

Planning and Analysis - 8 Tips

Whether your newsroom is interested in launching a comprehensive initiative to diversify sources, or you as an individual are looking to increase the number of women sources in your own stories, start by looking at your current record on sourcing and what approaches may already be working.

1) BENCHMARK THE GENDER SPLIT OF SOURCES

Your first activity should be to audit a selection of news content to determine the current gender split of sources. Gather a robust sample – spanning a month or more at least. Carefully consider what you would like to measure.

- If you benchmark on behalf of an entire newsroom, it could be easier to go narrow and deep rather than try to be exhaustive. You may want to begin by focusing on distinct sections, such as local news, sports or business.
- There are options for how to count. You might count the ratio of male sources to female sources. Or you can simply measure the ratio of articles that include female sources to those that don't.

- You may want to track the gender split of the source's function – are they a public official, spokesperson or academic? If your initiative is to improve the diversity beyond gender, consider including these other variables in your count.
- Be sure to focus on tracking only the sources that are within your power to change. This way you collect data that can help assess behavior change in the newsroom. Certain sources, such as politicians or particular spokespersons, are sources you must cite. Exclude these sources from your count, or track them separately, as they do not represent an opportunity for change.
- The more detail you gather in your benchmarking exercise, the more insight you will have to help you identify where you have a voice gap and where you want to focus your efforts. It will also give you a better idea of how to design a tracking methodology to measure the gender split regularly. See our section on tracking for more tips.

2) IDENTIFY EXISTING EFFORTS

Chances are some newsroom staff are already aware of the gender disparity of their sources and have developed techniques to address it. Consult staff across the newsroom, from different departments, to gather their insights. Analyze what past efforts managers or journalists may have implemented. Ask what was successful and what fell flat. If there are existing practices that are working, you'll want to consider how you can celebrate and build upon those efforts. Consider starting with a staff survey, like the [example](#) presented from Earth Journalism Network.



3) DIVERSIFY STAFF

When focusing on diversity in news content sourcing, remember that gender and minority representation inside the newsroom is an important part of the equation. Only when the staff inside the newsroom represent women and a range of communities outside the newsroom will content truly be representative and authentic. While a diverse staff does not negate the possibility of bias in source selection, a diverse staff can help identify representation gaps, instances of stereotyping or content that mischaracterizes communities. Any effort to diversify sources will be more successful if paired with a plan for diverse hiring. As Toronto Star Editor Irene Gentle effectively sums up, without a diverse staff, “we don’t know what we don’t know.”

Also, make sure you pay attention to who’s in the room for story planning meetings so that diverse outlooks are involved in every step of a story’s production.

4) MAKE SURE YOU HAVE LEADERSHIP BACKING

The commitment to inclusion must come from the top. Ideally, it’s included as an official policy of the publisher and expressed in a clear announcement or communication to staff. To effect change, journalists and staff need to know that their leadership, not only at the masthead level but their editors and department managers, consider it a priority. With leadership backing, staff feels greater license to not only speak up about inclusion but allocate more energy to the goal.

As Matt Frehner, Head of Visual Journalism at The Globe and Mail explains, “A newsroom is like any other hierarchy. If David [Editor and Chief at the Globe and Mail] sends a note that says, ‘this is a thing we care about, and we are going to be paying attention...’ it brings up the discussion when planning stories.”

“People need to understand from leadership that gender parity in sourcing is part of their objective, as much as their objective is to be partial, balanced, or creative.”

— JULIANA IOOTY, HEAD OF ASIA REGION, BBC WORLD SERVICE



Internews, launch of ‘Our Voices’ program in Iraq. Media representatives from across Iraq gather in Erbil to share feedback on challenges limiting women’s voice in media. photo credit: Internews

5) RECRUIT CHAMPIONS

During your planning phase, identify individuals who care deeply about closing the gender gap and are excited about a change in the newsroom. Choose leaders and helpers who are well-respected in the newsroom and able to bring people together.

Engage the younger generations of staff who are adaptable and have come of age during an era in which inclusion is a chief concern. Consider forming a task force of such individuals, who can meet regularly to plan and maintain your efforts.

6) SET ACHIEVABLE GOALS

Start small and build on success: focus interventions on discrete sections of the newsroom or a certain news beat. Choose a modest percentage goal in terms of gender balance in sourcing – perhaps just a 10% or 15% increase. Once you reach this goal, share the progress with the newsroom and communicate the next goal, or bring in new sections of the newsroom.

By building on incremental success, you can build the newsroom’s confidence and momentum, and create a more sustainable shift in the workflow.

7) CONSIDER THE ROLE OF ALL STAFF AND DEPARTMENTS

In your planning phases, consider the role of each person in the newsroom and their impact on whose voices are ultimately included in stories. Achieving parity in sourcing is a newsroom-wide effort. For example, The Globe and Mail found that the visuals team was integral to their effort to increase women’s voices. As the visual team seeks to increase diversity in photos, they identify gender gaps in stories, and remind journalists to seek female and diverse voices.

The Toronto Star leverages its social media team to investigate new diverse communities and voices, and to pass leads on to reporters across the newsroom.

8) FOCUS ON OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONVERSATION

Examine your department workflow and look for opportunities to integrate discussions about inclusion that are organic and natural. Rather than setting strict rules and procedures for how stories should be produced, foster conditions that encourage teams to talk about inclusion strategies.

**“It should not be punitive.
It should spark a conversation.
No one is going to get their pay
docked for not doing this.”**

— LAURA ZELENKO, SENIOR
EXECUTIVE EDITOR, BLOOMBERG