

# SJN ANNUAL REPORT 2016

We set out to integrate the practice of solutions journalism — rigorous reporting on responses to social problems — into the daily news.

[READ THE LETTER FROM THE FOUNDERS >](#)

# S



## OUR IMPACT

in 2016

CURRICULUM | NEWSROOM PRACTICE CHANGE | NETWORK | DISSEMINATION

# 1

### CURRICULUM

SJN's curriculum is the foundation of all we do. It provides an accessible explanation of the craft, with specific modules aimed at beats, issue areas, and different media.

[LEARN MORE](#)



TOPLINE STATS

## 8,815

people joined in a live training or used our online training resources

## 38

news organizations participated in our core training workshops

## 6

journalism schools integrated the solutions approach into course curricula



### Case Study: "The Poverty Puzzle" at

# 2

## NEWSROOM PRACTICE CHANGE

In its first four years, SJN has focused on intensive newsroom engagements to demonstrate proof of concept for solutions journalism.

LEARN MORE

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## TOPLINE STATS

**10 news organizations produced solutions journalism focused on violence prevention**



**7 Mountain West newsrooms  
produced “Small Towns, Big  
Change,” a solutions-focused  
regional collaboration**

16

news outlets joined  
our Philadelphia  
Reentry Reporting  
Collaborative,  
covering recidivism  
and prisoner re-entry  
through a solutions  
lens

**The Seattle Times' award-winning "Education Lab," now in its fourth year, reported story pageviews 102% higher and social shares 230% higher than regular education coverage**

3

## NETWORK

SJN's network strategy responds to the question: How do we drive the adoption of solutions reporting among more journalists with lower investment?

**LEARN MORE**

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**2,443**

**members**

Reached within 7 months after the launch of new website and online network, The Hub

**557**

**members reached at our Facebook discussion group**



**57%**

**Twitter followers increased**

with an average reach per month of 136,000 impressions

**Time on new website up 24.4%, with users viewing 21.1% more pages per visit**



**Launched local communities in Philadelphia and D.C.**



**4**

#### DISSEMINATION

SJN's dissemination activities are concerned with accelerating the diffusion of solutions stories into society and, in turn, building demand for more and higher-quality solutions reporting.

[LEARN MORE](#)

**1,579**

**stories**

in the Solutions Story Tracker™, a searchable archive of tagged stories

**presented at**

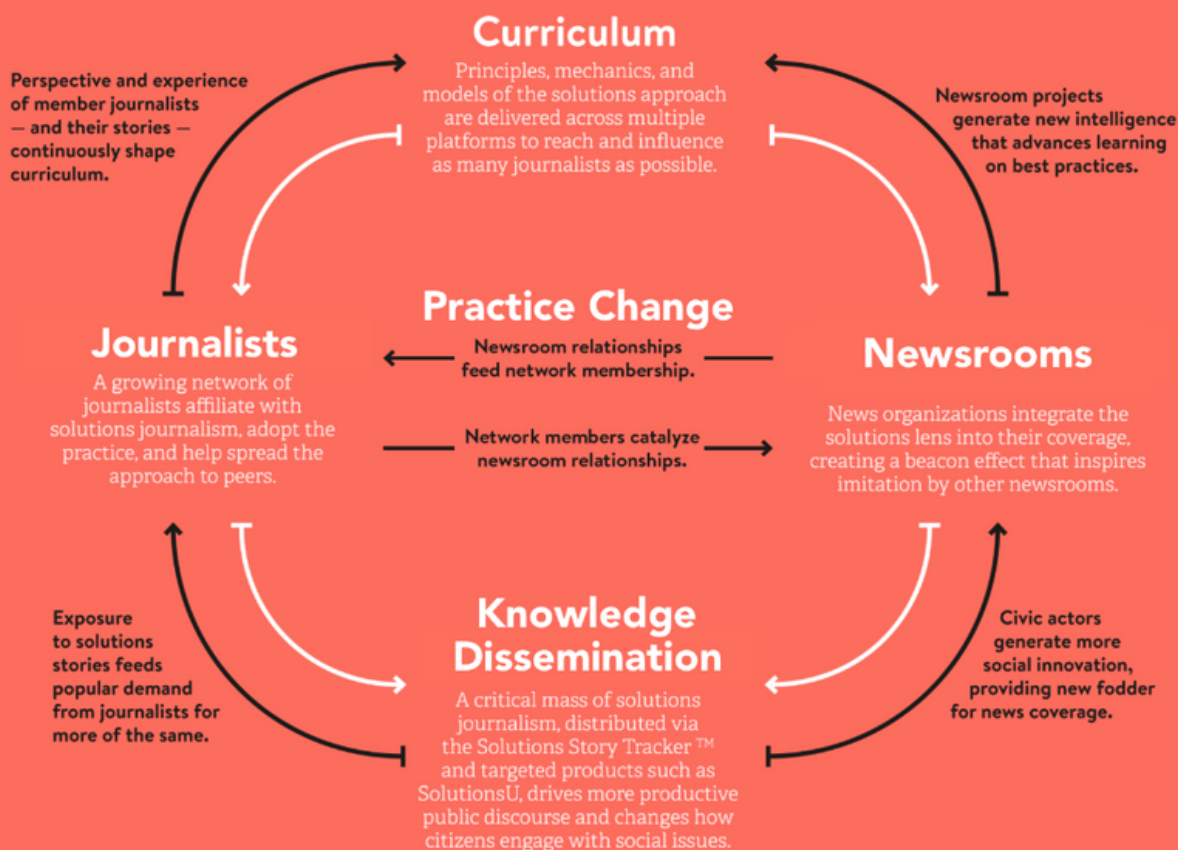
over 40 industry events, including: Sundance Film Festival, SXSW Interactive, IJF International Journalism Festival, AEJMC, ASNE, ACES, SPJ, Muslim Public Affairs Council, New Mexico Press Women Association, JAWS, AJPA

**87**

**media citations**

of SJN and/or solutions journalism, including articles in Nieman Lab, BBC, Tow Center for Digital Journalism, Poynter, and the Columbia Journalism Review

# SPREADING the Practice



## 2016 FINANCIAL updates

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The Solutions Journalism Network's operating expenses grew by 68% to \$3.8 million for the full year 2016.

This was up from \$2.3 million total expenses in 2015. Program expenses associated with newsroom collaborations, journalism school work, as well as the growth of our national network accounted for 87% of total expenditures in 2016, as compared to 72% in 2015. The total overhead ratio—including expenses associated with fundraising—was 14% in 2016, as compared to 28% in 2015.

A note regarding grants payable: During 2016, SJN restated its accounting for outstanding commitments on sub-grants payable to newsrooms. Grants payable as of December 31, 2014 and 2015 had not previously been recorded. SJN's 2015 financial statements have now been restated to reflect those sub-grant commitments

## ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY updates

During 2016, SJN continued to strive to adhere to best practices in non-profit administration, and during the course of the year:

- SJN became a fiscal sponsor to Honey Guide Media, Inc., a newsroom partner, under a sub-grant agreement through an SJN project grant that was funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
- SJN has been pleased to continue working with Raich, Ende and Malter as its independent auditor in 2016. In addition, SJN continued to retain Kiwi Partners for selected accounting support.

## GOVERNANCE

The organization elected **Nathalie Laidler-Kylander** to the board of directors during the first quarter of 2017. Ms. Laidler-Kylander joins the board in her capacity as Managing Director of the Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation, a new grantor for the organization in 2016

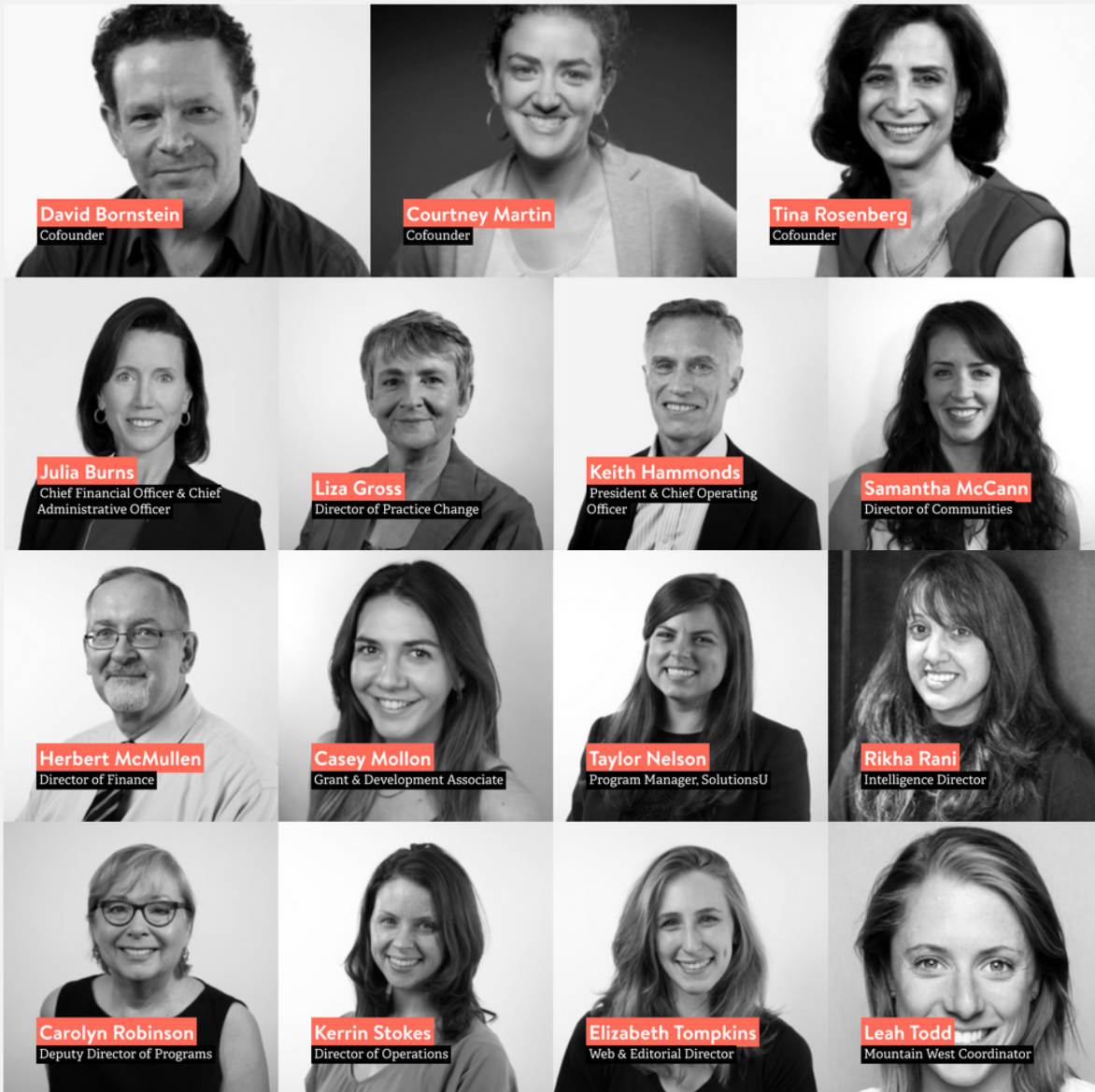
## FUNDING PARTNERS

- COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FOR GREATER BUFFALO
- THE COMMONWEALTH FUND
- EMERSON COLLECTIVE
- EINHORN FAMILY CHARITABLE TRUST
- THE ANNE E. CASEY FOUNDATION
- BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION
- DRAPER RICHARDS KAPLAN FOUNDATION
- CALIFORNIA HEALTHCARE FOUNDATION
- LOR FOUNDATION
- NELLIE MAE EDUCATION FOUNDATION
- NOVO FOUNDATION
- ONWARD AND UPWARD CHARITABLE TRUST
- SUSAN DAVIS
- PEERY FOUNDATION
- COURTNEY E. MARTIN & JOHN CARY
- ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION
- RITA ALLEN FOUNDATION
- SILICON VALLEY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
- THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION
- REID FAMILY FOUNDATION
- DAVID BOARDMAN
- SARIKA BANSAL
- TINA ROSENBERG
- HEWLETT FOUNDATION
- DAVID BORNSTEIN & ABIGAIL GAMPEL
- DEAN FURBUSH
- ENDOWMENT FOR HEALTH
- JESSAMYN & ALI SHAMS-LAU
- JOHN S. AND JAMES L. KNIGHT FOUNDATION
- FORD FOUNDATION
- JOSEPH J. DYER
- INNOVATE FOUNDATION
- LEGACY VENTURE
- PAUL P. DOSBERG CHARITABLE FUND
- WILLIAM JAMES FOUNDATION



# OUR PEOPLE

## Team & Members



## Coordinators & Consultants in 2016

**Catherine Cheney**  
Bay Area Coordinator

**Nina Fasciaux**  
Europe Coordinator

**Jean Friedman-Rudovsky**  
Philadelphia Reentry Collaborative  
Project Editor

**Ben Goldfarb**  
Mountain West Project Editor

**Joanne Levine**  
DC Coordinator

**Sabrina Vourvoulis**  
Philadelphia Reentry Collaborative  
Project Editor

**Holly Wise**  
Director of Journalism School  
Engagement

## Board Members



# OUR STORY

## Letter from the Founders

The 2016 presidential election revealed a deep sense of powerlessness among Americans. Many voters expressed deep feelings of alienation, telling pollsters that people like them “don’t have any say.”

Journalism bears considerable responsibility for this belief. Even high-quality news frequently leaves audiences feeling helpless, disheartened, overlooked, polarized, and wishing to tune out.

One of today’s hidden realities is that at the local, regional and national level, Americans of all backgrounds are building and reforming institutions, organizing in new configurations, pioneering approaches and strengthening citizen capacity to attack problems more effectively. It’s an extraordinarily important story—full of activity and knowledge vital to democracy—but it is vastly under-reported.

What if journalists brought the same attention and rigor to stories about responses to problems as we do to the problems themselves? Could it balance a news narrative that often feeds apathy? Could it spur citizen agency and engagement? Could it strengthen democracy?

many of the top news organizations in the United States. Thousands of journalists have joined our online community, barely a year old. And newsrooms in Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America have sought out our services—among them, the BBC, which has produced its own solutions reporting toolkit.

We know we still have a long way to go. But in 2016, we made significant headway. We now better understand the ways that solutions journalism can impact newsrooms, citizens and society. In addition to completing two studies around [headlines](#) and [audience engagement](#), we commissioned [two studies](#) examining solutions journalism’s effect on public discourse. We summarized the state of knowledge around the impact of solutions journalism in [this blog post](#).

And importantly, answers to the questions we confronted four years ago are emerging. When solutions journalism is integrated into the news, it has potential to elevate public discourse, reduce polarization, and energize citizen agency. It appears that the inclusion of possibilities, or options, can improve public conversations. Among the 25 newsroom projects published in 2016, nearly half reported one or more instances of "community-level" impact. These impacts include reports of increased civic participation, the raising of new funds, and stronger audience engagement. One important finding is that solutions journalism facilitates the exchange of knowledge between groups and organizations; it plays a "connecting" role within the community.

We are excited to move forward on many new opportunities. We believe a more fully-rounded approach to journalism will strengthen participatory democracy, helping people to see credible pathways and possibilities for reform. That is very much needed today.

We feel privileged to work with extraordinary partners and supporters towards this goal.

With appreciation,  
David Bornstein  
Courtney Martin  
Tina Rosenberg

## Our Impact in 2016

# Dissemination

**Big Picture/How we think about dissemination:** SJN's dissemination activities are concerned with accelerating the diffusion of solutions stories into society and, in turn, building demand for more and higher-quality solutions reporting. Over the past three years, the spread of solutions journalism has yielded a growing critical mass of solutions stories. These stories can help journalists, policymakers, academics, philanthropic institutions, and citizen-sector actors bridge the gaps between what is broadly understood about problems and what is usually not understood about emerging responses to those problems. Our dissemination work seeks to organize the market for solutions journalism by directing available supply to individuals and groups among whom demand is greatest. In time, we expect this to produce a virtuous cycle in which higher demand prompts increased supply, creating a reinforcing loop.

**Solutions Story Tracker™:** Our revamped Solutions Story Tracker™ launched in August 2016—first for a select group of 42 university educators, students, philanthropists, and journalists to get targeted feedback, and then, a month later, for the public. The Solutions Story Tracker™ attracted 12,228 views by year-end 2016. And the flow of solutions stories into the Tracker has accelerated: We now are adding an average of 77 stories a month. We have hired five part-time taggers to read, vet, and tag relevant stories, and our goal is to expand the Tracker to 4,000 stories by the end of 2017 – not an exhaustive catalog of all solutions journalism, but a large representative slice of the best solutions stories across issue areas.

### TOPLINE STATS

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**1,579** stories in the Solutions Story Tracker™, a searchable archive of tagged stories

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**87** media citations of SJN and/or solutions journalism, including articles in Nieman Lab, BBC, Tow Center for Digital Journalism, Poynter, and the Columbia Journalism Review

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**Tracker-Based Tools:** We are building online tools to aggregate, organize, map and distribute solutions journalism content to make it searchable and readily accessible to a range of potential users. Leveraging the Story Tracker, we are developing customized tools directed toward key target markets, starting with university educators and students, and then expanding to the philanthropic sector.

**SolutionsU:** The SolutionsU platform, scheduled for launch in September 2017, leverages the Solutions Story Tracker to offer a set of tools and services that can be integrated into university courses and programs devoted to social innovation. Over the past year, we have consulted with educators, students, and administrators from 65 universities and organizations to inform the design of the platform. We revamped the entire user experience, visual designs, and taxonomy for the Solutions Story Tracker™, including a new field called "Success Factors" that identifies critical factors driving outcomes. This user-centered approach seemed to pay off when we received the initial feedback from our beta test: 91.3% of participants were extremely or very satisfied with the Story Tracker, and 95.7% were extremely or very likely to recommend it to a friend or colleague.

**Presented at over 40 industry events, including: Sundance Film Festival, SXSW Interactive, IJF International Journalism Festival, AEJMC, ASNE, ACES, SPJ, Muslim Public Affairs Council, New Mexico Press Women Association, JAWS, AJPA**

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**Online mentions of "Solutions Journalism Network" more than doubled, from 414 to 936; online mentions of "solutions journalism" increased by nearly 75%, from 2,547 to 4,417**

## What We've Learned

Educators and students want to be able to find relevant information about solutions across many sources, topics, and disciplines. They want to more easily surface stories that show the ground-level struggles and challenges of social innovation, as well as stories about evidence-informed models that put solutions in context

## Where We're Headed in 2017

We will expand the story archive to 4,000 stories by the end of 2017 and invest in improvements to the backend of the database. We will launch SolutionsU and continue to build online tools that will assist a range of users to easily find, integrate, and share knowledge of solutions

## Our Impact in 2016

# Network

SJN's network strategy responds to the question: How do we drive the adoption of solutions reporting among more journalists with lower investment? It complements and syncs with our newsroom approach, which relies on direct, in-person training and project-based learning. But it is anchored in network linkages and peer-to-peer learning. It relies on recognition, support, and connection to spread the solutions approach. We expect that, over the next three years, the universe of solutions journalism practitioners increasingly will be populated by our network activities.

**Community Building Across the U.S.:** In-person events in our four communities (Bay Area, Philadelphia, D.C., and New York City) led by paid, part-time coordinators have engaged at least 350 distinct participants in activities from pop-up Q&As with social entrepreneurs and high-profile journalists, to trainings and workshops grounding journalists in the practice of solutions reporting and helping them develop their story ideas. Coordinators have shaped the emerging communities, seeding new participants, building relationships and connections, amplifying connections with newsroom activities, and spotting new innovations, best practices, and growing trends. By year-end 2019, we aim to have 5,000 *journalists* as part of the online network, with most communities led by volunteer coordinators.

**Our Online Presence:** We launched a redesigned SJN website in May, featuring our new online network, the Hub. Membership in the Hub surpassed 2,400 people by the end of year, well past the 1,500 we had projected. By year-end, our website page traffic was up 7.5% to an average of 13,000 pageviews per month. Users spent 24.4% more time on our new website and viewed 21.1% more pages per visit than they did in 2015. On social media, our Twitter followers increased 57% to 7,989, with an average reach per month of 136,000 impressions. In the fall we launched a Facebook discussion group, reaching 557 members by the end of the year.

TOPLINE STATS

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## Launched

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## What We've Learned

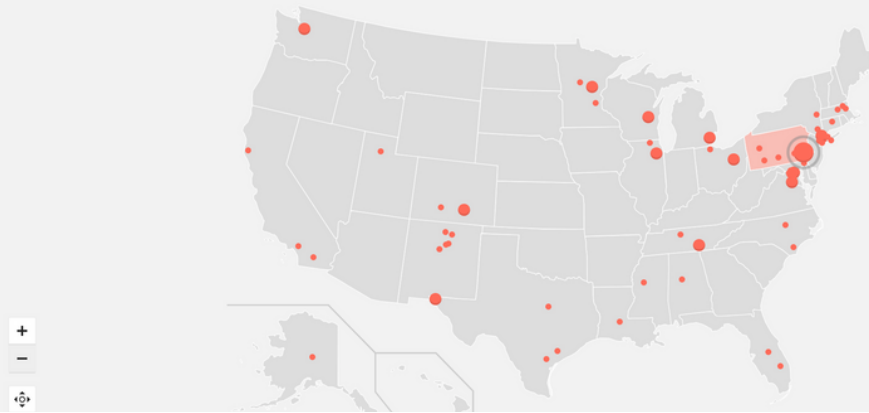
Deeper engagement with individuals leads to the production of solutions journalism stories. Production of a solutions story is a conversion point, after which it is more likely that the individual will do more solutions stories. There is overlap between the newsroom and network arms of SJN, and the two should and can be more integrated

## Where We're Headed in 2017

We'll be paring down the type of events we'll hold in the coming years, focusing primarily on professional development and community-building gatherings with journalists as the core constituency. We'll also be transitioning to a "franchise" model, a decentralized structure with local communities led by volunteer coordinators with the support of SJN headquarters

# Newsrooms Practice Change

PARTNERSHIPS



In its first four years, SJN has focused on intensive newsroom engagements to demonstrate proof of concept for solutions journalism. We have built a portfolio of highly visible and credible news organizations whose strong solutions-oriented reporting projects serve as “beacons,” catalyzing imitation and replication by other journalists. These engagements last six months or longer and typically involve substantial financial support from SJN.

**Community Vitality:** In 2016, SJN engaged six newsrooms in projects focused on community vitality, all featuring intensive audience and community engagement components. For example, The *Minneapolis Star Tribune* produced groundbreaking reporting on responses to the threat of radicalization and ISIS recruitment of young Somalis in the Twin Cities. The paper created a full-time position for a Somali-speaking reporter, hosted a conversation with 25 Somali community leaders and used Listening Post, a phone-based engagement tool, to surface neighborhood-level insights and build trust with Somali residents. Additionally, the *Star Tribune* translated stories into Somali and established a content exchange partnership with *Mshale*, the local Somali newspaper, to further the reach of its solutions content.

**Responses to Violence:** Ten newsrooms partnered with SJN to produce solutions series on different aspects of violence. Many of these projects featured town hall meetings or other audience engagement components, including an interactive database. Newspapers (including the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*), a TV Network (Univision), and a public radio station (WNYC) tackled solutions stories on violence against immigrants, gun violence in urban settings, and domestic violence. The *Detroit Free Press* delivered an ambitious multimedia series on solutions to the impact of violence on Detroit’s children. This series featured robust audience engagement in the form of surveys, crowdsourcing, and a town hall of policy makers and other stakeholders.

**Philadelphia Reentry Reporting Collaborative:** The Philadelphia Reentry Reporting Collaborative, which launched in November, is a consortium of 16 Philadelphia news outlets and two universities reporting on responses to the challenge of ex-prisoner reentry into society. The impact of this work is already emerging: The project website has become a “hush harbor,” where people can come to tell their own reentry stories. And reentry service providers have started reaching out to see how we can work together.

**Mountain West Collaboration:** We also launched, “Small Towns, Big Change,” a network of seven small newsrooms in New Mexico and Colorado that committed to jointly exploring responses to the challenges facing rural communities. The six-month initiative yielded 50 stories, creating a persistent knowledge asset for communities looking for new ways to tackle old problems. It also introduced the solutions approach to smaller news organizations, a critical constituency for SJN.

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**Education Lab Continues:** SJN's partnership with *The Seattle Times* on "Education Lab," an intensive investigation of responses to public education in Washington state, entered its fourth year – three years longer than we had originally anticipated. "Education Lab" has become a leading destination for daily solutions-oriented news and conversation about education in the Seattle area; its reporting and engagement activities have produced identifiable impact, leading to productive discussion of potential solutions and changed policy. It also has emerged as a model for other journalists, attracting attention, plaudits, and even envy from education reporters and editors across the nation – and providing a crucial base of evidence that has helped to advance the practice of solutions journalism in other newsrooms.

## What We've Learned

As solutions journalism gains popularity, we will be able to move newsrooms to higher levels of engagement faster, and with less investment of SJN resources

**We've partnered with 78 newsrooms to produce solutions journalism stories and series**

## Where We're Headed in 2017

Beginning in 2017, we will shift from an emphasis on relatively few funded projects to building a significantly larger universe of newsroom relationships that we support and advance in a variety of ways, at varying intensity, depending on the need and the opportunity. We are also launching initiatives that will introduce solutions journalism outside the U.S. — starting in Europe and Africa — building awareness and excitement for the approach in leveraged ways that create a foundation for possible future expansion

## Our Impact in 2016

# Curriculum

SJN's curriculum is the foundation of all we do. Our tools and other resources explain what solutions journalism is, why it matters, when to make use of it, how it fits into the theory and evolution of journalism, and how it connects to the emerging interest around news engagement and media impact. It provides an accessible explanation of the craft, with specific modules aimed at beats, issue areas, and different media. Our approach has been to disseminate We have disseminated this intelligence in easily accessible products, through channels that can reach a wide variety of journalists, journalism students and teachers, and others who will help drive a practice shift in media.

**Core curriculum products:** Our flagship learning product, the Solutions Journalism Toolkit, available for free via the SJN website, has been viewed by over 7,000 people in more than 120 countries. We've also created a resource for editors and one for education reporters – the first in what will be a series of issue-based guides.

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**Journalism school outreach:** We've also launched a framework for teaching solutions reporting in journalism schools, producing instruction guides for a full-semester stand-alone course – piloted initially at Temple University – and for a shorter module that can be dropped into existing courses, first used by Arizona State University across its intermediate reporting classes. Holly Wise, a journalist-entrepreneur and a faculty member at Texas State University, has led our effort to bring the solutions approach into journalism school courses. By the end of 2016, SJN had forged relationships with 22 j-schools. We now know of solutions journalism courses either underway or in the works at Kent State University (taught by Rachel Dissell of the Cleveland Plain Dealer, one of our newsroom partners), the University of West Virginia (with Nancy Andrews, a former partner at the Detroit Free Press), Muhlenberg College, the University of Florida, Arizona State University, San Francisco State University, the University of Oregon, and Temple University – which, with our assistance, has created a chair in "Media, Cities, and Solutions." Holly has been a visiting professor in residence for stints at the University of Colorado – Boulder and at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln.

**6 journalism schools  
integrated the solutions  
approach into course curricula**

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**Cofounders Tina Rosenberg  
and David were featured in  
podcasts at Chronicle of  
Philanthropy and How Do We  
Fix It?**

## What We've Learned

We have mostly completed the task of codifying what we know about solutions journalism. So our future investment will focus on harvesting and disseminating learning from our growing network

## Where We're Headed in 2017

SJN will consolidate its curriculum products into the Learning Lab, a dedicated platform at [solutionsjournalism.org](http://solutionsjournalism.org) that will integrate all our toolkits – with new guides for engagement and reporting on health and violence – into a single resource that our members can navigate in nearly infinite ways, at their own pace, to suit their needs. We'll translate core resources into different languages, beginning with Spanish and French, and later Arabic and Chinese, to help extend our reach outside the U.S.