



How to do solutions stories in days not weeks

After Tom Hallberg's initial training in solutions journalism at the Jackson Hole News&Guide, he thought every solutions story needed to be a deep dive that "definitively solved an issue." His first solutions story was 3,000 words, and his second was a four-part series. He then realized he could also do short solutions stories by approaching his beat differently. Below are his tips for how to build solutions stories into regular coverage.

1 (Almost) anything can be a solutions story.

Daily stories can become solutions stories if you just approach them a little differently. For example, when Wyoming's numbers showed that Jackson graduated a higher percentage of English language learners than the state overall, Hallberg focused on how the school directed resources toward those students. He was going to write about local graduation rates anyway, so using a solutions approach didn't take much extra effort.

2 New programs are ripe for solutions reporting.

If a governmental entity is proposing a new program or initiative, it's likely not the first organization to tackle said problem. Look for other communities that have faced the same issues; they can provide fodder for stories and an indication of how successful a new program might be. Here's [one example](#).

3 Talk to your sources about solutions journalism.

When public officials are crafting new initiatives, they sometimes look to what other communities have done. Examine those models to see if they are truly promising practices – and good solutions stories. This also helps you determine whether officials are looking in the right places.



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Organize your research according to solutions journalism's four pillars.

Identifying sources and interview questions that satisfy each of the four pillars makes it easy to ensure you don't miss a key ingredient.

5

Don't overload yourself with evidence.

A couple of strong pieces of evidence can be enough, especially when you are writing shorter solutions stories.

6

Remember to highlight your characters.

Describing the characters in a story and delving into their motivations and hopes gives you a natural framework and narrative elements that helps you ensure your solutions story doesn't sound formulaic.

7

Read stories in the Tracker.

The [Solutions Story Tracker](#), a database of thousands of solutions stories, is one of the best places to study how other reporters frame and construct solutions stories as well as to find possible solutions stories you may have overlooked.

8

Circle back to solutions stories a few months or years later.

Your work isn't done after the first solutions story on a topic. It's often important to return to the response to ensure it's still working, and to see whether other places have adopted it as well. For solutions journalism to be a practice, not a project, the work is not an endpoint, but a starting gate.

Hallberg, formerly a reporter at the Jackson Hole News&Guide and the managing editor of *Backcountry Magazine*, is now a freelance writer.



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