Hope with Teeth: Solutions Journalism for Faith-based Audiences

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April 21

@soljourno #TheWholeStory
What’s one story that faith-based audiences look to faith-based journalists to tell?
38% of people globally report avoiding the news because it’s too negative.

Reuters Institute
Digital News Report
2022

Americans who are both religious and spiritual are especially likely to believe the news media and political leaders exaggerate divisiveness.

Figure 5. Percent of Americans who somewhat or strongly agree with the following statement:

- Total
- Neither religious nor spiritual
- Both religious and spiritual

There is more common ground among the American people than the news media and political leaders portray.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Democrat</th>
<th>Republican</th>
<th>Independent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither religious nor spiritual</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both religious and spiritual</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>76</td>
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Base: Total Democrats, N=829; Total Republicans, N=600; Total Independents, N=578; Democrats both religious and spiritual, N=322; Republicans both religious and spiritual, N=326; Independents both religious and spiritual, N=207; Democrats neither religious nor spiritual, N=319; Republicans neither religious nor spiritual, N=175; Independents neither religious nor spiritual, N=238.
‘Hope with teeth’

“Readers are fairly sophisticated, and they know when they are being force-fed something. ... The idea [of solutions journalism] is not to change minds; it’s to show possibilities.”

—Claudia Rowe
Why do solutions journalism?

It’s **good** for your audience.

It’s **good** for your community.

It’s **good** journalism.
What we’ll do today

1. Show how solutions journalism is compatible with the mission of faith-based journalism
2. Define solutions journalism and its four key elements
3. Workshop solutions reporting for faith-specific stories
Solutions Journalism
THE BASICS
Solutions Journalism is:

rigorous, evidence-based reporting on responses to social problems.
THE FOUR PILLARS

Features not just a person or an organization, but a response to a problem

Provides available evidence of results, looking at effectiveness — not just intentions

Discusses limitations

Seeks to provide insights that can help others respond — not just inspiration
WHY THE FOUR PILLARS MATTER TO FAITH-BASED AUDIENCES:

Principles like healing, redemption, honesty, justice, and compassion are part of most religions. Solutions Journalism takes those things seriously, and reports on the impact they are having in the world.
EXERCISE

ANNOTATE A STORY

1. What is the problem and the response?
2. What’s the evidence?
3. What are the limitations?
4. What insights are included about the response?
5. Do the visuals reflect the response?
THE FOUR PILLARS PRESENT UNIQUE CHALLENGES WHEN REPORTING ON FAITH

How might reporting on limitations be challenging for faith-based outlets?
The four pillars help us keep a rigorous, accountability-driven relationship to our subject—not awe or “awwww”—including limitations, evidence, and insights, we have to ask hard questions.

*Why this speaks to faith-based communities:* We can protect our neighbors by carefully examining claims of success. As group members, we also want to be sure that the institutions that represent us are doing what they say they're doing, and that the work done in our name is living up to its promises.
CHALLENGE

What would you need in order to turn this into a solutions-focused story?

Amid Scandals and Politics, Poland’s Youths Lose Faith in Catholic Church

The Polish church is in a deep crisis, as its authority is sapped by cascading sexual abuse scandals and as more people grow wary of its perceived alliance with the country’s right-wing government.

By ANDREW HIGGINS

From the New York Times
Yes, it’s just **good journalism**

Makes our stories **stronger**, tells the **whole story** and strengthens accountability ... ... by investigating **solutions to the problems** right in front of us
Workshop
IDENTIFY AN ISSUE OR PROBLEM

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Define the issue as precisely as possible.

CLIMATE CRISIS

- Teen pregnancy
- Gestational diabetes
- C-section rates
- Postpartum depression
- Access to contraception
- Regenerative Cattle Ranching
- Carbon reduction in construction
- Heat Island Effect reduction
QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK

• Who’s doing it better?

• How does the response work?

• Is it being tried elsewhere? What are the barriers to replication?

• What does the research say? And what do critics say?

• Who is the response working for ... and not working for?
<table>
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<th></th>
<th>What response do you want to examine?  Pick one to focus on.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem</strong> - This can be a piece (or small slice) of the problem</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence</strong>: How do we know an effort is working? Is there data? Research? Other people adopting the idea? Other quantitative or qualitative evidence?</td>
<td><strong>Limitations/Caveats</strong>: Ones you know about or know you need to explore</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Insights</strong> - Lessons the response might provide to others</td>
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Print: a solutions story in 500 words

Para 1: The response, then summary of problems that led to the response
Para 2: Evidence (data) on the problem+response in your county/country/continent
Para 3 Insight (quotes) from the response implementer, relevant authorities
Para 4-5: Limitations and more Evidence on results (from data, beneficiaries, etc)
Para 6-7: Insight from other parties (a 2nd implementer elsewhere, critics, etc.)
Para 8-9: Insights on lessons from the solution, e.g more evidence from elsewhere
Para 10: Throw-forward on the expansion of the response or future of the response.
A Solutions Radio Spot: 1 minute or less

- Set up the problem in the host intro
- 1-3 sentences about the details of the response
- Quote - evidence, how the response works, more details
- 1 sentence on limitations, maybe 2 if there's time
- Close out the story with what’s next and/or insights
LET US KNOW HOW WE CAN SUPPORT YOU

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Additional optional slides
Audio/Video: a solutions story in 2 minutes

Start with a person’s story 20 seconds
*Possibly soundbite from the person 10 seconds

Describe the problem 20 seconds
*Possibly soundbite from expert 10 seconds

Describe the solution 20 seconds
*Soundbite from beneficiary 10 seconds

Some evidence of success 15 seconds
At least one limitation & insights of the approach 15 seconds
IMPACT YOU CAN MEASURE

- Institutional Change
- Awards
- Cross-Pollination

And increases in ...
- Revenue
- Trust
- Audience engagement
- Civic engagement
As the pandemic reshaped social life in April 2020, the newsroom turned to its audience for the series “Transforming our cities after the coronavirus.”

- Readers submitted 175 ideas, using the website’s engagement platform called #DansMaVille (#InMyTown),
- Mediacités’ identify 28 potential stories
- The publication received the 2020 Innovation Award from Médias en Seine for this work
After investigative reporter Nichole Manna wrote about a program in Richmond, California, dedicated to ending cyclical and retaliatory gun violence, Fort Worth established a similar effort. VIP FW (Violence Intervention and Prevention Fort Worth) uses ex-convicts instead of police to intervene in and mediate conflicts.

Manna's follow-up reporting found evidence that VIP FW is working and successfully mediated at least 25 conflicts in the first few months.