



ADAPTING TO A CHANGING CLIMATE

How collaboration addresses unique challenges
in climate-change and environmental reporting

By Caroline Porter

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Center for Cooperative Media | Montclair State University

About the Center for Cooperative Media



The Center for Cooperative Media is a grant-funded program based at the School of Communication and Media at Montclair State University. Its mission is to grow and strengthen local journalism in New Jersey and beyond.

The Center for Cooperative Media's flagship program is the NJ News Commons, which is a network of nearly 300 publishers and dozens of freelancers in the state of New Jersey. The Center's work for the NJ News Commons focuses on regular communication and networking, training, coaching and support, grant opportunities, ecosystem research, coordinating collaborative projects and more.

Nationally, the Center studies, researches and advocates for the practice of collaborative journalism, which includes maintenance of collaborativejournalism.org, an international database of collaborative reporting projects, a monthly newsletter, the publication of research studies and whitepapers and the annual Collaborative Journalism Summit.

The Center's work is supported by operational funding from Montclair State University, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Democracy Fund, the New Jersey Local News Lab Fund (a partnership of the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Democracy Fund, and Community Foundation of New Jersey) and the Abrams Foundation.

To learn more about the Center and its work, visit www.centerforcooperativemedia.org and www.collaborativejournalism.org.

About the Author



Caroline Porter is a journalist and media strategist. Her consulting work largely focuses on business models for journalism, working with media companies, academic institutions and others on subjects such as newsletter strategy, partnership models and fundraising.

Prior to launching her consultancy, Ralstin Agency, Caroline worked as a staff reporter for The Wall Street Journal in the Chicago and Los Angeles bureaus, covering U.S. news and education.

Caroline has also produced animated videos on news literacy and served as an adjunct lecturer at Northwestern University's Medill School.

Most recently, she produced an audio program on homelessness in Los Angeles and Berlin for The Big Pond, a podcast from the Goethe Institute and distributed by PRX.

About this report

This report is part of a series of research and guides related to collaborative journalism produced in 2020 by the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University, thanks to generous support from Rita Allen Foundation.

The Rita Allen Foundation invests in transformative ideas in their earliest stages to leverage their growth and promote breakthrough solutions to significant problems.

Introduction

It was 2012, the year of Superstorm Sandy, record heat and persistent drought¹, and Bernadette Woods Placky was staring down two discordant facts. First, meteorologists were consistently voted the most trusted sources of news in their communities; and second, about half of meteorologists were convinced that climate change was real, according to a 2010 national survey produced by George Mason University's Center for Climate Change Communication². The other half either did not believe in climate change, or they weren't sure what to believe.

"That was the work that had to be done," said Woods Placky, who directs the Climate Matters program for Climate Central, an independent organization of scientists and journalists. She and her team saw the latter group as a missing puzzle piece to help Americans confront the biggest issue of the day, climate change. She began hosting workshops, connecting scientists with meteorologists, and sending emails highlighting the stories that meteorologists create related to climate change.

Such was the development of Climate Matters, a collaboration between scientists and meteorologists to report on the changing environment. By the end of 2012, 22 meteorologists were working with Climate Matters on TV pieces. Fast-forward to 2019, and 800 meteorologists and 388 journalists partnered with Climate Matters to produce climate stories that year.

"Climate change was like a big hairy monster in the corner that people just avoided," said Woods Placky. "The more we had conversations about it, the more [journalists] realized they were already telling these stories; they just were not making the connection to climate change."

Climate-reporting collaborations, in which a news organization or journalist joins forces with other news organizations or affiliated groups to cover climate change and the environment, have rapidly expanded over the past decade. This report provides an overview of this trend; it establishes reasons why collaboration is well-suited to address the unique challenges of reporting on climate change and the environment; and finally, this research outlines potential opportunities and needs within this subfield for journalists and funders to consider.

¹ (3 Jan. 2013), "Top 10 Weather and Climate Events of 2012," Climate Central, accessed at: <https://www.climatecentral.org/gallery/graphics/top-10-weather-and-climate-events-of-2012>.

² Maibach, E., Wilson, K & Witte, J. (29 March 2010), "A National Survey of Television Meteorologists about Climate Change: Preliminary Findings." George Mason University. Fairfax, VA: Center for Climate Change Communication, accessed at: http://www.climatechangecommunication.org/resources_reports.cfm.

Conditions for climate-reporting collaborations

At least two contextual variables have set the conditions for climate-reporting collaborations to thrive.

To begin, the journalism industry has gone through immense upheaval in the past two decades. As the transition to online platforms decimated the predictable revenue streams of advertising and subscriptions, fast changes in technology and reader habits forced deep structural changes within the newsroom. News consumers became increasingly comfortable with a variety of sources for their information, leaving news outlets with less dependable readership and strapped for resources and relevancy. These broad shifts in the media landscape spurred an increase in collaboration among news outlets, with some of the biggest stories of the past decade stemming from collaboration (e.g. Stonbely, 2017). Perhaps the best known example is the Panama Papers, in which newsrooms large and small across the globe worked together to expose one of the most wide-reaching financial crimes to date. More than 100 media outlets, working in 25 languages and across almost 80 countries, worked on the year-long project³.

Meanwhile, interest in climate change and the environment has spiked. According to a 2019 survey by the Pew Research Center, a majority of Americans believe they have witnessed some effect of climate change where they live⁴, and Millennial and Gen Z Republicans were twice as likely as Republicans in the Baby Boomer or older generations to agree with the statement that the Earth is warming due to human activity⁵. A recent 2020 report shows that the percentage of Americans who believe global climate change is a top priority jumped to 52% from 38% in the past four years⁶.

Newsrooms have struggled to address the uptick in audience interest because the number of staff reporters assigned to cover the environment dropped in recent years, due to cuts and downsizing. “We don’t have as many environmental journalists as we used to have,” said Bruno Takahashi, associate professor of environmental journalism and communication at Michigan State University and research director of the Knight Center for Environmental Journalism. “On the other hand, we have a lot more coverage of environmental issues,” said Takahashi, referencing the mounting number of climate-related breaking-news events, often covered by

³ “The Panama Papers — About the investigation,” International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, accessed at: <https://www.icij.org/investigations/panama-papers/pages/panama-papers-about-the-investigation/>.

⁴ Funk, C. and Hefferon, M. (25 Nov. 2019), “U.S. Public Views on Climate and Energy,” Pew Research Center, accessed at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2019/11/25/u-s-public-views-on-climate-and-energy/>.

⁵ Funk, C. and Hefferon, M. (25 Nov. 2019), “Millennial and Gen Z Republicans stand out from their elders on climate and energy issues,” Pew Research Center, accessed at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/11/25/younger-republicans-differ-with-older-party-members-on-climate-change-and-energy-issues/>.

⁶ Johnson, C. and Kennedy, B. (28 Feb. 2020), “More Americans see climate change as a priority, but Democrats are much more concerned than Republicans,” Pew Research Center, accessed at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/02/28/more-americans-see-climate-change-as-a-priority-but-democrats-are-much-more-concerned-than-republicans/>.

general-assignment reporters. “In some instances, the lack of specialization in legacy media can lead to mistakes in reporting,” he concluded.

Takahaski pointed to membership changes within the Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ). A 2018 survey of the members of the Society of Environmental Journalists found that 47 percent of survey respondents were freelance reporters, 20 percent were salaried, beat reporters and 8 percent were salaried, general reporters.⁷

⁷ Maibach, E., Craig, R., Yagatich, W., Murphy, J., Patzer, S., & Timm, K. (2018). “Climate Matters in the Newsroom: Society of Environmental Journalists Member Survey, 2018,” Center for Climate Change Communication, George Mason University, accessed at: <https://doi.org/10.13021/G8S97H>.

Tracking the increasing popularity of climate-reporting collaborations

In response, climate-reporting collaborations are well-positioned to address the increase in audience interest and the decrease in newsroom capacity. Through a field scan of 40 climate-reporting collaborations dating to 2008 and based predominantly in the U.S., as well as more than 20 interviews with practitioners, funders, and academics, our research finds that climate-reporting collaborations have become more frequent.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	aa	ab	ac	ad	ae	af	ag	ah	ai	aj	ak	al	am	an	ao	ap	aq	ar	as	at	au	av	aw	ax	ay	az	ba	bb	bc	bd	be	bf	bg	bh	bi	bj	bk	bl	bm	bn	bo	bp	bq	br	bs	bt	bu	bv	bw	bx	by	bz	ca	cb	cc	cd	ce	cf	cg	ch	ci	cj	ck	cl	cm	cn	co	cp	cq	cr	cs	ct	cu	cv	cw	cx	cy	cz	da	db	dc	dd	de	df	dg	dh	di	dj	dk	dl	dm	dn	do	dp	dq	dr	ds	dt	du	dv	dw	dx	dy	dz	ea	eb	ec	ed	ee	ef	eg	eh	ei	ej	ek	el	em	en	eo	ep	eq	er	es	et	eu	ev	ew	ex	ey	ez	fa	fb	fc	fd	fe	ff	fg	fh	fi	fj	fk	fl	fm	fn	fo	fp	fq	fr	fs	ft	fu	fv	fw	fx	fy	fz	ga	gb	gc	gd	ge	gf	gg	gh	gi	gj	gk	gl	gm	gn	go	gp	gq	gr	gs	gt	gu	gv	gw	gx	gy	gz	ha	hb	hc	hd	he	hf	hg	hh	hi	hj	hk	hl	hm	hn	ho	hp	hq	hr	hs	ht	hu	hv	hw	hx	hy	hz	ia	ib	ic	id	ie	if	ig	ih	ii	ij	ik	il	im	in	io	ip	iq	ir	is	it	iu	iv	iw	ix	iy	iz	ja	jb	jc	jd	je	jf	jj	jk	jl	jm	jn	jo	jp	jq	jr	js	jt	ju	jv	jw	jx	ky	kz	la	lb	lc	ld	le	lf	lg	lh	li	lj	lk	ll	lm	ln	lo	lp	lq	lr	ls	lt	lu	lv	lw	lx	ly	lz	ma	mb	mc	md	me	mf	mg	mh	mi	mj	mk	ml	mm	mn	mo	mp	mq	mr	ms	mt	mu	mv	mw	mx	my	mz	na	nb	nc	nd	ne	nf	ng	nh	ni	nj	nk	nl	nm	nn	no	np	nq	nr	ns	nt	nu	nv	nw	nx	ny	nz	oa	ob	oc	od	oe	of	og	oh	oi	oj	ok	ol	om	on	oo	op	oq	or	os	ot	ou	ov	ow	ox	oy	oz	pa	pb	pc	pd	pe	pf	pg	ph	pi	pj	pk	pl	pm	pn	po	pp	pq	pr	ps	pt	pu	pv	pw	px	py	pz	qa	qb	qc	qd	qe	qf	qg	qh	qi	qj	qk	ql	qm	qn	qo	qp	qq	qr	qs	qt	qu	qv	qw	qx	qy	qz	ra	rb	rc	rd	re	rf	rg	rh	ri	rj	rk	rl	rm	rn	ro	rp	rq	rr	rs	rt	ru	rv	rw	rx	ry	rz	sa	sb	sc	sd	se	sf	sg	sh	si	sj	sk	sl	sm	sn	so	sp	sq	sr	ss	st	su	sv	sw	sx	sy	sz	ta	tb	tc	td	te	tf	tg	th	ti	tj	tk	tl	tm	tn	to	tp	tq	tr	ts	tt	tu	tv	tw	tx	ty	tz	ua	ub	uc	ud	ue	uf	ug	uh	ui	uj	uk	ul	um	un	uo	up	uq	ur	us	ut	uu	uv	uw	ux	uy	uz	va	vb	vc	vd	ve	vf	vg	vh	vi	vj	vk	vl	vm	vn	vo	vp	vq	vr	vs	vt	vu	vv	vw	vx	vy	vz	wa	wb	wc	wd	we	wf	wg	wh	wi	wj	wk	wl	wm	wn	wo	wp	wq	wr	ws	wt	wu	wv	ww	wx	wy	wz	xa	xb	xc	xd	xe	xf	xg	xh	xi	xj	xk	xl	xm	xn	xo	xp	xq	xr	xs	xt	xu	xv	xw	xx	xy	xz	ya	yb	yc	yd	ye	yf	yg	yh	yi	yj	yk	yl	ym	yn	yo	yp	yq	yr	ys	yt	yu	yv	yw	yx	yy	yz	za	zb	zc	zd	ze	zf	zg	zh	zi	zj	zk	zl	zm	zn	zo	zp	zq	zr	zs	zt	zu	zv	zw	zx	zy	zz
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Climate Central	2008	Ongoing	Integrated	Facilitator	2020+	12 x			evolving project, Climate Matters	https://www.climatecentral.org/partners/journalism																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																							
The Climate Desk	2009	Ongoing	Separate	Syndication	2020+	11 x			Mother Jones started about wood-burning stoves, fire and local newspaper	https://www.climatedesk.org/about-us/																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																							
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Harvest Public Media	2010	Ongoing	Cocreating	Resource Sharing	2020+	10			published under CC license - UK based impact tracker on each story	https://www.harvestpublicmedia.org/about-us																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																							
Carbonbrief	2010	Ongoing	Separate	Syndication	2020+	10			"boutique news development studio"	https://www.carbonbrief.org/																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																							
Food & Environment Reporting Network (FERN)	2010	Ongoing	Separate	Facilitator	2020+	10 x			CPB, radio; broken link; interview said 2011	https://thefern.org/what-we-do/																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																							
EarthFix	2011	CLOSED	Separate	Resource Sharing	2018	7 x			share button / cc license	https://earthfix.com/about/overview/																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																							
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Room, North America's Explosive Oil-by-Rail Problem	2014	Temporary	Integrated	Feature Partnership	2014	1				http://stories.weather.com/room																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																							
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Climate News Network	2014	Ongoing	Separate	Resource Sharing	2020+	6			4 freelancer reporters	https://climate.newsnetwork.net/support/																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																							
Dirty Little Secrets	2015	Temporary	Cocreating	Syndication	2015	1			Foundation, CCM, "Switch"	https://medium.com/dirty-little-secrets																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																							
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One River, Many Stories	2015	Temporary	Separate	Syndication	2015	1			41 public vs. same day model	http://www.onecivillife.com/one-river-many-stories/																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																							
Hell and High Water	2016	Temporary	Integrated	Feature Partnership	2016	1			Texas Tribune and ProPublica	https://projects.propublica.org/houston/																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																							
Great Lakes Today	2016	CLOSED	Cocreating	Resource Sharing	2019	3			Foundation, radio	http://greatlakes.today/about-great-lakes-today																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																							
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PODCAST: ELES - Enlace por la Justicia Energética y Socioambiental	2017	Temporary	Integrated	Feature Partnership	2017	1			radio NGO partnered w/ 2 groups to make a podcast	https://pod.org.ar/podcasts/periodicos-en-la-argentina-de-los-hoy/																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																							
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InsideClimate News - National Reporting Network	2018	Ongoing	Integrated	Facilitator	2020+	2 x				https://insideclimatenews.org/national-reporting-network																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																							
Sucked Dry - Water Journalists Africa	2018	Ongoing	Separate	Feature Partnership	2020+	2			Pultzer Center	https://pultzercenter.org/projects/sucked-dry-land-grabs-and-water-access-in-the-dry-basin/																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																							
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Climate Collection (Evolution and NYT)	2019	Temporary	Cocreating	Product Creation	2019	1			earth day - clothing	https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/22/us/politics/climate-collection/																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																							
From the Source - Delaware River	2019	Ongoing	Cocreating	Feature Partnership	2020+	1			Nat Geo	https://fromthesource.org/																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																							
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Exhibit A: A screenshot of the evolving Climate-Reporting Collaborations Tracker produced in spring 2020 on behalf of the Center for Cooperative Media.

In examining journalism collaborations that focused on climate change and the environment, we found that some explicitly addressed climate change as the main subject (e.g. The Climate Desk), while others (e.g. EarthFix) focused on environmental issues, within which climate change was a recurring subject.⁸

⁸ The phrase "climate reporting" is used by several reporting organizations, e.g. InsideClimate News, Covering Climate Now and Yale Climate Connections. In interviews with academic researchers, we found that "climate reporting" can be seen as a middle path between "environmental reporting" and "climate-change reporting."

New Climate-Reporting Collaborations By Year

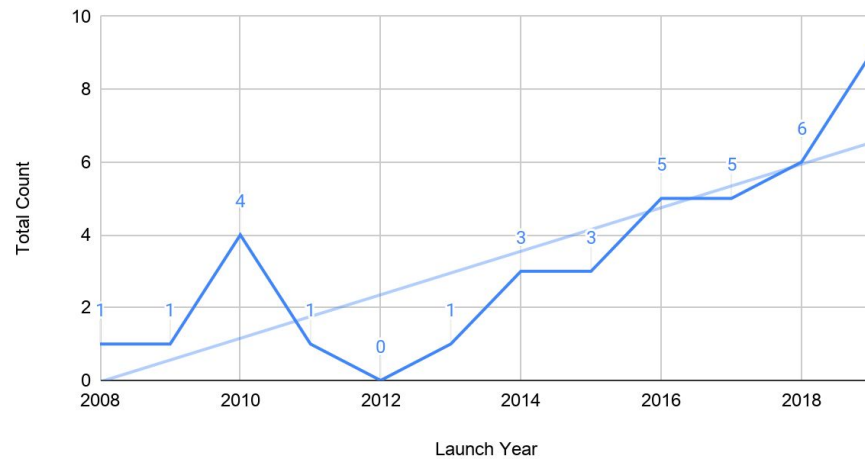
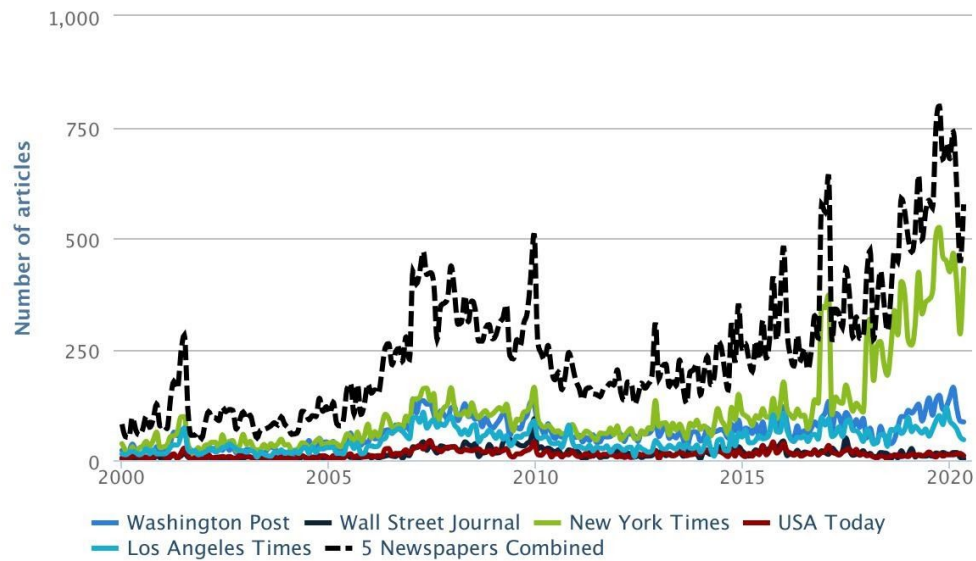


Exhibit B: Based on findings from the Climate-Reporting Collaborations Tracker, the number of climate-reporting collaborations increased sharply in 2010 and then again in 2019.

2000–2020 United States Newspaper Coverage of Climate Change or Global Warming



CIRES Center for Science and Technology Policy Research, University of Colorado Boulder, http://sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/media_coverage

Exhibit C: Trends in climate-change coverage mirror the trends in the launches of climate-reporting collaborations (CIRES Center for Science and Technology Policy Research, University of Colorado Boulder).

In 2010, an initial spike of new climate-reporting collaborations coincided with the launch of Local Journalism Centers (LJCs) by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). These Centers function as regional collaborations in which public radio and television stations share reporters and editors who report on regional, sometimes subject-specific, issues.

In total, the project entails 38 journalism collaborations among 125 public radio and television stations in 42 states, with an investment of \$39 million since 2010⁹. At least six of the LJCs dedicated focus to the environment and climate issues: Alaska's Energy Desk, EarthFix, Harvest Public Media, Inside Energy, Ohio Valley ReSource and StateImpact Pennsylvania.

Since then, the industry has increasingly relied on collaborative models to report on climate change and the environment at the local, national and international levels, according to the Climate-Reporting Collaborations Tracker produced in spring 2020 on behalf of the Center for Cooperative Media. The following research addresses why and how organizations have produced news in this way.

⁹ Merritt, K. (15 May 2020), "A Decade in Public Media Collaborations," Corporation for Public Broadcasting, [Conference session]. Collaborative Journalism Summit 2020, Montclair State University.

Climate-specific reasons for journalism collaborations

Earlier research has documented the growing interest in collaborative journalism and its increase in use throughout the field (Stonbely, 2017). In this report we show how different forms of collaboration uniquely address the complexities of climate-reporting journalism, for the five reasons outlined below.

Reason 1: Greater reach helps dismantle climate-change denial

After years of quoting climate-change deniers in the name of journalistic norms of objectivity and balance, news consumers have been trained to focus on whether or not climate change is a natural or human-made phenomenon, fueling climate-change denial. Through collaboration, media organizations are better positioned to transcend that era and pattern of news-reporting, ultimately working to alleviate media distrust.

There are at least three ways that collaboration can reduce the noise around issues of bias and mistrust that climate reporting can encounter: first, by humanizing the news; second, by pooling together media organizations' trust and credibility; and third, by producing complex stories beyond the standard political narrative.

Reason 1A: Humanizing the news

First, by drawing from more resources and sources, climate-reporting collaborations can reimagine the standard news story to be more about people and how they are affected by climate change, making climate-change denial harder to uphold.

John Upton, Climate Central's journalism partnerships editor, explained a guiding principle of Climate Central's storytelling. "We don't do stories about science or data; we do stories about people," said Upton, noting that as a general rule, every story's opening sentence must be about people, rather than scientific surveys or statistics.

In his role as journalism partnerships editor, Upton hires science journalists to report out information from Climate Central's data sets, and then together, they approach local reporters on the ground to provide local angles to the investigative and feature stories.

The Florida Climate Reporting Network began as a way to syndicate climate-reporting content across five Florida newspapers, and now is in the midst of two more ambitious collaborative projects to share reporting, pulling colorful stories from Network members reporting on the ground. Julie Anderson, editor-in-chief of the *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, editor-in-chief of the

Orlando Sentinel, and a cofounder of the Network, said, “We realize the issue with climate change, especially in Florida, is that people are overwhelmed by the topic ... we want to make it approachable and interesting with everyday examples.”



Offering more diverse perspectives of those impacted by climate change and putting faces on the stories of climate change make the subject more relatable to news consumers, making it harder to uphold climate-change denial.

Reason 1B: Pooling together media organizations' credibility

Second, participating organizations benefit from other partner organizations' credibility with audiences when they collaborate, helping to negate climate-change skepticism. When environment correspondent and author Mark Hertsgaard reached out to his editor at *The Nation* with an idea about partnering with other news organizations on climate reporting, he said that his next call was to an organization that embodies trust. “I then called Kyle Pope, editor-in-chief and publisher of *Columbia Journalism Review (CJR)*,” said Hertsgaard.

Together they co-founded Covering Climate Now, a global journalism initiative to transform media coverage of the climate story by, for instance, sharing stories across a wide variety of local, national and international journalism outlets. “*CJR* is the imprimatur, the conscience of the news business,” he said. “Without *CJR*, I am 100 percent sure there’s no way we could have attracted so many partners.”

Not only does trust beget trust on the national level, it also improves trust on the local level. Lyndsey Gilpin, founder of *Southerly*, a nonprofit outlet reporting on ecology, justice and culture in the American South, said that she benefits from working with hyperlocal news outlets because community papers already have the trust of local readers. “How do we get information out to people about climate change that doesn’t divide them more? There’s no way in the world of nonprofit journalism to try to build trust without collaborating with people who have that trust,” she said.



Climate-reporting collaborations can engender greater trust from audiences by working together, alleviating climate-change denial.

Reason 1C: Brainstorming beyond the political paradigm

Third, working together can combat climate-change denial by focusing instead on actual changes in climate rather than the politics of climate change, mitigating ideological reasons for skepticism. In 2009, following the Copenhagen Summit and in the wake of the 2008 recession, the editors at *Mother Jones* convened a group of eight editors from different publications in San Francisco to discuss a course correction for climate-change coverage.

The result was The Climate Desk collaboration, which now boasts 18 news organizations that share stories and reporting. “We saw it as a failure of the media in how this was being covered,” said Monika Bauerlein, now CEO of *Mother Jones*. “The worst habits of political journalism were being applied to what should not be a political story ... We asked, ‘Could we come out of our defensive, competitive crouches and work on this together? The whole would be greater than the sum of its parts, and the downside of not competing head-to-head would be far outweighed by the upside.’”



Climate-reporting collaborations can more easily step outside the binary political paradigm for reporting on climate change, reducing the time given to climate-change denial.

Reason 2: Leveraging combined resources to reach experts

One strength of collaborative journalism is that it allows individual news organizations to play to their distinct strengths. When a local news organization with a thick rolodex of on-the-ground sources can partner with a data- or visual-heavy news organization, the whole project benefits from stronger reporting on both fronts.

With climate reporting this is especially crucial; working together can increase expertise and understanding for a subject that is complex, detail-driven and especially subject to the scrutiny and wariness of news consumers.

An early collaborative organization, the Food & Environment Reporting Network (FERN), launched in 2010, and works “akin to a small film production studio,” according to Editor-in-Chief Samuel Fromartz. He said FERN leverages its deep subject-area knowledge and network of freelance writers to craft story pitches and then partner with specific news outlets on those pitches. “When we first started out, I thought the attraction would be helping underwrite the cost

of the story,” said Fromartz. “Actually what I’ve learned is ... what they really appreciate is our knowledge, expertise and ability to manage the project.”

He said he has seen firsthand how news organizations increasingly rely on FERN to work together on specialized and investigative stories. “Every major news company is looking for collaboration ... Staff has been so decimated [that] no one has time to search out good stories or reporters,” he said. “I think that’s why places are approaching us now.”

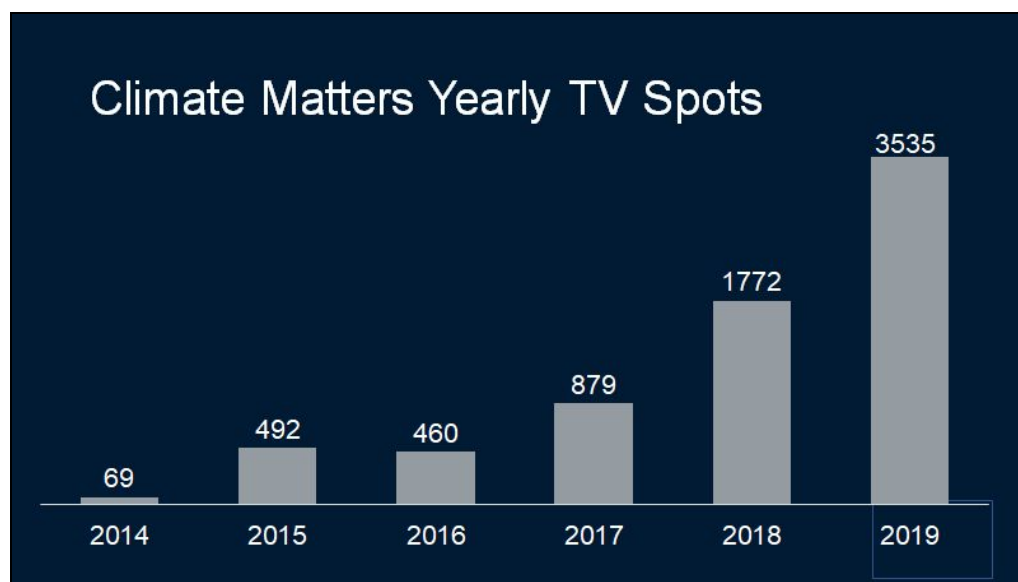


Exhibit D: In the above chart provided by Climate Central, the number of climate-reporting TV segments produced with local meteorologists has increased significantly since 2014.

Another example of a climate-reporting collaboration that focuses on increased access to experts is Climate Central. As a “climate science research and communications nongovernmental organization,” Climate Central establishes a link between scientists and reporters, providing new research and data, as well as sources and fact-checking. Climate Central’s program targeting local meteorologists, Climate Matters, began in 2010 and has since expanded to work directly with local news outlets and reporters.

A more recent example is SciLine, which began in fall 2017 and provides services to journalists reporting on science-related issues, which include climate news as well as other subject areas, such as social and behavioral sciences. Based at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the heartbeat of SciLine’s program is its matching service, in which a journalist can ask for help connecting to scientists for scientific information or context.

As of June 2020, the organization had fulfilled more than 1,200 direct requests for scientist-sources from reporters. For the month of June, about 75% of incoming requests came from local news outlets. For the calendar year of 2018, it was 20%, and for 2019, it was 40%.

“Journalism and science have a lot in common: getting the facts right is important, being first is important,” said Rick Weiss, director of SciLine. “We have fun; it is a pleasure for us to be in the cultural nexus where we get to play the matchmaking game, and we try to make for good relationships.”



Collaboration uniquely addresses a chronic challenge in climate reporting, the need for robust understanding of science and related fields, by connecting reporters more easily with the information and sources they need to tell thorough and accurate stories.

Reason 3: Force-multiplying the visibility of climate change

Whether observing the uptick in natural disasters¹⁰ or reading scientific reports that model the impact of global warming¹¹, it is evident that climate change is an increasingly urgent story, and one that is growing in visibility. In an acknowledgement of climate journalism’s value and significance, the Online News Association announced in April 2020 the addition of a climate-change reporting award to its roster of awards¹².

A Media Impact Funders report released in June 2020 on environmental media grantmaking found that between 2009 and 2019, U.S.-based funders made \$81 million in media grants for climate change alone, pointing to increased investments that reflect the need for fast action.¹³ One benefit of climate-reporting collaboration is that it can respond with unique speed and scale.

¹⁰ Reidmiller, D.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, K.L.M. Lewis, T.K. Maycock, and B.C. Stewart (eds.) (2018), “Impacts, Risks, and Adaptation in the United States: Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume II,” U.S. Global Change Research Program, accessed at:

<https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/chapter/front-matter-about/#chfront-matter-about-1>.

¹¹V. Masson-Delmotte, P. Zhai, H. O. Pörtner, D. Roberts, J. Skea, P. R. Shukla, A. Pirani, W. Moufouma-Okia, C. Péan, R. Pidcock, S. Connors, J. B. R. Matthews, Y. Chen, X. Zhou, M. I. Gomis, E. Lonnoy, T. Maycock, M. Tignor, T. Waterfield (eds.) (2019), “Global warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty,” World Meteorological Organization, accessed at: https://report.ipcc.ch/sr15/pdf/sr15_spm_final.pdf.

¹² (29 April 2020), “Prizes for climate change reporting and newsletters join the lineup for the 2020 Online Journalism Awards,” Online News Association, accessed at: <https://journalists.org/2020/04/29/prizes-for-climate-change-reporting-and-newsletters-join-the-lineup-for-the-2020-online-journalism-awards/>.

¹³ Armour-Jones, S. (11 June 2020), “Environmental Media Grantmaking: How Funders Are Tipping the Scales Toward Change,” Media Impact Funders, accessed at: https://mediaimpactfunders.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/EnvironmentalMediaGrantmakingReport_ver8.pdf.

Working together can move climate-change and environmental stories up the reporting agenda, expedite the reporting process, and often scale across audiences, leading to faster and more visible results. Plus with more attention and journalists on a story, access to sources increases.

One popular form of climate-reporting collaboration is the syndication model, in which partner news organizations cross-publish each other's work for free. The Climate Desk, Climate News Network and Covering Climate Now all leverage some version of this collaboration.



Working together can . . . expedite the reporting process, and often scale across audiences, leading to faster and more visible results.



Hertsgaard, executive director of Covering Climate Now, said that the fact of their collaboration led to an exclusive on-camera interview with UN Secretary-General António Guterres in September 2019.

“That interview would never have happened in the first place if we hadn’t gone to the secretary-general’s press people and said, ‘Look, we have over 300 outlets with a combined audience of over 1 billion people,’” said Hertsgaard.

“Collaborating with other media actually gave us all something that was very valuable, not only to us but to our audiences.”

Hertsgaard added that collaboration can also bump climate change higher on the

agenda for editors, as they see peer organizations covering the subject more. “Nobody wants to be behind the curve,” he said. “A lot of journalists knew that we needed to do much more and much better climate coverage but we weren’t,” said Hertsgaard. “What this project demonstrated was that there was and has been a critical mass within the mainstream media that knew we needed to do better and yet we weren’t.”

Now with more than 400 news outlets and a combined audience of roughly 2 billion people, Covering Climate Now produced its second week of joint coverage in April 2020 around the 50th anniversary of Earth Day.

A subject-based collaboration project called “From Rust to Resilience: What climate change means for Great Lakes cities,” launched in 2020 as part of the Institute for Nonprofit News’ Amplify News Project¹⁴. *Ensia*, a nonprofit environmental media outlet based in Minnesota, is a

¹⁴ McGowan, S. (20 April, 2020), “New INN-led member collaboration on Great Lakes launches today,” Institute for Nonprofit News, accessed at: <https://inn.org/2020/04/new-inn-led-member-collaboration-on-great-lakes-launches-today/>.

member of the collaboration. *Ensis* Editor-in-Chief Mary Hoff said that the experience has been positive so far. “It’s great to bounce ideas off each other,” she said. “We expand reach, and we also get to share content, get economies of scale, and not recreate the wheel.”



By encouraging collaboration among news outlets, climate-reporting collaboration creates a peer effect, moving the subject of climate change higher on the collective news agenda. This can lead to faster results at a wider scale, better addressing the public-serving mandate that journalism faces with climate change.

Reason 4: Crossing borders

Collaborative journalism reflects the nature of climate as a beat. Just like rivers, fault lines and mountain ranges, climate stories pay no attention to borders, like state lines. Collaboration among newsrooms in different cities, regions, and states allows reporters to track stories that also cross these borders; collaborating across newsrooms allows journalists to tell more complete stories.

Journalist and editor David Steves led a collaboration of public radio and broadcasting stations called EarthFix, focused on the environment in the Pacific Northwest. EarthFix, a Local Journalism Center (LJC) funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), boasted at its height seven full-time reporters, one full-time senior manager of community engagement, and one full-time editor, Steves.

This type of collaboration reflects a spoke-and-wheel structure, in which designated reporters and editors are at the center, sharing news stories with multiple outlets, which form the spokes.

One takeaway, according to Steves, was the capacity to produce regional reporting, rather than primarily hyperlocal stories. “The environment is a regional story,” he said. “The Columbia River is as much Oregon’s as Washington’s, which lends itself to that sort of collaboration.”

The collaboration began hiring in 2011 and officially closed by 2018. While operational, EarthFix provided stories across platform needs, which meant producing radio pieces, television segments and online stories. In addition, by reporting on the broader region, it was easier to pick up bigger climate stories rather than focusing on the smaller, play-by-play stories. One can see the forest *and* the trees.

Steves pointed out how climate-change journalism specifically benefited from this kind of collaborative reporting, as compared to another type of reporting, education journalism. “It’s my

impression that one [collaborative] that really flopped was the education desk,” he said. “It’s so locally driven, they struggled to find stories that were interesting; [readers] don’t care about another state’s textbook policy.”



By taking a wider reporting lens, climate-reporting collaboration can produce bigger and more complete stories of climate change and the environment.

Reason 5: Supporting checks and balances in the reporting process

While other reporting subjects also benefit from pooling resources, climate change in particular requires a deft touch, as two related trends collide. One, according to the U.S. 2018 national climate assessment, low-income communities are particularly at risk when it comes to harmful consequences of climate change¹⁵.

Two, local journalism ecosystems have suffered and in some places disappeared as the old business model collapsed over the past two decades, particularly in low-income areas (e.g. PEN America, 2019). Working together creates natural checks and balances with the participation of scientists, on-the-ground journalists and diverse partner organizations.

Collaboration can support a healthier ecosystem of climate reporting by decreasing the incidents of parachute journalism, according to Shady Grove Oliver, a local reporter covering the Arctic in Alaska. Oliver said that she receives regular calls and emails from national news outlets asking for names of sources to interview.

“At times it’s twice a week, sometimes it’s every other week, but it’s a constant,” she said. If instead, these national news outlets were reaching out to collaborate, the end result would be better reporting and better relationships with sources, she said. “These collaborations have to start at the beginning,” she said. “They cannot start because someone is struggling and needs a Band-Aid. Then it’s exploitative.”

Sebastián Auyanet, a journalist who partnered with AdaptNY as a community editor, said that climate-reporting collaborations create a different way to access people, such as through neighborhood networks, in order to truly engage change on the community level. “For reporting

¹⁵ Reidmiller, D.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, K.L.M. Lewis, T.K. Maycock, and B.C. Stewart (eds.) (2018), “Impacts, Risks, and Adaptation in the United States: Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume II,” U.S. Global Change Research Program, accessed at: <https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/chapter/14/#key-message-2>.

on these issues, you have to be part of a community in some sort of way,” he said. “You can be an investigative journalist but not rely on typical sourcing. People in these [affected] communities are tired of typical sourcing.”

Another type of climate-reporting collaborations are the collaborations in which distinct and separate news organizations work together on specific stories.

These collaborations are easy to spot by the sharing of bylines. Recent examples include the collaborations born of Connected Coastlines, a grant-funding opportunity organized by the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, as well as stand-alone projects like “Shallow Waters” by *Quartz* and *The Texas Observer*, and “Hell and High Water” by *ProPublica* and *The Texas Tribune*.

Steve Sapienza, senior strategist for collaborative projects at the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, manages the Connected Coastlines project, which houses 16 projects total and awarded grant funding ranging from \$5,000 to \$20,000, depending on the size and scope of the project.

Most grants totaled \$5,000 to \$10,000, according to Sapienza. “This idea that maybe you can organize separate newsrooms around vital issues and then share vital resources to ensure that there is a sustained, consistent coverage of a topic—that is starting to take shape,” he said.



By ensuring that climate journalism is not extractive, collaborative journalism can provide healthier checks and balances on the reporting process.

Conclusion and analysis: Opportunities and needs for journalists and funders

Through the course of this research, certain questions and ideas consistently cropped up. Below, the areas of opportunity and need are outlined with the goal to provide inspiration for both journalists and funders.

Resilience

With each climate-reporting collaboration, an inevitable question arises about the resilience of the project.

Max Boykoff, associate professor of environmental studies at the University of Colorado Boulder and fellow at the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Studies (CIRES), pointed to the decrease in climate-change reporting in spring 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic became the main story of the day.

“Improvements are fragile,” he said. “We picked up media coverage [of climate change or global warming] around the world that from 2018 as a whole to 2019 as a whole, had gone up 73 percent,” said Boykoff, referencing data analysis produced by the Media and Climate Change Observatory, a multi-university collaboration. Now in 2020, the media coverage of climate change or global warming decreased 59 percent from January to May, which he described as a stunning decline. “We need to build more resilient systems so they are not as vulnerable to shocks.”

Funding models for collaborations are key. With the example of EarthFix, the regional collaboration based in the Pacific Northwest, funding for the first few years of work was secured by the CPB grants. The intent was for news outlets to foot the bill after the CPB funding finished. According to Steves, three variables contributed to its closure.

One, news outlets’ needs changed over time, with one public television station merging with an online news outlet, and other stations deciding they had enough in-house capacity to do their own environmental reporting.

Two, several outlets dropped out as soon as the CPB funding ended, citing their inability to pay their part. Three, the fundraising arms of the stations chose to focus on raising money for their stations, rather than raising money explicitly for the collaborative journalism projects, making the brand management for EarthFix difficult, especially around fundraising.

Another aspect of resilience is the ability to adapt as needed. SciLine's Rick Weiss put it best when describing how his organization has shifted focus over time. "In one way, it's exactly what I anticipated: start with a few services but find out along the way what is really valuable, then bend and adapt," he said. In the case of SciLine he discovered that the program's matching service, putting reporters together with the appropriate scientist source, remains the most critical component.

Impact

An important question in research interviews for this project was asking interviewees how they measured their impact. The answers were nebulous. Organizations often track how often stories are shared on social media, who syndicates their work, and how many readers clicked on their stories. These are common metrics used within the news industry, but they fail to show comprehensive impact of the work.

Ensia offers a "republish" button that runs adjacent to its news stories and allows other organizations to copy the organization's work with the click of a button. Hoff said that some people use the button but it's not sufficient if they want their stories to get the broadest reach. "It doesn't work to throw things out there and hope someone somewhere will pick it up," she said. "It's a busy world." *Ensia* flags some of its stories to other publication partner organizations to ensure that they've seen *Ensia*'s latest work.

Gilpin of *Southerly* also said that she is actively considering better ways to measure impact by getting critical information into people's hands in other ways. "Republishing is one piece," she said. "Can we also facilitate the sharing of stories? We need to get more creative in the ways we distribute information so that it's accessible to people who need the information. Not everyone has time to read a 3,000 word story."

Industry standards

As news organizations learn to partner together, collaborators are building new systems and protocols. Yet partners are not always treated fairly, and there is an opportunity to develop protocols for how these collaborations can be equitable for all partners. Mat Hope, the UK editor of *DeSmog*, brought up issues when the small, nonprofit news organization was not credited for its investigative work in larger national publications. "We provide a lot of content for a small and dedicated beat, but when partnering with larger organizations there is no established way to ensure there is an equitable relationship when it comes to being given credit."

Another issue is final review and editing. "Collaborations work best when the one on the ground is leading it," said Gilpin. "It is kind of frustrating to partner with a big media company if it is still leading the coverage and the editing, because it defeats the purpose. They are still parachuting in; now it's in the editing or framing of the story."

Finally, with the speed and reach of cross-promotion, it's all the more critical to consider how to avoid spreading fabricated news stories when news outlets syndicate others' stories. While this has not been discovered as an issue in the course of this research, it poses a risk that would damage media credibility and trust. "Trusting newsrooms, and newsroom relationships, is the glue or the fuel for all partnerships," said Vernon Loeb, executive editor of InsideClimate News. "Obviously we look for reputable newsrooms who we can get to know, and we develop face-to-face relationships. It's one reason why conferences are so good."

These present new opportunities for template-building and industry standards about how to best work in a team, especially when a news organization is new to the mix.

Meta collaboration

Several interviewees entertained out loud the idea of creating a wire service for the collaborative, localized reporting they were producing, with the long-term goal of being able to charge for the news stories. Some type of wire service would also address another potential problem, which is repetitious stories. As the field of climate-reporting collaborations grows, a question of avoiding duplication arises. For instance, two different outlets are launching climate-reporting collaborations focused specifically on California agriculture. Is there room for those two collaborations to collaborate? This would qualify as meta collaboration.

Relatedly, others forecasted that next waves of collaboration will be with non-journalism players in local communities. How can these current collaborations expand their definition of partners beyond standard industry lines?

We look forward to seeing industry responses to these questions in the coming years.

Appendix A: Interviews

1. Julie Anderson, Editor-in-Chief, Sun Sentinel Media Group and Orlando Sentinel Media Group (via phone, May 20, 2020)
2. Sebastián Auyanet, Associate Producer, NowThis; Consultant, Sembramedia, The Membership Puzzle Project (via Zoom, May 27, 2020)
3. Monika Bauerlein, CEO, Mother Jones (via phone, March 9, 2020)
4. Max Boykoff, Associate Professor of Environmental Studies, University of Colorado Boulder; Fellow, Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Studies (CIRES) (via phone, April 14, 2020)
5. Heather Bryant, Founder and Director, Project Facet (via phone, March 20, 2020)
6. Samuel Fromartz, Editor-in-Chief, Food & Environment Reporting Network (via phone, April 10, 2020)
7. Lyndsey Gilpin, Founder and Editor-in-Chief, Southerly (via phone, May 20, 2020)
8. Becky Hazen, Associate Director, SciLine (via phone, May 6, 2020)
9. Mark Hertsgaard, Co-founder and Executive Director, Covering Climate Now (via phone, March 19, 2020)
10. Mary Hoff, Editor-in-Chief, Ensia (via phone, March 31, 2020)
11. Mat Hope, UK Editor, DeSmog (via Zoom, April 2, 2020)
12. Allison Kopicki, Researcher/Writer, Climate Central (via phone, March 3, 2020)
13. Joy Lin, Vice President, Journalism, Corporation for Public Broadcasting (via phone, May 18, 2020)
14. Vernon Loeb, Executive Editor, InsideClimate News (via phone, May 18, 2020)
15. Kathy Merritt, Senior Vice President, Journalism and Radio, Corporation for Public Broadcasting (via phone, June 2, 2020)
16. Shady Grove Oliver, Local Reporter Covering the Arctic in Alaska (via phone, April 8, 2020)
17. Steve Sapienza, Senior Strategist, Collaborative News Partnerships, Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting (via phone, March 23, 2020)
18. David Steves, Managing Editor, OPB Science & Environment; former Editor, EarthFix (via phone, April 15, 2020)
19. Bruno Takahashi, Associate Professor of Environmental Journalism and
20. Communication, Michigan State University, Research Director, Knight Journalism Center For Environmental Journalism (via phone, April 14, 2020)
21. John Upton, Journalism Partnerships Editor, Climate Central (via phone, March 10, 2020)
22. JoAnn M. Valenti, Founding academic member of SEJ; AAAS fellow and councilmember, emerita professor of science and environment communications (via phone, May 28, 2020)
23. Rick Weiss, Director, SciLine (via phone, May 6, 2020)
24. Bernadette Woods Placky, Director, Climate Matters and Chief Meteorologist, Climate Central (via phone, March 17, 2020)

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