Talking Climate Collaborative

LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT • 2026

Who's Really Talking About Climate?

Mapping climate communication in the United States and Canada

Talking Climate Collaborative

talkingclimate.com

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What We Learned from Climate Communicators

We surveyed 210 of the most active climate communicators in the U.S. and Canada in 2026. Here are five things we found:

1



They tend to work alone.

Communicators rarely share what they learn, and when they connect with others, it is usually with people or organizations much like themselves.

2



Funding is scarce. The work isn't.

They're doing a lot with very little. Six in ten haven't received communication funding in the last five years — but even still, nearly eight in ten communicate at least every week.

3



They're helping people understand & act.

Most see their mission as informing and empowering, not persuading - and they don't get partisan about it. Changing minds ranks 11th of 15 goals. Advocating for candidates ranks last.

4



They're mainly talking to insiders, not neighbors.

Survey respondents who identified their audience by sector named government, policymakers, energy and environment over five times as often as faith or manufacturing.

5



They need connection.

What communicators say they most need, after funding, is connection to each other and a way to learn what works. That's exactly what we're building at the Talking Climate Collaborative.

Climate change isn't a distant issue

It's already threatening our safety, damaging our health, and driving up our cost of living. This summer, Americans and Canadians endured extreme heat and flash floods, struggled to breathe through smoke-filled air, and fled their homes to escape wildfires. Over the last decade, insured losses from extreme weather events in Canada reached $37 billion[1] and total damages in the U.S. exceeded $1.5 trillion.[2] And the everyday costs are mounting too. Climate-related expenses already add at least $400 to $900 a year to the average household budget, and more than $1,300 in the hardest-hit areas.[5] The health toll is larger still. In Canada, wildfire smoke alone cost an estimated $231 billion from 2014 to 2025, driven by roughly 2,500 premature deaths a year.[3] In the U.S., wildfire smoke contributes to over 11,000 deaths a year.[4]

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$37 Billion
insured losses from extreme weather events in Canada over the last decade

$400-900
added to average household costs per year

What if we said something?

Even as climate impacts grow, people rarely talk about it. Just 20% of Americans discuss global warming with family and friends a few times a month or more, and only 1% do so daily. Nearly half, 44%, say they never discuss it at all.[6] Across 110 countries and territories surveyed by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, a majority of people in only twelve of those countries said they hear about climate change at least weekly — from any source at all, including television, newspapers and social media, not just from family, friends, and co-workers. Less than half of Canadians (48%) and even fewer Americans (41%) read or hear about climate change even once in an average week.[7]

We mistake silence for indifference.

The silence isn't due to lack of concern. Seventy-one percent of Canadians and 63% of Americans say they are worried about climate change.[8] But most people keep their worry to themselves, so they badly underestimate how many others share their concerns.[9] And when people don't hear their neighbors, coworkers, and friends talking about climate change, they're not only less willing to bring it up themselves but they assume that others don't care.

In the U.S., only 8% correctly estimate the proportion of their fellow citizens who are worried about climate change.[10] In Canada, 42% of people think about tackling climate change more than once a week, but assume only 26% of their neighbors do the same.[11] Yale and George Mason researchers call this a spiral of silence.[12] They also find that, of everything people can learn about climate change, the fact that *others care* is what best predicts whether people speak up.[13]



Communication is a climate solution.

Imagine a world where people know that others care about climate change, too. Climate change becomes a normal topic of conversation. Asking questions and sharing what we know helps everyone learn, and builds the understanding and momentum that collective action depends on.

If we don't talk about it, why would we care — and if we don't care, why would we act? Many people are worried about climate change, yet relatively few of them are regularly talking with friends, family members, and co-workers about it, sharing their concerns, and advocating for climate solutions. Conversations are how people get invited in: for example, even though most Americans who are alarmed about climate aren't yet acting, most say they probably would if someone asked them to.[14]

Does communication actually work?

Yes — but not all of it, and not equally. Many assume that if we can just make people worried enough, they'll act.

The evidence says otherwise. Sharing alarming updates about global trends raises awareness and concern, but erodes efficacy, the sense that what we do might actually matter.[15] Efficacy is one of the strongest predictors of whether someone acts at all, which means a message can succeed at worrying people while making them less willing to act.[16]

Who delivers the message matters as much as what it says. Even hard-to-reach audiences, like U.S. Republicans, can be

"If we don't talk about it, why would we care — and if we don't care, why would we act?"

–Katharine Hayhoe

successfully reached with new information if it comes from sources they trust.[17] And surveys show that people living where local TV weathercasters covered climate more often understood it better: that it is happening, that it is human-caused, and that it does harm.[18]

None of this happens on its own. The messengers people know and trust — weathercasters, doctors, faith voices, farmers — are rarely the ones with access to the research, the framing, or even local data. Closing that gap is why the Talking Climate Collaborative exists.

Who is doing this work?

It's easy to assume climate communication is a coordinated, well-resourced field. Our data shows it isn't. The Talking Climate Collaborative teamed up with researchers at the Center for Environment, Community, & Equity at American University to ask active climate communicators in the U.S. and Canada: Who are they talking to? Who do they work with? What barriers are they facing? And what resources do they need?

HOW WE DID IT

We identified 1,151 individuals and organizations and found working contact details for 1,034 of them. 941 invitations reached an inbox and 210 people answered, a response rate of 22.3%.

Most respondents worked at non-profit organizations focused on climate, nature and the environment. The rest were mainly in media, at colleges and universities, or individual influencers.

We focused on communicators working at a regional, national or continental scale, which means local-only groups, government bodies, journalism companies, university centers and for-profit firms fall outside this first survey.

This survey maps who is doing this work and what they need; it does not measure which efforts are succeeding or why. That's the next question that we intend to answer in future work.

The full methodology, including our criteria for inclusion in the survey, is available in the American University's research report.[19]

What the data says

We asked climate communicators how they work, who they reach, and what they need. Here's what we found:

1. Most climate communicators are soloists, not orchestra members.

Climate communicators mostly work alone. They rarely team up or share ideas, and when they do, they usually connect with people a lot like themselves: nearly half the connections from environmental non-profits lead to other environmental non-profits.

Mapping those networks shows a field that clusters in small groups and is significantly more fragmented than chance alone would produce. Hardly any of these relationships go in both directions, with only one pair of respondents reporting both collaborating and sharing information with each other.

Imagine a room full of talented jazz musicians, all playing individual solos. Now imagine what they'd sound like if they had a score and worked with each other. That's an orchestra.

2. Most climate communicators work with little funding and small teams.

Just 41% of those surveyed have received money earmarked for climate communication in the past five years. A third work entirely alone, and another third work with a small team of ten or fewer colleagues. But they are producing anyway. Nearly eight in ten publish something on climate change at least once a week.

3. Their mission is to inform and empower, not just persuade.

This is a sophisticated field. Most have already figured out that the job is to give people what they need to have the conversation themselves. When asked what they are trying to achieve, communicators most often told us it was informing and educating people about climate action (79%) and science (71%), and empowering people to talk about climate change themselves (68%). Changing people's minds ranked 11th out of 15, and advocating for specific elected officials came last, at 4%.

Their expertise shows in what they choose to talk about, too. Survey results indicate that environmental justice is as central to this field as climate science itself: 53% specialize in talking about environmental justice, 52% in climate science and 50% in energy. And of all the tactics we asked about, the one that communicators agree on most is the importance of connecting climate change to the things people already care about.

WHAT THIS SURVEY SHOWS

Just 4% of climate communicators identify advocating for specific elected officials as a goal of their work, and only 26% lobby or testify to legislative bodies.

WHAT THIS MEANS

This is a field focused on informing and equipping people, not on electing candidates. Communicators' top goals are educating audiences about climate action and science, and empowering others to talk about climate change themselves.

TRY THIS

The next time your work is dismissed as partisan, you have the numbers. Endorsing candidates is climate communicators' least common goal — chosen by only 1 in 25.

4. Communicators are talking mostly to the insiders, much less to their neighbors.

Despite communicators' focus on making climate information relevant, the survey suggests most are still talking to people already inside the climate conversation. Among those who define their audiences by profession, 63% are trying to reach policymakers and government, 58% energy, environment and utilities, and 46% science and research.

Far fewer are reaching the professions that most people encounter in daily life: the building trades at 21%, health professionals at 19%, faith at 10%. Why does this matter? Because people trust the people that they already know.[20] An HVAC installer, a nurse, or a faith leader can answer a neighbor's question, connect climate to what people already care about, and help turn concern into action in ways a distant expert can't.

Also, talking about a subject isn't the same as reaching the people who work in it. Health shows this most clearly. Over a third of survey respondents use health-related messaging, which ranks it 8th of 19 topics. A quarter of those who group their audience by interest name health and wellness. But among those who target by profession, fewer than one in five focus on the health sector itself.

> **"'Talk' is the fertile field in which cultural change begins; in its absence, it's impossible for a group of people to solve a problem."**
>
> — Sara Peach and Jennifer Marlon[21]

The same is true for young people. Among those who group their audience by demographics, youth and students are the most named group, at 62%. Yet only 30% specifically speak to education, child development and family services. Teachers, principals, librarians and coaches already shape what young people hear. What they need is to know how to talk about climate with them.

5. After funding, what they need most is each other & evidence about what works.

Communicators identified funding as their top need, at 81%, and 97% said they would benefit from more. After that, two needs were essentially tied: help finding peers and collaborators (57%) and regular updates on what works (54%). Both of these were well ahead of training (27%) and education on the science (24%). That gap is telling. Communicators want more information about their own craft: which messages land, which backfire, and how to effectively navigate disinformation.

Some of this information is in the research, where a growing body of literature is quantifying what moves people toward action versus what leaves them anxious and stuck. But findings published in journals rarely reach the coach on the sideline, the creator editing their video, or the doctor with two dozen patients waiting.

Connection with their peers also ranks high, and our network data shows how rarely that happens. When communicators compare notes from different fields and topics, they can share what worked, what challenges they faced, and spark creative new ideas.

WHAT THIS SURVEY SHOWS

Most communicators are working alone.

WHAT THIS MEANS

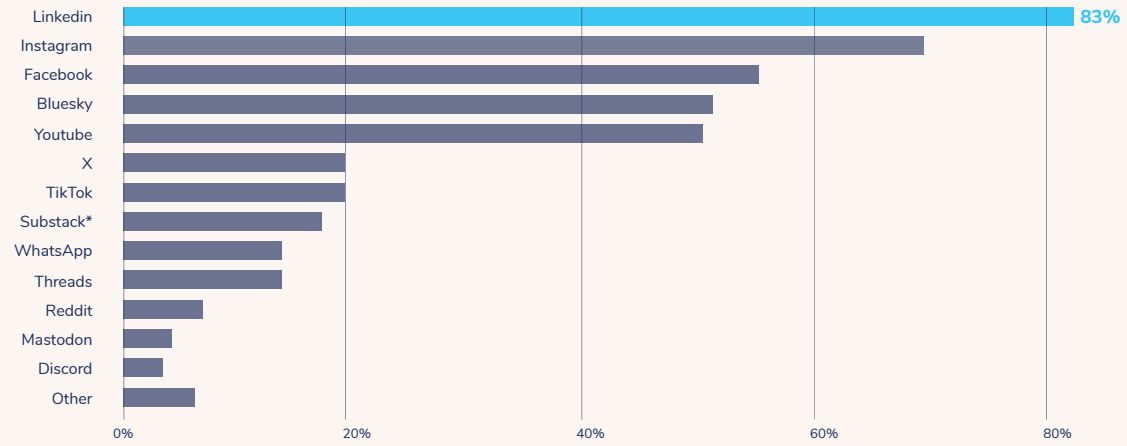
Communicators are solving the same problems separately. What one person learns rarely reaches anyone else.

TRY THIS

Join the Talking Climate Collaborative's network to find others working in your space.

LinkedIn is climate communicators' number one platform

Social media platforms used to communicate about climate change
(% of respondents, N = 167)

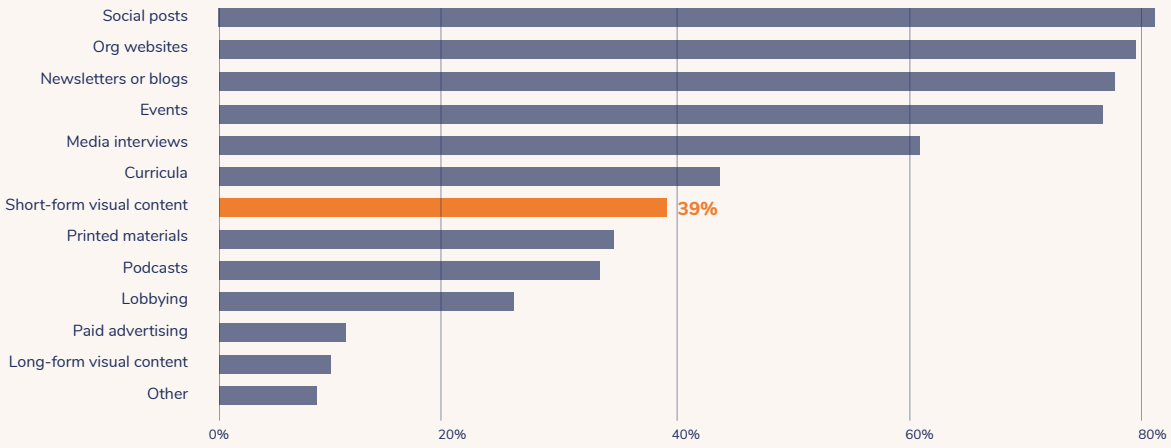


LinkedIn is used by more survey respondents than any other platform, at 87%. This is well ahead of Instagram (69%), Facebook (55%), Bluesky (51%) and YouTube (50%). But that is not where most people go for news. In Canada, just 6% of adults use LinkedIn to find, watch or discuss news in a given week, against 35% for YouTube, 33% for Facebook, and 17% for Instagram.[22] In the U.S., 38% of adults get news from Facebook, 35% from YouTube, and 20% each from Instagram and TikTok; LinkedIn is not among the platforms Pew reports,[23] and ranks 11th, after NextDoor, at 15% of U.S. social media users in a 2026 George Mason and Yale analysis.[24]

*Substack was not a listed option on the survey, but multiple respondents wrote it under "Other," so it was recorded as its own category.
Source: Fisher, Jayko, & Jasny (2026) Mapping the Ecosystem of Climate Communication in the US and Canada: A Landscape Assessment. doi.org/10.57912/32957927

Six in ten climate communicators don't use short-form visual content

Main forms of communication used to reach audiences
(% of respondents, N = 175)



Climate communicators in this survey reach people mainly through social media posts (81%), website content (79%), newsletters or blogs (78%), and events held in person or online (77%). Visual formats, where younger and more casual audiences spend most of their time, are less common. Just 39% use short-form visual content, and 10% use long-form recorded visual content, a smaller share than paid advertising (11%).

Source: Fisher, Jayko, & Jasny (2026) Mapping the Ecosystem of Climate Communication in the US and Canada: A Landscape Assessment. doi.org/10.57912/32957927

What's Next

Our survey results are clear on what communicators need most. They want funding, a way to engage with each other, and a way to learn what works.

That's what the Talking Climate Collaborative is building. Our website already hosts a directory of the hundreds of organizations identified in our landscape assessment, a guide to trusted resources, and a Start Talking tool with talking points for specific audiences and situations. Coming soon, we're building a network so people can connect with others, regular evidence-based updates on what works, and a shared library of content, training, tools and topic playbooks.

Most climate communicators are already proficient musicians, each playing their own tune. Our goal is to give them shared sheet music, and a place to hear each other play — because an orchestra carries further than a solo ever could.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **If you're a climate communicator:** You're probably doing this with little support; two-thirds of the people we surveyed work alone or on a small team. **Join TCC's network to connect with others and get regular updates on what works and why**. Also, we want to hear from you! We're building the tools and playbooks around what you ask for.

2. **If you care about climate change:** You already talk to people that other climate communicators don't regularly reach. Relatives, neighbors, co-workers and others in your life are more likely to get involved if you share your concerns with them.[24] Don't know where to start, or what to say? **Try out TCC's Start Talking tool and Katharine Hayhoe's Talking Climate newsletter.**

3. **If you're a funder:** Communicators are already there, putting out content every week – most without dedicated funding. Just 41% have received any money for their communication work in the past five years. Beyond funding, what they need most is connection to peers and evidence of which strategies and messages move people. We're building both and welcome conversations about what it would take to get there. Bernadette Woods Placky is TCC's Executive Director: bernadette.woodsplacky@talkingclimate.com.

The Talking Climate Collaborative was co-founded by Katharine Hayhoe, Lead Strategist; Bernadette Woods Placky, Executive Director; Sweta Chakraborty; Elisabeth Cohen; Allison Crimmins; and Laura Schifter. TCC is advised by Tim Kelly, Monica Medina, Ed Maibach, David Fenton, and Emma Stewart.

Our research partners who conducted the survey and analyzed the results are Dana R. Fisher and W. Chris Jayko from American University's Center for Environment, Community, & Equity; and Lorien Jasny from the University of Exeter.

More talk. More hope. More action.

About this research. The landscape assessment was carried out by Dana R. Fisher and W. Chris Jayko of American University and Lorien Jasny of the University of Exeter, in partnership with the Talking Climate Collaborative, and funded by Earth HQ — a fiscally sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors — with additional support from The David and Lucile Packard Foundation. TCC advised on survey design and sampling, and the full methodology is published as part of the American University's research report.[25]

About this report. It was drafted and finalized by Bernadette Woods Placky, Elisabeth Cohen and Katharine Hayhoe, with technical edits from Dana R. Fisher and Ed Maibach, and review by the whole TCC team. We used Claude, an AI assistant, to proofread the text, to provide an initial check of facts and citations against their original sources, to suggest alternative wordings, and to challenge our claims and our phrasing. Every final number, reference and claim was fact-checked, reviewed and confirmed by a human, and TCC takes full responsibility for everything in this report.

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