



Using Local Phenomena to Communicate Climate Solutions

Founder of ISeeChange, Julia Kumari Drapkin, shows children a map of historic New Orleans. Drapkin highlights the parts of the city that used to be swamp. Credit: Impact Media Lab / AAAS

What Is The Issue?

Communicating the reasons why we should respond to climate change is no longer enough. Climate science communication must be grounded in the [real actions of local communities](#). Focusing on the local phenomena (e.g., [sea level rise and flooding in New Orleans](#)) that are challenging communities, and local responses will allow others to envision [solutions and approaches appropriate for their own community](#)—fostering collective agency and collaborative decision-making amongst local governments, nonprofits, businesses, and the public.

WHY IT MATTERS TO YOU

- **Science communicators** should be familiar with their audiences (e.g., how they talk and care about climate-related phenomena), and they should be involved with what local communities are doing to respond to climate change .
- **Organizational leadership** should consistently [share resources for climate science communicator professional development](#) that support collaboration with local community members, businesses, government, tribal nations, educators, etc.—and prioritize that work.

Things To Consider

- When scientists communicate about climate change, solutions often seem distant and abstract to community members—even when the community involved is one of those most heavily impacted by climate change (e.g., [young people](#) and [low-income communities of color](#)).
- Moving towards solutions-centered climate communication (and away from reiterating decontextualized scientific facts) can alleviate [climate anxiety and despair](#) and [promote agency](#). Focusing on local community responses allows individuals to make personal connections to climate change in positive and constructive ways, rather than dwelling on it as a looming disaster. [When climate change feels personal, urgent, and close-to-home, then peoples’ beliefs, values, and identities change to make informed decisions.](#)
- Because the impacts of climate change vary, it is necessary to communicate with the [specific needs, values, and resources of each community or person in mind](#). Additionally, within each community, many decisions are not made based on science findings alone, but on [interpretations of that science within social and cultural contexts](#). As communities make decisions about complex transdisciplinary issues like climate change, [contributions from experts outside your established network are necessary to maintain locally relevant adaptation and mitigation responses](#). Collaborate with local leaders, [tribal nations](#), and others who live and work in the community to craft communications. Their place-based knowledge is essential.

Recommended Actions You Can Take

- Explore the examples of local climate change response efforts in the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) resource “[How We Respond](#),” including [videos and narratives from around the United States](#). These examples demonstrate how communities can adapt to and mitigate climate change when they use scientific knowledge and expertise from diverse backgrounds and life ways. These stories also show the power of [story-based communication](#).
- Continue to listen to and understand how communities are talking about climate change. [Many Indigenous communities have been communicating and responding to climate change in innovative ways](#) that Euro-Western knowledge systems do not account for. [Growing a network of collaborators with diverse cultural, community, geographic, and educational backgrounds](#) can help keep your climate communication grounded in [local needs and ways of relating to it](#).
- Stay involved with local climate change response efforts like the [Sunrise Movement](#) and [350.org](#) to increase your familiarity with local phenomena and build relationships through which to create action.

ALSO SEE STEM TEACHING TOOLS:

- #57 [Place-Based Science Ed](#)
- #67 [Justice & Phenomena](#)
- #68 [Climate Solutions](#)



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How are local community [histories](#), needs, values, resources being considered in how you’re communicating your climate change knowledge?
- How are the knowledges of youth and diverse communities being seen and included as local assets in climate change response?
- How are the climate change responses you’re presenting adaptable and scalable across contexts?
- Which communities are or are not represented in how you’re communicating about climate change solutions?

Attending to Equity

- Low-income communities of color are [disproportionately affected by climate change](#), yet are [often excluded in decision making for climate resilience](#). Intersecting systems of oppression (e.g. antiblackness, [settler colonialism](#), racism, heteropatriarchy, poverty, ableism, etc.) [limit access to necessary resources and protections for climate change adaptation and planning](#).
- It is important to know how to meaningfully integrate [a variety of knowledges, expertise, and practices in climate change decision making](#) in ways that support local communities’ interests, needs, and wellbeing.