Source Diversity Audit
By: Katy Wade

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Our Mission

“Montana Public Radio enriches the mind and spirit, inspires a lifetime of learning, and connects communities through access to exceptional programming.”

For over 50 years MTPR has been a mission-led, community-based station dedicated to representing the unique character of Montana.

As part of an ongoing commitment to our mission, MTPR is dedicating more of our efforts to the idea of “community engagement.” This means making sure the public is reflected in and at the center of our work.

We aim to be transparent and open with our audience and listeners as we continue this work. We’ve been working with America Amplified, a public media initiative funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting using community engagement to inform and strengthen local, regional, and national journalism.

The First Steps

We began by setting a few goals for what we want to accomplish with this work:

- build trust
- grow our audience
- increase engagement and community-collaboration with our news stories
- reach a younger audience
- increase the diversity of our news sources and coverage, by seeking out those who may have been underrepresented in previous news coverage

Our work starts in the newsroom with a look at who we are and aren’t including in our coverage. It is our goal to ensure that our sources are an accurate reflection of the population of Montana. For example, if the majority of the sources heard in our news coverage are from Missoula, we’re not doing our job in amplifying voices and perspectives from around the state.

We conducted a retroactive source audit, spanning from April to June of 2021, comparing our sources’ demographic information with U.S. Census Bureau data of Montana. We had 275 individual newsroom sources during this three-month period.

A Focus on Diversity

Our audit concentrated on five specific areas of diversity in our sources: gender, race/ethnicity, age group, location, and level of expertise. It is important to note that there is a significant margin for error as our sources did not self-report their own characteristics for this set of data. These demographics are based on our own research, which means that there is a potential for misclassification.

Gender
About 53% of our sources are male presenting, while the other 47% are female. As our sources did not self-define for this particular set of data, it is uncertain how many of those sources may be gender nonconforming. In comparison to the Montana State Census data, there is a slight disparity in our gender equity. Notably, we spoke to more male professionals and politicians, while female sources were more often in the “activist/community advocate” and “persons directly impacted” categories.

Gender by Level of Expertise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject expert or industry professional</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person directly impacted by the topic of this story</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government official/politician</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spokesperson for government official/politician</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activist/community advocate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporter/Student</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Race/Ethnicity
Approximately 67% of our sources were confirmed to be of Caucasian heritage, however about 22% were undefined. The “Undefined” section is how we resolved ambiguity regarding race/ethnicity, as our sources were not able to self-identify. The “Undefined” section could potentially include an entirely Caucasian group, putting the total percentage up to 88%. The Montana State Census data total percentage for “White alone” is 86%.

When compared with the gender category, a little more than half of the male sources are white. However, a larger portion of our female sources are Native American - two thirds, in fact. Only one person was able to be defined as “two or more races,” as again our sources were not able to self-identify.

Race/Ethnicity by Gender

Approximately 9% of our sources are Native American. Comparatively, about 7% of Montana’s population is American Indian or Alaska Native alone. This is our largest minority group in the state, and we want to make sure we hearing these voices in our reporting. We also asked whether the stories including Native American voices were only about Native lands or issues, and found that nearly a quarter of our Native American sources were commenting on stories that were not about Native lands or issues. The second largest minority group in Montana is Hispanic or Latino, for which we potentially only had one source. This source was marked as “Two or More Races” as they identified as both Chicana and Native American.
Age Group

The vast majority of our sources are at least 35 years old, which may correlate with the number of expert sources we have. When compared with the Level of Expertise category, 62% of Persons aged 35-65 were subject experts or industry professionals. Only 13% were directly impacted by the topic of this story. Only one source was under the age of eighteen, while there was a large percentage of sources whose age was undefined.

Age Group by Level of Expertise
Location

Many of our sources are from larger cities, which could be attributed to the fact that many of our sources are also industry experts, government officials, or spokespeople that are required to live in these major cities due to their career. We do have a wide range of contributors from across the state and hope to increase these numbers as a part of our outreach efforts. The bar chart does not include the twenty areas for which we had five or fewer sources. It is also important to note that there may be sources that work or teach in major cities but live in smaller counties throughout the state.
Key Takeaways

- Male and female presenting sources appear to align closely with Census Data.

- Racial and ethnic background for Caucasian and American Indian and Alaska Native sources also appear to closely align with Census Data. However, no sources were identified from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, which are located within the MTPR coverage area.

- The vast majority of our sources are between the age of 35-65, which could be accounted for by the number of sources identified as experts, government officials, or spokespeople who are in the working population. However, this age group makes up about 37 percent of the state’s population.

- About 8% of sources were “out-of-state,” which could again be attributed to their positions as field experts, government officials, or spokespeople.

- We did not have any sources that were able to be identified as over the age of 65, we expect that to change as a more precise age breakdown is a part of our ongoing audit.

- Most of our sources identified in this period came from cities, rural voices were uncommon.

We are continuing this work with an optional questionnaire our reporters will offer each source they interview, providing us with a more accurate set of data. Sources will be able to “self-report” their own gender, ethnicity, age, and location, so that we can continue to track progress against our goals. Hopefully, this will erase the “undefined” category and create a more accurate picture of the diversity of our sources.

As we continue this work, we hope to use this data as a tool to hold ourselves accountable in our goal to accurately reflect the Montana public in our news coverage. We will never require a source to respond to our demographic information questionnaire in order to share their story with us. We will never publicly release a single individual’s demographic information. We will occasionally publish a big-picture look at our latest source surveys and this report will obscure all individual information, as was done with our baseline audit.
What’s Next?

Our next step in our commitment to community-led journalism at Montana Public Radio is *The Big Why*, a collaborative reporting series where you ask questions, and we dig up the answers. We want more ideas for our news coverage to come from outside of our newsroom and start with the curiosity of our audience. What would you like to know about Montana and the people who call it home? Send us of your questions, qualms, and queries, and our team of reporters will share the answers to these mysteries as we uncover them. No question is too big or too small under the Big Sky, and we can’t wait to see what we’ll discover together.