

Lead with Listening

A Guidebook For
Community Conversations
On Climate Migration



The Big Idea (5)



**How Do You
Talk About It** (26)

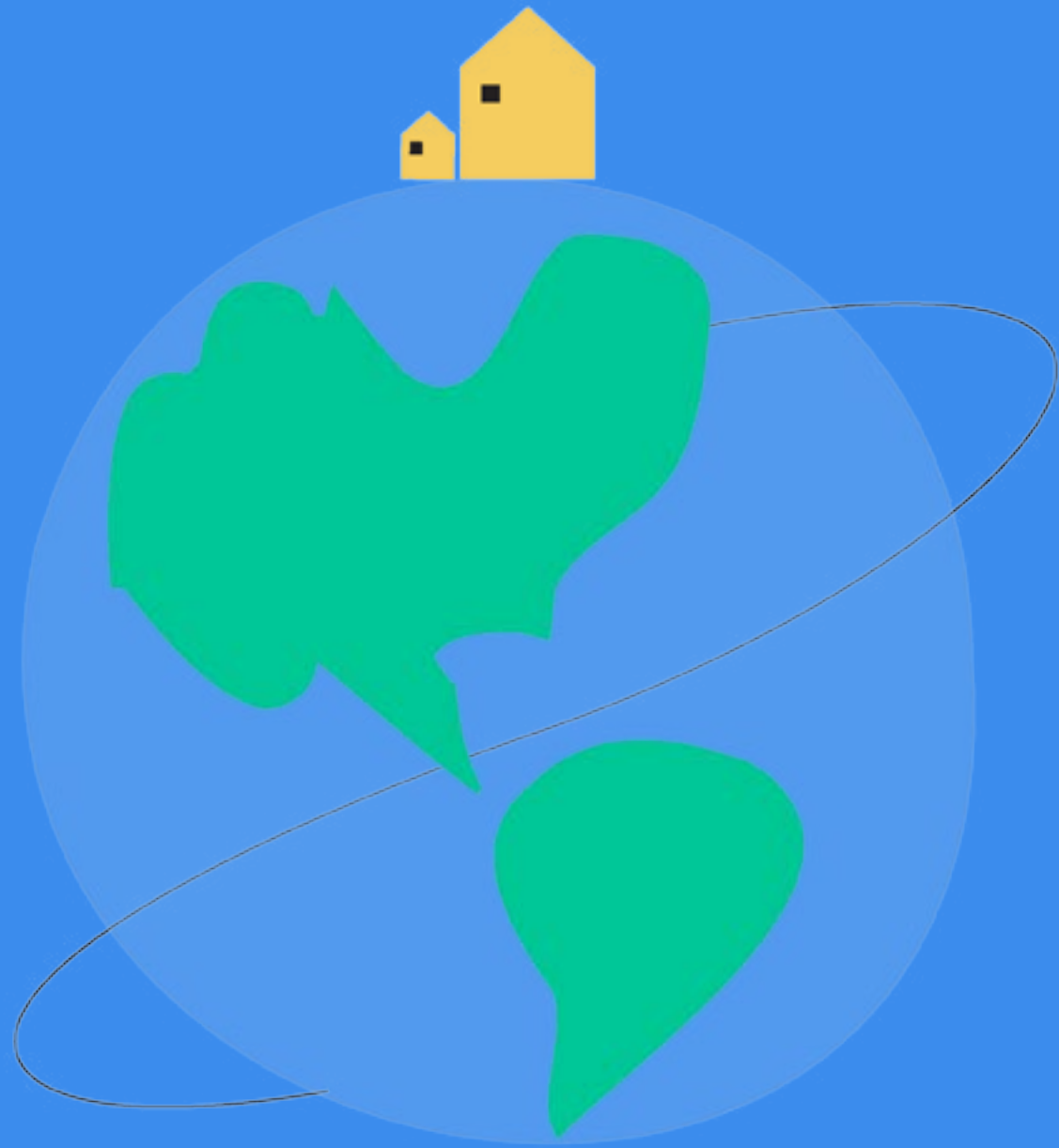


**Putting The
Guidebook
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The Big^{*} Idea

& Why It Matters

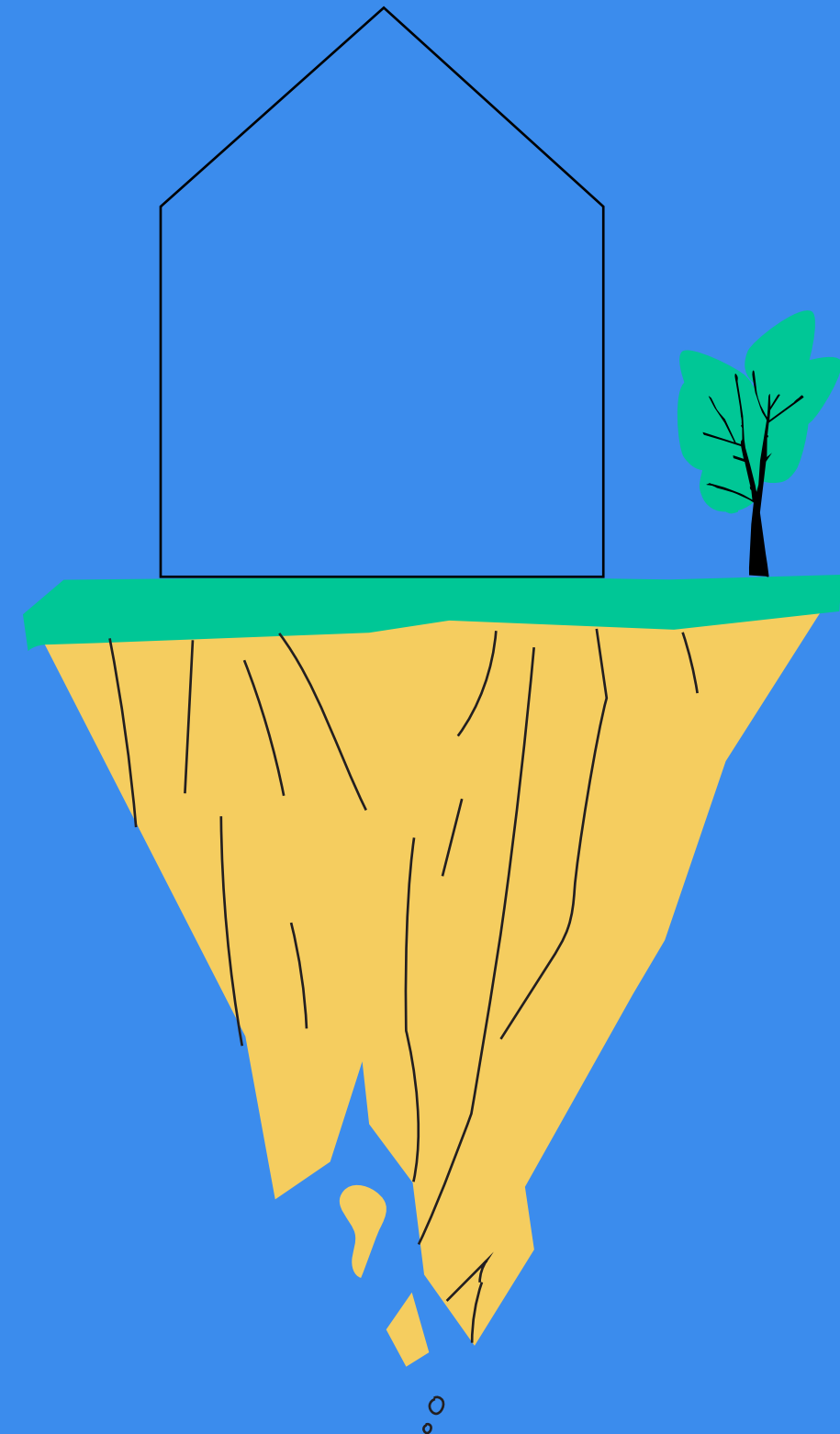
Why Now?

There's a common approach to big problems that holds us back: hoping things don't get too bad, and assuming "we'll deal with it when it happens." This approach can set us up for failure, and it often perpetuates harm and inequity.

We are hearing this in conversations on climate risk in communities across the US and beyond. Flooding, wildfires, droughts and storms have been growing in intensity across the country. A growing number of people have lost their homes, their livelihoods and, even worse, their loved ones. Yet there is minimal conversation about what this means for where people live in the future, or how people will get help moving if they need it.

Estimates vary, but it is widely accepted that in just thirty years time, climate change is likely to displace between 50 to 300 million people globally^[1]. Those most affected will move en masse to new locations, putting increasing stress on housing, social services, and health care while exacerbating identity-based conflicts. Neighborhoods or whole communities may empty out. Millions of Americans will be impacted in some way. Even those who are "high and dry" may see new neighbors in their communities who have had to move away from hazards or hardship in their previous ones.

Like COVID-19, climate change is amplifying pre-existing inequities in our society. But, if we have honest conversations about climate migration with those most affected, grounded in a community-led process and planning, we can reduce harm, save lives, and create equitable responses that lead to better futures for those who will want and need to move, and the communities that welcome them.

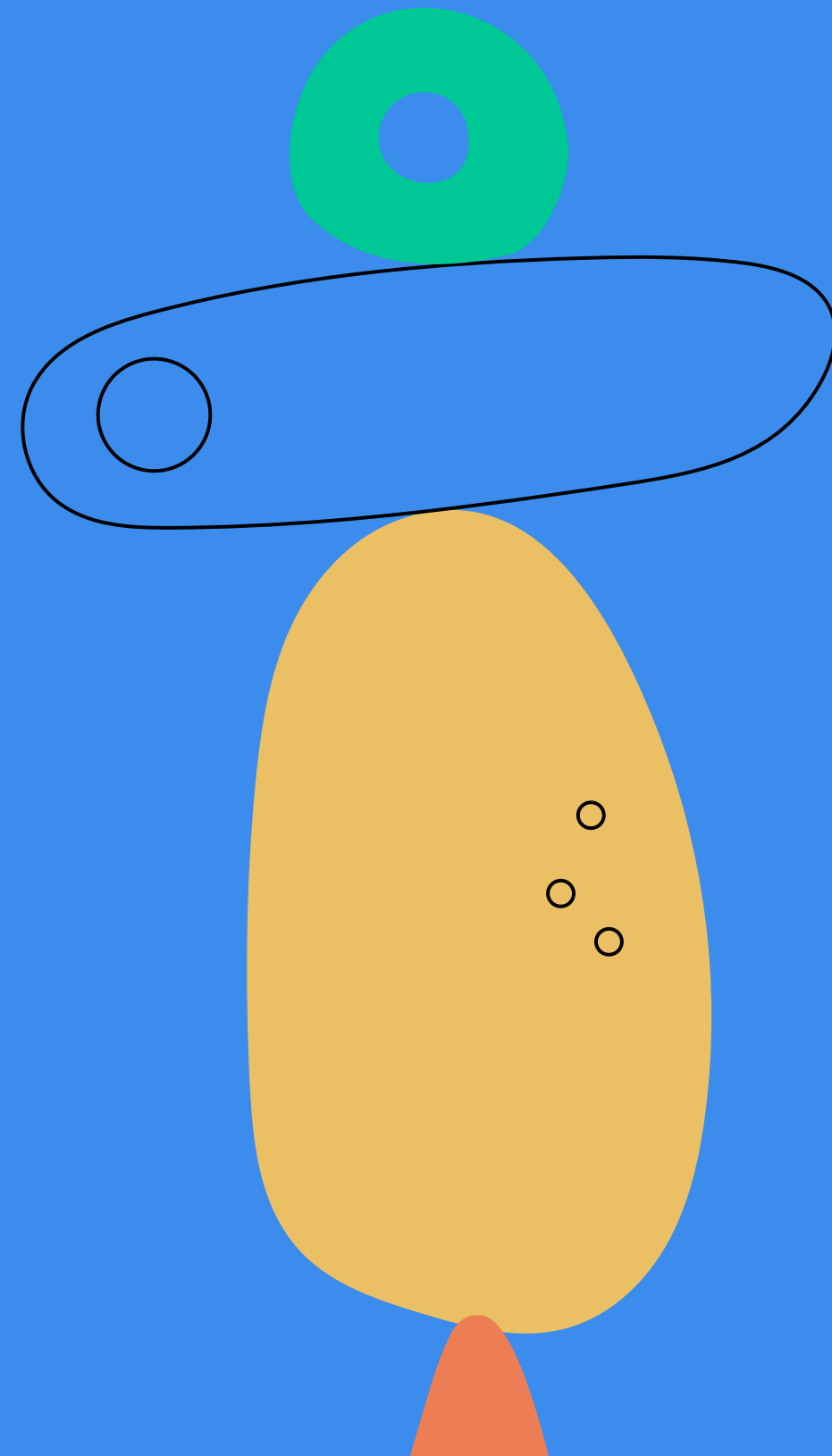


Our Process (How We Made This Guidebook)

Differences in culture, financial circumstances, and geographic location influence how we think and talk about climate risk and migration. The research team interviewed a broad range of community members across the country who are grappling with climate migration to learn from their experiences. Network members and the research team worked together to create this guidebook based on their insights. We hope the insights they shared will help others who will eventually face this reality too. Every conversation was built on trust and consent with clear conditions and agreements to minimize retraumatization or psychological harm as people retold or re-lived their personal stories. Each participant was financially compensated and valued for their time and wisdom.

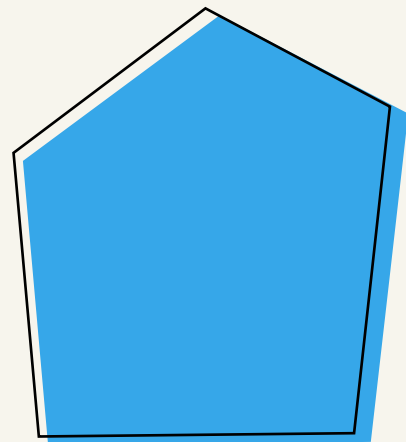
To create this Playbook, the Climigration Network partnered with an unorthodox creative research team led by:

- * Black They are practitioners and community leaders working in diverse contexts across the country.
- * Indigenous They all have experience working with "frontline communities" — those who are experiencing, first-hand, the consequences of climate change
- * People of Color (BIPOC) — or are a member of one themselves.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDEBOOK

This Guidebook shares insights we learned in the interview process on why conversations about climate migration are so difficult. The issue is nuanced, politicized, complex and sensitive.



PART I

Part I focuses on the big idea: Why the Guidebook was created, and how to use it.



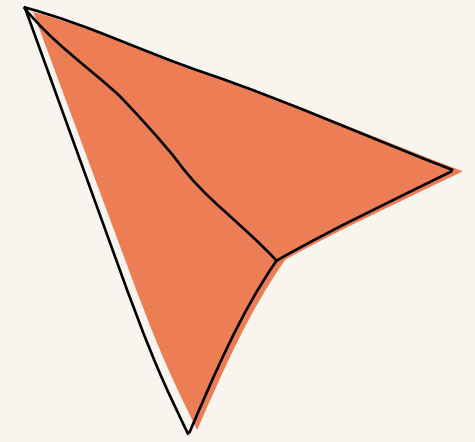
PART II

Part II reveals the insights that came from our conversations with community members, leaders and practitioners across the country who are directly impacted by this issue. These insights have been articulated in an action-oriented way so you can immediately integrate the lessons learned into your own work.



PART III

Part III offers ideas for how to begin a conversation on climate migration in an equitable, restorative, and culturally responsive way. There's also more information about what the Climigration Network is and how to get involved.



PART IV

Part IV concludes the Guidebook with parting notes from the research team, questions that still linger for the field, and ways for practitioners and community leaders to get involved with the Climigration Network.

Throughout the Guidebook, you'll find insights and approaches that we believe will create more open and meaningful conversations about climate migration.

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This book isn't exhaustive - it's just the beginning.

We plan to pilot test the ideas and suggestions shared here in communities and practitioner networks in the coming months. Every place and person is different, which means there's no 'one size fits all' approach to talking about climate migration. There might be some insights or activities that resonate with you, and others that do not. *That's okay!* Take in what is helpful and serves you and your community best, and please let us know what you learn in the process. We'll share feedback we received on the insights and activities in the coming months including additional resources to provide guidance on more challenging topics.

It is our hope that this Guidebook provides a solid foundation to build from and that we can work with partners to build these resources together.

WHO IS THIS GUIDEBOOK FOR?



COMMUNITY LEADERS

who are looking for approaches to begin meaningful conversations about climate migration with their community members.

PRACTITIONERS

who want to begin meaningful conversations with community leaders and members facing climate risk and displacement and who could influence the ways we support community-led climate migration. They include planners, policy makers and government officials.



Words Matter

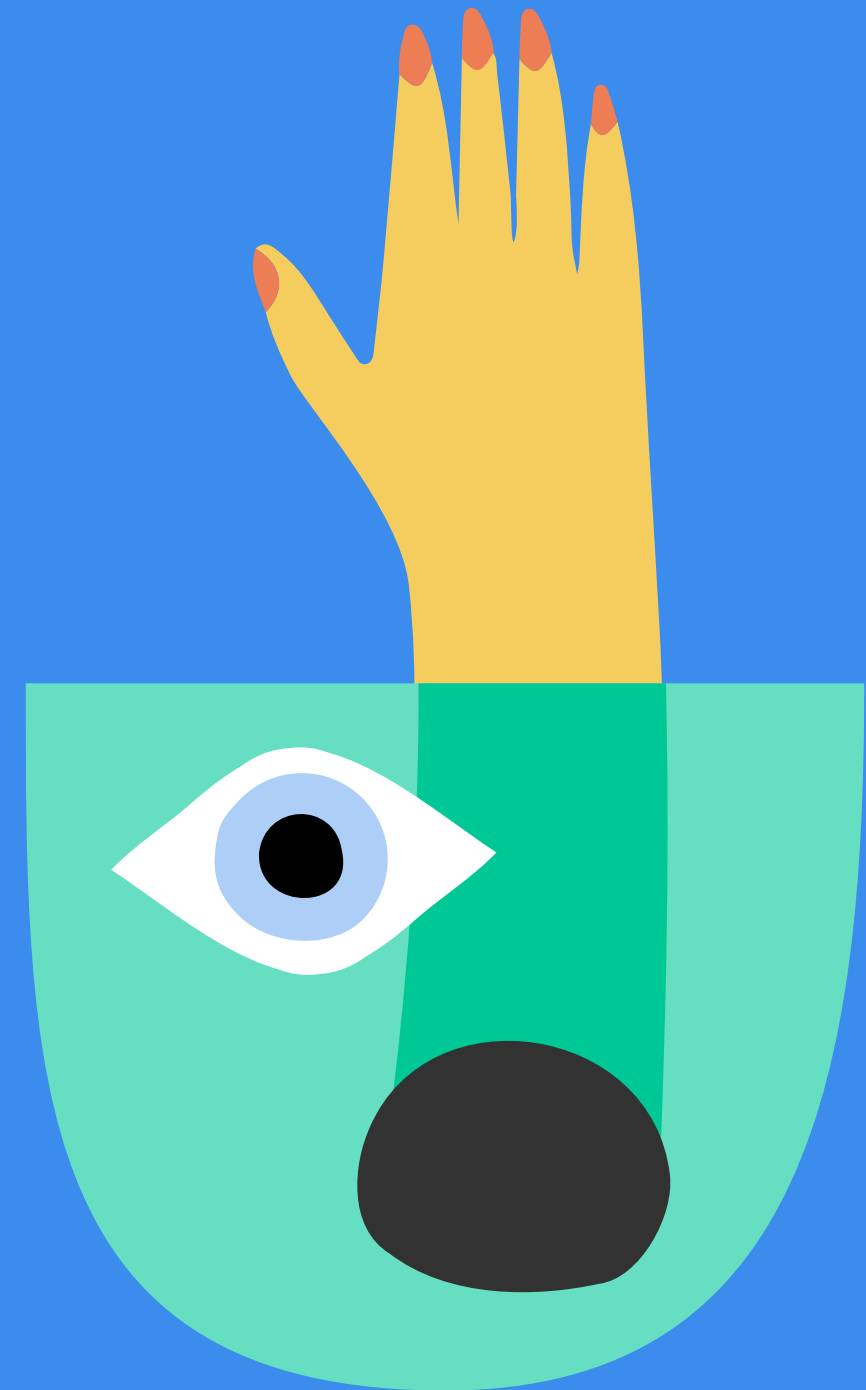
WHAT'S WRONG WITH USING LANGUAGE LIKE "MANAGED RETREAT"?

Most practitioners and researchers use the term "managed retreat" to describe the coordinated movement of people and buildings away from areas at risk of flooding, wildfire or drought. For them, the phrase expresses the desire to plan and direct resources to the movement of people away from risk before that risk becomes a crisis - to keep people safe.

However, we heard from many community members that this phrase does not resonate with them. In fact, it turns them off. When we asked community members impacted by climate risk why the term did not resonate, we heard that the word "**managed**," like "planned" or "strategic," feels top-down, like something is being forced upon the community. They said it makes them feel like they don't have any power or say in the outcomes.

We also learned that the word "**retreat**" evokes feelings of hopelessness and demoralizes people. The term elicited feelings of guilt, shame, and inadequacy - like there was something they could've done better - that they didn't try hard enough to "win" and save their homes. There's also a military connotation, such as losing a battle. It creates a negative narrative that people are **fleeing from** something, instead of **working toward** something else. The word communicates **what** we should do, but doesn't communicate **where** to go or **how** to do it.

The term "managed retreat" implies that everyone, with the right planning and resources, would be ready and able to move. However, in many communities, comprehensive managed retreat may not be possible due to lack of political will, community choice, funding, or unmet community needs.



So What Terms Do We Use Instead?

It is always important to consider, or ask, what language might resonate with your community, based on its history and culture. Every context is different.

In our interviews we found that words that imply partnership, like “assisted relocation” or “supported,” or empowerment, like “community-led,” might resonate more with community members.

There is no silver bullet - one phrase that will work in every context. Instead, the question is: “How do I test language to find out what phrases will resonate with this community?” Working in partnership with a community should give you the opportunity you need to ask, learn and have confidence in the phrase that will work best.



Conversations Matter

Dr. Bayo Akomolafe, an international speaker, poet and advocate for a shift in consciousness in critical situations, often shares an African saying he grew up with: "The times are urgent: let us slow down." He writes:

"Everywhere I was invited to speak, I offered an invitation to 'slow down', which seems like the wrong thing to do when there's fire on the mountain. But here's the point: in 'hurrying up' all the time, we often lose sight of the abundance of resources that might help us meet today's most challenging crises. We rush into the same patterns we are used to. Of course, there isn't a single way to respond to a crisis; there is no universally correct way. However, the call to slow down works to bring us face to face with the invisible, the hidden, the unremarked, the yet-to-be-resolved. Sometimes, what is the appropriate thing to do is not the effective thing to do."

In our haste to respond to disasters, we've perpetuated a pattern of bias towards action, without taking the time to listen or get to know the people experiencing the risk. This is leading to responses that are disconnected from the needs and realities of communities facing this risk.

This Guidebook offers a counter-narrative to an always-rushed, hyper-urgent culture: making the time to convene and converse as a community is a powerful way to develop thoughtful and coordinated responses to the changes that will affect us, our loved ones, and the places we cherish. Slowing down, and enabling these challenging conversations is key. After all voices have been heard, further work will be needed to access the resources to take action.

We hope the Guidebook's insights and suggestions help you facilitate meaningful conversations that lead to action grounded in the real experiences of those you serve.

70 percent of people in the U.S. believe that climate change is happening according to research by the Yale Climate Change Communication program. Yet, less than 1 in 3 people ever talk about climate change with others.





How Do You Talk About It?

Our connection to home, the place where we live or come from, is our identity. When we contemplate home, it calls to mind a dwelling, nature, memories, culture, family, familiarity, community, and much more.

In our interviews we heard that this transition is most compassionate when it encompasses choice, intention, culture, community, and even physical climates and spaces that feel familiar. The insights and context in this section honor the stories, experiences, and wisdom of people who have already had to redefine home - and what people need and want when considering or creating a new place to call home. The questions leading each section in part two frame the opportunity to consider how you can enter into conversations with a community with empathy, preparation, and curiosity instead of statements.



CENTER COMMUNITY MEMBERS AS EXPERTS

How am I building on the lived experience of community members?

Some communities may be just starting to experience the impacts of climate change, and thinking about moving may be new. However, we heard that for others, climate change and climate migration is not a “future” problem — it is happening to them now. More than 40,000 households have received home buyouts from the Federal Emergency Management Agency since 1989, primarily in the form of post-disaster assistance. Communities such as Isle de Jean Charles in Louisiana, and Newtok in Alaska, have already faced the difficult decision to relocate and have struggled through the problems of inadequate relocation assistance.

Community members are the experts on their lived experience - they are likely to have already witnessed or experienced the impacts forecasted by climate models and policy briefs. They may have been grappling with the emotional consequences of this challenge for a long time. It is imperative to first listen—and lead with questions, not answers—to learn from their knowledge and hear their needs before making recommendations. Overlooking their experience will likely lead to them feeling dismissed and ignored and will miss opportunities to leverage their valuable partnership.

It’s important to encourage people to listen to and share lived experiences. Creating space for this vulnerability, when done in a trauma-informed way, repositions people who have lived experience as experts in the conversation.

“My community has actually witnessed changes to our coast for over a decade. But when we would mention the trees shouldn’t be laying down on shore, the elected officials didn’t pay any mind...and not really seeing what we saw as natives because they were in political offices, but not out living from the shoreline. And so this has been a major thing since. Now, [to] have people come back to our community and say, wait a minute, we’re on to something?”

-Queen Quet



EARN TRUST

How am I building relationships through patience, honesty, respect and mutuality?

To open such difficult conversations, emails, websites, flyers or one-off town halls are too superficial. Deep trust has to be built on relationships, which takes time. To begin the process, we heard that it is important to consider the ways community members connect with one another. Is it through food? Is it through dance and ritual? Is it through churches or clubs? Investigate the ways people connect culturally and create spaces for conversation and information sharing that include these cultural elements so that people feel at home, invited and taken care of. When invited, consider the value in participating in these communities to build authentic relationships and share more about yourself, too.

If you are an outsider, consider your position with humility, patience, and self-reflection. We heard from several communities that they have a history of outsiders making decisions that impact their lives without adequate representation, consultation, and consent. This may be hard to hear, but it is critical to recognize the legitimacy of such concerns. People in the community may not want to speak with you. Do not force a conversation or express frustration. Instead, consider whether other community leaders or established community-based organizations may be more willing to have these conversations.

Also, keep in mind that community members may change their minds. An 'open door approach' allows you to re-engage if people have come to new realizations on their own time.

“We have a food truck, as well, and we serve ancestral foods as well as exchange information about the power plant and its closure. If folks aren’t interested in talking, we offer a survey they can fill out. But really, the assessment process became a really beautiful space for breaking bread with our community members, serving ancestral food, and also sharing knowledge about what the closure looks like and having conversations about climate change and about the beginnings of climate migration.”

- Kim Smith



CONSIDER CULTURE, NOT JUST BUILDINGS

How am I creating space to talk about cultural needs and identity?

In many communities, land and place are critical to culture and identity. This is especially true for Indigenous communities and communities that have struggled to claim a place as their own. As a result, moving may be as much about the loss of an identity as the structure someone lives in. Some people we interviewed expressed deep ties to the land they live on.

We heard: "This property has been in my family for generations" and "We've been here since my grandparents were liberated from slavery" and "My family is buried here." The grief of this loss is important to acknowledge and address. Farmers interviewed in Hawaii, for instance, feel they're one disaster away from losing it all. Not just their home, crops, and their livelihood, but also "Can I be kanaka (Hawaiian) without my land?"

Culture has helped some communities cope with social and political conditions that can undermine their ability to recover long after a disaster. Indigenous communities, like many communities of color, have a long history of colonization, forced cultural assimilation and other injustices. The federal government forced many tribes to relocate in the US, under horrific conditions. Building freeways and redeveloping cities, federal and local governments commonly displaced communities of color. Many of these places are now at great risk of flooding, storms and sea level rise. Like many communities that have experienced injustice, their internal resilience, the ability to survive against unbelievable odds, is connected to tight-knit community structures.

"The older I get, the more I understand that my DNA is of this place and the more and more I dove into trying to make sense of my Indigenous ancestry and contemporary conditions, the more I recognize it is this deep relationship with the land and water that really defines that part of my identity."

- Monique Verdin



ACKNOWLEDGE TRAUMA

How am I approaching this work in a trauma-informed way?

Many frontline community members we spoke to, especially those who are actively relocating, have already been approached by dozens of organizations and press. Some are tired or angry about retelling their story. Some have also felt “retraumatized” by requests to re-live the stress and grief of the events leading to their displacement. If previous efforts to work with them have failed, these become ‘negative exposures’ that can turn into distrust and suspicion.

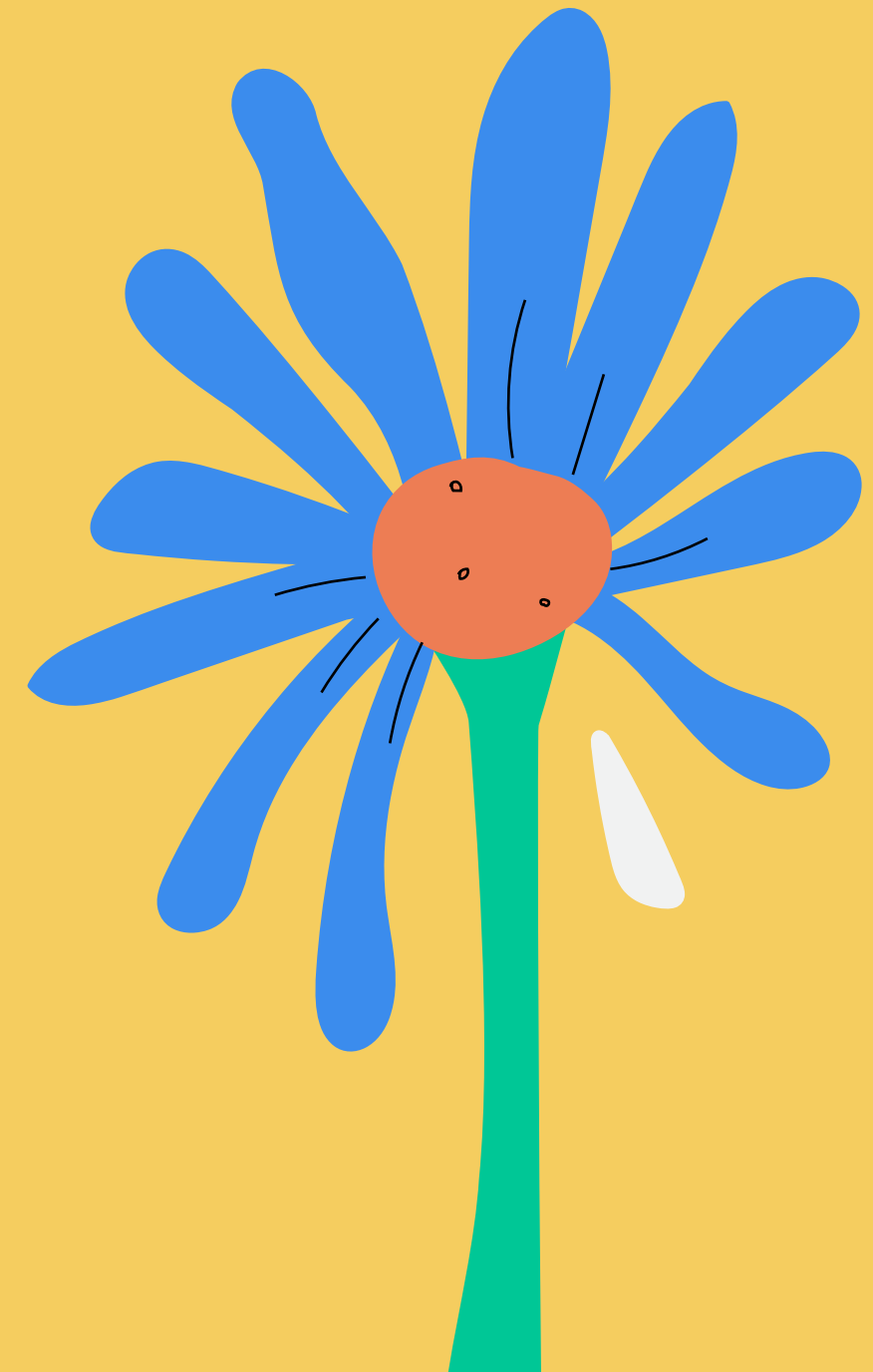
When you have a conversation with people who are directly impacted, it is essential to acknowledge and validate their experiences. “Trauma-informed” work is defined as realizing the widespread impact of trauma, recognizing its signs and symptoms, and integrating knowledge about it into policies, procedures and practices. Trauma-informed work isn’t a ‘nice to have’, it’s a ‘need to have’ on this issue.

If a community desires support, find targeted resources to help individuals and communities address their trauma and grievances. Whenever possible, work with licensed professionals or partner with facilitators who have substantial experience supporting survivors of trauma, so you can avoid unintended consequences, such as retraumatizing those you seek to serve.

*

<p>To prepare for community conversations in a trauma-informed way for this project, we had:</p>	<p>Introductory calls to understand whether people were still grieving and healing. And to emphasize that they would have the agency to choose not to answer questions or to end the conversation at any time. We also made space for people to talk about their future aspirations, to create a sense of hope and optimism. When we are trauma-informed, we gather the right amount of details to understand someone’s story, while also creating healthy boundaries to protect them from reliving the experience again.</p>	<p>See this infographic by the CDC for a brief overview of what a trauma-informed approach could look like.</p>
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“The flood took everything and our dreams away,” says Kuilima Lautaha, a former immigrant farmer in Hawaii Kai, Hawaii. “We were planning on paying off the overdue lease from the harvest, but we didn’t get to harvest anything. The water went up to 3, almost 4 feet. If only there was no rain in 2018 we would’ve still been at the farm and still farming.”



SPEAK TO THE FEAR & ANXIETY

How am I considering the role of emotions and mental health?

The ability to cope and recover from a natural disaster or chronic environmental risks may be confounded by underlying mental and emotional conditions such as PTSD, grief and loss, or the stress of caring for large families or elderly family members. People we interviewed who have been directly impacted by climate risk said that one of the hardest parts is not necessarily the “finding a new place to live”, but the emotional and spiritual harm that disasters inflict on your heart and mind. One co-creator noted that they “always felt like we lost our history. It feels like it’s all wiped out. It was losing all of the photographs and family mementos that surprised me and hit me the hardest.” Consider the role grief and anxiety may play in conversations with communities directly impacted by climate risk and ask what assistance or approaches would foster supportive conversations.

One practitioner in Savannah, Georgia, is regularly checking in with his own energy level, since this kind of work is emotionally taxing. He’s also learned to center mental health in community work and he understands that fear and anxiety show up in a myriad of ways. Having grown up in the midwest, he recalls the shut down of coal mines and mining jobs during the Clinton administration’s efforts to move towards “cleaner coal.” Generations of people worked at those mines - it was their livelihood and “representative of their identity.” Fast forward to today, and people are still talking about these same issues, particularly in Virginia where “they don’t want to lose their coal plants.” It’s important to recognize that for the coal miners then and for the coal miners now, this is not simply an issue of lost vocation, but the departure of livelihood and culture. Fear and anxiety related to climate migration, he said, is something that looks different depending on the person. Many of us have feelings on this issue that need to be spoken to.

“[The 2018 flood] was the nail in my PTSD coffin. It was the final blow for me. I didn’t go back over to that property at all for months. I hardly even left my room after that. I lost a lot of my beekeeping suits and equipment. It was quite an effort even in regard to the grocery store or to take [my mom] to a medical appointment. I was afraid to even leave the front door.”

- Navy veteran

RECOGNIZE POWER STRUCTURES

How am I acknowledging power structures and analyzing equity?

We heard that wealth inequality creates a huge barrier for less-resourced communities. While wealthier individuals and communities have more choice in where and when to move and access to the job market, less-resourced community members typically do not. Systemic racism is a huge barrier for some communities of color who might be considering relocation: "Will we be welcomed in a new community, or harassed? Will we be treated equitably? Will we face exposure to toxic pollution, like we are facing now?"

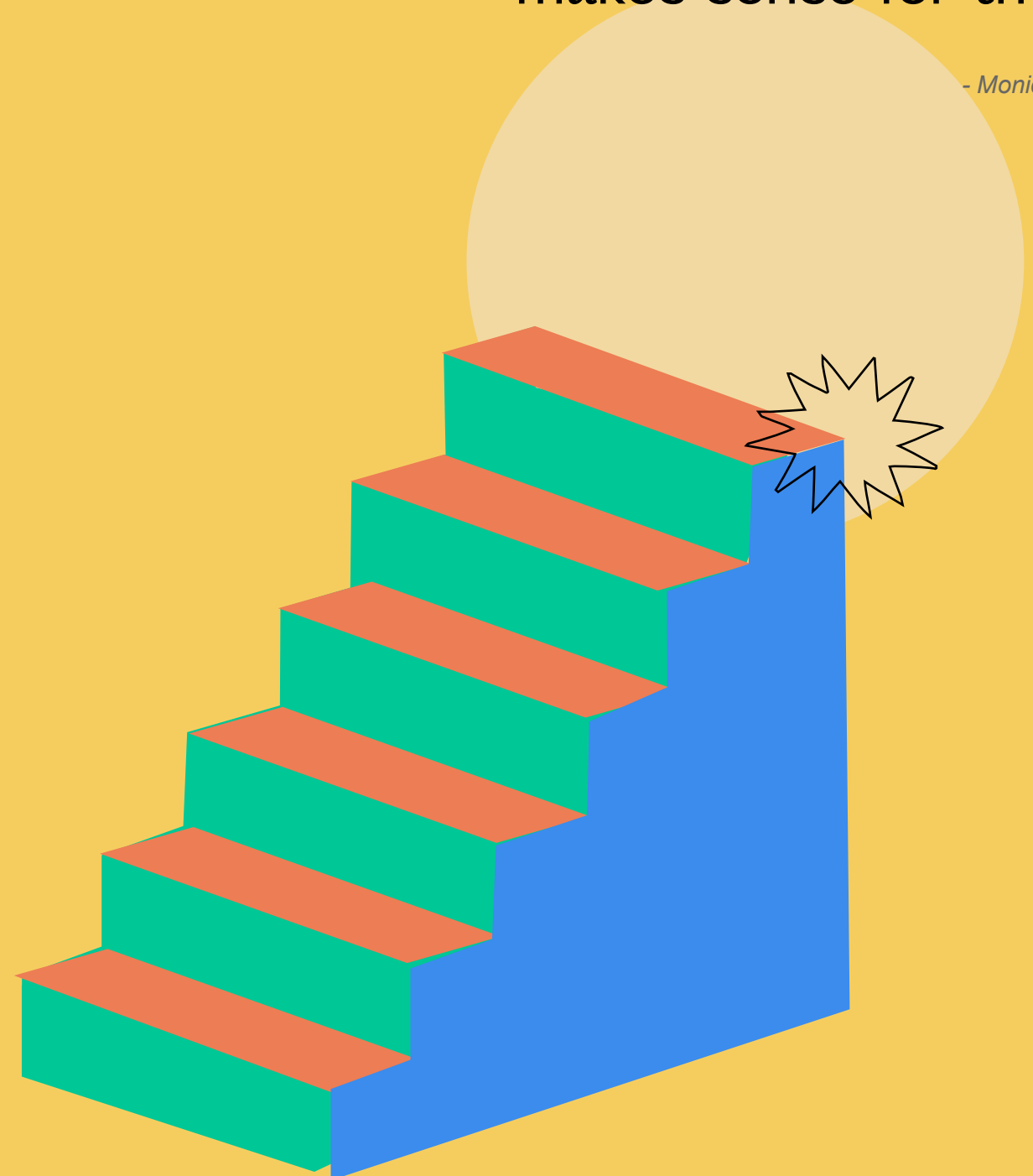
Consider ties that communities may have to powerful interests, that may influence communities choices and their narrative. Indigenous leaders have shared that in some communities fossil fuel companies fund and provide social services and other basic infrastructure as a way to create 'buy in' for resource extraction. As a result, the community depends on cultural centers or language and food programs funded by an industry which is also polluting those same communities. Failing to plan for the social services and jobs that could be jeopardized if industries leave creates tensions within communities that need these jobs, services and programs to thrive. Consider the education, health, and employment opportunities the community relies on and how those services will be ensured if they decide to relocate.

*

<p>Consider how you can reduce the barriers that some community members face to access or participate in conversations about their future.</p>	<p>Are you translating materials or leading conversations in languages that the community speaks? Are you offering different days and times to accommodate work and family needs? Are you offering childcare or food at your events? Can families attend who don't have access to personal transportation? Consider partnering with a community-based organization for guidance on possible barriers to participation and suggestions or partnerships to overcome them.</p>	<p>If you are asking for advice, an additional best practice is to offer compensation for community member or partner time to acknowledge the value and expertise they're bringing to the work.</p>

“People here are very much so in relationship with the oil and gas industry for their jobs and their livelihoods and the fears that come with that. We can point the finger at what’s causing climate change, but also at the same time, we need to show people real solutions so that they can start to think about what makes sense for them.”

- Monique Verdin



USE LANGUAGE THAT SPEAKS TO PEOPLE'S EVERYDAY LIVES

How am I testing language to ensure it's clear and compelling?

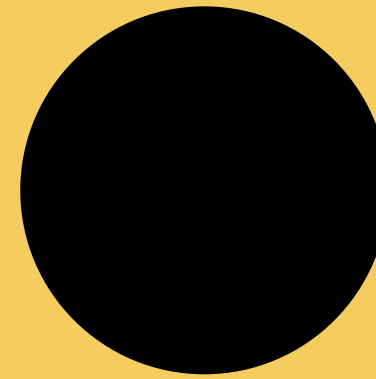
It's important to stay away from trigger words that might make someone feel isolated, unheard and othered in sensitive conversations. For example, we learned from practitioners that using common terms like "drought," "storms," or "flooding" to describe threats in their communities is an effective approach, rather than "climate change", which can isolate people politically, or other technical descriptions, which might be intimidating.

In any work, the process for choosing the best terminology must be viewed through the lens of emotion and mental health. One practitioner said, "You need to get people to understand the severity, and using stronger terms might help, but I just know so many people who also stick their head in the sand when they get scared and anxious. It's based on the audience you're talking to—which words you should use." That same practitioner said, "The emotional stuff has to be dealt with first. You can't get to the [logistics] until you've fully dealt with and responded to the emotional side, and there's so much emotion wrapped up in [the term 'climate migration']."

A state legislator representing a conservative region mentioned that words like 'jobs' and 'employment' are critical to engage their community. This was supported by other interviews with local leaders who recommended simple language that addresses common issues. For example, if you are speaking to residents who may be considering moving, speak to the issues that people can relate to, such as: ***How will I find a new place to live? How will I find a new job? Where will my children go to school?*** Remember, context matters: in some communities, questions about community cohesion and cultural values may be more important than jobs.

"The word 'climate change' is a loaded term for many of us down here. Also, don't be academic and use jargon, because it's a turn off. Be real with people and say what is going on in the simplest words possible."

- Community leader of a rural town in North Carolina





Putting The Guidebook Into Action

Engage With Community Members Directly

In Part II we shared insights from interviews with impacted community members and practitioners developing responses to climate displacement. There are no easy solutions and every community has a different context. That's why beginning a conversation is key.

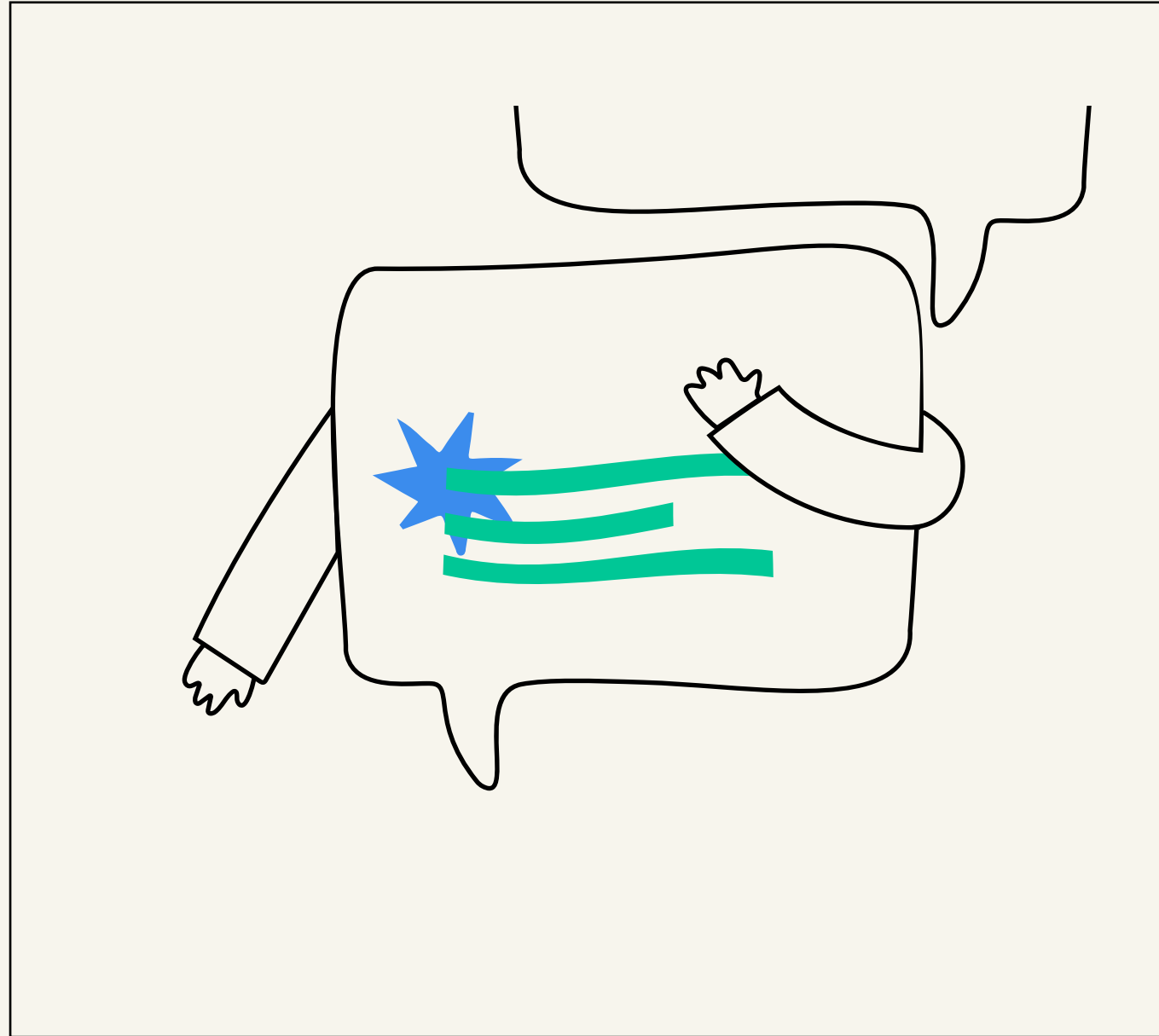
The following pages include examples of some activities you could use to engage community members, or work through yourself to prepare for a conversation with a community. Several activities call us to engage our creative, more personal side, which is extremely valuable when exploring and processing emotionally sensitive conversations. These examples were created from the collective wisdom of our research team, which has used similar creative community engagement approaches for this Guidebook project and beyond.

Some of you reading this may feel uncomfortable about these activities because you've never done them before, they might feel too difficult to facilitate, or it feels too unorthodox. These activities, however, offer an opportunity to bring new people into the conversation, open people up in new ways and encourage more compelling insights and creative ideas. Especially for a topic like climate migration, which is so complex and nuanced, it requires a mix of creativity, curiosity, empathy and emotional vulnerability. These are all necessary to do this work in a meaningful way.

If you are uncomfortable leading these conversations, find a partner that has experience facilitating creative exercises.



PREPARING YOURSELF FOR A CONVERSATION



It is important to begin by examining assumptions we might have about ourselves, our privilege, our credibility, our audience and the value we bring to this conversation from other people's perspective. Talking about climate related migration can be very difficult.

For many, it brings up traumatic memories and a sense of distrust, for others it can bring about apprehension around saying everything perfectly, which can do more harm than good. With proper intention, preparation and care, these conversations can be very powerful.



Facilitator Note: This activity can be used by community leaders and practitioners alike to help prepare them before beginning difficult conversations about climate risks (Adapted from author Judy Ringer).

Here is a checklist of actions you can take before engaging with a community, helpful concepts and suggestions to use during conversations, and ways to begin these conversations.



Questions to Ask Yourself

1. What is your purpose for having this conversation/what are you hoping to accomplish?
2. What assumptions are you making going into this conversation?
3. What do you think you know about your audience?
4. What are your key beliefs about how they perceive relocation?
5. What personal history of yours might be triggered when having this conversation?
6. Are you apprehensive from previous conversations about this topic that didn't go well?
7. Have you experienced these climate issues firsthand?
8. How might you be perceived to be contributing to the problem at hand?
9. How do you think you will be received by the audience you're talking with?
10. What reasons may they have to distrust your intentions?

Your turn

1

Beginning the Conversation

Actually starting conversations about climate migration can be the toughest step. Take 10 minutes to draft 5 different ways you might ask to set up a conversation with a frontline community member.

Here are some examples to get you started:

+

I'd like to talk about _____ with you, that I think will help us work together more effectively, but first I'd like to get your point of view.

+

I think we have different perceptions about _____. I'd like to hear your thoughts on this.

+

I'd like to talk about _____ I think we may have different ideas about how to _____

+

I'd like to see if we might reach a better understanding about _____. I really want to hear your feelings about this and share my perspective as well.

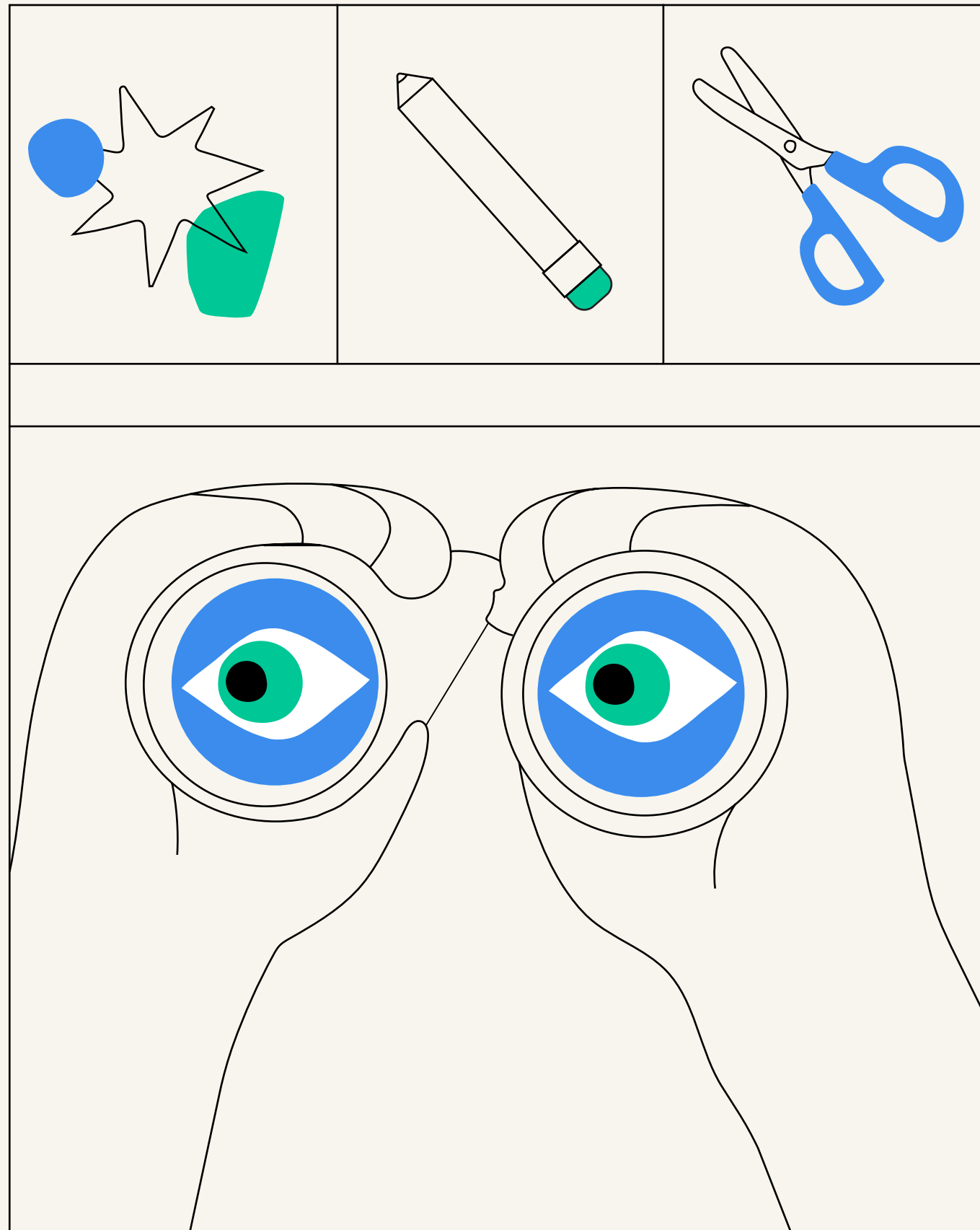
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Additional tips and suggestions:

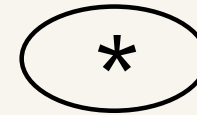
- A successful outcome will depend on two things: "how you are" and what you say. How you are (centered, supportive, curious, problem-solving) will greatly influence what you say.
- Acknowledge emotional energy—yours and who you are speaking with— and direct it toward a useful purpose.
- Know and return to your purpose and "how you are" at difficult moments.
- Don't assume the people you're speaking with can see things from your point of view.
- Practice the conversation with someone else before holding the real one.
- Mentally practice the conversation. See various possibilities and visualize yourself handling them with ease. Envision the outcome you are hoping for.

Your Questions

VISUAL ESSAY



Facilitator Note: This activity can be adapted based on the setting and time/resources available. For example, you can give people the prompt to complete before gathering, and ask them to collect examples by capturing photos on a cell phone, drawing, collaging, etc. Using different modes to get people sharing about their community often will unearth what's important to them. Knowing what people value in their community can be a starting point for a shared understanding of why something like migration may be so difficult.



This activity is about sharing what makes your community special. You will take the next ____ minutes to visually capture some of the things about your community that you'd like to share. You can go outside and take a few photos on your phone, draw on a piece of paper, cut pictures out of a magazine, or any other creative method you can think of! The important thing is whatever you show should highlight your community.

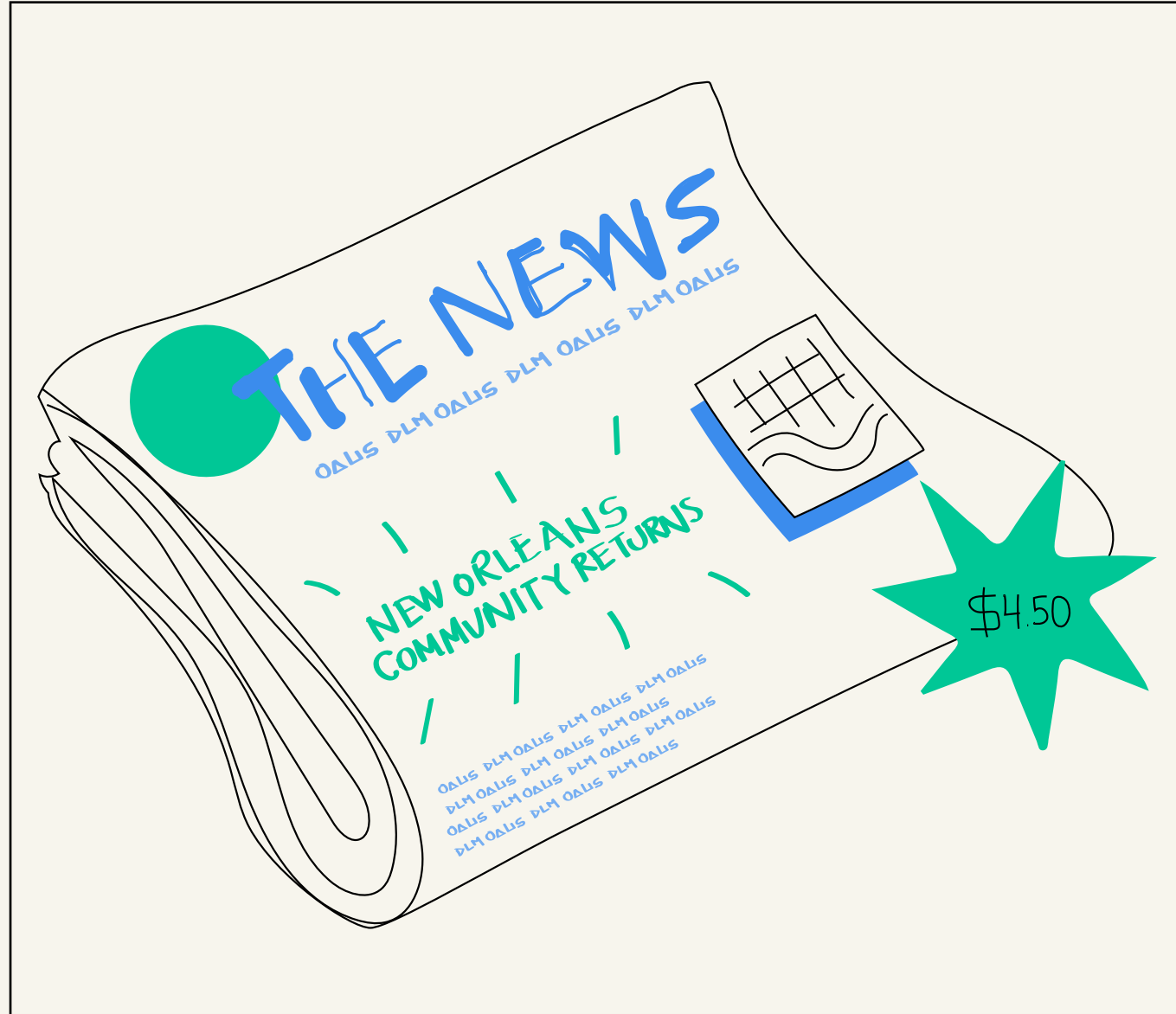


Debrief Questions:

1. Take ___ minutes to show the group what you put together and explain what it says about your community.
2. Why did you choose these things to share? What makes them important to you?
3. How might your community be different if it didn't have these things?

Your turn

NEWSPAPER HEADLINE



Newspapers include stories about all kinds of places, people, and events, but they're not usually written by the people from the places that experienced those events. This is your chance to tell us how we should be talking about what's important to your community.

Think about the last climate/weather-related event that impacted your community. This could be a really bad snow storm or hurricane, or

whatever else comes to mind. When the press covers these events, it often talks about how severe an earthquake was or how many inches of rain fell, but this doesn't tell the whole story. The people who experienced these events may have had to miss work, or had children who were scared by the thunder, or had their favorite park closed as a result of damages. This is your chance to share what the headlines don't always capture.

*

Facilitator Note: This activity serves as a way for people to think about how others see/talk about their community and how they might improve it. Often impacted communities aren't in control of their own narratives which can lead to distrust and a feeling of being misunderstood. Use this activity to hear in community member's words how they'd like to be portrayed.

1

Look up a headline from your local news that talks about a weather related event in your area that you're at least a little familiar with - this can be in a newspaper or news website.

2

What about the headline catches your attention? By reading the headline, what seems to be the most important thing the story talks about? Based on the headline, what might the story be missing or not talking about?

3

Pretend you're a journalist for a newspaper that only your family/neighbors read. Come up with a headline (one sentence, ~8 words) that would tell them how you experienced that event, or what was most important about it for you. If you're comfortable, share with the group.

4

Pretend you're a journalist for a regional/national newspaper and repeat.

?

Debrief Questions:

1. How was your headline different from the newspaper's?
2. After hearing other people's personal headlines, do you notice any similarities or differences between what they highlighted?
3. If you could give journalists advice on how to talk about these events, what would you say?

RESPOND TO A FICTIONAL STORY

*

Facilitator's note: One way to get people into a more creative, open, and less threatening emotional space is to use fictional stories to illustrate the challenges and circumstances that might affect a choice to relocate. The use of a fictional story can help participants internalize the complex issues associated with relocation without having to consider the difficult choices for themselves in the moment. This activity should not be done without the consent of survivors of disasters, as it may retraumatize them. As one interviewee, who is a survivor, told us after doing this exercise: "I don't want to imagine it, I've just lived through it."

1

This approach invites you to use your imagination to consider choices made by fictional characters facing climate risk and displacement and consider if you would make the same choices they did.

2

Consider a fictional story of people who are facing climate risk and displacement. If you don't have an example readily available, use the example below or this example

3

Take a moment to read through the story and consider the characters' personal circumstances, the choices they face, and what decision you'd make in their situation. Circle words or phrases that you think are important for a person or a family to consider when evaluating adaptation options and relocation.

4

In a small group, discuss the debrief questions and consider how different people approached the question of what to do next.

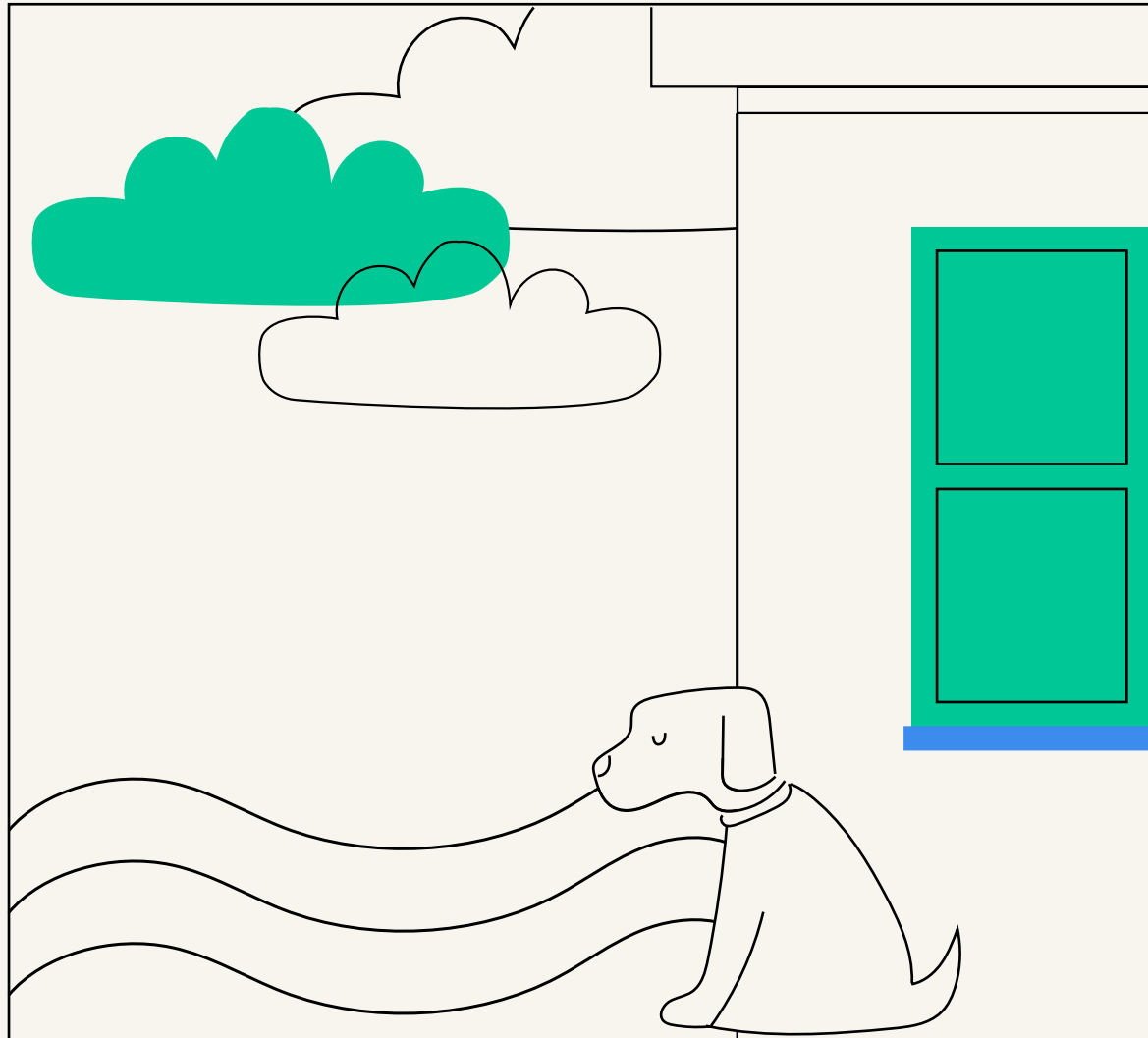
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Debrief Questions:

1. Consider the options available to the people in the story. What would you do if you were in that scenario?
2. What did you want to understand or know more about in the situation? What assumptions did you make?
3. What assistance, support, or incentives would encourage you to leave if faced with the same situation?
4. What did you learn about your perception of the challenge in this story and how it compares with others in your group?

Your Notes

Fictional Story ***



The Metcalf family has lived in a single story home in the same neighborhood since 2000, two blocks from the waterfront. Alan, a 47-year old construction contractor, commutes to the city every day. Susan, a 51-year old dental hygienist, enjoys meeting up with friends to walk the family's dogs near

the water. The couple love their home and raised their only daughter, Alice, there. She is now a senior at the high school and just got accepted to college. They are part of a close community of neighbors whose kids grew up with theirs. Susan's father lives one block away, with his sister.

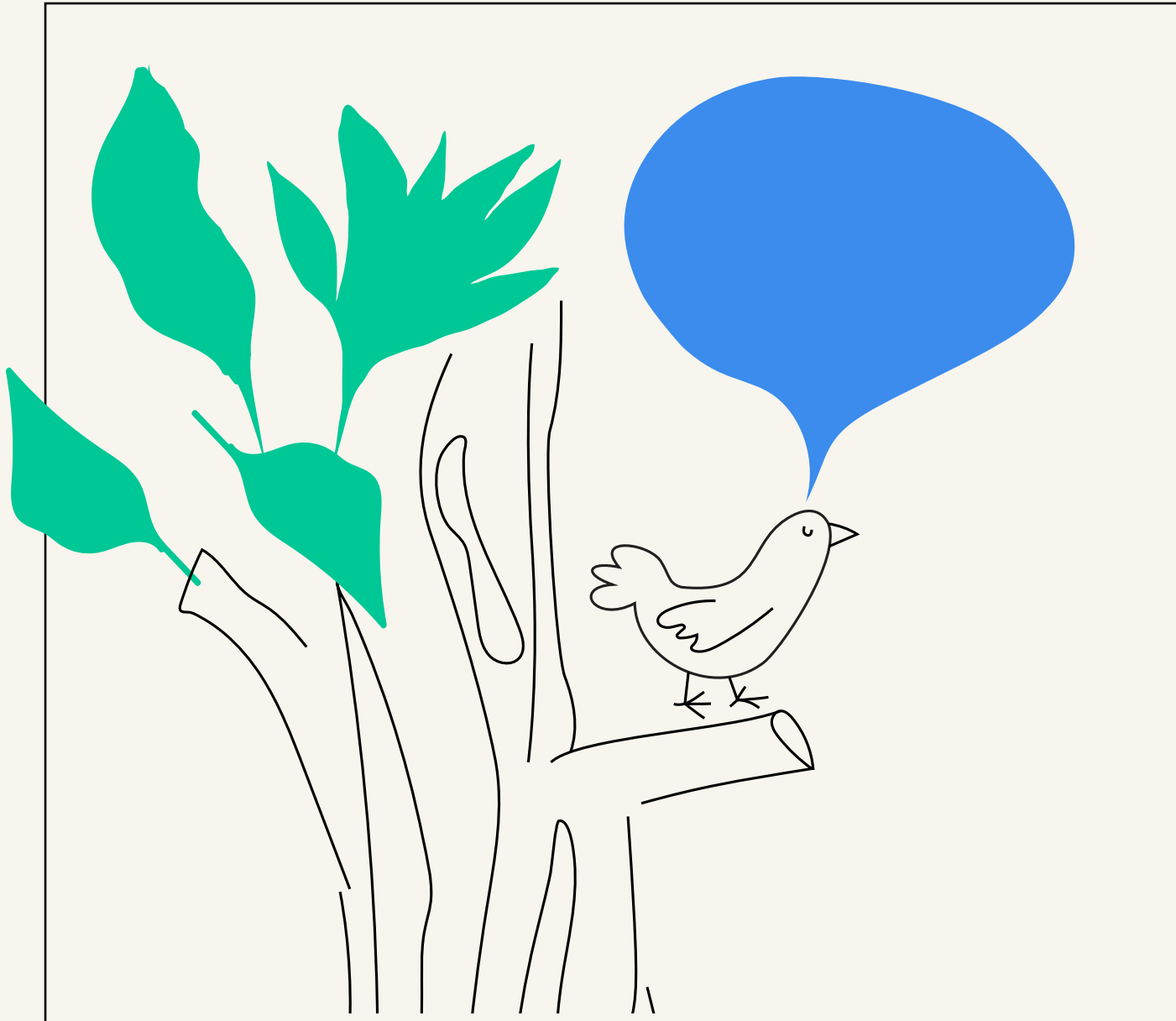
Before the first hurricane they experienced in 2015, the Metcalf's had expected their 30-year mortgage for their home, which they bought for \$200,000, to be fully paid off by 2030. Their main floor took on several inches of water during that hurricane. A second storm, in 2020, inundated them again. Only this time, not only were the utilities destroyed, but they lost about half their furniture on the first floor. The second experience deeply unsettled the family and gave Alice terrible nightmares. For the entire month and a half, while their house was being repaired from water and mold damage, they had to stay in a motel several towns over because it was the only one that would let them bring their dogs.

Since the second hurricane, the Metcalf's monthly flood insurance payments have gone up substantially. Several weeks a year, they must park their car on a different street. Susan tracks the family's finances and has become increasingly concerned about their plans for the future. She is not sure how they would fare if another hurricane were to hit. Alan has heart issues and diabetes. She is very concerned that between Alan's healthcare costs and Alice's college tuition, if another big storm hits or their

flood insurance goes up again, they will not be able to afford mortgage payments. Both parents would like to retire within fifteen years. They currently have \$10,000 set aside in an emergency fund, which Susan is wondering if it is worth investing to make their house less at-risk from flooding.

After repairing the damage the second hurricane did to their home, Alan and Susan thought about elevating their home, but the costs were many times what they could afford. They know that, given their home elevation, predicted sea level rise puts them at serious risk of regular flooding in their yard and main floor. Susan's garden doesn't grow anymore because of the saltwater and it frustrates Alan that he regularly has to wade through puddles to get out in the morning. They've thought about selling, but don't want to move away from Susan's father and aunt. They heard that another home that went on the market two months ago hasn't sold yet.

TELL A STORY



Stories are a wonderful way to get us out of our heads and into our hearts. They express our beliefs and values and often say more about what is important to us than conversation does. Writing our own stories gives us a sense of control and agency, especially when our voices have been traditionally marginalized or silenced: we get to define ourselves and our world in our own words.

to focus on facts and leave out our subjective experience. Stories can redress that balance by making room for the whole of who we are. A story can be a repository of feelings we may not dare express in other contexts for fear of making ourselves vulnerable. Finally, the act of sharing stories is an act of generosity that brings us closer together, creates strong bonds, and increases resilience. This was true when homo sapiens lived in caves and it is just as true today.

Conversations about the climate crisis tend

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Facilitator Note: This activity is a playful way for people to express what is most important to them about their area and community by putting words in the mouths of plants, animals, or natural features, and then acting them. It is a way to create an open, emotionally safe, and imaginative space where personal feelings can be shared while keeping the tone light.

1

Imagine if plants, animals, or natural features – such as mountains or lakes – could tell us how they feel. Or, if you live in a city, imagine what your local park, your neighbor's tree, or the birds outside your window might think.

2

Choose one of those natural features as your character. How old is that character? How do they feel? How do they speak? Why are they attached to this place and the people who live there?

3

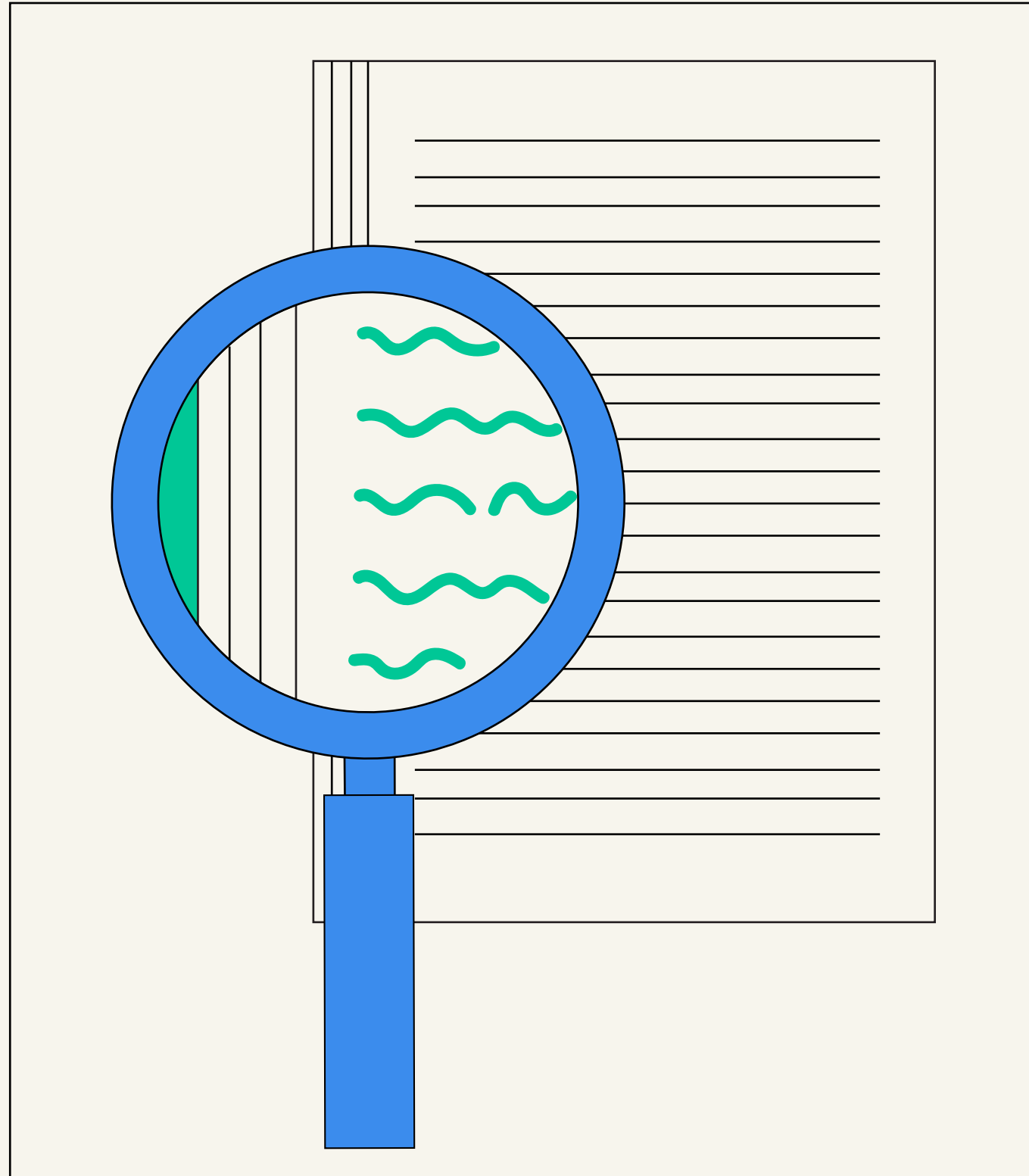
A newcomer arrives. Write a short monologue in your character's voice where they tell the newcomer why this place is so unique and special. Pull out all the stops to convince them. When you're done, read your piece out loud as if you were the character.

?

Debrief Questions:

1. What did you discover in writing this story?
2. Did you hear anything in other people's stories that resonated? What surprised you?
3. What are the three most important things you wish everyone knew about your area and community?

THE BELIEVING & DOUBTING GAME



*

Facilitator Note: People often stick to their assumptions and preconceived notions when they read, rather than being open to new ideas or possibilities. Placing oneself in the mind of the “other” side of an argument can be difficult. A simple practice called the “believing game” and the “doubting game,” from Professor Peter Elbow’s “Writing Without Teachers,” can help frontline communities as well as practitioners to challenge their own preconceptions and to think more critically about what they read.

1

Have members of the group choose an article related to climate migration (*The New York Times’ [“Carbon Casualties”](#) series is a good option, or [“Flooding of Coast, Caused by Global Warming, Has Already Begun,”](#) which reports on the pressures that increased flooding is placing on communities in the United States).*

After they’ve read the text, ask them to write for ____ minutes in response to the following prompts:

2

Believe: Write about all of the reasons you have for agreeing with this text. What examples could you offer in support of the argument, from the text or your own outside knowledge or experience?

Doubt: Write about all of the reasons you have for doubting the text. What counter arguments could you offer? How could you question the text? What examples do you have that would challenge what the author is saying?

Debrief Questions:

?

1. How do your personal beliefs and experiences make you more likely to believe or doubt what you read in articles around climate migration?
2. What are some ways you can “check” your own assumptions when taking in different pieces of media around this topic?
3. How can placing yourself in a different mindset (“believing” vs. “doubting”, for example) help you as you talk to people about migration due to climate issues?

Conclusion & Parting Notes

We hope the insights we've shared from our research with frontline community members and practitioners have provided some useful and thoughtful context on why climate migration and relocation are so challenging. We hope the activities we've suggested give you ideas for how to begin and support difficult conversations on relocation. We plan to pilot the guidebook in the coming months with communities and practitioners.

Questions for the research team still remain, such as: What is the role of welcoming or receiving communities? What factors will affect where people will choose to relocate to? How do community members best prepare and have conversations with one another for these shifts in demographics? What can we learn from other efforts in this space?

It is our intention that those who utilize this guidebook continue to search for ways to engage authentically with communities being impacted - we want to search with you.



CONNECT WITH THE CLIMIGRATION NETWORK

The Climigration Network is dedicated to creating effective, community-led approaches to climate-forced displacement from areas at highest risk of threats such as flooding, fire, and drought. We can connect you to practitioners and community members holding similar conversations in other communities or help you formulate what the best next step might look like for you and your community.



If you are a community member interested in learning more, [click here](#).



If you are an elected official interested in learning more, [click here](#).



If you are a practitioner interested in learning more, [click here](#).

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Researchers' Closing Thoughts

The Guidebook was co-led by a distributed collective of researchers who come from a diverse range of backgrounds. This work is also deeply personal to us. Many of us are living in frontline communities where we are actively facing threats like sea-level rise, flooding, wildfires, droughts and worsening storms. It's important to understand how our team's backgrounds shaped our approach to this work, which is why we're including a few reflections from each team member.



JADE BEGAY

I come to this research as an Indigenous woman, who grew up in a ten year drought watching rural families navigate those struggles and rising to those challenges. Throughout my life and now, I have seen how industry has exacerbated climate change while simultaneously polluting waters and lands and violating Indigenous human rights. I come to this work knowing that climate justice is more than technological solutions or policies but it also is about protecting identities and ways of life.

MYCHAL ESTRADA

Audre Lorde said, “There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle, because we do not lead single-issue lives.” Throughout my life and community organizing career, I’ve worked to connect the dots between various issues, movements, and solutions. Since attending the Global Power Shift conference in 2012, I’ve developed a lens that globally, poor and BIPOC people are often first and worst impacted by the changing climate. This lens has influenced my contributions with the Guidebook. It’s my hope that we can connect climate migration to issues like poverty, racism and neoliberalism, and begin to uplift more beautiful alternatives to our current way of being.

ANNA JANE JOYNER

I come to this Guidebook with 15 years of experience as a climate communications expert working with evangelicals, Catholics, millennial ex-evangelicals, musicians, farmers, hunters, rural communities in the Deep South, oyster fishermen, NASCAR fans, and most recently, Hollywood writers and producers. But I also come to this from a very personal place as well. I live on the frontlines of climate change in a small town on the Gulf Coast of Alabama that *Newsweek* deemed one of the most vulnerable places in the United States. I’ve been directly impacted by the climate crisis through a recent direct hit from Hurricane Sally, unprecedented storm seasons, and sea-level rise.

BRITTANY JUDSON

My research centered on my background in community engagement, local government, and climate resilience. Elected officials, policymakers, and staff have the power to influence and make decisions that have profound, long-term impacts. They’re key to ensuring that BIPOC and underserved communities are protected and have access to emergency resources before, after, and during climate weather events. While more and more governments utilize racial equity in their strategic planning, there still remains a significant number of local governments who’ve yet to learn, understand, and implement racial equity.

KĀLISI MAUSIO

Aloha mai kākou, I am Kālisi Mausio - a scientist, farmer and mother of twins whose ancestral lands (Tuvalu) are disappearing in the next 30 years due to sea-level rise. My career has been driven by my desire to marry science and Indigenous culture. This, and my motivation to safeguard my babies’ futures, have led me to my current research focused on Indigenous cropping systems and their role in helping us adapt to and mitigate future climate effects. This important context and these connections have been woven into this Guidebook.

SCOTT SHIGEOKA

I’ve worked on storytelling, media and entertainment projects for over a decade. My work centers on how we craft narratives that ‘stick’ in culture. Climate migration isn’t a much talked about issue—even in communities that face continual threats like floods, wildfires or droughts. This research has led to a distillation of principles and approaches that help us talk about this issue in a compassionate and pragmatic way. I’m feeling excited about the possibility for art, entertainment and other creative forms to build on this research and catalyze a national conversation about this important issue.

Acknowledgements

Work on such a complex and important issue would not be possible without the contributions of numerous supporters. The Climigration Network would like to thank the following for their help in developing this guidebook:

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The Co-Creators who shared their stories, pain and wisdom with us. Your collaboration was essential to this creative process.



The Climigration Network Narrative Building Workgroup, which provided insightful feedback and helped refine this Guidebook: Hannah Teicher, Edward Thomas, Debra Butler, Libby Zemaitis, and Kelly Leilani Main.



The Research and Design Team that undertook this opportunity and created what we hope to be a valuable tool for the field. Thank you. In particular, we would like to thank Erika Diaz Gómez and Lina María Osorio, who co-designed this Guidebook.



The Research and Design Team would like to thank Hannah Teicher and Kristin Marcell especially for their significant contributions to this Guidebook.

Additional Resources

In addition to the conversations we had with community members and practitioners, numerous additional resources were helpful.

View a Google Doc with a list of additional resources

View



Lead with Listening

A Guidebook For Community
Conversations On Climate Migration

