



Association of Alternative Newsmedia

AAN DIVERSITY AND DEMOGRAPHICS SURVEY 2015-07-14

Methodology

The survey is a follow-up on the last AAN Diversity and Demographics Survey, which was conducted in 2011-2012. The 2015 survey was conducted via SurveyMonkey.com between June 1 and July 3, 2015. Of 113 member publications, 37 responded (32.7 percent). That's down from 38 percent (49 responses among 130 members) in 2011-2012. However, the previous survey was active for more than four months, compared to one month and two days for the 2015 one.

The survey results were compiled and analyzed by Jimmy Boegle, of the *Coachella Valley Independent*, who is the head of AAN's Diversity Advisory Committee. Boegle also led the 2011-2012 survey.

Takeaways

AAN members continue to do well with diversity when it comes to having women and members of the LGBT community in the fold. However, AAN publications continue to be predominantly white, and if anything, are getting whiter: Respondents reported that just 12.6 percent of employees are people of color. That's down from 14 percent in 2011-2012.

Respondents noted that it's harder than ever to find, and then retain, employees who are people of color. On a heartening note, survey-takers say that diversity is important to them: Respondents rated the importance of diversifying their staffs an average of 7.6 on a 10-point scale, and rated the importance of diversifying readership as 8 on a 10-point scale.

Respondents had multiple suggestions on how AAN can help its members diversify, including some things AAN already has enacted (such as a Best Practices list) and some things AAN used to do but does not anymore (diversity internships). Other suggestions included collaborating more with organizations for journalists of color; funding stories that include diverse people and that would interest a diverse audience; and continuing to make issues of diversity a constant part of the "conversation."

Survey Results: People of Color

The 37 respondents reported a total of 906.5 employees (an average of 24.5 per publication), and said that 114 of those employees (an average of 3.1 per publication), or 12.6 percent, were people of color. This is down from 14 percent in the 2011-2012 survey.

About 54 percent of these 114 employees work on the business side, with 46 percent on the editorial/creative side. Eight of the 37 responding papers reported no people of color on staff.

As for management positions: 36 respondents reported 194 management positions, 25 of which were filled by people of color—just 12.9 percent. Twenty-three of the 36 respondents reported no people of color among their management ranks.



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Regarding freelancers: We asked respondents to estimate the percentage of their freelance contributors who are people of color. (Because a large number of respondents in 2011-2012 complained about the length and complexity of the survey, we did not ask for raw numbers here; we simply asked for a percentage from each paper, and then averaged it out.) Among the 27 respondents who properly answered the question, the average was 16.3 percent.

LGBT people

While AAN papers are having a rough time attracting people of color, they're having a much easier time attracting openly LGBT employees: 92 of the 906.5 employees among respondents are openly LGBT, or 10.1 percent. This is up from 8.3 percent in the 2011-2012 survey.

Respondents said 55 percent of openly LGBT employees work on the editorial/creative side, with 45 percent working on the business side. Just six of 37 responding papers reported having no openly LGBT employees.

As for management positions: 36 respondents reported that 27 of 194 managers, or 13.9 percent, are openly LGBT.

Regarding freelancers: The 23 respondents who properly answered the question have an average of 13.7 percent of freelancers who are openly LGBT.

Women

AAN publications continue to do a good job of attracting female employees. 463 of the 906.5 employees at responding papers, or 51.1 percent, are women. This is up from 48 percent in the 2011-2012 survey.

Respondents reported that 42.7 of the female employees are on the creative/editorial side, with 57.3 percent on the business side.

Regarding management positions, 96 of the 194 managers at responding publications, or 49.5 percent, are female.

When it comes to freelancers, 31 respondents reported that average of 51.7 percent of freelancers are female.

Reader Demographics

In an effort to get at least a rough sense of who is reading AAN member publications, we asked respondents to share demographic data on their readerships, if they have such data; the majority did not answer the question. Among those that did answer, the sources for the data included Quantcast, The Media Audit, Scarborough Research, a readership study, the Census (with the presumption that readership mirrored the area), a "wiki for local area" and even "my guess."

In other words ... the data we received in answer to this query may not be very helpful or accurate. Therefore, take the findings here with a HUGE grain of salt:

- Fifteen respondents reported an average Caucasian readership of 66.9 percent.
- Fourteen respondents reported an average African-American readership of 19.7 percent.



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- Thirteen respondents reported an average Asian readership of 4.1 percent.
 - Fourteen respondents reported an average Hispanic readership of 10.3 percent.
 - 11 respondents reported an average “other” readership of 3.1 percent.
- Adding these together, we get a total of 104.1 percent. Perhaps this is due in part to the fact that some surveys don’t separate “Caucasian” and “Hispanic,” as one survey participant pointed out. However, more likely, this total is due to the unreliable, all-over-the-map nature of the data.

Questions on AAN Feelings and Other Input

On a scale of 1-10, how important is diversifying your staff to you?

The 37 respondents gave an average answer of 7.6 (with 10 being of utmost importance, and 1 being not important). The breakdown by number:

- 10: 5 publications
- 9: 7 publications
- 8: 11 publications
- 7: 6 publications
- 6: 3 publications
- 5: 2 publications
- 4: 2 publications
- 3: None
- 2: None
- 1: 1 publication

On a scale of 1-10, how important is diversifying your readership to you?

The 37 respondents gave an average answer of 8 (with 10 being of utmost importance, and 1 being not important). The breakdown by number:

- 10: 9 publications
- 9: 5 publications
- 8: 11 publications
- 7: 5 publications
- 6: 4 publications
- 5: 1 publications
- 4: 2 publications
- 3: None
- 2: None
- 1: None

Do you make it a priority to include people of color in your coverage? Do you think you do a good job? Are there areas in which you want to improve? Explain.

Most of the 35 respondents said they do make including people of color a priority. A couple respondents noted that priorities and successes change as staff makeup changes. (A gay staffer tends to cover LGBT issues more; an African-



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American staffer tends to include more African-American viewpoints, etc.) A few respondents noted that they are in un-diverse communities, which presents a problem. One respondent noted: “Yes; (we do) reasonably good job, though I wish we didn’t have to remind staff occasionally.”

A skeptic could note that considering AAN’s low percentage of staffers who are people of color, it’s possible that the respondents may be overestimating how they’re doing.

Do you make it a priority to include openly LGBT folks in your coverage? Do you think you do a good job? Are there areas in which you want to improve? Explain.

Almost all of the 34 respondents said they do make it a priority, and that they do a good job’ considering the strong LGBT-employee percentages AAN publications report, there’s no reason to doubt this is the case. However, a few respondents did note that they could do better, and at least one respondent noted that this is becoming less of the concern as the LGBT community gets “mainstreamed.”

Do you make it a priority to include women in your coverage? Do you think you do a good job? Are there areas in which you want to improve? Explain.

The 34 respondents almost universally said they make it a priority and that they do a good job. However, at least respondent gave an answer that shows that there are places where the struggle continues: “We don’t discuss this as much as we discuss people of color and LGBT issues. But perhaps we should. We have a conservative corporate office, and some of our staffers have been chided for open office discussion on feminism.”

Do you make an effort to reach out to people of color when hiring new staff? If so, how?

A narrow majority of the 35 respondents said they did. More than a few respondents made comments to the effect that they either “reach out to everyone” or that they “look to the best candidates regardless of race.” A handful of respondents bemoaned the fact that all they get are white applicants. At least a couple respondents said they wanted to look to other AAN members on how to do this better.

Do you make an effort to reach out to openly LGBT folks when hiring new staff? If so, how?

More than half of the 34 respondents said they do NOT make an effort to reach out to openly LGBT people. Some said there is no need, as LGBT candidates come to them; others said they specifically do NOT reach out because it’s not appropriate to ask candidates about sexual orientation.

Do you make an effort to reach out to women when hiring new staff? If so, how?



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Again, the majority of the respondents said they don't reach out to women, as there's no specific need to do so.

On a scale of 1-10, how important should diversity be for AAN as an organization?

The 37 respondents gave an average answer of 8.1 (with 10 being of utmost importance, and 1 being not important). The breakdown by number:

- 10: 9 publications
- 9: 8 publications
- 8: 7 publications
- 7: 8 publications
- 6: 1 publications
- 5: 3 publications
- 4: 1 publications
- 3: None
- 2: None
- 1: None

What's your biggest challenge when it comes to diversifying your staff and/or readership?

For this question, since the individual answers are revealing, here are all responses (edited slightly for style):

- Remaining vigilant and working to develop talent in a number of different departments.
- This is a very Anglo community and there simply isn't a great deal of diversity. Our staff reflects the community.
- We don't have the relationships in the diverse communities that raise us to the level of "that would be an awesome job opportunity" when someone hears about it, or gets someone excited about spreading the word.
- Covering parts of community, like the black community, that don't read us enough.
- Small staff, not much turnover, homogenous demographics/rural area. Frankly, the main issue with diversity in this area involves social class, rather than race, gender or sexual orientation. A majority of the people in this area are poor, working class, predominately white.
- Resources—we only have six edit staffers and a very tight freelance budget. It would be great to be able to afford more freelancers, more staffers, but it's pretty rare that we have openings.
- We live in a very white city, and the majority of people who submit work to us—or apply for jobs—are white guys.
- Lack of diversity in (our city).
- (Our city) has a large majority white population. I think we do a pretty good job of spreading the work among readers who are interested in the paper,



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but it's difficult to reach into some minority communities because we don't do outside marketing.

- Applicant pool.
- (Our city) is the whitest medium-sized city in America.
- Our staff is pretty diverse, with the exception of LGBT. I feel like we could/should have more.
- Lack of qualified applicants.
- Hiring more staff. Readership isn't too bad.
- Availability. We're a very small, fairly non-diverse staff and I fear at times we're limited to our own experiences or interests, and that doesn't always accurately reflect our diverse region.
- Having more people of color in our community in the first place, and in particular individuals who meet the employment requirements of our company. It's a great goal to find and train more reporters of color, and to have reporters on staff who can cover diverse communities. But as an organization, AAN should be aware that not all the member papers are located in diverse places.
- The relative lack of diversity in the local community is a real challenge. We also lack Spanish-speakers in our editorial department.
- We try to offer alternative perspectives to mainstream media. Minority interest to those perspectives is sometimes limited.
- We have a small staff and few openings for new hires. There's a black female reporter available I would like to hire but don't have an opening now.
- Outreach to minority populations.
- Our challenge is not so much because our circ. area is diverse, racially and socio economically.
- We pay so poorly that minorities can earn more at other publications.
- We hire so infrequently, it's hard to have continuity with different organizations to help us in the hiring process.
- (Our city) itself. Not the most diverse city. Statewide, we're behind in a variety of ways.
- Getting staff to recognize that they need to cover diverse communities regularly, and making it part of our ongoing conversations.
- Reaching the Hispanic community since there is a language barrier.
- The cost of reaching this audience. Many communities of color are not in zones where there is a strong advertiser base; therefore it's costly to justify circulation in these areas. We still do circulate, but it's difficult to do so with any substantial penetration. Also, these areas tend to be rougher on news racks with graffiti and damage, which also makes it more costly to maintain distribution in that area. Further, there are less high-traffic retailers in these financially distressed regions, making it difficult to find businesses willing to carry the paper where papers will also be picked up in significant enough quantity to justify paying for the drop.



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- Keeping good African-American journalists. They are in demand and often move on to higher salaried jobs after a couple of years.
- Staff: finding applicants.
- Resources. We struggle to find good people, period, in this market.
- Getting applications from quality candidates of color.
- The lack of available talent for hiring. Diversifying readership would require more investment than we can afford right now.

How could/should AAN help papers increase diversity and/or its readership?

Here are all responses (edited slightly for style), not counting the responses that were “I don’t know” or the equivalent:

- Use internships and fellowships to develop talent with younger staffers; diversify editorial coverage and build fans within a number of different ethnic communities so you can draw on them for staff; recruit outside the paper and in person; distribute everywhere; diversify covers and encourage advertisers to diversify their ad photos.
- A collaborative story or issue on race worked on by several different alts.
- Best practices.
- Minority fellowships—foundation help.
- Continuing to survey (and shame) us, and continuing to stress diversity during conferences and programs.
- I don't know—we tried the diversity scholarships, which were a fab idea. But implementing them was a bit awkward, because we had to take on interns and have an intern ready to roll and be willing to work, whether they got the scholarship or not. Some of the interns we talked to found it odd to be asked to do an internship with a maybe/maybe not stipend attached. If we could award the scholarships to a publication, rather than an intern, then ask the publication to recruit a qualified candidate, it might have been easier to make it work ...
- Partnerships with journalists of color organizations. Continued push for coverage of non-white communities. Continued discussion of diversity issues. Scholarships for journalists of color.
- Fund some stories that include diverse people and issues that diverse people are interested in, and make them available to member papers. A culture of police violence against people of color and mistreatment of the LGBT community is one issue that could be picked up across the country, but localized.
- I think the best thing to do would be to up the diversity in readership, and then diverse people would want to work for you. That said, start with the editorial side. Some coaching could happen about how to report on certain subjects that some writers may not be well-versed in.
- Collaborations with ethnic media.



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- Encourage more diverse papers to join the organization.
- Covering relevant issues more frequently and in depth.
- I think the survey and diversity scholarships are a good start. Perhaps a mentoring program and more diversity related content at the conference.
- I'd like to hear ideas, examples and best practices for diversifying readership. Something I haven't thought much about.
- AAN papers, like most mainstream papers, are driven by the market. Most AAN papers thrive in affluent college towns where, unfortunately, the population may not be so diverse. Working-class neighborhoods are on the decline, along with the blue-collar jobs, so a naturally-diverse readership is in communities less viable for newspapers/mags to do business in. Certainly, AAN papers can promote coverage of issues that concern minority communities whether the communities are identified along racial, sexual orientation, gender, class lines, etc.
- It really depends from paper to paper and market to market. I don't think it's AAN's responsibility.
- 1. Hires. 2. Making it part of regular conversation and not something that should be avoided. 3. Looking at diversity as more than just black and white.
- This survey is a needed step toward assessing where we and other AAN papers stand on the topic, and we're looking forward to seeing the results.
- We sponsor several young African-American professional groups. We have a partnership with the local public radio station that features our world music writer. We sponsor pride and a ton of other events to help us stay connected to those communities. Perhaps AAN could look at sponsorships or an overall awareness campaign about the value of free press and our roles in our communities. Altweeklies are often the champions for minorities in our communities. They turn to us for social justice!
- Grants for writers, issues, and distribution.
- Sharing successful hiring-outreach stories; helping us get the alt-media story to j-schools—and maybe acting as a clearing house/go-between for j-schools and AAN members.
- Make sure diversity has a voice on the board beyond Tiffany and Jason. They have enough on their plates. Everything will go from there ...
- Connecting papers with resources that can help them reach quality candidates.