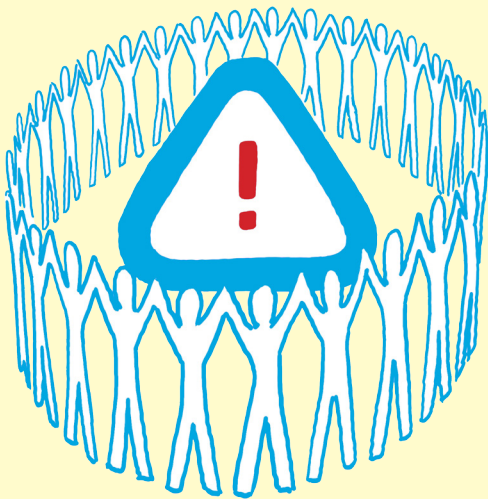


SOLUTIONS REPORTING CHECKLIST

6 STEPS TO HELP YOUR COMMUNITY *MOVE FORWARD*

SOLUTIONS
JOURNALISM
NETWORK

Most communities usually know the biggest problems they are facing.



Covering them over and over again...



People in power throw up their hands and say...



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

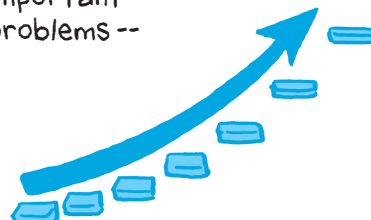
Stories that move beyond examining what's going **wrong**...



...to look at what's going **right**.



Who's making credible progress in addressing important problems --



-- and how.

✓ CHECKLIST: HOW TO COVER DEMOCRACY, ESPECIALLY AFTER ELECTION DAY

THE VOTES ARE IN AND THE WINNERS DECIDED, but more and more newsrooms are realizing that covering elections and candidates is just one piece of the important, ongoing coverage of democracy.

Instead of writing about campaigns like horse races, they are moving toward more effective and proven reporting approaches that inspire greater engagement in the news, build trust within communities, and focus on solutions rather than only on problems. The goal is to embrace a deep and ongoing examination of issues that will help communities see — and work toward — possibilities for a better world.



The **Solutions Journalism Network** produced this guide to help you and your newsroom do rigorous, evidence-based reporting focused on democracy, examining what's working when it comes to election issues like voter access and turnout.

Strong solutions stories...

1. Focus on a **response** to a problem or challenge.
2. Explain how **effective** the response is, using qualitative and/or quantitative evidence.
3. Share **insights** into the lessons this response holds for others.
4. Clearly identify the **limitations** of the response: what the response can't accomplish, what's holding it back, and its downsides.

Together, these four elements differentiate **solutions stories** from other types of reporting.

Looking for inspiration?
Following are some important topics related to democracy, accompanied by **solutions stories** that explore them.

SAMPLE SOLUTIONS STORIES

How states keep elections secure

Disinformation thrives when the public is unaware of how elections work, or how officials ensure elections are secure.

Solutions stories can educate voters on what officials are doing to keep elections safe and secure.



"Doug Mastriano's proposed voter roll purge addresses a nonexistent problem and targets vulnerable voters, experts say."

By Robby Brod, WITF

The Response

While there is no evidence of widespread voter fraud in Pennsylvania, some Republicans claim that the voting system is not secure. This story examines what the state has done to ensure its elections are safe.

Evidence

Pennsylvania has policies and regulations in place that are working to remove voters from the rolls if they've moved or died. For example, in 2020, officials said they removed over 260,000 ineligible voters.

Insight

Despite claims of voter fraud, election officials in Pennsylvania and other states are taking steps to protect election integrity.

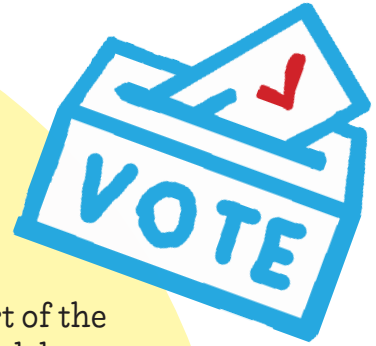
- Officials acknowledge more can be done to keep voting rolls secure.
- Purging voter rolls would hurt low-income voters and voters with disabilities, groups who already face obstacles in registering to vote.
- State law prohibits purging voters who have not moved.

Limitations

The process to ensure dead voters are removed from the rolls isn't perfect.

SAMPLE SOLUTIONS STORY #2

How communities are fighting voter disenfranchisement



Since the Supreme Court struck down a key part of the 1965 Civil Rights Act in 2013, states have passed dozens of laws that increase barriers to voting.

Community organizers and civil rights activists have responded with a variety of measures, ranging from voter education to Get Out the Vote efforts, to ensure all qualified voters can register and get to the polls.

Solutions stories focusing on this issue show which efforts are moving the needle.

"As last of Georgia ballots are counted, a look at how voter turnout hit record high."

By Carlisa N. Johnson, *The Groundtruth Project*

The Response

A coalition of groups conducted voter outreach year round, running ads and social media campaigns and sending direct mail to educate voters about their rights and to promote civic engagement.

Evidence

Georgia voters participated in record numbers in the 2020 election.

Insight

It's possible to increase voter turnout in states with restrictive voting laws by focusing on voter education and outreach, and also removing systemic barriers to voter participation.

Limitations

Despite progress, Georgia still has a relatively low voter turnout rate.

The **six steps** on the next page will help you do rigorous, evidence-based solutions reporting on any subject, including democracy.

They are a guide to helping you gather the **four main elements of solutions journalism**.

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.

