Solutions Journalism Network

Impact: December 2020 - March 2021

Accountability or Institutional Change: Solutions journalism holds leaders accountable and results in a change in policy, law or practice.

Northeast Ohio Solutions Journalism Collaborative/Ideastream [March 2021] A month after a Cleveland public radio station aired a solutions story examining the trend of “pay-to-stay” housing legislation, the city of Lakewood in northeast Ohio passed a similar measure, and city leaders in two other communities in northeast Ohio introduced the idea. The story, by Ideastream, examined what happened in other Ohio cities that had already implemented the measure, which allows tenants behind on rent to remain in their homes if they pay what they owe before local courts process the eviction. (Ohio is one of five states that allow landlords to file for eviction as soon as a payment is missed, without offering tenants any extra time to come up with the money.) Ideastream is part of the SJN-sponsored Northeast Ohio Solutions Journalism Collaborative. Housing advocates note that the widely shared story is helping educate the public and landlords.

Santa Fe Reporter [March 2021] The Reporter helped push its city to address homelessness by publishing a solutions series on potential pathways forward. The reporting (here and here) highlighted the need for cash to build a trust fund for affordable housing and the benefits of inclusionary zoning.

Revenue: Increased income for news organizations related to solutions journalism activities, verticals, campaigns, etc.

Charlotte Journalism Collaborative [December 2020 - February 2021] The Charlotte Journalism Collaborative, comprising six news outlets and three community institutions in North Carolina, is working with local visual artists to translate its reporting into creative formats to engage new audiences. A $9,000 grant from Charlotte’s Arts & Science Council, for example, helped the collaborative produce a graphic novel highlighting stories of the pandemic. Chris Rudisill, the collaborative's director, said the project opened up opportunities for journalists to collaborate with artists and “help bridge the gap between local news and the public.” Artist Wolly McNair said the project “is a game changer and hopefully will be something others use to model ways they can tell stories.”

www.solutionsjournalism.org
Hothouse [February 2021] Hothouse, a digital newsletter focused on climate change, has solutions journalism baked into its editorial identity. In a first for the fledgling publication, which primarily serves audiences in the U.S. and the U.K., Hothouse signed a deal of approximately $25,000 with a content distribution company that prioritizes solutions stories that can be syndicated to local publications in the U.S.

Minority Africa [November 2020] Minority Africa, a digital publication based in Kampala, Uganda, received a commitment for a grant totaling $32,000 from the Innovation Center at the Aga Khan University of Nairobi, Kenya. Caleb Okereke, Minority Africa’s founder and managing editor, said solutions journalism was featured prominently in the application process. He said that covering minorities in Africa with a solutions focus is a key part of what Minority Africa does and was of interest to the funders.

Cross-Pollination: Through solutions journalism, a community learns about something happening elsewhere, which sparks discussion and/or action.

Fort Worth Star-Telegram [August 2020] After investigative reporter Nichole Manna wrote about a program in Richmond, California, dedicated to ending cyclical and retaliatory gun violence, Fort Worth established a similar effort. That program, called VIP FW (Violence Intervention and Prevention Forth Worth) uses ex-convicts instead of police to intervene in and mediate conflicts. Manna’s follow-up reporting found evidence that VIP FW is helping: In the first few months of its existence, its staff had talked with 175 people, spent 275 hours engaging with known or suspected shooters and mediated 25 conflicts. Its leaders believe they prevented at least 18 shootings.

The Trace [February 2020] A story about a Louisiana sheriff’s lieutenant who created an inventive program to protect women from domestic violence led several other localities to consider replicating the model. The lieutenant, Valerie Martinez-Jordan, also was invited to develop a domestic violence curriculum for police departments across the state, which often ranks in the top three for rates of women murdered by men. Martinez-Jordan, herself a survivor of domestic abuse, put her small Lafourche Parish sheriff’s office in the vanguard when she created the firearms retrieval program, which takes guns away from domestic abusers. The federal Department of Justice’s community policing publication featured Lafourche Parish’s system in its newsletter.

Engagement and/or Trust: Solutions coverage leads to increased engagement and/or trust between a community and a newsroom, or with a particular issue.

SmithGeiger [late 2020/early 2021] To determine the impact of its work with TV stations, the Solutions Journalism Network commissioned media research company SmithGeiger to conduct...
a study with local news viewers in six media markets across the nation. Study participants were shown a problem-focused story as well as a solutions-focused story on the same subject, then asked a series of questions. In all six markets, which were geographically and demographically diverse, audiences much preferred the solutions stories. Researchers said that preference held for all age groups and political parties. SmithGeiger’s co-founders said the results clearly demonstrate that the public wants solutions journalism — and not just on TV. “You could use this data to persuade every newsroom in America that they need to do at least one story every day that has a significant solutions component,” said Andrew Finlayson, executive vice president of digital strategies for SmithGeiger.

Northeast Ohio Solutions Journalism Collaborative/The Land [March 2021] On March 15, 2021, a nonprofit providing housing assistance to residents in Cleveland’s Slavic Village neighborhood announced it received a $50,000 gift from an anonymous donor. According to a press release from the nonprofit, Slavic Village Development, the donation was made in response to a Jan. 26 article from the Northeast Ohio Solutions Journalism Collaborative, a project supported by SJN that aims to reinvigorate local media ecosystems through collaborative solutions journalism projects. The story was originally produced and published by The Land, a local nonprofit news outlet, but additional collaborative members republished it.

Associated Press [January 2021] An NGO featured in this solutions journalism story by the Associated Press said the article prompted an increase in donations to its operation in Matamoros, Mexico. It also helped expedite approval from Temple University to track health surveys and the COVID antibody status of refugees in Tapachula, Mexico, near the border with Guatemala, where the NGO is opening another facility. The story also caught the attention of the Hospital Roosevelt trauma department in Guatemala City, which is now in negotiations with the NGO, Global Response Management, to develop training and technology innovations. “What a difference one story can make!” said Andrea Leiner, GRM’s director of strategic plans.

Public Discourse/Civic Engagement: Solutions coverage leads to a change in the tone of public discourse, such as more civil conversations, particularly among people with different points of view.

The Laconia Daily Sun [Winter 2020 - Spring 2021] The Daily Sun invited some of its most frequent writers of letters to the editor to learn a deep listening technique that is part of SJN’s Complicating the Narratives initiative. The paper also hosted public tolerance forums and launched a digital public square — all to address what it saw as an increase in vitriol and name-calling on the opinion pages, and foster more productive civil dialogue. The result: Digital Editor Julie Hirshan Hart estimated the number of letters to the editor that include personal attacks has dropped by half, engagement is up, and the Sun’s audience has expanded. “The past year has brought an underlying goal into clearer focus, to be a place where our communities might turn in their search for solutions to issues that polarize our region,” said Hirshan Hart.
Rochester Beacon [December 2020] After the Beacon's Managing Editor, Smriti Jacob, participated in SJN's pilot Complicating the Narratives (CTN) training, she incorporated a CTN lens in her coverage. According to Jacob, the stories crafted using this deep-listening practice helped diversify the Beacon's audience and drew interest from freelancers, especially journalists of color. Jacob said the Beacon has had “a big gain in diverse readership” in 2020. “I've had Black journalists contact me to write for us, to freelance for us. That comes from the nuanced stories,” she said.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution [mid-2020] The Journal-Constitution replaced its lineup of national opinion columnists with more solutions-focused coverage, and that resonated with its audience. One reader wrote, “Thanks for pausing the polarizing ‘both sides’ discussions, especially during this time where we all need to come together to provide care and assistance to our neighbors.” Another said: “I appreciate the effort to improve and will look forward to seeing how it works out.” Managing Editor Mark Waligore said the solutions lens has made him and his readers feel smarter and more hopeful, and has helped his editorial team reframe some of its news coverage.

Practice Change: The solutions journalism approach is integrated on a newsroom-wide level.


South Dakota News Watch [March 2021] Since developing his solutions journalism practice in 2020, Bart Pfankuch, content director of South Dakota News Watch, has become committed to “seeking solutions while reporting on problems.” Leadership within the newsroom shares his belief that solutions journalism has “increased News Watch’s overall credibility and commitment to public service journalism,” and many of the 125 publications it shares content with often republish its solutions stories.

Are We Europe [February 2021] Priyanka Shankar, a freelance journalist with Are We Europe, a border-breaking magazine, participated in the Solution Journalism Network’s Complicating the Narratives (CTN) training with the staff of Are We Europe. Shankar and another freelancer, Inbar Preiss, then were invited to co-edit an entire issue of the magazine and used CTN skills to explore the ongoing impact of colonialism in Europe. The issue sold out quickly. Shankar told SJN that CTN helped her and Preiss tackle their own confirmation biases through better listening. Shankar and Preiss reflected on their experience with CTN for the International Journalists’ Network.
Next City [December 2020] Next City, a nonprofit with a mission to inspire greater economic, environmental and social justice in cities, deepened its commitment to solutions journalism by adopting a new set of criteria to guide its editorial process. Freelance projects will now be greenlit only if, among a few other criteria, they present a solution and analyze it critically.

The Local [November 2020] The Local, a multiregional English-language digital news publisher in Europe, trained 100 experienced and early career journalists (including students) from 20 countries to apply the solutions lens to reporting on migration using the Solution Journalism Network’s online resources and curriculum. Over a dozen stories from the project are now available in SJN’s Solutions Story Tracker.

Awards: Solutions journalism is recognized with awards.

Outriders [February 2021] Outriders, a Warsaw-based nonprofit digital magazine published in Polish and English, was awarded first prize from the International Center for Journalists for a solutions project in the category of science and health reporting in English. Outriders was honored for its online comic, “Favela vs. COVID-19,” which tells the story of the grassroots initiatives launched by the residents of three favelas in São Paulo to address problems caused or exacerbated by the pandemic. The comic was produced by a team of journalists based in Brazil, Poland and Spain and was published in English, Polish, Spanish and Portuguese. It was also longlisted in the Digital Media category of the 2021 One World Media Awards.