

Covering Climate Equitably

A GUIDE FOR JOURNALISTS

THE SOLUTIONS PROJECT.ORG

DEVELOPED BY



The Solutions Project is a national nonprofit organization that promotes climate justice through grantmaking and amplifying the stories of front-line community leaders in the media. The organization seeks to accelerate the transition to 100% clean energy and equitable access to healthy air, water and soils by supporting climate justice organizations, especially those led by women of color.

TheSolutionsProject.org



For almost 20 years, Provoc has partnered with visionary leaders on the critical issues of our time – from redefining the Smithsonian’s global brand to launching a sophisticated, science-based platform to accelerate an end to Alzheimer’s. As a firm specializing in outcome-driven design, by the people, for the people, Provoc roots its work in an equity lens. Through this lens, Provoc seeks to work with clients and partners who believe in social, economic and racial justice.

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Conspire for Good is a strategy and communications collaborative committed to helping progressive organizations, entrepreneurs, and social ventures achieve their goals and scale their impact. Through organizational development, strategic planning, and messaging and branding, we help clients build and refine the foundation they need to succeed.

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FOREWARD

Whether and how the media covers energy, climate, and environmental issues matters. Journalists across all media (print, broadcast, radio, online) have the power to influence how people think, what they believe to be possible and what we collectively aspire to achieve.

While coverage of these topics has increased in recent years as renewable energy investment has soared and the climate crisis escalates, important stories are missing about the communities most affected by climate change and dirty energy. Research has shown that the climate crisis is disproportionately affecting poor and low-income communities and communities of color.

We use the phrases “communities of color” and “people of color” throughout this guide, but The Solutions Project recognizes that these catch-all terms are problematic because they don’t capture the nuance of individual racial and ethnic groups, and that it’s best to refer to specific groups as they identify themselves whenever possible.

Research conducted by The Solutions Project and Conspire for Good found that:

- Of the more than 2,300 renewable energy articles reviewed in 2019*, 42% included women as spokespeople, up a meaningful 21% from our [study in 2018](#)
- Only 6% of articles talked about issues of equity or justice; and
- Only 2% referenced communities of color, down from 7% in 2018

** Articles came from LexisNexis and Google News and from publications including national and state outlets, and online and trade publications.*

Given the disproportionate impacts of climate change and dirty energy, many communities already understand the urgency. Grassroots community groups and those engaged in front-line, on-the-ground work are the strongest source of leadership and drive toward 100% renewable energy policies. While mayoral leadership rises in prominence, it’s the communities that inspire local and state policy by driving local governments to take action based on proven solutions they create. These are the stories that don’t often make headlines.

One reason is limited time and resources. Shrinking budgets for most media outlets make it hard for reporters to spend time finding and cultivating new relationships with frontline and grassroots spokespeople or educating themselves about issues of **equity**. When on deadline, it's often easier for a reporter to contact existing sources and cover their beat using language and storylines already familiar to them and their readers.

Additionally, approximately **95%** of each year's \$60 billion in U.S. foundation funding goes to organizations led by white people, while **70% to 80%** goes to organizations led by men. About half of climate funding is concentrated in just 20 organizations, with demographics that match this extreme homogeneity in leadership. Due to insufficient funding, most climate groups led by Black, Indigenous, Hispanic, Latinx and other people of color lack communications capacity to pitch their stories to journalists. Addressing this issue needs to be a priority for funders. That's why The Solutions Project made a **100% Commitment to Justice**, pledging to devote 95% of its funding resources to groups led by people of color, with at least 80% of those groups led by women.

Covering Climate Equitably: A Guide for Journalists – designed with input from journalists and editors, and endorsed by **Solutions Journalism Network** – seeks to serve as a valuable resource for media professionals, making it easier to source, report and write stories that include an equity lens. While *Covering Climate Equitably: A Guide for Journalists* utilizes print outlets for the case studies, the approaches suggested are intended to be adaptable to television, radio and online outlets as well.

The guide also intended to hopefully serve as a catalyst for journalists to consider more inclusive ways to report about clean energy and climate issues based on our research reports. It does not purport to address every way in which people across intersecting communities, backgrounds and identities are disproportionately impacted by other systemic and structural injustices. Several media and advocacy organizations and journalism associations have published guides as well and we hope this guide will complement those existing works ([see additional resources](#)).

Thank you for the important work you do to shine a light on the issues, people and solutions that are so relevant for our time.



SARAH SHANLEY HOPE

VP, Brand + Partnerships
The Solutions Project

Reporting Considerations



Volunteer Members and Staff of Georgia WAND

Photo Credit: Sheila Pree Bright / The Solutions Project

WHY USE THIS GUIDE?

If you're seeking to write inclusive stories that cover climate change and provide information on clean energy and other climate solutions, this guide is for you. If this isn't your usual beat, but you find clean energy and other climate-related themes emerging in your regular reporting, this guide is for you, as well.

An equity lens is important because for decades the impact of systemic racism, classism and unjust disenfranchisement has left people of color to live with, and fight against, our reliance on dirty energy; as a result, people are left to grapple with its ill effects – from poor health to displaced property values and disinvestment.

This disparate treatment is called **environmental racism** and it's a form of **structural racism** where laws, regulations, policies and corporate decisions benefit white people at the expense of people of color.

These prejudices and longstanding sustained inequities also have shaped some media coverage. We are missing thousands of powerful stories not only about the impacts on these communities, but also about communities and leaders who are standing up for **environmental justice** and are leading the way on **clean energy and climate solutions** at the local, municipal and state levels.

Now, with climate scientists sounding the alarm and huge investments being made by philanthropic, public and private capital, all eyes are on clean energy, regenerative agriculture and stormwater management. This an opportunity to elevate the voices of those most impacted by the climate crisis, and who are innovating climate solutions that work for everyone.

This guide is designed to help you navigate some of the obstacles you might face in reporting these stories and tell the story of clean energy and climate solutions through a racial and gender equity lens. Structurally, this guide starts upstream, with an exploration of core values, key questions to consider before writing and the importance of narrative frameworks.

Toward the end of the guide, you'll find a glossary of terms, a list of potential resources and contacts, additional links to other guides and supportive content, and a few compelling case studies.

GUIDING VALUES

As sponsors of this guide, at The Solutions Project, we are driven by the values that we hope inspire partners, communities and key communicators to tell equitable and expansive stories about a new future. The values that drive our work – and that we also consider vital to the craft of journalism – are as follows:

PURSUIT OF TRUTH

In our striving for accuracy, we are responsible for asking tough questions, reflecting on motivations and holding those with power accountable.

FAIRNESS

To ensure fairness and balance, we incorporate historically under-represented voices and do not rely only on the usual spokespeople.

POSSIBILITY

We understand that the possibilities we see for our future are a direct reflection of the stories we consume.

SOLUTIONS

The urgency of our climate crisis necessitates solutions. If we center those most affected by climate change in our work and in the stories that guide our work, we will be closer to the solutions that will create a new future. And where solutions to pressing problems exist, they're an essential part of the story. Thankfully, there are already many solutions ready for scaled implementation.

HUMANITY

We are aware that the stories and images we share have the power to inspire, motivate and shape outcomes. Personal stories can connect to larger insights and themes to move our audiences.

COMMITMENT

We recognize that centering equity in our work is not a one-off; it's an ongoing process requiring dedication, patience and active listening.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

When people use the phrase “apply an equity lens,” it may feel vague or unclear how to incorporate it into news stories. While there is no perfect or simple way to embrace an equity lens, here are a few questions to ask in the beginning to frame your thinking:

Starter Questions:

Q: Is there a perspective or community angle missing from my story that I should include?

Q: Does my story rely on any assumptions about groups of underrepresented people?

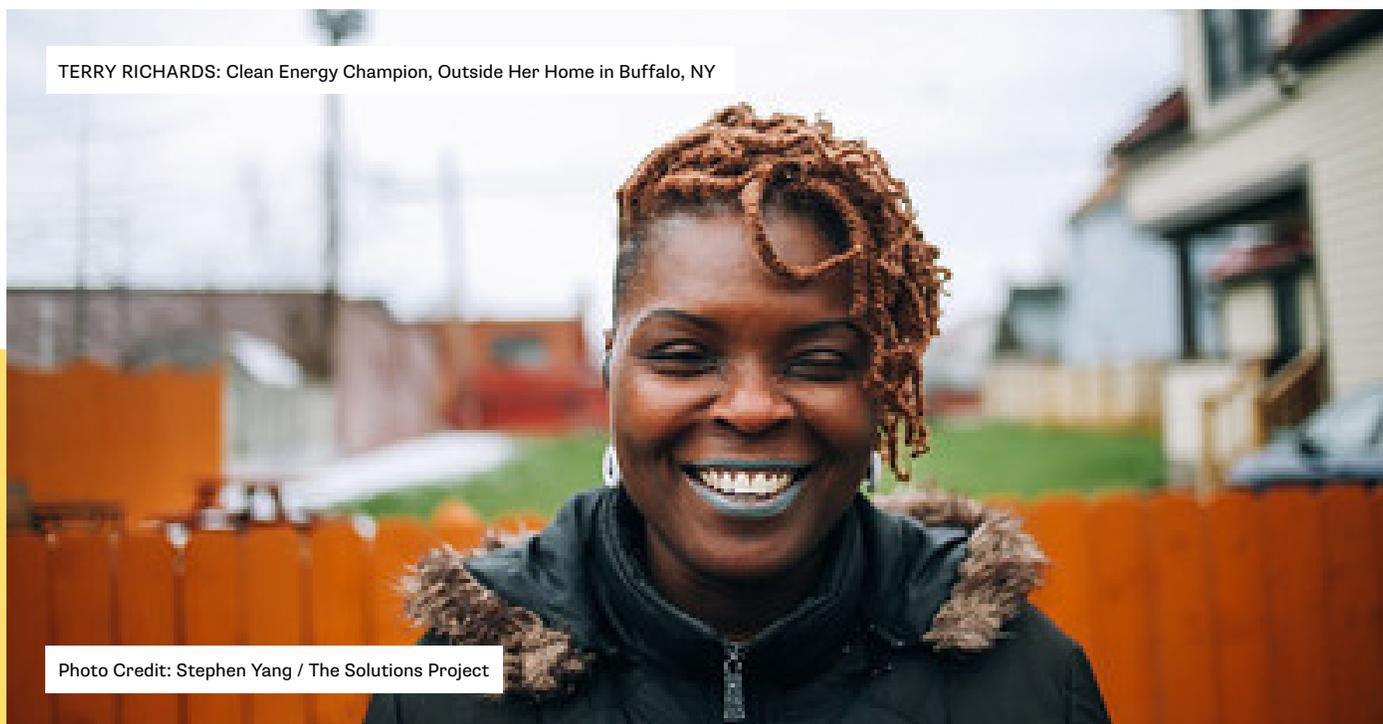
→ If yes, do I need to rethink those assumptions?

Q: When describing groups of people, their characteristics or their actions, have I accidentally leaned into any problematic narratives?

→ Are any groups described in ways that portray harmful stereotypes?

→ Have I removed the agency or power of underrepresented groups in my writing (i.e., describing them in ways that portray them as victims or blames them)?

→ Have I unintentionally perpetuated any problematic dynamics between different groups of people?





SHANDA NEAL: Staff of Georgia's 9 to 5

Photo Credit: Sheila Pree Bright / The Solutions Project

FRAMING A STORY

Bringing an equity lens to your reporting is not just an altruistic endeavor or moral obligation. We trust that every journalist strives to write *more equitable stories*. Plus, representative and human-centered stories are often more authentic and compelling to readers.

As a journalist, you have a unique ability to shape the public narrative about clean energy and other climate solutions. Freedom of the press is enshrined in our Constitution, and the media plays an essential role in informing the public, exposing injustice and helping us imagine a better future. Those who profit from dirty energy have powerful public relations teams working every day to shape the energy narrative, but those living on the front lines of the climate crisis deserve to have their story told in their own words, too. It's also important to note that the climate organizations most resourced to pitch stories, or to be on source lists, are often disconnected from impacted communities. That's where the equity lens comes in.

As a reporter or editor, you often get to choose the frame of every story you tell. You typically decide whose voices and interests are central to the story, and who is often not heard.

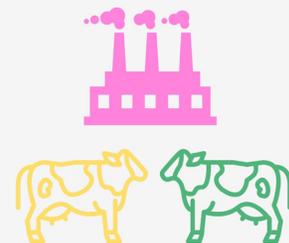
Kimberlé Crenshaw, Professor of Law at UCLA and Columbia Law School and a leading authority in Civil Rights and Black feminist legal theory, shares the perfect **example** of how this framing responsibility manifests and how the frame we choose dictates the solutions that are possible. She uses a frame with a picture of cows grazing in a field to illustrate her point:

“The cows are sick. Who is responsible”? she asked people. “Do the cows need to exercise more, change their behavior, is it the music they listen to?” She then widened the frame from the cows to show a factory belching smoke, just behind the field, and talked about how the narrative of individual responsibility places blame on people for their own health problems when the problems are systemic and structural.

Using the cow predicament as an analogy for modern institutional approaches steeped in individualism: regardless of behavior, one cannot responsible their way out of a toxic environment. In parallel, those struggling for equity have to learn to detect, disrupt, and open up new, different narratives: “Our desire isn’t enough when the dominant narratives don’t give us the info we need to understand the scope of the problem... the narratives we have access to don’t fully tell our stories.”¹



When we expand the frame, we change the narrative.



Building on Crenshaw’s analogy, as reporters who aim to tell equitable and balanced stories, it’s important to ask if the frame you chose for your story is expansive enough to present the full scale of possibilities for potential solutions.

¹ Wainwright, Corrina. “Building for Racial Justice and Health Equity Narrative Power.” Edited by Bisola Falola and Steffie Kinglake, www.opensocietyfoundations.org, The Open Society Foundations and Public Health Program, 12 Aug. 2019, [building-narrative-power-for-racial-justice-and-healthy-equity-20190812.pdf](https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/building-narrative-power-for-racial-justice-and-healthy-equity-20190812.pdf).

COMMON CHALLENGES

When working to tell stories fairly and through an equity lens, you may face challenges and run into a range of obstacles – everything from logistics and process issues to some pretty entrenched hurdles that reflect deeper, systemic barriers to change. Let's dive in:

MAKING TIME WHEN YOU HAVE NONE



Challenge:

“How am I supposed to get this level of research and relationship building done when I’m on such tight deadlines?”

Solution:

Energy and climate change are complex topics. When you tug at one strand of a community’s story, you’ll likely find it tethered to another, and another. Remember this is about more than writing a single story. Incorporating an equity lens is an ongoing process; it takes time and commitment to shape new narratives. Take small bites and use your reporting to steadily chip away at the complexity and offer new perspectives. In the process, you might educate both yourself and your readers.

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?



Challenge:

“I’m not sure my editor/executive producer even knows what equity and environmental justice mean.”

Solution:

This is a tricky one because it’s one of those upstream challenges where you have to educate before and during your work on your stories. Your editor or executive producer might know a little or not know much (or anything) about equity and environmental justice, but you can help engage them. You can make the business case for stories that explore clean energy and climate through an equity lens. Too often these stories are left untold, and this could be your outlet’s opportunity to tell an original story that draws in new audiences. Stories about climate are no longer limited to the environmental beat – coverage of the topic happens across health, business, politics and lifestyle stories. This allows for even more opportunities for increased engagement. Plus, using an equity lens reflects traditional journalistic value, such as fairness, balance and accountability.

NEW PROTAGONISTS



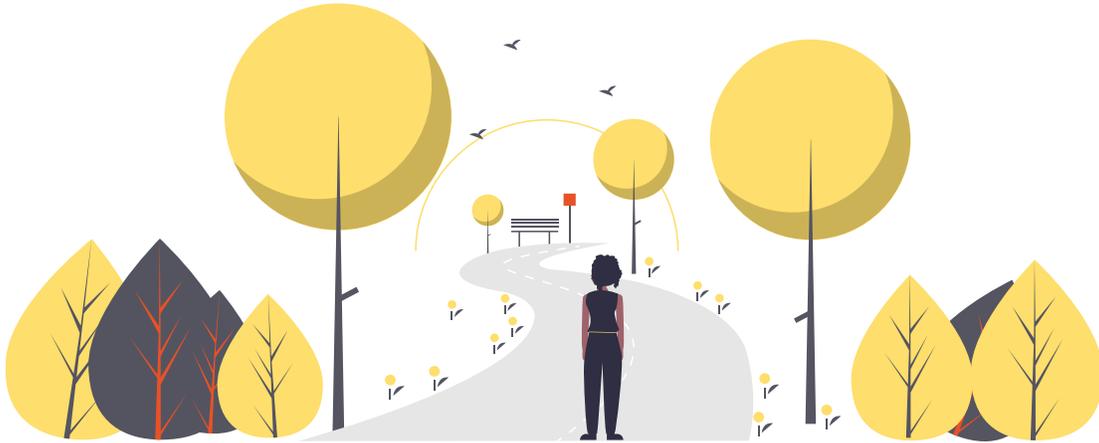
Challenge:

“I’m trying to feature frontline voices in my writing, but they’re not keen on talking to me.”

Solution:

One of the biggest challenges for people of color working on clean energy and other climate solutions is they are often portrayed as the “victims” in the story, rather than leaders and innovators. Strive to build authentic relationships with new story sources, and write those stories with those community leaders as the true and relatable heroes of the story. Ask them what they think is important about the story and what other reporters have overlooked. Consider there is often complexity and abundance and joy that is not covered, and that is really part of this work at this personal and local scale.

FAMILIAR ASSIGNMENTS



Challenge:

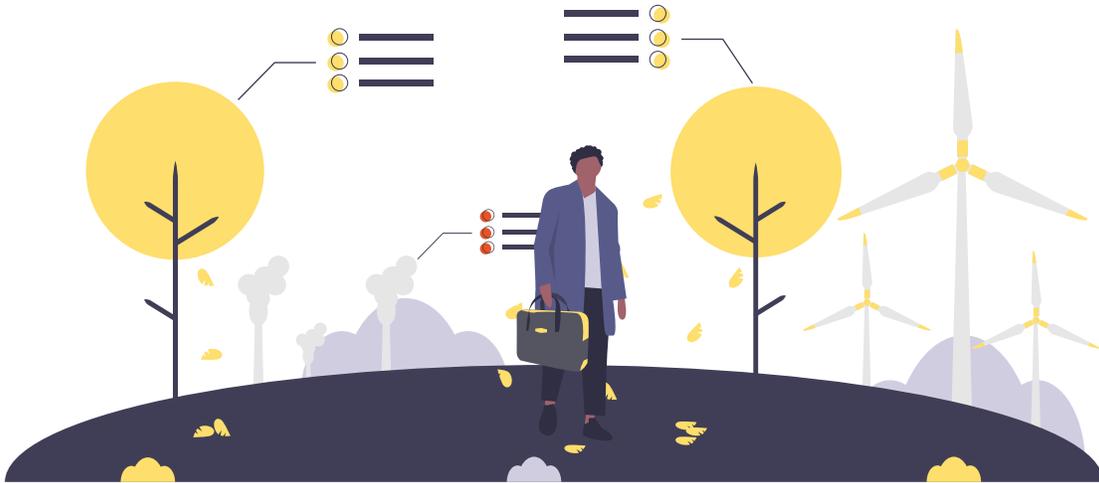
“I keep getting asked to write about the latest high-tech entrepreneur.”

Solution:

It takes time to develop relationships with new sources for stories – and it also takes time and effort to work with your editors to pitch them on new ideas. If you keep getting assigned a familiar story, explore new ways to tell it while centering an equity lens. For example, you could look at the demographics of a company’s leadership, workforce, and place of production and how those shape the company’s values and products.

Case Study Example:

[Chicago’s Blacks in Green promotes energy efficiency in ‘looked over’ areas](#)



Challenge:

“But isn’t clean energy all about technology? That’s the only angle I ever see covered, and that’s not my expertise.”

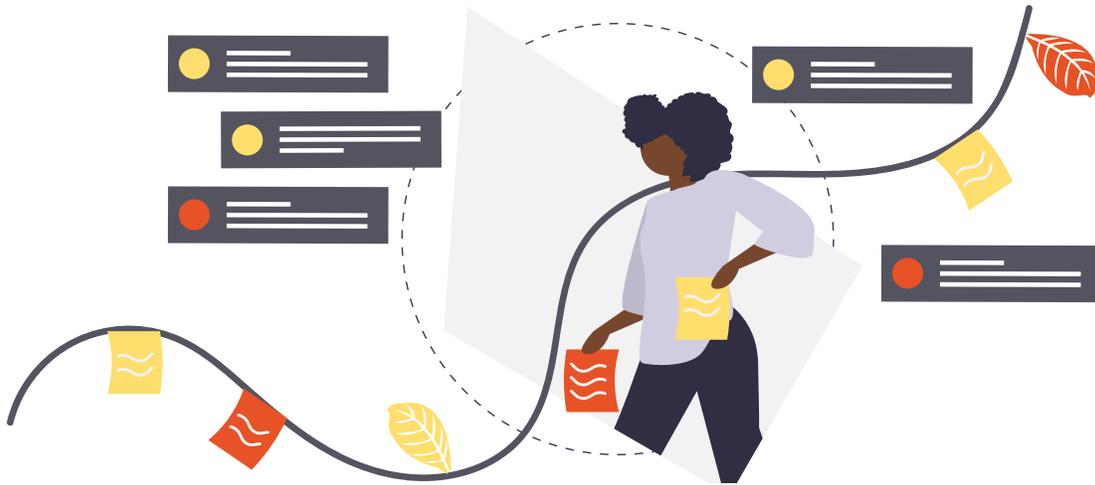
Solution:

There are lots of ways to connect the clean-energy story with the environmental justice story. You can connect the dots between clean energy and improved health. You can look at gentrification, job creation, property values and other economic benefits that happen when a community transitions away from dirty energy. You can talk with city planners to understand how a community is preparing for or responding to climate change. You could profile a solar installer who took advantage of a clean-energy workforce development program.

Case Study Example:

[Houston activist fights industry in backyard and beyond](#)

THE (HE)ART OF INTERVIEWING



Challenge:

“I feel like I’m hitting a wall in my interviews. I’m not making a good connection.”

Solution:

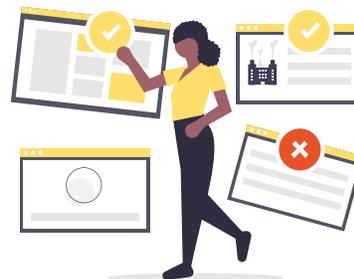
Many front-line communities have been marginalized and victimized by having their stories misrepresented – so it’s critical that journalists learn new ways of interviewing, connecting and listening. Ask what’s most important in the story to the person you’re interviewing. Ask what your interviewee would most want to have featured and celebrated in the story. What’s being overlooked? Who else should you talk to? Listen carefully to the words and the tone that are being used, and be sure to capture those accurately. Remember that it can take time to build trust.

Case Study Example:

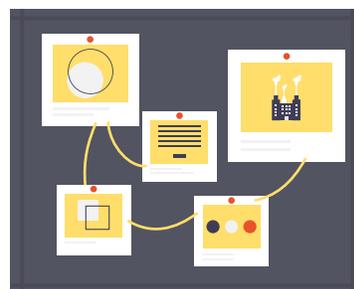
[The History of Earth Day](#)

HOW TO GET STARTED

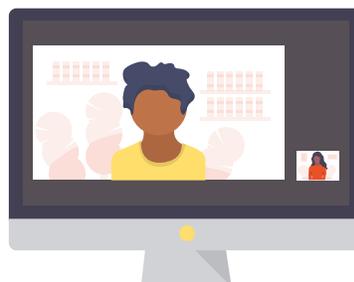
- 1** Start researching and gathering reliable leads for environmental justice and clean energy or other climate solutions stories (This guide is a great place to start and includes examples of equity-centered stories in the [Case Studies section](#)).



- 2** Familiarize yourself with the history and the energy or climate story of the community you're writing about – sometimes that could be a story in and of itself. Who made what energy decisions and when, and how does it impact the community now?



- 3** Begin reaching out to and building relationships with some of the people you'd like to interview.



- 4** Take stock of how many environmental justice and clean-energy stories your media outlet has covered in the past month, the past three months, the past six months (see next section on tracking progress).



HOW TO GET STARTED

- 5** How are other news outlets – especially those by and for people of color and in various languages – covering this topic? What would you like to do differently or better? What stories aren't being told?



- 6** Start planting seeds with your editor or executive producer to gauge their interest in covering these stories. Show them a couple of good examples (again, you can reference the [Case Studies](#) section of this guide as a helpful place to start).



- 7** Know that it might take a little longer to nurture a lead, develop a relationship with a story source and understand a community's energy story.



Tracking Progress



Photo Credit: La Marana



One of the key obstacles to increasing representation in stories is not having a clear understanding of your equity goals and how you're measuring up against those goals. This is best done on a newsroom-wide scale, so here are a few easy steps for your newsroom and/or producer to begin to track how clean energy and climate data are reported:

- 1** Gather buy-in from key people in the newsroom, especially top editors and producers.
- 2** Don't over-complicate the plan. Start simply with a lift that feels achievable. As you begin to track data with rigor, you can explore more detailed metrics and processes. Focus first on just getting started and making it a habit.
- 3** Identify what metrics you would like to track. You need to decide what type of representation you are seeking to increase, while also avoiding tokenization. You must also decide what parts of stories should be monitored. Examples of metrics include:
 - Representation: race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, etc.
 - Story components: sources, quotes, experts, bylines, photography, etc.
- 4** After identifying your metrics, establish preliminary goals.
- 5** Decide how often you want to measure and evaluate.

- 6 Create a spreadsheet that is simple and easy to use; you might want to use the sample below as a template. Make sure your spreadsheet has a place to track each metric and goal you've established.

Sample Spreadsheet

Article Title	Publication Date	# People of Color Quoted	# Women Quoted
Article 1	DD/MM/YY	x	x
Article 2	DD/MM/YY	x	x
Article 3	DD/MM/YY	x	x
TOTAL		xxx	xxx
Quarterly Target		xxx	xxx

- 7 We recommend setting a calendar reminder to input data into the spreadsheet that maps to your agreed-upon cadence.
- 8 Compare results to goals on at least a monthly basis.
- 9 Find time to celebrate your successes and share stories that you're especially proud of; you may even consider joining or forming a peer group across the field.
- 10 If you're tracking data only for your own stories, consider initiating a conversation with the producers or editorial board to get buy-in from the whole newsroom.



Tools and Resources

Local Buffalo Youth at the The Grant Street Neighborhood Center Which Provided an Open, Safe and Productive Community

Space with Resources and Programs That Respond to Expressed Community Needs of Buffalo's West Side.



Photo Credit: Stephen Yang / The Solutions Project

LANGUAGE CHOICE

Journalists can do the hard work of creating the most compelling story, yet choose words that alienate or stigmatize readers, negating all that hard work. In addition to longstanding resources such as the [AP Stylebook](#), we highly recommend consulting a guide like the [Progressive's Style Guide](#) by Sum of Us.



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Here are some of the key terms that can be helpful in covering energy and climate issues with an equity lens. There are many ways these terms can be defined. These definitions represent our best synthesis from a variety of sources. It is not intended to serve as an exhaustive list, but to highlight some of the common terms journalists may use in covering stories with an equity lens.

CLEAN ENERGY

The phrases “clean energy” and “renewable energy” are often used interchangeably, but usage varies, and it’s worth clarifying definitions when sources use these terms. Renewable energy comes from natural sources or processes that are constantly replenished, including solar, wind, geothermal and most existing hydropower. Because they generate energy with little or no greenhouse gas emissions or other pollution, these also are considered clean forms of energy. While nuclear power doesn’t emit greenhouse gases at the point of generation, issues involving spent fuel, nuclear proliferation, and the potential for Fukushima-level accidents prevent us from calling it “clean.” As for hydropower, reservoirs can generate CO₂ and methane, especially in the first several years. New hydropower projects also risk displacing local vulnerable populations and disrupting local ecosystems. For these reasons, we don’t consider new hydropower to be clean energy. Similarly, local stakeholders may have strong opinions on what counts as clean.

DIRTY ENERGY

Dirty energy is generated by burning fossil fuels, including coal, oil and natural gas. Burning these fossil fuels releases carbon and pollution into the atmosphere. The extraction and production of these fossil fuels through fracking, mining and processing also is highly polluting and damaging to communities and ecosystems. Many communities advocate to “Keep it in the Ground” and stand against all extraction. Many also advocate against biomass, nuclear and other energy sources that increase pollution and security risks for those living or working close to production. A good rule of thumb is to interview stakeholders closest to the energy source, including workers and neighbors.

DIVERSITY

Diversity refers to many ways in which people differ, encompassing all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. Diversity includes many things, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, age, nationality, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, physical appearance, ideas, perspectives and values.

ENERGY BURDEN

Energy burden is the percentage of household income that goes toward energy costs, including electricity, home heating and cooling, and transportation.

ENERGY RELIABILITY

Energy reliability refers to a power system that has enough generation, demand response and network capacity to supply customers with the energy that they demand, when they demand it, with a very high degree of confidence.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Environmental justice (EJ) is the equitable treatment and inclusion of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, class, ability or income with respect to the development, implementation, protection and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.

ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

Environmental racism refers to the disproportionate negative impact of environmental pollutants, dirty energy, lack of clean energy access, fair and equitable policies, regulations and infrastructure on Black, Indigenous, Hispanic, Latinx and other communities of color.

EQUITY

Just and fair inclusion making it possible for all to participate, prosper and reach their full potential. It's important to be explicit about the source of systemic inequity being addressed; for example, racial equity, gender equity, etc.

EXTRACTIVE CULTURE

Extractive is defined as involving extraction, especially the extensive extraction of natural resources without planning and providing for their renewal. An extractive culture is one where there is an imbalance of power, and where one group is exploited in terms of health, safety, labor and economic security. This is also true in storytelling and journalism where sources are viewed as resources to be tapped, and thus dehumanized (see [extractive storytelling](#)).

FOOD APARTHEID

Food apartheid recognizes that lack of access to healthy food is more systematic and looks at the whole food system, along with race, geography, faith and economics. It impacts people from all backgrounds, although Black and brown people are affected disproportionately. Food desert is not an accurate term, because communities might have access to food while lacking healthy options. (see activist [Karen Washington](#) on redefining food systems).

FRONTLINE COMMUNITY

Frontline communities are those that experience the first and most damaging impacts of the climate crisis. They are most often low-income communities of color, Black communities, Indigenous and Native communities, and neighborhoods that lack access to resources and infrastructure to defend against the toxic and polluting impacts of a dirty energy economy. They are closest to the problems of pollution, climate change and extraction.

GREEN JOBS

Green jobs are part of the larger framework of a green economy, which focuses on sustainable development that minimizes environmental risks and ecological damage. Green jobs provide financial security, while generating products and services that use or create renewable energy resources, reduce pollution, conserve energy and natural resources, and reconstitute waste.

INCLUSION

Bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes and decision-making in a way that authentically shares power.

INTERSECTIONALITY

The theory introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw that explores the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap or intersect, especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups. “It’s basically a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status. What’s often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts.” - Prof. Crenshaw

SEXISM

A system of beliefs and actions, fueled by institutional power, targeting people based on supposed naturalistic categories of sex, gender and/or gender identity.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Describes a person’s enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to another person. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same and should not be used interchangeably.

STRUCTURAL RACISM

The normalization of historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal dynamics that routinely advantage white people while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. Structural racism is the most profound, pervasive form of racism, and all other forms of racism emerge from it.



PUSH Buffalo Staff Inside Local Greenhouse on Buffalo's West Side

Photo Credit: Stephen Yang / The Solutions Project

SOURCES AND CONTACTS

The Solutions Project funds nonprofits focused on community organizing, policy work, fossil fuel infrastructure resistance, Indigenous-led movements, innovative community development projects and democratically controlled rural electric cooperatives.

[Learn more](#) about their frontline work.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Asian American Journalists Association](#)

[Free Press: News Voices](#)

[GLAAD: Media Reference Guide](#)

[Guide to Less Extractive Reporting](#)

[National Association of Black Journalists](#)

[National Black Justice Coalition:
Gender Justice Toolkit](#)

[Native American Journalists Association](#)

[Racial Equity Tools](#)

[Society of Environmental Journalists:
Guide to Diversity in Environmental
Reporting](#)

[Sum of Us: Progressive Style Guide](#)

[The Association of LGBTQ Journalists](#)

[The National Association of Hispanic
Journalists](#)

[AP Stylebook](#)

CASE STUDIES

Now that we've provided some information, tips and insights on how to write about clean energy and other climate solutions with an equity lens, here are a few real-world examples that demonstrate some of the best practices from *Covering Climate Equitably: A Guide for Journalists*. Below you'll find three articles covering a range of media outlets. We've summarized each article and highlighted key insights.



HOUSTON  **CHRONICLE**

Houston Activist Fights Industry in Backyard and Beyond

Sergio Chapa, a *Houston Chronicle* reporter, took a unique approach to covering a documentary premiere that was postponed due to COVID-19. Written largely as a profile feature, this article centers the two frontline voices featured in the film and employs an equity lens throughout to help the reader begin to understand a Latinx community's complex relationship with dirty energy.

The article leads by introducing Bryan Parras, who has disrupted the usual narrative by becoming an environmental activist. It's clear that Chapa aimed to tell an authentic story about Parras's work and values. Later in the piece, a second community voice – Yudith Nieto – is tapped to further illustrate what it's like to be raised alongside the oil and gas industry and decide to fight back. The result is a compelling and relatable story.

While Chapa briefly mentions the oil and gas industry's sizable economic footprint, he focuses on the lived experiences of Parras and Nieto – from poor health outcomes and limited economic opportunities – to how they've organized against an industry that both pollutes and employs people in their community. By practicing equity lens principles and including direct quotes, Chapa has introduced a new frame to Houston's energy story by giving voice to those living in the shadow of dirty energy.

From language barriers to their community's economic reliance on dirty energy, this piece lays bare the **complexity of the challenge** these activists face in the transition to clean energy – including how some, like Nieto, ultimately leave due to the lack of opportunity. Moreover, Chapa has the activists explain, in their own words, what progress means. For them, changing minds is much more important than blocking permits and other institutionally focused tactics common in the mainstream environmental movement.

Finally, by including the indigenous prophecy that motivates Parras and quoting a Spanish adage (“La lucha sigue... The fight continues”), this piece pushes back on whiteness as the dominant narrative and value system. Chapa shows respect for the culture and language of those living, working and fighting back against Houston’s oil and gas industry.

[READ ARTICLE →](#)

BEST PRACTICES FOR AN EQUITY LENS

- Include at least one perspective from a community member working on the frontlines of climate and clean energy
- Employ a variety of sources
- Avoid **extractive storytelling**
- Highlight solutions, especially those created by impacted communities

ENERGY NEWS NETWORK

Chicago's Blacks in Green Promotes Energy Efficiency in 'Looked Over' Areas

Katie Pyzyk from *Energy News Network* – a trade publication for “influencers, policymakers, and citizens” – recognized that the possibilities we see are a direct reflection of the stories we consume. So she aimed to tell a new kind of energy story. Her unique approach to covering the opening of a community center in an economically depressed area of Chicago is an example of how focusing on the **agency** of frontline communities is key to framing them as the innovative clean energy leaders that they are.

There's no doubt when the Green Living Room opened in West Woodlawn, the utility company that funded its construction aimed to get some good PR with a press release and ribbon-cutting ceremony. But this piece doesn't depict them as saviors – in fact, it doesn't give them a direct voice at all. Instead, Pyzyk recognized her **responsibility as a journalist** and made the hero of the story the community itself. She placed the Black-led community group that advocated for the new facility at the **center of her frame**, giving the organization invaluable media exposure it might not otherwise have the resources or capacity to gain.

Pyzyk took time to build trust and was **committed** to telling an authentic story about Blacks in Green (BIG) – including what they've accomplished and their vision for a sustainable future. Quickly, you realize this story is about more than a single community center; it's about West Woodlawn's innovative strategy to combat poverty by creating a self-sustaining community powered by clean energy.

After reading the piece, it's easy to see BIG's “sustainable square mile” model as an **energy solution** that all communities should aspire to as we rise to the challenge of climate change.

By centering the voice of BIG's founder, Naomi Davis, Pyzyk makes the community the hero of its own story. Through the use of direct quotes, this article was able to thread a delicate balance – explaining how **systemic racism** has excluded people of color from the clean energy conversation, without mistakenly framing them as disinterested or powerless to improve their circumstances. Instead, this story casts frontline communities as leaders and innovative change agents blending sustainability with economic development to make their community wholly sustainable and self-sufficient.

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BEST PRACTICES FOR AN EQUITY LENS

- Build trust with frontline communities to tell an authentic story
- Use power as a frame to depict frontline communities as the leaders that they are
- Highlight local solutions and show how they might be relevant for other communities
- Employ a variety of sources
- Explain systemic, structural and/or historical context of inequities discussed

teenVOGUE

The History of Earth Day

There's always more to a story, including the history of Earth Day. This piece does an excellent job introducing its primary audience – teenagers – to what Earth Day has become over the past five decades, and how. The author, **Molly Taft**, gives direct voice to those living on the frontlines of the climate crisis and ends her piece by instilling hope – arguing that the pandemic presents an opportunity to return to the holiday's radical roots and ensure those most impacted are leading the movement.

The article features multiple **frontline voices** from different corners of the environmental movement. From an executive director of a Brooklyn-based community group to a youth activist with the Sunrise Movement, Taft offers new perspectives on what Earth Day means for people of color. It's more than a 50-year event – it's about addressing 500 years of **systemic racism** created by **slavery and colonialism**.

With an eye on the magazine's teen audience, Taft describes the radical roots of Earth Day that are sure to contrast with the feel-good classroom observance that teens are most familiar with. Taft devotes an entire section to the **historical context** – namely, the political and cultural forces – that spawned the first Earth Day and fueled the movement's subsequent policy victories. Then, Taft explains what changed when the movement went mainstream during the pro-business deregulation era of the 1980s. This context helps the reader better understand the coming critique of the environmental movement in terms of how it has failed to prioritize the needs of **frontline communities**.

Taft introduced **new perspectives** and included frontline activists' critiques of the largely white-led mainstream environmental movement. She quotes an activist who says her community's needs have been ignored by well-funded organizations that impose their own agenda (an example of **philanthropic colonialism**). This critique exemplifies the writer's dedication to **the pursuit of truth**, and helps the reader understand how even well-meaning environmental groups can be complicit in racial biases that marginalize and exploit those most impacted by the climate crisis.

Even amid a pandemic, this piece doesn't end on a doom-and-gloom note. Instead, Taft wraps her story by featuring the perspectives of youth climate activists who see the global response to COVID-19 as proof that we can boldly address the climate crisis while also tackling the intersecting crises of poverty and inadequate health care.

To inspire hope and **possibility**, she mentions the huge number of people – four million – who took to the streets in 2019 in the largest-ever climate mobilization. Taft concludes by recognizing young activists as the visionaries behind a new, more inclusive era of the environmental movement.

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BEST PRACTICES FOR AN EQUITY LENS

- Include at least one perspective from a community member working on the frontlines of climate and clean energy
- Explain systemic, structural and/or historical context of gender, racial and class inequities discussed
- Offer new empowering perspectives
- Highlight solutions and possible paths forward that will lead to more equity



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