



AAN Diversity/Inclusion Best Practices

Remember that diverse media outlets must do more than recruit minority staff members and freelancers: Media-diversity experts advise that media sources need diversity on three intertwined elements: (1) recruitment, hiring and retention; (2) diverse content; and (3) culture in the newsroom and other departments. You can do well at one or two of those components and still fail at diversity. It is necessary to focus on all three to succeed.

Recruitment/Hiring/Retention

Keep a stocked pipeline: It is vital to constantly watch and develop your “pipeline” of possible hires. One way to find potential hires is to speak to universities, historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), and even diverse parent groups about your publication and its commitment to diversity (or “covering the entire community”). If you’re not diverse enough, admit it to them (it’s not like they can’t tell) and ask for help. Never leave without giving out cards or one-sheets on your internship and training programs.

Have a rockin’ internship/training program: Take the time to design a training program with weekly or biweekly workshops and opportunities to do “real” work. (These can be unpaid if they include a solid training component.) Include projects for your interns and trainees to work together and with reporters to cover under-served communities. It’s a great opportunity to teach multimedia and create content. (This works well with nearly all Generation Y-age interns and new hires.)

Form academic alliances to help with your pipeline and intern programs: Approach local colleges to build relationships with professors who can help design (and perhaps facilitate) your training program. They will often help due to the need for tenure and sometimes to help with their own accreditation needs. (Note that HBCUs are often looking for diversity, meaning white involvement.) Many schools also have ethnic student-journalist organizations. Make friends with them.

Form good alumni relationships with employees (especially from diverse populations) who leave: They often will send you more applicants and recommend you to skeptical minority applicants.

Form relationships with national ethnic and other minority journalism groups: They help their people get jobs. It’s that simple. Again, remember the student-journalist groups, too.

Be willing to train: Not everyone walks in the door with the same experience (and this is good for diversity). Learn to look for the talents, skills and attitudes that will make great editorial staffers, and then train them to do it your way. We do this all the time with non-minority staffers anyway.

To diversify staffing, emphasize diverse content even if your staff is all-white: It is very difficult to recruit and retain minority journalists if you are not showing commitment to diverse content. Your product is unfriendly to them, and they do not want all the “diversity” responsibilities to fall into their laps. Build it, and they will come. Therefore ...

Diverse Content

Realize that your own community is far more diverse than you think it is: No matter how white and straight the statistics say your community is, there’s diversity there. Really.

Decide to cover your entire community: Editors must decide to cover their entire communities—and make it happen. Do what we do well, but not just about certain parts of town. And don’t be shy about keeping an eye on your diversity to make sure that it’s solid; that is not the same thing as quotas or forced coverage.

Encourage everyone to get out of their comfort zones: When a new reporter or intern starts, one of the editors or seasoned reporters can drive them around unfamiliar parts of your community and brainstorm story ideas. It builds excitement.

Make a plan: Editors and writers should not fall into the trap of thinking they are “just looking for good stories” and that seeking out stories based on some kind of racial “quota system” is forced, unfair, pandering and/or PC. Don’t think stories should come to you organically; they won’t. Most alt-weekly staffs don’t include many people of color, so it’s more difficult (though not impossible) to have these story ideas organically manifest themselves. You need to make an effort.



Build a “Rainbow Rolodex”: Editorial (and advertising) teams should be diligent about adding diverse sources (and clients) to your network. Actively seek out organizations (the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce or the local PFLAG group, for instance), and ask to talk to them about what stories you’re missing. Listen carefully, and don’t leave the meeting without a list of five more sources to reach out to. Consider one-on-one meetings and focus groups as well.

Seek out freelancers/contributors who know their minority communities well: Go out of your way to work with these writers. They can be great sources of good stories that need to be told.

Cover minority residents when times are good: A common complaint that minority readers make about the press is that their communities only get coverage when someone is getting arrested or caught in a scandal. It’s fine to publish those kinds of “bad news” stories—you can’t control the news. But publications should balance that coverage by regularly doing stories about minority people, places and things that aren’t tied to some breaking-news horror. That balance lets readers know you aren’t out to malign them or continue the stereotypes they battle on a daily basis.

Do not overdo predictable coverage of minority residents: Be cognizant of whether your paper tends to, for example, only do positive sports and music stories about African Americans, and so on.

“Mainstream” minority residents into all coverage: Do not fall into the trap of thinking diverse coverage means doing more stories about minority issues and people. Be sure that your editorial people are using their “rainbow Rolodex” to reach out to diverse sources on all stories—include people of color and openly gay residents in stories that have nothing to do with being “minority” or gay. They care about sewage issues, too.

Regularly feature minority residents on the cover: If your paper is interested in providing better coverage of the city’s ethnic populations and/or expanding its reader base beyond its traditional core audience, the best way to make a big impact is to feature them on the cover on a regular basis—whether or not the story is about a “minority” issue. This delivers the message in a powerful way that you’re committed to diversity. And, no, the fears about featuring non-whites on covers (white readers won’t pick it up; advertisers will be scared away, etc.) aren’t true in the 21st century. It really is all about good stories and good imagery. On top of that, the move can help you increase your minority audience bit by bit. Please don’t fall into the trap of only putting minority residents on the cover for negative stories about their communities.

Include people of color in illustrations: When your artists create illustrations using faces of anonymous people, be sure they regularly use different skin tones, hair types, etc. Train them to think about diversity and look for images of non-whites as stock photography. The same goes for advertising; you can train clients to provide more diverse art.

Seek minority opinion voices: Seek out community members to write opinion pieces (or blog entries) that do not require the same level of journalistic training as other reporting. Consider including photos with columns to show your diversity commitment (at least when you’ve added diverse writers). Those columnists are often the very reason you start getting more story tips and diverse applicants. But be careful about including a satire/humor column written by a minority columnist (such as “Ask a Mexican” or the Stiggers column in the *Jackson Free Press*) if you do not have other serious journalism about those communities. Without that context, those kinds of columns can turn off minority readers.

Include context about minority communities and problems: Media diversity experts warn that a vital component of becoming more attractive to minority readers (and advertisers) is being sure to include context about problems such as crime or race issues. Often, white journalists just haven’t done the level of study from a different perspective and do not know where to look for this context. Encouraging all journalists to dig deep for context is key to becoming a trusted publication for the entire community.

Remember that diversity goes beyond ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc.: For example, economic diversity. Is your paper’s coverage neglecting the poor, for example?

[Newsroom/Company Culture](#)



Take a hard look at your culture: This can be the hardest thing to do, because it is where the most denial can live. Many companies work hard at diversity in content and hiring, but do not realize that their cultures are not friendly to people who aren't members of the majority culture. It can be helpful to get outside consultants or academics to spend some time in your company to observe interactions and listen to conversations, and then give you feedback.

Do not assume that non-minority staffers can make the same jokes as minority staffers about “their” status or issues: This should go without saying. White staffers should not call each other the n-word even if black staffers use it themselves, for example. They may not complain about it, but they may just leave.

Seek and listen to feedback from minority staffers—but don't go overboard to the point where they're relied on as “minority experts”: Regularly create a safe space where staffers feel willing to talk about diversity and newsroom-culture issues. Train yourself to listen first without getting defensive or joking about it. Ask for suggestions. You can even facilitate good group conversations about the issues. (Ask the Maynard Institute for advice, for instance. Or Keith Woods at the Poynter Institute).

Work for buy-in from all management: If you're an editor, for instance, who doesn't have buy-in from your publication's publisher or owner on the need for diversity, there are many resources regarding the business advantages of media diversity (especially about keeping Generation Y readers of all races) that you can provide. If you're an owner or publisher without buy-in from your editor, you can invest in diversity training, show them materials on the business argument—or simply make it a requirement of keeping the job. The Center for Association Leadership, aka ASAE, advises getting a written commitment from all top managers about the need for diversity efforts. It can't hurt.

Talk about diversity in all strategic-planning conversations: This is more advice from ASAE: Always link diversity to every area of planning. Talk openly about it in sessions; the more you talk about it, the more people get familiar with it. And don't be put off by those who are uncomfortable with it; that means you need to work harder at it.

Get goals for diversity (or “inclusion”) benchmarks, and celebrate progress: Non-diverse publications cannot change completely overnight.

Always include diverse speakers on programs: And not just about diversity. They often bring different perspectives that journalism needs, or they show your staff and attendees that minority people don't all think alike, or don't necessarily think differently. Both are good outcomes. Encourage speakers to bring diversity into conversations whenever relevant, not just in talks about “diversity.” (A good thought for AAN conventions and workshops as well.)

Remember that a diverse culture is helped by all diverse employees and efforts: That is, even if you can't find a great minority reporter, make the effort to recruit designers, sales reps, accountants and other minority staffers. A diverse culture isn't possible if you just have one minority staffer sitting in the corner. Consider other culture-building components as well, from the art on your walls, to the books in your library/conference room, to the causes you support in the community.

Get the whole staff involved in diversity check-ins: For instance, when you do your strategic editorial plan for the year, or when you go through papers for award ideas, get the staff to do a diversity analysis. This alone shows you're serious about it. Then get them to “workshop” diversity issues, with each offering three to five solutions and then voting on the top priorities. That way, everyone has an equal voice.

Be careful about getting all the voices at the table: Obviously, this applies to gender issues as well. Be sure that everyone gets to speak at meetings. If the same people (often men) do most of the talking, figure out a way to get all voices in there somewhat equally. Workshopping is a great way to do this.

Don't be ashamed of a lack of diversity—only of not doing anything about it: Don't be afraid to ask for help. It is very unusual that people think poorly of someone who asks for help on diversity.