

SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM CRITERIA

The Solutions Journalism Network designed these criteria to train journalists how to report using a solutions approach, and to help news consumers identify the solutions approach in journalism. The criteria are the foundation of our methodology, but in consideration of diverse narrative styles and resources, we also apply it with flexibility to a variety of story formats.

For stories to qualify as solutions journalism, the intentions of the criteria's components need to be communicated in the stories. The response and insight must be strongly and clearly reported. Good solutions stories also will include evidence of impact/ progress, as well as limitations of the approach; at the least, journalists should signal in their stories that they have considered these facets intentionally.

1. RESPONSE: Journalism that focuses on a response or responses to a problem.

The emphasis of reporting should center on *how* a response has worked -- or *why* a response has not worked.

2. INSIGHT: Makes a response relevant to others. The framework of the story includes a "teachable lesson" that presents the response as portable and accessible to others. This could include understanding of how solutions that work might be applied in other contexts -- or why other solutions have failed.

3. EVIDENCE OF RESULTS/ INDICATIONS OF PROGRESS LINKED TO THE RESPONSE: Evidence that lends credibility to the response and the effectiveness of a strategy.

Solutions journalism can include evidence in either qualitative or quantitative metrics, or both.* If a response is new, a pilot program, or just in early stages, then there may not be explicit data available for these metrics. In these cases, stories should try to include anecdotal evidence, including perspective from the people who are affected. The reporter should be transparent about the lack of more conclusive evidence and should signal why the program is nevertheless newsworthy.

*These can include ground-level voices, numerical data, the identification of similar scaled efforts, and visual documentation of the response.

4. LIMITATIONS: Discusses any limitations of the approach.

Stories should explain the shortcomings of a response. No solution is perfect; some work well for one community, but may fail in others. A story that represents these shortcomings accurately, and places them in meaningful context, is more credible. At a bare minimum, the story should avoid presenting the response as a silver bullet.