

MIT CLIMATE PROJECT

ENVIRONMENTAL SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM FELLOWSHIP

2026 IMPACT REPORT



OVERVIEW

Since 2021, the MIT Environmental Solutions Journalism Fellowship has supported local and regional journalists in reporting high-impact news stories that connect local priorities with climate impacts and solutions. This report marks the successful conclusion of the fourth cohort of these fellows, whose stories were published in summer 2025 in outlets and radio stations around the United States.

By anchoring this fellowship in the local outlets Americans trust the most, we have succeeded in reaching readers and listeners with climate stories relevant to the places they call home, with special attention to audiences who are unsure, disengaged, or doubtful about the need to act on climate change. Our results to date demonstrate that high-quality climate reporting commands a significant audience in every corner of the country, and can drive meaningful change in communities and newsrooms.

"The best science on the planet... is not enough if we can't connect all that information to why it matters to me and you, where we live—which is exactly what your fellows are doing."

- Katherine Hayhoe,
renowned climate scientist
and science communicator

Please see the end of this report for all image credits.

BACKGROUND

It is critical to engage Americans across the political spectrum on climate change

Surveys find that around 41% of American adults think that global warming is *not* caused by human activities, and only 53%

say global warming should be a high priority for the President and Congress. When you separate audiences by political affiliation, it paints a telling picture: 91% of Democrats say they are worried about global warming, whereas only 33% of Republicans say the same. Given the scientific consensus on the causes and impacts of climate change – and the need for bipartisan support of ambitious climate policies – these are alarming figures.

We need to make climate change local

Studies show that localizing climate change impacts and solutions is an effective way to convince individuals that climate change is happening and engage diverse audiences in climate solutions.

Yet climate journalism is often limited to national news outlets

In recent years, national news outlets like *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* have increased climate change reporting, employing dedicated journalists and sometimes running front-page climate stories. But this treatment is still mostly reserved for national and specialty publications. In local papers, climate issues receive far less coverage and are usually reported by journalists covering other beats such as politics or economics.

And local journalism in general is on the decline

Local news outlets generally do not have the resources or expertise to take on climate change reporting. In fact, over the past 20 years, about 3,200 newspapers – more than a third of the country's total newspapers – have permanently closed, leaving almost 55 million Americans with no local news source.

But there are local reporters and outlets who want to cover climate stories

MIT saw an opportunity to bolster these journalists' ability to tell impactful local stories on climate change. Our first four years have demonstrated not only that these stories and opportunities are meaningful, but also that the experience makes a lasting difference for our fellows' careers, newsrooms, and future coverage.

Please see the end of this report for sources.



FELLOWSHIP RESULTS

104 published stories

- including print, podcast, and radio pieces

1.3 million readers

- 670,000 print, 640,000 online
- 22 local, regional, and national outlets
- 3,200 attendees at public events

133 syndications

- Major outlets including *USA TODAY* and The Associated Press
- Radio programs including NPR's *Morning Edition* and *Here & Now*
- 23 TV and radio interviews of fellows

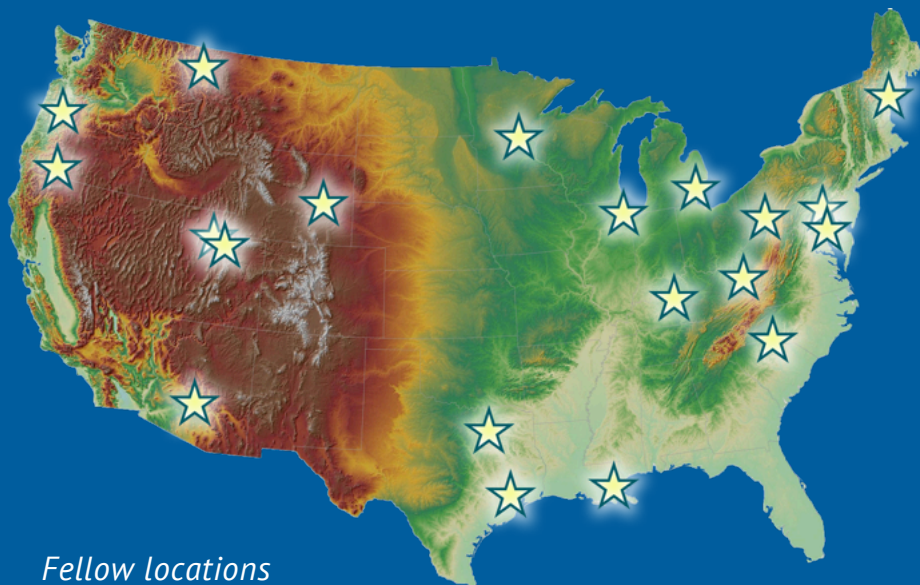
1.6 million listeners

- Public News Service adapted 5 stories for radio
- Picked up by 195 radio stations in 25 states



READ ALL STORIES

[CLIMATE.MIT.EDU/JOURNALISM-FELLOWSHIP](https://climate.mit.edu/journalism-fellowship)



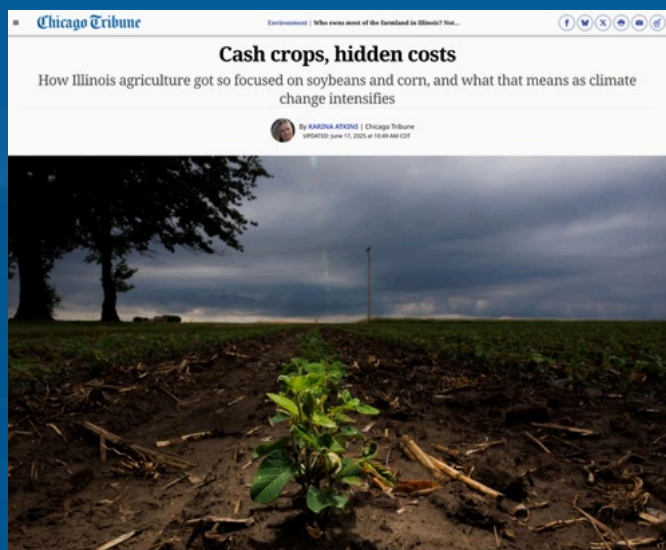
Fellow locations

BOLD, FRONT-PAGE STORIES

KARINA ATKINS CHICAGO TRIBUNE



Karina's series for the *Chicago Tribune* began with a question: As climate change brings increasing drought to the nation's fruit and vegetable basket out west, why is Illinois, with its more favorable weather trends for agriculture, still overwhelmingly growing corn and soybeans? What she learned was so compelling that the *Tribune* led the front page with her stories four times. Her in-depth, empathetic reporting revealed how public policy can help or hinder farmers' ability to adopt sustainable practices. The immensely popular project attracted nearly 250,000 pageviews, sparked conversations online and in the paper's inbox, and led to appearances on both local and national public radio.



"With funding from the MIT Environmental Solutions Journalism Fellowship, we were able to devote four months to tracking down records, visiting farmers, and interviewing corporate landowners, insurance company representatives and government officials... City residents, farmers and environmentalists reached out to encourage us to continue telling these stories because no one else is."

- Michelle Rowan, Deputy News Editor, *Chicago Tribune*

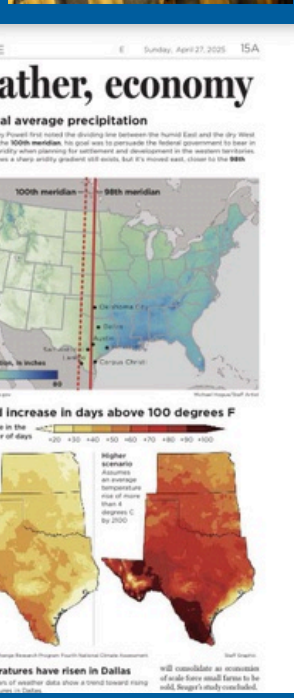


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PHILIP JANKOWSKI THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

Three front-page stories

Philip is a politics reporter at *The Dallas Morning News* who applied to the fellowship in the hope of extending his coverage into more detailed and informed stories on climate and energy policy in Texas. As his reporting deepened, his project caught the attention of the paper's management, who allowed him extra time to develop his stories and assigned members of their audience team to shoot promotional videos with him and develop an extended social media campaign. His lead story was printed above the fold in the paper's Sunday edition.

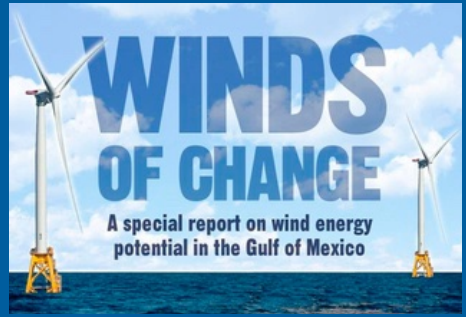


TRISTAN BAURICK TIMES PICAYUNE | NEW ORLEANS ADVOCATE

Front page, Thanksgiving Day edition



"The project relied on experts from the oil and gas industry to introduce the idea of offshore wind energy and the opportunities it could offer the region. This approach made readers who are skeptical of climate change and renewable energy let their guard down and consider these topics with a more open mind."
- Tristan Baurick



LEADING NATIONAL COVERAGE

MICAH DREW FLATHEAD BEACON – MONTANA

In June 2023, reporters from major national media outlets descended on Montana to cover the first US constitutional climate change lawsuit to go to trial. But Montanans were able to get their news from a trusted source: a local reporter. Micah had been on the ground covering the youth plaintiffs from the beginning of their quest to sue the state for violating their constitutional right to a clean and healthful environment and was able to provide in-depth, contextual, relevant coverage.



“Being able to dedicate weeks on end to in-depth background reporting allowed me to publish the most comprehensive reporting on this lawsuit, to the point where almost every national outlet that parachuted into Montana to cover it linked to my work, or the reporters told me in person that they’d used my reporting as background.”
- Micah Drew



- The series ran in 10 outlets across Montana, in addition to several national outlets
- Micah was cited and interviewed by national newsrooms including NPR and Inside Climate News
- The newspaper created a dedicated website for the series, which consisted of four feature stories, four plaintiff profiles, and news stories about the trial



TRANSFORMING CAREERS

NORA HERTEL ST. CLOUD TIMES – MINNESOTA

For her 2021 fellowship, Nora Hertel produced a six-part series on climate solutions in Minnesota farms and forests, with an accompanying podcast series. Her work won a Best of Gannett award and led to public events and an appearance on Minnesota Public Radio. Fresh off the success of her project, Nora launched her own state news outlet and nonprofit for lifting up local journalists.



"It has given me a lot of confidence to branch off on my own and launch a news site that will feature environmental solutions in rural Minnesota." - Nora Hertel

Since her fellowship, Nora:

- Founded Project Optimist, a non-profit, local solutions-journalism site
- Received start-up funding from Reynolds Journalism Institute
- Won a \$100,000 McKnight Foundation grant
- Won two Press Forward grants in 2024 and 2025
- Won five awards from the Minnesota Society of Professional Journalists
- Provides training on media literacy and community journalism



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DUSTIN BLEIZEFFER WYOFILe – CASPER, WYOMING



Fellowship Project:

- Three-part online series on climate change impacts in rural Wyoming
- Four videos highlighting local experiences
- Public event: "Beginning the Climate Conversation in Wyoming"

"I believe the fellowship and my project were integral to convincing my employer and Report for America to agree to my request to shift from education reporter to energy and climate reporter. That was a huge thing. They rarely allow their Corps members to switch beats." - Dustin Bleizeffer



CAROLYN BEANS FREELANCE SCIENCE JOURNALIST

Fellowship Project:

- Four features in print and online about climate-smart dairy for *Lancaster Farming*
- Series reached 50,000 print subscribers and as many as 100,000 people in the dairy industry



"I recently learned that I was selected as an NYU Stern Climate Economics Journalism Fellow. I know that my MIT Environmental Solutions Journalism Fellowship made me a much more competitive applicant for this opportunity." - Carolyn Beans

Trusted local voices

Local newsrooms rarely have the resources to maintain a climate beat. By tailoring our fellowship to local journalists and offering them training, support, and experience developing extended reporting series on climate issues, we are able to seed the country with reporters and editors who have the skills and confidence to anchor more and better local climate reporting for years to come.

TRANSFORMING NEWSROOMS

STREETCAR SUBURB NEWS PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND / D.C.



PAUL RUFFINS SCIENCE COLUMNIST

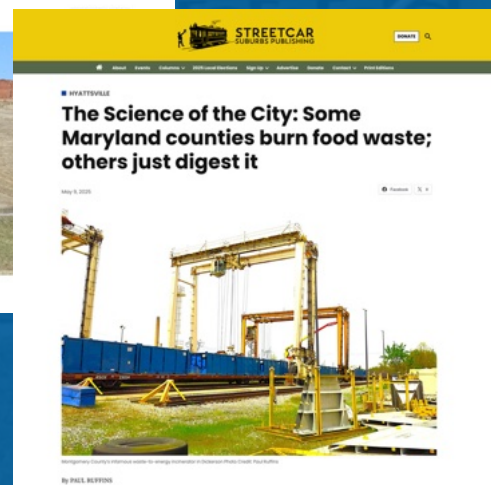


“Rather than people reading my stories to find out about ‘climate change,’ I showed how local issues like curbside pick-up of food waste were more important because of their impact on climate change.”

- Paul Ruffins

Streetcar Suburbs News reports on the Maryland suburbs of Washington, D.C., a hub for lawmakers and national nonprofit leaders. Our fellow Paul Ruffins investigated a local experiment in industrial composting, and whether and how it can effectively be replicated nationwide.

Paul’s series broke ground for the paper in two ways: They have not previously sought grants or fellowships, believing they’re too small to attract funders; and they rarely publish longform reporting, particularly in their science column. His fellowship project was proof of concept for both, and already his executive director is applying for another grant to support additional original science reporting.



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Vigorous climate journalism

The success of our fellowship is measured not only by the immediate reach and impact of fellows' projects, but by our ability to increase the quantity and quality of climate coverage in newsrooms for the long term. Following successful fellowship projects, several of our outlets have made new commitments to maintaining and expanding a climate beat.



Philip Jankowski's successful foray into climate reporting at the *Dallas Morning News* led the paper to change internal practices with the aim of fostering additional stories on the climate beat, creating a climate channel in their newsroom Slack and adding a climate tag to online stories.



"This series helped us refine a replicable editorial and engagement model, combining solutions journalism, Q&A tools, and community-centered reporting. We're now applying that model to other deep dives."

- Nina Ignaczak

Following the success and popularity among readers of Karina Atkins's project on sustainable farming practices, the environment editor at the *Chicago Tribune* is exploring funding opportunities to hire a full-time agriculture reporter.



"I was able to convince my supervisors that my weekly story load should be lightened up so that I can spend more time doing similar deep-dive and investigative climate work. The MIT project allowed me to show them what I can do in this space, and now they are allowing me a longer leash to try to go do more of it."

- Joan Meiners

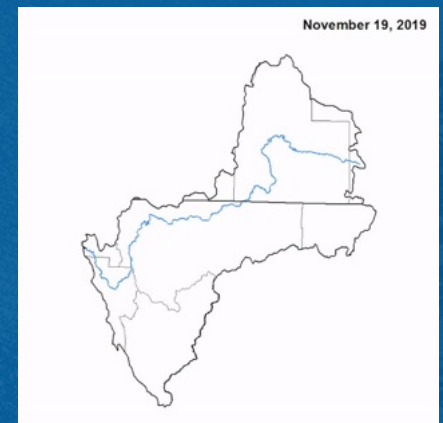
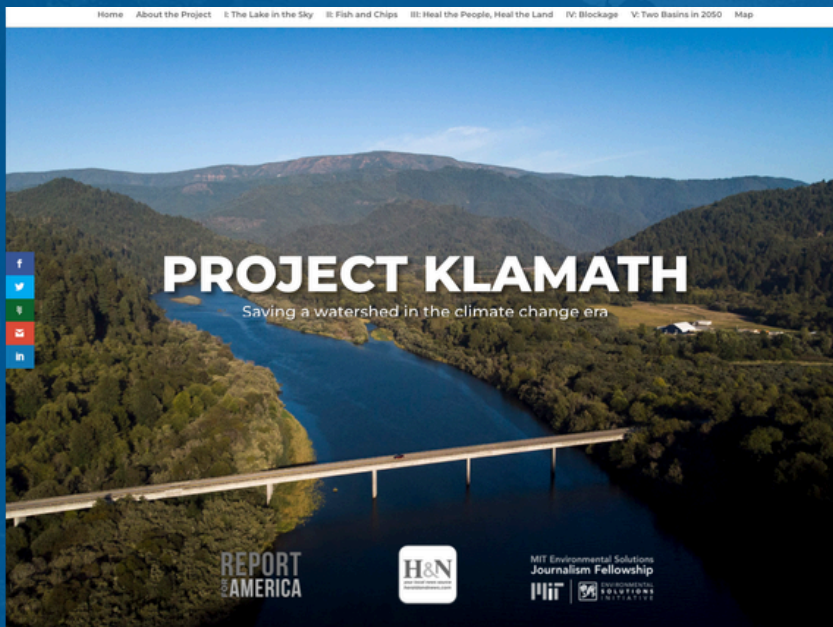
INNOVATIONS IN STORYTELLING

ALEX SCHWARTZ HERALD & NEWS — KLAMATH FALLS, OREGON



Alex's five-part series told the story of water usage, dams, and climate change in the Klamath River Basin through weekly print publications and an interactive website, blending hard reporting with imaginative storytelling, including an illustrated climate fiction narrative. Alex appeared on NPR's *On Point* and won a prestigious Eric and Wendy Schmidt Award.

EXCERPTS FROM ALEX'S PROJECT



"It did more than tell stories... The report showed that how people respond to the coming changes could make a vast difference."

- Oregon Capital Chronicle

"What local journalism should be."

- Gillian Flaccus, AP



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Multimedia features

Fellows' projects have included a range of creative elements that extended the reach and impact of their reporting. Multimedia features include a podcast series on local climate solutions, an illustrated zine about landfills, an online quiz game about composting, several interactive maps, and a number of videos highlighting the fellows and their reporting, sources, and subjects.

ELENA BRUESS HOUSTON



As a capstone to her project for the *Houston Landing*, Elena commissioned an illustrated zine informing residents about the city's lack of planning for the looming retirement of landfills, the local impacts of landfill siting, how to reach regulators and lawmakers, and ideas for handling their own food waste. She partnered with the Robert Bullard Center for Environmental Justice to distribute this zine in impacted communities in Houston.



NINA IGNACZAK DETROIT



Nina's series for *Planet Detroit* combined data-driven investigations, solutions journalism, editorials, and interactive features including a game, data exploration tools, and a reader guide to food waste. She now plans to make this a template for future projects, including a follow-up series on food waste in Michigan schools and healthcare.



If you compost about half of your food waste, you cut your food waste's climate impact by about 20%. So that's like you:

drove 447 less miles, or roughly the 6.5-hour trip from Detroit to Marquette

burned 195 pounds less coal

shaved 39 years off your phone charging time

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ANASTASIA HUFHAM SALT LAKE CITY



As part of her investigation into the revival of Utah's uranium industry, Anastasia produced a feature video on the history, economics, and future of the last conventional uranium mill in the US.



[Link to video](#)



[Link to video](#)

NORA HERTEL ST. CLOUD, MINNESOTA

Nora's series on carbon sequestration in Minnesota was accompanied by an animated explainer on the science of how farms, forests, and other biological reservoirs draw down carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

DUSTIN BLEIZEFFER WYOMING

As he reported on changing climate patterns in the state, Dustin conducted video interviews of Wyoming residents from all walks of life about their personal observations of the shifting weather and landscape, including this video of a rancher in Crook County.



[Link to video](#)

BEYOND THE NEWSROOM

Real-world impact

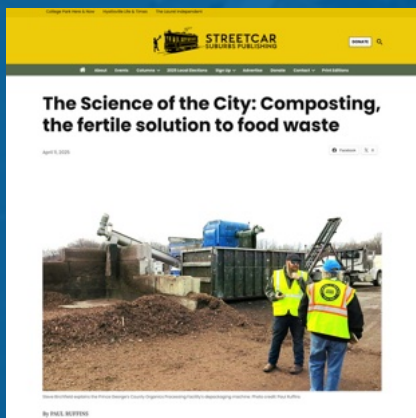
The work of our fellows has earned the attention and accolades of people and organizations with the ability to act on the information, insight, and analysis revealed by their reporting. This includes businesses, lawmakers, community leaders, nonprofits, activists, tribal leaders, and scientists.

"I was informed that the executive director of ECO Cities Farms has been sharing the composting story to help with their fundraising."

- Paul Ruffins

"Food Rescue US–Detroit reported new inquiries and volunteer signups following the series... Food rescue organizations and composting advocates have also used the reporting to support their outreach and advocacy."

- Nina Ignaczak



"The resource development director for the Modoc Nation said a comprehensive look at the Klamath has been something many people have tried to do in the past, but that this was the one attempt that succeeded... A tribal advocate from downriver said Project Klamath is something people will cite in the future during discussions about water in the Klamath."

- Alex Schwartz

An environmental advocacy group agreed to drop their opposition to food composting at a Montgomery County, Maryland, organic waste facility after reading **Paul Ruffins'** series; a new agreement is now being negotiated with the county.

Dustin Bleizeffer's project provided a boost for environmental and natural resource protection groups including the Wyoming Water Development Association, the Wyoming Outdoor Council, and the Powder River Basin Resource Council, and encouraged them to continue their efforts.

"I've received positive feedback from both miners and local government leaders as well as environmental organizers and scientists. I'm proud of the extensive time I took to build trust with sources and... [the] positive results in terms of the stories' resonance and reach with the local community."

- Brooke Larsen, High Country News



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Fellow interviews and appearances

Our fellows spoke to a broad range of local television stations, local and national radio shows, think tanks, professional associations, nonprofits, and community groups about their projects, and implications for science, policy, and the public.



Philip Jankowski appeared on the Dallas NBC affiliate to discuss his reporting on changing rainfall patterns in Texas and their implications for farmers and residents.

Fellows' speaking engagements included:

- Sierra Club
- Council on Foreign Relations
- Sustainable Farming Association
- Citizen's Climate Lobby
- Arizona Humanities
- Third Act Maine

Fellows' media appearances included:

- NPR *On Point*
- NPR *Here and Now*
- NBC News Dallas
- CW Network News Houston
- Vox Media: *Today Explained*
- Public radio stations in eight states



Elena Bruess was interviewed about her series of stories on landfills by the Houston CW affiliate.

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Lawmakers take notice

Fellows have caught the attention of policymakers at the local, state, and national levels, with officials attending events, sharing stories with their constituents on social media, and using what they've learned from our fellows' projects to inform their work.

Philip Jankowski received positive feedback on his stories from Texas State Rep. Erin Zwiener, who leads the Climate and Energy Caucus in the state legislature.

"Several city sustainability offices, including those in Ann Arbor and Detroit, shared the reporting with staff." - **Nina Ignaczak**



"Some sources and others in the Maine energy policy community have been sharing the stories among themselves and their colleagues."
- **Annie Ropeik**

Tristan Baurick's stories were read and shared on social media by U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA)



"Two [government] agencies that have some of the biggest impacts on water management in the basin finally began to provide me more information after we published Project Klamath."

- **Alex Schwartz**

Three sitting lawmakers — a Republican mayor, a Republican state representative, and a Democratic state senator — attended **Nora Hertel's** event on agricultural climate solutions.

A spokesperson for Oregon Governor Tina Kotek gave **Alex Baumhardt's** series on carbon storage in state forests a rave review, saying, "I learned so much from just reading your pieces."

"The Office of Energy Communities has retweeted our stories. We've received thank yous, support and retweets from Democratic lawmakers, and influential advocacy organizations in Appalachia including the Mountain Association... Community environmental advocates used one of our stories during a speech to Louisville's Metro Council calling for more to be done on climate change."
- **Ryan Van Velzer**, Louisville Public Media



Paul Ruffins' stories about food waste solutions were seen being passed around on the floor of the Maryland legislature as they debated the state's waste management policies.

READER IMPACT

“Instead of leading with climate framing, we led with problems people see and feel in their communities, then connected those to broader climate consequences... The volume and tone of reader feedback, social shares, and event engagement suggest we reached beyond the ‘already convinced’ and built trust with a broader slice of the public.”

- Nina Ignaczak

Response to Annie Ropeik’s project:

“This weekend’s piece on heating oil is the clearest, best-detailed such look at how we heat our houses in Maine that I’ve ever read.”

“I’ve enjoyed reading your very down-to-earth articles about heating with fossil fuels and heat pumps; your practical information is surely more helpful to readers than the general claims often set forth by various advocacy groups.”

Response to Alex Baumhardt’s project:

“Another incredible article on the dynamics of Oregon forests and carbon markets... Greatly appreciate the forest focus and informed relay of what is an opaque and challenging subject to inform and report on. Raises significant awareness on potential and possibilities of forestlands which is helpful particularly for the layperson.”



“My project definitely made strides. The first and most obvious were the people I interviewed and featured in my reporting. All but one are climate skeptics, but they spoke in detail about climate changes they’ve observed, and very eloquently described their concerns.”

- Dustin Bleizeffer

Response to Brooke Larsen’s project:

“I was impressed to see an accurate depiction of my community and industry. I’m a 4th-generation coal miner, a very hardworking one, and a proud one... I’m reaching out to thank you for talking to real miners and not just the company spokesman.”

AWARD-WINNING JOURNALISM

Eric and Wendy Schmidt Awards for Excellence in Science Communication

These prestigious awards are given annually by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine in partnership with Schmidt Futures.

Mike Tony – 2024

- Recognized in the Science Journalist: Local/Regional category with a \$20,000 prize

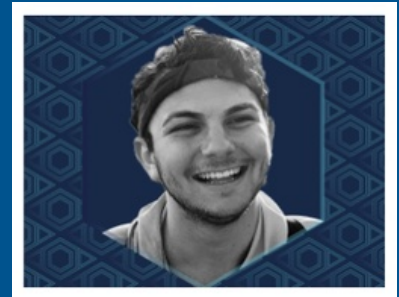
“This award will allow me... to shine a brighter light on environmental health hazards throughout Appalachian communities.” - Mike Tony



Alex Schwartz – 2022

- Recognized in the Science Journalist: Early Career category with a \$20,000 prize

“As an early career journalist, it’s hard to put into words what having my own work recognized in this way means to me.” - Alex Schwartz



Peter Lisagor Awards for Exemplary Journalism

Awarded by the Chicago Headline Club, the nation’s largest chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists.

Karina Atkins – 2026

- Recognized for Best Reporting on Environment/Climate Change



Best of Gannett Annual Journalism Awards

Awarded by the company that runs *USA TODAY*.

Nora Hertel – 2021

“Judges praised her strong focus on solutions and the innovative digital presentation.”





FELLOWSHIP EXPERIENCE

- Fellows **apply with a sponsoring newsroom** and project plan, outlining how their reporting will connect climate change and climate solutions to the priorities, values, and perspectives of their local audience.
- Selected fellows receive a **\$10,000 grant and an expense budget** for travel, materials, and media development.
- Fellowships begin with a **weeklong workshop** covering topics in climate science, climate communications, and journalistic practice, featuring guest speakers from MIT and beyond.
- Fellows remain embedded in their host outlets for their four-month terms, conducting **on-the-ground reporting**.
- Fellows meet in biweekly virtual sessions and *ad hoc* events and trainings.
- MIT provides access to the MIT Libraries and to faculty and research staff as background sources.
- An **editorial coach** with a deep background in science journalism is available on demand to help fellows develop, write, and edit their projects, as a supplement to their newsroom editors.
- At the conclusion of fellows' terms, their outlets publish their projects, typically **four or more features** that are given prominent placement.
- MIT, fellows, and newsrooms work together to **extend the impact** of fellowship projects, through republications, radio adaptations, social media campaigns, public events, radio and television appearances, and more.

PROJECT ADVISORY

- **Deborah Blum**, Director Emerita of the MIT Knight Science Journalism Program
- **Prof. Jim Paradis**, Robert M. Metcalfe Professor of MIT Writing and Comparative Media Studies
- **Steve Sapienza**, Senior Strategist, Pulitzer Center
- **Christina Couch**, Assistant Director of Professional Development, MIT Graduate Program in Science Writing

RESOURCES, TRAINERS, AND GUEST SPEAKERS

- **Climate Communications:** Aaron Krol, Managing Editor, MIT Climate Project; Laur Hesse Fisher, Vice President of Impact and Learning, DEPLOY/US; Fen Montaigne, Senior Editor, Yale 360; Kaitlyn Trudeau, Research Associate, Climate Matters
- **Editorial Coaching:** Betsy Mason, independent science journalist, former science editor for WIRED Magazine, instructor at the UCSC Science Communication Program
- **Journalism and Writing:** Joshua Hatch, editor, *KSJ Science Editing Handbook*; Brooke Borel, project lead of the KSJ Fact-Checking Project and author of the *Chicago Guide to Fact-Checking*; Angela Evans, Director of Communities of Practice, Solutions Journalism Network; Prof. Arlie Hochschild, professor emerita of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley and author of *Strangers in Their Own Land*
- **Climate Science:** Prof. Desirée Plata, Director, MIT Climate & Sustainability Consortium; Prof. Kerry Emanuel, MIT professor emeritus of atmospheric science and author of *What We Know About Climate Change*; Dr. Adam Schlosser, Deputy Director, MIT Center for Sustainability Science and Strategy; Alison Smart, Executive Director, Probable Futures
- **Climate Policy:** Joshua Hodge, Executive Director, MIT Center for Energy and Environmental Policy Research; Krystal Noiseux, Associate Director, MIT Climate Pathways Project
- **MIT Libraries:** Alejandro Paz, Energy and Environment Librarian; Madeline R Wrable, GIS Specialist
- **Special Guest Webinar Moderators:** Prof. Katharine Hayhoe, Chief Scientist for the Nature Conservancy, professor of public policy and public law at Texas Tech University, and author of *Saving Us*; Lagipoiva Cherelle Jackson, climate journalist and Director of the Pacific Islands Program for New Narratives; Jenny Splitter, climate and food journalist and editor-in-chief of *Sentient*

IMAGE CREDITS

All included images were provided by the fellows or were produced through the fellowship, and are used with permission.

Pg 1.

- Rian Dundon/Oregon Capital Chronicle. *John Christensen in his and wife Julie's forest in Corbett, Oregon, near the Columbia River on July 17, 2024.*
- Luna Anna Archey/High Country News. *Hunter Power Plant looms in the background as a solar array is installed in Emery County, Utah.*
- Flathead Beacon. *Nelson's Spring Creek.*
- Smily N. Pool/Dallas Morning News. *Fellow Philip Jankowski with JR Howard's sheep as they graze near a solar array owned by Adapture Renewables near Gainesville, Texas, on Tuesday April 30, 2024.*
- Armando L. Sanchez/Chicago Tribune. *Rain clouds pass over a cornfield owned by Farmland Reserve, May 29, 2025, in downstate Arrowsmith.*

Pg 2.

- Arden Barnes/Herald and News. *A sign reads "Endangered farmer can't survive without water" near Tulelake, Calif. on June 14, 2021.*

Pg. 8

- Amanda Jones. *Molly Pitcher Milk in Shippensburg, Pa.*
- Andy Bollinger. *This solid-liquid manure separator has been running on Meadow Spring Farm in Lancaster County, Pa., since 2009.*

Pg. 10

- Smily N. Pool/Dallas Morning News. *Fellow Philip Jankowski visits a solar array owned by Adapture Renewables near Gainesville, Texas, on Tuesday April 30, 2024.*

Pg. 11

- Arden Barnes, Herald and News. *Amy Cordalis cleans a salmon caught by her and her father, Bill Bowers, via gill net on July 21, 2021.*
- Maps from the U.S. Drought Monitor.
- Illustration by Jenna Gibson.

Pg. 12

- Illustration by Sarah Welch/Mystic Multiples.

Pg. 19

- Chris Granger/Times-Picayune | New Orleans Advocate. *Fellow Tristan Baurick visits an offshore wind farm in Rhode Island.*

SOURCES

Sources from Background section:

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CONTACT

Aaron Krol, Managing Editor & Program Officer, MIT Climate Change Engagement Program, akrol@mit.edu