



Content Audit

A content audit does not have to become an arduous task. Apply the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education "Fault Lines" guidelines - race, ethnicity, age, gender, class and geography - to your stories and to your own knowledge base. You'll quickly realize where improvements are needed.

Questions You Need to Ask:

- What is the demographic breakdown of my circulation area and state?
- Who on the staff has "listening posts" or sources in communities of color?
- **Where are they?** Do you know the grass roots leaders? Could your staff members identify the leaders from their pictures? Could you?
- **What are the images being projected by the front pages?** Who are in the photographs? Do the ratios of men to women or people of color to whites match our demographic profile?
- Do positive images of minorities show up only in sports and entertainment?
- Who are the sources in the stories? How often do "average" citizens show up to comment in government stories dealing with taxes, the budget, community projects compared to institutional sources?
- **How does the total paper represent the "fault lines" of coverage:** race, ethnicity, geography, class, gender, and age - in stories dealing with lifestyle issues in the daily paper? What about religious and political viewpoints?
- **What discussion guidelines do I have in place** in news meetings, editing conferences, copy editing, layout, graphic and photography to ensure accuracy of the total community?
- **What mechanism holds the staff** accountable on these issues?
- **Do we maintain an electronic Rolodex** that is accessible so the staff can develop stories with non-mainstream voices?
- Is the staff encouraged to go off on source hunting expeditions and to share their finds? Do we audit the paper to see if new voices appear?
- **Do recruiting efforts** bring in people with different points of view aside from skin complexion?
- **Do I have a system that guarantees** that a diverse person will be considered

for each job?

- Do I evaluate my own performance in terms of content, hiring, retention, and community outreach to make the newspaper a comfortable place for a diverse audience?
- What am I doing now to promote diversity? What could I do? What will I do?

Doing Ethics in Journalism/A Handbook With Case Studies. Principal authors: Jay Black, Bob Steele and Ralph Barney. The Sigma Delta Chi Foundation and the Society of Professional Journalists, Greencastle, IN., 1993

Putting the Checklist to Work

During the Seattle Times RAPP effort -- a year-long race awareness training project involving the entire news staff -- reporters grappled in part with the question: Is the quality of journalism compromised in any way as reporters become more aware of diversity, then seek to include elements of diversity throughout reporting? "There was a fear that there could be something 'unjournalistic' about content that was more diverse," said Times managing editor Alex MacLeod.

The group working on the Poynter/SPJ ethics handbook didn't share that fear. In developing the checklists for each chapter, we relied on a set of journalistic values, the "Principles of Duty," formulated by the SPJ Ethics Committee and the Poynter Institute for Media Studies. The principles are considered fundamental to the work of all journalists

When considered in this light, diversity in coverage becomes an essential part of ethical standard practice.

The Times' RAPP group reached the same conclusion: diversity in coverage is consonant with journalism's values and goals, and indeed as MacLeod and others affirm, the endeavor produces better journalism.

Because journalism's guiding principles had been the basis of the diversity checklist, it was not surprising that as editors and reporters began using the list, they also began suggesting ways to expand its scope. The advice from The Seattle Times and others reflects some of the ideas recommended.

A Beat Reporter's Self-Evaluation

- As I examine and explore my coverage area, how do I assess its importance in the lives of people in various groups throughout our area?
- Do I attempt to find out how the actions of the agency or organization I cover affect

people in diverse populations in our community?

- **Do I communicate with my editor** about ways to broaden our focus, so that the paper looks at this beat with an eye toward the variety of stories it could produce?
- **Do I seek stories that originate with the members of the community** affected by this agency or organization, rather than from the players within the organization?
- **How do I expand** my own lists of contacts and sources?
- **On general assignment, how do I seek story ideas?** In what ways can I expand the types of people, places and organizations from which I draw story ideas and angles?
- **Where do my assignments come from?** How connected are we to various demographic groups in our area? How receptive are we to story suggestions?

Used with the permission of [Arlene Morgan](#), assistant dean of continuing education, Columbia Graduate School of Journalism