

# Diversity = Accuracy

American journalists are concerned to get comprehensive community coverage.

In May 1999, more than 2000 journalists across the USA turned their spotlight on themselves. Their mission? To see how accurately their coverage reflected the diversity of their communities.

Organised by the Associated Press Managing Editors (APME) and the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), the activities that unfolded had two themes:

- to address diversity in reporting and editing as an element of accuracy — i.e. as integral to core journalistic values;

- to broaden the definition of diversity beyond race and ethnicity — to include class, geography, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, political ideology, and any other issues that defined people in their communities. More than 150 newsrooms and 43 Associated Press bureaus agreed to take part, in response to a letter reading:

*"While America's editors say they value diversity in their newsrooms and in their coverage, change has been incremental. We're taking the unprecedented step of asking*



every American newsroom to take 'a national time-out' during the week of May 17 to discuss diversity in coverage as a core journalism issue based on the following premise:

*"We want to accurately reflect life in our communities. If our newspapers are not inclusive enough to regularly portray the diversity of those communities, then we are presenting a fundamentally inaccurate report. That lack of accuracy undermines our journalistic credibility.*

*"We're asking you to sponsor staff meetings, brown bag lunches, pizza parties, whatever works for you. The purpose is to debate the premise we've presented and to see what changes — if any — you might want to make to achieve a higher degree of accuracy and authenticity in your daily report."*

Sixty newsrooms did audits of their coverage of race, gender, geography, class and age. An overwhelming majority reported they were dissatisfied with the results and said they needed to work harder to reach more deeply and broadly into their communities for sources and story ideas.

Among the comments from participants:

*"We found that our photo report reflected the diversity of the area (actually we seemed to be doing better than we had*

*suspectd). However, the survey was valuable because it pinpointed a couple of specific areas — hiring and promotions column in business, and weddings and anniversaries in features — where we needed to make more effort to seek and included photos of minorities." — Tom Eblen, managing editor, Lexington Herald-Leader.*

*"Our most common problem is going back to the same sources too often. Reporters get in a rut, thinking that one person represents a group." — Melinda Meers, managing editor, Florida Today.*

Among the ideas arising during the week were the following:

- The Record Searchlight has a programme called "Community Connection", where editors and reporters have to speak with a group that is dissimilar to their own lifestyle or demographic. The goal is to return with five suggestions for how they can better cover or reach that segment of the community.
- The Wausau Daily Herald has a newsroom 'diversity guru' who reads the paper every day and marks areas where the paper has done a good job of diversifying its coverage.
- In addition to stressing diversity in staff meetings, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram has added a 'Diversity Checklist' to its daily newsbudget, and includes a 'Think Diversity' note on all photo assignments.
- The Sun Herald (Miss) trains its reporters to seek out the voices in the middle of an issue, rather than simply stop with the extremes.

The "Time-Out for Diversity and Accuracy" was partnered by The Freedom Forum and the Maynard Institute. Full report available from the APME.



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