

GOT A PROBLEM? READERS WANT A SOLUTION

Solutions journalism has potential benefits for readers, news organizations and communities, a new study finds.

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News organizations are likely to benefit from shedding light on solutions in addition to problems, a new report suggests.

The practice of solutions journalism may help news organizations, readers and society, according to the [report](#) released June 2. The [Engaging News Project](#), housed at the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life at the University of Texas at Austin, and the [Solutions Journalism Network](#) collaborated on the study. The network is a non-profit organization based in New York.

Solutions journalism is evidence-based reporting on credible responses to social problems, such as childhood trauma, homelessness and poverty. Solutions-based articles cover responses that are working as well as how and why. Just as importantly, they cover responses' limitations and trade-offs.

Solutions journalism does not advocate for or propose ideas or models. It also does not recommend how readers should resolve a problem.

The study examined how readers reacted to solutions-based articles and non-solutions articles. The survey, which had a final sample of 755 respondents, found that solutions journalism holds promise in three ways.

1. Increasing readers' perceived knowledge

Readers of solutions-based articles were more likely than readers of non-solutions articles to:

- Indicate that they felt better informed about the issue
- Respond that the article had increased their interest in the issue
- Believe that they could contribute to a solution
- Indicate that they felt inspired and/or optimistic after reading the article

2. Strengthening readers' connection to news organizations

Readers of solutions articles were more likely to indicate that they would:

- Read more articles from the newspaper
- Read more articles about the issue

- Share the article on social media

3. Catalyzing readers' potential engagement in their communities

Readers of solutions articles were more likely to indicate their desire to:

- Get involved in working toward a solution
- Donate money to an organization working on the issue

"The results were fairly clear-cut," says Alex Curry, the study's co-author. "Across the board, in 16 measures, solutions journalism was significantly better than non-solutions journalism," adds Curry, a research associate of the Engaging News Project.

While the research suggests but does not prove the effectiveness of solutions stories, the report offers insights for journalists.

Curry says, "They can look at their own reporting and say, 'Are we just reporting on the problems or are we reporting on how these problems are being addressed? What are some organizations or individuals doing to address these problems? How are these efforts panning out?'"

Keith Hammonds, the study's co-author and chief operating officer of the Solutions Journalism Network, says, "This study reinforces what we've seen anecdotally in our work with dozens of newsrooms. There appears to be a significant engagement gap between stories that only tell us what's wrong and those that include evidence-based reporting on attempts to fix what's wrong."

Even though solutions pieces are rooted in rigorous reporting and analysis, not all of them have to be long. Journalists can write about a smaller piece of a problem and introduce a response to it, Hammonds says. They can build on that reporting down the road, he adds.

Some journalists are already doing this kind of journalism, Hammonds says. The new research shares information to help them codify and measure what they have been doing, he adds.

The Solutions Journalism Network's website features examples of solutions pieces and a blog. For more information, go to solutionsjournalism.org.

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