

Shared service: Solutions journalism coaching

The key challenge in solutions journalism lies in developing a robust framework before diving into reporting. Journalists must ask critical questions upfront: How will we explore the response to the problem? What evidence will we seek? What insights do we hope to uncover? What are the potential limitations of proposed solutions?

Medill's Local News Initiative will offer coaching to individuals, teams and full newsrooms subjects including:

- What's working? Solutions journalism introduction
- Complicating the narrative: Advanced techniques for solutions-oriented journalism
- Assess framing: Redefining narrative through strengths
- Systems mapping for solutions-oriented journalism

Process:

If you are interested in custom coaching on any (or any combination) of the below services, [signal your interest here](#).

Description of various trainings:

Training 1: What's working? Solutions Journalism Introduction

This foundational workshop introduces participants to solutions journalism, a rigorous and compelling reporting approach that focuses on responses to social problems rather than problems alone. Based on the framework developed by the Solutions Journalism Network, this course teaches journalists how to identify, research, and craft stories that provide valuable insights into how communities can more effectively address serious challenges.

Overview:

Solutions journalism represents a shift from traditional problem-focused reporting to coverage that examines what's working and why. Research demonstrates that solutions stories engage audiences differently, fostering more constructive public discourse and potentially catalyzing meaningful change. This workshop provides the theoretical foundation and practical tools necessary to implement this approach effectively.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this course, participants will be able to:

- **Define and Analyze:** Clearly articulate what solutions journalism is and what it is not, distinguishing it from advocacy journalism, "good news" stories, and traditional reporting approaches
- **Identify Story Opportunities:** Recognize which types of stories are appropriate for a solutions approach and evaluate the potential impact of solutions-oriented coverage
- **Apply Critical Frameworks:** Discriminate between solutions journalism, advocacy, and soft news through structured analysis and evaluation criteria
- **Understand Impact Potential:** Recognize why and how solutions journalism can produce more impactful stories and generate deeper audience engagement
- **Develop Reporting Skills:** Create a comprehensive framework for producing solutions journalism, including appropriate story structure, source selection, narrative framing, and specialized interview techniques
- **Examine Journalistic Purpose:** Investigate and compare the roles, functions, and societal purposes of traditional journalism versus solutions journalism

Components:

Through a combination of case study analysis, hands-on exercises, and structured discussions, participants will explore real-world examples of effective solutions journalism while practicing the skills needed to identify and develop their own solutions-oriented stories. The workshop emphasizes practical application while maintaining the rigorous standards essential to credible journalism.

Target Audience:

This course is designed for working journalists, journalism students, editors, and media professionals seeking to expand their reporting toolkit with evidence-based approaches that can

enhance audience engagement while contributing to more constructive public discourse around complex social issues.

Outcomes:

Participants will leave with a clear understanding of solutions journalism principles and a practical framework for implementing this approach in their own reporting, equipped to create stories that not only inform but also inspire and enable positive community action.

Training 2: Complicating the Narrative: Advanced Techniques for Solutions-Oriented Journalism

This innovative journalism course introduces participants to Complicating the Narrative, a groundbreaking approach that draws from conflict mediation expertise to transform how journalists cover divisive issues. Rather than reinforcing polarization, students learn to tell richer, fuller stories that provide clarity and understanding while building trust with diverse audiences.

Overview: In an era of declining media trust and increasing news avoidance, journalists need new tools to engage audiences across divides. This course teaches practical strategies and techniques designed to help journalists move beyond traditional problem-focused reporting to create stories that foster understanding rather than further division.

The Four Pillars Framework: Journalists will master four core competencies that form the foundation of narrative-complicating journalism:

- **Listen Differently:** Learn advanced interviewing techniques including "looping," a trust-building method that demonstrates understanding before agreement, creating psychological safety for sources to share more authentic perspectives.
- **Go Beneath the Problem:** Develop skills to uncover the deeper motivations, values, and experiences that drive people's positions on contentious issues, moving beyond surface-level disagreements.
- **Embrace Complexity:** Practice techniques for presenting nuanced, multi-dimensional stories that resist oversimplification while remaining accessible to audiences.

- **Counter Confirmation Bias:** Implement strategies to challenge both your own assumptions and those of your audience, using targeted questioning techniques to reveal unexpected insights.

Practical Skills Development: The course emphasizes hands-on application through interactive exercises, partner activities, and real-world scenario practice. Journalists will learn to use the 22 *Interview Questions to Complicate the Narrative* framework, master the four-step looping process, and develop confidence in their role as community facilitators rather than passive observers.

Learning Outcomes: Upon completion, participants will be equipped to approach any divisive topic with tools that build rather than erode trust, uncover solutions-oriented angles, and create journalism that serves communities by fostering dialogue and understanding. This approach is particularly valuable for covering complex social issues, political divisions, and community conflicts where traditional reporting methods may inadvertently increase polarization.

Target Audience: Ideal for working journalists, journalism students, and media professionals seeking to enhance their interviewing skills, build stronger source relationships, and create more impactful, solutions-focused coverage in an increasingly fragmented media landscape.

Training 3: Asset Framing: Redefining Narrative Through Strengths

This specialized journalism workshop introduces asset framing, a transformative narrative approach that redefines how journalists tell stories about people and communities. Building on the principles of solutions journalism, asset framing offers a methodology for creating more complete, respectful, and engaging coverage that addresses the growing trust gap between media organizations and diverse audiences.

Overview:

Championed by social entrepreneur Trabian Shorters, asset framing is a narrative model that prioritizes people's strengths, assets, and aspirations before addressing challenges and deficits. This approach moves beyond traditional problem-centered reporting to create response-driven narratives that honor the full humanity and complexity of story subjects while maintaining journalistic rigor and addressing substantive issues.

Core Principles:

Asset framing operates on the fundamental belief that all people possess inherent value and make ongoing contributions to society. Rather than defining individuals or communities primarily by their problems or deficits, this approach leads with strengths and capabilities, providing crucial context that enables audiences to see themselves and others reflected with dignity and authenticity.

Learning Objectives:

Participants will learn to:

- **Understand the Framework:** Master the theoretical foundation of asset framing and its relationship to solutions journalism and community trust-building
- **Identify Assets and Aspirations:** Develop skills to recognize and highlight the strengths, resources, and goals that exist within individuals and communities
- **Reframe Story Structures:** Transform traditional problem-centered narratives into asset-led stories that maintain journalistic integrity while presenting more complete portrayals
- **Address Challenges Constructively:** Learn to acknowledge difficulties and deficits within an asset-framing context that doesn't diminish or ignore serious issues
- **Build Audience Trust:** Create coverage that allows diverse audiences to see themselves represented with respect and accuracy, fostering stronger media-community relationships
- **Apply Practical Techniques:** Implement specific interviewing, writing, and editing strategies that support asset-framed storytelling

Approach:

Through case study analysis, hands-on writing exercises, and guided practice sessions, participants will explore how asset framing creates space for more nuanced, dignified, and effective journalism. The course emphasizes practical application while examining the broader implications for media representation and community engagement.

Target Audience:

This course is ideal for journalists, editors, media professionals, and storytellers committed to creating more inclusive and respectful coverage, particularly those covering communities that have been traditionally marginalized or misrepresented in mainstream media.

Outcomes:

Participants will emerge with concrete skills to implement asset framing in their reporting, equipped to tell stories that engage audiences more effectively while contributing to journalism that builds rather than erodes community trust and social cohesion.

Training 4: Systems Mapping for Solutions-Oriented Journalism

This advanced journalism workshop introduces systems mapping as a powerful analytical tool for understanding and reporting on complex societal challenges. Participants learn a comprehensive framework and methodology to identify the interconnected elements, power dynamics, and leverage points within systemic issues, transforming their approach to solutions journalism and community engagement.

Overview:

Traditional journalism often focuses on isolated events or individual stories without examining the broader systems that create and perpetuate social problems. This course teaches journalists to map entire systems, revealing the relationships, patterns, and structural forces that drive complex challenges. By understanding these interconnections, journalists can identify critical intervention points and highlight opportunities for meaningful change.

Approach:

This methodology fundamentally shifts the journalist's role from passive observer to active facilitator. Rather than simply documenting problems, participants learn to empower communities, policymakers, and organizations by revealing actionable pathways for systemic

change. This approach unlocks new dimensions of solutions journalism that can drive collective action and community-led innovation.

Objectives:

Participants will develop expertise in:

- **Systems Analysis:** Master techniques to map complex interconnected challenges, identifying root causes, feedback loops, and system dynamics that traditional reporting might miss
- **Power Mapping:** Learn to recognize and analyze various forms of power within systems—institutional, economic, social, and political—and understand how power flows influence outcomes
- **Opportunity Identification:** Develop skills to locate strategic leverage points where interventions can create maximum positive impact
- **Pattern Recognition:** Uncover recurring patterns in human behavior and institutional responses, learning to envision and communicate potential shifts
- **Intervention Design:** Identify stuck points and bottlenecks within human systems and explore innovative approaches to navigate or transform these barriers
- **Community Facilitation:** Transform reporting processes into collaborative efforts that engage stakeholders as partners in solution development

Practical Applications:

The course emphasizes hands-on application through real-world case studies, collaborative mapping exercises, and community engagement simulations. Participants practice applying

systems thinking to various challenges including public health crises, economic inequality, environmental issues, and social justice concerns.

Target Audience:

This course is designed for experienced journalists, investigative reporters, editors, and media professionals seeking to enhance their capacity for complex systems reporting and solutions journalism. It's particularly valuable for those covering policy, social issues, public health, economics, or community development.

Outcomes:

Participants will emerge with a sophisticated toolkit for systems analysis and a new framework for solutions-oriented reporting that positions journalism as a catalyst for positive systemic change. They will be equipped to facilitate community-driven problem-solving while maintaining journalistic integrity and objectivity.

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