



2026 IMPACT REPORT

The climate innovation is already here. Our work is connecting it.

A year of building North Carolina's community of clean and climate tech founders, from our first gathering at Frontier RTP to Raleigh-Durham Climate Week.



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OUR STORY

We set out to build a community, and to create the conditions for climate innovation to take root in North Carolina.

North Carolina has what it takes to lead in climate innovation: research universities, advanced manufacturing, agriculture, energy, deep talent, and founders building real companies. Carolina Climate is a peer-led community that brings those founders together, makes the ecosystem easier to see, and shares its story with the world.

We chose to build from the ground up, with founders rather than for them. We listened first, and that listening built a bond and a sense of ownership. Many of those founders rolled up their sleeves to build alongside us, and they keep showing up. The founders gave us the vision. Our job was to make it happen.

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

480+

newsletter subscribers following the NC climate ecosystem

45

founders in our Founders Circle

65

founders and 58 climate tech companies connected

85+

attendees at our first Climate Tech Day, opening Raleigh-Durham Startup Week

\$20K

Impact Partner Grant from the City of Raleigh

6

anchor ecosystem partners

The interest is here. The talent is here. The companies are here.

Let's keep building this community together.

From one room to a climate week

JULY 2025

Our first gathering at Frontier RTP

Carolina Climate hosts its first event as part of Frontier RTP's Out of Office meetup.

SEPT TO NOV 2025

Founders Circle pilot

Three founder-led sessions at First Flight Venture Center, built around listening: why we build in climate, what gets in the way, and how we show up for each other.

WINTER 2026

Building the rhythm

A coffee meetup and a happy hour at First Flight keep founders connected between bigger moments.

APRIL 2026

Climate Tech Day opens Raleigh-Durham Startup Week

85+ attendees, founder pitches and an investor panel, supported by the City of Raleigh Impact Partner Grant.

SUMMER 2026

Founders Circle Dinners

Intimate, high-bandwidth dinners at Bella Monica and Mez Contemporary Mexican.

AUGUST 2026

Full circle at Frontier RTP

A year later, back in the same room for Climate Connections, this time alongside Duke Design Climate.

NOVEMBER 2 TO 6, 2026

Raleigh-Durham Climate Week

The first climate week for the Triangle, focused on founders, startups and capital.



We listened first

As a builder you can identify the problem and propose a solution, and still let that solution be shaped by the people you are building it for. That is what we chose to do.



Three sessions at First Flight Venture Center, facilitated by ADVago and the Carolina Climate team.

Why

Why are you building in climate?

What

What challenges do you commonly face as a climate tech founder?

How

How do you want to show up for this community, and how should it show up for you?

What founders asked for

A high-trust, peer-led community built on transparency and shared ownership

Practical help with funding, customers, talent, supply chain and go-to-market

Small, lightly facilitated circles to learn from each other

More visibility for founders, and a clearer story for North Carolina

What it gave us

That initial work gave us momentum. It let us move with intention and strike the right partnerships and collaborations, because we knew what we were building toward. The listening built a bond and a sense of ownership, and many of those founders continue to show up and build alongside us.

Opening Raleigh-Durham Startup Week

85+
attendees



It started with real connection

Founders in the room, honest conversations about what this ecosystem needs and where each of us fits. Session led by ADVAgo, with lunch from E2.

Back to first principles

Stephan Jacob of Cotopaxi on building the company you believe in. Malhar Shah led a fireside with Stephan and Aleks Gosiewski of Keel Labs.

A candid conversation on building in climate

Josh Dorfman (Plantd, Supercool) with Dr. Kathryn Polkoff of Hoofprint Biome, recorded live for the Supercool podcast.

Founders stepped up

Live pitches and real investor feedback from Sustaera, Innatrix and Seagull EcoChem.

The questions founders care about

An investor panel moderated by Joshua Hayes of Hutchison PLLC, with Oval Park Capital, Symphonic Capital and Blueridge Climate Ventures.



“Having choices is a privilege.”

Stephan Jacob, Cotopaxi
Delivered with Raleigh-Durham Startup Co. and supported by the City of Raleigh through the Impact Partner Grant.

A community that meets all year

Between the big moments, three recurring formats keep founders connected, learning from each other and bringing new people in.

Founders Circle Dinners

Intimate, high-bandwidth dinners where founders talk through real challenges and wins. Hosted this summer at Bella Monica and Mez Contemporary Mexican.

Leadership Sessions

Peer sessions for founder-CEOs to work through leadership questions together, in a small and trusted room.

Climate Connections

Open happy hours for the wider climate community, an easy way for founders to bring peers into the fold.



FULL CIRCLE · AUGUST 2026

Back in the room where it started

Our first event was at Frontier RTP in the summer of 2025. A year later, we were back in that same room with Duke Design Climate, with a lot of growth behind us and more ahead.



NEXT UP · NOVEMBER 2 TO 6, 2026

Raleigh-Durham Climate Week

Founder gatherings, investor conversations and partner-led programming across the Triangle. A week to share what North Carolina is building with the world, organized with Raleigh-Durham Startup Co. and supported by the City of Raleigh.

WHO'S IN THE COMMUNITY

Sectors

Energy and grid, bio and agtech, circular economy, water, blue tech, carbon, materials, storage and the built environment

Stage

Mostly pre-seed to seed, alongside companies at Series A and beyond, including Hoofprint Biome, Plantd and DG Matrix

Place

Rooted in the Triangle, with founders in Greensboro, Wilmington and Western North Carolina

ANCHOR PARTNERS



Center for
Entrepreneurial
Development



With gratitude to the City of Raleigh, E2, Frontier RTP, Duke Design Climate, ADVago and every founder, speaker and volunteer who showed up.

Let's build this together

Join us as a founder, a partner or a supporter. Partners help bring Founders Circle Dinners, Leadership Sessions and Climate Connections to life, and help North Carolina tell its climate innovation story.

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