

EQUITY CHECKLIST FOR JOURNALISTS

Tips for more inclusive, impartial storytelling

Check this list while sourcing and newsgathering -- and especially before you publish.

- 1. INTERVIEW PEOPLE FROM UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES.** Consider the following sources: women, people of color, young people, people with different abilities, LGBTQ people, non-binary people, military members. Include diverse sources without referencing race/ethnicity, class, socioeconomic factors, gender, geography, sexual orientation or generation unless this information is relevant. Look for diverse sources even when the story isn't about diversity. Ensure data represents underserved communities. Request data be broken down into groups to avoid generalizations.
- 2. TREAT PEOPLE WITH DIGNITY.** Be patient and respectful. Use courtesy to show that you respect, appreciate and value community members, and unless a person is hard of hearing, avoid raising your voice, which may offend people who speak English as a second language. Meet people where and when they are most comfortable.
- 3. GET NAMES AND PRONOUNS RIGHT.** Even if it means asking multiple times, make every attempt to pronounce and spell people's names correctly, including using accent marks. Use the correct pronouns and do not refer to people's *preferred* pronouns. Pronouns are not a preference. Be aware that some people use multiple pronouns. Follow USA TODAY [Network's guidance](#).
- 4. EXAMINE STORY FRAMING.** Where news judgment and inclusion meet: Do not automatically follow common tropes, such as white savior, problem people, or overcoming the odds. Look for different approaches and points of view.
- 5. LEVERAGE RESOURCES AND EXPERTISE.** Check your own assumptions and research elements of identity and race from those closest to it. If you're going into a new community or space, ensure you know the basics, so your questions of sources are more nuanced. Google it. Do your homework. Talk to experts. Search links and credible online expertise to learn about your topic.
- 6. CHECK YOUR BIASES AND BLIND SPOTS.** Know your own hangups before you sit down to do the content. There are times when we *assume* that we know. We may not recognize that blind spots can be just as damaging.
- 7. VALUE THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF DIVERSE SOURCES.** Listen carefully to a person's story. Understand you may have gathered some misrepresented information from the internet and people journalists traditionally think of as experts. Allow people to represent their own history.
- 8. ACQUAINT SOURCES WITH THE REPORTING PROCESS.** Give people an idea of how you present information. Make time for a new source to get to know you as a journalist and a storyteller. Answer questions about your work before the interview (maybe even send a few bylines). Explain what to expect. During the interview, be conversational. Build trust by being approachable.
- 9. ENSURE PHOTOS AND STORY PLAY REFLECT DIVERSITY.** Visuals offer us a powerful opportunity to fairly represent diversity online and in print. Look for patterns that might reveal unconscious bias. Guard against portraying people in stereotypical ways. Check that photos, captions, b-roll, headlines, brief fields, etc., accurately reflect the person and capture the story.

10. DO A FINAL CHECK. One bad headline or wrong reference can ruin the trust we are building with younger, more diverse communities. Step outside your comfort zone. Put down your shield (be vulnerable, not defensive). Review the story, design, photo choices from the perspective of various stakeholders to consider criticisms or omissions. Look for statements based on assumptions, not confirmed by reporting. Be willing to delay publication to get it right. Be willing to take responsibility for mistakes.

SOURCES

Equity Checklist Subgroup: Cynthia Benjamin, Jean Hodges, Michael McCarter

USAT Diversity Committee Goal 2 Subgroup

Inclusive Newsroom “Arc”, Mizell Stewart III/USATN, CBC

DEI Virtual Meetups, LGBTQ Lunch & Learn, Cynthia Benjamin

Asian American Journalists Association, Ai Uchida, 2022 Board Member

USAT Visuals Best Practices

Contributing:

Jayne Fraser, USA TODAY, Maryann Battle, David Oliver, USA TODAY; Mary Chao, Bergen Record; Jaime Cárdenas; Eve Chen, USA TODAY; Amelia Robinson, Columbus Dispatch; David Plazas, The Tennessean; Rob Bell, Rochester Democrat and Chronicle; Sammy Gibbons and Sarah Hutchings, Pride Forward; Stacy Sullivan, Phoenix; Bill Cannon, USA TODAY; Tina MacIntyre-Yee, Rochester; Sandy Hooper, USA TODAY; Emily Brown, USA TODAY; Rebecca Markovitz, Design Center; Tiffany Cusaac-Smith, USA TODAY New York.

RESOURCES

Women resources: <https://www.freedomforuminstitute.org/initiatives/power-shift-project/about-the-power-shift-project/resources/>

NAHJ on Spanish surnames: <https://nahj.org/2021/12/30/nahj-issues-guidance-on-the-proper-use-of-spanish-surnames-following-the-tragic-killing-of-valentina-orellana-peralta/>

Disability Style Guide: <https://ncdj.org/style-guide/>

Pronouns Matter: <https://pronouns.org/>

Trans Style Guide: <https://transjournalists.org/style-guide/>

GLAAD Style Guide (LGBTQ): <https://www.glaad.org/reference>

Native American guide: <https://najanewsroom.com/reporting-guides/>

Asian American guide: <https://www.aaja.org/news-and-resources/guidances/>

AJC on anti-Semitism: <https://www.ajc.org/resources/antisemitism>

AJC on Israel: <https://www.ajc.org/resources/israel>

AJC on Iran: <https://www.ajc.org/resources/iran>

Network Style Committee guidance: [Pronouns and other areas](#)

Media Education - Maynard Fault Lines: <https://mije.org/diversity-training/fault-lines/>

Language Please: [Resources for equity in journalism reporting and editing.](#)

Covering Poverty: <https://journalistsresource.org/economics/covering-poverty-avoid-get-right/>
<https://coveringpoverty.uga.edu/2020/11/18/covering-poverty-tip-sheet/>

Covering violence, conflict, tragedy: <https://dartcenter.org/>

YOUR EQUITY CHECKLIST:

Tips for more inclusive, impartial storytelling

Check this list while sourcing and newsgathering -- and especially before you publish.

(ALTERNATE VERSION With quotes from journalists who contributed to this list)

1. INTERVIEW PEOPLE FROM UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES. [Pew research](#) shows journalists most often quote older, white, educated sources. Media frequently report on and in diverse communities without speaking to the people the story is about. Who else can you include besides officials: women, people of color, young people, people with different abilities, LGBTQ people, non-binary people, military members. Include sources from diverse backgrounds without referencing race/ethnicity, class, gender, geography, sexual orientation or generation unless including this information is relevant. All these folks are part of our communities. Quote and include them. This applies to data, too. Ensure data accurately represents the experiences of underserved communities.

___ Did you stop and think: Whose voice is missing from the story?

“Talk to people in the community you’re writing about. Quote people from the community. Before anything else, as a baseline.” - David Oliver, USA TODAY

2. TREAT PEOPLE WITH DIGNITY. Be patient and respectful. the same courtesy with multicultural and underserved communities as you respect, appreciate and value. Unless a person is hard of hearing, avoid raising your voice, which may offend people who speak English as a second language.

“When someone speaks English as a second language or with an accent, recognize: It takes time for the person to translate into English. Be patient with your source.

Avoid speaking loudly or raising your voice as though the person (who speaks English as a second language) cannot hear.” -- Mary Chao, Bergen Record

3. GET NAMES RIGHT. Even if it means asking a person multiple times, make every attempt to pronounce and spell people’s names correctly (Asian American Journalists Association). Verify how people use their last names, particularly those of Latin heritage (National Association of Hispanic

Journalists [guidance.](#)) Be specific about how people self-identify (Puerto Rican, Navajo, Korean, for example; person with a disability vs. disabled).

“The name is important for a lot of Asian Americans because we have to anglicize our names so that people feel comfortable talking to us, and because it is a hard name to pronounce and it is not easy for English speakers to understand.

We don’t mind if people say, ‘How do you pronounce your name?’

That’s all it takes, and like, ask me 10 times I don’t care. I love it when people ask me how to pronounce my name. The name is tied to everyone’s identity, not just Asians, you know? They want you to get their name right because that’s the first thing people know about you.” -- Ai Uchida, Asian American Journalists Association Board

“Check, double check, triple check.” – (Will Carless, USA TODAY)

4. EXAMINE HOW YOU ARE FRAMING THE STORY. Where news judgment and inclusion meet: Be conscious of common frames. Do not automatically follow a white savior or problem people or overcoming the odds storytelling approach – even if doing so is unintentional. Beware of “inspiration porn.” Ensure people of different abilities aren’t viewed as tokens of inspiration.

___Did you seek out a different approach or a different point of view for this work?

“Pause and think: Challenge yourself. If a white teacher is helping immigrants learn English as a second language, do not automatically go with a white-savior storyline, which may be at the expense of others who are impacted. Did you consider writing about the students themselves?” - Jaime Cárdenas

“Think about who you’re talking to a community rather than just about the community.”

-- Felecia Wellington

5. LEVERAGE RESOURCES AND EXPERTISE. Google it. Do your homework. Talk to experts. Search out resource links and credible online expertise to learn about your topic.

“Did you seek internal expertise, such as [Employee Resource Groups](#) (diversity committees, etc.)? Reach out to the appropriate ERG. They may advise you of good sources of information, and trusted groups.”- Eve Chen, USA TODAY

6. CHECK YOUR OWN BIASES AND BLIND SPOTS. Know your own hangups before you sit down to do the content. There are times when we *assume* that we know. We may not recognize that blind spots can be just as damaging.

“Have you thought about your personal biases and hangups? (We all have them.) Recognize your biases and hangups. It goes a long way to helping tell a better story. Stop and think: Am I putting my biases into this story?” -Amelia Robinson, Columbus Dispatch

7. VALUE THE LIVED-EXPERIENCE OF DIVERSE SOURCES. Value lived experiences and listen to a person’s story. Be comfortable with knowing you may have gathered some misrepresented information from (the internet). Allow them to represent their own history.

“Sources from underserved communities often are not quoted, and to have those relationships (with journalists) is based on trust. Recognize that if someone connects you with a source they’ve worked

with, building a source-relationship and understanding is fundamental. Have someone who can at least guide you to this source.” -David Plazas, The Tennessean

8. ACQUAINT SOURCES WITH THE REPORTING PROCESS. Make time for a new source to get acquainted with you as a journalist and a storyteller. Answer their questions about your work (maybe even send a few bylines). Explain what to expect. Be conversational. Talk it out with new sources when time permits. Take their questions and answer to the best of your knowledge. And then let your source represent their own history/their own story. Let them know that they can voice a question throughout the whole interview process and try to make the interview more conversational as you build trust. Ensure visual journalists have time to explain that part of the process, too, before they pull out gear to take photos.

“People aren’t used to being interviewed. The great majority don’t know the process of how their quotes and their story will be used in the news. So I found it valuable to, kind of like, before I even start interviewing, just take some time to just have a regular conversation with the person and give them an opportunity. Maybe (let them) ask you some questions and you know, just to kind of create a level of comfortability -- where they’re willing to be vulnerable with you.” -Rob Bell, Rochester Democrat and Chronicle

Ask, “What are your questions for me?” rather than “Do you have questions for me?”

9. ENSURE PHOTOS AND STORY PLAY REFLECT DIVERSITY. Visuals offer us a powerful opportunity to fairly represent diversity online and in print. Look for patterns that might reveal unconscious bias. Guard against portraying people in stereotypical ways. Check that photos, captions, b-roll, headlines, brief fields, etc., accurately reflect the person and capture the story. Don’t count on photo editing (blurring, silhouetting, etc.) to hide someone’s identity (immigrants, children). Look for ways to take the photo to protect identity. Also, ask yourself if you are distributing diverse content on all platforms. *Consider the impact of different communities. (Jayme) ...*

“The goal of visual journalism is to represent events as accurately as possible. Using visual clichés, generic images and stock photos erode reader’s trust. They should be avoided whenever possible.” USA TODAY Visuals Best Practices

“We often have preconceived notions about religious groups and so many of the ideas around them are overgeneralized, and it can be easy to assume/approach issues that have a religious angle with outdated views.” Rebecca Markovitz, Design Center

10. DO A FINAL CHECK. One bad headline or wrong reference can ruin the trust we are building with younger, more diverse communities. Check that photos, captions, b-roll, headlines, brief fields, etc., accurately reflect the person and capture what the story is about. Step outside your comfort zone: Be willing to experience discomfort on the story. Be willing to delay the story (if it will help avoid rushing to publish when delaying would benefit (e.g. accuracy, sensitivity check, understanding the audience for the story, etc.)). Put down your shield (be vulnerable, not defensive). Maintain self-awareness. Bring empathy to the interview. Stay in the room. Be willing to take responsibility.

“Challenge your assumptions.” (Jayme Fraser)

“Be very careful about what you link to, publications that deal in spreading hate or falsehoods. (Michelle)

“Don’t direct readers or increase access to hate groups.” (Will)

“Please do raise concerns – be willing to note something worth bringing up.” (Michelle)

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