



Field Guide 1

BEFORE THE CLOUDS GATHER

A framework for climate hazard reporting
before, during and after emergencies

For editors, reporters and newsroom leaders

Introduction

The core shift this toolkit asks of you:

From covering disasters as breaking news → To covering climate resilience, preparedness and recovery as long-term public interest journalism.

What this is for

Most climate reporting begins when disaster strikes.

This guide helps newsrooms:

- Prepare before hazard season
- Respond during emergencies
- Follow recovery and accountability afterwards

How to use it

- Use the before section to plan and prepare.
- Use the during section as an operational reference when an emergency hits.
- Use the after section to guide recovery and accountability reporting - and to set up your After the Storm review (see Module 4) with your team.

The editorial calendar at the end is designed to be filled in, assigned to named people, and revisited each season.

Tip for the Newsroom

Before hazard season, a local editor invites a scientist, emergency responder or local risk expert for coffee.

Three months later, when a flood warning is issued, they already know who to call.

The best climate coverage starts long before the emergency. Yours begins here.

● BEFORE - PREPAREDNESS AND RISK

Your job before the emergency is to make the next emergency less surprising.

KEY QUESTIONS:

- What climate hazards recur in our territory?
- Which communities are most exposed?
- Who holds trusted information locally - and who doesn't receive official warnings?
- What misinformation typically circulates before this type of emergency?

ACTIONS THIS SEASON:

- Build a seasonal risk calendar
- Map vulnerable communities and high-risk zones
- Establish contacts with scientists, emergency services and local organisations before crisis hits
- Prepare explainer templates - warning systems, risk terminology, evacuation information
- Identify which platforms your communities rely on during emergencies

Tip for the Newsroom

Before hazard season, a local editor invites a scientist, emergency responder or local risk expert for coffee. Three months later, when a flood warning is issued, they already know who to call.

● DURING - USEFUL, VERIFIED, TRUSTED

Your job during the emergency is clarity, not volume.

KEY QUESTIONS:

- What information do affected people actually need right now?
- What is verified? What is uncertain? What are we still checking?
- Which rumours are circulating locally?
- Are the most vulnerable communities being reached?

ACTIONS IN THE MOMENT:

- Use the *Before You Publish* verification workflow for every piece of information
- Run a live “*What we know / What we don’t know / What we’re checking*” format
- Prioritise actionable information over dramatic imagery
- Coordinate with trusted local amplifiers
- Label uncertainty clearly and update as information develops

Tip for the Newsroom

During a flood, wildfire or other emergency, assign one person to verification. Their only job is checking claims, images and rumours before they enter coverage. When information is moving quickly, accuracy is more valuable than speed

● AFTER - RECOVERY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Your job after the emergency is to stay when everyone else leaves.

KEY QUESTIONS:

- Who is recovering and who is being left behind?
- Which promises are being made, and by whom?
- What structural vulnerabilities does this disaster expose?
- Are reconstruction efforts reducing or reproducing risk?

ACTIONS OVER THE COMING MONTHS:

- Schedule follow-up reporting at 3, 6 and 12 months
- Track reconstruction commitments against on-the-ground reality
- Investigate where recovery funding is going
- Return to the same communities - not just the same story
- Run your *After the Storm* review (see Module 4) with your team

SCHEDULE THIS INTO YOUR EDITORIAL CALENDAR NOW:

TASK	DEADLINE	OWNER	DONE
Risk calendar built	Before hazard season		☐
Contacts database updated	Before hazard season		☐
Listening session with community	Before and/or after event		☐
Follow-up story	3-months after event		☐
After the storm review	4-6 weeks after event		☐

BEFORE THE CLOUDS GATHER CHECKLIST

A one-page tear-out / printable checklist.

● BEFORE

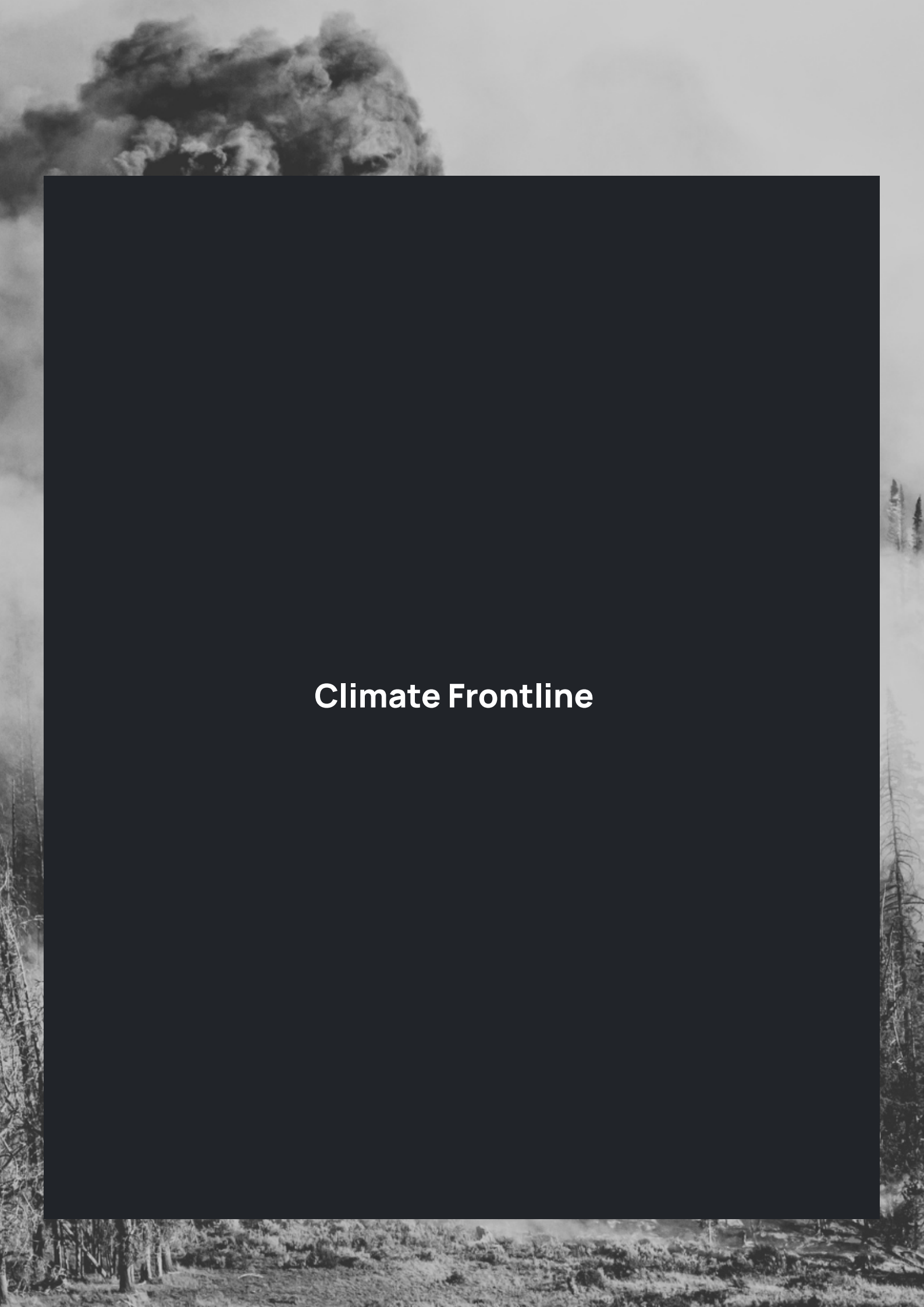
- ☐ Have we mapped the main climate hazards in our territory?
- ☐ Do we know which communities are most exposed?
- ☐ Do we have contacts for scientists, emergency service and local organisations?
- ☐ Have we prepared explainers on warning systems and risk terminology?
- ☐ Do we know which platforms people rely on during emergencies?

● DURING

- ☐ Are we prioritising actionable information?
- ☐ Have we clearly labelled uncertainty?
- ☐ Are we verifying before publishing?
- ☐ Are we monitoring rumours and misinformation?
- ☐ Are vulnerable communities being reached?

● AFTER

- ☐ Have we scheduled follow-up reporting?
- ☐ Are we tracking recovery promises?
- ☐ Are we investigating where funding is going?
- ☐ Have we returned to affected communities?
- ☐ Have we conducted an After the Storm review?



Climate Frontline