗ “Climate change could displace 1 billion people this century.”

# REPORTING SUGGESTIONS FOR JOURNALISTS

These principles are about **accurate, effective journalism**

## REPORTING TIPS

1. **Ask:** “What’s most important about this story to you? What gets overlooked?”
2. **Ask:** “What would you want celebrated in this story?”
3. **Ask:** “Who else should I talk to?”
4. **Take time** to build relationships. Frontline communities have often been misrepresented.
5. **Listen** for complexity, abundance, and joy—not just trauma.
6. **Position** community members as the experts and leaders they are, not victims.

## COMMON PITFALLS

1. **“Both-Sides” False Balance** when one side dehumanizes people.
2. **Extractive Interviewing** where sources are “tapped” for quotes without relationship-building.
3. **Savior Narratives** where white-led orgs are heroes saving Black or Brown people.
4. **Techno-Solutionism** focusing only on technology, not community-led solutions.
5. **Doom Framing** with no paths forward.
6. **Poverty Porn** focusing only on suffering without joy, complexity, or agency.
7. **Tokenization** including one person of color to check a box.
8. **ANY “Illegal” Language**, even in negation.



# CLOSING REFLECTIONS

## WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

This guide has been built from the ground up – from the research, from the lived experiences of frontline organizations in Buffalo, Miami, and the Bay Area, and from the broader body of work that the immigrant and climate justice movements have produced over years of narrative experimentation and organizing. Taken together, these materials show we are at an inflection point, and the narratives we choose right now will shape what becomes possible.

### **The Opportunities are Real**

Across every source we examined, a consistent set of openings emerged. Stories of joy, agency, and collective resistance – not just harm and crisis – are proven to move even skeptical audiences. The intersections of climate and migration are no longer abstract; in Miami, Buffalo, and the Bay Area, communities are already living them, and their experiences offer compelling and credible narratives available to the movement. Cultural moments, from community dinners to public art to faith celebrations, offer powerful entry points that reach people where policy language cannot. And the appetite for a bigger, more connected narrative ecosystem – one that links community organizers, artists, journalists, and funders around shared values – has never been greater.

### **The Challenges are Significant**

Rights-based frameworks are proving insufficient in a moment when rights themselves are being openly violated. Communities

are emotionally exhausted by crisis-only storytelling with no visible path forward. The communications infrastructure that immigrant communities depend on has been decimated, replaced by platforms that spread misinformation faster than trust can be built. And the diversity within migrant communities – Central American Indigenous families, Congolese refugees, Southeast Asian elders, undocumented workers, domestic climate migrants – means there is no single story, no single messenger, no single channel that reaches everyone. Any guide that pretends otherwise will fail the people it's meant to serve.

There is also a structural challenge: Narrative work remains underfunded, undervalued, and often treated as secondary to policy and legal work, even though the research is clear that without narrative power, policy wins are temporary. Artists and cultural workers remain dramatically underused across the movement.

# NEXT STEPS

For organizations and communicators putting this guide into practice, we suggest focusing on the following:

- ✔ **Invest in Story Infrastructure, Not Just Stories.** Identify the trusted channels – WhatsApp networks, audio-visual formats, peer-to-peer communication, multilingual media – through which your community actually exchanges information, and build there. A powerful story that reaches no one changes nothing.
- ✔ **Center the Storytellers Who Are Closest to the Experience.** Make space for immigrants and migrants to tell their own stories, in their own languages and forms. Engage immigrant-led groups and artists as full partners, not sources to be quoted or represented.
- ✔ **Shift from Crisis to Vision.** Move toward content that models the future you want to see – neighbors protecting neighbors, communities building climate-resilient infrastructure together, people with full agency making decisions about their own lives. Testing consistently shows that this future-facing, values-rooted content outperforms fear-based crisis framing, even with “law-and-order” audiences.
- ✔ **Name the Villains.** Vague system-blaming is less effective than clear storytelling that identifies who is profiting from militarized borders, from climate inaction, from the exploitation of undocumented workers. Audiences respond to stories with protagonists and antagonists – give them both.

- ✔ **Build Across Movements, Not Just Within Them.** The climate and migrant justice movements share common adversaries, common values, and increasingly common constituencies. The full potential of this intersection has not yet been realized. Sustained investment in cross-movement narrative alignment – between organizations, between cities, between funders – is one of the highest-leverage actions available. There also needs to be further deepening work at the intersections including around domestic U.S. climate migration as an underserved reality requiring deeper narrative attention.
- ✔ **Think in Years, Not Campaigns.** Narrative change is cumulative. The organizations and funders that have made the biggest impact have committed to multi-year efforts, with dedicated space for experimentation, failure, and iteration. Short-term messaging campaigns, however well-crafted, cannot substitute for long-term narrative ecosystem building.

The work documented in this guide – from the focus groups in Miami to the organizing spaces in Buffalo to the multilingual zines produced in the Bay Area – represents something worth protecting and growing. As climate impacts continue to displace families and reshape communities, this work becomes not just timely but essential – because climate resilience is inseparable from migrant justice. The people at the center of these stories are not waiting for perfect narratives. They are building resilience, demanding dignity, and creating the future right now.