# ISOJ 2021: Day 4, Workshop

## Covering climate change: Best practices for how to localize a planet-sized story

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- Amal Ahmed, *reporter*, Texas Observer
- Frank Mungeam, *chief innovation officer*, Local Media Association, *lead*, LMA Covering Climate Collaborative
- Donovan Quintero , *reporter*, Navajo Times
- Mark Schleifstein , *reporter*, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune Times
- Bernadette Woods Placky, *program director*, Climate Matters

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**Mallary Tenore** Hello and welcome, everyone. I'm so glad you're here today, and I hope that you are enjoying the 22nd annual ISOJ. We have about 7,200 people from 134 countries joining us at this year's ISOJ, which is a record for us. So we're really happy that you're part of this year's audience. And before we get started with our workshop, I just would like to share a few notes and also give a special thanks to this year's ISOJ sponsors, the Knight Foundation and Google News Initiative. And I want to remind everyone that this workshop will be simultaneously interpreted into Spanish, thanks to support from Univision Noticias. So if you're tuning in via Zoom, you can click on the interpretation globe in the bottom right hand corner of the screen, select the Spanish channel, and you'll be able to tune in via Spanish. And if you run into any technical difficulties with Zoom, you can always tune in via YouTube. So we will be streaming it live in Spanish and in English to YouTube, and we'll provide the links in the Zoom chat.

So now we're going to turn our attention to today's workshop, which is focused on how to cover climate change. During the workshop, you're going to hear from five super smart journalists who will offer up best practices for localizing a planet-sized story. And as we all know, climate change is a topic that transcends so many different beats, so this workshop will no doubt be applicable to a wide range of journalists. Leading today's workshop will be Frank Mungeam, chief innovation officer at the Local Media Association, where he leads a nationwide collaborative of local newsrooms reporting on climate change. So thanks so much for being with us here today, Frank. Take it away.

**Frank Mungeam** Thank you, and thanks to all of you for joining us for what we hope will be both a valuable and a practical session. I'm thrilled to be joined by and moderate this panel of great working journalists. You'll here from the front lines of whether it's breaking news from Texas and their power outages, to representing diverse voices, and really to covering the long arc of climate, thinking back to Hurricane Katrina. Great, great lineup we have for you.

Really, we're here, all of us, for a couple of key reasons. These are statistics for the United States. More than half of Americans say they're either concerned or outright alarmed about climate change, and importantly, that number has gone up 28 percent in five years. Yes, there are doubtful and dismissive folks, but that number continues to shrink. There's been a huge spike in those who are concerned and alarmed. So this is an issue that really does matter to the audiences we serve. Interestingly, that same research finds that people want more coverage than they're seeing. Almost regardless of platform, audiences say they're

interested in more reporting, and they want to see the media do more. And then in research that just came out this week confirming things we as journalists suspect we already know, people want from their journalism, not only problem reporting, but reporting on solutions and responses to those problems. So I think those three statistics are really important placeholders and a place to begin.

What we hope you'll take away from today's session, five things. Some really practical reporting resources to help you feel confident in the science and really identify the best places to go to check your work. Practical and tactical ways to take what really is a planet-sized story and humanize and localize it. How to get the science right, and how to handle the denial. And then more important than ever, how to tell the story of equity and inclusion and really ensure there's justice in climate reporting because we know that communities are not equally impacted by climate change. And then also how to connect the dots for our audiences so that we aren't merely problem identifiers, but are connecting them and reporting with rigor on the solutions. So those are our goals for this session. And with that, I'm thrilled to start off by turning it over to Bernadette Woods Placky, whose organization Climate Matters, has tremendous resources to help local reporters cover this topic. Bernadette?

**Bernadette Woods Placky** Thanks, Frank, and thanks everybody for joining us today. This is such an important conversation. I actually have a conflict, so I am at the top of this. I'm going to have to go. But it was so important that I needed to be here today, and I'll get you my information so that anyone can reach out afterwards too. But this is where we're going to start. As Frank said, the public understands something's happening. They don't know exactly what, and what it means to them and their family, and what they can do about it. And they're asking these questions, and people aren't answering them enough. So that's where we have built this whole program to really support resources for reporting on this subject matter.

Now, Climate Central, we're a nonprofit, non-advocacy organization. We really focus on the science and ways of telling the story. We work with a collection of other great teams out there at George Mason University, Climate Communication, NASA, NOAA, and Yale, and all of us are really trying to help people understand and tell the story. So with that, I'm going to get started on these slides that I have for you because I want to show you some examples of how to do this.

So the program is called Climate Matters. And how we do this is really focusing on the science, first and foremost. It guides everything we do. But another thing, as Frank was saying, it's a global issue, but you feel it locally. You experience it locally, and so we localize data and storytelling whenever possible. We operate on a news cycle, so we're really trying to stay ahead of the story with information and data for you. We make it simple and compelling. If we can't translate this simply, we're not going to put it out there because then it'll be too complicated for you to jump into and then tell the story. We do produce content weekly in English and in Spanish, and we offer trainings and ongoing support on a wide range of climate change topics that people are telling stories on here.

So how can you sign up to receive the information? MediaLibrary.ClimateCentral.org. Go to that box right there. You can enter your information. The thing is, this is a little clunky website here, but we're redoing it right now. So hopefully in the next couple of months it's going to be even better than ever. And it is a searchable engine, and that is going to get updated here. But this is where we store all the information that we produce. And here's an example of the types of weekly packages you get. You see across the top, sort of a key

line of what this is, and why this matters to you, and if it's something you want to explore. Then we have TV produced visuals that are also perfect for social media sharing. We localize again when we can, and we try to pair that with a national and sometimes international perspective. A lot of what we do is focus in the U.S., but we do some international stuff top. Key concepts. And then as I click through here, I want to show you in these boxes, there's a whole lot of good stuff, a full narrative release. Sometimes we do a report on this topic. For example, we did a full report because there was more to tell on the story. Graphics in different formats and in different languages, Spanish and English. Resources for experts who we've identified, and they are willing to be interviewed on this subject matter. And ideas on how to go locally with those experts and a methodology to what's going on. We always package this with other content from the archive that can help tell the story and help build it out.

And we get inspired when we see other people doing these stories. We always try to share stories and how people are doing this. And just a quick sampling of the types of things we put out there, everything from basic science on how temperatures are increasing, why that matters, how it's affecting our oceans, to a ton on extreme weather. This program started with a focus on meteorologists, and that is my background. So we've hit the weather climate angle pretty much every way that you can, but it's so much more than that. Right. Here's a look at heat going forward globally. A whole program we did shifting cities. And then health is another area greatly affected by climate change. How our mosquito seasons are getting longer and more intense and bringing diseases with them. Poison ivy is exploding and sucking up all this carbon dioxide. Air quality is worsening in many different ways. And pollen seasons are only getting stronger, too. This is costing us money. Billion dollar disasters are off the chart in the United States and globally. Weather related power outages are increasing. And some of our ways of life, some of our culture identity, some of our favorite beverages are being affected by climate change, from beer to coffee to wine to our sports.

And another thing we really try to dig into, especially now as we are all moving forward and trying to solve this issue. putting that in perspective. What has to happen to meet these global goals? Where are we going with this? And another way of telling some of these solutions based stories is through renewable energy. We have a weather power tool. What it does is it pairs already installed spaces of wind and solar with weather that's going on. It's a forecast of how much wind and solar you're going to generate in your area. We have a really robust sea level rise program, too, because sea level, if you're in a coastal area, it's everything, right? If you're not a coastal area, this may not be as pertinent as it is to other people. But this is a global tool, and it shows you where that water's going, and what's at risk underneath that water rise.

Also, at Climate Central we have a partnership journalism program. This is where we partner with different outlets in coproducing stories. So if you're newer to this or if there's a new data set that you're having a hard time figuring out, we have a whole set of scientists that can help sort through that data and do the story with you. And our newest, most exciting tool, our climate reporting masterclass. It's ClimateReportingMasterclass.com. That is the URL for it. You can go here. There are multimedia modules, and this is just the beginning of so much more to come. We're hosting live events on it, and we're also going to build our future modules.

So other resources, just sort of a snapshot here. All science is really grounded in the IPCC globally, and the newest IPCC is coming out this summer, which is super exciting. It only comes out about every six to seven years. This is really big news. In the United States, we

also have the National Climate Assessment, which is a go to source for all of the science and how it relates to you in the United States. There are regional chapters. There are topical chapters. You can sort through a really good website to learn more on that. Get to know your local universities. They're on the cutting edge of this research, and they can help you understand the topics. In the United States, we have regional climate hubs. But these exist in different forms in different countries, and they're everything from the EPA and NOAA to USDA, Fish and Wildlife. The Yale Climate Opinion Maps. That's the data that Frank was talking about at the beginning. There's a ton of data on how your audience views the subject matter, and it's all downscaled across the United States in the Yale Climate Opinion Maps. But there is international research there, too. So if you go to Yale or to the George Mason Center for Climate Communication, you can find a ton of audience information, and really, you got to know your audience. It's the golden rule communication, right? Skeptical science. If there are questions that are posted to you and you don't know how to answer them and you think it might not be true, they've debunked all the myths with climate change on that site. CINI is great for connecting people with resources and experts on deadline, and they also have a whole series of quick facts. You've got to quick turn a story, Covering Climate does another global initiative, really trying to build out resources and support in advancing the story. And there are so many great newsletters. If you want examples of how people are doing this. Climate Nexus is one of them. There are so many out there right now.

So I'm leaving you with this lessons learned in this program. Know your audience. And that means topic, tone, timing, way to get into a story, when to tell that story. We're not going to dive into a snow report in the northern hemisphere in the middle of summer. Right. Southern hemisphere, a different story. Meet people where they are. If your audience is going to be turned off by the word climate change, there are other ways to tell the story. Connect with shared issues. Connect with shared values. There are ways to connect because unfortunately, climate change is affecting almost all parts of our life right now. Simplify, you don't necessarily have to come up to the level of a scientist to explain this. Break it down. If you don't understand what the scientists are saying, your audience isn't going to either. So break down that jargon, really. That's what it is. And I always say this because this is really critical. It's not called dumbing it down. It takes great skill and expertise to be able to simplify a really complex issue. Personalize, localize, find the faces, tell a story. We can help you with the science and the data, but then you are so good at telling that story. So go do it, and don't be afraid. Science is on your side. These are facts. And so if you're having a hard time trying to sort through some of the science, we're here to help. We're one of many resources out there. So please do reach out to us. Frank.

**Frank Mungeam** That was a huge amount of information squeezed in a short window of time. I'll just say the Climate Matters newsroom collaborative is a tremendous resource in my experience. And for those who might have missed the first couple of slides, we'll figure out a way to get those to all of you as well, and then just the contact information to follow up. Because nonprofit, nonpartisan, science based, it's a tremendous resource for local reporters.

And with that in mind, let's segue to our local reporters. And that's where the proverbial rubber hits the road. I'm thrilled to start with Amal Ahmed, a reporter at the Texas Observer. And welcome to Ground Zero for not only national but international breaking news this winter with the power outages following the exceptionally cold weather. I'd love to start there. Because one of the challenges often of climate change is it's a very large, very complex problem that any particular day doesn't seem urgent, but if you were in Texas at this time, it was actually urgent breaking news as well. So I'd love to have start

talking about how you take such a huge story and connect it at a human level, and try to connect those dots between the breaking news and the macro issues behind.

**Amal Ahmed** Yeah, definitely. I think the more that I report on climate change and environmental issues, you find that everything sort of does come back to people. Like the reason that we care about this is because it affects the way that you live your life. It affects how comfortably or how safely you can go about your day to day. And so I think that in all of my reporting, I really try to think about that. I mean, I think every great story starts with a community and sort of shows you how the policies that we have or the problems that we have are really affecting these communities. So I think a lot of our reporting at the Texas Observer on the winter storm really highlighted that. Right.

So, you know, we were covering, obviously, ERCOT, the great operator here in Texas that sort of oversaw the massive outages and whatnot, and a lot of their policies that led to those outages during this extreme cold. But a lot of the stories that I was able to do were actually kind of tangential, right. Quote unquote. So I did a story on housing. I did a story on public health. So these are the ways in which a really complex issue like climate change actually impacts every aspect of your life. I'm not sure if that answers your question.

**Frank Mungeam** Yeah, so humanizing is the way to take the planet-sized story and make it real. It does feel like a common trap in this vertical of reporting is the kind of both sidesism. How do you avoid that? Particularly, I mean, if I may say, Texas is a red state or certainly large pockets, where you think of it as a more conservative state. I think that's a common challenge that climate reporters face.

**Amal Ahmed** Yeah, well, first off, I would say at The Texas Observer, as a magazine where we sort of tend to be able to say what we want to say, I think we face a lot less pressure than maybe other outlets that sort of appeal to everyone. Right. So, you know, in my reporting, I think I'm in a place where I can just say this is climate change. Like this is what it is. We have the science. We have all the data. Like, we're not really going to mince words. But I also think it's important to remember that in Texas, where people are seeing the impacts of climate change firsthand, whether you're in Houston and there's just increased flooding and these stronger hurricanes along the coast, people are very aware of what's happening. Right. I think that that's another really important thing to remember in climate reporting, is that people are experts in their own lived experience, and they know what's happening. And I think our job as reporters is to sort of supplement that. And we have access to local officials and academics, so we can contextualize that. But I think sometimes I find the sort of political framing like a little less useful, at least in my reporting, because I think that for the most part, people know what's happening, and they just need the help to sort of get that extra context.

**Frank Mungeam** Yeah, and along those lines. Right. These days, perhaps we could say there isn't really just a climate story anymore. And Texas has also made news around voter rights and voting access. The effects of climate change are not experienced equally in all communities. Talk a little about how you connect those dots, and how climate reporting isn't only about the climate component.

**Amal Ahmed** Yeah, I think that it's important to remember, again, that climate change touches everything, right. So like housing is a climate change policy.  Criminal justice to some extent is a climate issue. When you think of jails and heat deaths, that's something that our criminal justice reporter at the Observer has covered too. So all of these things

actually come back to climate change. So, yeah, I think it's important to remember just how many aspects of our lives this touches. And the reason that I think this political framing sometimes isn't helpful is because a lot of folks in Texas are advocating for the solutions that would fix a lot of the problems that we're seeing. Better infrastructure on the coast. Better pollution regulation. That's the kind of stuff that's playing out in legislature right now. And to some degree, we know that voter suppression is so rampant in Texas and so does our state, but does our political leadership reflect the things that people really want on the ground? Sometimes there's a very clear mismatch. When you look at some of the nitty gritty of the bills being debated right now, just in terms of, like, asking polluters to pay more in fines. That stuff is controversial in the legislature because of the way that the seats get proportioned.

**Frank Mungeam** And you talked at the beginning about how critical it is to humanize this planet-sized story. Can you talk a little about just your reporting process? A lot of it is how we find the voices that we showcase. So what is your process for being inclusive and really representing the humans who are ultimately affected in their daily lives by climate change?

**Amal Ahmed** Yeah, so I think my process is actually, I personally never really enjoyed doing cold calls. So that's something that I just tend to avoid just because I don't particularly like doing it. But I also think that they can be not as helpful as possible. So my approach is usually to sort of find the community groups that are working in the community. So who knows the homeowners who have had to rebuild their homes a couple of times from floods? Who's already working in the space? Who is the centralized expert in this community, right? And then talk to them and figure out what work are they doing. Like what issues are they seeing? What roadblocks are they facing? And then from that, branch out into finding the central character to tell a story around. I think it's really important to sort of do that because I think that you get a much better picture of how something affects a community. Like, I think it's really important to point to the systemic issues, which you can so rarely do that by just telling one person's story. So I think it's really important to sort of talk to the communal level of expertise, and supplement that by calling the local official who works with them, calling the academics who have been setting that right, and to really round that out. That's sort of my approach to that.

With the housing story that I wrote after the blackouts, I started with community groups that worked to distribute funding, which is energy assistance funding for low income families. So talking to them about what is sort of the status already of the housing infrastructure in these areas that were hardest hit, low income communities and communities of color? What were the existing problems in that housing infrastructure? How is it already hard to get these buildings up to a standard where you feel comfortable during a normal winter? Right. How is that worse when the power was out for days on end? Because these are the folks that are working in the community, they know very well the ins and outs of that issue. And then you can talk to someone who's had to sort of live through it, if they're willing to sort of go through retelling that traumatic experience. For me, I found that to be the most helpful, but also the most respectful way to sort of balance everything. It is obviously important to tell stories about people and individualize the story for narrative purpose, but you also need to get that systemic aspect as well.

**Frank Mungeam** Right, the balance. Like so many things, the balance is key. Well I have more questions, including how in a state like Texas, which has such legacy energy sources, how you cover the, if you will, the old versus the new energy economy. So when

we get into our group discussion, I have more questions around that. But thank you, Amal. It's so helpful to hear, fresh off of a huge story in Texas.

Next, I want to introduce Mark Schleifstein, who has had an amazing career in climate journalism at the Times-Picayune, Pulitzer winning coverage of Hurricane Katrina. And Mark, I have many questions for you, but I know you have some thoughts that you want to start off sharing with in terms of just for reporters, especially reporters newer to the climate beat. Just what you have learned over the years in terms of best practices, whether it's where to find the stories, how to manage up your editor, and then also how to get science right when you're a journalist, not a scientist?

**Mark Schleifstein** Right. I do have some slides that I want to run through sort of real quick that sort of takes you through what we've been dealing with. For much of my early career, I was dealing with the effects of climate change, without climate change really being identified as the key issue. It has become the key issue in terms of sea level rise in more recent years. But the effects of both hurricanes, storm surge and increased rainfall events, you can see our coastline. This is the city of New Orleans, Lake Pontchartrain, the Mississippi River. And this is during a high river period. You see all this sediment that's coming out the bottom of the river? Well, that's land building that we lost in this area here and in this area here. And the result of that is that these areas, the wetlands are disappearing, and it's becoming a real problem. So we've had to deal with that.

So I'm going to I'm going to run through some slides real quick that will talk about what we've done with the effects and also how there's been a sea change to start talking about causes in our state. OK, so first of all, let me just put in a plug here for the Society of Environmental Journalists. For you guys on the ground, SEJ is a real resource to look at for climate change issues, how to cover stories, how to deal with things and grants. If you look on the right hand side, there are grants out there right now through SEJ for climate change reporting, so it's really important for you to take a look at what's going on at SEJ.org.

So our problem along the coast has been this loss of wetlands. And you can see that if no action is taken over the next 50 years, all that red stuff is where wetlands will have used to be in 50 years. And that's a significant problem, especially for sea level rise, storm surge events. So the state came up with a plan that it updates every five or six years. It calls for spending $50 billion dollars over the next 50 years on a variety of different projects aimed at restoring wetlands and also building levees or other structures to reduce risk from a storm surge event. And it's a heck of a lot of money for which the state of Louisiana really had no way of funding it until the BP oil spill came along. And now about half of the wetlands restoration portion of this is being funded by BP spill fines and natural resource damage assessment payments made by BP. So this is what happens. You can see it's not going to solve the problems. It's going to reduce the problems, if it is successful. There will still be a lot of lost wetlands that we're going to be dealing with increasing risk. And that's going to be a problem that we're going to have to deal with. All of this, of course, is based on this particular plan. This medium scenario is about a foot and a half of sea level rise along our coast, and it basically assumes that there will be no change in climate emissions, greenhouse gases.

So the state has been dealing with the greenhouse gas issue. In February of last year, just as the COVID pandemic began, the governor created a climate initiatives task force that divided up the economy into different segments and started looking at how can we reduce emissions or respond to the effects. And the reason I'm doing this part of it is to give you

guys an idea of what you can do locally based on these issues that are being identified by our folks in our state that will have the potential of being local stories for you. So transportation is one segment of the society, and there are obvious things that people don't look at them in terms of climate change and emission reductions. But there's how do we make our public transit more climate effective? How do we get people to bicycle, walk and ride share more? The whole passenger car transition. President Biden in the United States is talking about building five hundred thousand electric stations instead of gas stations across the country to deal with electric vehicles to expand the use of electric vehicles to reduce emissions, which, of course, has its own problems. You have to have a transmission system, which we'll get into a little bit later. Land use. Buildings and housing. Again, all local stories. What are you guys doing to put solar panels on people's roofs? Are there building codes that are addressing climate issues? Are there funding processes available for people to retrofit their homes? Are local government controlled, NGO controlled facilities doing these same things? What's happening with the schools, the hospitals, office buildings? All of these are local stories. And then there's mining, oil and gas segment of our economy. Louisiana is a major oil and gas producer, also has some coal. And there's upstream the extracting of oil, gas and minerals. And then there's midstream the moving of this stuff. And there's these things that are popping up that people aren't aware of. There's a big push to reduce methane flaring nationwide right now. There's been a reversal in Congress of one of the methane regulations dealing with that. There are efforts made to get industries to reduce their leaks on their facilities, to manage demand, and to capture carbon, to start looking at how they process things, and create ways to capture that carbon and dispose of it without releasing it into the atmosphere. And that includes the creation of sequestration. And sequestration can take the place of a variety of different things, whether it's building concrete materials where carbon is included in the concrete, so it's captured and taken out of use. It can be, in Louisiana, there are several companies that are now working to build sequestration projects where they're going to pump carbon dioxide captured from companies and pump it deep underground where it becomes a liquid or a solid under pressure and will stay there, hopefully permanently, but at least a significant portion of it will stay there. That also will result in the creation of new pipelines as you'll see in a moment.

And those things are going to have to be dealt with on a local basis. There are going to be conflicts with localities over where these pipelines will be, and where these new facilities will be, and what the laws will be. At the midstream level, where you're moving this material, as I said, you've got this new transportation of carbon being added to everything else that people are dealing with. But you've also got the creation of hydrogen as a new non carbon fuel that will start happening, and how that hydrogen, which is obviously very explosive, will be dealt with as it moves through communities or stored in communities, things like that. In the manufacturing industry field, you've got all those things that we've been talking about, but a lot of this is having to do with what companies are already doing to start reducing their carbon footprint, figuring out ways of reducing their use of heat and power, and how to change their processes to reduce the amount of carbon that they're using, or again, to capture carbon, to create product out of it that will store it long term. Things like that.

The power production and distribution and use we've talked about a bit. Agriculture, forestry, conservation and waste, all of these things are going to be important to you in your local communities and have the opportunity of creating stories for you. And as you're looking through this, the state has created these four committees to look at some of the major issues that are going to be happening that are going to be occurring as this stuff is put into place. What are going to be the legal changes? What are the financial effects of all

these things? What are the equity effects? How are these things going to affect communities that have already been affected by the economy? How do you deal with these issues? And finally, the science. How do you make sure that decent, adequate is science is used in dealing with these things?

And that's basically it for me. That's what we're working on. We're having to deal with this literally on a daily basis. What I showed you was a quickie outline of what these committees are doing, and they're supposed to come up with major plans for the state to be dealt with in terms of legislation going through the state legislature at the end of next year that will provide a framework for reducing carbon down to zero emissions by 2050. And all of those things are going to have local effects and are going to end up being stories that you guys can cover.

**Frank Mungeam** That's a tremendous specific illustration of the climate angles hiding in plain sight. I think I saw probably 50 or more stories there. So a quick follow up, and I know more questions in our open-ended section. But a quick follow up would be, what advice would you give to a climate reporter, and folks watching this can imagine going through those same processes for whatever the urgent issue is in their region, how do you then recommend managing up with your editor? Because that's an almost overwhelming number of storylines to be following. So how do you approach that? How do you recommend that climate reporters talk to their editor?

**Mark Schleifstein** Yeah, you really have to train your editors. It's your responsibility to do that, to get them to understand what the significance of these issues are on their community. Explain to them, you know, that it's money. It really is. It's money on both sides. The effects of climate change are going to cost the community and are going to result in increased amounts of money that will be spent to try to resolve those effects. While at the same time, the opportunities are there to create jobs as well. Those are good stories that people are going to want, and that I think your editors are really going to want to do. We have that battle daily in our newsroom, where I'm always reminding reporters when they get one of these stories about a new project that's coming up that they have to look at climate, especially with the governor, with his climate change task force, saying he wants everybody to be zero carbon in 50 years. What is this new company going to do to deal with that? That's part of the story.

**Frank Mungeam** Absolutely, and I'm going to go on to add Donovan into the conversation, but I want you to be thinking about another question, which is how can reporters avoid, to your last point, of falling into the trap of greenwashing, which all of a sudden seems very much a hazard now that suddenly it's cool to be green? So back to you on that in a moment.

But I'm thrilled to bring into the conversation at this point Donovan Quintero, award winning climate storyteller from the Navajo Times. And Donovan, we've talked. I know something that's important to you in terms of equity and inclusion in climate storytelling is to make the extra drive. So I just love for our audience today that you are, in fact, in your car having made a big drive this morning. So we're so glad you could join us. When it comes to equity and inclusion in reporting, talk a little more about what do you mean literally, but also more broadly, about the idea of make the extra drive. What are you wanting to see newsrooms do?

**Donovan Quintero** Well, thank you for the introduction. I hope everyone can hear me, I am parked out here. I had to pull off at a gas station to speak here. And thank you for that

by the way. It's a great honor to contribute what little knowledge I have. But in terms of covering the amount of area that we cover with such a small staff, we're only staff of seven, I think that the challenge has always been to try to cover as much ground as possible, especially, just the fact that right now I'm in route. I wasn't expecting this, but I do enjoy being out here. I think what mainstream media can do is try to make more effort. For lack of better words. I know that I'm sure plenty of people have said that already, but I can't stress that enough, you know. Make more effort to come out to indigenous countries, and make more effort to get to know the people. Make more effort to learn the culture. Those are just a few things that I can talk about. You know, I'm not talking about having to go through years of any kind of training. It is just a matter of just learning about it. Felicia Fonseca, with the Associated Press, she's based out of Flagstaff. She's one reporter who has made those efforts, who has gone out and made the effort to learn about the Navajo culture, learn about how how big we are. We cover three states, Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. It's such a big area, and many different environmental issues going on from uranium miners who are still affected by uranium mines from decades ago, to our water, to drought, overgrazing and so on, just to name a few. While I appreciate that mainstream media has made the effort to cover those issues, I still feel that they are not coming out here enough to learn about who we are as a people. I think that those are just a few things that I can talk about.

But in terms of SEJ, which I'm a member of, and I feel very honored to be part of this group, is that one of the things that we are tackling that is being tackled, I just managed to take over as the chairperson for DEI, one of the things that we are talking about is that SEJ seems to be made up of many non-native journalists. You know, there are hardly any people of color, journalists of color, as members. I myself had no idea SEJ existed until my story won an award. And the awards said, "Hey, would you like to attend an SEJ conference?" Like, what is that? So I'm really thankful that they introduced me to SEJ because now, and especially now in the position that I'm in as a board member, as DEI chairperson, that I hope to start making some changes. Along with my nine other colleagues who are trying to help me make these changes happen. So I cannot stress enough that mainstream media needs to continue coming out to our areas, especially rural areas. I understand it takes a lot of money, a lot of investment, a lot of planning, but it can be done. I mean, I'm perfect example for that. I'm on my way to Phoenix, which is a few hours drive. So that's where my news assignment is this afternoon. And I guess if I can make the effort to go out to those areas, they certainly can make the effort to come out to our areas. I'm sitting in a vehicle in a gas station. That's as in-your-face as it can get.

**Frank Mungeam** So you are modeling the advice today. I love that. So, I mean, I think for everybody watching it, though, the lesson there is both literal and figurative. Literally make the drive, but figuratively, even if it's it's an interview done by Zoom, make the extra effort to get the extra voices. And as you've said, you'll get better stories. Along those lines, the other thing you talk about that I think is so important for people to hear is aspire to become your editor. So for reporters, maybe talk a little bit why you think it's critical to actually drive to get into the editorial ranks in order to accomplish some of these goals around inclusion and more diversity?

**Mark Schleifstein** OK, thank you for that. That's a great question. I say that. I tell young reporters now that it's great they want to come home. I love that idea. You know, that they should come home and tell the stories of their people. You know. I always commend that, and I certainly do support that. The other thing I do tell young reporters, young upcoming journalists, is that especially in business journalists, that they should also strive to, I use the word I said earlier, is to infiltrate mainstream media and become editors there.

Because, you know, I really, truly believe that most editors out there are non-native. Most of them are situated in cities. And I'm pretty sure many of them have never gone to go visit our reservation, federally or state recognized tribes. I just truly believe that's absolutely important that a journalist, an indigenous journalist out there should seriously think about going out there, putting in the work, and striving to become an editor, perhaps at Huffington Post, New York Times, Washington Post and so on. So that they could actually become part of that influence, part of covering stories not just in mainstream cities and talking about mainstream topics, but they should come out to these smaller areas where very important things are happening, too, as well. You know, real people are being affected out here. And that's absolutely important. And I think that most reporters and especially editors, in my opinion, they tend to forget that. That we are covering real people out here with real problems, and if their lands are being affected, then those stories need to be told. That's why I say that. I really, truly believe that's important, that up and coming reporters, and photographers, and videographers need to get out there and seriously think about working towards becoming editor in mainstream newsrooms.

**Frank Mungeam** It's a great point, and thank you for that. And so that's actually a perfect segue. We've got questions coming in from the audience, which is terrific. And so this one's for Mark, but I'll open up to everyone. We'll start with Mark. Juan Carlos asks, to follow up on this point, how do you convince your editor to expand information and coverage on climate change, including special reports? Any suggestions on upselling, more, deeper, better?

**Mark Schleifstein** Boy, you're not going to want to hear this, but my suggestion is that you go out and fundraise yourself. And that's basically what I did. I went out and was able to find money. It's a long story. The newspaper that I'm with now has the same name as the newspaper I used to be with, the Times-Picayune. The old Times-Picayune, when I was with them, I fell into an opportunity to get a grant to add two reporters to our newsroom to cover climate issues involving our coast, and I jumped at it. And it came at a time when our editors said, "We'll be glad to take that money because we don't have any money for reporters." And we've been under that grant ever since, and I've been added to the grant. And there are grants out there, as I pointed out. SEJ has $5,000 dollar grants available right now. There are grants. There are fellowships. There are other things. And so that's your first step. Your second step is to make the argument that your stories produce advertising. Whether it's advertising opposed to what you're writing or advertising that is aimed at dealing with the issues that you're writing about, that's also another reason why your editor should be using your work and putting it in that direction. It's a difficult sell, I know. But you should do it, and you should go to your boardroom, your publisher, and make those arguments. That's what I've done at my new owner.

**Frank Mungeam** Amal, I wanted to ask you is kind of the same question. Donovan has made the point that the editor role really is the gatekeeper. And Mark has offered some strategies. For you, what has worked best when you're trying to pitch a climate story you're passionate about?

**Amal Ahmed** Yeah, I mean, I guess it's a little different for me, like first a nonprofit newsroom. And, you know, climate and the environment is my beat at the Observer, and so it's something that we've always covered. I feel that we have a lot of responsibility to cover and to educate our readers on this. So it's definitely a little different for me, probably a little bit easier, it sounds like. But in terms of pitching a story, I mean, sometimes, I think, a lot of these stories can seem very vague. Like right now I'm working on something that's just very broad, and I have no idea what the real story is and how to sort of figure it out. So

that's on me to figure out how I am going to go about reporting this and make it understandable and digestible. And so every day that's sort of part of the process, is to figure out how to distill the most important thing from these very large topics, like sea level rise or whatever. Right.

**Frank Mungeam** Which comes back to the point of humanizing. Humanizing it, yet still getting the science right. Well, this is actually a related question. This question is from Guatemala from someone working on a series of stories on the effects of climate change and social inequality. This is a really good question. One of the problems I'm anticipating is how to make these issues relevant to the population who is not yet directly affected by climate change? I think that is a challenge for all of us in the space. Thoughts on how you make the connection for those who aren't already experiencing it? Mark, it looks like you have a ready answer?

**Mark Schleifstein** Well, I really think that basically you have to do that with your writing. You have to make it sound relevant to your readers and make your readers drive the reason. You have to try, especially if you're dealing with it from far away, you've got to make it relevant to your readers. You can do that by addressing how it's the same, how the issues that are very similar to what your local area is experiencing.

**Frank Mungeam** And Donovan, I wonder if you have a take on that almost from the opposite direction of one of the goals in better telling the stories of indigenous people is actually to get the non-Indigenous audience to appreciate why that should matter to them as well? So any thoughts? Certainly even in your own reporting, how you try to connect the dots for sort of the mainstream audience on why these are important stories to them also?

**Donovan Quintero** Thank you for that. Well, you know, I think number one is we're all in this together, right? This is our mother. You know. And so because of that connection, you know, we all have to care about our mother. What are we doing for mother? We have to take care of our mother too. It can't be just our mother taking care of us. It's on us to take care of our mother. So I think that's number one. Of course, I think everybody knows, there are changes happening for the worse or for the better. It depends on who you talk to about that. But I think that we can't deny that. Right. We're all going through this change, so I think that's another one. But I think the tricky part is getting their attention when they look at a photograph while they're standing in a grocery store line or at a gas station. They see a photograph of something, and they read the title of the story. Hopefully that will trigger a curiosity in them to want to engage some more, learn more about this issue. For me why I care about the environment is because I grew up herding sheep. I grew up without running water, without electricity. So those are the things that I grew up with. I grew up living in dirt, on the sand, I should say, on the ground. You know, that was mine. We all came together and ate on a sheet, and we would kind of eat out of one pan. That's how I grew up. So I tried to convey that back to the people and my readers, our readers. I try to convey that back. You know, this is why I care about the environment. It's because I lived in it. I respect it. I've learned how to understand what water means to us, right? In Navajo, water is life is basically how I can roughly translate that, and that is just a teaching itself. You know, I believe a person could write a book about that. So those are the things that I try to engage. Let people know that, hey, you know, we all drink water. We all live on our Mother Earth. We all breathe this air that we're all in right now, you know? So that's what I try to bring back to people while they're out there busy with their lives. They got bigger problems, I think a lot of people, that's how they see things. And I just ask that, hey, take a look at our environment, you know. Just understand, you shouldn't waste water. I mean, again,

I'm not trying to preach to people out there, but that's just one thing I talk about out here. You know, our water is so precious out here, where we live. That's what I want people to take away. When I do write a story about the environment in that, yes, of course, about people, too, as well. I just want to quickly say that one of the other big issue here is missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, and the two spirits we call it. These are the people that we also need to address too, as well, and I truly believe that our environment, and our culture, and our teachings, and how we think and view things are all tied together. You know, we're all here together right now as as a group, and I have hope that all of us are here together trying to figure out how we can fix things. And thank you for that, by the way.

**Frank Mungeam** Thank you, Donovan. And for the group, we just have two minutes left. I want to be sure to have time to get a quick response from each of you. We live in a politicized, divisive time. Fake news is a phrase that gets used a lot with specifically the climate. Wonder what advice you have, and Amal I'd love to start with you, what advice you have, or how you navigate the sort of politics of climate as a journalist?

**Amal Ahmed** Yeah, I mean, I think it's tricky. I did a story on disinformation about solar farms. And I think what you find is that you can sort of report on it. But the balancing act, I think, is like taking seriously the concerns of the people that are kind of falling for fake news. So what I found with that story is like, you know, it may not actually be that the solar farm itself is what's causing this anxiety, but it's the fact that all of this land next to what was previously undeveloped is changing, and it's bringing a lot of infrastructure and change to the community. So how do you sort of take that part seriously, while debunking like, no, solar panels aren't going to all get crushed. So I think that's sort of the balancing act that I did in that story. But I think in general, there's always some sort of kernel of discomfort or anxiety that I think can be taken seriously to some degree, even as you sort of grapple with what's true and what's not.

**Frank Mungeam** Mark, what would you add?

**Mark Schleifstein** Well, I've been sort of fortunate in that I do get trolls who do troll me on some climate issues, and I deal with them as trolls and basically ignore them. Or sometimes I'll respond. But a lot of people who are actually responding to my stories and don't agree with everything that's in it, they're much more direct and much more aimed at specific things I've been writing about. And I tend to respond to them, and that's what we need to do is just be clear on who our sources are and why we're saying what we're doing.

**Frank Mungeam** Thank you. I'm looking at the clock and there's so much more we could discuss, but we are at a time. I want to respect the time of all those who've come. So thank you, Donovan, for making the drive and the time. Thank you, Amal. Thank you, Mark, for sharing your expertise. And Bernadette, who was able to join us for the beginning. I hope collectively we've given all of you watching some very practical ideas on how you can better and more deeply report climate as a local story. And with that, Mallary, I'll hand it back to you.

**Mallary Tenore** Great. Thank you so much, everyone. I really, really appreciate you being here and making the time for this workshop, even if it meant having to join from your car, Donovan. We know that sometimes you can't say no to assignments, usually never can. So we appreciate you pulling over and making the time and to each of you for sharing all of these wonderful tips. I know that attendees are going to want to revisit this workshop, and so you can do so by visiting our ISOJ YouTube page, where we'll have a recording of

this workshop in both English and in Spanish. And we'll be sharing that on social media as well.

So for those of you in the audience, I want to make sure that you sort of know what's on the horizon. Next up, we are going to have an amazing panel that will start at about 1:00 p.m. Central Standard Time. And it's going to feature a fantastic lineup of opinion journalists who will talk about the growth of opinion in online journalism. So you're not going to want to miss that panel, which will be led by Katie Kingsbury, opinion editor of The New York Times. And in the meantime, we would love to be able to provide you with an opportunity to mingle with some other ISOJ'ers. Normally, if we were meeting in person, you would leave the session and go chit chat with others in the hallway. And while we can't quite replicate that in-person feel, we do have a virtual alternative, and that's a platform called Wonder, which is basically a site you can use to mingle with other ISOJ'ers and speakers. So we will have that room open after this workshop, and we'll post a link to it in the chat. We will also post a link to our Spotify playlist, which features local music from Austin, the live music capital of the world, because it wouldn't really be an ISOJ without some loud music. So we hope that you'll enjoy the music, mingle with some other ISOJ'ers, and join us back here at 1:00 p.m. Central. See you then.