

A Look at Diversity in Public Media Journalism

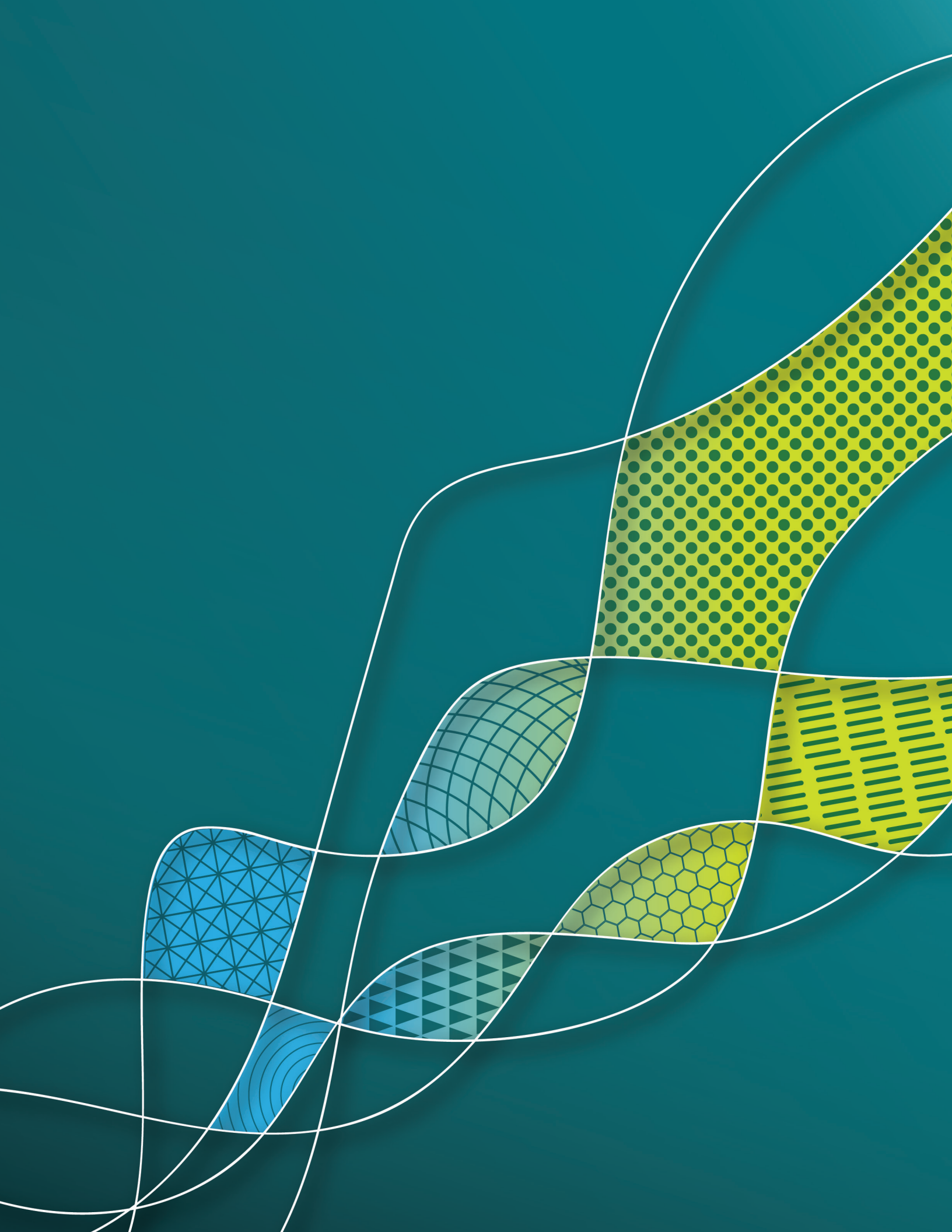
INSIGHTS TO GUIDE A MORE INCLUSIVE FUTURE

Analysis by: *Stan Jastrzebski, Syracuse University*



PMJA

PUBLIC MEDIA JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In the summer of 2020, our nation was deeply wounded by the tragic loss of George Floyd. This painful event ignited a powerful conversation about race and equality that touched every corner of our society. Public media, like many other institutions, was called to examine its own role in fostering a more inclusive and just world.

At PMJA, we've been on this journey for some time. Our commitment to building a more equitable public media system is a core part of who we are. We've openly acknowledged our shortcomings and worked diligently to chart a path forward. Our 2020 statement, "Building an Inclusive Public Media System," was a significant step, but it was just the beginning.

We believe that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are essential to the health of our industry. Our recently published Statement of Ethics outlines our vision for a public media system where everyone feels valued, respected, and supported. But we know that words alone are not enough.

To truly understand the challenges and opportunities within our industry, we needed to gather firsthand experiences. This report is the first step in that direction. By listening to the voices of newsroom employees, we've gained invaluable insights. We're excited to share these findings and use them to build a stronger, more inclusive future for public media.

PMJA is passionate about creating newsrooms where everyone belongs and can thrive. This research is a testament to our ongoing commitment to making a positive impact.

Christine Paige Diers
PMJA Executive Director

INTRODUCTION

These results have been collated from an online survey distributed by the Public Media Journalists Association in 2023. Presented in these pages are analyses of eight open-ended questions posed as part of that survey. The analysis was performed using NVivo, an industry-standard textual coding software commonly used in qualitative scientific research. In each case, survey question results are broken down into themes identified using NVivo. In reporting results of each question, some relevant quotes representing these themes are included (though all respondents have been anonymized in these findings, and some quotes have been lightly edited to remove data which might identify the journalist, such as the locality in which they work).

The researcher, Stan Jastrzebski, was a public radio news director from 2008 to 2020, serving at stations in Indiana and Florida. He is now a Ph.D. candidate in mass communication at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University, where he is completing his doctoral dissertation—a comparison of the work done by public and commercial journalists in the United States. He has published academic papers in peer-reviewed journals on the same topic. He anticipates continuing his public media research as a tenure-track professor starting in 2024.

One of the key findings of Stan's research is that public media newsrooms tend to be slightly more diverse workplaces than commercial newsrooms, based on demographic information

provided by the journalists themselves. However, neither type of workplace is truly representative of the American populace, and both have work to do in terms of hiring staff to make that goal a reality.

For more background, read a paper in the journal *Journalism Practice* called “Mission vs. Money: Professional Values and Attitudes of Public and Commercial Media Journalists in the United States,” co-written by Stan and Lars Willnat as part of the *American Journalist* survey, a once-every-ten-years survey of U.S. journalism. You may also look for the newest edition of the full survey results (including a chapter on public media), set to be published by Peter Lang in 2025, called “The American Journalist Under Attack: Media, Trust and Democracy,” or visit www.theamericanjournalist.org.

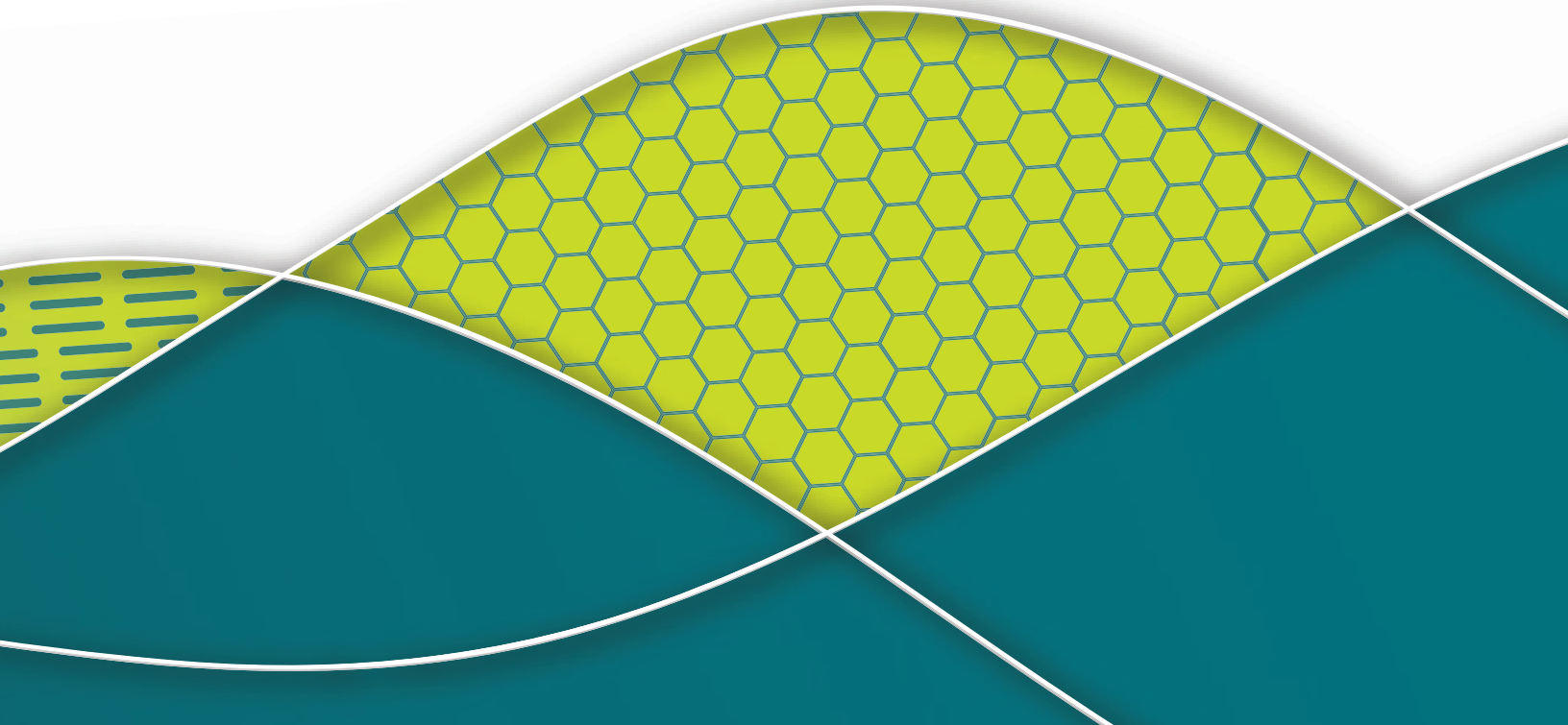
This study's findings show a similar pattern as those from the *American Journalist* survey—there's been some improvement in recent years, but most stations have work left to do. As such, this survey should be seen as a starting point for research into DEIA issues in public media, rather than an endpoint. At the conclusion of this document are suggestions for future research, which could be done in both qualitative and quantitative ways (assuming the continued cooperation of public media journalists, which has thus far been exemplary).

QUANTITATIVE DATA

A total of 215 public media journalists, reached through PMJA e-mail lists, filled out the survey, with 179 providing their names. Eighteen respondents say they're independent journalists not currently working in a newsroom, while 197 are currently employed in a public media workplace (more than 80 stations are represented in the survey). The responses are slightly skewed toward those from general staff (98), as opposed to newsroom leaders (83). It should be noted that not all survey-takers answered every question, so the number of respondents will be listed individually next to each question's results below.

As we'll see, demographic data are somewhat difficult to work with due to many questions being left open-ended and respondents not being forced to answer. Still, survey respondents report the following:

They were born between 1950 and 2002, with 131 people saying they were assigned female at birth and 65 saying they were assigned male at birth. Six people identified as non-binary and three as another gender non-conforming pronoun. When asked to type in what their sexual orientation was, more than 30 different responses were given, many of which refer to gender rather than to sexual orientation and many of which included multiple words or phrases. However, based on the first word or phrase reported for each respondent who gave a response, 121 identified as some form of either "straight" or "heterosexual," 14 as "bisexual," 12 as "queer," nine as "gay," six as "lesbian," six as "pansexual," and one each as "asexual" and "demisexual." When asked if they identified as being a member of a historically marginalized group, 103 people said yes, 76 said no, and 36 declined to answer.



01

DESCRIBE DIVERSITY AT YOUR STATION

143 RESPONDENTS

It is perhaps telling that, after words such as “diverse” and “diversity,” words connoting whiteness make up the second-most often used grouping among responses to this question, comprising nearly 3% of words in these written responses, even ahead of words such as “newsroom” or “station.” Indeed, 32 separate respondents described ways in which their newsroom or organization was mostly white. Several attributed this to their station’s location or its small staff size, but one constant was that station leadership does not appear to emulate the diversity the newsroom is trying to achieve.

One respondent said this:

The newsroom is more diverse and tends to be younger, while other positions (management, underwriting, membership) tend to be more white and older. A lot of our diversity issues stem from poor hiring practices and lack of growth opportunities. I don’t think certain members of leadership view diversity as a priority either.


Another said this:

I think the newsroom itself is pretty diverse, but leadership and management outside and above the newsroom is almost entirely white and male.

A common theme was that stations had achieved diverse representation in a small number of areas, but there were almost always areas which still needed improvement. Some of these comments read as follows:

1. We have a very good mix of international diversity—people from all parts of the world. But there is a lack of diversity in terms of thought/ideologies/politics.
2. We have great diversity around age and sexual orientation. Some ethnic diversity. And very little apparent gender identity and ability diversity.
3. Our station has a diversity of gender identity and sexual orientation that seems to me likely to mirror society at large. We have very little ethnic and racial diversity, even once you consider we live in a very predominantly white state. The organization has some amount of ideological diversity, though liberal views are definitely over represented.

Multiple respondents said they do not consider their newsroom diverse. “A priority in theory—and based on our hiring of expensive outside consultants—but not evident in our recruitment, our hiring practices or our employee retention. All talk and little action,” one person said. Another noted the fact that there was “very little disabled representation.” Many comments stressed the need to continue diversity efforts—some kinder than others to their organization.



Diversity is sorely lacking at my station. There’s a lot of talk and public facing language expressing support, but we rarely get past that intention into action. It’s been frustratingly slow to be a BIPOC journalist, and realize I won’t find the growth and support I need here, even when I’ve tried to institute the change.

About the same number of respondents expressed the feeling that their station had made noticeable improvements in recent years as those who felt their station was growing less diverse with time.

Finally, 14 respondents mentioned LGBTQIA+ representation in their responses. Because many studies do not ask people to self-identify using these categories, it can often be hard to tell how well-represented these journalists are in American newsrooms. It is therefore encouraging to have several people either express that they are LGBTQIA+ or know that one or more of their colleagues are, as this may imply an ability to show that side of oneself in the workplace. However, the comments still run the gamut. The more positive ones often identify a single individual as LGBTQIA+. “There are several people in senior leadership who identify as people of color and at least one person who belongs to the LGBTQ community,” one said. Another noted, “One of the Native reporters identified as queer.” But comments from reporters identifying as LGBTQIA+ were often much different in tone than these.

1. Leadership is mostly white, straight and cisgender, but they think of themselves as diverse because they’re mostly women. Staff is mostly white, straight and cisgender, too. People of color there often bemoan the lack of opportunity to move up there, and I don’t even have a bathroom I can use.
2. I’m the only Black reporter in the newsroom and only openly queer reporter.
3. We have a decent mix of races and ethnicities, but no trans employees in the newsroom. People from marginalized backgrounds also aren’t always supported in their desire to bring their full selves to their reporting.

02

HOW DOES DIVERSITY AT YOUR STATION IMPACT YOUR WORK?

137 RESPONDENTS

While there were at least a dozen respondents who said they believe their station's diversity makes little to no difference to their work, there was a clear majority opinion: more diverse stations generate improved coverage because of it, and those with less diverse staffs see more flaws in how news is done. However, those who were critical of their organization's diversity found multiple areas where they think it's hurting them or their news coverage.

“MORE DIVERSITY = BETTER STORY IDEAS”


The above quote, given by one respondent, distills into five words what nearly one of every three people appears to feel about their newsroom. Those who saw benefits to their station's diversity regularly mentioned conversations among staff which led them to be mindful of other perspectives or challenged them to think about topics in new ways, often based on the lived experience of another staff member with a background different from their own:



I really appreciate having a non-white boss to provide a check when I miss something as a white person. I really appreciate when coworkers pitch ideas that come from their own experiences because they are different than mine.

“LACK OF DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES HINDERS NEWS COVERAGE”

Nearly 20 respondents spoke out about the way a homogeneous newsroom is failing to live up to its potential. One person left a single-word comment: “Stifling.” Many said they lacked representation of key demographics in their community, from race to age to political orientation.



There is not a lot of understanding among staff at the station that their world views may not represent what is commonly believed outside the world of public radio, which is an impediment to finding and telling under-reported stories or stories that will fill information gaps for the state's residents. It limits the scope and impact of the work we do.

A lack of foresight was a common theme:



It deeply impacts the content we're reporting on. We miss so many stories, stories we can't even begin to conceptualize, because of the lack of diversity. Meanwhile, leadership will claim to embrace things like diversity in gender identity, but make token or lackluster efforts to truly embrace that.

As a result, several people thought their newsroom's outward credibility was harmed. Some said only having white editors made the station look bad. Another said their station couldn't be taken as seriously because white journalists have trouble presenting a wide variety of views on "racially-sensitive issues."

Perhaps as a result, several people said they felt DEIA initiatives at their station appeared performative—an act of going through the motions to appear diverse. Several said hiring practices were impacted by their station's diversity. "It makes it hard for me to approach and recruit diverse talent to work here, which I have been asked to do on multiple occasions," one person said. "I do wish there were more diverse candidates to even choose from," said another.

The inability to hire as diverse a staff as many would like leads to downstream effects for reporters. Several bemoaned the fact that they receive story assignments based on their demographics:

1. "I try to include as many people as possible on my beat. But often feel that I'm assigned to cover places where Black residents live even though there are others who live closer to that area than I do."
2. It definitely impacts the assignments that I get and the stories I'm expected to report. Sometimes I get steered away from stories I want to do because they're not about the Black community. But there's also a lot of excitement for stories that are about communities of color so it can be a double-edged sword at times.
3. Many, but certainly not all, possible perspectives are represented, and staff members are often good at seeking out representation and stories about people unlike themselves. However, it is sometimes left to a single person who represents an identity to champion coverage of that identity. This is tiring.

On the other side, at least one journalist seemed to think this placed undue pressure on them to do stories they might not otherwise:



I feel like our newsroom is pressured to do more stories about diversity in our community and underserved communities. I am all for reporting important issues and do quite often, but I do feel pressure to do so.

Reporters also mentioned that it can be hard for journalists in less diverse newsrooms to see a clear career advancement path, even as younger journalists may do the lion's share of DEIA work—which several journalists pointed out takes time away from their reportorial duties.

03


DOES YOUR WORKPLACE HAVE DEI (DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION) INITIATIVES? IF SO, WHAT ARE THEY?

167 RESPONDENTS

The vast majority of respondents to this question indicated there was at least some sort of initiative ongoing at their station to address issues of diversity. However, these vary widely in both scope and perceived effectiveness.

“YES” RESPONSES

The most common response was that the station had formed some sort of committee, task force or working group to discuss and/or implement diversity initiatives. Some were very supportive of those committees' aims and accomplishments:

 ***Yep! We have regular meetings. It's part of our strategic plan. Our “north star” goal is related to DEI. It's very much incorporated into our day-to-day.***

A few people, though, questioned what these committees accomplish:

1. Yes, a committee. Not exactly sure how what they do affects the day-to-day operations though. I don't see it and it really doesn't impact me as a worker, so they need to do better about implementation.
2. Yes, although they were introduced a couple years ago and then don't seem to have gotten any follow-up. We spoke about DEI at one all-staff meeting and had a semi-genuine and productive conversation. Our CEO created a DEI committee that I think met? We never heard the results.

So it seems clear that where committees are meeting, journalists would like to know of those groups' decisions and accomplishments, as evidenced by the more than 20 additional respondents who indicated there are DEI initiatives at their station, but could not (or did not) indicate what those are.

This is not to say that there were not tangible efforts underway at many stations, though. Multiple respondents indicated their station now tracks the demographic information of story sources, and some have even set goals for story diversity (with at least one person saying that meeting these goals is discussed during annual performance reviews).

More than ten people mentioned changes to hiring practices. Some responses indicated there are now DEI-focused positions in their newsrooms—either in terms of the demographics of the person hired or the beat on which they report. Other respondents mentioned stations had begun to hire employees whose job it was to oversee DEI efforts and maintain workplace DEI culture. However, one person mentioned that their station now focused on hiring because other initiatives were poorly received:

We have had DEI initiatives. They haven't gone well. They've exposed frictions between older management (which tends to be white and cis gay) and younger staffers (who are more likely to be of nonbinary or people of color). So we've pivoted to focusing on hiring and empowering staffers to use their perspective as they see fit, rather than forcing uncomfortable or unwanted conversations.

Such “uncomfortable” conversations may happen in training sessions, which about two dozen respondents said they have taken. Several people indicated these trainings happened in the past and have not been updated recently. Others indicated that their station—often university licensees—adheres to policies set by its license-holder, but doesn't go above and beyond to offer additional resources to the newsroom.

“NO” RESPONSES

About one-in-five respondents indicated that their station either (a) has no DEI initiatives they know about, (b) hasn't made them aware of such programs or (c) has a diversity statement, but lacks follow-through on that statement's goals. Several respondents from university-owned stations in Florida specifically lamented the impact that Governor Ron DeSantis's policies have had on DEI initiatives.

Other journalists indicated that while their station has policies or a written statement about diversity, they don't see much action arising from those words. Or they indicated that “diversity” could use more definition:

Everyone is encouraged to create individual DEI goals that feed into broad goals to diversify and retain the company workforce, and support diversity, equity and inclusion in whatever our work is.

POSSIBLE DEI ACTIONS TO TAKE

Before moving on to the next question, about possible areas for improvement, a few notes of possible suggestions given to this query. More than a dozen respondents indicated that their station takes multiple steps toward DEI goals:

1. Required staff trainings, optional lunch & learns, annual DEI surveys, antiracist media club, race-based caucusing, tracking source diversity, tracking staff diversity, questions about racial framing integrated into newsroom processes.
2. Outreach to diverse job candidates, yearly DEI training, making our station more inclusive with things like a welcome kit for new employees, making our bios friendlier and a media club where we use books, articles, films and podcasts to explore different points of view.

Still others said their newsroom is conducting more community engagement events to reach underserved publics (including hiring staff to facilitate these interactions) or focusing on changing pay rates for existing staff to be more equitable.

04

DO YOU SEE SIGNIFICANT ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE AFOREMENTIONED AREAS? IF SO, WHAT ARE YOUR OBSERVATIONS?

145 RESPONDENTS

Two main areas for improvement dominated responses to this question: (a) changes that could be made by (and to) leadership, and (b) changes that could strengthen staff recruitment and retention.

Recruitment and retention was mentioned most often, with about one-in-four respondents angling their answer in this direction. Many respondents suggested that their station needed to hire journalists with a specific racial background, because that kind of representation was lacking in their newsroom:

1. Yes, more diverse hiring of people of color, Asians, and people with various religious background... not all white with some kind of Christian background.
2. More diverse hiring, including more Black, Asian, LGBTQ and disabled staff, would be helpful.

But even more common was a sense that some journalists are often not paid a fair wage or offered the chance to improve their skills or their standing within the organization:

1. Until the company is willing to pay people a living wage at lower levels people will keep leaving the company because they can't afford to work here.
2. More competitive pay and benefits would probably help.
3. One of the things local stations need to do is work within communities to create a pipeline of future journalists. Set up workshops, Radio Rookies programs, go into schools and vocational centers to encourage people to pursue journalism.

Given these two issues, some journalists said they see a pervasive downward spiral, where a diverse pool of journalists does not exist because only some applicants see themselves reflected in the existing newsroom staff and thus do not apply for some jobs:

I see significant need for improvement when it comes to diversity in both our newsroom and our leadership team. It's difficult to even recruit people of color, queer people, people with disabilities, and people who are trans or nonbinary when they don't see themselves reflected in our staff, particularly in positions of power. We make a lackluster effort in recruiting those kinds of people, too, mostly leaving it up to local journalism orgs to send people our way.

04: DO YOU SEE SIGNIFICANT ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE AFOREMENTIONED AREAS?

Further, multiple respondents suggested that employee retention suffers because there is not a more wholesale effort to embrace diverse staff and their viewpoints once they're hired.

I'm really tired of high-level discussions about DEI. I would like to see more concrete efforts to hire, retain, develop and promote diverse staff from within the organization, and I'd like our programming decisions to be made with the input of/under the direction of more diverse leaders within our organization.

There were many similar comments which laid the blame on station leadership, which respondents tended to label as old, white and male.

I think our station does well in terms of diversity of gender, and sexuality, but there are no people of color in leadership positions, on air, or in the newsroom, and I think that harms us. I think we need people of color on our governing board to start with, and to do more work to recruit from diverse communities.

As mentioned before, respondents would like to see a more diverse and transparent promotion process, so DEI could be improved from within. Some respondents pointed out this would change the ways public media stations spend their limited resources, possibly enabling them to make different kinds of change than have happened before:

- 1.** There needs to be diversity in the C-Suite, to have minority input on the finances and the direction of the agency.
- 2.** It's great that we've made space and processes for people to feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts but there needs to be more transparent, progressive and radical action. Leadership is hesitant to talk about systemic issues and take accountability for it (not personal accountability, but institutional accountability), and without that, there are no significant actions undertaken to address DEI in our station.

Several respondents again mentioned how their location limits their ability to recruit diverse candidate pools, but others suggested audience diversification also needs to be a priority, since audience funding sources represent a majority of public media dollars.

We need to think of diverse audiences as the future. We need to stop making older, white, rich donors the only consideration for content because at some point they will run out and we'll be ill-prepared to have relationships with younger, more diverse donors.

But with several areas to focus on, at least one respondent suggested stations need to address issues one or two at a time, or risk solving none of them:

Choose one and do that well. Also, stop trying to please everyone's DEI needs. You can't. Pick the one or two that will make your mission strongest and the audience experience better and commit to that.

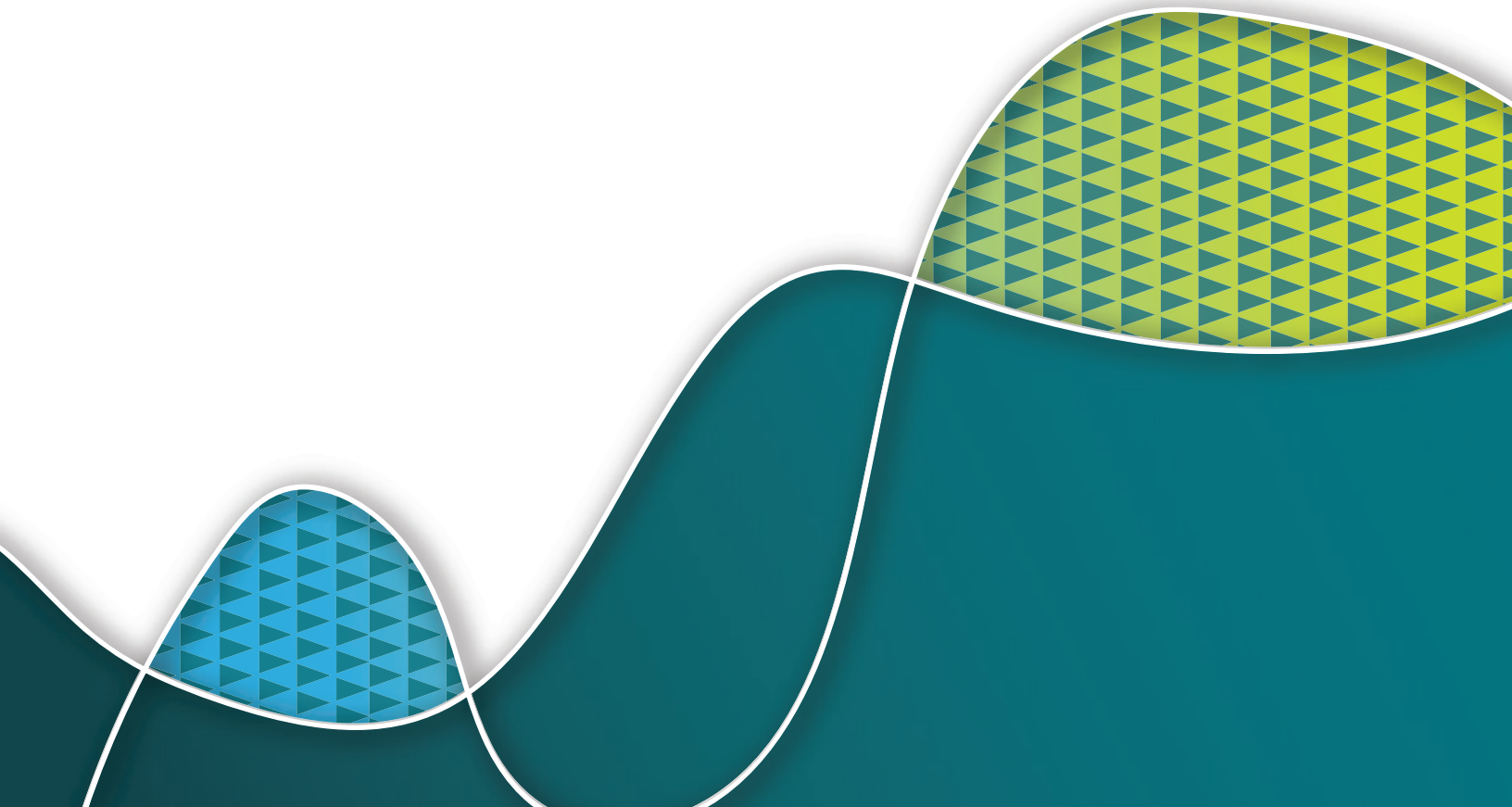
04: DO YOU SEE SIGNIFICANT ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE AFOREMENTIONED AREAS?

Also, nearly one-in-ten respondents said they did *not think* there was significant room for improvement:

1. I've worked at this radio station for more than 20 years and have never seen the news team as racially diverse as it is now. We also had a trans woman hosting our Sunday morning flagship show.
2. I don't see significant room for improvement. It is my understanding that there are active steps being taken to become even more diverse and inclusive.
3. I don't see any significant room for improvement, but this is coming from a straight white guy, so that doesn't mean there isn't room.

Finally, several respondents suggested that whatever their station's plans, there need to be concrete measures put in place to ensure plans received follow-through:

1. I want more concrete results in terms of funding, hiring and community outreach to come out of all these very excellent conversations.
2. Yes, make written clear plans, share them with the staff, and follow-up with how and where those goals have been achieved.



SURVEY PART TWO

The next three questions were only answered by people who elected to continue on in the survey, so the response numbers are somewhat smaller, and thus should be read as representing only a small portion of the overall survey sample.

05

HOW HAS YOUR IDENTITY IMPACTED YOUR EXPERIENCES IN PUBLIC MEDIA AND JOURNALISM?

58 RESPONDENTS

Because the number of respondents to this question dipped down to about a third the size of some other questions, and because the wording surrounding identity is relevant to individual respondents on a personal level, NVivo was used to analyze the language from these 58 responses and create a word cloud, seen below. Larger words represent themes which arose more often, and word length was set at five letters or more to help weed out words such as prepositions, conjunctions, articles, etc. Some themes from prior questions show up again, among them: whiteness, leadership, training, and hiring.



Once individual responses are analyzed, three main sources of identity appear to most affect negative ways people are treated (though it should be noted the question left open the possibility for any sort of identity-related experience to be mentioned): gender, race, and LGBTQIA+ status.

WOMEN JOURNALISTS

The most commonly reported identity to affect workplace actions and attitudes was being a woman. More than one-third of all responses mentioned how women are still treated differently in male-dominated media. At best, this appears to be a double-edged sword:

1. On the one hand, my identity as a black woman has given me access to a lot of opportunities because there are so few black women working in public media. But it also means that I work every day on a medium that really doesn't reflect the most scored points of hard to find myself, and quite frankly alienate people with my identity in those closest to me. It also means that, even though people value having me in a room, they often devalue my experience and don't situate in the decisions that they make in trying to reach people who look like me.
2. I'm a non-white woman who grew up poor—so working in journalism has put me among peers who are often the opposite of me. It has given me an edge in being able to reach sources others can't, but my experiences are often dismissed or doubted within the newsroom.

However, common criticisms of the past appear to persist, such as women hearing complaints about their on-air voice or being paid less than male colleagues. Several respondents mentioned feeling left out of conversations because of their gender, and thus missing out on some opportunities, including for career advancement:

1. I feel I haven't been included in some male conversations and bonding at work or at national conference. Some guests and sources have taken me less seriously than male colleagues (including my own employees).
2. My identity as a woman has impacted how I bond with other female colleagues, how I navigate "boys club" situations and how I see myself as still very privileged.
3. As a woman I feel like my career in journalism has stalled at times. Also, the woman at our station make substantially less than the men on staff who hold managerial positions.
4. There are also so many jobs/internships I haven't been able to take because of my family's financial background, which worries me that I have limited opportunities to succeed compared to my colleagues who don't have student debt and can take low pay at great organizations.

Several respondents suggested public radio offered a more welcoming atmosphere than previous media jobs, particularly at those stations where women hold leadership roles.

JOURNALISTS OF COLOR

About one-in-five journalists who answered this question mentioned that non-white journalists appear to be treated differently because of the color of their skin or their cultural heritage. This treatment can come from both sources and others in the newsroom:

05: HOW HAS YOUR IDENTITY IMPACTED YOUR EXPERIENCES IN PUBLIC MEDIA AND JOURNALISM?

1. I've dealt with microaggressions and a lack of welcoming from white managers and on air talent from all ages and genders.
2. Overall Asian Americans have a place in public media and journalism, but I sometimes still sense the stereotyping of Asians as quietly hard-working and behind-the-scenes, not as much for leadership roles.
3. It's hard to know the root of any of my negative experiences. Any blatant racism I've experienced has come from sources.

Several people mentioned seeing improvements in media jobs over time, and said they have used their race to help tell stories from underserved communities with which they identify. Several women and journalists of color also mentioned that their socio-economic status appears to have set them apart from some of their colleagues and been a barrier to career advancement or workplace acceptance.

LGBTQIA+ JOURNALISTS

A persistent theme from LGBTQIA+ journalists responding to this question is that others around them are careless with language, often in hurtful ways. "Being gay/queer I often have to explain things to editors about why we use certain language and at times fight for it," one respondent said. Similar to women and journalists of color, LGBTQIA+ journalists say they could use more role models in public media leadership, particularly when it comes to working through situations others might not encounter:

1. As a Gen X lesbian, I've never felt directly or intentionally excluded and there have always been plenty of LGBT folks in public radio. I have also offered my perspective on LGBT issues when I was the only one in the newsroom with that lived experience and I have had to deal with HR/benefits issues (pre-2015) because of having a same-sex partner that other people often aren't even aware of and certainly haven't had to deal with. I was also very conscientious about *not* outing myself on the radio (e.g. during pledge drives when someone might refer to their husband/wife, I would say "spouse" and avoid pronouns).
2. I don't see a lot of queer and/or fat folks in leadership, and it makes me feel like there may be no path to leadership for me. It's been a struggle just getting my workplace to acknowledge my increasing responsibility with title changes.

OTHER IDENTITY-RELATED ISSUES

In several other categories, one or two respondents suggested additional aspects of their identities which appear to set them apart from colleagues. These included their disability status, their religion and even being a white man. "My identity as a white male has made it easier for me to be accepted in many situations during my 46-years in journalism. That shouldn't be, but it's how it has been," the respondent said.

As with previous questions in this survey, respondents suggested that their identity has led them to cover certain stories, or to be questioned whether they could be objective in their reporting because of a particular identity characteristic. Only one respondent out of 58 said that their identity has had no impact at all on the trajectory of their journalism career.

06

HAS YOUR WORK EXPERIENCE OR EDUCATION BEEN VALUED THE SAME AS OTHER MEMBERS OF YOUR FIELD?

59 RESPONDENTS

Responses to this question fell into four broad categories: yes, no, unsure, and recent improvement (often those people who have been treated better since moving to their current job). For the purposes of coding, those respondents who cited specific instances where they felt slighted have been coded as responding “no,” since this represents an instance where that person felt like they were treated unequally.

Of the 59 respondents, 22 were coded as “no,” and four each as “unsure” and “recent improvement.” The remaining 29 were coded as saying “yes.”

Those respondents who answered “no” used myriad reasoning to explain the answer. As in previous questions, several cited pay disparities (especially in reference to men in similar jobs) as ways they’ve been quite literally undervalued.

1. Men of any experience or education level get more respect than me or other women I've worked with at multiple newsrooms.
2. I have a masters degree and have worked at the network level, yet I am still paid far less than other male managers with far less experience.

But multiple respondents cited apparent double standards in their jobs which made them feel like they were being unfairly singled out. Several made reference to the idea of not belonging to an ingroup of some sort:

1. In public media, if you're a white person who grew up listening to NPR, you're 'part of the club' automatically. I'm an outsider.
2. By some, yes. Others look down on my state-school education because it's not Ivy League.
3. No, I have not followed a traditional journalism career path or receive a master's in journalism so it's been hard to have the depth and breadth of my experience valued in the same way.
4. Some people seem to value certain journalism schools over the state schools. It's ridiculous since I have not noticed a difference in quality in the work produced between the "groups" of people.

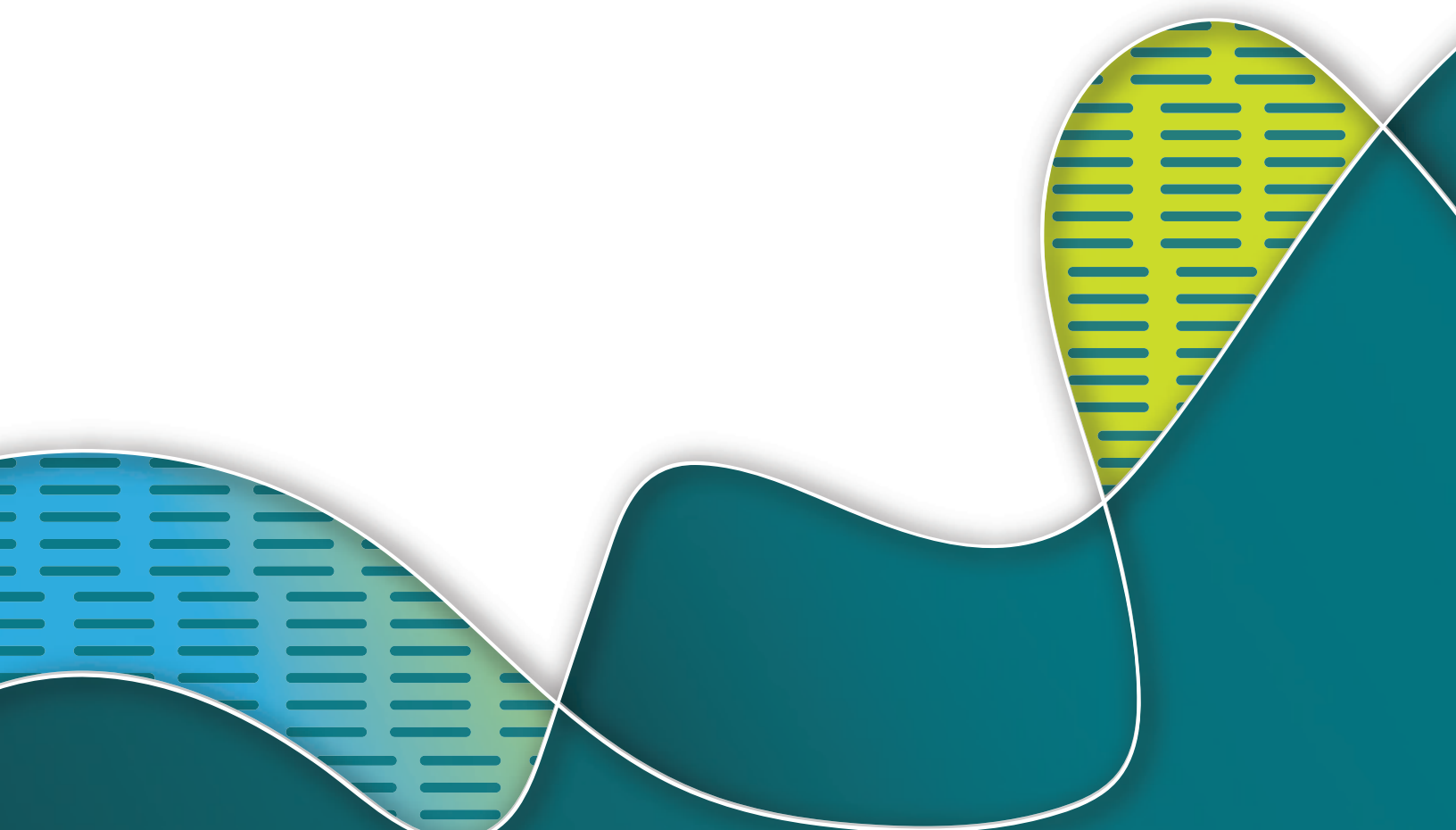
06: HAS YOUR WORK EXPERIENCE OR EDUCATION BEEN VALUED THE SAME AS OTHER MEMBERS OF YOUR FIELD?

Others suggested that evaluations of them change in capricious ways. “Unless one error or you have a bad day... then you’re totally undervalued,” one person wrote. “I am often made to work twice as hard to get half as far,” said another. Some also suggested that their career experience was deliberately overlooked:

1. Recently had to request a salary review because my experience and education and responsibilities are above the pay level of colleagues.
2. I have been dismissed and forced into entry-level positions/pay and excluded from projects, promotions or leadership options in newsrooms even though I possess 10+ years in news and documentary and an advanced degree in journalism.
3. I don't feel that I have been overlooked for opportunities necessarily. I was explicitly excluded from a pay band because part of my experience and skillset was not defined as professional experience.

Among those people in the “not sure” camp, respondents suggested this was perhaps a function of gaining more experience and professional respect over time, rather than deliberate discrimination. However, at least one respondent—a recent immigrant who’s been mostly relegated to being a freelance journalist, and who wrote the longest response to any question in the survey, made several points about how their education and lived experience appear valued in some places and disregarded in others.

Finally, the few people who suggested their circumstances have improved recently chalked it up to (a) a move to public media from television news and (b) going back to school to get a graduate degree, so they could achieve a leadership role.



07

DO YOU THINK IDENTITY IMPACTS TURNOVER AT YOUR WORKPLACE OR JOB SETTING?

63 RESPONDENTS

It stands to reason that, based on some of the responses given previously in this study about problems that public media appears to have bolstering journalists' intersectional identities, there would also be concern about what this means for employee retention. True to form, more than half of all respondents to this question (33 of 63) say they believe identity impacts turnover.

There were a handful of respondents who said they believed other factors—low salaries, career growth out of starter markets and geography among them—also play a role, but by far the most common response was that unequal or improper treatment of people based on their identity causes those people to leave jobs in public media. Among the portions of a person's identity that were specifically cited are: age, LGBTQIA+ status and race, but notably only two people mentioned gender as a factor, including this respondent:

While we haven't had many queer journalists in the newsroom, and no trans ones beside me that I'm aware of, I know for a fact that queer employees within my organization in other departments have been driven out by the environment. When someone says something that's racist/sexist/homophobic/transphobic, it's swept under the rug and there's no disciplinary action that I'm aware of. We had a member on our DEI committee who's been known to throw the word "tranny" around.

More than one person mentioned the combination of a journalist of color serving a majority-white area on which a station reports (particularly in some areas of the Northeastern United States), and suggested this mix played a role in losing those employees:

1. It's possible that non-white staff feel somewhat out of place due to the low representation—but [state redacted] is a very white state, so it's expected.
2. Yes. I think it can be hard to be a marginalized person in [state redacted]. I think our workplace can only do so much given the culture in the state.

Others appeared to suggest younger staff are more likely to leave, either because the respondent feels early career journalists are more sensitive to their identities not being fully acknowledged, or because not enough opportunities are specifically identified to keep journalists of color on staff, or simply because it's common for journalists to want to move up in market size in the early part of a career:

1. Age is more of a determiner; we're a career stepping stone.
2. I do not think effort is put into training and retaining young employees of color at the station.
3. Yes, because of lack of growth opportunities that are critical to keep young, diverse journalists on staff.
4. Yes, to a certain extent—mostly among young staff.
5. I think some members of our team can be particularly overworked and leave feeling unheard compared to colleagues who have been able to stay here for a while.

Two respondents indicated their station doesn't have much turnover, with one saying that actually presents a barrier to diversifying the news staff:



We don't have a lot of turnover, and that is part of the problem with diversifying our team. People don't leave often and there aren't many opportunities to bring in new people from more diverse backgrounds.

Seven respondents said they were not sure if identity figures into turnover rates, and 17 people (about half as many as said yes) indicated it is not, in their opinion—some of them emphatically. Two people mentioned that, at a previous station, they saw evidence of journalists from marginalized groups leaving, but those in the “no” camp were more likely to attribute turnover to a combination of low pay and high cost of living.



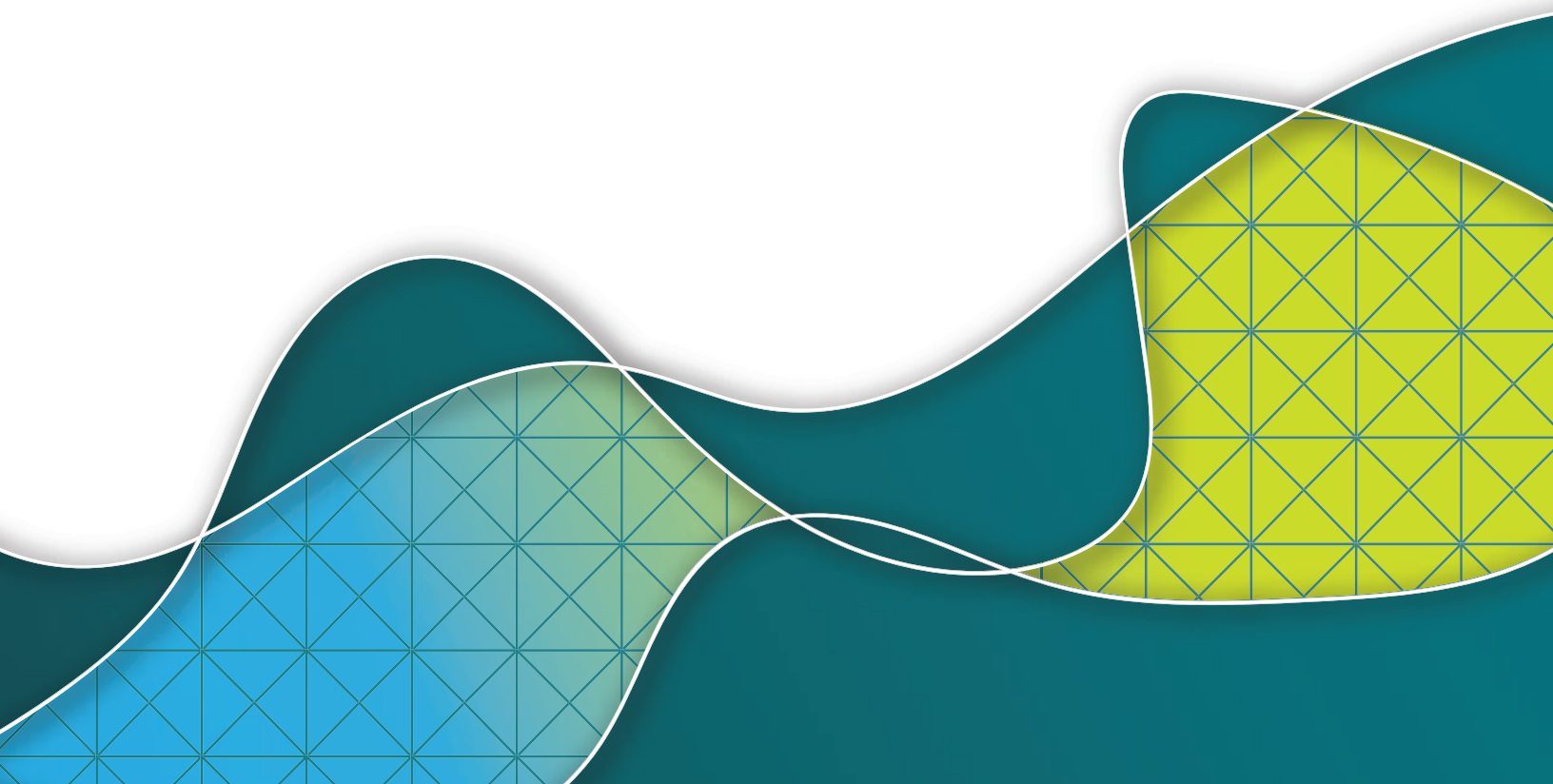
CONCLUSION

This study is part of what is shaping up to be a new era of U.S. public media research. To the great credit of U.S. public media journalists, they are a group which has shown an uncommon (and welcome) willingness to give their time to participate in research about their organizations—often answering surveys and calls for interviews at a much higher rate than most other groups of journalists. It is the goal of this researcher and PMJA to ensure findings from such studies make their way back to the newspeople who participate, in addition to appearing in scientific journals. Only then can participants see how their newsroom compares to others in the country and learn from one another's practices.

This study was not without its limitations, which should be acknowledged. Many of the questions in it deserve much more study, albeit with rephrasing and reframing. Though it was advertised as being non-scientific, many of the quantitative measures this study sought to produce could not be used, because any interpretation of them would have been fraught with questions about the generalizability of the data produced.

However, this study's quantitative measures—which took considerable time to answer and produced many thought-provoking statements—offer multiple avenues for future research. For instance, future studies would do well to learn more about what causes turnover at stations, about whether LGBTQIA+ journalists are indeed better-represented in public media newsrooms than in commercial media (and why), and about differences in the content produced by different sub-groups of journalists.

There are, of course, a great many more such questions that can be asked. With the continued help of public media journalists, studies such as this may offer some answers.



GUIDING STEPS TOWARD MORE INCLUSIVE PUBLIC MEDIA JOURNALISM

At PMJA, we believe that a diverse and inclusive public media journalism landscape is essential to creating a more informed and engaged public. We're committed to working alongside our member stations to make that vision a reality.

PMJA's Ongoing Commitment

We're taking a number of steps to help public media stations create more welcoming and representative newsrooms, including:

- **Training and Resources:** We're currently updating our training and education program to better meet the needs of public media journalists, addressing gaps in the system and offering diverse learning styles to create more inclusive and meaningful experiences.
- **Expanding Our Reach:** We're growing our meet-up and affinity groups to foster connections among journalists from all backgrounds and career stages. We continue to expand our offerings beyond newsroom leadership to empower all staff to contribute to a more inclusive environment.
- **Cultivating Diverse Talent:** Our growing focus on early career journalists is intentional. This is where we find the most diverse pool of potential talent, and we're committed to providing the support needed to help them thrive and grow into the leaders public media will need long into the future.
- **Broadening Outreach:** We're working hard to ensure that all staff in the newsroom—not just leadership—have access to PMJA resources and information.

Recommendations for Public Media Stations

We encourage stations to consider the following:

- **Diversity Beyond Race:** When considering diversity, it's important to go beyond race and ethnicity. A truly inclusive newsroom represents a variety of abilities, ideologies, and experiences.
- **Action Over Words:** It's not enough to simply talk about DEIA. Take concrete steps, no matter how small, to build DEIA into your everyday operations and planning processes.
- **Storytelling Beyond Lived Experience:** How can you cover stories that are outside of your own experiences? Consider new reporting strategies and partnerships to broaden your newsroom's perspective.
- **Transparency and Communication:** Clear communication is key. Regularly update staff on DEIA initiatives and be transparent about your organization's finances and audience development efforts.
- **Welcoming Environment:** New hires should feel valued and supported. Invest in onboarding and professional development opportunities to help your staff thrive.

Building on Our Foundation for Inclusion

We recognize that building a more inclusive public media landscape is an ongoing journey. While this report provides valuable insights, it's just the beginning. We're committed to continuously learning, adapting, and refining our strategies to support our members. By working together, we can create a public media system that truly reflects the communities we serve.

Belinda Rawlins
PMJA Chief Experience Officer

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The journey to understanding the current state of diversity, equity, and inclusion in public media journalism began with a simple yet profound question: How can we measure progress toward building an inclusive public media system without first establishing a baseline?

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