

An Update on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at NPR

Feb. 17, 2022

Almost 18 months have passed since the SAG-AFTRA unit of NPR presented [the union's demands](#) for improving racial and ethnic diversity, equity and inclusion in our organization.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic and months of financial uncertainty for the company, the union and NPR's management rallied together to codify many of those demands from September 2020 into a robust [collective bargaining agreement that was ratified in October 2021](#).

Separate from the union's efforts, management has made its own strides towards the North Star of diversity set by CEO John Lansing. In February 2021, NPR's inaugural DEI manager, Whitney Maddox, began leading internal anti-racism conversations and targeted efforts to address inequities facing women of color on staff.

Still, despite this progress, NPR has a ways to go in reflecting the public it serves — through both its staffing and its content — and meeting its other DEI goals.

The recent series of departures of staffers of color from across the organization — some headline-making, many below the public's radar — have only underlined what has long been true: The need for change is urgent, and a commitment to change must be sustained.

The SAG-AFTRA unit's DEI Accountability Committee and shop stewards are heartened by Lansing's continued insistence that diversity, equity and inclusion are essential to NPR's future.

However, we have yet to see effective follow-through on every commitment. For example, while there have been improvements in the racial and ethnic diversity among recent hires, many SAG-AFTRA members see supporting and retaining staffers of color as a key challenge for management, according to a recent union survey.

Dismantling the barriers that have kept NPR from fully achieving its mission will take collective action. The committee and the stewards recognize they will need to continue to engage with all SAG-AFTRA members and allies outside of the union in order to truly improve DEI.

We offer the following recommendations to management as we push towards our goals:

- Review how DEI-related directives and updates are communicated to lower-level managers and across different divisions and teams to try to ensure everyone in the organization is working from the same set of information
- Review how NPR uses data to evaluate the effectiveness of DEI-related initiatives in order to fill gaps in data gathering
- Set up a schedule for more regular updates to staff about DEI-related efforts at the division level

Signed,

NPR SAG-AFTRA Shop Stewards and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Accountability Committee

Status summary of our demands and reforms

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Status of our demands to NPR's management

EXECUTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

From September 2020: "NPR managers and executives should be held accountable for failing to make measurable progress toward diversity. As a starting point, executive bonuses, currently on hold because of economic conditions, should not be reinstated unless employee representation of people of color is at least 35% within every individual division."

Some DEI-related goals are factored into executive bonuses through existing divisional goals, such as a company-wide goal to "deploy more resources and develop a strategy to improve recruitment of diverse hires across departments." These goals, along with other divisional and individual goals, make up 50% of upper management's bonus program (the other half is tied to financial metrics). Additionally, all leaders are expected to meet the commitments made to address challenges facing women of color at NPR that were surfaced through the organization's 2020 climate survey and follow-up research. Management has committed to posting divisional goals so they are visible organization-wide, which will help with transparency. But the SAG-AFTRA unit continues to push for bonuses to be tied to more quantifiable DEI targets to ensure executive accountability.

PLAN FOR REPORTER/EDITOR DIVERSITY

From September 2020: "NPR must build a reporter/correspondent corps that reflects the diversity of the nation we cover ... NPR must publish a pledge and a plan to bring the corps of reporters/correspondents/hosts and editing staff, specifically, up to parity with the nation's demographics, whether through new hires or promotions and reassignments."

Management has recognized the problem flagged by the SAG-AFTRA unit and started tracking a similar (though not identical) metric — audience-facing journalists, which include reporters/correspondents (both those based in the U.S. and those outside the U.S., who are not SAG-AFTRA members), newscasters and hosts. This group, which is 68% white (and not Latino) as of September 2021, has been significantly whiter than the U.S. population, which is 58% non-Hispanic white according to the 2020 census. While there is a higher share of Asian Americans among NPR's audience-facing journalists (11%) than in the U.S. (6%), people of color as a whole have been underrepresented in this cohort, particularly American Indians and Alaska Natives, Black people, Latinos, Pacific Islanders and multiracial people. The SAG-AFTRA unit continues to believe NPR's news and programming divisions should have a plan for how to make

the corps of reporters/correspondents, hosts and editors more representative of the United States. Among editors (Editor I and above), about 75% identified as white as of January 2022. While editors are generally not considered “audience-facing,” they hold a significant amount of control over NPR’s content, and diversifying the racial and ethnic makeup of this cohort is key to achieving the organization’s DEI goals. Additionally, the union recognizes that editorial power isn’t limited to these roles. The union’s DEI Accountability Committee is concerned that a recent demographic analysis by the union of all roles in the three highest salary bands (7-9, including roles such as Producer III, Senior Producer, Senior News Apps Designer/Developer and Senior User Experience Designer) found that this cohort is 75% white.

SUPERVISOR ACCOUNTABILITY

From September 2020: “Supervisors at all levels should have their job descriptions rewritten to explicitly require them to meet HR best practices for hiring processes and to support people from marginalized backgrounds on their teams. Their annual reviews must assess their success on these fronts, with corrective actions taken if they are falling short of their job duties.”

NPR now requires that supervisors at all levels include DEI-related skills and responsibilities in job descriptions, as well as DEI-related questions in interviews with supervisor candidates. However, management confirmed to the SAG-AFTRA unit’s DEI Accountability Committee that a January 2022 audit found DEI language missing from some job postings. Management has conducted a round of “skip up” meetings between women of color at NPR and their supervisors’ supervisors. And to help ensure supervisor accountability, management is working on implementing a system that allows employees to give written feedback as part of a manager’s formal review — an effort that the SAG-AFTRA unit strongly supports. So far, management says they have piloted a program with 20 supervisors (who are not in the news or programming divisions) and expect to expand the program across NPR during the current fiscal 2022 year-end performance review cycle.

HIRING POOLS AND PANELS

From September 2020: “At least 50% of all finalist pools for open positions should come from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, and hiring managers should be prohibited from moving forward if this is not the case. As NPR has recognized, all hiring panels must be diverse. HR should track finalist pools and hiring panel makeup, publish the overall results and hold individual hiring managers accountable when they fall short.”

As part of the SAG-AFTRA unit's new collective bargaining agreement, NPR management has agreed to work towards ensuring that at least 30% of external candidates who receive interviews are from groups who would advance NPR's DEI priorities. NPR's talent acquisitions team is working to check compliance with having diverse finalist pools and hiring panels, and management says they should be able to provide data on the demographics of both of those groups in summer 2022.

EXIT INTERVIEWS

From September 2020: "Management must commit to offering confidential exit interviews to every employee who leaves NPR. NPR must commit to analyzing information gathered from the exit interview process for issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion and providing at least a biannual, aggregated summary of relevant suggestions, trends and issues to union representatives."

Management says employees who are leaving NPR should receive a link to an optional, online survey and a notice for an exit interview with a human resources department representative before their departure dates. During exit interviews, the HR representative may ask questions based on an employee's online responses, as well as those from a questionnaire. The SAG-AFTRA unit's DEI Accountability Committee has provided preliminary feedback on a draft of that questionnaire, which management plans to share with all NPR staff by April 1, 2022. In January 2022, management provided the committee with a qualitative summary of major themes from interviews over the past two years. Management says it expects to be able to share recent trends from the online survey by summer 2022.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

From September 2020: "NPR must develop credible and meaningful career development opportunities within the News and Programming divisions to correct its long-running failure to invest in the careers of its producers and junior employees."

Management has recognized that a lack of career development opportunities has contributed to departures from the organization at all levels, based on exit interviews. Management has offered courses and sessions through NPR's career development and learning team and editorial training team, as well as a pilot rotation program in the programming division that is planned to run from March to May 2022. While those opportunities can be helpful, the SAG-AFTRA unit still sees a lack of opportunities that give its members on-the-job experience that could help with their professional development and career paths. Additionally, most of the examples management highlighted to the union's DEI Accountability Committee in January 2022 seem to be mainly geared towards members who aspire to be managers or gain management skills. The

union still believes there is an urgent need for more reporting and editing development opportunities for junior employees.

TEMP ANALYSIS

From September 2020: “NPR must commit to an analysis of its use of temporary employees, including: demographic data on current temporary employees; data on the rate of temporary employees leaving the organization; and whether racial disparities exist in the conversion of temporary employees to permanent employees. NPR must release this data as part of its annual release of newsroom diversity data through the public editor and on NPR.org.”

During all-staff meetings in 2021, NPR internally shared data on the demographics of employees converted from temporary to regular status, meeting one of the SAG-AFTRA unit’s demands. However, properly contextualizing this data requires also tracking the demographics of current temporary employees and the rate at which temporary employees leave the organization. The SAG-AFTRA unit continues to believe it is critical for this analysis of temporary employees to be included in NPR’s [public report](#) on staff diversity.

SOURCE TRACKING

From September 2020: “To show that NPR is prioritizing source tracking as a way to immediately improve efforts to make sure NPR looks and sounds like the U.S., NPR must demand that every team immediately start tracking sources...”

On Dec. 6, 2021, NPR management started requiring all news and programming units to regularly track the demographics of their interviewees and other sources using an internal tool called Dex. This tool allows individuals to generate real-time reports on their own data, a key element of the SAG-AFTRA unit’s demands. The DEI Accountability Committee, however, remains concerned that union members from multiple teams have reported that the responsibilities for entering data into Dex have not been distributed equitably. A small number of staffers are finding and entering data to make up for colleagues who are not. Management has told the committee that it is “vitaly important that source tracking is a shared responsibility” and that it will “follow up with the managers of the unit(s) to figure out how to remedy any issues,” as well as work with the Dex team to “address any issues related to data entry and equitable distribution of workload on teams.” Management says that it “will work with the Dex team to have periodic check-ins across the newsroom and programming to ensure adoption is happening across teams.” The programming division is having quarterly meetings to share insights and adjust processes, and it has provided the committee with information about

the challenges related to this rollout, including staffing issues. The news division has only committed to “periodic” check-ins and has not provided similar details.

TRANSLATIONS/INTERPRETATION

From September 2020: “NPR must set aside a pool of funds that would ensure that all translations and interpretations of languages into English can be done professionally by contractors or another service provider.”

As part of the SAG-AFTRA unit’s new collective bargaining agreement, management has committed to providing professional resources for NPR’s language needs. NPR has started a trial with a translation and interpretation service for the news and programming divisions, and the trial period was recently extended to the end of February 2022. Starting in January 2022, all employees who perform translation and/or interpretation work — regardless of union representation — are guaranteed a \$100 bonus for any pay period during which they use their non-English language skills. SAG-AFTRA expects to receive the first quarterly report on the awarded bonuses later this year.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION FUNDING TRANSPARENCY

From September 2020: “NPR must provide SAG-AFTRA with an accounting of how much funding has been allocated to support diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, as compared to other training and hiring programs.”

At the SAG-AFTRA unit’s request, management provided data about the funding for DEI initiatives in fiscal 2021 and has committed to continue providing this information. The union’s DEI Accountability Committee has learned that it is difficult to fully quantify the resources dedicated to DEI initiatives because many of them are not funded individually. But management’s data reports are helping the union monitor NPR’s financial commitment to DEI efforts over time and ensure there is ongoing support.

EDITING, RESEARCH AND PRODUCING CREDITS

From September 2020: “NPR must establish a mandatory company-wide policy for publicly crediting the work of editors, producers and RAD researchers.”

In April 2021, Nancy Barnes, senior vice president of news and editorial director, shared NPR’s new byline/credits policy for both the news and programming divisions with staff. After last year’s negotiations for the new collective bargaining agreement ended in September,

management agreed to work with the SAG-AFTRA unit if there are changes to the policy. In January 2022, management informed the union's DEI Accountability Committee that the policy is being "updated with some additional language" and that an updated version with "input" from news and programming teams will be shared in March 2022. SAG-AFTRA was not notified of the discussions that prompted this latest round of updates, and the committee has requested more information about who was involved in these conversations.

STYLE GUIDE AND CORRECTIONS

From September 2020: "NPR must commit to a comprehensive, transparent and ongoing review of our style guide and corrections process to assess NPR's policies on race/ethnicity, gender identity and other topics related to marginalized groups, and ensure the entire newsroom has access to clear and updated policies."

As part of the SAG-AFTRA unit's new collective bargaining agreement, management has agreed to this demand, with the goal of ensuring the organization has access to clear and updated policies and consults with journalist affinity groups for guidance. An Ethics Advisory Panel was set up in November 2021, and management says that members are scheduled to meet weekly on Thursdays through June 2022. However, the union's DEI Accountability Committee is concerned that management has been slow to fully implement this demand and offer intermediate measures, especially as the relentless news cycles have shown no signs of slowing down. Management has told the committee that an updated version of NPR's style guide, what management has referred to as a "Guidance guide" and an updated guidance section of the NPR Ethics Handbook will be available to NPR staff by the end of February 2022. The committee will monitor this rollout to ensure new guidance is presented in a way that makes it clear how guidance has evolved over time and how staff should report instances in which published and/or aired NPR content may be inconsistent with current guidance. Management has told the committee that NPR's recently hired managing editor for standards and practices, Tony Cavin, has met with representatives of the Asian American Journalists Association, National Association of Black Journalists and Native American Journalists Association and is planning to meet with National Association of Hispanic Journalists and NLGJA: The Association of LGBTQ Journalists to set up channels of communications. Management noted that Cavin plans to reach out to those groups at least every six weeks to discuss guidance and that when or if NPR's editorial guidance differs from an affinity group's guidance, the differences will be noted in communications to NPR staff. The committee will follow up to make sure management is aware of other journalism groups, including the Arab and Middle Eastern Journalists Association, National Center on Disability and Journalism, South Asian Journalists Association and Trans Journalists Association.

ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

From September 2020: “NPR must create a committee, with members representing the unions as well as senior management, that will meet monthly to assess progress on these action items, and make additional recommendations on how to support a diverse newsroom...”

Since the September 2020 release of the SAG-AFTRA unit’s DEI demands, the DEI Accountability Committee has met six times with management representatives, including Chief Diversity Officer Keith Woods and Chief Human Resources Officer Carrie Storer. CEO John Lansing, Vice President of Human Resources Selyn Hong and Stuart Harding, associate general counsel for labor and employment, have also periodically attended meetings. The unit’s new collective bargaining agreement cemented the existence of, and NPR’s continued commitment to, the committee, and the beginning of 2022 has already seen one meeting and improvements to the process of information sharing between SAG-AFTRA and management.

Status of reforms to our union

SURVEY OF MEMBERS

From September 2020: “The union will follow up with additional surveys as work progresses and present this document at a member meeting to foster discussion and the generation of new ideas for what the union can do.”

The SAG-AFTRA unit surveyed members in 2020 and 2022. The union also held a town hall meeting in 2021 to solicit members’ input. For the most recent survey, many members said they had not received enough updates from the union about the status of DEI efforts and provided suggestions for how to improve engagement with the unit as a whole. In ongoing DEI work, members urged SAG-AFTRA to prioritize retention issues, a tool to provide feedback on supervisors (as described above under “Supervisor Accountability”) and following up on management’s promised data releases.

ENGAGEMENT WITH EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS

From September 2020: “The union will send a representative to meetings of the ERG council to listen and learn how the union can best support efforts toward mutual goals.”

The union's DEI Accountability Committee's solidarity subcommittee, which is made up of shop stewards, has attended some ERG Council meetings and discussed potential contract proposals with ERG leaders. The subcommittee has also begun reaching out to other employee-led DEI efforts at NPR to find out what issues other groups are working on and to see how the SAG-AFTRA unit can support them in solidarity.

HOLDING MANAGEMENT TO ACCOUNT

From September 2020: "Having delivered demands to NPR, the union will work to oversee progress toward those demands and will keep the membership informed, as well as independently present progress reports to NPR's board of directors."

After delivering demands to management in September 2020, the SAG-AFTRA unit's DEI Accountability Committee has submitted multiple information requests to monitor progress towards those demands. The union presented status updates to its membership in January 2021 and in October 2021, shortly after the ratification of the new collective bargaining agreement that incorporates many of the demands. The committee is presenting this report to NPR's board of directors and considering additional demands to management.

REPRESENTATION

From September 2020: "The union will reconsider its steward election procedures to incorporate some means of ensuring that the elected stewards reflect the diversity of the newsroom."

The current slate of elected shop stewards for NPR's SAG-AFTRA unit does not reflect the full diversity of identities, backgrounds and work experiences of its membership. To broaden the range of perspectives on decisions and help foster communication throughout the unit, the liaisons program, which is made up mainly of union members who are not stewards, will continue meeting regularly with stewards to surface concerns and offer input on proposals under consideration.

CONTRACT LANGUAGE

From September 2020: "The union will, at each contract negotiation, fight for new contract provisions to give diversity efforts more legal teeth."

Thirteen distinct proposals that further the DEI goals of SAG-AFTRA's membership at NPR are now part of the unit's new collective bargaining agreement (for details, see the

“SAG-AFTRA/NPR DEI Initiatives One-Pager” in the Appendix). Two of particular note include the company’s obligation to conduct pay equity studies every other year and a re-write of the non-discrimination clause to include a broader range of protected characteristics and identities. The contract’s negotiating committee — made up of shop stewards, other members and SAG-AFTRA staff — drafted those proposals to give the union more legal backing in holding management accountable for meeting DEI objectives, in addition to pushing management to consider how proposals not directly planned as DEI objectives would affect members of marginalized or underrepresented identities.

UNION ACTIVITIES

From September 2020: “The union shop stewards commit to fostering inclusivity in all of the union’s regular activities, such as membership meetings and weekly stewards’ meetings.”

To help ensure the union is aware of and addressing the needs of all of its members, the shop stewards of NPR’s SAG-AFTRA unit are committed to revamping the liaisons program. When scheduling membership meetings and events, stewards are taking into account the varying workshifts of its members, including those working overnight and during weekends. Stewards have resumed a regular rotation of the facilitator and note-taker roles at weekly stewards’ meetings to strengthen inclusivity among the union’s leaders.

FOSTERING AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE

From September 2020: “The union will continue to vigorously defend the rights of its members; however, those rights do not include the right to uphold racism or stymie efforts to build a more inclusive NPR.”

The SAG-AFTRA unit’s shop stewards are actively trying to think of ways to make our communications and processes, including for how to recruit candidates for future steward elections, as inclusive as possible. Additionally, the union’s DEI Accountability Committee is looking into ways to strengthen solidarity among formal and informal, grassroots DEI-focused groups across the organization. Wherever the SAG-AFTRA unit can collaborate on increasing diversity, equity and inclusion, the union is striving to do so.

Appendix

- I. [NPR SAG-AFTRA's Sept. 9, 2020 statement and demands on DEI at NPR](#)
- II. [SAG-AFTRA/NPR DEI Initiatives One-Pager](#)
- III. ["Our Ongoing Work" from NPR management's webpage on diversity](#) (last accessed on Feb. 14, 2022)
- IV. ["Our Staff" from NPR management's webpage on diversity](#) (last accessed on Feb. 15, 2022)