

Solutions Reporting Checklist

6 Steps to Help Your Community Move Forward

The biggest problems facing communities are usually well known, and covering them over and over often doesn't lead to change. People in power throw up their hands and say, "We're doing all we can." Or they and others might not know how to begin.

To better help communities move forward, more and more news organizations are employing **solutions journalism** — stories that move beyond examining what's going wrong to look at what's going right — who's making credible progress in addressing important problems and how.

Here's how to create a solutions story in **6 steps**.

☐ **1** When looking at a problem facing your community or audience, ask "Who's doing it better?" Who's making significant improvement at a big or key piece of the problem — whether close to home or far away? (You'll still be talking about the problem, but in a fresh way — about someone, somewhere making progress in ways your community can learn from.)

☐ **2** Once you have possible answers, ask: "How do we know?" Is there data and other evidence that shows the effort is making a difference? Is that evidence credible and is some of it independent — i.e., from sources other than the people leading the effort? If so, you've got yourself a solutions story.

☐ **3** Interview sources about how they pulled off their success, what challenges they've overcome, and which ones they still face. This is the howdunnit — the narrative engine of your story.

☐ **4** Examine the limitations of the effort. This is journalism, not advocacy, so you need to interrogate the data and other evidence you have. What are its strengths? What are its weaknesses? What does it tell us? What doesn't it tell us? Include all of this in the story.

☐ **5** Identify what can be learned from the effort, especially for your community and audiences. Include that in the story, too.

☐ **6** Finally, after the story is published or aired, listen to how people respond so you can answer questions, correct misconceptions and pick up ideas for your next story — maybe your next solutions story.