

Module 1: What is Solutions Journalism?

[00:00:12] Hi. Welcome to module one and this course and Solutions Journalism. New ways of elevating your reporting and engaging audiences. My name is Hugo Walter. I'm very glad you've decided to join this group. It means that at the very least, you're intrigued by solutions, journalism and how it might enhance your reporting skills. Great. We at the Solutions Journalism Network believe journalists gain a lot when they look at responses to problems. A wide variety of compelling stories simply don't get covered. Why? The field of journalism has traditionally been resistance to seeing responses as legitimate fodder for investigation. Some reporters and editors fear it will be perceived as advocacy, fluff or PR. If you think similarly, I hope to change that perception. Solutions Journalism is rigorous, compelling coverage of responses to social problems reporting done with the highest journalistic standards. What is solutions? Journalism was the subject of the first reading for this module, an article called *As Journalists Look to Build Trust. Solutions Journalism Might Help*. The author, Hazel Feldstein, writes, the solutions journalism adds an additional W to who, what, when and where, and why. It asks, What's next? As journalists, our job is to hold an accurate mirror to society. If we fail to cover the many ways people and institutions are trying to solve problems, successful or not, we fail to do our jobs. We only cover the systemic problems in schools, for instance, and ignore the models that are working to improve education. We're not telling the whole story. Many of us became journalists because we want to have an impact to make the world better. But uncovering wrongdoing isn't the only way to have an impact. Revealing problems is crucial, of course, but that impact is magnified if alongside the problems. We report on how people are solving them.

[00:02:27] Education reporters, for example, produce hard hitting stories about how public schools are failing poor children. They'd have more of an impact if they also reported on how some schools are educating all of their students and how they are achieving this. These kinds of stories energize readers, listeners and viewers. They change the public debate and they change policies. People don't change merely because someone points their problems. We need to know that change is possible and models of how to do it. Societies work working the same way. I hope you will find value in these lessons. Whether you're a veteran print journalist looking to reinvigorate your approach. Mid-career videographer looking to reconnect to your original reasons for becoming a journalist, a journalism student, looking to define your career or anything in between. Let us begin with a basic question How do I know which solutions journalism? Here are four criteria to apply when writing or producing a solutions journalism story. These criteria inspire us and are the foundation of how we define solutions journalism in practice. These criteria can be applied with flexibility for diverse narrative styles and story formats, even with flexibility. Each solution story should contain all four pillars to some degree. Number one, a solution story focuses on a response to a social problem and how that response has worked or why it hasn't. If the story doesn't describe a response, it's not a solutions journalism story. That response should be explained in the context of the problem it's trying to address, and the story should delve into how it works. The narrative is driven by the problem solving, and the tension is located in the inherent difficulty in solving a problem. Documenting the causes of the problem will clarify the opportunity for a solution to create leverage and impact.

[00:04:48] Number two, the best solutions to reporting distills the lessons that makes the response relevant and accessible to others. In other words, it offers insights. What makes solutions journalism compelling is discovery, the journey that brings the reader or viewer or listener an insight about how the world works and perhaps how it could be made to work

better. Number three. Solutions. Journalism looks for evidence, data, or qualitative results that show effectiveness or the lack thereof. Solutions Stories are upfront with audiences about that evidence, what it tells us, and what it doesn't. A particularly innovative response can be a good story, even without much evidence. But the reporter has to be transparent about the lack and about why the response is newsworthy anyway. And number four, reporting limitations is essential. Solution stories reveal a response response, shortcomings. No response is perfect, and some work well for one community, but may fail in others. A responsible reporter covers what doesn't work about it and places the response in context. So, Solutions journalism is reporting on a response to a problem successful, partially successful or failed. And the associated results usually with a narrative that seeks to reveal how the results were produced and explore what can be learned from that effort. A solution story will never claim a program is 100% successful. There is no such thing and no one will believe you if you make that claim. You have more authority and credibility if you describe limitations. What makes a solution story worth writing was the focus of this week's second reading. Ten Reasons Why We Need Solutions Journalism. And at the top of that list is that Solutions journalism provides a more complete view of society when we cover problems, but not responses. We omit areas of human activity and perpetuate misleading beliefs about reality.

[00:07:07] Remember Solutions Journalism reports on efforts to solve problems. They don't celebrate those efforts. Watch Out for Impostors Misidentified as solutions Journalism. In the next video, we will go over misconceptions about what solutions journalism is. Thank you and I will see you soon.