

PAM'S STORY: PREPARING FOR POSSIBLE FUTURES

A workshop tool to
facilitate climate adaptation
planning in the Yorkshire
and Humber region.



Context

Each year we're seeing bigger efforts being made to meet net zero targets and limit the degree to which our climate alters. Progress, however, has been slower than needed and the impacts of climate change are already being felt in many parts of the world, including across the UK. We must keep increasing the pace at which we reduce emissions to limit the magnitude of these changes, but we must also prepare for inevitable changes to our environment and our ways of life.

Scientific models are powerful in determining an understanding of potential future climate scenarios. But it is challenging to interpret this information in terms of what could happen on the ground in our own towns, cities and regions. This workshop toolkit has been created to facilitate exploration of what climate change impacts will mean for people and communities, and to plan more effective interventions to protect and support people in the long-term.

The toolkit is aimed at those working in place-based climate adaptation roles and for people looking to increase the understanding of climate impacts within their organisation. It has been designed to be useful for people with or without climate science expertise.

Terms of use

This toolkit has been developed for use within organisations to facilitate discussion and planning for climate adaptation and resilience. The material is protected by copyright and includes recorded performances by a professional actor. These materials are licenced for use by organisations as an internal workshop tool, but they should not be shared publicly without further permission. If you are in doubt about how you can use or share this toolkit, please contact yhclimate@leeds.ac.uk

Available Training

The Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission and Vesper Hill offer free online training to help potential facilitators get the most out of using this tool with their colleagues and networks. Please contact yhclimate@leeds.ac.uk for more information.

Evaluation

We are keen to understand how useful this toolkit is for people and organisations in the Yorkshire and Humber region and beyond. If you have used the tool, please do fill in the short evaluation form at <https://yorksandhumberclimate.org.uk/weather-narratives> to tell us what worked and what needs improvement.

If you'd like to share more in-depth feedback or discuss how the toolkit could evolve for future use, please email yhclimate@leeds.ac.uk to arrange a chat with us.



This workshop toolkit has been created to facilitate exploration of what climate change impacts will mean for people and communities



1. Using real-world narratives

Storytelling is a powerful tool. Drawing on projected climate scenarios and observations of changes in weather patterns that we are already seeing as a result of climate change, we have created two narratives exploring possible weather futures in our region. Whilst these narratives use lots of assumptions and do not pretend to be accurate weather forecasts, they are designed to provide a vision of the challenges and changes our region may face in the coming years.

To help bring to life how people in our communities might experience the impacts of climate change, we use the first-person perspective from a fictional character living through the weather described. This character, Pam, discusses her experiences of local weather somewhere in the Yorkshire and Humber region in the near future.

The weather in both narratives is the same, but Pam's story changes according to context:

- **In the first version** (subtitled "how it will be"), Pam's account reflects a future in which no new adaptation measures have been implemented in the region.
- **In the second version** (subtitled "how it could be"), Pam's account reflects a future in which coordinated efforts have been implemented across the region to prepare us for climatic changes.

About Vesper Hill

This toolkit is a collaboration between the Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission and Vesper Hill.

Vesper Hill is a social enterprise that uses creative methods and stories of lived experience to engage audiences with the urgency of climate adaptation. Their interactive workshops and professional theatre performances are designed to help participants reflect on future uncertainty, without giving in to doom and despair. What kinds of constructive action can we take together, in our communities and places of work, to help make the future more liveable?

We use the first-person perspective from a fictional character living through the weather described



2. How to use this toolkit

The toolkit is centred around two alternative, first-person accounts of a year in the future. These narratives are intended to prompt workshop participants to think about the weather impacts they could see in the future in their area, what the compounding effects of these might be, and how this might affect residents and businesses in their communities.

The narratives are presented as audio files. We recommend that you structure the workshop in the following sequence:

- i. Preliminary guidance**
(See 2.1 and 2.2)
- ii. Play first recording**
(See 2.3)
- iii. Group discussion of first recording**
(See 3.1)
- iv. Play the second recording**
- v. Group discussion of the second recording**
(See 3.2)
- vi. Review and conclusions**
(See 3.3)

2.1 Psychological safety

Begin by clearly explaining to the group that discussing the impacts of climate change can be distressing and the workshop will be exploring difficult and emotional topics. Advise participants to take a step back from the session if they are finding it difficult to listen or feeling overwhelmed by the content. If possible, provide a separate space for people to take some time out and create opportunities within the session for people to talk to each other about the emotional challenges of facing future climate impacts.



2.2 Setting the context

The narratives are set in 2048. Remind the group that this is only two decades in the future and many of the impacts that will be explored in the session are already being experienced by people in our region.

You might ask people to reflect on what age they were two decades ago, what they were doing and how much has changed in that time.

Explain that **the narratives are based on mid-level scenarios** from climate modelling. They do not pursue the most severe climate predictions, nor the least severe.

Remind the group that the session is designed to explore how to protect our communities from the inevitable impacts of our changing climate by adapting to new ways of life, building resilience and minimising vulnerabilities. The objectives of this workshop do not extend to the equally vital question of how carbon emissions can be reduced.

2.3 Using the recordings

Emphasise to your groups that this is an exercise in active listening. Your participants need to listen carefully and engage with the audio narratives, avoiding other distractions if at all possible.

If the session is being held in-person, you could invite listeners to close their eyes (for some, this will help them focus better), or to use the handout provided as a point of immediate visual focus. This handout, provided with the toolkit, should be distributed before you play the recordings. It summarises the raw details of the weather that Pam experiences in the year she describes and provides space for participants to make their own notes.

If the session is being held online we recommend encouraging people to use headphones when listening to the narratives to help immerse themselves in the story and avoid distractions. Ask all participants to turn their cameras off while the recordings are being played. A simple slide-deck is provided to display on screen during this listening exercise.

The toolkit also contains a transcript of the audio narratives, which can be provided to participants on request. We recommend asking your participants in advance of the session whether this additional support might be helpful (e.g. if they have hearing impairments). However, we would advise against providing the text as a default option, because reading a script while listening to a recording can detract from the impact of the performance.

We strongly recommend that, following the beep that marks the end of each recording, participants are allowed a minute or two to reflect quietly and write down their immediate reactions to Pam's story. Advise your participants in advance that you will do this, and then try to avoid jumping in to fill in the silence. If listeners are engaged, there will be plenty happening during that silence.



Emphasise to your groups that this is an exercise in active listening



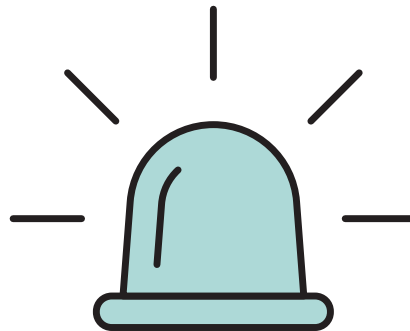
2.4 Facilitating the discussions

After playing each recording, workshop facilitators should provide participants with the opportunity to discuss their responses and reflections. These discussions should ideally be conducted in small groups, so as to permit relaxed, open exchanges between participants. If the meeting is being conducted online, please use “breakout” functions as appropriate to the size of your group.

Facilitators should try not to ask questions that presume particular answers. Instead, try to let participants respond on their own terms. However, if the discussion begins to go off-piste, gently nudge it back to the central question of adapting to a changing climate. If participants default to a discussion of carbon mitigation instead of adaptation, you can point out that both versions of Pam’s story assume the same weather in 2048, as a consequence of current emission levels.

Top tip

We recommend appointing a note-taker for each group, to capture key points of discussion. These notes will provide a record of the meeting, and – where appropriate – can be used to feed back to the larger group during the closing, plenary discussion.



Facilitators should try not to ask questions that presume particular answers instead, try to let participants respond on their own terms

3. Suggested workshop question prompts

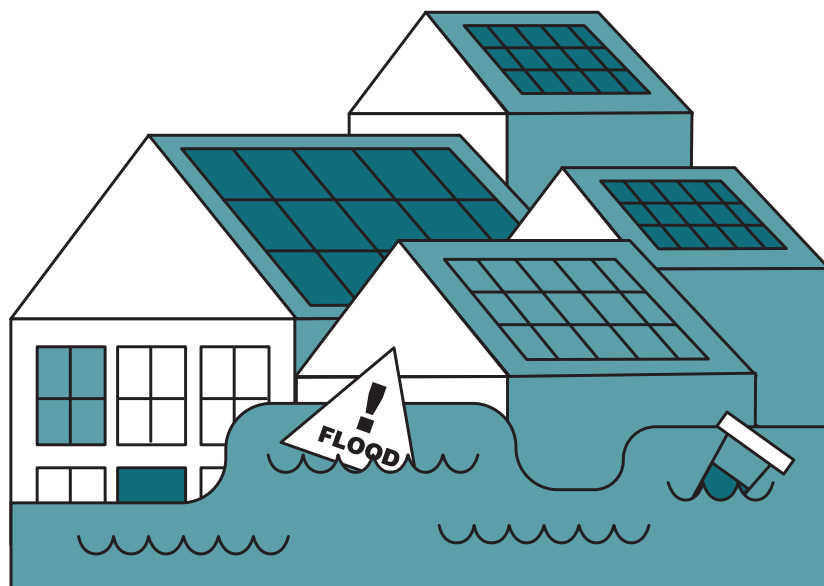
The following suggestions are provided to help facilitators understand the material in more depth, to support and prompt rich discussion between participants.

3.1 Version 1

In version 1 of Pam's story, the region is not well-adapted to, or prepared for, the impacts of climate change. Pam feels isolated, frustrated, and disconnected from her community. She also feels abandoned by the organisations that exist to protect and support residents – such as the local authority. Encourage the group to consider the following:

- What struck you most about Pam's story?
- What were the problems Pam described? In what ways is her community vulnerable?
- Who could this be really bad for? What could the worst-case scenarios be for people living through this experience?
- From your professional perspective what other risks can you see for Pam and her community if things don't change?
- Which parts of Pam's experience would you describe as an emergency situation or a crisis? Why?

In version 1, Pam feels isolated, frustrated, and disconnected from her community. She also feels abandoned by the organisations that exist to protect and support residents – such as the local authority



3.2 Version 2

In version 2 of Pam's story, the region is well adapted to, and prepared for, the impacts of climate change. The weather is no different (it's important to emphasise that with participants), but Pam's experience is very different. She is living within a functional community and feels socially connected and supported. She also alludes to adaptive changes in the local environment and some experiences from version one are absent from Pam's experience this time – she does not mention flood, for example. Encourage participants to consider the following:

- What struck you about Pam's story this time?
- Considering the weather pattern was exactly the same as in version 1, what vulnerabilities are likely to have been addressed to achieve version 2?
- In your context (community/sector/organisation) what measures or interventions could be implemented to help achieve these more positive outcomes?
- How could the level of social cohesion be achieved that provides the community and support Pam is experiencing in version 2?
- How realistic or utopian are the changes that have taken place in version 2? If it can't all be achieved or afforded, which adaptations are most important to prioritise?

3.3 Group discussion and identifying actions

We recommend that your smaller discussion groups reconvene into one full meeting. Encourage each group to share the main points from their discussions.

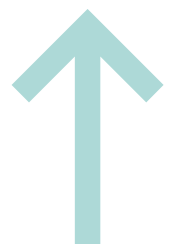
What common threads emerge from these summaries?

What recommendations can be articulated for concrete action toward positive change of the sort seen in version 2?

Try to keep the focus of this concluding discussion on actions that might be achievable – whether in the short, medium, or longer term – by the community or professional sector represented in the room.



In version 2, she is living within a functional community and feels socially connected and supported. She also alludes to adaptive changes in the local environment and some experiences from version one are absent from Pam's experience this time – she does not mention flood, for example



Credits

The Weather Narratives toolkit was developed by Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission in partnership with Vesper Hill

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Audio performed by Kat Rose-Martin

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