

## What's working for U.S. workers?

### Promising approaches to today's labor challenges

**T**he complexity of labor issues has increased dramatically in recent years with the rise of the **gig economy** and a decline in stable employment.

U.S. workers, employers and the organizations that serve them are working to respond to those challenges, finding ways to ensure workers are paid a **liveable wage**, work in **safe conditions** and have access to **affordable housing, health care, education and transportation**. Workplace **democracy efforts** give employees more agency in company decisions.

Still, many workers today are working harder than ever, yet earn less, with less security and few, if

any, benefits.

**People of color, people with disabilities and immigrants** in particular remain overrepresented in these low-wage jobs.

At the same time, news coverage of labor has declined dramatically, with few reporters specializing in coverage of worker issues. This has left a **huge hole** in public understanding of labor and workplace issues, and the larger **systemic forces** at play in economic mobility in the United States.



The **Solutions Journalism Network (SJN)** produced this guide to help you fill that gap through **rigorous, evidence-based reporting** on what's *working* to address systemic labor problems.

It builds on the work of 10 U.S. newsrooms that partnered with SJN in 2022 to examine efforts that seek to help workers move up the economic ladder.

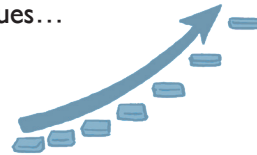
These stories look beyond what's going wrong...



...to examine what's going right...



...understand who's making credible progress in addressing systemic issues...



...and how.

**Here's how to integrate solutions reporting into your coverage of labor and workers:**

### Strong solutions stories...

- 1 Focus on a response to a problem or challenge.
- 2 Explain how effective the response is, using qualitative and/or quantitative evidence.
- 3 Share insights into the lessons this response holds for others.
- 4 Clearly identify the limitations of the response: what the response can't accomplish, what's holding it back and its downsides.

Together, these four elements differentiate **solutions stories** from other types of reporting.

## Sample Solution Story #1

### **Ban the Box policies reduce barriers for the formerly incarcerated**

By Tamar Sarai, [Prism](#)

The national **Ban the Box** campaign has succeeded in making it illegal for employers to ask job applicants about their conviction history and/or rescind a job offer because of a previous offense. **Thirty-seven states and the federal government have Ban the Box policies.**

#### **The Response**

Ban the Box, run by the California grassroots organization All of Us or None, is a campaign that promotes legislation aimed at preventing myriad forms of employment discrimination for people with conviction records.

#### **Evidence**

While it's difficult to measure how social stigmas and prejudices affect job hunters with histories of conviction, Ban the Box policies have raised the hiring rate for applicants with criminal records. In Washington D.C., for example, the hiring rate of applicants with conviction and arrest records increased 33 percent after Ban the Box legislation passed there.

#### **Insight**

More people with a past conviction will apply for jobs if they know they won't be automatically rejected. And in some cases employers are responding to incentives to hire and retain existing employees with an arrest or conviction record, like New York.

#### **Limitations**

Research shows that some employers attempt to circumvent Ban the Box policies by “upskilling” education or experience requirements, adversely affecting employment outcomes for people without conviction or arrest records.

**BAN THE BOX**

“We’re not just doing this to be nice; we’re doing this to fill positions. If you limit your hiring scope, you are going to unduly limit your hiring pool. From my point of view, why would you artificially narrow your pool of applicants?”

— Leslie Crary, co-owner of Rubicon Bakers in California



## Sample Solution Story #2

### How Tucson's Southside Worker Center has helped undocumented workers earn fair wages over decades

By John Washington, [Arizona Luminaria](#)

Across the country, approximately 70 day labor centers help workers find work and stay safe. In Tucson, AZ, the **Southside Worker Center** has been operating since 2006 and has been integral in winning political battles in the state, **fighting for and extending worker and immigrant rights.**

#### The Response

Tucson's Southside Worker Center supports day laborers dealing with wage theft, unsafe working conditions, verbal abuse from bosses and threats of deportation.

#### Evidence

Multiple workers described the primary benefit of the Southside Worker Center in simple terms: They get paid more. Though Southside doesn't officially track hiring rates, each day an estimated six to eight workers find jobs. At a similar center in Seattle, construction workers earned over 25 percent more in wages than workers who found similar jobs at informal hiring sites in 2015. In the same year, the hiring rate at the Seattle center was more than 15 percent higher than at informal sites.

#### Insight

The Tucson center offers workers a safe place to wait for employment as well as English-language workshops, leadership training and connections to social services. Workers also note intangible benefits such as increased confidence and the opportunity to develop relationships and trust.

#### Limitations

Even as Southside helps day laborers become a more accepted part of the Tucson community, it can't guarantee them jobs and its mission does not include helping undocumented workers gain legal status.



“Day laborers and their worker centers have been central to so much in Arizona, not just contributing to the economy, to keeping the construction industry humming, but pushing back against the likes of Joe Arpaio and the anti-immigrant vigilantes.”

— Chris Newman, legal director for the National Day Laborer Organizing Network



SOUTHSIDE WORKER CENTER

## Here's How to Create a SOLUTIONS STORY in 6 Steps...

**1** When looking at a problem facing your community or audience, ask: **"Who's doing it better?"**

Who's making significant improvement at a big or key piece of the problem — whether close to home or far away?

(You'll still be talking about the problem, but in a fresh way — about someone, somewhere making progress in ways your community can learn from.)



**2** Once you have possible answers, ask: **"How do we know?"**

Is there data and other evidence that shows the effort is making a difference? Is that evidence credible and is some of it independent — i.e., from sources other than the people leading the effort?

If so, you've got yourself a **solutions story!**



**3** Interview sources about how they pulled off their success, what challenges they've overcome, and which ones they still face.

This is the **howdunnit** — the narrative engine of your story.



**4** Examine the **limitations** of the effort. This is journalism, not advocacy, so you need to interrogate the data and other evidence you have.

- What are its strengths?
- What are its weaknesses?
- What does it tell us?
- What *doesn't* it tell us?

Include all of this in the story.



**5** Identify what can be **learned** from the effort, especially for your community and audiences.

Include *that* in the story, too.



**6** Finally, after the story is published or aired, **listen** to how people respond so you can answer questions, correct misconceptions and pick up ideas for your next story — maybe your next **solutions story**.

