



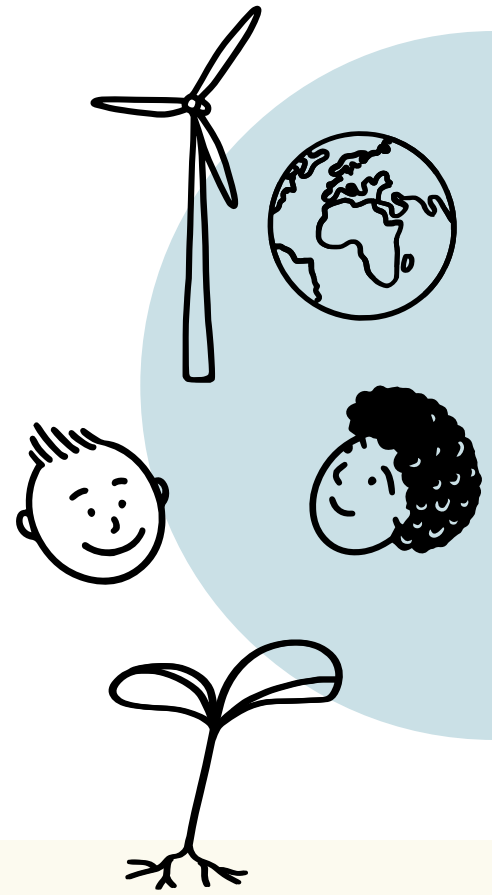
THE CLIMATE ACTION PLAYBOOK A JOURNALIST'S GUIDE TO SOLUTIONS REPORTING



Social media buzz with statistics about how a specific month has become the warmest on record. As alarming as the figures sound, the accompanying visuals—the highly vibrant and animated charts and whatnot—make for better engagement. But do they always work to inform the public about the hard questions that must be asked to address climate emergencies?

Angela K. Evans, climate network manager for the Solutions Journalism Network, puts it succinctly: “The climate crisis hits on every beat and aspect of our lives.” While the science of this global issue tends to be inaccessible, especially to underprivileged people or at-risk communities, some intersections bring us closer to how we experience it in our daily lives.

Members of the first cohort of ten newsrooms in the [Constructive News: Fostering Solutions Journalism Across Europe](#) (SoJo Europe Program) and their mentors and trainers encourage a shift in thinking when reporting about the climate crisis. It’s not always about the problem or the solution. It’s also about reframing journalists’ focus and mindset, especially when approaching the issue from the solutions journalism perspective.



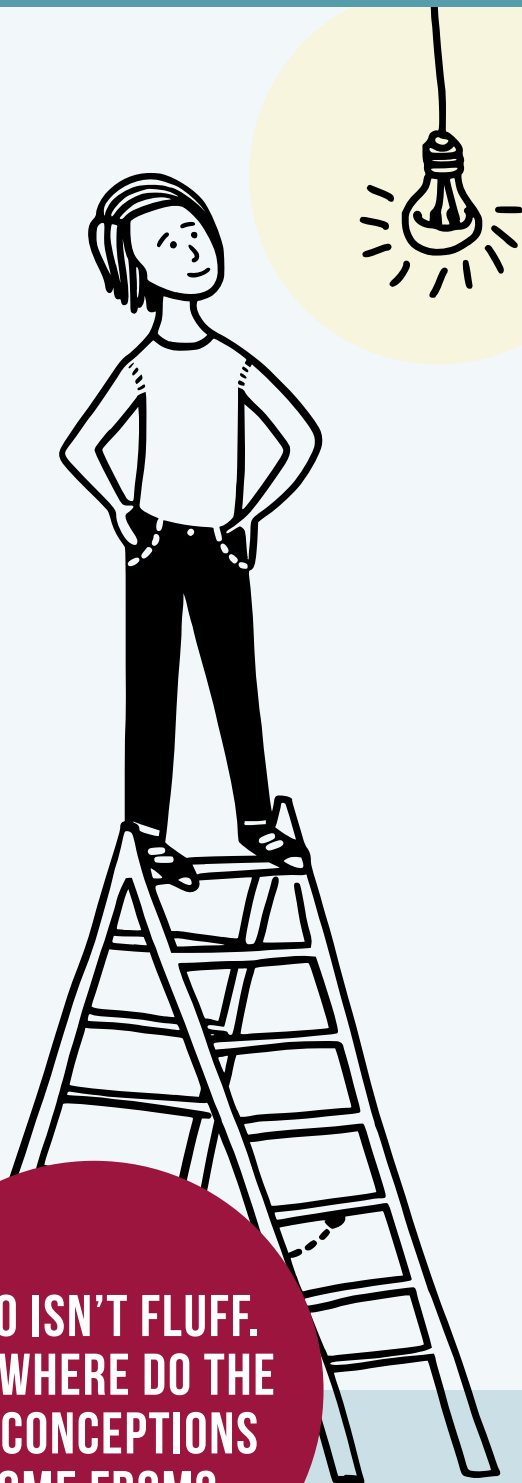
THE BIG QUESTION: WHY COVER CLIMATE ISSUES FROM THE SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM PERSPECTIVE?

TACKLING CLIMATE ISSUES LOCALLY



Many aspects of the climate crisis unfold simultaneously, but audiences perceive and experience them in real time in different ways. Focusing on such wide or all-encompassing climate issues with a local perspective may sound daunting, but SoJo Europe members have some strategies.

- For [Paolo Valenti](#) and [Andrea Giambartolomei](#), journalists at the Italian magazine [lavalibera](#), the climate crisis can be viewed within daily contexts such as living in sweltering urban jungles, taking overcrowded public transport, plowing dry agricultural fields, being caught off guard by flash floods, and more. Solutions journalism can become “relevant and inspiring for public administration or local communities” when covering these issues, Giambartolomei says.
- Many enterprising or creative solutions can be connected to topics such as funding or local action. Freelance journalist Matty Edwards, who was previously a reporter and editor at [The Bristol Cable](#) in the United Kingdom, suggests looking at climate adaptation where it can be “easier to report on action taken on a local level.”



**SOJO ISN'T FLUFF.
BUT WHERE DO THE
MISCONCEPTIONS
COME FROM?**

Solutions journalism practitioners and proponents make it clear: this approach is not advocacy reporting or news full of fluff. But where did these views come from?

Freelance broadcast journalist and producer Petra Kovačević offers an interesting viewpoint: “The misconceptions actually come from newsrooms, editors, and journalists and not so much from audiences.”

HOW CAN SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM FLESH OUT CLIMATE STORIES?

The four pillars of solutions journalism (response, insight, evidence, and limitations) provide a framework to investigate or revisit issues, especially whether solutions have succeeded, are failing, or something in between. For some journalists, this journalistic approach offers more insights for a beat as heavy as climate:

- For [Lucie Černá](#) of [Transitions](#), solutions journalism works well for **covering adaptation measures** and assessing the impact of responses early on.
- For [Oana Filip](#), a reporter at Romania-based journalism platform [Scena9](#), it is **a form of resistance and presents a different narrative**. “Solutions journalism is not about embellishing or presenting an issue in a light way, but also a reminder that everything isn’t bad. And even if it is bad, some people do something to stop it. And we’re not looking for a silver bullet that will solve everything.”
- [Anna Violato](#), science writer and editor at Italy’s [RADAR Magazine](#), considers SoJo **a great lens for reviewing climate justice**. “Solutions journalism forces you to look at limitations and issues from a wider perspective. It brings you to talk to the affected people and the communities involved.”
- Matty Edwards says SoJo **offers fruitful ways to link climate and other social justice issues**. “Journalism about the climate crisis can be overwhelming or depressing, so it’s important to not bombard your audience with scientific information or data. Frame stories around action or change, and include characters and narrative to increase the chances of your audience engaging with the story.”
- [Slow News](#) editor-in-chief [Alberto Puliafito](#) talks about **uncovering pathways, lessons, and shifts that move the needle forward, even incrementally**. “The solutions journalism mindset shift has kept us going. So far, we’ve never walked away from a story—because even when solutions seem frustrating or limited, there’s always a way to contribute meaningfully to the conversation.”

“Either somebody reads briefly about solutions journalism or goes through a training and listens only with one ear, and then makes their own version of it, which [may be less rigorous] than what solution journalism should be, and then they do something that’s ‘half solutions journalism’ or ‘positive news.’ The other thing is that the very traditional journalists or editors in newsrooms still sometimes perceive solutions journalism, along with constructive journalism, as some kind of an inferior form that lacks rigor or only wants to get audiences through some easy fixes. It’s not encouraged in the newsrooms, or you are being frowned upon by your colleagues because you’re doing it.”

AVOIDING CLIMATE SOJO PITFALLS

Investigating the climate crisis can easily go awry, especially when journalists aim too high, seeking a solution to a massive, complex issue. What other traps are there to look out for?

- **Getting lost in complex solutions.** The advice of *El Confidencial*'s multimedia journalist Lola García-Ajofrín? “Break the problem down” and turn it into more easily grasped pieces. That way, it will help you and your audience better understand the problem and its response or solution.
- **Comparing data from different governments, locales, or contexts,** which can lead to a blind alley, *lavialibera*'s Paolo Valenti says. His colleague Andrea Giambartolomei suggests finding a common subject where data can be gathered and compared easily.
- **Focusing too much on the problem, or looking for the perfect solution.** For Alberto Puliafito, that's the key lesson they've learned at *Slow News*. “Obsessing over finding the one perfect solution can become part of the problem itself. If the goal is just to pinpoint a single, definitive fix, then frustration is inevitable—and giving up becomes the likely outcome.”
- **Focusing on a person and what they have done.** This tends to turn an article into a “hero story.” Lucie Černá of Transitions says it is natural to be attracted by the strengths and initiatives of inspirational people, but too much of it may lead to hero worship. “Go deeper and investigate what's behind that person. Look for what is replicable. What enabled this particular person and many others?”
- **Failing to look beneath the surface.** It's not enough to simply report that a solution exists—you need to ask: Is it truly effective? Is it solving the problem, or is it creating new ones? Henrik Grunnet, senior advisor at Copenhagen-based *International Media Support (IMS)*, warns against stopping at surface-level reporting. “That can be the problem, and the way to [address] that is to be just as rigorous” in reporting the solution as the problem. By digging deeper, journalists can uncover whether a solution is sustainable, scalable, or even beneficial in the first place.
- **Ignoring ongoing work in communities.** Angela K. Evans considers this an overlooked aspect. “We have many stories about adaptation, about how communities that have faced real climate crises change their behaviors. They are also ‘resilience’ stories—how people are anticipating what the climate crisis is going to bring.”
- **Falling for greenwashing.** Be wary when companies promote shiny fixes or advanced solutions to climate issues without actual evidence. Evans advises to “find critics to speak to it” or dig into company data to see what's working.
- **Overlooking “failed” solutions.** Because “some things just fail,” Evans says. “But most responses or solutions, especially in the climate space, fail for very specific reasons, and they could be addressed and iterated on to be successful in the future.”
- **Assuming that small solutions are not worth it.** “It's still worth reporting on,” she adds. “No solution is too small.”

DEALING WITH SKEPTICISM AND DISENGAGED AUDIENCES



In the Digital News Report 2023, the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (RISJ) found that news avoiders “are more likely to say they are interested in positive or solutions-based journalism and less interested in the big stories of the day.” This suggests that solutions journalism may be a key way to engage audiences who feel overwhelmed or disillusioned by traditional climate reporting.

But how should journalists navigate skepticism, polarization, or outright denial? The answer is to remain grounded—reporting solutions without overhyping them and exploring climate issues in connection with other societal challenges.

“Solutions are never isolated; they emerge from the interplay of multiple disciplines and perspectives,” says Alberto Puliafito. “The sooner you realize this, the more effective your work becomes.” Rather than treating climate as a siloed topic, effective reporting looks at the broader systems at play—economic, social, and political factors that shape both the crisis and its solutions.

ELEVATING OTHER VOICES

Reporting climate solutions demands the same journalistic rigor as any investigative story. Here are some methods to strengthen your climate reporting toolkit:

- **Research local academic databases** or review case studies **to see whether improvements or real changes have (or haven't) happened** over the past five to ten years. Don't rely too much on the internet, Lola García-Ajofrín (*El Confidencial*) says, because "local solutions working in communities are not [always viewable or accessible] online."
- **Collaborate with environmental organizations, local experts, and communities** to see what solutions play out or need more work. Anna Violato (*RADAR Magazine*) and Viktoriia Hubareva (environmental journalist from the Ukrainian solutions media outlet *Rubryka*) suggest doing this to help with deconstructing complicated terms. Hubareva adds, "Community input is also critical to give the story life and make solutions relatable." Going beyond, Oana Filip (*Scena9*) advises **looking into how communities understand solutions in their daily contexts** to not create the impression that they are a catch-all answer to every issue.
- **Use data collection and visualization tools** such as climate models, trackers, or satellite imagery to help audiences visualize the differences a solution or response has in an area. As Alberto Puliafito says, "Visual contrast becomes a way to help readers grasp the spatial and environmental significance of redevelopment." Likewise, such tools, he says, are invaluable for journalists in conceptualizing a story, framing key questions, and guiding audiences.
- **Zero in on available evidence**, as García-Ajofrín suggests, especially when data is insufficient to assess the effectiveness of solutions or responses. This, she says, can help in analyzing the implementation in a time frame.
- **Find the human angle in highly technical climate stories.** Kaja Seruga, who writes about construction, architecture, and urban development as both environmental issues and potential solutions, says: "At the heart of it are people's homes, their comfort, health, and socioeconomic security—most people's eyes glaze over when talk turns to energy efficiency, but they care about that."
- **Go beyond the story and check in with the audience.** Angela K. Evans (Solutions Journalism Network) suggests adding editor's notes or incorporating surveys to probe what the audience feels or if they have taken action after reading the story.
- **Remember, your story still needs to be critical.** In training journalists, Henrik Grunnet (IMS) reminds his trainee journalists to consider the "constructive compass" or a set of values to guide the search for a starting point or angle for a story: "The story should or could be **critical, solution-oriented, nuanced, and engaging for audiences.**"

FINDING ANSWERS FROM AND WITH YOUR AUDIENCE

For seasoned or newbie journalists, it takes a lot of humility to acknowledge that not everything is within their grasp of understanding. Some newsrooms, like *Slow News*, have embraced a journalistic principle of learning alongside the audience. Its editor-in-chief Alberto Puliafito adds: "We talk to experts, gather data, read widely, and most importantly, stay humble in the face of complexity. Instead of positioning ourselves as the ones who 'already know,' we position ourselves as the ones who are learning alongside our audience. This not only makes our work more transparent and engaging but also fosters trust—because readers recognize that we are not trying to push an agenda, but to genuinely understand and explain."

This mindset can allow unlearning to happen—questioning assumptions or being willing to ask the most basic of questions. But how to strike the right balance between humility and journalistic competence? This could be asking readers about what climate issues they want answers to, as Matty Edwards' previous newsroom *The Bristol Cable* did in 2021 (a [reader callout](#)), or admitting confusion and pushing sources to explain more clearly. Staying curious—and humble—is key.



CONTACT US

Whether you have questions, want a solutions journalism training or want to collaborate, our team is dedicated to supporting you. Reach out to us at transitions@tol.org to explore solutions journalism, share ideas, and make an impact together.



WE ARE HERE TO HELP

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