

WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR KILLER SOLUTIONS IDEA

JAWS CAMP2018 PANEL:

Moderator:

[Megan](#) Kamerick, SJN fellow and broadcast journalist

Panelists:

[Linda](#) Shaw, SJN regional manager Pacific West

[Tracy](#) Matsue Loeffelholz, editorial director Yes! Media

Organizer: [Linda](#) Kramer Jennings, freelance journalist

Here are links to clips, tips, research and other useful information on finding and successfully pitching solutions journalism stories.

From Tracy: Top tips for pitching a story, from perspective of an editor who reads 40 pitches a day.

- In the pitch, show me you have a compelling “story” to tell. We want characters and drama, not just people talking about their initiative.
- In the pitch, give me the “Hey, Mabel” numbers. Aside from what the initiative’s advocates say, what is the research or data on the problem or the solution that I won’t be able to ignore.
- Address potential impact — what audience would benefit, what other communities need to know this?
- Find the trend line of the solutions: Are other communities starting to do this?

Resources to share: We make public our [Solutions Pitch/Assignment form](#) so prospective reporters know what kinds of things we want a story to address.

From Linda Shaw -- top tips, from perspective of editor in charge of doing solutions-focused work, and what Solutions Journalism Network has developed to help journalists tell solutions stories.

- First, look for evidence. That evidence can be qualitative or quantitative, and it can be from the effort you’re writing about or a similar one elsewhere, but evidence is key.

- If you're writing about an effort outside of your city or state, make it clear, right from the start, why editors (and their readers) should care. They will lose interest quickly if they don't know why it's relevant to their lives.
- For editors who aren't familiar with solutions journalism, you don't need to label an idea as a solutions story. These stories, after all, are just good enterprise pieces.
- Join SJN's HUB, where you can connect with other journalists doing solutions stories, and find out about grants and other opportunities.

When an editor says, you might say:

(Tips from Tina Rosenberg and David Bornstein, SJN co-founders)

1. "No problem, no story." Remind the editor that yet another story on the problem is "dog bites man." A story that shows a worthwhile response is "man bites dog."

Example: When a plane crashes, that's news and when it lands safely, that's not. But it's also news when there used to be five crashes a year, and now there are none. How that happened is a solutions story.

2. "Isn't this just advocacy?" Remind the editor that you can do solutions journalism with high standards so it doesn't come off like advocacy or PR.

3. "Will anyone read it?" Show the information on how well solutions journalism stories do. Latest tidbit: One in 10 readers of a story in the Guardian's new Upside section shares it on social media.

In general, stories that do well are stories that produce strong emotion. These are often outrage or anger. But they can also be excitement and hope.

4. "We can't ignore the problems." Remind the editor that a solutions journalism story always covers the problem. It's just a fresh approach, and one that often takes away excuses.

Failure Stories - These can also be solutions stories. Why didn't something work? Here are two from the Solutions Journalism Story Track

[-Domestic Violence: Could Vermont's New Gun Law Have Saved Anaka Lumumba's Life?](#)

[-Police Failed To Ask 11 Questions That Might Have Saved Anaka Lumumba](#)

TRACY'S 7 FREELANCER TIPS FOR AN "UNFLUFFY" SOLUTIONS PITCH

- 1 Sell the tension of the story.
- 2 Be all over the problem statement and show how the solution fits in.
- 3 Include data or expert research. A time investment that will pay off.
- 4 Acknowledge the limitations/arguments against in one sentence
- 5 Use “advocates say ...” to distance yourself in relating why they think it works
- 6 Address potential impact — what audience would benefit, what other communities need to know this
- 7 Find the trend line - are other communities starting to do this?

EXAMPLE OF PITCH AND STORY:

1. **Brenda Iasevoli, who has done a lot of freelance work for The Hechinger Report, sent in this successful pitch to Executive Editor Sarah Garland.**

Garland said this pitch provides everything she wants in a pitch (for all stories, not just solutions stories): “A succinct summary of why the story matters, what’s new and how you will report it.” Here’s Sarah’s [full pitch guide](#).

PITCH

A shortage of skilled workers in the U.S. is driving up wages, yet women aren’t flocking to male-dominated professions like welding, construction, and auto repair. Currently, only about 3 percent of trades workers are women. But some high schools have found that when they offer girls-only trade courses, the girls sign up. Take Sherwood High School in Oregon, where a welding or wood shop class of 30 boys typically contained at most two or three girls. When the school began offering the welding course “Imagine, Design, and Build It—No Boyz Allowed,” it filled to capacity. Other high schools have seen the same success. In Charlotte, North Carolina, where automotive jobs are in high demand and boys dominate courses in auto repair, an all-girls auto class at Myers Park High School has filled up. The idea is that if girls can fire up a blowtorch or rebuild an engine in a low-stress environment, they will gain the confidence to tackle advanced mixed-gender trade classes. Can the strategy of separating genders in trade courses really make a dent in the skills gap in this country?

STORY:

[Girls-only trade classes are spreading — and upending stereotypes](#)

All-girls shop classes aim to empower girls, but risk running into the crosshairs of Title IX

by [Brenda Iasevoli](#)

July 20, 2018

High school auto mechanics teacher Kristina Carlevatti knows what it's like to be one of just a few females in a class filled with males. That was her frequent experience while earning a degree in technical and trade education at the State University of New York at Oswego. "There was the sense that you were being judged, like you didn't know what you were doing, so the guys might try to help you or hit on you," she said.

Carlevatti has been teaching auto repair for six years now at Myers Park High School in Charlotte, North Carolina, where a booming automotive industry has produced plenty of jobs. Boys dominated the shop courses until Carlevatti started an all-girls Intro to Auto class this past school year.

When only coed trade classes were offered at the school, Carlevatti would see one or two girls at most. But Intro to Auto filled up quickly, drawing 16 girls.

Other resources:

[Solutions Journalism toolkits](#)

Add your solutions stories here

<https://storytracker.solutionsjournalism.org/>

What impact has the Solutions Journalism Network had?

<https://www.solutionsjournalism.org/impact>

[Outlets that seek solutions-oriented stories, and how to pitch to them](#) (Requires free registration in SJN's HUB.)

[How to get a travel grant for a solutions story from the Solutions Journalism Network](#)

[Examples of great solutions stories](#)

[Complicating the Narrative: How to ask better questions](#)

SAMPLE SOLUTIONS PITCH FROM YES!:

Below is a story pitch for your Mental Health Issue. I would love to share a current success story and the latest developments on Alzheimer's and dementia, a disease that has devastating effects on both patients and caregivers. For once, the wellness path doesn't involve the public scrambling after expensive, problematic pharmaceuticals.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Tracy

Possible Title: *Without a Dementia Cure, Some Find Control and Clarity in the Kitchen*

Paula Wolfert, 79, can no longer remember how to make an omelet or taste the difference between pecans and walnuts. This would be unsettling for anyone who likes to cook, but Wolfert is famous in the food world for popularizing Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cuisines in America, having published nine award-winning books and hundreds of articles about food. She was known for her deep research into authentic recipes and laser-sharp sensory understanding of food.

A lot has changed since she was diagnosed with dementia in 2013, but she is not giving up.

She is fighting dementia with the same ferocity as she applied to studying the intricacies of couscous for 40 years. Her primary weapon is what she knows best—food.

In this 1,500-word article for your Mental Health Issue, I'd like to share the culinary and other lifestyle approaches being used and researched today, while a cure for Alzheimer's and dementia is still at bay.

Wolfert did not invent this dietary/lifestyle approach, of course, but she is outspoken about her condition and her process and serves as a beacon for many. Late 2017 was actually a pivotal year for this approach because multiple clinical trial reports, though based on small studies, offered proof that cognitive decline is reversible with nutrition and lifestyle changes.

The basic solution? A hyper-specialized ketogenic diet, yoga and meditation, cognitive exercises, nutrient supplementation, and programmatic sleep recovery.

This is not an affirmation of a particular diet but about how individuals are taking more control over their health, unwilling to accept "no cure" as a final answer.

I'll interview Wolfert as well as physicians notable in this field such as Dr. Dale Bredesen of the UCLA Mary Easton Center for Alzheimer's Disease Research, who was the first to reverse memory loss in a small study, with what is now known as the Bredesen protocol or ReCODE (reverse cognitive decline).

According to the Alzheimer's Association, 5.7 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's. About 11% of Americans over the age of 65 have been diagnosed with dementia. For those over 85, it's more than a third. It has such devastating effects on the patients as well as the caregivers, and the purpose of the article will be to provide some answers and offer some relief of the fear and despair that comes with an Alzheimer's or dementia diagnosis.

My bio: I'm a food and health editor and journalist. As executive editor for several publishing houses including Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and Wiley, I edited more than 75 cookbooks and health books, including books on diabetes, weight loss, and the gluten-free and vegetarian lifestyles. As a writer, I've covered cutting edge topics such as infertility and natural killer cells and the gut-brain connection. Paula Wolfert has consented to be interviewed for this article and I've worked with many doctors and can secure a top expert for this article.

[YES! SOLUTIONS PITCH/ASSIGNMENT FORM](#)