

Impact in Journalism:
A Global Report on Current Practices,
Challenges, and Emerging Trends.

JOURNALISM IMPACT

IMPACT JOURNALISM

JOURNALISM IMPACT



Pulitzer Center
twenty years of impact

Photo credit: Image courtesy of Raseef22 to Mohammed Hafeedh



Photo credit: Kyodo News Stills/Getty Images

CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Executive coordination and editor: Flora Pereira

Authors: Jazmín Acuña, Flora Pereira

Project coordination: Hannah Berk, Gabriela Brenes, Jonatan Rodríguez

Research concept: Flora Pereira

Data analysis: Federico Acosta Rainis

Collaborators: Mouhamad Alem, Lisa Gibbs, Marina Walker Guevara, Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, Mark Schulte, Intan Febriani, Rozina Breen, Jonatan Rodríguez, Gabriela Brenes, Hannah Berk

Graphic design: Lucy Crelli, Anderson Rodrigues

Copy editor: Dana Thompson



TABLE OF CONTENTS

BRIEF OVERVIEW	1
FOREWORD: THE IMPACT TURN	2
Why Think of Impact Now?	2
When Listening to Audiences Becomes Part of Journalistic Rigor	3
A Field in Transition: Between Intention and Practice	5
From Epistemological Crisis to Impact Architecture	6
INTRODUCTION	8
METHODOLOGY	11
LIMITATIONS	13
KEY FINDINGS AND EMERGING TRENDS	14
CONCLUSIONS	23

This research report was developed as part of the Pulitzer Center's Impact Initiative to explore how journalists, editors, and media organizations think about impact, the degree to which impact strategies are part of their work, and what opportunities exist to advance impact thinking in journalism.



THE IMPACT INITIATIVE

The Pulitzer Center believes in the power of stories to facilitate real-world change. We place impact and audiences at the heart of our work, advancing an approach that helps people make sense of a complex world and their role within it.

The Impact Initiative helps journalists carry their reporting beyond the page and into classrooms, community halls, photo exhibitions, and the everyday conversations where change begins. We do this through grantmaking, capacity building, and knowledge sharing.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH REPORT

This report shares and contextualizes findings from a digital global survey of journalism professionals working in newsrooms and independently, which the Pulitzer Center conducted in 2026. The questionnaire explored current approaches to impact, organizational capacity, measurement practices, attitudes toward impact-oriented journalism, and perceived opportunities and risks associated with this work.

foreword

THE IMPACT TURN

WHY THINK OF IMPACT NOW?



Over the past two decades, journalism has undergone one of the most profound transformations in its history. The digital revolution changed how information is produced, distributed, consumed, and trusted. At first, this transformation appeared to open a more democratic information ecosystem: Anyone could publish, and more voices could enter public debate.

But this promise of horizontal communication also produced a paradox. While producing and publishing information has never been easier, ensuring that information reaches the right people has never been more difficult. The internet created a new bottleneck around distribution, attention, and trust. Being online does not mean being seen. Publishing does not mean being read. Producing rigorous information does not guarantee it will reach the communities, institutions, or decision-makers who could use it.

This challenge extends far beyond journalism. Nonprofits, researchers, advocacy organizations, public institutions, and educators face the same fractured information environment. Any institution that once relied on being a messenger now competes within an ecosystem marked by excess content, fragmented attention, algorithmic mediation, and a continued shifting flow of information intermediaries. Journalism, however, occupies a particular place within this transformation.



By Flora Pereira
Chief Impact Officer
Pulitzer Center

For much of the history of modern journalism, publishing and reaching audiences were more closely connected. A good story had a reasonable chance of finding its public—an assumption that no longer holds. Outstanding reporting can now disappear beneath an overwhelming volume of content. From local newsrooms to global mainstream outlets, from robust investigative teams to independent journalists, all are confronting some version of the same crisis: As audiences move through new information ecosystems where platforms, languages, and messengers regularly emerge, there is no guarantee of reach, and even less of quality of reach—that is, of reaching audiences able to use, circulate, or act on the reporting.

This is where the commodity logic of journalism becomes insufficient. In this model, reporting is treated as a unit of production: story pitch, reporting, publication, next story. The rhythm of the work privileges volume, speed, and the continuous production of new stories over the long tail of a single piece of reporting—how it travels, how it is translated, who uses it, and what it makes possible after publication. Once the story is published, the work is often treated as finished.

The problem is not the commitment to rigorous reporting. It is the assumption that production itself is enough: that if journalism keeps producing relevant stories, the public will somehow be informed. In the current information environment, publication can't be the end of the journalistic process, as quality is not, by itself, a distribution strategy, and as reach is not, by itself, impact. If journalism is in the business of information, then circulation, accessibility, usability, qualified reach, and the afterlife of this information cannot remain secondary to the work. They are part of what makes reporting a functional public good.

WHEN LISTENING TO AUDIENCES BECOMES PART OF JOURNALISTIC RIGOR

Impact thinking begins here. It asks journalism to be more deliberate about the relationship between the reporting it produces, the audiences who can meaningfully use it, and the societal change that reporting makes possible. It does not require journalists to do advocacy, prescribe solutions, or control outcomes. It asks them, from the beginning, to pose a different set of questions: What public purpose is this story meant to serve, and what pathway might allow that purpose to be realized?

Central to this is a rethinking of how journalism understands its audiences. An audience-centered approach is not synonymous with subordinating editorial independence to metrics or popularity. It means understanding audiences specifically enough to ensure that essential information reaches them in forms they can actually use and in ways that make them feel connected to it.

Journalism has often operated through an information-deficit logic: People do not know, so journalism must inform them. But in many contexts today, people are not information-poor. They are overwhelmed. They navigate more than enough information—of uneven quality, relevance, and reliability. The challenge is therefore not only knowledge scarcity. It is trust, timing, format, language, and the channels through which people actually seek, receive, and use information.

Audience-centered journalism asks different questions: Who specifically needs this information? What do they already know? Where do they look for information? Who do they trust? What would make the information usable? In this sense, listening to audiences becomes part of journalistic rigor rather than a compromise of it. Trying to reach everyone often means reaching no one. Defining audiences clearly is not a narrowing of journalism's ambition; it is a condition for impact.

If audience-centered journalism asks the field to rethink its relationship with the public, porosity asks it to rethink its relationship with the wider ecosystem through which information now travels. I use porosity to describe the capacity of journalism to connect with other fields, institutions, formats, and messengers without losing its editorial independence. It is more than partnership as a practical arrangement. It reflects a recognition that impact is rarely achieved alone. A newsroom is not always where a community looks for information. A media outlet is not always the most trusted messenger for every audience. A story may need to travel through educators, researchers, civil society organizations, community groups, or content creators to reach the people for whom it matters.

If journalism once occupied a privileged position as one of society's principal public intermediaries—helping determine what entered public debate and how people encountered public problems—that position is now more distributed. The role shifts from being the sole messenger to being the originator of trustworthy information that can travel through many messengers. This requires journalism to understand other fields not primarily as competitors for attention, but as possible partners in the circulation of quality information—especially in a public sphere increasingly shaped by misinformation, disinformation, fragmented trust, and communities that no longer necessarily turn first to traditional media.



©Brett Sayles by Canva.com

A FIELD IN TRANSITION: BETWEEN INTENTION AND PRACTICE



These questions motivated the Pulitzer Center to undertake the global survey of journalism professionals detailed in this research report. Over the past five years, the Pulitzer Center has invested in understanding and advancing impact thinking in journalism. Rather than assuming where the field stands, this research was designed to listen: to understand how journalists, editors, and media organizations perceive impact, what meanings they attribute to it, where they see gaps, and what opportunities are emerging across different regions and contexts.

The findings reveal a field in transition—not because impact is absent from journalism, but because it appears with uneven strength across different stages of the journalistic process.

At the level of purpose, impact is strongly present. Across diverse contexts, respondents associate impact with democracy, rights, citizenship, accountability, systemic change, and the inclusion of marginalized voices. Impact is not primarily understood as institutional performance or audience growth. It is linked to journalism's contribution to public life and to the social function that many journalists already see as central to their work.

Impact is also present at the beginning of the editorial process. It appears in how many journalists and organizations think about story selection, editorial agenda-setting, and the public relevance of a topic. Decisions about which stories matter are often shaped by a sense of what could produce public value, expose injustice, inform debate, or contribute to accountability. In this sense, impact thinking is already influencing editorial choices, even when it is not always named as such.

But this intentionality becomes less consistent as the process moves forward. Once a story enters the reporting phase, the connection among intended impact, audience understanding, and reporting design often weakens. There is less evidence of systematic methods for translating impact intentions into reporting choices: which audiences need the information, what they already know, what formats would make it usable, which voices should be centered, and what pathways could allow the reporting to travel beyond publication.

The gap becomes even clearer after publication. Distribution strategies are emerging, but they are often still oriented toward reach, visibility, engagement, clicks, or awareness rather than toward quality of reach. In other words, they focus less consistently on whether reporting reaches the audiences who can use it, circulate it, teach it, act on it, or bring it into decision-making spaces. Distribution is becoming more present in the field, but it is not yet always understood as part of an intentional impact pathway.

At the same time, the survey shows that many journalists and media organizations are already operating within an impact logic without necessarily naming it as such. Across regions—particularly in the Global Majority, but also beyond—we see partnerships with civil society, collaborations among media organizations, community-oriented practices, audience engagement, and emerging distribution strategies. Porosity, it turns out, is already there. Journalism is already moving through other actors, institutions, and messengers.

Yet these practices often remain fragmented. They may appear as engagement, outreach, awareness-building, social media, digital strategy, or partnership work, rather than as part of a coherent approach to designing, implementing, distributing, and learning from journalism’s public contribution.

This is what makes the transition incomplete. The field is not lacking in commitment to impact. Nor does it lack practices that could support it. What remains underdeveloped is the infrastructure that connects these elements across the full life cycle of journalism: from story selection to reporting design, from audience understanding to distribution, from partnerships to evidence and learning.

The survey therefore reveals an architecture gap. The elements exist, but the connective tissue is missing. Impact is increasingly shaping discourse and editorial choices, but it has not yet been fully translated into shared methodologies, workflows, routines, and institutional practices. The idea is spreading faster than the architecture needed to make it operational.

FROM EPISTEMOLOGICAL CRISIS TO IMPACT ARCHITECTURE

The findings also help us understand a second dimension of this transition: Journalism is not only trying to practice impact more intentionally; it is still negotiating what impact means.

This is why the challenge is also epistemological.

For a long time, especially with the consolidation of digital journalism, impact was often approached through the language of reach. Big numbers offered a sense of evidence: page views, clicks, shares, engagement rates, audience growth. These metrics still matter. They tell us something about circulation and visibility. But respondents widely recognize that they are insufficient. Large numbers do not necessarily translate into public understanding, accountability, quality of reach, institutional response, policy debate, or social change.

The field now seems to be moving through an intermediate moment between older quantitative proxies for success and a more complex understanding of impact. This does not mean abandoning quantitative evidence, nor does it mean replacing metrics with purely qualitative narratives. Awareness, reach, engagement, use, accountability, and change require different forms of evidence. But the relationship among them remains under-theorized. What counts as impact? The survey suggests that this question is alive in the field, but not yet settled.

Without a shared meaning of impact, the challenge increases in designing for it, tracking it, or accounting for it. Yet, the forms of change journalism may contribute to are diffuse, cumulative, and long-term. They rarely move at the pace of journalistic production. Reporting works through deadlines, editorial cycles, and publication calendars; social change moves through institutions, relationships, debates, classrooms, public hearings, community meetings, and decisions that may unfold over months or years.

Impact may therefore be real and still remain partially invisible. It travels through organizations, conversations, and public processes—rarely in straight lines, rarely attributable to a single story. As one respondent put it, “We know most (impact) information through serendipity.” That phrase captures something essential: Journalism does not control the pathways through which its work becomes meaningful.

Theories of change, combined with intentional strategies for impact, offer a starting point. Not as a promise of outcomes journalism cannot control, and not as a claim of causality where only contribution can be demonstrated, but as a way of making explicit the assumptions behind a reporting project: what change is being imagined, who the reporting is meant to reach, what those audiences might do with the information, what pathways could connect reporting to change, and what signals might indicate that journalism played a role.

Taken together, the survey points to the need for an impact architecture: a framework that connects shared meaning, editorial decisions, audience understanding, partnerships, distribution, evidence, and organizational learning into a coherent process.

This report maps journalism at the moment before that architecture has fully taken hold. The challenge is no longer convincing the profession that impact matters. It is helping journalists, editors, and media organizations build the concepts, methods, and routines needed to define, design, practice, and understand impact deliberately.

INTRODUCTION

By Jazmín Acuña
and Flora Pereira



Photo credit: Olaoluwa Olowu

Across the world, journalists are grappling with declining trust, growing news avoidance, and audiences increasingly turning to content creators. At the same time, the rise of AI-mediated information ecosystems is accelerating questions about how journalism can maintain relevance and demonstrate its value.

One key response is to ensure journalism is connected to the audiences it serves—listening and engaging with them so that the practice is based on their needs and not on assumptions. These efforts are now part of a broader conversation around impact. In this context, impact refers to the ways journalism can lead to changes in awareness levels, debate framings, cultural perceptions, accountability, community organizing, or policy shifts, to name a few.

The conversation fundamentally addresses the issue of how to move beyond traditional metrics of value—largely shaped by platform algorithms—and better articulate journalism’s contribution to society.

Yet important gaps in knowledge persist regarding how impact is currently understood and practiced across the field. This report is part of the Pulitzer Center’s broader efforts to better understand and support impact-oriented journalism through the Impact Initiative, which helps journalists extend reporting beyond publication to foster conversations, strengthen community engagement, inspire action, and facilitate solutions.

Past issue research¹ at the Center about reporting themes has helped us understand how topics are perceived by journalists and experts: what’s known, what’s missing, and where reporting can make a difference. Now we’re focusing on the interconnection between journalism and impact.

¹ Some of our past research is available online:
[Charting a Course for Stronger Ocean Storytelling](#);
[Climate Change and Labor: The Media Landscape](#);
[From Hype to Reality: Demystifying AI Through Baseline Research](#)

Photo credit: Iqbal Lubis/Bollo.id



THE PULITZER CENTER LAUNCHED A GLOBAL SURVEY TO LEARN HOW JOURNALISTS AND NEWSROOMS APPROACH IMPACT:

how widespread this work is, what impact design looks like in practice, and where structural barriers exist. The survey, which received 273 responses from 51 countries across every region of the world, helped to identify what's already working, remaining challenges, and what support would be most valuable.

The analysis reveals a consistent pattern across regions: **Journalists strongly adhere to impact as an aspiration**, but struggle to integrate it systematically into editorial workflows and measurement practices.

THERE IS NO ATTITUDINAL GAP.
**THE PROBLEM IS
STRUCTURAL.**

Journalists believe that journalism has a broader role beyond informing the public: holding power to account, helping people make decisions, inspiring action, and facilitating change. They engage in impact-oriented activities even if only partially equipped to carry them out. But they lack the systems to support their vision and will. The roles, frameworks, and measurement tools that can sustain impact work are significantly absent across newsrooms and among journalists.

These and more detailed findings can be useful to many: funders, newsroom leaders, media specialists, academics, editors, journalists, and impact practitioners. We hope that this report contributes to the conversations on the impact of journalism with more evidence-based knowledge. The findings can help challenge assumptions and add clarity about what journalists believe and their current approaches. Their answers are a best guide to addressing the existing constraints, which are formidable, and also building on top of the identified strengths and opportunities, which are promising.

METHODOLOGY

Our global survey on how journalists view and put impact into practice combined closed-ended and open-ended questions to capture quantitative trends and qualitative insights. The questionnaire explored current approaches, organizational capacity, impact measurement practices, attitudes toward impact-oriented journalism, and perceived opportunities and risks associated with this work.

To support a more consistent interpretation of key concepts across respondents, **the survey explicitly distinguished between reach, engagement, and impact.**

CONCEPT	DEFINITION	EXAMPLES
REACH	QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS OF VISIBILITY AND DISTRIBUTION	• Views; • Impressions; • Readership; • Geographical spread.
ENGAGEMENT	AUDIENCE INTERACTION AND PARTICIPATION	• Comments; • Social media shares and reactions; • Time spent on articles; • attendance at events.
IMPACT	QUALITATIVE CHANGES JOURNALISM MAY CONTRIBUTE TO	• Increased awareness; • Narrative reframing; • Accountability; • Community organizing; • Behavioral shifts; • Policy reform.

These definitions were included throughout the questionnaire to encourage a shared understanding of terms that are often used interchangeably in journalism practice.



The survey reached
273 JOURNALISTS
ACROSS 51 COUNTRIES

**SPREAD THROUGH LATIN AMERICA, ASIA,
AFRICA, EUROPE, AND NORTH AMERICA.**

Respondents included newsroom staff —senior leaders, reporters, engagement and audience editors—and freelance journalists.



The analysis draws primarily on the statistical patterns that emerge from the closed-ended questions and the qualitative interpretation of written responses. Closed-ended questions enabled drawing comparisons between newsrooms and freelancers, geographic regions, and different forms of impact practice.

Open-ended responses shed more light about implementation and helped identify conceptual gaps or areas of confusion. Rather than aiming to produce a conclusive map of the state of impact, the survey was designed as an exploratory effort to surface patterns, tensions, and opportunities to inform conversations around impact in journalism and future support.



The answers to the survey that support this report came primarily through the Pulitzer Center's network, which adds the possibility that respondents skew more impact-oriented than a broader journalist sample.

The responses have a strong Latin American skew, with the region accounting for more than half of all respondents. As a result, some findings may reflect regional norms and trends that are more established than in other contexts. Also, this limits cross-regional comparisons and demands caution when reading the analysis. North America, Asia, and Europe have samples small enough that a handful of responses can shift a percentage meaningfully.

Close to half of newsroom staff that completed the survey are part of teams with 10 or fewer people. Therefore, a good portion of the staff responses tell more about the reality of outlets with rather limited resources and capacity.

The survey did not capture variables such as a for-profit versus nonprofit status, beat, or years of experience, which are worth exploring in a follow-up survey.

As with any survey based primarily on closed-ended questions, the findings should be interpreted with caution. Preformatted answers facilitate quantification and comparison across respondents but may flatten complexity. Even though key concepts such as reach, engagement, and impact were defined, participants may still understand them differently or select answers that reflect aspirations rather than common practices. The open-ended questions help to mitigate these limitations by providing additional context. They also helped identify ambiguities in how respondents understand and approach impact.

LIMITATIONS



KEY FINDINGS AND EMERGING TRENDS



Photo credit: ANTARA FOTO/FB Anggoro

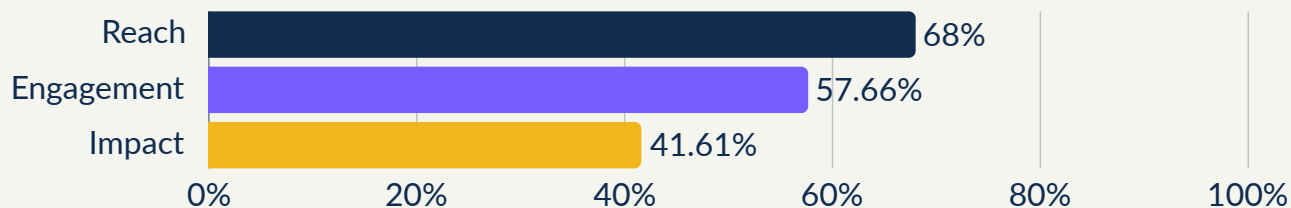
1. REACH AND ENGAGEMENT REMAIN THE DOMINANT MEASURES OF VALUE

Impact is the least embedded value metric in newsrooms and among freelance journalists. In the survey, 68% of staff respondents report always measuring reach, more than half (57.66%) always measure engagement, whereas fewer than half (41.61%) report tracking impact. While the latter still represents a significant proportion, there is a clear hierarchy where quantitative metrics sit atop qualitative assessments of change. It is also worth noting that engagement is easily conflated with reach rather than actual audience interaction.

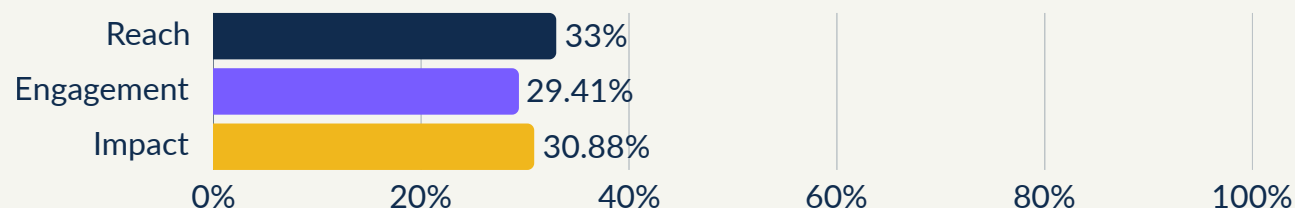
This reflects the imprint of an **attention-driven information ecosystem, where visibility has long been equated with relevance and revenue** through advertising, subscriptions, and platform performance.

The same pattern emerges among freelance journalists, but at substantially lower levels than newsroom staff. Around a third report always tracking reach (33%), engagement (29.41%), and impact (30.88%). This suggests several constraints, including limited access to performance data, less institutional support, and weaker incentives to monitor outcomes beyond publication. It may also point to the nature of freelance work itself, where the relationship with a story often ends once it is commissioned and published.

Percentage of staff respondents who always measure each metric



Percentage of freelance respondents who always measure each metric



2. IMPACT MEASUREMENT CAPACITY IS LARGELY LIMITED

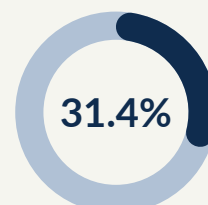
Roughly half of the respondents who track impact checked increased awareness as the most commonly measured outcome. This equates with the fact that awareness is relatively easier to capture through traditional engagement metrics, such as views, clicks, or comments. **It also reflects the difficulty of establishing causal links between reporting and broader outcomes, which are often indirect and difficult to attribute to a single story.**

Both newsroom staff and freelancers checked agenda setting, mentions, and narrative reframing as other common measures of impact. Systemic forms of impact—such as policy reform—are reported less frequently overall.

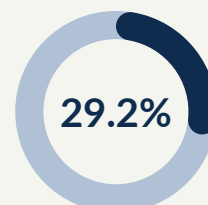
However, newsrooms appear more likely to document these outcomes than freelancers (41.61% newsrooms versus 30.88% freelancers). Again, this gap may reflect a structural difference: The relationship between freelance journalists and outlets often ends once a story is released, making it more difficult to track shifts that result directly or indirectly from reporting.

Awards as a type of impact also reveal an interesting contrast. Newsroom staff report measuring them at more than double the rate of freelancers (31.39% versus 13.97%). This disparity is probably due to differences in capacity, as newsrooms are often better positioned to compete for awards and may pursue them more strategically as part of fundraising and reputation-building efforts.

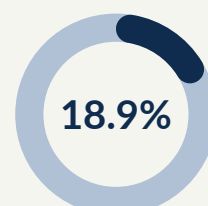
Percentage of newsrooms that have dedicated staff formally working on impact



No



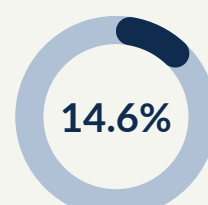
Yes, dedicated role/team



Yes, part of another role



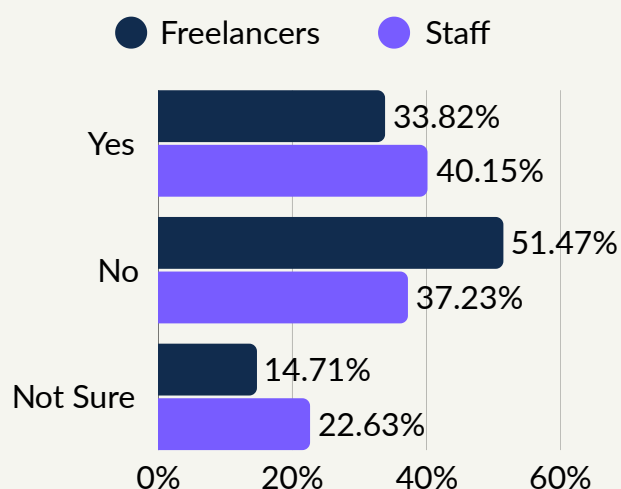
Yes, part of engagement role/team



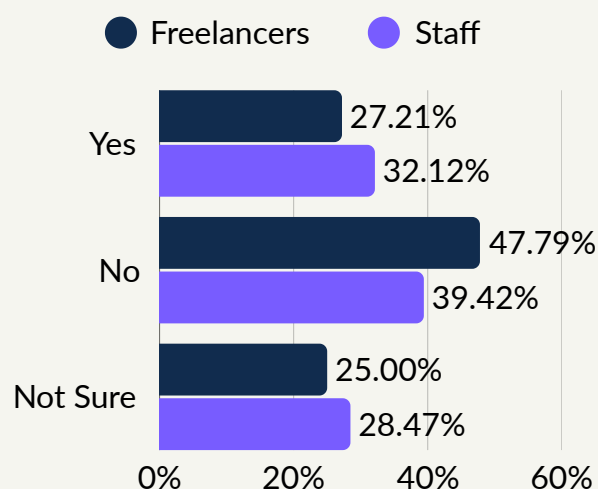
Not sure

3. IMPACT REMAINS WEAKLY INSTITUTIONALIZED

Percentages of freelance reporters and staff that have a method to measure impact



Percentages of freelance reporters and staff that have an impact design framework or guideline



Current approaches to reach, engagement, and impact reflect how newsrooms allocate resources. **Engagement is significantly more institutionalized than impact: More than three-quarters of newsrooms report having staff dedicated to reach and audience engagement**, often through clearly defined roles across newsroom sizes.

By contrast, just over half report having staff working on impact, and a smaller proportion have dedicated teams. Many small and mid-sized newsrooms (1–25 staff) report having no impact staff at all.

The survey also suggests that impact work is not yet systematized. **The use of tools or frameworks to plan for impact is low:** Only 32% of staff and 27% of freelancers report having a framework when working on the impact potential of a story. Freelancers are also more likely to report having no guidelines at all.

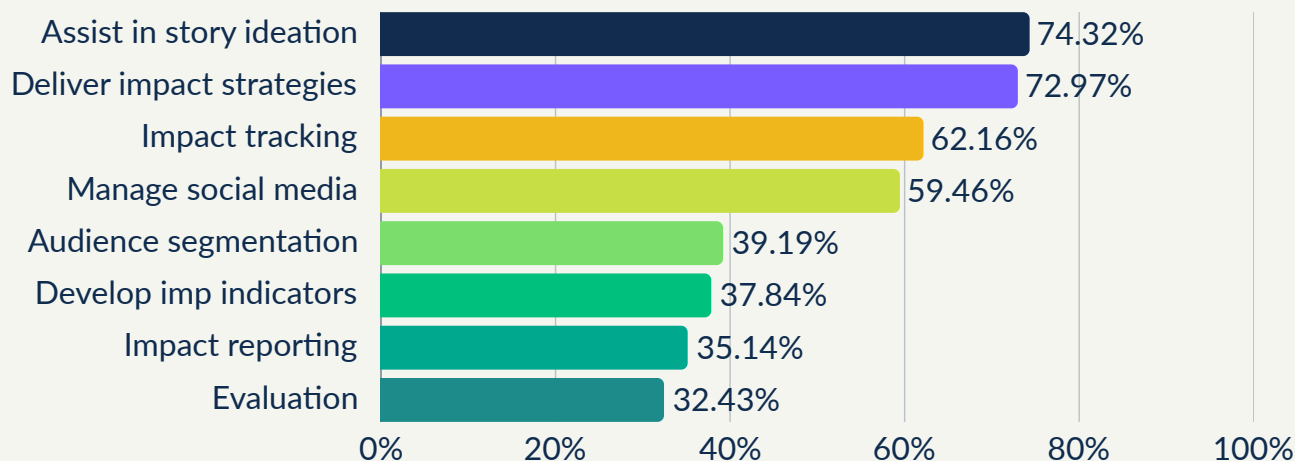
A similar pattern appears in impact measurement. **Less than half of respondents report using impact indicators or trackers**, though adoption is somewhat higher among newsrooms (40.15%) than among freelancers (33.82%). The implication is that **the outcomes of a large part of the work remain effectively invisible**. The value beyond traditional metrics is largely untracked and undocumented.

These findings point to a systemic misalignment: While a good number of journalists and outlets are beginning to integrate impact into their editorial workflows, the roles and tools needed for this work remain underdeveloped.

Freelance journalists and newsrooms, especially small to mid-size, could benefit from support that helps them nurture and structure their impact efforts.

4. CORE AND STRATEGIC IMPACT RESPONSIBILITIES ARE MISSING

Responsibilities of newsroom staff involved in impact work



Within newsrooms that do have staff dedicated to impact work, certain functions are well established, particularly those tied to the early stages of reporting and publication cycles. The most commonly reported responsibilities include supporting story ideation and designing impact strategies.

Further down the production cycle, impact work appears to lose consistency. **More strategic functions—such as developing impact indicators, reporting outcomes to funders and audiences, and conducting evaluations—are less common.** These responsibilities are critical to embedding impact within workflows. They provide shared language and benchmarks that support implementation, enable iteration, and facilitate more systematic documentation of outcomes. They also strengthen accountability and transparency toward funders, partners, and audiences. Yet, the responses show that these post-publication tasks are rather rare.

Another revealing finding is that slightly over half of impact staff also manage social media responsibilities (54.96%). This reflects both the continued prioritization of reach and engagement metrics and the tendency for impact-related work to be merged with adjacent distribution functions. While this integration is not undesirable, it may also dilute the focus of work.

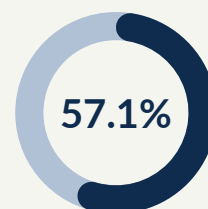
5. AUDIENCE RESEARCH REMAINS UNDERDEVELOPED

Impact work appears insufficiently informed by audience intelligence. Proof of this is that within newsrooms with dedicated impact staff, fewer respondents checked audience segmentation (39.19%) and mapping stakeholders (37.84%) as their key responsibilities. Also, when asked how they capture or document the impact of their work, relational methods such as conversations with stakeholders (38.1%) and online surveys (28.57%) rank particularly lower among newsroom staff.

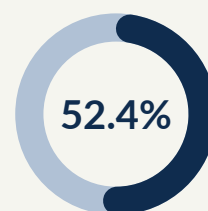
Some news organizations work proactively to earn audience loyalty, but **there is little evidence of structured strategies for listening to, understanding, and studying these audiences**—identifying what they seek, where they seek it, and how that aligns (or fails to align) with what outlets offer.

At the same time, there is an important conceptual shift in the idea of what an audience is. The public is no longer seen solely as consumers, readers or a mass audience, although these terms still show up in the responses. Increasingly, audiences are understood as distinct stakeholder groups such as policymakers, affected communities, funders, educators, and others.

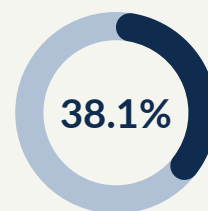
How newsrooms capture indicators of impact



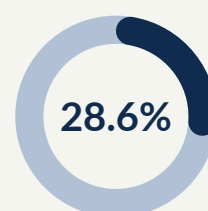
Media monitoring



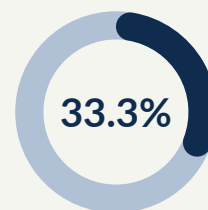
Comment analysis



Conversations with stakeholders



Online surveys



Relevant group chats

6. RECEPTIVENESS TO IMPACT-DRIVEN JOURNALISM IS STRONG, BUT JOURNALISTS LACK SUPPORT SYSTEMS TO IMPLEMENT IT

The main gap in impact practice is not intention or planning—it is structural capacity. This is one of the clearest findings of the survey. Respondents across regions show strong comfort levels toward journalism that seeks to engage audiences more actively and facilitate change. However, these attitudes are not matched by equally robust systems, frameworks, or resources to implement impact work consistently.

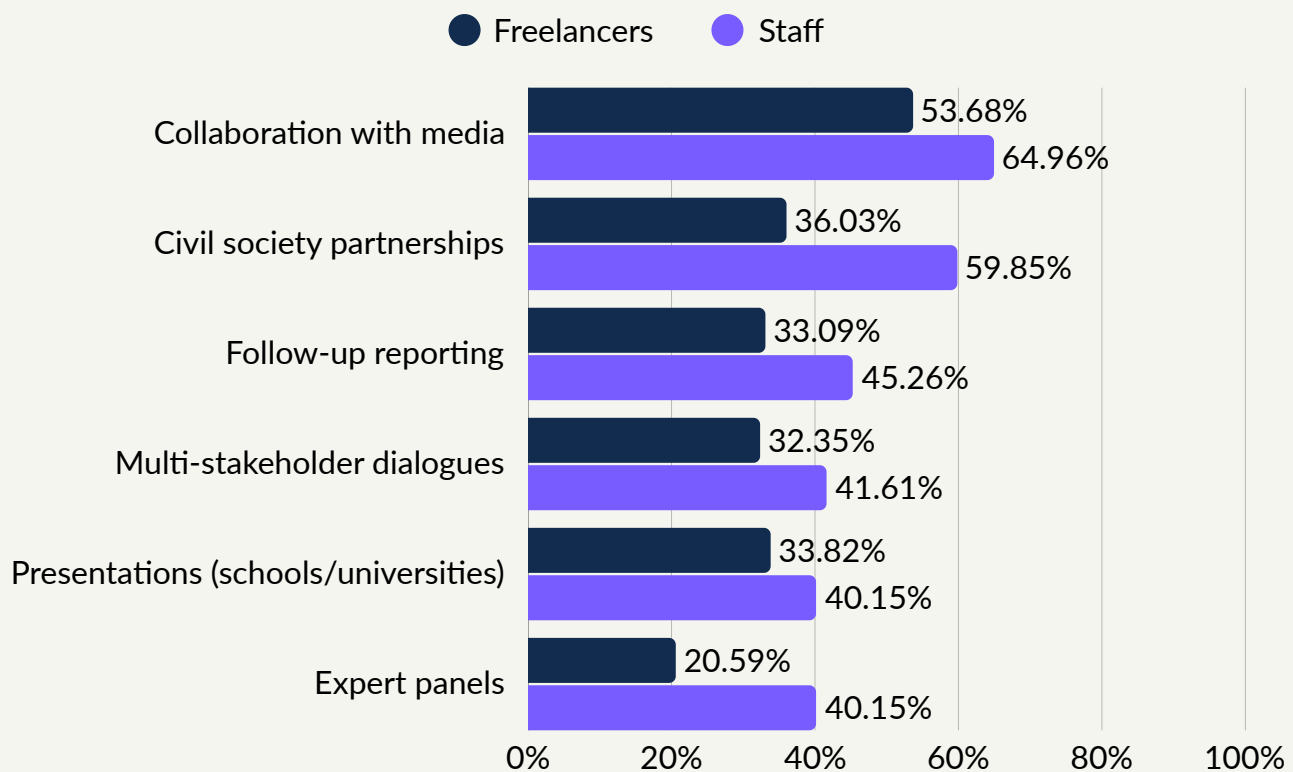
91.2% of respondents say they plan at least one substantive impact-oriented action, while 54.6% take action without having a method.

A majority of freelancers and newsroom staff report considering the potential impact of stories early in the editorial process, particularly during pitching and editorial planning (~72% at the pitch stage and ~55% at editorial planning). **Respondents also express high levels of comfort with broader understandings of journalism’s role beyond informing the public**, including holding power to account, helping people make decisions, and inspiring action. Many already engage in impact-oriented practices—such as partnerships with civil society organizations, collaborations with other media outlets, and educational presentations—even if they do not formally describe these efforts as impact work.

Yet the survey consistently reveals challenges when it comes to implementation. While journalists often identify societal changes they hope to contribute to, fewer report having the resources to guide and promote this work over time. Only 36% of freelancers who document impact share their findings publicly—and 42% of them do not share at all—compared to 60% of staff who do. Most are using functional tools such as Google Docs or spreadsheets to store evidence of impact, which are poorly designed for longitudinal tracking or accountability.

This picture shows that what is missing is not the will to embrace this approach, but the infrastructure needed to sustain impact-oriented practices.

Impact-oriented activities reported by freelancers and newsroom staff



Structural constraints emerge as the most significant barriers to implementation. Freelancers and newsrooms rank lack of funding among the greatest challenges. They also point to lack of time as a primary limitation. Freelancers also highlight lack of leadership support, while staff checked lack of know-how as a major constraint. Together, these findings point to a broader mismatch between the strong adherence to impact-oriented journalism and the limited organizational capacity available to support it.

7. JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATE IMPACT WORK WITH GREATER AUDIENCE TRUST AND RELEVANCE

Even though respondents checked being perceived as advocacy as the primary risk associated with impact work, these concerns clearly coexist with broader receptiveness to impact practice.

The challenge to address these concerns, therefore, is more operational and cultural. Clearer boundaries, shared language, and stronger professional guidelines are required.

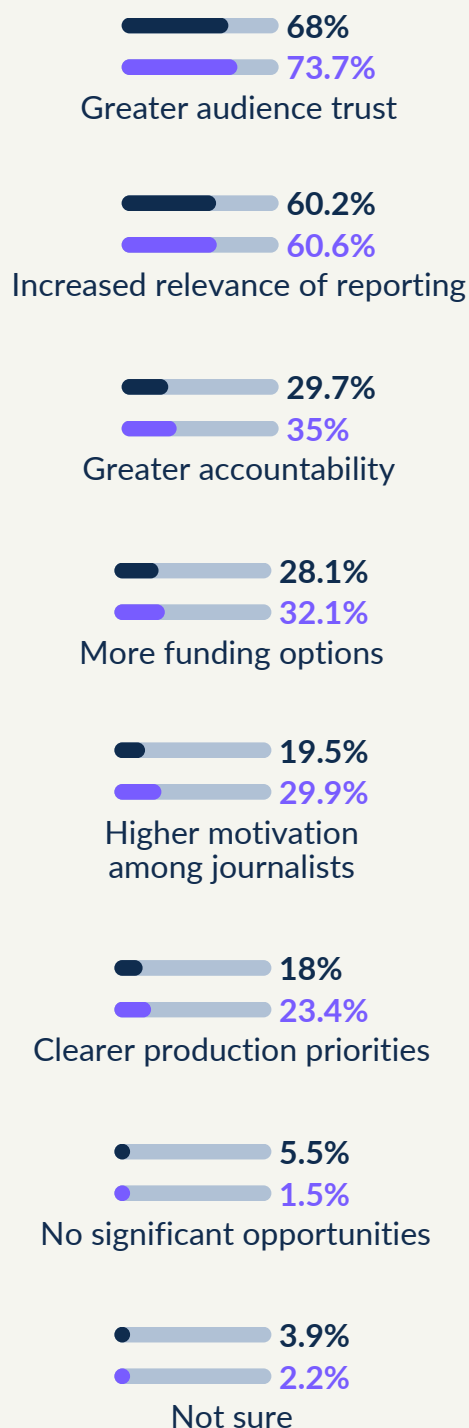
A majority of respondents associate impact-oriented journalism with greater audience trust and increased relevance of reporting. This aligns with broader industry findings and **reflects a growing recognition that the value of journalism must be articulated beyond traditional metrics.**

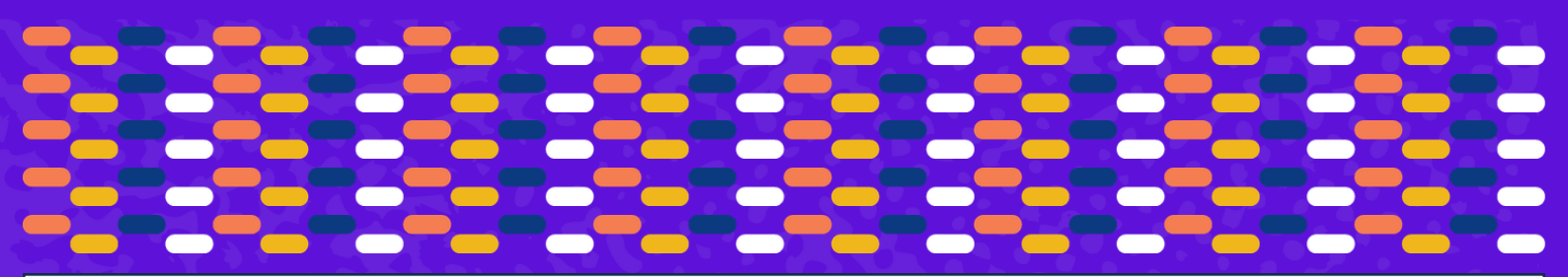
At the same time, fewer respondents associate impact approaches with more concrete or practical outcomes, such as increased funding opportunities or clearer production priorities. This suggests that **impact is still primarily valued for its effects on audiences, rather than as a key driver of sustainability or editorial decision-making.**

These perceptions may evolve as newsrooms and freelance journalists gain access to more knowledge, tools, and other resources that demonstrate how impact work can translate into concrete benefits. Strengthening these connections will be key to building momentum and integrating impact thinking more broadly in the field.

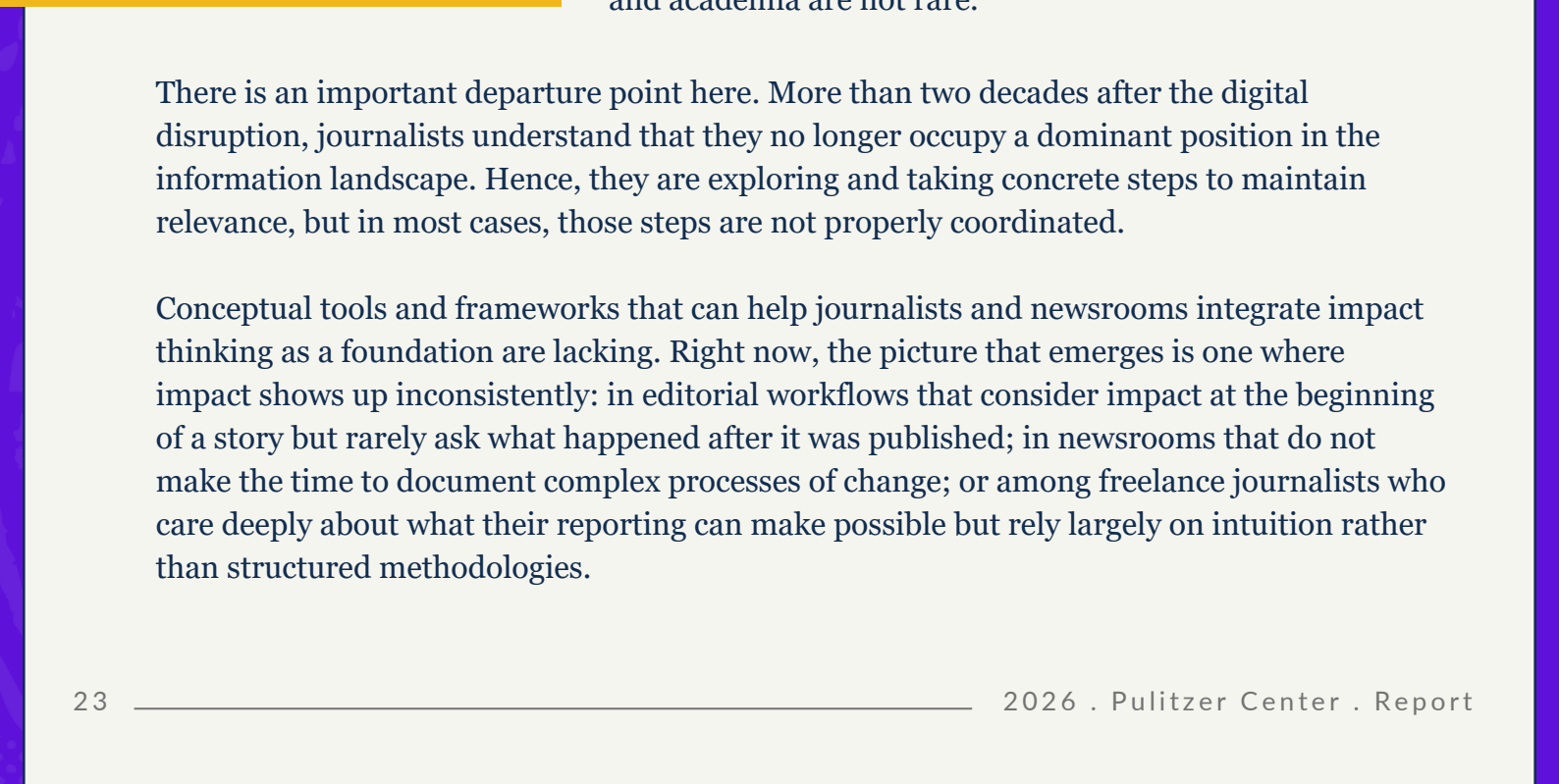
Perceived opportunities of impact-oriented journalism

● Freelancers ● Staff





CON CLU SIONS



The picture of impact in journalism that emerges from this global survey is one that signals motion. Across geographies, newsroom sizes, and professional roles, journalists are already embracing practices that extend beyond the traditional boundaries of news production. They also show strong receptiveness to the idea that journalism should do more than inform. The gap, therefore, is not in intent. It is in the conditions needed to make this approach effective.

The survey also shows that journalists are becoming more familiar with qualitative forms of impact as meaningful indicators of journalistic value. Reach and engagement remain key, but they are no longer enough on their own.

Respondents identify outcomes such as narrative reframing, behavior shifts, and policy reform as indicators of success. This reflects a growing recognition that the value of journalism cannot be explained solely in terms of page views or clicks.

The findings also point to an important shift in how journalists relate with the public. Civil society partnerships, multi-stakeholder dialogues, and engagement with schools and academia are not rare.

There is an important departure point here. More than two decades after the digital disruption, journalists understand that they no longer occupy a dominant position in the information landscape. Hence, they are exploring and taking concrete steps to maintain relevance, but in most cases, those steps are not properly coordinated.

Conceptual tools and frameworks that can help journalists and newsrooms integrate impact thinking as a foundation are lacking. Right now, the picture that emerges is one where impact shows up inconsistently: in editorial workflows that consider impact at the beginning of a story but rarely ask what happened after it was published; in newsrooms that do not make the time to document complex processes of change; or among freelance journalists who care deeply about what their reporting can make possible but rely largely on intuition rather than structured methodologies.

The implications of these findings are significant and promising. For funders, the survey reveals an investment opportunity in the infrastructure that can make journalism impactful and ensure it stands out in an age of endless synthetic content: methodologies, measurement systems, learning tools and roles, to name a few.

For newsroom leaders, the survey suggests a need to rethink workflows and make space to build impact not only as an extra task, but as culture.

For media support organizations, the results indicate that journalists and newsrooms require capacity training, guidelines, communities of practice, and more.

Journalism touches people's lives in countless ways. The question has never been whether journalism can achieve impact. The question is whether the support needed so that it continues to happen emerges in a radically transformed information landscape.

Learn More About the Pulitzer Center's Impact Initiative



IMPACT JOURNALISM



Pulitzer Center
twenty years of impact

Photo credit: Kate Jensen