



ANNUAL REPORT

2025–2026



Center for Media
Innovation & Social Impact

ANNUAL
REPORT
2025–2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

MISSION	.....	2
DIRECTOR’S LETTER	.....	4
LEADERSHIP	.....	5
BY THE NUMBERS	.....	6
WHAT WE DO & WHERE WE’RE GOING		
RESEARCH	.....	8
CO-LEARNING	.....	12
CREATIVE WORKS	.....	21
PEOPLE	.....	24
WORDS ABOUT MISI	.....	25
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	.....	26

MISSION

Trust between people, institutions, and the information that circulates between them – including the scientific knowledge we rely on to make collective decisions – is foundational to a functioning society, and it is in rapid decline.

The Center for Media Innovation & Social Impact (MISI) investigates how people come to trust one another and how information becomes trustworthy in a fractured media environment. We produce empirical research on media and public trust, and we work with the communities most affected by social and institutional breakdown, co-designing new approaches to storytelling that are more accountable, inclusive, and worthy of public trust.





LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

We are living through a precarious moment. Media and technology ownership continue to consolidate into fewer and fewer hands, political institutions are under strain, and public trust in journalism, in government, in science, and in each other, has eroded to levels that would have seemed unthinkable a generation ago. This is not a passing storm. It is the environment we now work in, and it is what gave rise to Boston University's Center for Media Innovation & Social Impact (MISI).

I'm proud to share that MISI's first year of activity has more than affirmed the need for this work. In November, we held our inaugural summit, Communicating Climate, which served as the official launch of the Center. The event brought together an extraordinary mix of speakers, artists, and thinkers, and drew more than 150 attendees. This demonstrated to us that people are hungry for spaces where hard conversations about media, trust, and shared reality can happen in creative and constructive ways.

That same spirit has carried through the rest of the year. We launched our Media and Public Trust seminar series, creating an ongoing forum for scholars and practitioners to work through the complexities of public trust. The seminar gathers people from a range of scientific and practical backgrounds to ask questions about if and why people trust what they do.

This year, we welcomed our first class of Trust + Storytelling Fellows, an effort made possible through the generous support of the Mellon Foundation. The fellowship included fifteen people, from BU faculty to local activists and artists, united by a shared mission – to tell stories that are both ethical and authentic, and that reach the communities that most need to hear them. Through monthly in-person gatherings and other events throughout the year, this group of strangers coalesced into a creative community that will undoubtedly persist beyond the fellowship year.

None of this would have been possible without the collaborators, partners, and community members who showed up, again and again, to build something new with us.

And we are just getting started. Looking ahead to this coming year, we've welcomed two postdoctoral researchers, 15 new Trust + Storytelling fellows, we've launched two new research initiatives, and brought more than a dozen faculty from across the university into our affiliate community. This November, we'll hold our second annual summit, turning our attention to the need for roots in a digital society – what it means to stay grounded in tradition, ecology, attention, or civics, in an era defined by acceleration and dislocation.

I'm deeply grateful to everyone who has been part of this first year – as speakers, fellows, partners, and friends of the Center. If you haven't yet found your way into MISI's work, I hope you'll consider this an invitation. There is a great deal still to build, and we need you.

With gratitude,



Eric Gordon

Director, Center for Media Innovation & Social Impact
Boston University College of Communication

LEADERSHIP



Eric Gordon • Director

Eric Gordon is a professor in the Journalism department. His research focuses on the role of emerging technologies on trust and democratic governance. A founding member of the [RethinkAI](#) collective, he co-authored the 2025 report [Making AI Work for the Public: An ALT Perspective](#). He is also the author of over 50 articles and chapters on media and urbanism, and the author of three books on the topic. His new book, [How Institutions Listen: Civic Data, AI, and the Path to Public Trust](#) will be published by MIT Press in October 2026.



David Abel • Associate Director of Creative Works

David Abel is a professor in the Journalism department. His work focuses on climate change in New England and on how local storytelling makes a global crisis tangible. A reporter at The Boston Globe for nearly 25 years, he shared the 2014 Pulitzer Prize with Globe colleagues for coverage of the Boston Marathon bombings. His documentary films include [Sacred Cod](#), [Lobster War](#), [Gladesmen](#), [Entangled](#), and [Inundation District](#); [Entangled](#) won a Jackson Wild Award and received a national Emmy nomination.



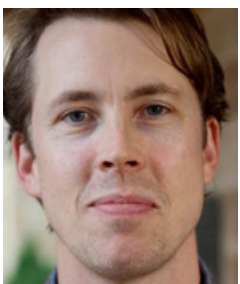
Amy Geller • Associate Director of Community + Co-Director of Fellowship

Amy Geller (COM MFA '16) is a professor in the Film & Television department. An award-winning creative producer and filmmaker, her 20-year career spans documentary, fiction, and branded media broadcast. She is co-director of the feature documentaries [The Guys Next Door](#) (2016) and [The Rabbi Goes West](#) (2019) and of the narrative podcast [The Rabbis Go South](#) (2024). She has served as artistic director of the Boston Jewish Film Festival and president of Women in Film & Video/New England.



Kannan Thiruvengadam • Co-Director of Fellowship

Kannan Thiruvengadam is the Executive Director of [Eastie Farm](#), and serves as President of [Friends of Belle Isle Marsh](#) and [Boston Conservation Commissioner](#). He hosts [What's Up Eastie?](#), a weekly community radio show on Zumix 94.9FM, and has been a ward and state Democratic committee member. He is a Harvard Loeb Fellow (2024), 2023 Grist 50 Fixer, and MIT MLK Visiting Scholar – recognized for work that advances justice, equity, and community resilience in the tradition of Dr. King's vision of beloved community.



Chris Wells • Associate Director of Research

Chris Wells is a professor in the Journalism department and the Emerging Media Studies program. His research uses both conventional and computational methods to study how news coverage takes shape, how citizens learn about politics, and how public discourse does or does not translate into political action. He is a founding member of BU's [Faculty of Computing & Data Sciences](#) and project lead for the Focused Research Program on data and misinformation at BU's [Institute for Global Sustainability](#). He is a co-author of [Battleground](#), a study of Wisconsin's political communication ecology.

BY THE NUMBERS

15

FELLOWS IN OUR
INAUGURAL COHORT

\$572K

IN NEW GRANT FUNDING

6

PUBLIC EVENTS

400+

EVENT ATTENDEES



WHAT WE DO + WHERE WE ARE GOING



RESEARCH



CO-LEARNING



**CREATIVE
WORKS**

RESEARCH



During 2025-2026, Eric Gordon and I began the design of MISI's first major research projects.

PACT centers on our society's widespread crisis of trust: in our major civic institutions, in the media, and even in fellow citizens. The study's focus is on the question of how people come to trust, or not trust, public speakers and institutions as they confront a new issue — that is, one that may not already neatly align with pre-existing political or other biases. The issue we have selected is the construction of AI data centers, a topic that has burst onto the scene in 2026, cuts across many existing political cleavages, and has elements that are both national and local in scope. We will be studying three communities: Lowell and Westfield in Massachusetts, and Jay in Maine (Lowell is an urban center, Westfield is a suburb of Springfield, and Jay is in rural Maine). Our study will qualitatively and quantitatively investigate the channels by which residents are learning about data center proposals for their communities, and how they come to trust certain sources of information and not others. In early 2026, we hired a post-doc who will focus on the project: Sarah J. Halford (Ph.D. in Sociology, Brandeis University), who is an expert in online discussions about information sources and conspiracy theories.

C-SCAPE concerns the relationship between university research and the communities in which the research often takes place, and which are often imagined as potential beneficiaries of the research. For several years, the notion of "social impact" has been prominent in university communications and funding initiatives. But what does it mean? We have learned that social impact is thought of quite differently by different researchers. The aim of this study is to examine what social impact means in a major research university close to home: Boston University. In early 2026, we hired a research fellow who will head up this study: Amanda R. Finn (Ph.D. in Nutrition Science, University of Alabama at Birmingham) will lead and execute an analysis of how social impact is conceived, discussed, and written about by researchers at BU. The aim is to provide a report (and publications) that clarify the conversation about what social impact is, what it is for, and how it is being delivered.

Chris Wells

Chris Wells
Associate Director of Research, MISI
Boston University College of Communication

INITIATIVES



PACT investigates how people form trusting relationships with one another and with the information they encounter – from news and social media to institutions and public figures. The initiative produces original, actionable research and convenes scholars and practitioners around the most pressing questions in media trust.



C-SCAPE explores the full spectrum of impactful research emerging from universities – from translational science to participatory action research. The initiative builds frameworks and forums for an informed, cross-disciplinary conversation about what impact means, and how research creates value for the publics it serves.



GRANTS & PROJECTS

\$487,000

Mellon Foundation

\$85,000

Rita Allen Foundation

URBAN INTELLIGENCES PROJECT

The Urban Intelligences Project (UIP) asks what it would mean for our futures if we could leverage AI's abilities to understand the many intelligences a city holds and shape equitable cities of the future. To that end, over three years, the UIP team will construct an AI-powered digital twin of Boston's Fenway neighborhood to surface new ways of knowing the city, allowing us to understand, and make actionable, the multiple intelligences that create pathways to humane and equitable cities.

PENDING PROPOSALS: \$800,000 (Templeton Foundation) & \$500,000 (Mellon Foundation)

SATELLITE MAPPING

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

with Brooke Williams

Using cutting-edge, localized satellite data to fill gaps in environmental justice data, emerges a resource to measure water quality in New England with satellite imagery so journalists, activists, lawmakers, and concerned citizens can focus their efforts where it matters most.

ON THE PORCH

On the Porch is a hyperlocal large language model (LLM) for community for community knowledge and representation. Built with the Talbot Norfolk Triangle community in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood, this chatbot is a resource for community safety and cohesion. The model, trained on structured 311 and 911 data, policy reports and documents, and hours of community meeting and conversation data, will provide information about what's happening, what people are thinking about, and what people can do.

FOSSIL FUEL NATIVE

ADVERTISING OBSERVATORY

with Michelle Amazeen

The Native Advertising Observatory is a robust dataset of 2,500 native ads across nearly a dozen news outlets. An interactive dashboard to track narrative trends in sponsored news content that will help advocates, journalists, and lawmakers to understand and represent the influence of native advertising on public perceptions of the fossil fuel industry.

GENERATIVE AI FOR

SENIOR ADULTS

with Yi Grace Ji

Using AI chatbots to reduce loneliness and social isolation and promote intergenerational understanding and ethical communication. This project examines how generative AI in the form of chatbots can be designed to enhance technology literacy and mitigate loneliness and social isolation among senior adults.

MEDIA AND PUBLIC TRUST SEMINARS

Seminar on

MEDIA and PUBLIC TRUST

BEYOND THE LEFT – RIGHT DIVIDE

with
**Peter
Levine**



Peter Levine – professor at Tufts University’s Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life – spoke at MSI’s first seminar on Media and Public Trust with a timely conversation titled “Beyond the Left-Right Divide.” This series convenes scholars and practitioners to explore how media systems shape public trust and how research, innovation, and community engagement can help address some of our most urgent civic challenges. As Associate Director of Research Chris Wells noted, the goal is to “show the way forward” in strengthening democratic life.

Levine’s talk challenged the simplified idea that we exist along a single left-right spectrum. The existing polarized media environment forces people’s nuanced beliefs into rigid identities, disallowing meaningful and dynamic conversation. As an alternative, Levine proposes thinking in terms of “idea networks,” where each of us holds multiple, interconnected beliefs – networks of facts and values that are continually shaped and reshaped through interaction with others. Even within the same political ideology, belief systems are heterogenous and dynamic. If communities and cultures can be understood in this way, then disagreement does not signal democratic failure – it reflects complexity and allows for productive conversation.

The seminar invited attendees to reconsider how we foster civil conversation. If people are more capable of democratic reasoning than simplified models suggest, then “one of our best hopes is that we learn from each other,” said Levine.

FILLING THE GAP BETWEEN ACADEMIC RESEARCH AND REAL WORLD ACTION

with
**Gregory
Wellenius**



Gregory Wellenius – professor of environmental health at Boston University’s School of Public Health and director of the Center for Climate and Health – spoke at MSI’s seminar on Media and Public Trust with a conversation titled “Filling the Gap Between Academic Research and Real-World Action.”

The gap Wellenius described is not one of knowledge. We know extreme heat is dangerous; what remains unresolved is how that knowledge becomes protective action. Wellenius pointed to a lack of coordination within the city of Boston itself, and argued for widening the frame beyond mortality: heat disrupts sleep, work, school, and movement long before it kills anyone, and counting only deaths understates both the burden and the case for action.

Closing that gap, Wellenius suggested, means changing how research is produced and delivered, not only how it’s disseminated. Local data proves more actionable than national data, as his collaboration with the Chicago Tribune to map neighborhood-level heat risk demonstrated. Behavior spreads through social networks, and the most durable public health wins like seatbelts and road safety have paired individual behavior change with infrastructure change. MSI’s own research takes up the question the seminar kept returning to: which communications will the public actually trust, and what does an effective public health response really look like?

CO-LEARNING



Co-Learning is MISI's practice of convening students, community members, practitioners, and scholars to learn from one another. Most notably, in 2025-2026, we launched the inaugural Trust + Storytelling Fellowship (TAS), a nine-month program that brought together a diverse group of BU academics, COM students, and Boston-area artists and organizers. Each fellow received a cash stipend and an official BU affiliation, as well as support and technical expertise from MISI staff, students, and their cohort peers. The goal of TAS was to help bridge the gap between academic research, artistic expression and on-the-ground community experience to advance climate resilience and environmental justice locally through storytelling. One fellow summed up his experience beautifully: "Years from now, I imagine I will still be discovering how this experience has shaped the questions I ask and the scholar I am becoming."

Our second annual TAS fellowship will kick off this September with a cohort of twelve new fellows and three returning fellows.

We couldn't be more excited to shepherd the fellowship as well as other events and programs that bring people together for shared learning in the year ahead.

Amy Geller
Associate Director of Community + Co-Director of Fellowship, MISI
Boston University College of Communication

Kannan Thiruvengadam
Co-Director of Fellowship, MISI
Boston University College of Communication

TRUST + STORYTELLING FELLOWSHIP

The Trust + Storytelling Fellowship brought together fifteen people who don't normally share a room: BU faculty, journalists, photographers, faith leaders, and community organizers from across Boston and the Cape. Made possible by the Mellon Foundation, the fellowship exists to help people tell stories that are both ethical and authentic and that reach the communities that most need to hear them. Fellows met monthly throughout the year, and collaborated on numerous projects over the course of the year.

[Watch the 2025–2026 cohort speak about the fellowship, and why trust and storytelling matter.](#)



**MICHELLE
AMAZEEN**

Associate Dean of Research &
Associate Professor of
Mass Communication, BU

Michelle researched [native advertising by fossil fuel companies](#) and their impact on the spread of misinformation in today's media landscape. 'Native advertisements' are ads created by external stakeholders disguised as credible news within a journalistic article.



**MARK
ARAUJO**

Community Engagement Manager,
Boston Food Forest Coalition &
Co-Founder, EquiTable

Mark began a multimedia project to represent the holistic sensory experience of [spending time in public kitchens](#) as a way of communicating to the greater public the beauty of those spaces and of what food makes possible.



**JAELYN
CARR**

Environmental Analysis and Policy
(BA) & Energy and Environment
(MS) Student, BU

Jaelyn created a [zine for renters in Boston](#) to understand their rights to healthy living conditions. Demystifying municipal policies by giving people the information they need to navigate everyday systems, her goal was not only to increase access, but to tap into community wisdom and lived experiences – empowering people to reimagine these systems to better serve their communities.



**JODI
CRANSTON**

Professor of Renaissance Art, BU

Jodi connected her expertise in 16th century Venetian art history – both the past portrayal of climate concerns and community-building – to today's climate crisis and explored alternative approaches to environmental care.



JULIA CUMES

Photographer & Visual Storyteller

Julia completed a portrait collection titled *Invisible Threads: Portraits and Stories of our Global Neighbors*, in collaboration with Lipe Borges. The project documents immigrant experiences on Cape Cod as part of the region's cultural and economic fabric. Julia also worked with Daylight Books to convert the portraits into a book as a way of overcoming the accessibility challenges that come with a single physical gallery space.



JOANNA DAVIDSON

Associate Professor of Anthropology & Faculty Director of Society of Fellows, BU

Joanna wrote a series of anthropological "braided essays" on naming, marriage, and death, comparing the structure to that of a Karararaku vine, an unassuming yet very deliberate intertwined structure. She brought environmental issues to new audiences by including them in her writing and framing them as a part of life without making it the main focus.



BARBARA ESPINOSA BARRERA

Environmental Justice and Health Equity Organizer, GreenRoots

Inspired by her Pulitzer Center fellowship and the observed community behavior surrounding the impending threat of volcanic eruption, Barbara spent her time with MISI building on her background in environmental justice, public health, and religion to explore the relationship of faith and activism. She researched Catholic and Christian texts and spoke with others in the field to connect how faith can function both as a propeller to organize and take climate action.



ROY GRUNDMANN

Associate Professor of Film Studies, BU

Roy focused on the public imagination of ocean ships, investigating their role in public consciousness and what it might mean for our climate imagination. "What is the interplay between nationality and global connection with ships as containing worlds unto themselves?"



JAMES HOWARD HILL JR

Assistant Professor of Religion, BU

James began structuring a community-based learning space called the Public Study Collective focused on how New England ecological concerns connect to spirituality, freedom, and education. The goal is to encourage conversations and embrace the idea that all perspectives and knowledge are valuable without the limitations that come with the formal hierarchy of a typical university course.



YI GRACE JI

Assistant Professor of Communication, BU

Grace began a research project on the experiences of seniors with Generative AI that will inform the development of AI-powered chatbots as interventions to reduce loneliness and increase AI literacy and autonomy.



IRIT KLEIMAN

Associate Professor of
Romance Studies, BU

Irit began writing a new collection of short essays titled *Where does transgression begin?*, which explore representations of forest spaces in art and literature alongside experiences that resist representation. Additionally, she is planning a series of environmental-themed poetry events held in green spaces.



BOBBIE D NORMAN

Research Associate,
Data+Soul Research

Continuing research from her Mass Audubon's Environmental Education and Engagement Fellowship, Bobbie D began work to implement a new street sign for Mass Audubon as she found a disconnect between the local community and the Mass Audubon demographic. Designed by kids in the community, she hopes to bring greater diversity into the program.



MEERA SUBRAMANIAN

Freelance Journalist

Meera worked on gaining traction for *A Better World Is Possible: Global Youth Confront the Climate Crisis*, a young adult nonfiction graphic novel she co-authored. The book tells the story of four real-life youth climate activists and makes climate history and challenges accessible through compelling visuals and engaging writing.



REV. MARIAMA WHITE-HAMMOND

Founder & Current Pastor,
New Roots AME Church

Rev. Mariama worked on her book: *Divine Diving: Sacred Lessons from Under the Sea*. Through her written words, as well as other media extensions of the project, her goal is to help humans, and particularly Black women, restore their personal and communal relationships with the water, as well as encourage ideas of what care for the environment and for society could look like.



BROOKE WILLIAMS

Professor of the Practice,
Journalism, BU

Brooke investigated environmental change in New England waterways using satellite data and a tool called CyFi (short for cyanobacteria finder). She is working on mapping and predicting harmful algae blooms across the region. Her project aimed to translate complex environmental data into digestible and accessible, public-facing information.

ANNUAL SUMMIT



November marked the first-ever MISI summit – now a standing tradition, held every year, built around the people and disciplines that don't usually share a stage: scholars and journalists, artists and organizers, technologists and pastors. Each summit takes on the fault line where public trust is under the most strain.

COMMUNICATING CLIMATE

Friday, November 7, 2025

Duan Family Center for Computing & Data Sciences

150+

ATTENDEES

18

SPEAKERS

The inaugural summit, titled Communicating Climate, doubled as the official launch of the Center. Over the course of a single day, more than 150 attendees moved through a keynote conversation and five panels tracing climate communication from the halls of state government to local newsrooms to the algorithms shaping what people see. The day opened with Harvard's Cass Sunstein and journalist Michael Grunwald in conversation, moderated by COM Dean Mariette DiChristina, delightfully interrupted by a circus performance and a physical, interactive workshop, and closed with a reception among a youth art exhibition by Bow Seat.

Keynote Conversation: Power, Policy, and the Climate Narrative

Michael Grunwald and Cass Sunstein

moderated by Mariette DiChristina

Policy, Science & Public Engagement in an Age of Skepticism

Carol Gregory, Melissa Hoffer, and Nathan Phillips

moderated by Eric Gordon
on connecting climate science to public understanding

Ground Truth: Local Action and the Fight Against Climate Misinformation

Kenneth Bailey, Barbara Espinosa Barrera, and Patricia Fabian

moderated by Kannan Thiruvengadam
on hyperlocal strategies for countering misinformation

Telling the Climate Story: Journalism, Trust & Cultural Relevance

Ian Cheney, Andrew Revkin, and Meera Subramanian

moderated by David Abel
on reporting climate risk across platforms

The Business of News: Audience Trust & the Future of Science Journalism

Dan Mauzy, Brian McGrory, and Sue Robinson

moderated by Meghan Irons
on the business models that can sustain trustworthy reporting

Signals and Noise: Emerging Media, AI & the Climate Crisis

Joan Donovan, Santi Garces, Ainissa Ramirez, and Ethan Zuckerman

moderated by Chris Wells
on AI, algorithms, and the climate fight



COMMUNITY VOICES: BUILDING STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN ACADEMIA & COMMUNITY

MISI and Boston University's College of Arts and Sciences hosted "Community Voices: Building Stronger Partnerships Between Academia and Community" at the Howard Thurman Center. Chaplain Clementina Chéry, the founder, President, and CEO of the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute; Dr. Peter Masiakos, a Harvard professor and director of pediatric trauma surgery at Massachusetts General Hospital; and Eric Gordon, Director of MISI; sat down together to discuss the importance of genuine community engagement in universities and hospitals, and the challenge of turning research into usable resources for community. Reflecting on their partnership in building the initiative, Transforming Narratives of Gun Violence (TNGV), the conversation challenged the siloed dynamic between medical, academic, and community institutions by centering stories, collaboration, and people. "When conversations change, we change," said Dr. Masiakos. The initiative was championed as a starting point for investing in families and communities. "We're training, educating, and putting the emphasis on the solution," said Chéry.



WITH A SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS:

-  College of Communication
Center for Media Innovation & Social Impact
-  Wheelock College of Education & Human Development
Strategic Partnerships & Community Engagement
-  Arts & Sciences
Center for Innovation in Social Science
-  Government & Community Affairs
-  Boston University Office of Research

-  Arts & Sciences
Center for the Humanities
-  College of Arts & Sciences
-  College of Communication
-  Initiative on Cities

ACCOMPLISHMENTS & COLLABORATION

Fellows worked independently and together on books, zines, podcasts, photography exhibits, apps and digital tools. Some of it was already underway before the fellowship began; some of it came about because this particular group ended up in the same room. The cohort was able to create lasting impact, memories, and friendships through the work they did. Community is a defining feature of our Co-Learning pillar which emphasizes the symbiotic nature of learning from one another.

BOOKS



Michelle Amazeen

Content Confusion: News Media, Native Advertising, and Policy in an Era of Disinformation



Roy Grundmann

On Shoreless Sea: The MS St. Louis Refugee in History, Film, and Popular Memory



Meera Subramanian

A Better World is Possible: Global Youth Confront the Climate Crisis

MASSENERGIZE CONFERENCE

with Jaelyn Carr,
Meera Subramanian,
and Rev. Mariama White-Hammond

CLEAN ENERGY FOR RENTERS

Jaelyn Carr, who was studying Energy & Environment, discovered the best way to educate her intended audience about clean energy was to create an accessible and easy-to-follow zine for renters.



BU SPARK! CIVICHACKS

To round out February at MISI, two of our fellows celebrated exciting successes at BU Spark! CivicHacks 2026, pitching and developing projects in the Environmental/Sustainability track. During the two-day event, student teams collaborated on real-world impact initiatives addressing pressing civic challenges.

Barbara Espinosa Barrera won “The G.O.A.T.” prize for her Air Quality Data project, and Mark Araujo won the “Foodgrid” prize for his food-mapping project serving the Boston area – which also took home the award for Best Overall Project.



PODCASTS: THE COMVERSATION & GOETHE INSTITUTE'S "BETWEEN FEAR & HOPE"

with Julia Cumes and Roy Grundmann

Roy Grundmann, Associate Professor of Film Studies at COM and an archival researcher, and Julia Cumes, a veteran photographer and photojournalist, discovered cross-disciplinary intersections in their work on migration and displacement. They explored these connections in a talk, sponsored by the Goethe-Institut Boston, entitled "Between Fear and Hope" and in the 'The COMversation' podcast, hosted by Charlotte Howell.

BOYCE COMMUNITY KITCHEN

with Julia Cumes and Mark Araujo

Julia leant her photography skills to aid Mark in capturing the essences of his work with Boyce Community Kitchen. Mark's multimedia project explored representing the holistic sensory experience of spending time in public kitchens as a way of communicating to the greater public the beauty of those spaces and what food makes possible. Julia's photos captured the bright smiles and colors that floated around the Boyce Community Kitchen, bringing Mark's goal to life.



SOUNDING

with Julia Cumes and Meera Subramanian

Even though they both live on Cape Cod, Julia Cumes and Meera Subramanian met for the first time during the fellowship. They became fast friends, hosting a lunch and a viewing of Julia's exhibit. Meera is writing the introduction to Julia's latest book of portraits featuring immigrants who have made their home on the Cape (to be published Fall 2026).

CREATIVE WORKS



This year, MISI's Creative Works supported artists, filmmakers, journalists, photographers, and others producing work with a direct impact on their communities. Our Trust + Storytelling Fellowship supported 15 fellows exploring novel storytelling practices around climate change, community violence, and migration – each backed by a stipend, a \$1,000 mini-grant, direct mentorship, and connections across campus to support production and distribution. The fellowship culminated in what we intend will be an annual spring storytelling event at WBUR's CitySpace, where fellows shared carefully crafted personal stories around climate change before a live audience. Fellows' projects ranged from a graphic novel on youth climate action to a zine on renters' rights and green energy in Boston. This fall, we will launch a practicum through BU's College of Communication connecting students directly with MISI fellows, with students becoming eligible for their own \$1,000 mini-grants upon completion. Looking ahead, we're working to grow the Creative Works pillar into a full creative incubator – with larger grants, distribution partnerships, and broader support for the local journalism and documentary ecosystem beyond our immediate fellows.

David S. Abel

David Abel

Associate Director of Creative Works, MISI
Boston University College of Communication

PROJECTS

A BETTER WORLD IS POSSIBLE

with Meera Subramanian

Students at [PRLab](#), BU's student-run public relations agency, worked with veteran journalist Meera Subramanian to envision a promotional campaign and book trailer for the release of *A Better World is Possible: Global Youth Confront the Climate Crisis*, a young adult graphic novel co-authored with Danica Novgorodoff.

FOOD JUSTICE

with Mark Araujo

A team at [Real World Productions](#), a student-run, client-driven production company, collaborated with Mark Araujo's food justice non-profit, [EquiTable](#), to produce a video about a thriving food pantry and community kitchen in Charlestown, a model for future initiatives throughout the Boston area.



STORIES FROM A WARMING MASSACHUSETTS

with David Abel

Student teams from BU's Global Health Storytelling class, led by MISI's David Abel, reported multimedia stories from ten Massachusetts communities confronting climate change including coastal erosion in Sandwich and Hull, urban heat and air pollution in Chelsea and Chinatown, and contaminated soil in Danvers. These profiles of people in Massachusetts share how they have been personally affected by climate change and environmental justice issues.

STORIES FROM A WARMING WORLD



Stories from a Warming World was an evening of live storytelling staged at WBUR and hosted by MISI's own David Abel. Four of MISI's fellows and two associate directors each told a personal story about living through environmental change. The stories are collected in a companion book of the same name, published by MISI.

We include the evening here, in creative production, because the stories stand on their own as creative works, not as illustrations of research findings, but as narratives in their own right.

ON THE STAGE

Journey to Justice

Jaelyn Carr

Hands in the Dirt

Kannan Thiruvengadam

Going Through Things

Joanna Davidson

Sea Change

Amy Geller

What We Leave Behind

Julia Cumes

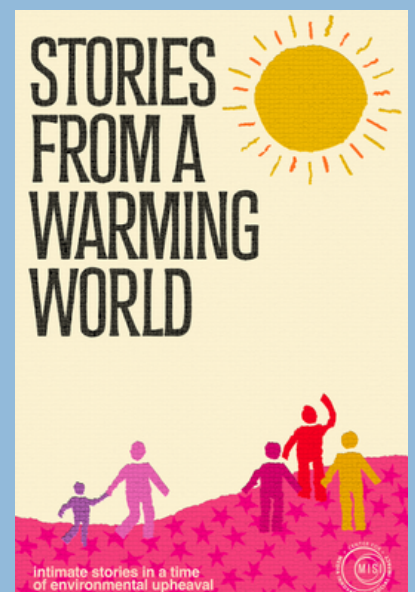
Everybody Everywhere All at Once

Meera Subramanian



ON THE PAGE

An extension of the stories told that night, MISI's first published book, *Stories from A Warming World*, features works from members of the 2025 – 2026 fellowship cohort. Focused on looking inward during a time of environmental upheaval, our fellows shared personal narratives with the goal that people who hear, read, and watch stories from their own community are more likely to take climate seriously, to act, and to sustain that action over time.



PEOPLE

LEADERSHIP & STAFF

ERIC GORDON
AMY GELLER
CHRIS WELLS
DAVID ABEL
KANNAN THIRUVENGADAM
SHARON WONG



FELLOWS

MICHELLE AMAZEEN
MARK ARAUJO
JAELYN CARR
JODI CRANSTON
JULIA CUMES
JOANNA DAVIDSON
BARBARA ESPINOSA BARRERA
ROY GRUNDMANN
JAMES HOWARD HILL JR
YI GRACE JI
IRIT KLEIMAN
BOBBIE D NORMAN
MEERA SUBRAMANIAN
REV. MARIAMA WHITE-HAMMOND
BROOKE WILLIAMS

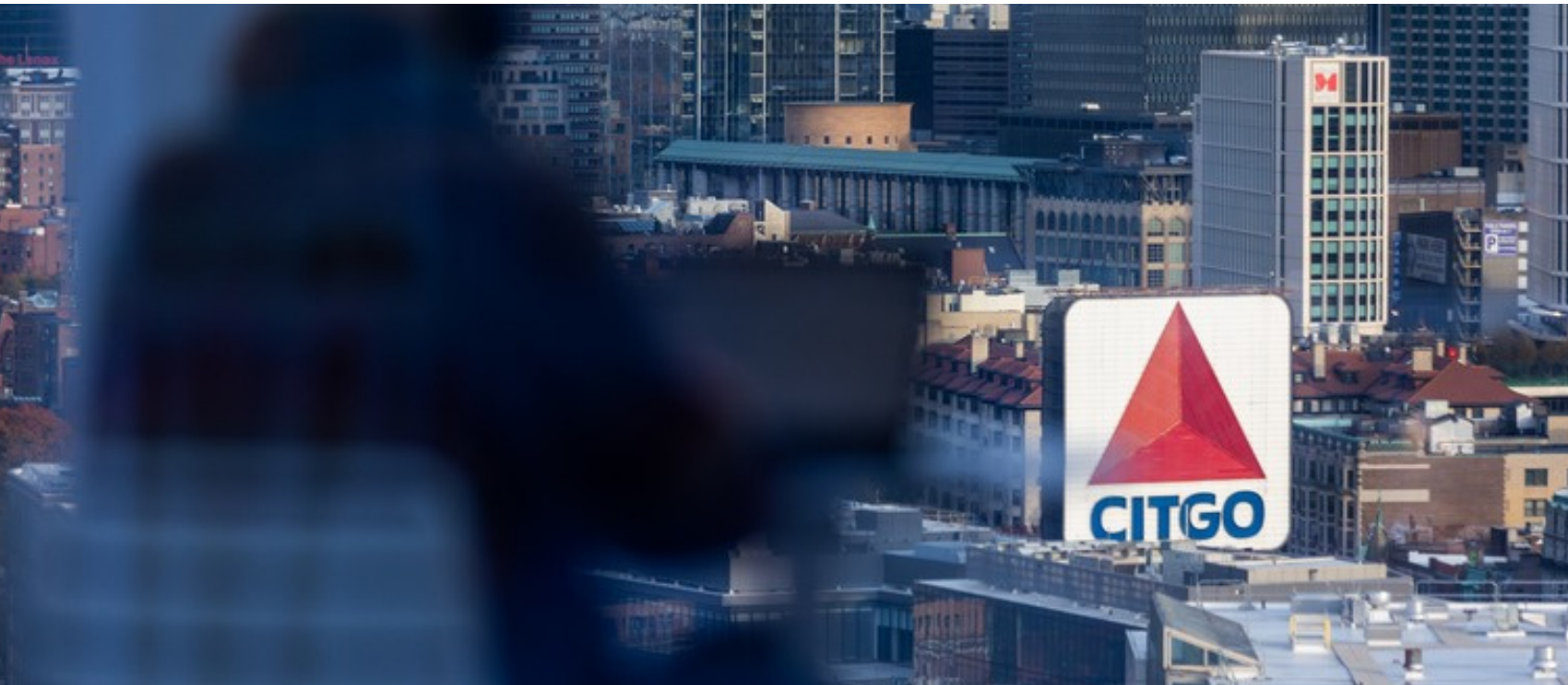


STUDENTS

ANUSHKA
JANISE BONILLA
JOSEPH CHIRINOS
HANNAH LE
ANNA MCCLEAN
BARIA MUSTAFA
SOFIA SANCHEZ



WORDS ABOUT MISI



"This center was born out of ambitions to help society unlock its potential through amazing communication. Communication helps the world work, but if communication isn't going well, then the world can't move forward."

– Dean Mariette DiChristina ('86),
Boston University College of Communication

"This [summit] gives me a chance for human interaction, for conversation [and] for relationship building outside of the silos...that we all inadvertently are just a part of. We don't really need more science. What we need are better communicators."

– Executive Director Nathan Scott,
MassEnergize

"I'm so grateful to have had the opportunity to be a fellow. The year went by so quickly and I think that I only grasped what I could gain from the experience as it was ending. But I will be forever changed by it and hope that all of the organizers know how much I appreciate their hard work on our behalf and their willingness to be so open to the group and to embark on this experiment!"

– Jodi Cranston, 2025-2026 Fellow

"One of the things I'll take away most strongly from this fellowship is the sense that many of these relationships and collaborations are continuing beyond the program itself. Some already have...I also appreciated being reminded how inspiring it is to spend time around people whose work is so different from my own."

– Julia Cumes, 2025-2026 Fellow

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The founding of MISI was made possible by the vision and generosity of many. We want to thank Mariette DiChristina, the dean of the College of Communication, for her early and unwavering support in imagining what a center like this could be at Boston University, and the committee of faculty colleagues who spent hours shaping our original charter, turning an idea into an institution with real purpose and direction. We are also deeply grateful to the Mellon Foundation, whose support made our Trust + Storytelling Fellowship possible. Their investment did more than help us tell compelling stories about climate change; it affirmed the essential role of the humanities in science communication, and gave our fellows the space to explore that intersection with rigor and creativity. To advance our efforts in civic science, Kenneth Feld and the Feld Family Civic Science Initiative, in collaboration with the Rita Allen Foundation, made it possible for us to hire a full time civic science fellow to explore the methods through which scientific insights gain traction with communities.

Beyond these founding contributions, we want to acknowledge the extraordinary reception MISI has received across the university. The students and faculty who have engaged with the center this year have done more than participate. They have shown up, given their time generously, and embraced the center's vision as their own. Most importantly, they have placed their trust in me and in our leadership team, and it is this trust that has allowed MISI to grow into what it is today. As we move into our next year, we carry that trust with gratitude and with a deep sense of responsibility to continue earning it.

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