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New National Science Foundation Grant Supports The Nation's TV Weathercasters As Local Climate Educators

PRINCETON, N.J. — The nation's television weathercasters will have better tools to keep their viewers informed about the local consequences of climate change, thanks to a \$3 million National Science Foundation grant awarded to George Mason University and Climate Central, a non-profit science and journalism organization.

The 3-year grant – *Taking to Scale a Proven Climate Education Method by TV Weathercasters: Climate Matters* – will expand Climate Central's current efforts to produce and deliver localized TV-ready climate science content and professional development opportunities to TV meteorologists around the country.

"We found in our prior NSF-funded research that TV weathercasters can be highly effective climate educators" said the lead investigator for the project, Dr. Edward Maibach of George Mason University. "We also found that there are many TV weathercasters around the country who are eager to inform their viewers about the local weather impacts of climate change."

More than 150 weathercasters are participating in the program, called *Climate Matters*. The goal of the current grant is to add an additional 200 weathercasters to the project, although all of the nation's approximately 1,300 weathercasters will be invited to participate.

"Weather is becoming more extreme in every region of the country," said Climate Central's Dr. Heidi Cullen, who is the co-lead investigator on the project. "Local TV weathercasters have a truly unique opportunity to explain these weather changes to members of their community. They are trusted, they have unparalleled access to the public, and they are truly talented science communicators."

Each week, participating weathercasters receive localized TV-ready climate data and graphics. They also can participate in monthly one-hour web-based continuing education sessions hosted by WSI, a division of The Weather Company, and day-long climate change educational seminars conducted at the annual meetings of their professional associations, the American Meteorological Society (AMS) and the National Weather Association (NWA).

"This is an exciting opportunity for the broadcast meteorology community to rise to the communication challenges necessitated by our changing climate" said Dr. Keith Seitter, AMS Executive Director, and a partner in the project. "TV meteorologists are an important part of the natural disaster early warning system in their community. This project will help them fulfill that role in new and important ways."

Launched by George Mason University and Climate Central in 2010 with support from the National Science Foundation, *Climate Matters* began as a pilot test in a single station, WLTX, the CBS affiliate in Columbia, S.C. During the course of the project's first year, WLTX viewers learned more about climate change than did viewers of other local stations. WLTX's Chief Meteorologist, Jim Gandy, continues to be an active participant in *Climate Matters* today, and

his station's news shows have become #1 in some time slots in their media market.

In 2011, with support from private foundations – including The Schmidt Family Foundation, The Robertson Foundation and others – Climate Central launched **Climate Matters** as a national program that has grown to include more than 150 participating weathercasters at 110 stations in 75 different markets, including 22 Spanish language weathercasters at 18 stations.

NOAA, NASA and Yale University are also partners on the current project. NOAA and NASA, through their participation in the project, ensure that all **Climate Matters** materials are based on the most current and most credible scientific evidence.

Building on the highly rated climate science educational seminars he has been conducting for TV meteorologists and weathercasters over the past five years, Yale Climate Connections editor Bud Ward will be organizing and hosting day-long climate science seminars each year at the AMS Broadcast Annual Meeting and the NWA Annual Meeting.

“These seminars, taught by nationally recognized experts, have proven to be invaluable learning opportunities for broadcast meteorologists to sharpen their on- and off-air climate communications at a time their audiences are demanding more and better information on climate and ‘weird’ weather-related developments,” Ward said.

About George Mason University

George Mason is Virginia's largest public research university. Located near Washington, D.C., Mason enrolls nearly 34,000 students from 130 countries and all 50 states. Mason has grown rapidly over the last half-century and is recognized for its innovation and entrepreneurship, remarkable diversity and commitment to accessibility.

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About Climate Central

Climate Central is a non-profit research and journalism organization providing authoritative, science-based information to help the public and policymakers make sound decisions about climate and energy.

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About Yale Climate Connections

Yale Climate Connections, previously *The Yale Forum on Climate Change & The Media*, is an independent, nonpartisan, multimedia climate news and information service that provides original reporting, commentary, and analysis on the issue of climate change, one of the greatest challenges and stories of our time.

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