

Diversity at the Station Level

Panelists:

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Special note: This session generated much discussion that is integrated in the notes.

Polly used to be at the General Manager round-robins and, during the meetings, many current COOs were talking about the need for diversity to reflect their communities. In Albuquerque, they feel as though they do have that representation at their station and New Mexico is the only minority majority state.

Joseph grew up in a segregated community in South Texas and “wasn’t supposed to be here” but had supportive parents who worked hard so he could get here. At several points in his career, people who were hiring decided to think about things a little differently and hire him. We tend to go for people who look like us and have our values. He has also been encouraged and mentored at a few places along the way.

Why is it important to reflect the community?

- How can we adequately serve our community if we don’t look anything like them?
 - o As we move forward, it fits in our mission.
 - o As a viewer in the various places – the programming never really reflected the community though many times during pledge they’d bring out the diverse programs. Why wouldn’t the population ratio be applied to the programming also?
- From a business standpoint – the country is changing. It’s about good business and the future.
 - o Intel wanted to be in New Mexico because it currently looks like what the rest of the country will look like in 20 years.
 - o It’s not overly dramatic to say that it’s about survival.
 - o Over the next 20 years America is going to change so much more than it did over the last 20 years. Diversity will increase significantly in the coming years and successful organizations recognize the importance of immediate action.

The need is there

- Lack of minority representation at the conference
- The number of women CEOs in public broadcasting is going down.
- When you are an African American – you could have achieved everything, but when you’re walking down the street it doesn’t matter and you could be pulled over with no cause just as quickly.
- That’s just the tip of the giant iceberg.

Diversity encompasses race, gender, education, sexual orientation, age, background, perspective, etc.

- Different people bring things maybe because of their ethnic background or maybe because they’ve been there for 40 years.
- Everybody brings something different to the table and successful management supports complete diversity and includes different viewpoints.
- Diversity in programming, activities, events and educational endeavors is necessary as well.

The idea does scare people and anybody who attempts to implement a diversity program has to expect that it isn’t going to be easy – both internally and externally.

- Tricky especially when you throw in the economy – when the \$ gets tight, the first thing to go is local programming because it’s expensive and the hardest thing to fund.
- Every angry call is the potential for a sale and perhaps you could have a town hall meeting.
 - o It’s safe to not get these calls. If you are getting these calls, are you not doing enough diverse programming and the once-in-a-while programs are throwing people off?
 - o We just have to push that content and take negative feedback as an opportunity to talk about what you’re doing.
 - o Could make a campaign out of diversity and involve the community.

How do you move towards a more diverse look of your staff that would hopefully translate into other areas of your activities? What can you do?

- Commitment to diversity must start at the top.
 - If it's not stressed at the very top level of the organization, it's not going to be carried through.
 - Maybe it starts with your boards and a real honest conversation.
 - The board of CPB and Pat Harrison are very involved. With Joaquín's departure there certainly isn't less of an initiative. It permeates every department.
 - Everybody talks about diversity because Pat Harrison talks about diversity.
 - When you talk about it, it usually gets done and become a value.
 - At CPB, they see themselves as the stewards of the American investment in public media and expect that diversity will be reflected in the institutions and programs.
- Tips on implementation
 - Evaluate where you stand before you make a plan. We're lucky we have the SABS reports – the Station Activities Benchmarking Survey – that are comprehensive and necessary for Federal funding. It includes the diversity and make-up of your staff.
 - Involve every employee in formulating the plan – bring in the people who are resistant to change to be on the committee.
 - Foster a sense of openness.
 - Look at what's happening to the global workplace – the pace of change is accelerating and organizational success and competitiveness will depend on the ability to manage diversity effectively.
 - A real sense of urgency is necessary.
 - Look for ways to reach out to the community and assess the needs of the community.
 - What may work in TN may not work in NY.
 - Rather than introducing the traditional community, it's introducing what is the new community.
 - Ex: Nashville Public Television's Next Door Neighbor series that introduced all of the Nashville traditional viewers to the Somalis, the Kurds.
 - A Somali woman said that "it has just changed our community's perspective on where we fit in."
 - It has to be real and thoughtful not just token programs.
 - You have to have a pipeline for new talent and getting other people involved.
 - It is a process that will take years and will have ups and downs. When the GM starts to do it, then people start to pay attention.

Signs of progress

- The CPB is in the middle of a review process for the distribution of CSG funds.
 - The review process made up of 13 GMs and they worked to have full representation of geography, race and gender (and it was hard to do).
 - One of things that they talked about is that the workforce in public broadcasting isn't representative of the population.
 - What rules should be in place that govern eligibility to receive federal funds and to incentivize diversity of the staff, of the audience and of the content?
 - Important lessons from the NFL – the Rooney rule – when you interview for a head coach, you have to interview a minority candidate.
 - When they started, there weren't any black coaches and the last two teams that won the Superbowl have both had black coaches.
 - Asking the panel to provide feedback
 - Is it minority and women?
 - Is it at the GM level or does it go deeper?
 - This is something that would happen when the GM leaves and is a policy that would govern the actions of the board as they seek to bring new representation to the organization.
 - The board would have to be fully aware of the rules that could jeopardize federal funding.

- If the staff is diverse but the content isn't, does it mean you're not eligible?
 - They're looking at the eligibility question and the incentive question.
- CPB is banging the drum – trying to drive the issue home
 - Supporting primetime content that helps you reach new audiences
 - Supporting children's programming that addresses the needs of the diverse children and schools
 - Professional Development...assistance in attending national meetings – they have stipends and can help
 - My Source – some connection of communities of color with stations and they can help in their role as conveners.
- There's an opportunity for sharing best practices going forward and there's hope that the NCME to help with that.
 - NCME has been in conversations to develop some sort of training model for management staff but it's very preliminary.
- Support of diversity by the current administration
 - They are streamlining the process for student aid to make it easier for lower income and minority students to apply.
 - The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans
 - Wouldn't it be great if, even informally, we could connect some of the stations with a greater Hispanic population?
 - After the PBS content summit, Juan Sepúlveda and Joseph are going to talk about how they can come up with a plan for this. Also working on bringing together historically black colleges and universities.
- Attendee Suggestion: With new digital TV, each station can have multiple digital streams but some of them have the same programming. There is space there and time for people to do low-cost programming that you don't have to say okay, we'll spend \$100,000 on a doc, but maybe we'll give a camera to somebody for \$300 and every week we have this half-hour show and now you have the diversity from the ground-up and young people who are learning to be producers and suddenly you have this whole audience out there and they'll talk about it with each other. Out of the 10 or 15, one is really good and the starts to move up.
 - It's a capacity issue for stations.
 - Had a CPB program during the election called citizen journalists that was similar
 - The World multi-cast channel re-invention – heavily involved in the distribution of diverse content.