

EXISTENTIAL CRISIS COMMS:

Lessons from climate storytelling for anyone
trying to change the world through *culture*

by Jessica Riches

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AN INTRODUCTION

After discovering activism at university, I have spent 15 years working as a narrative strategist - first in digital campaigning, and then in strategic communications - but screenwriting has always been my passion. I'm lucky enough to have two parallel careers that enable me to do what I love: understand the urgent challenges humanity is facing, and create stories that influence culture to better help us face them.

I refer to my work as 'existential crisis comms', and climate disaster is the subject I have worked in the most: including with The UN, the Wellcome Trust, and TikTok with social impact agency Purpose, as part of UCL Climate Action Unit's inaugural 'creative storytelling policy' fellowship, and on screen industry programmes run by Climate Spring, the WGA East, and the Writer's Guild of Great Britain.

My work is built upon the importance of narrative to overcome humanity's psychological resistance to existential threats. Research into public engagement understanding of existential threats shows three consistent barriers:

- we avoid reminders of our own mortality;
- we struggle to grasp exponential change - or slow-moving threats that have the potential to get worse quickly;
- we find it difficult to engage with risks we have no personal reference point for.

The climate crisis triggers all of these, which means that better facts does not equate to an increased understanding of the reality and risk we are facing. Direct warnings - however urgent, however accurate - trigger our defence mechanisms and make us shut down.

But narrative and entertainment can overcome this response, because when people are transported into a story, counterarguing - a critical resistance that stops direct persuasion being effective - simply doesn't activate in the same way. Stories allow us to bypass the barriers that facts cannot cross, and are more effective at transmitting key messages and modelling the hope we need to avoid feeling the doom that leads to inaction.

In Autumn 2025, I was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to research the landscape for the development of climate stories in film and TV, and bring my insights back to the UK.

Over two months in New York and Los Angeles, I attended industry events, and had formal interviews and informal conversations with representatives from more than twenty organisations across the landscape: consultancies, funders, fellowships, studios, guilds, programmes, coalitions, and individual practitioners. People were both generous with their time and candid about their experience.

This report is anonymised, and quotes are all real but unattributed so that everyone could speak freely. I'm very grateful to everyone who shared their time and wisdom to help create it, and I'm in awe of the work that everybody in this space has done.

What did I find?

I started this project asking: what programmes exist to develop climate stories in film and TV? How are they structured? What's succeeding? Where are the gaps? And most importantly: in the current political landscape, where urgent action has been rolled back, what can the UK learn from the USA - but also, how can the UK support the USA?

I finished with something far more expansive than I expected. Overwhelmingly, what I heard was that the climate crisis is not an isolated issue. The climate crisis is one of many symptoms of a society broken by design: the concentration of power in the hands of a few, the corruption of democratic institutions, the deliberate manufacturing of distrust, and the systems that protect all of it from scrutiny.

Hollywood exists as a microcosm of these structures, but it also works - and even exists - to uphold them. The success of the organisations in the climate storytelling landscape shows us we have the power to challenge them, and to break through.

This report is a playbook for anyone trying to make stories about concentrated power, corruption, or systemic injustice in an industry that has been created to support those structures. It's for funders considering where to put resources, for industry members navigating this space, and for creators who want to tell stories that change things.

Inspiration beyond climate

The organisations in the climate storytelling landscape do not get enough credit for what they have collectively achieved. Most people I spoke to modestly reiterated, "we still have so far to go." But their success cannot be understated. A decade ago, climate was largely absent from mainstream entertainment. New analysis shows that 5 of the 16 eligible films at the 2026 Oscars have passed The Climate Reality Check to determine if climate change was represented in the work - a record number.

Climate is regularly integrated in content of all genres, formats, and production values: rippling out into how climate is portrayed, discussed, and represented in culture, media, and our everyday lives. This has had an impact on the beliefs of ordinary people, their behaviour, their voting intentions, and therefore the climate action pursued by their elected officials. This work has changed things.

That's why this report is not a bullet point list of climate narrative theory - expressing that is what these organisations already do so well, and would be largely redundant. The true insights I'm here to share are more systemic and urgent, far beyond 'climate storytelling', or even the more broad 'climate communications'.

What I'd like to share from my deep dive into the climate storytelling landscape is:

1 - THE CREATIVE: how to engage creatives in 'issue stories', framing them as opportunities and not medicine

2 - THE BUSINESS: how to speak Hollywood's language and get progressive stories across the line

3 - THE FUNDING: how it moves, and why replicating existing structures won't create change

These lessons apply far beyond climate. This is a blueprint for building large-scale public narrative shift efforts using effective issue-based storytelling for film, TV, and new media - across any issue space that humanity is facing, but that media and culture are not confronting.

To get the most out of this document, I'd recommend viewing the climate crisis communications insights as a case study: the specific example for lessons that apply far beyond this subject matter.

A brief snapshot of the ecosystem

"People see the progress, but they don't see what it took to get there. We were tirelessly working to get this ingrained, far harder than we needed to because fossil fuel narratives had run riot for so long."

Narrative shift at scale works because of the stories, but it requires people deeply committed to telling those stories and creating a space for them where there was not one. These organisations exist because waiting for permission was taking too long.

Coalition building is essential to escalate cultural momentum at the speed we need - especially when overcoming narratives as deeply embedded as those the fossil fuel industry has funded, leading to

the delay, doomism, and doubt stopping urgent climate action to this day.

The organisations working in the climate storytelling space have successfully built an effective ecosystem that has created measurable impact in Hollywood and beyond. Here's just some of what those organisations offer:

- Hosting and facilitating climate story events, platforms, contests and communities targeting established and emerging creatives, building a thriving community around the issue of our generation
- Consultation that educates and informs creators about how to include climate change authentically in their work, and connects creators with subject matter experts to portray scientific truth
- Fellowships and development programmes for emerging creatives - in particular, writers - to ensure climate is growing with the system
- Development funding and issue-based education for established creatives, supporting them to use their selling power to get climate stories across the line
- Industry coalitions across departments in-house at production companies, studios and streamers, from development through production and into marketing
- Maintaining relationships with distributors, festivals, and other buyers to ensure finished films reach audiences
- Data, analytics, industry figures, and box office trends, mapping the impact of climate stories on Hollywood creators, executives,

and viewers - and how that has an impact on behaviour, policy, and climate action

This ecosystem works because different talented and passionate people have decided: this must exist. Organisations were created to fill specific needs, and the snapshot to date shows a professional and well-balanced landscape. The grassroots nature with which much of this grew has had a ripple effect.

As well as organisations working with a focus on climate storytelling, nearly every studio now has a sustainability department; the Academy has institutionalised sustainability; major industry bodies have followed. This happened because of external pressure: membership pressure, funding pressure, creator pressure, celebrity pressure, and community pressure. Those combined forces are incredibly effective when harnessed well, and they are a unique combination of forces available to those working in the storytelling space.

This report exists to share lessons from various stages in the climate storytelling ecosystem, so that organisations and passionate individuals can learn from this approach to narrative shift as we attempt to build a fairer society.

1. THE CREATIVE

"Climate change is not an issue - it fits with every story you're already telling, every issue you already care about, every genre you could possibly be writing in."

The first thing every organisation in this space has learned: the moment "climate" feels like an obligation, you've lost the room.

"We've always presented this as an opportunity... not a mandate, not a requirement."

Creatives don't want to be told what to create. Artistry is their thing; the joy of making something out of nothing lights them up. But what many creatives will respond to is creative opportunities: interesting characters, fresh angles, stories that haven't been told a thousand times. Climate offers all of that, but only if we frame it that way.

That principle maps onto other issue spaces that we need to embed within culture. These issues are precisely that because they have the potential to impact our lives in large and small ways. Help creatives to understand that, and see what their imagination finds.

The "don't say climate" test

If we're leading with the issue rather than the story, we're making it easy to say no.

This is a tough line to walk, because if we want to promote climate stories - or stories around any issue - and stimulate more of them to be created, we do need to express what they are and what we're looking for, and explore all of the facets. But the stories have to include more than that, and we have to make sure we're using the right language in the right rooms.

At the development stage, when working with other creatives, we have to talk about the themes and intentions of our stories. This is the perfect time to talk about issue spaces we want to explore, and impact we want to make. It's essential that we bring up climate in these spaces, whatever the story is.

But beyond ideation, the stories must be able to be pitched like any other: who is it about, what do they want, and what's stopping them from getting it? Integration of issues through narratives that are otherwise compelling is key.

We need to ensure that people will be interested in buying and then watching our stories regardless of the impact message we want to get across, and often we're at a disadvantage because we have to prove that the story is more than its message. If people wanted to see an impact message, they could just visit the website of any NGO for facts, figures, and case studies.

"Scripted brings carefully crafted entertainment and emotional arcs that you don't get from an advert or a documentary, and sidelining that to tick messaging boxes or to meet impact goals defeats the object entirely."

"There's a test worth adopting: if you can pitch your story without saying 'climate', you're more likely to be focused on the things that actually help explain your story, like characters, plot, and world. And it's probably a better story."

"The highest compliment anyone can give or receive in this space is: 'I forgot I was watching a climate thing.' Or even: 'I didn't notice.'"

"Climate works through allegory and history. It works when peppered throughout rather than made the explicit subject. Nobody is going to Netflix for a lecture."

Finding the narratives

"We've spent the past 20 years pivoting away from every climate movie being The Day After Tomorrow... it's a brilliant movie, but we had a lot to undo; just the world absolutely ending."

Say "climate film" and people's minds leap to disasters, dystopia, and eco-terrorists. The creative canvas is, in actuality, almost unfathomably vast, but for a very long time, the only climate stories that were told were filled with apocalyptic storytelling.

It makes sense that these were the first climate stories to be identified as such, as there was an urgent need to sound the alarm, and use the platform that film and TV offer to awaken wider culture to the huge crisis on our hands.

But the reality is, those first stories were being told at a time when public education and awareness was limited, and we hoped that scientists would be listened to, global governments would act, and we would be able to avert the worst of the global disaster. We are no longer in that situation.

Stories that focus on the danger may be the most traditionally cinematic, but they are not effective at shifting the cultural mood to one embodying the optimism, or at least the willingness, required to make the drastic changes needed for the survival and adaptation of the human race. Fear and panic are not emotions that lead to rational decision-making, nor do they motivate a fractured society to come together for the greater good.

"We've kind of done the alarm piece. We don't want to be bashed over the head with that horrific, apocalyptic future anymore. We want to figure out how to get the hell out of here."

Broadly speaking, three types of story are crystallising in the climate space - and organisations have done a lot of work in educating writers on what they're looking to support, so we're seeing more of these appear in early development, in order to see a broad portrayal of the issues we're facing, what we need to get through them, and how we got here.

1 - Crisis and disaster. Stories with the "oh shit" factor, that show us the worst consequences of our actions, or lack thereof.

Currently, these are the stories that define the mainstream understanding of climate stories. They're brilliant for showing the worst case scenario and have mass mainstream appeal so can reach wide audiences, but in isolation they can lead to a sense of despair or doomism, like there is no reasonable future to hope for.

2 - Solutions and alternative futures. Stories that show us heroes, leaders and systems helping us navigate and survive the crisis point, and what a world we aspire to could look like. Includes "protopia" stories - somewhere between dystopia and utopia, showing realistic and liveable futures through transition and beyond.

These are the stories that are essential for our ability to imagine a future through and beyond the climate crisis. It's going to take a huge amount of civilian, political, and industry work for us to adapt to a post-1.5 degree-heated world, and to mitigate to stop further rises, but it is possible. These stories make that possibility feel real.

3 - Accountability and bad actors. Stories that show us how we got here, name who caused it, how they got away with it, and what it cost.

These stories need to be told to provide the context of the crisis we're living through. They are well-served in the documentary and podcast spaces, but we're lacking narratives in scripted entertainment that take the truth behind the man-made nature of the climate crisis and break through into the general population. "We have not had our Mad Men for the fossil fuel industry happen properly yet."

To reiterate - these approaches express how the climate strand is demonstrated in any story. But it should remain a strand, not the entire pitch. You can take these same strands and apply them to any issue space - what's the crisis we need to avert, what's the path through, and how can we reveal the injustices at the heart of it? This is how we ensure that there are stories being developed with a wide enough scope that we don't end up how we did with climate, with the overwhelming cultural agenda skewing towards disaster, a binary win-lose situation, and a lack of hope.

Finding the creative opportunities

One of the easiest ways to think creatively about climate or issue-based storytelling is to consider currently unexpected or underserved genres, tropes, and formats, and see how audience expectations can be met, or even exceeded, with creative climate inclusion. It's a helpful creative exercise to take a story that's already compelling and ask "how does this take on elements of a climate story, and how does that make it better?"

Through genre: To challenge the notion that climate films are disaster narratives, there's been a push for rom-coms, Christmas films, light indies, comedies, and relationship-focused stories that include climate elements. These can allow more nuanced takes, and showcase specific aspects of both crisis or solution, than big genre films. That said, there are also alternative genres to disaster to explore, with science fiction being one example of a great space for imagining future worlds.

Through structure: Climate change is not a story that is necessarily suited to the hero's journey, because one protagonist, or one nation, defeating one villain doesn't map onto a systemic crisis created by structures rather than individuals, where there is no clear moment of victory, and in which we need everyone to come together for change - moving away from individualism. Collective challenges need collective stories, and ensemble casts can work well to showcase wider approaches to overcoming systemic issues.

Through format: Some of the richest potential reported to me was around engaging creatives working in larger order formats, like sitcoms, soap operas, and procedurals. These creatives work fast and need different resources than other formats, because of the structure of how the rooms work and how fast they need to be producing. Especially in plot-heavy formats that require a story of the week - crime, legal, hospital, first responders - climate has been proving a prime creative tool. Grey's Anatomy received massive acclaim for its Heat Dome storyline, and research showed significant attitude shifts in viewers.

Through location: Nearly every place in the world is experiencing a changed reality due to climate factors. If a location or geography is integral to a story, this comes with it a series of unique climate factors to explore that are authentic to lives there now and in the future.

Through character: We've seen a rise in TV shows in particular taking an 'insert opinion' approach by giving one or more

characters the role of 'climate advocate', allowing these characters to educate audiences directly about crisis, solutions, and causes. Practitioners now are urging people to ensure that climate activists don't become the butt of the joke, as this can do more harm than good.

How to support creatives

Where most issue-based storytelling efforts go wrong is in the approach. They produce research, toolkits, panels, with a focus on strict clarity of messaging rather than making something that values entertainment first.

What creators - especially those with the power to create things that actually make it onto screens - need is:

- Inspiration, not impact recommendations
- Platform and access to tell stories that can reach people
- Connection to like-minded executives who actually want this work
- Sounding boards who understand story - experts who can be creative partners rather than people who dump research and leave
- Development money: the defining factor in which projects creatives have the time to pursue

The space for meaningful creativity

"We have to stop preaching to the choir. The most exciting potential of entertainment for social impact is that it reaches demographics far beyond those who typically engage with specific issue spaces, without them feeling patronised or like it contradicts their political identity."

When using film and TV as channels to reach audiences about any global challenges, it's vital to look at where different audiences are on the spectrum of their awareness and ensure that there are strategically targeted messages embedded in appropriate media and culture. This is about strategy as much as it is creativity.

This is the value that specialist organisations working across the issue spaces at different touchpoints can bring. Studios and production companies aren't sharing their slates with each other, and independent creators aren't either. It's critical to have real people at organisations responsible for relationships that allow us to gauge trends, gaps, and saturation.

Every systemic issue has an equivalent angle: something that makes it personal, that sidesteps ideology, that meets people in their own lives rather than asking them to care about an abstraction. In climate stories, we've seen that health is a major intersection that appeals across demographics. Every issue space has the potential to cross over with a universal part of the human experience, and that's a rich place to start looking for stories.

But for stories to stay rich, they have to spark with something in the creator that was already there. Simply saying "we need more stories about X" and then doing a document dump isn't the right way to make progress. If talented writers, directors, and producers were interested in making PSAs, they would have gone into that role.

Give creators the tools, the time, and the freedom to be genuinely creative - with support, guidance and education - and they'll come up with stories far more impactful than an entire room of impact professionals could even take the first steps towards imagining. That's because imagination is a gift and a craft that these professionals have spent their careers honing - so let them use it.

2. THE BUSINESS

Hollywood is a business. It is risk-averse and profit-driven. This is not a criticism; it's simply a description of how the industry functions. Buyers - studios and networks - want to invest in producing and distributing what people will actually watch.

"The business plan is to entertain the world, not to save it."

This means that - when it comes to selling our stories - moral arguments don't work. We can't appeal to what Hollywood should do, or what would be good for the world. We have to make the business case, and that requires speaking a different language entirely.

The generational reality

Older producers are "allergic" to climate content. Younger executives are "very, very excited" about it. This is the type of hyperbolic language that I heard repeated in many interviews. While this sentiment is oversimplified, there is some logic to the claims, as well as the anecdotal evidence of many people I spoke to.

"[Older executives] remember the projects that failed, the audiences that didn't show up, and the notes that said 'too political'. That's why it's all safe bets and IP. If they swing big on a story that 'says something' that might alienate their shareholders... well, there's a double incentive for them not to go about that."

"Younger executives are more likely to see stories about wealth inequality, corporate corruption, or democratic erosion as relevant and urgent - just look at the success of A24, building its name on some of the greatest social issues of our time and smashing it at the box office. They want to make a name for themselves in this sexy new space, and they'll put themselves on the line to do so."

In campaigning, we tend to prioritise engaging persuadable audiences over hardliners, as we have more chance of success. It's the same in Hollywood. The task is finding the executives who are ready to be excited by content around our priority issue spaces, and giving them the language to champion these projects internally. As much as they want to do good in the world, they'd have joined an NGO if they didn't also want to do good in their career.

"Frame climate storytelling as professional development rather than activism. Position it as an emerging market with an underserved gap, and bring box office numbers to prove it."

"Just as our job is to equip the storytellers with the subject matter expertise they need to tell a damn good tale, it's our job to equip the executives with what they need to sell the shit out of that story to a table of men who think in dollar signs."

Business, not activism

"The writer's job is to write a good story to sell. It's our job to make sure there's a market knowing it's a good business decision to buy it."

The creative case is necessary to get a project sold, but it is not sufficient without the commercial case. The moral case, however, is almost entirely irrelevant.

Organisations focusing on impact goals are not speaking the same language as TV and film executives. Wanting to "change culture" or "change the world" sounds like an agenda with little return. Talking about underserved audiences, market gaps, and the profitability of stories with a social message sounds like a business opportunity.

"Describe what you're making, not what you're trying to achieve."

When approaching those with buying power to express the necessity to invest in projects around an issue space, official research and data proving climate films make money has been a huge part of increasing the number of projects with climate themes that get made. This is because that's the language buyers speak.

Again, this can come back to not leading with the issue until we have evidence that the issue works as a selling tool. In climate, the word had accumulated so much baggage that it made it harder to get a fair hearing. Now we know to lead with the story, the sales potential, and not the importance.

Every issue space has its loaded words that trigger instant assumptions, that make executives flinch, and that carry the weight of every failed project that came before. Part of the work is identifying those words and finding ways around them with facts, stats, and stories in order to get far enough into the conversation that your story can be judged on its merits.

So when funders are working in the impact storytelling space, sometimes forcing coherence of message can actually stop the project getting made, and there needs to be a focus on a different kind of data. The most useful tracking when it comes to generating a pipeline for issue-based stories is arguably: how many people saw it, did it make money, and does it set a financial precedent for next time?

"DEI succeeded inside Hollywood not because of moral argument but because the culture was moving that way. Audiences wanted to see themselves reflected; talent wanted to work in inclusive environments; awards bodies started paying attention. The moral case existed, but the commercial and reputational case is what moved the industry; the business followed the market."

This is the insight that applies most broadly. Culture and policy are locked in a standoff, each waiting for the other. The only way to break the deadlock is to build infrastructure that creates momentum: organisations that develop projects, connect creators with executives, and fund the work that wouldn't otherwise get

made, then demonstrate that audiences are ready even if the industry hasn't caught up.

Talent engagement

Film, TV and new media are talent-based industries. Execs do an important job, but it's the recognisable names and faces on-screen that make the sales. A lot of the business negotiating power we have comes from maximising the talent ascribing to our cause.

In the UK, Green Rider are already using this knowledge, giving actors, writers and directors the negotiation language to get stories and productions to be greener.

"Established creatives have the chance to move the needle in a way that newer ones don't, not just in terms of public response, but in terms of opening creative doors in the industry."

Established creators with track records get things greenlit. Trust is built over time, and a creator who has delivered before will always have an easier path than a first-timer with the same pitch - but newer creators need to be nurtured, too.

"Everyone is looking for the next hot thing. If the next hot thing - whether that's a festival short, or a killer spec on The Black List - happens to be a climate story, and then it happens to get picked up by A24, then suddenly the town is listening. That's the time for newer creators to be bold and tell the stories that are important to them."

Great stories are ultimately what makes a breakthrough in these cases. Newer creatives are always looking for opportunities to get their foot in the door, through opportunities and contests that established creatives wouldn't consider.

In particular, with their Black List partnership, NRDC's 'Rewrite the Future' programme has been responsible for promoting the value of writing climate stories with a cash prize and industry development. For the first time, SXSW Festival is awarding a prize for 'greenest' production. Incentivising new voices to consider how issues can appear in their work is a critical pathway to ensuring that stories are appearing at all stages of the content stream.

Becoming too institutionalised

The climate storytelling ecosystem has become a recognised part of the broader Hollywood apparatus, and it has been instrumental in ensuring that sustainability is a key factor at all stages of the journey from idea through production, through marketing and distribution.

"Where we are now, we run the risk of becoming a box to tick, instead of creating actual change."

Institutionalisation is necessary if you want to be taken seriously. Having a department, a committee, or a formal initiative all create legitimacy and access. But the development of these are not goals in and of themselves.

"We're a part of the conversation, but I don't know that matters if it just remains a conversation."

Formalising the necessity for climate stories and sustainable processes created a seat at the table for organisations in the climate storytelling space, but this seat at the table does not guarantee that anyone will listen to what you say once you're sitting there. The real task is turning a seat at the table into actual influence over what gets made - and that means that being accepted into institutions is the beginning, not the end of the journey to push for issue-based storytelling in film, TV, and new media.

3. THE FUNDING

As with any issue space, the major problem that people I spoke to noted was with funding:

"The gap between what gets resourced and what actually moves the needle is gigantic."

"Organisations get funding for what funders will fund. That's not always the same as what's most effective. There's a version of this work that looks impressive in grant applications - convenings, research reports, toolkits - and a version that actually changes what gets made. They're not always the same thing. And it's frustrating to be spending so much time on one and not the other."

"The organisations with the most money aren't necessarily the ones best positioned to do the work, but they can crowd out the smaller, more nimble players who are."

The funding landscape

Hollywood has long been known as a place built on nepotism, meaning that the only people who can afford to work within it are those with the resources to do so. The same appears to be true for many of the most effective initiatives run by the professionals I spoke to.

Many of the programmes that have had the most impact run entirely on volunteer labour, self-funded by people doing other

work to pay the bills, particularly in cases where there was a concerted effort to give access to underrepresented voices.

I asked why getting funding for narrative shift was so hard to get off the ground, knowing that environmental institutions have significant resources, and that many of them have created climate storytelling programmes.

"For most of them, story and culture is a side project compared to the science and the groundwork. Which we completely understand. But it's tough. It's not their priority."

"The duplication of research efforts is frustrating... funders aren't talking, so they're all doing their little mini tests. You're publishing the same things over and over, multiple organisations commissioning similar research. And who is even reading them? Not the people actually doing the work. And then the people doing the work are doing it for free."

"When I was working in the entertainment industry, there were a number of sustainability committees that were starting to talk about climate storytelling - but you had to be a union member to be a part of them. It's extremely challenging to become a union member, especially when unions are contracting. So some big constituencies, young people especially, were not a part of those conversations."

Critically, many of the programmes in this space have been intentionally accessible for newer creators and younger executives, positioning climate as a career opportunity in a world where the path to 'break in' to Hollywood seems less reliable than ever.

Significant opportunities in the climate storytelling space offer grants and funds directly to creators, which is the single most effective tool there is for creating new stories, but also for supporting new voices - often those who bring diverse, representative perspectives and lived experiences - to drastically change the DNA of the systems we are in.

Impact measurement

Philanthropic funding comes with expectations around impact measurement. That's understandable; funders need to know that their money is doing something. But in the storytelling space, this creates real problems.

"Impact reporting just kills me... I think it's a fixation."

There's a sense that funders are looking towards safety rather than taking risks, which is a clash with the need for drastic change that underpins this work. Combined with the risk-averse nature of Hollywood, many people who straddle the two spaces feel creatively stifled from both fronts.

"There is a tension between what funders want out of climate stories and what actually makes a good story."

"Can we get to a place where we can trust intuition again?"

The biggest frustration is that, especially within an administration that is actively pulling back on climate agreements that are essential to the avoidance of key scientific tipping points, now is not the time to be playing it safe, or by existing rulebooks. And besides, the organisations funding the ongoing climate mis- and disinformation campaign have not been playing safe or by any rulebook for quite some time.

"You want a case study? I don't need a little baby case study... Charlie Kirk is the case study. Joe Rogan is the case study."

"The opposition hasn't needed randomised controlled trials to prove that embedding messages in entertainment works. They just did it, for decades, and the results are visible everywhere."

That's not to say that measurement as a whole isn't vital. Studies on the impact of the Grey's Anatomy Heat Dome storyline, as well as Adam McKay's Netflix hit Don't Look Up, have been essential parts of building the many cases for what works, and what is important, and for the power of stories in general when it comes to communicating complex issues. But that is not the kind of research and measurement that gets in the way of groundbreaking, future-shifting creative narrative work that makes a real impact worth measuring.

Don't reinforce a system that needs changing

We are not doing this work simply to make stories about climate change. We are doing this because we want to make a change in the world.

"The work is the values work - not talking points."

There is a valid systemic critique about the movement being "very white centric" that I heard repeatedly in interviews, and that speaks as much to Hollywood as to the NGO space. Some of the hardest projects to get funding for have been those that deliberately step outside of this and try to give essential space to the stories of those from communities that are directly impacted by our climate-changed world, specifically those from indigenous communities or those from the global south.

"The actual people that are immediately harmed are always sidelined."

I was trying to work out where to put this section of my report, because I feel that it fits into so many. But fundamentally, I wanted to end the research portion with it because I think it's the most important. And I wanted to place it within the 'funding' section because there is a consistent and strong drive to lift up new voices and storytellers across the climate storytelling landscape. The only thing standing in the way of running vital programmes to do so is the funding.

If the infrastructure to challenge global challenges simply replicates the existing industry structures we already have, we will not see fundamental change. The people already in the room are inevitably the people who built the structures that we are fighting in our impact work. It is essential that we bring new people into the room - and that means funding them.

This final quote does, to me, encapsulate what we mean when we say that there is no solving climate change without first demanding and facilitating systems change.

"The voices that have shaped this world and these systems are problematic, so you're not going to be able to envision new systems if you're not literally resourcing opportunities for new voices."

CONCLUSION: THE CASE FOR IMPACT STORYTELLING

Many organisations in the climate storytelling space exist because waiting for bigger organisations to do the right thing was taking too long. Passionate people decided to build the infrastructure themselves - connecting creators to experts, executives to data, projects to funding - and in doing so, they have created a form of narrative shift. Climate went from virtually absent in mainstream entertainment to regularly integrated across genres, formats, and production values - and this shift is happening at a historically significant time to drive mass support of global, if not national, climate action and policy.

But something worrying came up repeatedly while I was doing this research: while we've been focused on film and TV, the opposition has been elsewhere.

|"Charlie Kirk is the case study. Joe Rogan is the case study."

We know that fossil fuels and related industries have run a decades-long propaganda campaign in media of all forms, and that's what has made the work of the climate storytelling world so difficult; we have been fighting lies that are deeply embedded.

While progressives have been pushing hard on traditional media to reach mass audiences to rectify public understanding of climate narratives, the right seems to have moved away from traditional media altogether. Instead, the right has been funding and operating

across smaller, parasocial spaces - podcasts, gaming, sports content, faith communities, influencers who speak directly to people, and often young men, in places progressives have written off or failed to understand. They have sidestepped Hollywood and prestige and inaccessible celebrity. Instead, they've just shown up, consistently, and with a lot of funding, in the spaces where people actually are.

“*Is there a Good Energy for online? I don't think there is.*”

This report focuses on film, TV, and new media because that's where the climate storytelling infrastructure exists, and where the lessons are clearest - and because that is what I set out to investigate. But I want to be honest: even as we celebrate what's been built, there's a version of this work that needs to happen in spaces we haven't yet figured out how to reach. The playbook here is a starting point, for the climate industry and beyond, but it is also a call to action that there is a lot more we need to do if we want to catch up again.

The structures we're working within - Hollywood, philanthropy, institutions - were not designed to tell these stories. They were designed to protect the interests of those who benefit from the status quo. The same concentration of power, the same risk aversion, the same gatekeeping that keeps challenging stories off our screens is a feature, not a flaw. Getting a seat at the table is not enough if the table was built to exclude us.

What's required is not just better programmes or more funding, though both would help. What's required is a fundamental shift in who holds power, who gets resourced, and whose stories get told. The climate storytelling ecosystem has shown this is possible - but it's taken years of unpaid labour, grassroots organising, and people who refused to stop, even when there was limited funding and support to continue.

"We need you to do this now, because we're concerned about funding... we need a strong connection with countries who aren't as impacted by the random whims of a man who could wake up one day and decide to defund literally everything."

The current political moment has made this urgent in a new way. US organisations are looking outward for support and partnership, philanthropy may be shifting its base, and university partnerships are under threat. The infrastructure that has been painstakingly built is now vulnerable - and the UK has an opportunity to step up, not just to learn from the US model, but to provide a lifeline. Existential threats are, after all, global challenges. They impact us all.

For funders: trust intuition, expertise, and risks that may pay off over 'safe' approaches that haven't worked in some time. Stop demanding proof from movements when the opposition has operated on faith for decades. The most effective work is often the hardest to quantify, and the people doing it are exhausted from justifying their existence while doing it for free.

For industry: a seat at the table means nothing if it doesn't translate into influence over what gets made. Sustainability departments and formal initiatives to support diversity or change may create legitimacy and seem like action, but they are not enough if they do not create meaningful opportunities to push harder on broken systems.

For creators: imagination is a tool. It has been weaponised against us for decades - by fossil fuel companies, by those who profit from division, by an industry that would rather make the same safe story a hundred times than take a chance on something that matters. The stories we need are not going to come from impact consultants or philanthropic strategy documents - they are going to come from the most human parts of people existing in a changing world. And stories are what we need if we are going to communicate and mobilise to face any existential threat. They are the only tool that can bypass our fear of confronting the truth of what is coming - and that is what leads to support for action.

I started by saying this, and I'll conclude in the same way. This is about more than climate change, because climate change is one symptom of a society broken by design. The same structures that created the crisis - the concentration of power, the corruption of institutions, the deliberate erosion of trust - are the ones protecting it. The playbook that has worked for climate storytelling can work for any issue space where the stories that need to be told are stories that challenge the world as it is, because the world needs to change.

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jessicariches.com