



Press Forward
Media Diversity Project

Preliminary Study

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Key Findings in Brief

The purpose of this study, a preliminary effort of the Pittsburgh Black Media Federation, was to assess issues related to diversity and inclusion within Pittsburgh-area newsrooms.

For this study, the Pittsburgh Black Media Federation sent out surveys to 24 local newsrooms within the Pittsburgh region, as defined by the Pittsburgh Regional Alliance. We received completed surveys from 10 newsrooms, including the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, Pittsburgh City Paper, and Beaver County Times. None of the major broadcast or radio stations we asked to participate – WPXI, WTAE, WESA, WQED, KQV or KDKA – completed a survey. None accepted our invitation to participate.

The survey asked questions related to three areas – newsroom diversity, diversity recruitment, and ethics and diversity.

- People of color make up about 13% of the Pittsburgh Metropolitan Statistical Area. On average, they make up only 9% of workers among the newsrooms surveyed.
- People of color make up about 20% of the population in Allegheny County, and 35% of Pittsburgh's population. On average, they make up about 10% of workers among the newsrooms surveyed in Allegheny County.
- Asians and Latinos each make up only 1% of workers within the newsrooms surveyed.
- Only one newsroom, The Pittsburgh City Paper, has any reporters of color assigned to cover issues related to criminal justice, education or urban

neighborhoods. The Tribune-Review has a single reporter of color assigned to cover government issues.

- More people of color left the newsrooms surveyed than were hired over the past two years.
- No newsroom surveyed had a specific plan in place for the recruitment of newsroom workers of color.
- No newsroom requires diversity training of its employees.
- No newsroom had a meeting to discuss issues of diversity with regard to coverage and newsroom climate in the past two years.
- No newsroom had a formal editor or community group designed to review coverage of communities of color.

It is our goal to continue our efforts to study issues related to diversity and inclusion within Pittsburgh-area newsrooms over the next two years. In addition to completing an updated, more comprehensive survey, we will specifically seek information pertaining to diversity, inclusion and newsroom climate, the coverage of women of color, and journalism education.

Introduction

In 2014, the Society of Professional Journalists, one of the nation's oldest journalism organizations, made a significant change to its code of ethics. SPJ decided that, in addition to remaining accountable to the public, journalists also had an obligation to transparency.

"It is imperative that journalists make every effort to be transparent about their actions," SPJ said in an announcement on its website. "It acknowledges the

importance of corrections, engaging the public in discourse over journalism issues and it tells journalists they should uphold the highest ethical standards in all engagements with the public.”

In adopting this language, SPJ was primarily focused on transparency of sources. But if newsrooms are going to be truly transparent, should they not also discuss the people they use as reporters? More specifically, should they not be transparent about the levels of diversity they have among their newsroom staff? We believe this is a measurement that is critical to assessing the ability of a newsroom to fairly and adequately engage with its audiences.

We did not know in Pittsburgh how many reporters inside of local newsrooms were racial minorities. We did not know the policies these newsrooms had implemented to increase diversity. We also did not know what steps these newsrooms had taken to improve their coverage of communities of color, and avoid the type of stereotyping highlighted by a 2011 study commissioned by the Heinz Endowments. It is with these issues in mind that the Pittsburgh Black Media Federation set forward to study, to the degree possible, diversity and inclusion issues within Pittsburgh-area newsrooms.

The results of this preliminary effort are very concerning. Not only do local newsrooms within the Pittsburgh area not reflect the level of diversity within its local communities, these same newsrooms lack comprehensive plans to increase diversity. Furthermore, the newsrooms have next to no measures for assessing news coverage of communities of color. While admittedly small in scale, this report, nonetheless, suggests that the Pittsburgh area has a long way

to go with regard to efforts to diversify its newsrooms with empowered journalists of color.

Genesis of Study

The Pittsburgh Black Media Federation, which has fought for the fair representation of people of color inside and outside of newsrooms since 1973, formally established its Diversity Study in November of 2015. While a number of factors led to our decision to pursue this effort now, issues related to diversity and inclusion within the news media are hardly new.

Since the release of the Kerner Commission report in 1968, serious questions have been raised about the ability of newsrooms to effectively cover communities of color, notably when they lack diversity within their newsrooms. The report, which included a chapter on press coverage, concluded that traditionally black newsrooms covered urban communities of color with much more empathy than traditional, non-ethnic newsrooms. The reason? Non-ethnic newsrooms had failed to develop strong connections within communities of color, in large part, because their staffs lacked diversity. This is why the commission concluded that the traditional mainstream press had “too long basked in a white world looking out of it . . . with white men’s eyes and white perspective.”

Since then, diversity has increased within newsrooms nationally, but it still pales in comparison to the actual level of diversity in society. In 1978, the American Society of Newspaper Editors began a nationwide census of newsrooms. In announcing the study, ASNE set a goal of having diversity in newsrooms on par with the overall diversity in the United States. In 2016, ASNE

announced that the percentage of racial minorities within the newsrooms they surveyed stood at just over 17 percent. But according to 2015 estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau, the nonwhite population in the United States was about 38 percent. That means racial minorities are underrepresented as newsroom workers by just over 20 percent.

Based on recent newsroom departures, and discussions with journalists, the Pittsburgh Black Media Federation became concerned that many newsrooms in the area were also underrepresented with regard to diversity. With this in mind, we decided in 2015 to take steps toward the development of such a survey. The effort, however, would not merely look at hiring statistics.

Even as diversity has increased within mainstream newsrooms, a host of studies released over the past 40 years have been highly critical of how they cover communities of color. These studies suggest, among other issues, that African-Americans are disproportionately represented in the news as criminals, welfare recipients and drug users. Similar issues were found with news coverage in Pittsburgh, according to a 2011 study commissioned by the Heinz Endowments.

The study, which looked at major traditional news sources within the Pittsburgh market, found that African-American men were disproportionately displayed as criminals, and, in more than 90 percent of all stories featuring them, shown to be either criminals or athletes. The study also called on the local news media to change its policies, as a means of improving its coverage of communities of color. Given the results of the study, and continued concerns we

received regarding local coverage, we also decided to ask local newsrooms about their plans for combating stereotypical coverage of communities of color.

As noted, concerns expressed to us by PBMF members and concerned residents were more than enough to lead PBMF toward the development of a study. But two other controversies involving local journalists galvanized our belief that such an effort was needed. The first major incident was the controversy surrounding a column published by the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette in September of 2015. The piece, based on no evidence, suggested African-Americans suffered no consequences from enslavement. The second major incident took place just after PBMF announced its study. A veteran anchor for a local television station made controversial comments on her workplace Facebook page about African-American men following a mass shooting in Wilksburg. The episode, which made national news headlines and remains a point of controversy in Pittsburgh, further highlighted the need for a more comprehensive study of diversity issues as they relate to Pittsburgh-area newsrooms.

Methodology

For this effort, the Pittsburgh Black Media Federations relied on several forms of data. First, PBMF emailed questionnaires to 24 select, established local newsrooms in April, May and June. We emphasized established newsrooms that specifically cover the Pittsburgh region, as opposed to newsrooms that may have a more national or statewide focus. In terms of area, we focused on the greater Pittsburgh region, as defined by the Pittsburgh Regional Alliance. This area

includes Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Washington and Westmoreland Counties.

Of the 24 newsrooms that were sent surveys, 10 completed them. Four of the newsrooms represent daily newspapers – the city’s two largest newsrooms, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, the Beaver County Times, and the New Castle News of Lawrence County. Another two participants, the New Pittsburgh Courier and SoulPitt, are publications that cater to African-Americans in the Pittsburgh-area. The final four participants, The Pittsburgh City Paper, PublicSource, Pittsburgh Quarterly and NextPittsburgh, are smaller newsrooms that each feature fewer than 10 full-time reporters, but cater to a largely mainstream audience. We sent our survey to several local broadcast news stations – KDKA, WESA, WPXI, WTAE, KQV and WQED. None of these stations participated in our survey. While this is disappointing, and while the overall participate rate – 42 percent – may seem low, the response rate, nonetheless, mirrors this year’s response rate for the American Society of News Editors survey completed in 2016, and it is slightly higher than the response rate for ASNE’s 2015 study.

It should be noted that the surveys were submitted largely on a rolling basis, as a means of encouraging participation. The earliest surveys we received were in April. The latest we received a survey was in September. As a result of the constantly changing staff levels of newsrooms, the data reflected in our study may not represent data as it exists today. Nevertheless, we present these numbers as a snapshot of newsroom diversity for this year.

Newsroom Diversity

Not only does racial diversity within Pittsburgh newsrooms surveyed fail to match the overall diversity of the Pittsburgh Metropolitan Statistical area, but most newsrooms also are woefully underrepresented in relation to the communities they directly serve. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the nonwhite population in the Pittsburgh Metropolitan Statistical Area was 14 percent in 2015. Allegheny County, in which Pittsburgh is located, has a racial minority population of 20 percent, while the city itself has a racial minority population of 35 percent, according to 2015 estimates by the bureau.

Collectively, the newsrooms surveyed failed to match the nonwhite population within the Pittsburgh MSA. Combined diversity across the nine newsrooms within the Pittsburgh Metropolitan area – the New Castle News falls outside the MSA – stood at just above 9 percent. The gap in diversity was greater with regard to Allegheny County and the city of Pittsburgh. Across the eight newsrooms situated within Allegheny County – which would not include the Beaver County Times – newsroom diversity stood at just under 10 percent of total newsroom population. Thus, these newsrooms, in relation to the county and city, were collectively underrepresented with regard to racial diversity by 10 and 25 percent, respectively.

The newspapers, which boast the vast majority of newsrooms workers in this study, were all underrepresented in terms of diversity. The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette employs the most people of color of the newsrooms surveyed. Nevertheless, they still fall short of parity. Racial minorities represented 12

percent of the Post-Gazette's news workers. While this places the newsroom close to the MSA, it leaves the newsroom underrepresented in terms of the level of diversity in the county and city. The Tribune-Review isn't close to parity on any regard. Racial minorities make up only 5 percent of the total newsroom staff.

The diversity situation within suburban newspaper newsrooms is worse. To be fair, neither newspaper represents an area with a significant population of color. While both Lawrence and Beaver counties have small nonwhite populations, at 7 percent and 10 percent, respectively. But neither newsroom comes even close to parity despite the lower threshold. The Times has one staff member of color. This person is neither a reporter, nor supervisor. The New Castle News has no news workers of color, and has not had any for at least the past two years.

Collectively, the smaller, non-ethnic newsrooms surveyed have a combined 20 full-time newsroom workers. Combined, they have four journalists of color, meaning that workers of color represent 20 percent of full-time workers across these newsrooms. By percentage, Pittsburgh Quarterly has a staff that is one-third of color. PublicSource has a staff that is one-quarter of color. Pittsburgh City Paper's staff is 10 percent of color – although, as will be noted later, it uses a heavy percentage of freelancers of color. NextPittsburgh, an online magazine, has only one full-time worker, its founder and publisher. Soul Pitt has a staff of four. All of its staff members are African-American. The New Pittsburgh Courier's full-time staff is 50 percent African-American. But the historic newspaper only has two full-time employees.

The number of supervisors of color across these newsrooms is also small. But in comparison to the overall workforce of color in the region, it does meet parity; for example, 13.7 percent of supervisors within the newsrooms surveyed were people of color. When the Courier and Soul Pitt are removed from the equation, that number drops to 11 percent. While this statistic is somewhat encouraging, another number revealed in the study is disturbingly low.

The most troubling detail to come out of these surveys is just how few newsroom workers of color actually cover traditional news, notably issues of great concern to communities of color. We asked each of the newsrooms to list the primary coverage responsibility of each of its reporters of color. The survey revealed that, across all 10 newsrooms, only one person of color had been assigned to cover issues related to education, criminal justice or urban neighborhoods – a single reporter with the Pittsburgh City Paper. That means neither of the city’s two daily newspapers, nor its newspaper dedicated to issues impacting the African American community, have a person of color reporting about these issues. Additionally, only one reporter of color, a staff member at the Tribune-Review, was listed as covering government issues. Thus, with regard to the core issues impacting urban communities of color, the 10 newsrooms surveyed have, by and large, failed to use individuals of color to cover them.

The region also lacked representation of color in other areas. Across the 10 newsrooms, there were very few visual journalists (photographers and graphic designers) of color. Only five people of color were listed as either photographers or designers in the surveys. The survey also noted that three people of color for

traditional print publications, and one person for an ethnic publication served on the editorial desk or as a columnist.

Some newsrooms do use a significant number of freelancers of color, notably smaller newsrooms serving the city of Pittsburgh. The Pittsburgh City Paper said it used 100 freelancers over the past two years. Of that total, it estimates that between 25 and 30 were people of color. The New Pittsburgh Courier relies heavily on freelancers. Fourteen of its 16 freelancers were people of color. Soul Pitt, a magazine that focuses on the African-American community, used 28 freelancers of color. NextPittsburgh used eight freelancers of color. Neither the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette nor Tribune-Review offered information on the backgrounds of their freelancers.

The Post-Gazette did provide the most internship/apprenticeship opportunities to individuals of color. Over the past two years, the newspaper used 86 interns. Of this group, 21, or nearly a quarter, were individuals of color. An additional 11 interns of color were used across the newsrooms surveyed, including four each by the Tribune-Review and City Paper, two by the New Pittsburgh Courier and one each by PublicSource and Soul Pitt. None of the interns used by the suburban daily newspapers were individuals of color.

Recruitment

The survey revealed that none of the newsrooms had a specific plan in place for recruiting diverse talent. Newsrooms are struggling to recruit and retain talent across the nation, including Pittsburgh. With each round of cuts, more and more journalists of color are lost from the reporting ranks. Over the past two years, 13

journalists of color left their respective newsrooms, including 10 among the non-ethnic news participants. During this same time, these newsrooms hired only six journalists of color, resulting in a net loss of seven newsroom staffers of color. Neither Soul Pitt nor the New Pittsburgh Courier added a staff member.

How are local newsrooms attempting to replenish talent of color? The survey asked each newsroom if it had in place an action plan specifically designed to recruit diverse staff members into its ranks. Six of the newsrooms said they did not, while a seventh merely replied that “diversity is very important to our newsroom.” The other three newsrooms offered actions they have taken to recruit diverse talent, but none stated they had a specific plan. NextPittsburgh said it has reached out to local journalism programs and the black arts community. The Tribune-Review has, in the past, advertised its open positions through the National Association of Black Journalists. Pittsburgh Quarterly said it places calls for freelancers with diverse backgrounds on its website, and on Pittsburgh Today, which was described as a sister operation.

Hiring talent from college doesn’t seem to be a priority for most newsrooms. Only three of the newsrooms hired people directly from college in the past two years. Only one, the Post-Gazette, hired any people of color, two African-Americans. In total, the Post-Gazette hired eight total reporters from college. The Beaver County Times hired four out of college. The New Castle News added three reporters from the collegiate ranks. None of these individuals was of color.

If the newspapers were more willing to hire from collegiate ranks, specifically appealing to historically black colleges and universities for talent could prove lucrative. Many top African-American journalists have gone through such programs, and several, including Hampton University in Virginia, Howard University in Washington, D.C., Florida A&M University, and Southern University in Louisiana, have programs accredited through the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications. None of the newsrooms stated that it recruited talent at HBCUs.

For newsrooms seeking more seasoned talent, the National Association of Black Journalists has a jobs database featuring the resumes of journalists from around the nation. Only the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review has utilized the database. The Tribune-Review also stated it has advertised positions with NABJ.

In fact, it is not clear if any of the newsrooms surveyed has a specific plan in place designed to increase the diversity of their newsrooms. The Tribune-Review noted its efforts to advertise available editorial positions. NextPittsburgh stated that it has reached out to local universities and local foundations to try to find diverse talent. Pittsburgh Quarterly said it advertises its jobs, and requests help from diverse talent. But none of the newsrooms stated it had a specific action plan. Six newsrooms said they did not have a plan available.

Ethics

As mentioned, the 2011 Heinz Endowments study, which found that black men were overrepresented as criminals within the news media, called on the

local media to take measures to improve news coverage. Based on the results of this survey, which asked local newsrooms about the policies they have in place to avoid stereotyping, it suggests that such measures were not put in place following the release of the now five-year-old study.

As a means of reviewing coverage, some newspapers utilize either public editors – an on-staff person dedicated to critiquing coverage – or community boards that serve a similar function. The goal of such efforts is to provide routine criticism of coverage, particularly as it pertains to communities of color. None of the newsrooms has either a public editor, or a formal community board that reviews news coverage. To be fair, the Beaver County Times did note that it has made an effort to connect more with communities of color, and has met with community groups to find ways to improve coverage. While not formal, this does reflect an effort to improve overall news coverage. Pittsburgh Quarterly noted that issues of diversity are discussed during its annual meetings. Additionally, the New Castle News said its editorial board weighs in on news coverage.

Another means of addressing potential coverage is with diversity training. Many companies order their employees to go through such trainings, which are designed to deal with issues impacting both job performance and office climate. None of the 10 newsrooms had any form of diversity training in the past two years.

A final way to discuss issues of diversity as they relate to both news coverage and newsroom climate is the all-staff meeting. The purpose of such meetings is to allow staff members to air out concerns related to perceived poor coverage of

racial minorities, or issues related to the treatment of workers of color within the newsroom. The New Orleans Times-Picayune, for instance, held such meetings during a series they developed on race relations within their city. No newsrooms held such a meeting for all staff members.

Conclusion

This effort, though limited in scope, suggests that Pittsburgh area media have a long way to go with regard to diversity and inclusion issues within both news coverage, and newsroom climate. By our objective measures, Pittsburgh-area newsrooms are not diverse. Despite this, there seem to be no significant efforts made by any newsroom to actively increase the number of people of color within their newsrooms. These newsrooms also have done little to evaluate how they cover communities of color, and have made no formal effort to train their staffs on how to better cover these communities.

We were left especially troubled by several data points from this survey. First, the fact that the two suburban newspapers, The Beaver County Times and New Castle News, have no reporters or editorial leadership of color is extremely problematic. As noted, neither county, as a whole, is particularly diverse. People of color represent about 10 percent of all residents in Beaver County, and about 7 percent of all residents in Lawrence County. Each county, however, has at least one city or borough with a sizable African-American population. Aliquippa, Beaver Falls, New Castle and Rochester each possesses an African-American population of more than 13 percent. Given these facts, there is no reason for

these newsrooms to not employ, at the very least, one reporter to cover issues impacting these communities.

The same critique could be made, however, to just about every other newsroom in the survey, notably the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and Tribune-Review. Again, for newsrooms serving a city with a relatively sizable African-American population, and increasing Latino population, they could make a greater effort to ensure that people of color are helping shape the day-to-day coverage of issues impact their neighborhoods. This flies in the face of the logic set forward by the Kerner Commission nearly 50 years ago, and brings into question each newsroom's commitment to telling stories with the interests of communities of color in mind.

Another data point from this study is also disturbing. The New Pittsburgh Courier, a paper with direct roots to one of the most historic and impactful African-American newspapers in the nation's history, has a woefully small contingent of full-time staffers. The newsroom, while dedicated to African-American issues, simply cannot provide the type of comprehensive coverage of such communities without more full-time staffers. Hopefully, this issue can be addressed in some fashion.

Finally, this effort suggests that these newsrooms, by and large, do not make a concerted effort to either diversify newsrooms, or assess the overall quality of news coverage impacting communities of color. Thus, it is very difficult to argue that newsrooms within the Pittsburgh region are actively concerned with issues impacting communities of color, or issues impacting journalists of color. Not only

are these newsrooms lacking solutions to these issues, but it also appears that, in many cases, they aren't even asking questions related to issues of diversity and inclusion. This must change. But, unfortunately, it may not change without additional pressure and monitoring from organizations like the Pittsburgh Black Media Federation and the collective will of the media organizations.

This effort especially left us concerned about the overwhelming lack of diversity within suburban newsrooms. To be clear, most suburban counties in Pittsburgh have diverse populations hovering around 5 percent. But 5 percent is higher than zero. Moreover, in many boroughs and cities outside of Pittsburgh proper, notably areas where the steel industry once thrived, the population of African-Americans exceeds 20 percent of total population. This means these areas have significant, long-standing communities of color, some of which are suffering the same issues as other areas and neighborhoods where the steel industry has crashed. It is simply not acceptable for these newsrooms to not have any individuals of color covering these communities.

We also believe more analysis is needed to assess climate issues within local newsrooms. While some newsrooms, statistically, do well with diversity in terms of numbers, interviews with former newsroom employees suggest that the climate with regard to diversity in these spaces is not always positive. It is merely not enough to hire individuals of color. Individuals of color need to feel included, a sense of belonging, empowered, and believe their voices matter.

As noted, this report does not have a solid grasp of diversity in broadcast media. As a result of time considerations, this study does not include any specific

analysis of news coverage. Additionally, while we began the process of interviewing individuals who have worked in newsrooms, and some community members regarding their impression of diversity and inclusion efforts made by local newsrooms, additional interviews are required to make a fair assessment of other issues impacting the local news media. To make such an informed assessment, we will need to interview current newsroom workers, current newsroom managers, and citizens who have been impacted – positively or negatively – by actual news coverage.

For this reason, the Pittsburgh Black Media Federation intends to continue this important research of Pittsburgh-area newsrooms as a means of gaining an even more comprehensive understanding of diversity and inclusion issues within local media.

Over the span of the next two years, the Pittsburgh Black Media Federation hopes to conduct more specific research focused on each of five areas within the news industry – traditional print media, traditional broadcast media, ethnic media, online and alternative media and local student media. More specifically, it is our goal to gain a better understanding of issues related to newsroom climate. While diversity is an important measurement, surveys that count the number of people of color within newsrooms – such as ours and the longstanding survey by the American Society of News Editors – fail to ascertain the degree to which newsroom workers of color are empowered within their work spaces.

Two local studies by the Regional Workforce Diversity Indicators noted that workers of color within the Pittsburgh region feel their employers do not truly

embrace diversity. Respondents of color felt they are often overlooked for promotions, do not feel they have the same opportunities to voice concerns, and do not feel as valued in comparison to their white colleagues. Based on preliminary interviews with past newsroom workers, we are deeply concerned with the level of inclusivity that genuinely exists within some Pittsburgh-area newsrooms.

The Pittsburgh Black Media Federation also hopes to assess the content of news coverage. We specifically seek to launch an effort to look at the coverage of women of color in the Pittsburgh region. We feel this is needed to balance out the 2011 survey commissioned by the Heinz Endowments, and to give voice to populations that are often ignored within current narratives of today's media environment. Finally, we will seek to study what is happening within local journalism and communications programs, to discover who is coming through the pipelines, and understand what students at the collegiate level are learning with regard to diversity and inclusion in newsrooms, and who they are learning these lessons from on a daily basis.

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