



AAN DIVERSITY AND DEMOGRAPHICS SURVEY

Methodology

This survey—written by the AAN Diversity Committee, with the bulk of the work done by Kathleen Richards, of the East Bay Express—was conducted via SurveyMonkey.com between Oct. 5, 2011, and Feb. 15, 2012. Of 130 member publications, 49 responded, or 38 percent of members

Getting people to respond to the survey was a challenge. At first, a link to the survey was sent to an email list of publishers by the AAN office—and that effort garnered just 11 responses. The rest were gathered by sending emails to various AAN lists; by sending emails to specific publishers and editors; and in-person harassment at various AAN events.

Some respondents complained about the length and the varied information asked about in the survey. Also, we learned while compiling the results that some questions could have been posed in a better way. For example, we asked a series of questions about people of color, women and LGBT folks in management—yet forgot to also ask respondents the total number of people in management in their publications, to use as a baseline. Also, the fact that some individual questions required multiple answers caused some problems, both for respondents and in the analysis process.

The survey results were compiled and analyzed by Jimmy Boegle, of the Tucson Weekly, who is also the chair of the Diversity Committee.

Takeaways

The good news: AAN members seem to, as a whole, be doing well with diversity when it comes to women and the LGBT community, both in terms of hiring and coverage.

However, AAN members have a definite problem when it comes to hiring and retaining people of color. Respondents reported that only 14 percent of employees are people of color. Most respondents recognized a diversity issue here, especially when it comes to diversifying staff, and many publications expressed concerns about finding qualified, diverse applicants, and having the resources in terms of time and money to find and keep diverse applicants.

Most respondents recognize the value and importance of diversity, saying that diversity rated an average of 7 on a scale of 10 in terms of importance. (However, it's worth noting that more than 20 percent of respondents placed diversity as 5 or lower on that scale.)

Interestingly, despite the 14-percent number when it comes to employees of color, the majority of respondents say they have the information, resources and ideas needed to diversify their staff and readership. However—in something of a contradiction—many respondents had great ideas on things AAN can do to help in diversity efforts.

See the final question for those ideas.

SURVEY RESULTS

Total number of staff

The average answer was 24.9 staffers. (Some editors who took the survey—three, perhaps—on behalf of their papers restricted their answers to the newsroom.)

Number of people of color on staff (multiracial people included)

The average was 3.4—or not quite 14 percent of the total staff average. Of 49 respondents, nine said zero.



Number of people of color in each department (editorial, art/production, advertising, marketing/promotions, business, online, IT, circulation)

The bulk of the people of color are in the editorial and advertising departments, with a fair number in circulation and art/production. Raw numbers, with estimates for answers like “several”: The 49 respondents reported 44.5 editorial; 33 art/production; 43 advertising; 5 marketing/promo; 21 business; 7 online; 5 IT; 30 circulation. (The total here is 188.5; interestingly, the total to the previous question was 170. The difference is probably due to people counting some contractors in this question, but not the previous one.)

Number of openly LGBT people on staff

Forty-seven respondents reported 90 openly LGBT people on staff, or an average of 1.9 per respondent. That’s 8.3 percent of the employees reported by these 47 papers. Two papers said N/A or “don’t know.” (One stunningly PC response: “At least four that I know of, but it’s against the law for me to ask, guys. And I don’t. Expect it’s more. Not privy to this info.” The openly gay diversity chair responds: “The question was OPENLY gay for a reason.”) Of 47 respondents, 10 said zero.

Number of openly LGBT people in each department (editorial, art/production, advertising, marketing/promotions, business, online, IT, circulation)

Most LGBT employees are in sales and editorial. While the total was 90 in the question above, the breakdown here adds up to only 74. The respondents reported 20 editorial; 14 art/production; 25 advertising; 1 marketing/promo; 9 business; 2 online; 0 IT; 3 circulation.

Number of women on staff

The 49 publications that responded had an average of 12 women on staff, out of an average of 25 employees—an average of 48 percent of the staff.

Number of women in each department (editorial, art/production, advertising, marketing/promotions, business, online, IT, circulation)

Among the 44 papers that responded to this question, by far, a plurality of women are in the advertising department, with editorial second. The breakdown: editorial 129.5; art/production 87.5; advertising 204; marketing/promotions 18; business 90.5; online 11; IT 3; circulation 34. (This total of 577.5, for some reason, is higher than the total of 538 women reported by the 44 respondents on the question above.)

Number of people of color in management positions. What percentage?

The 48 publications that responded reported 31 people of color in management positions. 28 of them reported 0.

Number of openly LGBT people in management positions. What percentage?

The 44 publications that responded reported 29 openly LGBT people in management positions. 27 of them reported 0.

Number of women in management positions. What percentage?

The answers here were delivered in a variety of ways, making it hard to get a true handle on the numbers. (Some publications put just a number; others put just a percentage; others put both. We erred by not asking how many total managers were at each publication.) Here’s what we do



know: Of the 50 respondents, 20 reported that the number of women in management positions was 50 percent or higher. (Some of the respondents who only put a number down presumably are at 50 percent or above, but are not included here.) Only two respondents said zero—and one of those two reported that he was the only manager at the operation.

Number of people of color regular freelancers. What percentage?

The responses here were all over the map: Of the 49 publications that responded, 8 left the question blank or put down N/A or “don’t know.” One reported: “Way too few.” Just 14 of the 49 publications reported that 20 percent or more of their freelancers were people of color. Six publications reported zero.

Number of openly LGBT regular freelancers. What percentage?

Again, responses were all over the map. Of the 49 publications that responded, 23 acknowledged having openly LGBT freelancers; 7 said they had none; and 19 left the question blank, said N/A or reported that they did not know. Some respondents, again, failed to grasp the concept of “openly.” Someone engaged in missing-the-point grandstanding (“Unknown—we hire the best person for the job, and sexual orientation as well as race or gender are irrelevant”), and another needs to get out more (“I don’t ask, and all the dealings are through email”). One person properly noted that open sexuality is “harder to know than ethnicity.”

Number of female regular freelancers. What percentage?

Of the 49 respondents, 24 reported that females make up half or more of their regular freelancers, while 16 reported numbers below 50 percent. Two respondents just put down numbers and not percentages, and 7 said N/A, don’t know or left the question blank.

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

The 48 respondents to this question gave an average answer of 6.98 (with 10 being of the utmost importance, and 1 being not important). The breakdown by number:

- 10—8 publications
- 9—2 publications
- 8—9 publications
- 7—11 publications
- 6—6 publications
- 5—9 publications
- 4—1 publication
- 3—none
- 2—1 publication
- 1—1 publication

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

The 48 respondents to this question gave an average answer of 7.25 (with 10 being of the utmost importance, and 1 being not important). The breakdown by number:

- 10—6 publications
- 9—7 publications
- 8—11 publications
- 7—10 publications
- 6—4 publications
- 5—6 publications



- 4—2 publications
- 3—1 publication
- 2—1 publication
- 1—none

Looking at your issues in the past year, how many people of color were featured on the cover? How many openly LGBT folks were featured on the cover? How many women?

While it personally took me about 15 minutes to look over a year’s worth of covers and do a tally—and have an eye-opening experience in the process—this question was too much to bear for many respondents. On a legitimate note, a fair number of respondents said they normally use illustrations and therefore can’t answer the question; others felt the need to include numbers of men and/or white folks to give their answers more context. Those who did answer reported averages of 7.6 covers with people of color; 1.9 covers with openly LGBT folks; and 12 covers with women.

How often do you include people of color in your coverage? (Every week, every other week, every month, once every few months.) How often do you include openly LGBT folks? Women?

The vast majority of the respondents said they include people of color and women in their coverage every week. In fact, everyone who responded properly said they included women each week, and only three respondents said they covered people of color less frequently (one every other week; one monthly; one every few months). Respondents said LGBT coverage was less-frequent; most respondents said weekly, but a substantial number said monthly; with a few saying every other week, and two saying less than once a month. There were also three or four respondents who missed the point, with comments like: “We include people who are relevant to the story.”

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.

While a handful of respondents trotted out lines like, “No. We make it a priority to cover relevant news/music/art/culture, etc.,” the rest of the respondents—with two exceptions I’ll explain shortly—said they do make covering people of color some sort of priority. About half of these respondents think they’re doing a fine job—while about half admitted they could do better. Those two exceptions: Two respondents admitted that they’re doing a poor job at including people of color. One bemoaned the paper’s lack of a distribution footprint in minority areas, while another said: “We do not make it a priority. We do not do a good job. There are areas where we want to improve. We need to devote more attention to our large population of poor people of color.” (Note to these staffers: AAN’s here to help, if we can help.)

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.

The vast majority of the respondents think their LGBT coverage is just fine. Only six respondents conceded they could do better; about 10 respondents said they do NOT make including openly LGBT coverage a priority, yet are doing just fine.

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 vast majority of the respondents said they cover women well; one respondent said the staff may be doing “too good of a job” at their publication. 10 of the 49 respondents said they could do better in some form or another.

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

Of 48 respondents to this question, 27 said that they do make an effort, while 21—in some form or another—said they did not. This includes responses ranging from the defiant—“There’s a theme here: We’re looking for good people. Not quotas. We seek talent, regardless of race, sex, or orientation”—to the despondent: “Sadly, I wouldn’t say we make an effort; we are painfully aware of our melanin deficiencies.”

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

Just 12 of the 44 respondents indicated that they make an effort to reach out to openly LGBT folks. It’s important to note that a fair number of the respondents who said they do not reach out said they don’t need to reach out, because they get LGBT applicants due to their publications’ gay-friendly reputations.

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

15 of the 45 respondents here said they make an effort to reach out to women. Like with the question above and LGBT candidates, a fair number of the respondents said they get plenty of women applicants already, and therefore do not need to reach out.

How important should diversity be for AAN as an organization?

The 48 respondents to this question gave an average answer of 7.31 (with 10 being of the utmost importance, and 1 being not important). The breakdown by number:

- 10—9 publications
- 9—2 publications
- 8—13 publications
- 7—8 publications
- 6—9 publications
- 5—5 publications
- 4—0 publication
- 3—0 publication
- 2—2 publications
- 1—none

Do you feel you have the proper information, resources and ideas to diversify your staff and/or readership?

Of the 45 respondents (and that does not count the respondent who wrote: “Don’t know what this means”), 26 say that, yes, they have all of the above. Four say they do not (though one of those four wrote: “I actually have no idea what a diversity goal should be, or what a benchmark for success should be.” May I suggest AAN’s Diversity Best Practices document?). The other 15 respondents fell somewhere in the middle—and a fair number of those cited resources as an issue: They know what to do, but don’t have the resources to do it.

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



While there have been a wide variety of responses to the questions on this survey, there was a surprising theme that ran through the answers to this specific question, at least on the diversifying-your-staff side: The biggest challenge is 1) finding qualified, diverse applicants, and 2) having the resources in terms of time and money to find and keep diverse applicants. A few other answers popped up here and there (including attracting young-adult readers; finding ways to diversify readership; and getting others in the office to make diversity a priority), and three very fortunate publications indicated that they really don't have any challenges.

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

While a theme emerged in the answers to the previous question, the answers here were all over the map. While a couple of answers were dismissive of diversity concerns, most respondents offered fantastic feedback.

One thought: AAN needs to somehow, someday, do more education on what the organization DOES offer, because a number of respondents suggested things we already do: Offer diversity project/intern scholarships, for example.

Others mentioned things AAN just did or started doing: A Best-Practices list. Diversity scholarships to AAN conventions and training.

Others mentioned things that AAN does, but perhaps not enough: Highlight success stories, good diversity-related coverage/ideas (that other publications can steal) and publications that are succeeding at diversity. Do training on social-media strategies to reach more-diverse audiences. Partner up with the ethnic/minority journalism organizations more. And simply: Keep doing things—like this survey, and having more discussions—to keep diversity in the forefront of members' minds.

Yet others had fantastic new ideas that AAN should consider: Actively share websites and other resources papers can use to find qualified minority candidates. Develop relationships with colleges and universities with numerous minority students. Do training on how to hire better.

Finally, I have to share my favorite answer: "Send us three black lesbians and a gay Puerto Rican. But seriously, we're open to suggestions. We really are cognizant of our lack of diversity and the narrow demographics of our readership. We want to do better ... aaarrrrghhhh I hated this survey!!!"