Representation Matters: Better Writing Through Diversity

As a follow-up to the [opening plenary session](#) (organized by Shraddha Chakradhar and Jenny Cutraro) at ScienceWriters2020, we invited attendees to brainstorm ideas for improving diversity in science reporting. Participants were randomly split into seven breakout rooms, each discussing one prompt. We asked them to populate Google documents with their best ideas, strategies and resources, which we have now compiled into a single resource for the science writing community.

Let us know if we've missed anything by clicking the 'h' icon at the top-right to open the [Hypothesis commenting system](#).

Prompt 1: When does it make sense to specifically include diversity and representation angles of sources and subjects in stories?

Moderator: Rodrigo Pérez Ortega ([@rpocisv](#))

Non-profit's [www.SciCommDiversity.org](#) Fellowship connects diversity journalism organizations members (Natl Assoc of Black Journo, NAHispanicJ, NativeAJA) to NASW community.

Overview of fellowship program published: [https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fcomm.2020.00051/full](#). Article has examples of how to include diversity angle to science reporting (for *DiverseScholar.org* magazine [see [https://communitypartners.org/project/diverse-scholar](#)]). Thx to NASW Idea Grant funding for catalyzing fellowship.

FYI, if searching for diversity STEM communities, pls see Alberto's non-profit's Stakeholders page w/ many non-profits (eg NOBCChE Black Chemists, SACNAS Latinx & Native Americans), events (eg Tapia Computing, ABRCMS Biomedical Minority) and now new online communities ([#LatinxChem](#), [#BlackAndSTEM](#), [@500QueerSci](#)) [https://www.minoritypostdoc.org/stakeholders](#)

If the person decides to go that route (of talking about their background), continue the conversation, even if you didn't plan on covering that specifically through that angle. Ask questions that continue to move in that direction.

When presented with choices of sources and angles, actively choose inclusivity.

As an ally reporting on a minority source/story, it will be difficult to please every possible reader.

- Depend on allies to tell the story if/when the reporter isn't a member of the community.
- Do try to find an ambassador/liaison to the community you're reporting on to build trust.

Question: how to approach identity when it's not the main subject of the story?

Ask sources how they would like to be identified, give them the space to share or to not share. If they just want to talk about science, then perhaps it might be pertinent to ask why their identity is not a

part of their science or research.

I'm thinking of the [Henrietta Lacks book](#) where, IMO, the author seemed to do a good job at putting herself in a position of vulnerability and trying to be an ally, share the story of someone else and their family.

In a non-direct way, perhaps describe to source about how your news outlet has a diversity mission/initiative. Note: this tactic is more common during job interviews, where hiring manager & candidate are assessing culture of organization.

Research your source's professional organization membership and/or service activities. If any have a diversity mission, then ask about that community/work.

Leading questions: How did you get interested in this research or field?

At the end of interview: Is there anything you wished I'd ask you? Anything I might not have known to ask you?

I've found the [Inclusive SciComm](#) community to be a great place to learn about how to respectfully include DEI (or JEDI :)) in your writing work

Prompt 2: What aspects of diversity are science writers neglecting?

Moderator: Doris Truong ([@DorisTruong](#))

Takeaways:

- Ask sources whether they're open to sharing demographic information.
- Make sure tracking diversity of sources is embedded in your business practices. Here's a [sample form from America Amplified](#).
- Push people to direct you to more diverse sources. Don't let them stop with the usual suspect(s).
- Look carefully at study design and interpretation of disparate results.

Aspects of diversity, from [Poynter's Doris Truong](#)

Race/Ethnicity*	Intro-/extro-vert	Neurodiversity
Class/Socioeconomic*	Housing status	Passport?
Gender*	Language(s)	Political belief
Age/Generation*	Family status	Education
Sexual orientation*	Nationality	Criminal background
Geography*	Immigration status	Body shape
Religion	Work experience	Intersectionality
Military status	Physical (dis)ability	

The 6 characteristics marked with asterisks are Fault Lines, a construct from the [Maynard Institute](#) that helps people identify their unconscious bias.

🗣️ **[Thoughts from breakout attendees]** 🗣️

Body diversity is a subject that's lacking in coverage - anything from disability to different body shapes. We focus on including all races, but representation from all races are still predominantly physically fit individuals.

Often feel like we're not doing enough to accommodate for physical disability, especially alt-text and hashtags on social media– so even after stories are told, aren't always accessible
→ Read "[I live with chronic pain. Someone you work with does, too.](#)" from Poynter

Recently told that I tweeted too much about my mental health issues and it might affect my hireability…

- ^definitely a generational difference (e.g., students are more willing to discuss this)
  - → Read "[Why we're going dark](#)" from the Daily Gamecock

Often discussion about tracking diversity of sources quickly defaults to tracking only binary gender. I think that's a significant limitation that we should work to move beyond.

- ^^once interviewed a nonbinary person, found out and used their preferred name when talking to them and writing the draft, but failed to ask if that's what they wanted to appear in print so I ended up having to change it in the piece to the (different) name that they publish under
  An earlier session talked about the importance of exploring how diversity intersects with the foundations of many scientific fields. How science is done, what questions are asked and how.
- ^Absolutely. Too often study subjects are all one sex, or not diverse in other ways.
  - → Read [NLGJA Stylebook](#) ([en español](#)); [Transgender Journalists Association Style Guide](#)

— When writing about studies, look carefully at how the researchers interpreted results that varied by racial/ethnic/sex/age/etc groups: how do they attribute/allocate differences in results to genetic vs. environmental factors? What questions did they ask along these lines (e.g., urban vs. rural residences, SES status)

— Thinking about identity variables as representing something else (access to healthcare, experience of discrimination, cultural practices, ex). We need to fine tune our analyses so that we understand what outcomes related to identity are being invoked when we say disparities exist.

- ^^I think this is super important. If we're not talking about the social determinants of health in reporting on health disparities then I really fear that we're straying into the language of genetic determinism.
- ^^^When one observes disparities, the next step is to learn what factors might be behind that. Some are very subtle. Chandra Jackson, Ph.D. (NIEHS) looks at sleep disparities. For example, the homes of lower-income folks tend to be in noisier neighborhoods, with more disturbed sleep as a result. And guess what, cardiovascular health and so much else is related to sleep. So, not income/education/race per se, but the noise and light levels where you sleep.
- ^^ooh that's super interesting! Makes me think of people with little kids –like how the pandemic has especially negatively affected women because of the burden of care and invisible work?
  - → Read "[How we fail black patients in pain](#)" from AAMC

As a woman of color, often writing about or communicating perspectives on "hot topic" issues can lead to being perceived as the "angry black/brown woman". Difficulty towing the line between being passionate about a subject and coming off as "angry".

- ^^ also a WOC, and I do feel pressure to conform to acceptable norms, which may limit my ability to tell the story / add my personal experience
- +1 Yes, and it often feels like you need to write about these topics for a White audience and explain yourself…
- ^^Exactly! Are there any/enough pieces written by BIPOC for BIPOC?
  → BIPOC friends, find support in Journalists of Color. Not a JOC? Read "How to Be an Ally in the Newsroom" from Open News.

Global diversity. Also making sure that we don't assume a single person represents an entire group. There is diversity within "diversity"
Re global diversity: reporters sometimes give different amounts of identifying information for researchers from different countries which transmits the idea that for some countries it's notable that researchers are from there and for some countries it's not, and that conveys bias.

- Scientists often move around the globe. For global diversity, do you consider their location or nationality? (Sometimes you don't even know their nationality!)
  → Read (with tipsheet!) "Updates to style guide entries related to race are heartening, but far from comprehensive" from Poynter

I've been working on developing a source-tracking document for use at The Open Notebook (to also share with reporters and newsrooms who may wish to adapt it for their use), and one of the challenges in doing that has turned out to be figuring out which dimensions of diversity to attempt to track, i.e., finding a balance between too simplistic and too unworkably complex.

- ^I would download a source-tracking Google Spreadsheet in a heartbeat
  → See America Amplified's form

My thought is that it's more difficult to address diversity that isn't immediately visible or even known to you as a writer.
In The Open Notebook's "Finding Diverse Sources for Science Stories" document, we recommend that reporters consider sending a note to sources that says something like: "Our publication is committed to including diverse sources in our stories so that we can accurately capture the range of experts whose voices, perspectives, and expertise are relevant. Toward that end, we try to track information about who our sources are. If you are comfortable doing so, I would appreciate it if you would let me know whether you identify as a member of any historically marginalized communities. This information will be used for internal accountability purposes, and no individual information will be shared publicly. Again, this is voluntary, but would be helpful to us as we work toward greater equity and inclusion in our coverage."

In the opening plenary, someone made the point that it's necessary for journalists/science writers to become more comfortable with being uncomfortable. I feel that's 100% correct. (I'm thinking of this particularly with respect to asking sources about their identities as part of a source-tracking effort)

Do societal norms prevent us from sharing our own lived experiences that would expand the list of diversity axes? As someone with unexplained infertility who conceived through in vitro fertilization, will conception status and fertility status be folded in under family status or reach more prominence as more people are conceived through interventions?

Re: imposter syndrome: Do not assume WHY the woman referred you to her male colleague: maybe there's a pecking order in her department and she'd face retaliation if she didn't toss the request to the alpha male.
Important point. Also, I wonder if we can be more forthright when a PIO tries to steer us toward a less diverse source.

- ^ as a PIO: respectfully ask "why the diversion" is a good place to start.

Re: immigration status, I used to write a lot about student experiences and international students were definitely less willing to speak to me about anything they perceived as a contentious issues (e.g., their university's COVID response) which was very sad :(for them and also b/c it made the story less diverse…

Has anyone found a great resource for images of members of underrepresented groups? That is so important but can also be very time intensive.
being very careful about not tokenizing people by using images out of the context in which they were intended.

- https://www.blackillustrations.com/illustrations/the-office-hustle-illustration-pack-official
- Unsplash (caveat: double-check photo permissions; you might want to reverse image search to be sure someone's IP isn't being violated)
- https://tonl.co/
- broadlygenderphotos.vice.com
- jopwellcollection.jopwell.com/internedition/
- www.flickr.com/photos/wocintechchat/
- www.nappy.co/
- www.gettyimages.com/collections/leanin
- burst.shopify.com/

Prompt 3: How can editors and writers work together to ensure more representative reporting?

Moderator: Sarah Zielinski (@SarahZielinski)

(From Sarah, moderator) At *Science News for Students*, we do several things in this venue. For years we have had a requirement that features include as a source at least one woman or person of color. Our audience is young, and we have felt that it is particularly important that they see that science has a place for everyone. In 2018, we began tracking the diversity of our sources in an ad hoc manner. We use that data in house only to track our progress. This year, we asked that our writers help contribute to our diversity tracking effort, and some of them now provide that information (via a Google form) for the stories they report. To help my writers in their efforts, I provided a document with suggestions about how to find more diverse sources. It also gave a script that writers could use when speaking with sources so that they could collect demographic data as part of their reporting. (Other than the requirement for features, the rest is voluntary.)

Finding sources outside the US

In the case of stories that take place in countries outside the United States, always include the testimonies of local researchers. Not just from the US.

Database of Hispanic/LatinX women scientists: https://cientificas.amit-es.org/

A project that profiles Indian women in STEM: https://thelifeofscience.com/category/people/science/

Facebook group showcasing the work of Mexican women scientists. I'm sure many of them would be glad to be consulted if needed https://www.facebook.com/cientificasmx/

There is also a Mexican association of science writers and journalists (Red Mexicana de Periodistas de Ciencia). This group may help you connect with sources at least in Mexico. https://redmpc.wordpress.com/

This is the Argentinian network of science journalism. https://radpc.org/

If you're doing reporting in another country, contact a local science writer. They are often willing to help you figure out the lay of the land.

Other suggestions from the group:

It's important to start a network early of people that you can reach out to. When you're working under pressure, it's hard to do this on the fly.

Editors could check in with who the sources are. They can't just rely on the writer.

Editors should seriously consider whether a deadline is hard or not. If writers know that an editor might be able move a deadline, it makes it easier to make finding diverse sources a priority.

When writing about a paper, look down the list of authors. There are often younger and more diverse people farther down the list. Also ask the first author for people who can comment.

Instead of starting with your story and then searching for diverse sources, you can start with the sources and then find the story. This is especially important when dealing with an overwhelmingly white area (whether geographically or scientifically).

Eos did diversity tracking for a year and has now switched to sending those sources a survey to ask them directly. The advantages of this include that data collection is more accurate and you can also ask things like if a source is early career, LGBTQIA, etc. Here is the survey (we have taken out the early career question at the moment, because the definition is fuzzy… welcome any thoughts on that): https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSelvtFUtB9IEaKz6LiJx_pFKnHrxZvOPRl4g4oDi8DxirS__g/viewform

Diverse sources (beta): https://diversesources.org

It's important for an editor to have that five-minute discussion in the beginning, at story assignment, about expectations, which should include sources and voices that a reporter includes in the story. "We all need a reminder."

500 women scientists (website) has always been a good source for me.

Twitter sometimes has Black in ____ weeks – I try to follow and make a spreadsheet of new scholars and their expertise/contact for future stories.

There are also some smaller groups like "Ladies of Landsat" that can be good sources.

Prompt 4: What tools, resources, and strategies can you use to gauge and improve representation in your writing and reporting?

Moderator: Steve Bien-Aimé (@Steve_BienAime)

We have to devote time to diversity

Monitor your diversity statistics. Then review them regularly. Every month? Every quarter? Every six months?

The Native American Journalists Association is a good source for media reporting guides about American Indian communities and culture. https://najanewsroom.com/

- What are the stories you're covering? That impacts the people interviewed.

- Seek out more voices from multiple disciplines.

- Who are the post-docs or research assistants? Try doing a group interview to avoid the PI dominating the narratives.

- It also helps to have questions prepared beforehand that involve every person in the team (provided that there is some prior knowledge about the roles of everyone)

- Journalists tend to interview the same folks … and these practices tend to impede diversity.

- We look for experts at smaller institutions, too.

- For press officers who can, sometimes you can track down a reserved grad student/postdoc in-person after the group interview with a few follow-up questions.

- Do the universities have diverse people? It's not all on the PIOs. What is our role in diversity Initiatives?

- Identify diverse sources but also sources (who may be white men) who care about representation who will help you find others

  - Ask experts for other sources, perhaps even for diversity.

- Also look toward specialized journals for experts because the main journals often marginalize work in diversity – https://academic.oup.com/joc/article/68/2/254/4958972

- Know there is visible and invisible diversity

  - Visible: Race, sex
  - Invisible: SES, region, sexual orientation

- We need to think about diversity tracking in an holistic way

- Work on making experts comfortable

- Promote the work of various colleagues – embrace this ethic in diversity training

- **Question**: has anyone found a great resource for images of members of underrepresented groups? That is so important but can also be very time intensive. We currently use Shutterstock.

  - TONL specializes in diverse stock photography: https://tonl.co/

- There's a new resource of free images of Black professionals. Just a sec. https://www.blackillustrations.com/illustrations/the-office-hustle-illustration-pack-official

Prompt 5: How can we avoid 'tokenism' in our writing and reporting?

Moderator: Kendall Powell (@KendallSciWrite)

Kendall Powell's (freelancer) take on tokenism: Plenary was amazing. One definition of tokenism in journalism would be: The practice of including diverse voices only to prevent criticism, boost numbers of diverse sources, or give the appearance of fairness and balance in your reporting.

Becomes very obvious to everyone, including the sources themselves and your editors and your readers, if you're only calling to pop one TK-type-of person into the story.

Trying to find diverse sources who really bring an expert, unique opinion or valuable perspective on a story.

Two methods (not always successful):

1. Cultivate go-to sources for fave topics who also bring diverse perspectives
2. Ask sources to point toward other experts + ask for Women, BIPOC, LGBTQ. Also ask the PIOs. They know who interviews well. Use your PIO resources!

A couple of resources for finding diverse sources: 500womenscientists.org 500queerscientists.com

Both of these have "search" functions that journalists can use to identify scientists with particular research interests AND in particular geographies.

DO make sources feel valued and included, not "othered"
DON'T ask sources to speak for their entire demographic or group (unless they are an expert in *that*)
DO ask for their own personal and/or professional take on the subject just like you would for any source

Karen McNulty Walsh (a PIO at Brookhaven): Limited to the number of scientists at her institution. Strive for diversity, but often feels like she's pushing to include people in stories + Photos. People who are very qualified on some topics, but not all topics. To highlight BIPOC work. Is that tokenism? Karen thinks it's best to promote the BIPOC when they can. Megan (also a PIO) runs into this problem, too.

^^Diana's opinion on the above: It depends. But it's good to highlight BIPOC scientists. Maybe turn to the grad students and postdocs more often? Seek out the first authors on the studies! They're experts, too.

- ^^Great point! Especially because professors, especially tenured or heads of labs get credit for work that has been done by students and postdocs.
  - ^^Agreed! Also - PIOs should take opportunities to provide media training and encouragement to early career scientists who may be more diverse as a group; that can help them feel prepared and comfortable to jump into it.

Tina Saey (reporter): Developing a diverse source list. She draws heavily from awards that go to scientists who are from diverse backgrounds + taking a look at conference speaker lists (those have

headshots) and lots of conferences are pushing to include diverse people. And their expertise immediately pops out based on their talk's title.
→ Tina says here's an example of the awards list she looks at:
https://www.hhmi.org/programs/hanna-h-gray-fellows-program#Fellows

Carolyn Collin Petersen (freelancer + event organizer): Some scientists refuse to be on 'manels' until you get more women on the panel. Ask around with the nearby institutions.

Matthew Francis (freelancer) uses Twitter to find diverse sources because scientists on Twitter tend to be more diverse but also because their threads allow you to "see" their voice and stances on things. He also uses a spreadsheet of sources in stories to keep himself accountable. If you are not reaching 50% women or whatever other target, then you aren't there yet.

Matthew also brought up using the Finkbeiner Test when deciding about what details to provide about a scientist's life or background within an article. The test was originally about writing about women, but also stands for other underrepresented groups in science. The rule is generally if you wouldn't include those details about skin color, background, LGBTQ status about a majority scientist, then you also shouldn't include them for an underrepresented scientist.

Finkbeiner Test essay: https://www.lastwordonnothing.com/2017/10/26/the-finkbeiner-test-a-tool-for-writing-about-women-in-their-professions/

Dana Smith (senior writer) shared that she always looks to the first authors on papers because they are often younger and more diverse and suggests that PIOs also put those early career researchers forward for stories. She also looks for the same criteria that marks any source as an expert–have they written a book on the subject? Etc.

What to do when you encounter a reluctant source/or one who points you back to other majority voices?

- Jennifer Huber (freelancer) says depending on your relationship with the source, and if not too awkward, it's okay to be personal and honest with sources, saying "I've already got too many white men in my story…" or "But I'd really like to hear from YOU on this."
- Karen McNulty Walsh (PIO at Brookhaven) used similar tactics to convince a woman researcher at her institution to be part of a brochure on that field. The researchers didn't want to be the "token woman" but Karen convinced her that she is a leader in her field and deserved to be highlighted, plus if she didn't participate, then there would be no women featured.

Marisol (PIO) says that PIOs really appreciate it when reporters are very specific in their requests about what type of source they are looking for. Don't be shy about asking for a woman of color who could comment on TK.

Dawn Levy (PIO at ORNL) agrees. Half of ORNL's researchers are from other countries and there are a lot of international projects and teamwork. PIOs have gotten to know their people and they want to help you find those diverse sources.

Robin Kazmier (editor, PBS Nova) emphasized reassuring sources that you are seeking their opinion because of their experience and expertise, show them in your email or opening conversation that you've done your homework and you know they have a valuable, expert opinion here.

Instead of seeking a diverse voice/perspective for just one quote or idea, consider writing the narrative around them. This might only be possible in the case of a longer feature, but if you can

humanize the story and write more about that diverse person's background, it might seem less like you are choosing them because they "check a box" of the diversity and more because they have a unique perspective to tell. Also, you can let the person know you sought them out because you were looking for someone with a different "lived experience". (Brittany Uhlorn, science writer at UArizona)

I organize science panels for local events (I'm a science writer and the event organizers have made me part of their organization team) and I had a scientist tell ME that he would not speak on my panel until I had at least 50 percent female (or further diversity) on the panel. It was a good push for me to look beyond my usual sources of speakers. (CC.petersen@gmail.com if you have questions about how we implement this)

I come from a unique background because I am new to science writing but have worked in science education for several years. One way to avoid tokenism in a future (ideal) world is to expand young people's idea of what it means to be a scientist, so I started a nonprofit enrichment program that brings scientists in to speak to students. Like Matthew, I rely on spreadsheets to keep track of my search for diverse scientists! I also use photos on department websites and Twitter to help with my outreach. ([@Blackafinstem](https://twitter.com/Blackafinstem) is a great account, for example)

Also, when creating multimedia journalism pieces, it is really important to use a diversity of voice-over/narrators/interviewees. In the same vein of "If she can see it, she can be it", I want to make sure "if she can hear her own voice in a piece, she can BE it".
→ Yeah, make sure they know which "code" to "code switch into for the V/O" ? Or at least have a dialogue about that, because the default "scientist speak" is very much a white dialect?

- Good point. I usually ask people to give it very "conversationally" and we rehearse a bit ahead of time so that I can head some of that off at the pass (so to speak).

Make sure to highlight diverse voices throughout the year, not just during particular celebration months.
Yes! It is exhausting as an LGBT scientist, to always be sought out during June (Pride month)

Would it help for institutions to have photos of scientists in their directories or does that encourage tokenism?

- ^^Good question. I think that because the Twitter lists of scis of color are somewhat limited, a lot of times the same few scientists get asked for quotes over and over?
  - ^^I would say that yes, it would help to have photos in directories. Everytime I start to prep for interviews, I am doing Google searches for scientists, which usually includes their images and I can use that to factor into my searches for a broad range of voices on topics. It's obviously not the SOLE way of including diverse voices, but another piece of data.
  - –I love when departmental websites have photos on their faculty list page with at least keywords as to their expertise–it makes it really easy to go from topic to relevant source.

When is it important to bring in diverse sources?
→ When an ecology story is set in another country, definitely include people from that country! (i.e. If you're writing re: lemurs, def try to include Malagasy scientists as sources)

Perhaps Der Spiegel could take a few lessons from this test; vis-a-vis their interview with Andrea Ghez's co-winner of the Nobel.
Oh god yes I have a rant in progress on that Genzel interview………
Yup. I was seeing red after that mess.

A few good ways to find diverse scientists/avoid tokenism:

- Use Twitter lists, find the relevant hashtags, contact professional orgs like SACNAS or Society of Black Archaeologists to ask for a referral to experts in a specific area. If you need help, especially with Twitter lists, let me know! Robin: robin_kazmier@wgbh.org
- Find searchable databases like Database of Diverse Databases.
- Use google site search to search databases evem of they aren't readily searchable, like 500 Queer Scientists.
- Be open to interviewing grad students if their experience is more aligned with the topic
- Include multiple underrepresented voices in stories; normalize diverse perspectives
- Use these strategies to get in the habit of having multiple underrepresented sources in every single story. Once you know where to look it's not that hard to find people.
- Reach out to orgs to ask if they have a list of members willing to talk to the press.
- As an editor, make it clear to reporters that diversity is a must have, not a "nice to have" - support them in finding those sources
- If there are absolutely no underrepresented people that fit into your story, question why you're telling that story.

Prompt 6: How can PIOs and journalists work together to ensure more representative reporting?

Moderator: Kelly Tyrrell (@kellyperil)

Talk to graduate students and postdocs and not just corresponding authors; these are often the first authors. PIOs can also include diverse sources in their own stories.

Many lead PIs are excited to include younger faculty, students, postdocs. PIOs can navigate these conversations at the front end and quote these scientists, too, so they're more obvious sources for reporters to talk to.

Younger experts/early-career faculty are sometimes less willing to go out on a limb when speaking with reporters. This can require some work by PIOs to train these experts.

PIOs can push back on PIs and ask/require junior scientists get involved.

Consider storytelling centered exclusively around junior researchers.

Go deeper into the author list and ask the lead/PI: Is there someone else I can talk to about this on the paper? "Are there any women who are studying this?"

Institutions should make efforts to find more diverse sources - reporters should ask for diverse sources whenever possible, and upfront. Challenge is that reporters are on deadline and want timely response and white men/usual go-tos are more often first to respond.

What about tokenizing experts? Might end up over-relying on some experts to achieve diversity. Can you ask for others in their field or in their realm who might be able to share the burden? Experts of color are often asked to take on more responsibility and service than their white counterparts.

If an expert does not have an obvious or ethnic name, is it clear they're "diverse"? Is it important to represent diversity in some way? Making the effort to find a diverse source brings their perspective, whether or not you "know" they are diverse. Their perspective/quote in a news story can lead to profiles or other downstream outcomes.

For example: profiles, or when writing for kids/students - some classrooms look up the scientists and the research.

Consider linking back to the individual's page so you don't have to divulge details that may be inappropriate to call out.

How do you navigate calling out diversity? It's best to avoid calling out what makes someone diverse. By pointing that out it "de-normalizes" their perspective in a sense, because you're calling something out (say, that they are a Black scientist) that you wouldn't for someone who isn't "diverse (a white scientist).

Highlight diversity of perspectives, broaden the point-of-view of your stories. Our work shouldn't involve checkboxes or categories. It may be that a white man may offer a different socieconomic perspective. To avoid tokenism, at the very start of a story, examine the questions you are asking and see what questions you could be asking. When you choose a source, really be intentional about the value and expertise that they bring to the table. That will translate to the source as well in your conversations.

PIOs can choose to highlight people through Q&As and profiles. We can choose stories from the outset that represent diverse perspectives.

It's difficult in some fields to do this (for ex: physics, engineering) when they also lack diversity, especially in higher ed.

Might be worth looking at institutions with more diverse faculty for experts. Ask experts to speak with their grad students or postdocs.

Images in storytelling:

- TONL specializes in diverse stock photography: https://tonl.co/
- Getty Image, which allows you to filter by race/ethnicity - but it doesn't always return great results.
- a new resource of free images of Black professionals: https://www.blackillustrations.com/illustrations/the-office-hustle-illustration-pack-official

Prompt 7: How can science writers better cover social justice issues?

Moderator: Wudan Yan ([@wudanyan](#))

PIO from JHU says that even when she publishes stories about health inequities, or POC communities, she finds that journalists don't like to cover these stories. She keeps pushing it because it's important, but gets severely less pick-up.

Others chimed in that it's possible writers don't know how to tackle these stories with clarity / nuance, and they risk saying something insensitive or off-base during the interview. Someone said that these stories seem touchier – "how can I convey this information without being offensive, or should I just not cover it at all?"

When covering people affected by social justice issues: It's challenging to get people to find people to speak on the record without being triggered.

Sometimes folks want to stay anonymous, but anonymous sources may impact credibility of a piece.

It may be helpful to look at these issues from a sociological point of view: why is this [injustice] happening? Why are people behaving this way – to put events in context.

Freelancers writing about social justice issues are not always confident that their editors are trained to recognize the sensitivity that social justice stories may need during editing.

TLDR: Would be helpful to have resources on NASW, for instance, that provides guidance on how to cover social justice issues as a writer, and how to navigate editing social justice stories as an editor.

From chat:
cassandrawillyard: I've used anonymous sources or only first names, but it's tricky and standards do depend on the outlet.

Wudan Yan (she/her): I'm striking out! B/c there are so many, but there's a lot of good stuff here: https://dartcenter.org/resources?page=1&topic%5B0%5D=76

Spoorthy: Picture a scientist is so moving! Very thought provoking! Great job at that!

WaunShae Blount: I agree Spoorthy!

Spoorthy: Thanks everyone on your inputs to my thoughts!

Lisa Munoz: Thank you! I will tell the film team it came up and they will be thrilledWe are working to bring the film to more NASW members too

Calley Jones: Is there a strong role for publications which are specifically geared for the intersection between science and social issues (i.e. Undark)? Does this idea promote stories that reflect on these topics, or does it sequester them to their own areas?

Brandie Jefferson (she|her): did I miss the google doc link?

Spoorthy: Please do @Lisa, I watched it last week as part of UKSCJ

Brandie Jefferson (she|her): Oh wow, I didn't even know that was a thingQ

Meg Evans Smith: me neither — that's pretty cool.

Brandie Jefferson (she|her): omg

Sally James: My black-owned nonprofit has great editors, but they don't have budget for extensive editing. Plus, in cultural terms, I think the sensitivity does not cross all boundaries, so different sensitivity for Latinx than Black?

Natalie Rogers: Yeah that's a big yikes

WaunShae Blount: Lisa- That's awesome! Such a touching and striking view of women in science and how we may be viewed. I appreciate the dialogue the documentary promoted and how open the speakers were.

Melissa Hellman (she/her): I think one big step is knowing what you don't know, and when you need to hire a sensitivity reader (or possibly revise your institution's style guide).

Sally James: hate idea that the burden would fall on people of color to volunteer for others

Meg Evans Smith: Is it naive to suggest that some sort of living style manual could help out with sensitivity in different kinds of writing?

cassandrawillyard: I think of a sensitivity reader as someone who knows all the latest style guide updates and can turn a careful and thoughtful eye to your copy and see places that might be problematic.

Natalie Rogers: I like that idea Meg but it presents the same problem—who would do that?

Meg Evans Smith: true.

cassandrawillyard: But then there are people who prefer "autistic person" so it's complex.

Brandie Jefferson (she|her): Exactly Cassaundra, that's what I'm wondering abouyt

Melissa Hellman (she/her): I'd argue that you need to have multiple sensitivity readers available. For instance, I wouldn't necessarily expect a Black sensitivity reader to be the authority on LGBTQ+ issues and language.

Wudan Yan (she/her): yeah definitely cassandra!

Giuliana Viglione: Yep +1 to Cassandra. I've had sub-editors change "disabled scientist" to "scientist with disabilities" when the former was direct from the scientist I interviewed

Additional resources

[Diverse Voices in Science Journalism](#) (The Open Notebook)

[Including Diverse Voices in Science Stories](#) (The Open Notebook)

[Diversity in Science Writing: A Survey](#) (The Open Notebook)

[Finding Diverse Sources for Science Stories](#) (The Open Notebook)

[I Analyzed a Year of My Reporting for Gender Bias and This Is What I Found](#) (Medium)

[I Analyzed a Year of My Reporting for Gender Bias (Again)](#) (The Atlantic)

[New On-Air Source Diversity Data For NPR Show Much Work Ahead](#) (NPR)

[What Is Tokenism, and Why Does It Matter in the Workplace?](#) (Vanderbilt University; see also [slide 28 here](#))

[Let's Talk: Journalism's Race Problem — Colorado Media Project](#)

What aspects of science intersect with social justice? ([Slide 47 here](#) offers hints)

[Objectivity isn't a magic wand](#) (CJR)

[The Debate Over Objectivity In Journalism](#) (NPR)

[Activism and Science Journalism: Where Are Your Boundaries?](#) (The Open Notebook)

[Journalistic Objectivity: Origin, Meaning and Why It Matters](#) (Time)

[Objectivity is dead, and I'm okay with it](#) (Medium)

Need a refresher on diversity, equity, and inclusion terminology? Head to [Slide 21 here](#).