



## ENGAGING NEWS PROJECT

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## **SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM MAY BENEFIT ENGAGEMENT, COULD LEAD TO HIGHER EXIT AND BOUNCE RATES**

A new report from the Engaging News Project finds that there are benefits to newsrooms using solutions-based journalism, but it is not a cure-all for audience engagement.

Solutions journalism emphasizes responses to entrenched social problems. It focuses not just on what may be working, but how and why it appears to be working or, alternatively, why it may be stumbling. The experiment and two field tests we conducted for this report – a follow-up to our 2014 report on solutions journalism – were funded by the Solutions Journalism Network.

For our experiment, a sample of 834 U.S. adults saw one of two online news articles, both reporting on the struggles of the working poor. The articles were nearly identical in every respect, except that one version focused on the working poor's hardships, while the other reported on the hardships *and* how some organizations were coming to the aid of the working poor.

We also led two field tests in conjunction with the Deseret News. As part of the tests, visitors to the Deseret News homepage saw one of two (solutions or non-solutions) versions of an article at random. The purpose of the field tests was to gauge differences in reader behavior based on whether a reader saw a solutions article or a non-solutions article.

Based on the findings of the experiment and field tests, we determined that time on page was greater for readers of solutions articles compared to non-solutions readers, even though both versions were indistinguishable in length. In the experiment and in one of the field tests, readers viewing the solutions article spent about 30 seconds longer on the page, or 25 percent more time than those viewing the non-solutions article.

There were some pitfalls associated with the solutions articles. Results from our field tests indicate that bounce and exit rates were higher for solutions articles than non-solutions articles. While there were differences in the number of unique visitors to each page used in our field tests, the bounce rates were consistently about 15 percentage points higher for solutions articles while the exit rates for solutions readers were 5 to 9 percentage points higher than non-solutions readers.

Other findings include:

- Commenting and social sharing patterns were similar for solutions and non-solutions readers.
- Self-efficacy and optimism were greater for those exposed to solutions articles compared to non-solutions articles.
- Solutions stories were considered less likely to influence opinion, and yielded lower intentions to read more about the topic. This was the opposite of what we found in our 2014 report on solutions journalism.

“When deciding the best way to write stories, journalists and their newsrooms should weigh the potential uptick in time on page against the possibility of higher bounce and exit rates,” said Alex Curry, co-author of the report and a research associate with the Engaging News Project. “What is clear, however, is that readers of solutions stories leave news sites feeling more optimistic and more likely to believe that there are potential solutions to important social problems.”

*The Engaging News Project provides research-based techniques for engaging online audiences in commercially viable and democratically beneficial ways. Learn more at [engagingnewsproject.org](http://engagingnewsproject.org)*