

# INSIGHTS FOR CLIMATE SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM FROM THE 2024 SJN CLIMATE SOLUTIONS COHORT

In 2024, Solutions Journalism Network gathered a diverse group of freelance and staff reporters who focused on equitable coverage of communities disproportionately affected by the climate crisis while exploring the benefits and challenges of climate solutions across the U.S. These journalists, SJN's Climate Solutions Cohort, covered topics that ranged from the clean energy transition to local climate solutions, industrial agriculture and the intersection of faith and climate action.

The group also met regularly to discuss how to position climate solutions journalism as a beacon of hope to inspire action and collaboration toward a sustainable and resilient future. Through the practice of rigorous, community-informed climate solutions journalism, they collectively wrestled with core questions such as: How do you build trust with communities that are not yours? How do you honor the lived experience of communities by centering their definitions of real solutions? How do you know when a promised solution has failed?

Between March and November, 14 of the climate fellows also became accredited solutions trainers with SJN. These journalists delivered a total of 30 climate solutions trainings to approximately 350 journalists.

Below you'll find insights and lessons from 10 of the cohort members, which we hope will help you deepen your own climate solutions practice.



# MARIA RAMOS PACHECO

## INSIGHT/ADVICE

Find climate solutions happening at the local level. Ask people what solutions they would like to see in their neighborhoods. (They usually have an idea of what should be done.) Look at what other places are doing to achieve what the community would like to see happen locally.

## CONTEXT/THE WHY

At the hyperlocal level, residents know their environment and quality of life are being altered by climate change, and they want to know what is being done elsewhere to mitigate and adapt to these changes. Most people don't spend their day thinking about climate change as a major world problem. Once you start talking about how it is affecting their lives, they'll be more invested in reading about solutions and participating in them.

## THE HOW

Spend time with people in the community you are reporting on to understand other issues they face in addition to climate change. Ask them how they envision their neighborhood and what would give them a better quality of life.

## THE WIN

People want to improve their communities, but they may not know how to get involved or where to start. By using hyperlocal solutions, residents can get engaged, feel part of the solution, and take pride in what their neighborhood is doing.

## STORIES

[Dallas 'cool pavement' pilot project shows promise](#)  
[Texas Trees launches a five-year plan to make South Dallas more green](#)  
[Could pilot programs bringing heat to low-income residents in Denver and NY work in Dallas?](#)



*María Ramos Pacheco is a bilingual government reporter at The Dallas Morning News, focusing on environmental injustice and the Hispanic community. Previously, she covered local issues in the Dallas-Fort Worth area for Al Día. She graduated from the University of Texas at El Paso. She participated in NPR's NextGen project in 2021 and ProPublica's Emerging Reporters Program in 2020. María was born and raised in Chihuahua, Mexico, where her love of journalism took root.*

**Location:** Dallas

**Pronouns:** she/her

**Instagram:**

@mramosnews

**X:** @mariamosnews

# YSABELLE KEMPE

## INSIGHT/ADVICE

Prioritize building relationships with directly impacted community members as much as you prioritize snagging an interview with a high-ranking government official or a renowned expert.

## CONTEXT/THE WHY

Government officials, business and nonprofit leaders, and academic researchers often spearhead climate solutions. However, community members whose everyday lives are impacted by a program or policy can offer just as much expertise on a solution's real value and limitations. Connecting with impacted individuals early, rather than as an afterthought or a secondary priority, helps center and honor the community's experiences. Plus, these conversations can inform richer interviews with experts and those promoting a climate solution.

## THE HOW

Build a reporting plan early that outlines who might be impacted by the solution and how you can connect with them. Know that connecting with these folks and building trust for an interview may take longer than with people who have had media training.

## THE WIN

A reporting process forged in collaboration with affected community members and a final story that paints a more complete picture of the benefits and drawbacks of a solution.

## STORIES

Results are in for a Los Angeles cool pavement experiment

Carbon removal: What's the local government's role?

Geothermal system is a US first

An air conditioning law, the first in its region, changed tenants' rights in this Maryland county



*Ysabelle Kempe will soon be Canary Media's copy and production editor. Until recently, she was the editor of Smart Cities Dive, which covers urban innovation for an audience of U.S. city leaders. Before that, Ysabelle was the environmental reporter at The Bellingham Herald in Washington state, and her work has also appeared in Grist, Scientific American, The Boston Globe, Wired and more.*

**Location:** Brooklyn, New York

**Pronouns:** she/her

**LinkedIn**



# REBECCA RANDALL

## INSIGHT/ADVICE

Report on how a solution works in multiple communities. Figure out who has connections and access to sources in multiple communities. Plan the time to connect with many sources and start conversations about the problem you are covering to learn about responses and similarities in approach.

## CONTEXT/THE WHY

Local beat reporters or national reporters covering a specific topic might identify a response to a problem people are facing in a community they cover. Including information about how other communities are facing — and responding to — the same thing strengthens the reporting. A thorough solutions approach will consider how limitations to a response might be attributed to community differences. It also helps readers who belong to other communities evaluate what a response might look like in their community or determine that it would not work.

## THE HOW

Ask sources: Are you connected to people in other communities responding to this problem in the same way? What other communities have inspired your approach?

## THE WIN

For national reporters and freelancers, the story has wider appeal and application. Local reporters might find insights from a community addressing a problem much differently than their own.

## STORIES

[Researchers Turned to Churches To Study St. Louis Air Quality](#)

[Puerto Rico parish aims to be climate resilience hub to respond to extreme storms](#)

[Forest therapy for wildfire survivors](#)

[A tool to tackle climate emotions](#)



*Rebecca Randall is an independent journalist specializing in the intersection of climate and religion. She is exploring responses to mental health and child welfare, particularly in vulnerable communities. She is based in the Pacific Northwest, where she spent her early career as a community reporter. She worked for five years as the science editor at Christianity Today. Her work has appeared in Sojourners, High Country News, Grist, YES!, and Atmos.*

**Location:** Vancouver, Washington

**Pronouns:** she/her

[LinkedIn](#)

[Bluesky](#)

[Substack](#)

J' Look for ways to collaborate, and keep an eye on power dynamics

# GRACE HUSSAIN

## INSIGHT/ADVICE

Work with communities instead of writing about them. Choose sources who have varied perspectives, and don't assume you know what they're going to say or how they're going to feel. Take the time to connect with community members to understand them, not just to get good quotes.

## CONTEXT/THE WHY

Sometimes it can be tempting to start reporting with the assumption that you know what the solution is. Choosing the people you talk to and how you talk to them could significantly change how you view and ultimately report on the solution. In a lot of solutions reporting, communities — whether workers at a wind farm or people in a certain ZIP code — know as much or more about the solution and its impacts than researchers, nonprofit employees or entrepreneurs.

## THE HOW

Before doing interviews, consider whether the questions assume certain answers. Asking “How has the farmers market made your life better?” is different from asking “How do you feel about the farmers market?”

## THE WIN

Working with communities to better understand solutions and their impacts deepens solutions reporting and builds relationships that could lead to future coverage.

## STORIES

[To Improve Fish Welfare, a Startup Blends AI With an Ancient Japanese Fishing Method](#)

[For Sicangu Nation, Taking Food Sovereignty Back Means Eating Climate-Friendly](#)

[The Power of Plants: One Doctor's Mission to Fight Diabetes Through Diet](#)

[Shareholder Activists Push Fast Food Chains to Commit to Climate Targets](#)



*As solutions correspondent for Sentient, a nonprofit publication reporting on factory farming, **Grace Hussain** writes about agricultural policy, justice and climate change. Her byline has appeared in Truthdig and Corporate Knights. Through the Public News Service and BBC World Service, her work has been adapted for radio, reaching millions of listeners. She holds an M.S. in animals and public policy from Tufts University. When not writing she can be found hiking or paddling around Florida dodging alligators with her dog, Birdie.*

**Location:** Miami

**Pronouns:** she/her

**[Bluesky](#)**

**[LinkedIn](#)**

**J** Look for ways to collaborate, and keep an eye on power dynamics

# SHI EN KIM

## INSIGHT/ADVICE

Always think about the equity of solutions. Ask: “Who is this response not working for?” Make it a default question in your reporting toolbox. This approach is a good way to expose the social injustices affecting marginalized communities.

## CONTEXT/THE WHY

It’s rare that a solution works for everyone. There’s a good chance that one group isn’t benefiting as much as others, and as reporters it behooves us to ask why. Thinking about equity helps reporters identify who has been left out of the conversation. This approach is a good way to expose the social injustices affecting marginalized communities. Adopting an equity lens allows the reporting to be fairer and more transparent. It’s also a salient way to fulfill the limitations pillar of solutions journalism.

## THE HOW

Cast a wide net in your reporting — evaluate the problem and solution from as many different angles as possible to brainstorm with diverse parties who have a stake. During interviews, ask sources for recommendations of others to speak with, especially those who might disagree with their viewpoints. Play the devil’s advocate during interviews, and encourage sources to do the same.

## THE WIN

Contemplating inequity opens the door to more nuanced reporting questions: Why has this particular group been neglected? Is the omission reflective of a greater structural problem? What can be done to bring about more holistic reform? Or is a more tailored initiative required to effectively address this inequity?

## STORIES

[Fishing the Ocean’s Twilight Zone Comes at a High Cost](#)  
[Six months after its worst floods, Rio Grande do Sul works to bounce back](#)

[Can Fungi Save This Endangered Hawaiian Tree?](#)

[Why the Burgeoning Plastics Problem Is More Than a Waste Issue](#)



*Shi En Kim is an omnivorous freelance science journalist. In 2024, she co-founded a journalist-owned online digital magazine, Sequencer, to give off-the-beaten-path science a more analytic and comedic take. Away from the desk, she likes to go hiking in the mountains when she gets a chance, and she may have more opportunities now — recently, she became a science and climate fellow at High Country News and is in the process of moving west.*

**Location:** Washington, DC

**Pronouns:** she/her

[LinkedIn](#)

[Bluesky](#)

**Instagram/X:**

@goes\_by\_kim



**J** Look for ways to collaborate, and keep an eye on power dynamics

# CLAVEL RANGEL JIMENEZ

## INSIGHT/ADVICE

Collaboration is key. Always propose working in a team, whether with a photojournalist or another trusted colleague, especially if you're a freelancer. You never know when the answer will be yes.

## CONTEXT/THE WHY

It is becoming more difficult for freelancers and staff journalists to work collaboratively, often due to budget constraints and tight deadlines. This situation has led to heightened competition, as many journalists strive to cover the same stories and secure sufficient resources to develop them. Collaborating on research allows for deeper insights and a more comprehensive understanding of issues you might not be familiar with. It also generates new questions and perspectives, enriching the narrative.

## THE HOW

Partner with another media organization that is interested in the same story but is targeting a different audience. This could be a newsletter, a radio show, a social media content creator, or a photojournalist with the same interests in reporting on the same community.

## THE WIN

For freelancers in particular, collaborative work results in a more visually compelling and content-rich outcome. It deepens the exploration of the solutions you are investigating. Moreover, collaborative efforts can complicate the narrative in productive ways, offering better answers and sparking ideas for further reporting on the same issues.

## STORIES

[Una red de jardines nativos florece en Miami y rescata especies en peligro](#)

[Miami-Dade está perdiendo las tierras de agricultura, y el agroturismo fuera del límite de desarrollo urbano aspira ponerle freno](#)

[Cómo comunidades de Miami encontraron soluciones climáticas con un modelo de participación comunitaria](#)



*Clavel Rangel Jimenez is a bilingual freelance Venezuelan journalist based in Miami and co-founder of the Network of Journalists from the Venezuelan Amazon. She tells stories about climate, environmental issues, justice, human rights and migration. Clavel's work has been featured in prestigious publications like The Guardian, Univision, Correo del Caroní, El Tiempo Latino and Armando.info.*

**Location:** Miami

**Pronouns:** she/her

**[LinkedIn](#)**

**[Bluesky](#)**

**Instagram:** @clavelrangel

J' Look for ways to collaborate, and keep an eye on power dynamics

# CARLOS MUÑOZ

## INSIGHT/ADVICE

Center the community in visuals. Show real people, not just problems. Prioritize portraits and candid shots of community members actively engaging with their environment or addressing challenges. Avoid generic imagery that reduces people to victims of a problem.

## CONTEXT/THE WHY

In climate reporting, visuals often focus on the impact of disasters or environmental degradation. While these are important, showing the faces and daily lives of the affected communities adds a layer of humanity that statistics or problem-focused visuals cannot convey. Focusing on people builds empathy and connection. It helps the audience understand that the story is about real lives, not abstract problems. This approach can also foster greater engagement and drive action from readers or viewers.

## THE HOW

Build trust with community members by spending time with them and engaging in conversations before and during the shoot.

## THE WIN

Community-focused visuals can shift narratives from despair to empowerment, showcasing resilience and inspiring action.

## STORIES

Una red de jardines nativos florece en Miami y rescata especies en peligro

Miami-Dade está perdiendo las tierras de agricultura, y el agroturismo fuera del límite de desarrollo urbano aspira ponerle freno

Cómo comunidades de Miami encontraron soluciones climáticas con un modelo de participación comunitaria



*Carlos Muñoz is a documentary photographer from Caracas, Venezuela, now based in Miami. With a background in engineering and communications, he discovered his passion for photography while advocating for social causes. Carlos focuses on amplifying underrepresented voices, capturing the stories of migrant communities in South Florida. His fellowship with the History Miami Museum in 2023 further fueled his dedication to storytelling and the power of visual narratives. Committed to solutions journalism, he aims to inspire positive change through his lens.*

**Location:** Miami

**Pronouns:** he/him

**Instagram:**

@photomaton1986



**J** Recognize that solutions come in all forms - including small, failed and imperfect

# YESSENIA FUNES

## INSIGHT/ADVICE

No solution is perfect. Don't let the imperfections of a solution turn you off. Embrace its imperfections and dig deep to understand why those limitations exist in the first place. Often, this lens allows you to highlight wider systemic issues that are actually at the root of the problem.

## CONTEXT/THE WHY

Climate change is a massive, complex issue. Every solution has its pros and cons — from funding sources to environmental justice implications. Our job as journalists is to try to make sense of it all for our readers. If we as journalists try to sell some new policy or project as the cure-all for the climate crisis when the truth is more convoluted, our readers will continue to struggle with not only trusting the media but also fully grasping the enormity of our changing planet.

## THE HOW

When covering a solution, identify how, where else, and by whom it's been implemented. What did they get right or wrong? What's different this time around? Be direct and ask proponents of a solution about this to give readers a full picture.

## THE WIN

Solving the climate crisis will look different everywhere. It's not a black-and-white issue. There are many gray areas that require attention. If we're honest with the public about that, we just might have a shot at building an informed populace.

## STORIES

These American Climate Corps workers are paving a just, green future

After generations in the dark, this group is bringing solar power to tribal lands

This Black church created a solar-powered emergency hub using federal climate funds



***Yessenia Funes** is an environmental journalist who's been covering the climate crisis and environmental issues for 10 years. Her reporting centers the perspectives of the oppressed. She publishes a weekly creative climate newsletter called Possibilities. She also writes regularly for Atmos, a magazine where she's editor-at-large; Vox; Yale Climate Connections; and New York Magazine.*

**Location:** Queens, New York

**Pronouns:** she/her

[Bluesky](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

**Instagram:** @yessfun

**Newsletter**

**J** Recognize that solutions come in all forms - including small, failed and imperfect

# ETHAN BROWN

## INSIGHT/ADVICE

Ask: "What's different about this solution?" Search for places or institutions that have found success where others haven't, or ways that a particular solution might be different or better than alternatives, and put them in your headline.

## CONTEXT/THE WHY

As the media landscape demands headlines of a more compelling, clickbait, "breaking news" type, it becomes harder to frame solutions stories, which are often more evergreen. But solutions can produce eye-catching headlines, too; we just have to take the right approach. Our job as journalists, even solutions journalists, is to report news. A solution on its own probably isn't particularly flashy; a solution that is doing something fresh and different — now that's a front-page headline!

## THE HOW

Think: What's a small piece of the solution that's really important to my audience? Perhaps it is faster, cheaper, more equitable, more accessible, more widely adopted, etc. That answer is your headline, and can drive the piece's news hook.

## THE WIN

Studies show audiences want and trust solutions stories more than problem-oriented news, but also show emotional reactions drive clicks. Leading with what's different can evoke the emotion required for audiences to start reading, and give the best of both worlds.

## STORIES

[Can the Power of Teamwork Decarbonize Air Travel? Colorado Thinks So.](#)  
[Employee Advocates Show Individuals Can Address Climate Change](#)



*Ethan Brown is a writer and trainer who is passionate about combating climate misinformation, anxiety and polarization. He founded and hosted the award-winning PBS climate podcast "The Sweaty Penguin" (now a news site), and was named a 2024 Emerging Journalist of the Year by Covering Climate Now. He currently works at the University of Rhode Island's Metcalf Institute developing a fellowship to transform climate coverage within seven Southern New England newsrooms. His notable bylines include Newsweek, The Hill, and The Times of Israel.*

**Location:** Bethel, Connecticut

**Pronouns:** he/him

**LinkedIn**

**Instagram/X:**

@ethanbrown5151

**J** Recognize that solutions come in all forms - including small, failed and imperfect

# JENNIFER OLDHAM

## INSIGHT/ADVICE

Just because a solution fails doesn't mean we can't learn from it. Laying out how a prospective solution didn't work may allow a reader to devise a fix that could resurrect the project, experiment, law, etc. and perhaps successfully mitigate the issue the failed solution was originally designed to address.

## CONTEXT/THE WHY

Teasing apart why solutions fail is just as instructive as showing readers why they work and can help others avoid similar missteps. In my experience, writing stories about what can be learned from a failed response is an important way to hold corporations and governments accountable for claims they make about steps they are taking to address climate change. Are these statements true solutions, or not?

## THE HOW

While these stories are likely more complex to report and write than straight-up solutions stories, they are arguably just as important to illustrate both what works and what doesn't.

## THE WIN

Interrogating all solutions, whether they are working or not, in stories structured around the four pillars is the best way to practice solid solutions journalism.

## STORIES

[The High-Tech Tools That Can Bust Careless Oil and Gas Drillers](#)

[Weather Data by and for the People](#)

[Colorado's Groundwater Experiment](#)



***Jennifer Oldham** is an award-winning freelance journalist whose investigations expose threats to the environment and solutions devised to ameliorate them. Jennifer specializes in stories that center climate change, economic inequality, land use, policy, politics and water. Her pieces have appeared in National Geographic, The Center for Investigative Reporting, ProPublica, The Washington Post and National Public Radio, among others. She was a staff writer at the Los Angeles Times for 15 years, where she shared two Pulitzer Prizes.*

**Location:** Aurora, Colorado

**Pronouns:** she/her

**[LinkedIn](#)**



**J** Recognize that solutions come in all forms - including small, failed and imperfect

## REBECCA RANDALL

### INSIGHT/ADVICE

Don't overlook seemingly small solutions. In your reporting, pull out the little things being tried on a local or grassroots level and give them the spotlight.

### THE HOW

Listen to people who are working to address a particular problem and ask them what simple, quick fixes are helpful as they work toward larger solutions.

### CONTEXT/THE WHY

Climate reporters are often examining big, complex problems. It's easy to become overwhelmed and lost writing about the big systemic solutions (and hurdles to implementing them) that have the potential to make the largest impact. Beginning a conversation with smaller solutions still allows journalists to highlight the challenges in addressing problems on a broader level. It gives people examples of how others have taken baby steps when faced with an enormous problem.

### THE WIN

Stories about small solutions inspire readers, highlighting how they might build upon existing solutions using the insights of others' experiences.

## CLAVEL RANGEL JIMENEZ

### INSIGHT/ADVICE

Address a solution's limitations early in the reporting process. Explain why discussing limitations is essential, and make your sources aware that limitations are just as important as the successes or responses achieved.

### THE HOW

When discussing how a solution was developed and how it is performing, dedicate equal time to exploring its limitations. Ask questions like: What aspects of the solution could be improved? What unexpected challenges have arisen? What needs to change to achieve better outcomes?

### CONTEXT/THE WHY

Companies, organizations, governments and individuals developing solutions often showcase their ideas as highly successful. This is frequently due to grant or budget responsibilities that require them to demonstrate measurable progress to continue their research and proposed solutions. Some solution proponents may hesitate to discuss limitations, mistakenly believing that acknowledging them reflects poorly on their idea. However, highlighting limitations can provide valuable insights and foster credibility.

### THE WIN

By addressing limitations early, you'll better understand the solution's impact in less time. Additionally, you'll be better equipped to approach and analyze the challenges, which will help you present a balanced and comprehensive report.

**J** Recognize that solutions come in all forms - including small, failed and imperfect

## CARLOS MUÑOZ

### INSIGHT/ADVICE

Capture process, not just results. Highlight the journey: how solutions are conceived, who is involved, and the challenges they face. Show progress over time instead of just the final result.

### THE HOW

Follow the timeline of a project. Document meetings, hands-on work and community engagement. Revisit your sources multiple times to capture different stages of the process. Include images that show tools, teamwork and incremental changes.

### CONTEXT/THE WHY

Climate solutions often focus on outcomes, but the process of getting there is equally compelling. Documenting the steps, efforts and collaboration involved in implementing solutions provides a more complete and inspiring narrative. Process-focused visuals demonstrate the hard work and ingenuity behind solutions. They make the story more relatable and inspire confidence that change can be achieved through collective effort.

### THE WIN

Audiences gain a deeper understanding of the solution's complexity and the dedication required to achieve it. This can inspire other communities to adopt similar approaches, fostering a sense of empowerment and possibility.

## SHI EN KIM

### INSIGHT/ADVICE

Solutions journalism isn't just a type of story, but a mindset. It can be defined quite broadly: Pretty much all government policy news or new scientific research can fall under this umbrella. It's just up to journalists to gather enough data to evaluate whether the responses are working.

### THE HOW

The first step to solutions journalism is basic storytelling: Who's doing what, and why? The crux of a story is change, so almost all storytelling can be presented as a solutions story – someone taking action to bring about change. The next step is balancing storytelling with factual evidence in objective support or criticism of the main character's action. To make the piece more compatible with the news cycle, journalists need to gather relevant, timely context as the news peg rather than relying on the brand-newness of the solution itself.

### CONTEXT/THE WHY

The solutions journalism mindset is storytelling buttressed with evidence-based reporting on whether an effort is working. Doing solutions stories pushes journalists into the habit of finding empowering narratives, actively seeking out evidence and thinking critically about data and sources' statements.

### THE WIN

Stories that show rather than tell when it comes to fixing societal problems.

**SOLUTIONS  
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