

Reflect the Diversity of the Community

From Terry Clifford, Tom Thomas, and Bill Davis

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Three months ago, SRG was poised to launch a multi-part plan to improve the quality and impact of our journalism by better reflecting the diversity of our communities.

Then, almost overnight, came the pandemic, the implosion of our national economy, the ensuing challenge to public media's local economies, and the world-wide eruption of protests against racism and police violence – all of which will have a profound, long-term impact on our nation, our communities, our workplaces, and our personal lives and work.

We know – all of us together – that we are at a moment of crystalline inflection, and that diversity issues command our attention with a renewed urgency.

We are writing today to affirm SRG's commitment to our mission-critical diversity initiative and our readiness to move to action in partnership with SRG's members and others.



As we have reviewed our planning materials – notes from SRG's retreat and board meetings, member survey results, commentaries from the field, audience data – we are reminded of how hard many SRG members have been working toward diversity, equity, and inclusion, how long many of us have been at it, and the genuine progress we can clearly see. We respect the distance already travelled.

But we still fall short of where we need to be. And we've been struck by the recent statements by SRG members acknowledging the need to do much more and the sense of opportunities that are before us to realize our public service mission, purpose and principles more completely.

Stewart Vanderwilt wrote to the Colorado Public Radio community and referenced an update of the organization's values completed earlier in the year. He said:

*"Diversity, inclusion and equity are core values of our workplace and essential to our mission . . . We could point to and rely on the work we do on a daily basis, our values, and our commitment to an expansive and inclusive mission as our answer to ignorance, intolerance and racism. **But these are clearly not enough.***

*"We must do more. Colorado Public Radio is committed to combating racism and building a more equitable and inclusive community. This week, we brought many illuminating voices, experiences and perspectives to our audiences. **We need to make this the standard.**"*

In Washington, D.C., GM JJ Yore posted a message on WAMU's site, reflecting as a native Washingtonian on the massive and continuing protests that had gripped the city:

"The recent acts of violence against people of color and subsequent cries for racial justice are consuming our personal lives, our journalism, and our work throughout the station.

*"Despite the daunting nature of this challenge, I see an opportunity to facilitate real and lasting dialogue, and to amplify the voices of under-served communities – particularly communities of color – protesting systemic racism, violence, and economic injustice. **Connecting communities across our region to each other is our mission, and one of the founding principles of public radio.** Our duty is to reflect the unique experiences of the communities we serve, a goal that has never been more important."*

And in Sacramento, Jun Reina, who in two weeks will succeed Rick Eytcheson as CapRadio's President & CEO, wrote to his team:

*"I'm thankful to our Board for putting their trust in a person of color . . . to lead the station at such a pivotal moment . . . And my commitment to all of you is **to keep building an organization that looks like and reflects the wonderful communities we serve** . . . a workplace that honors, respects, and celebrates diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and cultures.*

"I do not take this task for granted nor think it'll be easy. But know that I will keep at it for as long as you let me."

CHARTING A PATH

In mid-March, just as the dark curtain of the pandemic fell, SRG reported that SRG members had assigned priorities to a short list of organizational pivots that will advance their roles as premier providers of public service journalism.

At the top of the collective list – in a dead heat with “achieving greater community impact” – was “journalism that better reflects the diversity of our communities.”

After further consultation, it was clear that most SRG member news organizations were ready to work together on multiple approaches to this shared goal, aiming to fulfill what, for many, are commitments that extend across many years.

SRG’s plan is to focus on four imperatives in 2020 and 2021:

- Retain and support the journalists that already bring racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity to our organizations. Identify, recruit, and hire more to join them.
- Diversify the sources to which newsrooms turn in their reporting.
- Address multiple issues of bias (e.g., implicit bias) to support a more inclusive culture within newsrooms, specifically, and the overall organization as well.
- Engage diverse communities in determining editorial priorities and strategies for coverage.

These imperatives are mutually supportive; we must ultimately get to all of them.

We are beginning with two areas: staffing and sourcing.

Talent and staffing strategies

SRG’s board and staff recognize the crucial challenge we face in continuing to diversify our newsroom teams. We have identified individuals and firms with both experience and a track record of results – advisors and doers we can turn to that will help us stay on track.

We will build on members’ efforts to date and identify how stations can increase the productivity, impact, sense of inclusion, and opportunities for advancement of journalists who contribute to our newsrooms’ diversity and are already at work in our organizations. We will examine and evaluate our collective recent experiences with recruiting and hiring for diversity and on-boarding new staff. We will identify how SRG can best support newsroom leaders as they manage and inspire a diverse team.

And then, despite the financial strains of the moment, we will turn to finding, recruiting, and hiring additional journalists *and* finding the new resources needed to make and sustain these new commitments.

SRG's board of directors and a working group of SRG members will shape our plans for working together, including identifying potential partnerships and resource requirements to take us beyond our individual actions. We will track the state of play at member organizations to inform our work and monitor our progress.

Sourcing strategies

Important work is already being done at several SRG members toward the goal of greater diversity in the sources to which newsrooms turn in their reporting. We will form a working group to capture existing work, plan shared activities, outline the scope of effort required beyond local initiatives, and consider funding strategies to scale up the efforts.

Initial work product

SRG will publish on its website substantive reports and analyses that speak to diversity in public media's journalism and we will regularly turn to SRG members for summaries, reports, documentation, plans and proposals that will keep this evolving library in the here and now.

SRG will create its signature big-picture perspective in charts, graphs, and discussion points that will aim for as much value to members' development departments as to their newsrooms. SRG's distinctive analysis, strategic planning, and practical execution are among our most important services to members. We want to both drive transformation in members' work and increase our collective ability to capture support for diversity and inclusion initiatives from individual donors and philanthropic foundations.

We will identify key opportunities to organize action projects among small groups of members that are "on the same page." Examples include source tracking tools, group work with a consultant, shared recruitment outreach, and multi-station professional development for new staff – projects that move forward will bubble up from local organizations and be shaped by their needs and capacities.

Our goal with all these activities is to support and empower station leaders and their teams with both near-term assignments and longer-term strategies.

Funding these initiatives

We believe we can move relatively quickly within current resources at member organizations and at SRG. Organizing the work outlined here will initially be supported with member dues.

The community-by-community ramping up of activity will require new investments by donors and philanthropy within our respective communities. Our working assumption is that by

working together and creating something larger, we can create a more compelling case for those donors and philanthropies.

We will also look for opportunities to approach regional and national funders, either through SRG member organizations who are ready to take leading roles and may be in the same communities as such funders, or through SRG itself.

Our starting place with a national funder is the Google News initiative, which has committed \$5.8 million in grant funds for work focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion in journalism. <https://www.blog.google/outreach-initiatives/google-news-initiative/innovation-challenge-sustain-diverse-media> Their deadline, initially mid-May, is now August 12.

“We’re Built for This”

In recent weeks local public media organizations have accomplished amazing things in responding to the nesting crises in American life – and done so under extraordinary circumstances. Even with the occasional stumble, we have done right by our communities on many levels.

The challenge to produce reporting that better reflects the full character of our community, however, will require much more than the adrenaline of the moment. It is the day by day by day effort that shapes not only more relevant response but enduring change.

Spike Lee, in an interview with the *Washington Post* about his new film and his role as an artist in turbulent times, declaimed “I’m built for this.”

In our own, different ways, so are we.