
Covering Climate Now

Transforming News Coverage of the Climate Crisis ... and its Solutions

UN scientists declared in a landmark report in 2018 that avoiding global climate breakdown requires a radical transformation of the world's energy, transportation, agriculture, finance and other sectors by 2030. Covering Climate Now's mission is to transform the media sector. Our theory of change is that unless the world's most influential news outlets dramatically improve their climate coverage, there simply will not be the public awareness and political pressure needed to transform those other sectors at scale and in time.

Our Approach and Impact

Unlike previous efforts to improve news coverage of climate change, Covering Climate Now is organized by journalists, for journalists—so our newsroom colleagues across the US and around the world listen to us in a way they don't to outsiders. Our collaboration includes more than 400 news outlets with a combined audience of roughly 2 billion people. Together, we've helped some of the biggest names in news do more and better climate coverage. And we're just getting started.

Covering Climate Now works closely with newsrooms to up their game: to produce more frequent and accessible climate coverage, to give the climate story bigger play, to treat every newsroom beat—from politics and weather to business and more—as a climate beat, and to drive a public conversation that empowers people to act. In addition to providing story ideas, background trainings and best practices, we also share quality content among our partners, enabling all of them, regardless of their internal capacities, to give audiences insightful and timely coverage of the defining story of our time.

Co-founded by the *Columbia Journalism Review* and *The Nation* in association with *The Guardian*, Covering Climate Now's partners include three of the world's biggest news agencies—Reuters, Bloomberg, and Agence France Presse—each of which in turn provides content to thousands of other newsrooms. Other partners include CBS News, NBC and MSNBC News, PBS NewsHour, Univision, Telemundo, Al Jazeera; most of the biggest public radio stations in the US; many flagship newspapers and TV networks in the Americas, Europe, and Asia; and dozens of leading magazines and journals, such as *Nature*, *Rolling Stone*, *HuffPost*, *Teen Vogue*, *Harvard Business Review*, and *Scientific American*. We focus on big, mainstream news outlets, because that's where most





“Now more than ever it is important to cover one of the most pressing issues in our lifetimes,” said *Today Show* co-host, **Al Roker**, who is heading up the Climate Unit at NBC News.

people get their news. In the US, 44 percent of the public still gets its news primarily from television, according to a Yale Climate Connections survey, compared to 34 percent who get it online.

Much of our work takes place behind the scenes as we consult confidentially with editors and reporters to bolster their approach to climate reporting. For example, a recent climate story on one of America’s preeminent TV news programs originated in strategic conversations CCNow’s executive director, Mark Hertsgaard, who has covered climate change for 30 years, had with the show’s executive producer. Similar brainstorming has sharpened and expanded climate reporting by Reuters, NBC News, and other partners.

In our public work, Covering Climate Now convenes climate journalism conferences and “Talking Shop” webinars where journalists (and only journalists) can candidly discuss the practical challenges we face in

covering the climate story and how to overcome them. We have consistently had more than 100 journalists attending these “Talking Shops”—and sticking around for the entire hour, a clear sign of their value. We publish a weekly newsletter, *The Climate Beat*, that provides expert analysis of the latest news in climate reporting and is co-published by *Columbia Journalism Review* and *The Nation*. *The Climate Beat* also alerts partners to excellent stories by fellow CCNow partners they can republish and/or rebroadcast. Every few months, we take this content sharing to a higher level when we organize partners to produce a week of coverage on a given theme. For example, during a week of coverage around the UN Climate Action Summit last September, our partners produced a staggering 3,640 new climate stories, which helped drive a sharp increase in coverage by the rest of the media as well, as other news outlets followed our example. Finally, we amplify our partners’ climate coverage through a robust social media presence.

The Business Case for Climate News

We advise our newsroom partners on commercial as well as editorial aspects of climate coverage, in particular by emphasizing that strong climate coverage can actually make newsrooms money. This is a crucial insight at a time when so many news organizations are on the verge of going out of business. As record heat waves, wildfires, storms and other climate impacts become more and more obvious, people across the ideological spectrum, especially younger people, want better climate coverage. Indeed, one of the world’s most recognized news outlets has confided to us that it now gets 25 percent of its annual revenue from environmental coverage. One leading news agency found early in the COVID-19 crisis that climate change was the only non-COVID-19 story generating significant traffic. An Ipsos poll conducted as COVID-19 death tolls were soaring in late April found that 71 percent of adults in 14 countries, including the US, nevertheless felt that climate change was as serious a crisis as COVID-19.

Our Plans and the Need for Support

Our annual operating budget is \$1.1 million. Generous grants from the Schumann Media Center and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation are covering our expenses through year-end 2020. We seek committed partners who understand journalism’s essential roles of informing communities about the urgency of the climate crisis (and its solutions) and holding public officials accountable for

taking strong action. We aim to raise an additional \$5 million to scale this project over the next several years.

In 2021, we plan to continue and expand the activities that have yielded such progress over the past 18 months. Our plan is to:

- **Drive additional weeks of coverage**, building on the success of previous weeks of coverage. In 2020, we organized our partners to provide high-profile coverage on four key themes: climate solutions; the too-often-overlooked links between climate change and racial, economic, and gender injustice; the connections between climate change and the extra-intense hurricanes, heat waves and wildfires that scientists forecast for this summer; and the 2020 US elections, which will shape humanity's climate future and where the Green New Deal is emerging as a key contrast between Democrat Joe Biden and Republican Donald Trump.
- **Amplify distribution of strong climate content** to our partners' combined audience of roughly 2 billion people. We chose *The Guardian* as our lead media partner because its climate coverage is the global gold standard. We urged our other partners to read and emulate—and occasionally republish—content from *The Guardian* and other climate reporting leaders, boosting quality across the partnership. During our week of climate solutions coverage around Earth Day in April, we facilitated *Teen Vogue*, which reaches an audience of 3 million, republishing stories by *Green Queen Media* in Hong Kong, which typically reaches 59,000. *Scientific American*, which reaches 8 million, republished a story by InsideClimate News, whose audience is about 166,000. Syndication relationships also allowed non-CCNow partners to republish some of our stories, boosting the audience by millions of people.
- **Host “Talking Shop” webinars and press briefings**, as we've done in 2020 to help drive improved climate coverage, including in specific regions—Florida, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Michigan—where climate impacts are visible, we have strong local partners and where climate change should be a major concern for voters in November.
- **Expand the scope of our partner base** to include more television and radio outlets, especially in local markets across the US. Local TV is by far the most trusted news source by Americans of all ideological perspectives. Working with our esteemed partners at Climate Central, we will continue to reach out to weathercasters at local TV stations to help them, and the rest of their newsrooms, do justice to the climate story in the run-up to the November elections.
- **Provide editorial leadership** as described above, both behind the scenes and in our weekly Climate Beat newsletter.
- **Evolve our website and social platforms** to provide a clearinghouse for climate reporting resources and create more opportunities for journalists to connect and learn from one another. Already, the resources and reporting we aggregate have helped partners generate more and better climate coverage; a more robust digital presence would amplify this impact.

In this historic moment of challenge and opportunity, Covering Climate Now needs visionary partners to help us achieve these goals. We hope you will be one of them.

Contact Info:

Judy Doctoroff, Managing Director
Covering Climate Now
judy@coveringclimatenow.org
845-641-3975

“The coronavirus is a reminder of the looming threat we face from the climate crisis, which will continue even after this terrible pandemic ends. And it, like the coronavirus, will test journalism—test how we apply data and science, how we plan for global, amorphous threats, how we can prod national leaders to focus on catastrophes yet to come.” — **Kyle Pope**, CJR’s editor and publisher