

Finding Diverse Sources for Science Stories



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Lack of diversity in science journalism limits which stories get told, how they are told, and whose voices are heard. It affects public perceptions of the scientific enterprise, suggesting that science is for some more than others. And it perpetuates stereotypes, societal injustice, and distrust of both science and journalism among historically marginalized communities, including Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic people; LGBTQ+ people; women; people with disabilities; recent immigrants; scientists in the Global South; and other underrepresented minorities. While many newsrooms are discussing how to attract and retain more journalists from underrepresented communities, including a wider range of perspectives from sources is also an important step towards equity. Including diverse voices in science stories ensures more accurate and complete stories that more fully reflect and inform readers, and is the equitable thing to do.

Writing for *The Open Notebook* in 2016, science journalist Christina Selby [offered a four-step program](#) for science writers who want to include more diverse sources in their stories. That program called for reporters to recognize biases that inhibit them from including diverse voices, to track the diversity of their sources, to break out of old reporting patterns to

cultivate new sources, and to broaden their definition of who is an expert. For some reporters, finding diverse sources may seem daunting, especially on a tight deadline. But no matter how much or how little time you have, prioritizing diversity in sourcing should be a core part of any journalist's working routine, as it already is for many science writers.

Here, we compile detailed and specific resources and strategies that reporters can use to make that goal a reality, drawing on the wealth of information available from many U.S.-based organizations and scientists. Strategies for finding diverse sources can include drawing on publicly available scientist databases, social media accounts and hashtags, affinity organizations in STEM, sources, colleagues, public information officers, expert-referral services, and online discussion groups. We also suggest ways for editors to support reporters' efforts to include more diverse sources, including by creating a newsroom culture that welcomes collaborative discussion about diversity (in sourcing and other respects), by setting and tracking goals, and by encouraging and concretely supporting reporters' sourcing efforts.

A Note about Asking Members of Marginalized Communities for Help

In working to cultivate a more diverse set of sources, it can be tempting to ask others for help in doing so, especially if they have successfully done so themselves. Be sensitive, though, to the fact that people from historically marginalized groups should not be expected to take on the [emotional and time-consuming labor](#) of helping other reporters solve the problem of lack of diversity in their sourcing. If it's possible to find needed information by doing your own research, it's best to do that. This work is not the responsibility of people who are members of historically marginalized communities. That's especially true when such efforts are unpaid.

Make the Search for Diverse Sources a Habit of Mind

As with any effort to defeat systemic racism and other forms of prejudice and discrimination, a first and necessary step in cultivating more diverse sources is to make doing so a priority and a habit of mind—not just when there's a crisis, but as a standard practice. That means setting aside time, even in the absence of a specific assignment, to learn about and become more familiar with a range of diverse experts in the fields you cover. You don't have to do everything at once; small actions accumulate, and the more often we take steps to engage with a diverse group of potential sources, the more easily it becomes a habit.

Editors: Support Writers in Efforts to Include Diverse Sources

Editors play a key role in helping ensure that their publications include diverse voices. Here are some ways to do so:

Create a newsroom and team culture where discussions of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are a standard part of coverage decisions and reporting and storytelling practices. Show by example that all team members, including freelancers, can take responsibility for thinking about and working toward DEI goals as a standard practice. Make clear that this responsibility should not rest on those in your newsroom who identify as members of any marginalized ethnic or racial group or other minority. At the same time, if you are not a member of any underrepresented minority group, prioritize listening and make space for others' ideas for how your organization can be more diverse, equitable, and inclusive, in its sourcing and in other respects.

When discussing diversity and inclusion in sourcing with staff and freelancers, approach the topic in a collaborative, problem-solving way. The goal is not to shame reporters for not including diverse sources, but to help cultivate a culture where everyone feels safe to discuss their successes and failures openly and where everyone strives to improve.

Set measurable goals for diversity in sourcing, and communicate your goals and expectations clearly. Make a concrete plan for when and how you will check progress on these goals and update them, including who is responsible for leading that effort; consider setting up a rotation of staff members who have responsibility for organizing and overseeing this process. Make your progress toward DEI goals public—whether your progress is good or not. Consider creating a page on your publication's website that you update on a regular basis, and share that information on social media. In sharing results, make clear the degree to which information about sources is unknown.

Ask writers to always make it a priority to include diverse sources in their stories and to keep track of their sources—for example, in a spreadsheet or shared database. Be sure to consider a wide variety of dimensions of diversity and intersectionality, rather than just one aspect, such as gender. The process of tracking sources will be an imperfect process, since you can't always know about every aspect of people's self-identity. But it's better to have an imperfect process than no process. Consider encouraging reporters to send sources a note, either during the course of their reporting or after a story's publication, 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.”

Integrate DEI sourcing practices into annual performance goals. Doing so can help ensure that collaborative, solutions-focused discussion about diversity in sourcing is a regular practice.

Consider what resources newsroom leaders can make available to assist in such efforts. Some examples could include:

- Creating shared resources such as beat-specific resource lists or a source diversity tracking form that includes categories for multiple dimensions of diversity (such as race/ethnicity, gender, LGBTQ+ identity, disability, geographic location, career stage, and so on), as well as other information that you might want to collect about the role each source plays in a given story and/or what type of story it is. Such resources could be made available to all team members, including freelancers.
- Hosting monthly brown-bag (or virtual) newsroom meetings or small-group meetings to discuss successes and challenges in the month’s efforts to include diverse sources, share tips about what worked or didn’t work, how to find diverse sources more skillfully, and how to make such efforts a standard practice. Consider inviting regular contributing freelancers to these events as well.
- Committing to hiring [sensitivity readers](#) for some fraction of stories you publish, with the goal of making the whole team more aware of where the publication could be more inclusive in its reporting.
- Hosting seminars, workshops, or webinars by professional consultants and newsroom leaders at other outlets who can share approaches to including more diverse sources in coverage.
- Regularly sending commissioning editors, staff, and/or regular freelancers to DEI-oriented training workshops or webinars, to scientific meetings where they are most likely to meet and learn from diverse experts, and/or to journalism meetings of historically marginalized groups.

Case Study: One Newsroom's Tracking System

Chemical & Engineering News sends a memo to staff and freelancers that offers a list of diverse sources, emphasizes that diverse sourcing is important to the publication, explains that *C&EN* tracks the diversity of its sources, and asks freelancers to consider diversity of sourcing in their own writing. The magazine provides to its staff a link to a Google Form to use for tracking diversity data for each story. Staff reporters fill in their own data, and editors fill in data for freelance stories. The data for the whole team are tabulated each quarter and shared, without identifying anyone individually, and the team talks about what's working and what could be better.

Search Diversity Databases

Many, many groups and individuals have created lists and databases of scientific experts that journalists can consult in their search for relevant sources. We share some of them below. (We welcome suggestions for others, especially if they are not already included in the “databases of databases” we link to below. To suggest additions, [email us](#).)

Databases of Diverse Scientists in All Fields

- 500 Queer Scientists aims to increase the visibility of **LGBTQ+ people** in science. Its [database of scientists](#) is searchable by discipline and location.
- The Society for the Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science's [Biography Project](#) presents first-person stories by and about **Chicano/Hispanic and Native American scientists**.
- [Disabled Writers](#) aims to increase representation of disabled people in media, and publishes a database that includes both **disabled subject-matter experts** and disabled writers.
- The Women's Media Center's [SheSource](#) is an online database of **women experts**, searchable by keyword, area of expertise, language, and location.
- 500 Women Scientists is an organization dedicated to “the transformation of leadership, diversity, and public engagement in science.” Among other projects, the group publishes [a database](#) of **women scientists**, searchable by keyword, location, and discipline. Users can also “favorite” experts for future reference.
- [People of Color Also Know Stuff](#) includes a database of **experts in various fields, including political science, psychology, and public health**. The database includes information about experts' affiliations, research interests, and contact information.
- [Diverse Sources](#) is a database of **scientific experts from underrepresented communities**. The database is searchable by keyword, and people who choose to be listed can include information such as their area of expertise, location and time zone, pronouns, and contact information. (Note that information about how experts self-identify is not included in this database.)

- NPR's [Source of the Week](#) database is a curated collection of **experts in many fields who are members of underrepresented racial and ethnic communities**. Users can browse the directory alphabetically or by location or area of expertise. (Note that information about how experts self-identify is not included in this database.)
- Editors of Color's [Database of Diverse Databases](#) includes **field-specific databases of diverse experts in numerous scientific fields**, including virology, chemistry, systems neuroscience, ecology and evolutionary biology, life sciences, physics, cell biology, engineering biology, microbiome research, material science, biochemistry, and more.
- The Georgia Tech Diversity and Inclusion Project's [Database of Databases](#) was established to help conference organizers identify diverse STEM experts as possible speakers. It includes both **general and field-specific databases of experts in numerous scientific fields**, including ecology and evolution, plant sciences, microbiology, neuroscience, physics, astronomy, chemistry, data science, and more.

Additional Field-Specific Databases

- [Diversify Chemistry](#) is a database of **chemists who identify as members of underrepresented communities**. The database includes information about people's branch of chemistry, institution, country, career stage, self-identification (with categories of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender), and contact information.
- The [LGBT+ Physicists Outlist](#) is a directory of **LGBTQ+ physicists and allies**. The directory includes people's job position, institutional affiliation, location, and contact information.
- The American Astronomical Society's [Astronomy and Astrophysics Outlist](#) is a directory of **LGBTQ+ members of the astronomical community**. The directory includes people's job position, institutional affiliation, location, and contact information.
- The [Society of Women Engineers](#) hosts the following affinity groups on Facebook: [African-American](#), [Latinx](#), [LGBTQ and allies](#), [Asian Connections](#), [Native American](#). Membership in the affinity groups is private, but admins are public.
- The [Women in Neuroscience Repository](#) includes **women graduate students, post-docs, and senior scientists in neuroscience**. The database is searchable by keyword, and users can filter results to only include people from under-represented countries and/or to include only scientists in senior positions.
- [Women+ \(Sourcelist\)](#) is a database of **women and underrepresented genders in technology and technology policy**.
- [The Women in Physics Speakers List](#), and the [Minority Physicists Speakers List](#), both run by the American Physical Society, are searchable by keyword, location (state or country), and subfield.

Follow Diverse Scientists on Social Media

You're more likely to find diverse sources for any given story if you expose yourself, regularly, to the ideas and perspectives of scientists whose voices are underrepresented in

science journalism. One way to do that is by making sure your reading diet includes books, journalism, essays, and other contributions from people who are members of marginalized communities. It's also helpful to follow a wide range of people on social media, to see what they're writing, what they're reading, who they're following, and so on. Here's a (non-exhaustive) list of Twitter accounts, lists, and hashtags that can help you find scientists relevant to the beats you cover:

Twitter Accounts

[@500QueerSci](#) | [@500WomenSci](#) | [@AISES](#) | [@AAS_WGAD](#) | [@BlackandSTEM](#) | [@BlackAFinSTEM](#) | [@BlackWomenSTEM](#) | [@CientificasMx](#) | [@CultureDish](#) | [@DisabledWriters](#) | [@GAIAIndigneers](#) | [@HBCUSTEM](#) | [@InclusiveSci](#) | [@LatinasinSTEM](#) | [@LGBTscholars](#) | [@LGBTSTEM](#) | [@MinoritySTEM](#) | [@MinorityPostdoc](#) | [@NOBCChE](#) | [@NSTNSorg](#) | [@OUTinStem](#) | [@POCAlsoKnow](#) | [@PrideinSTEM](#) | [@RequestWSTEMM](#) | [@SACNAS](#) | [@SheSource](#) | [@VanguardSTEM](#) | [@WOCinSTEM](#) | [@WokeSTEM](#)

Hashtags

[#Academics4BlackLives](#) | [#AmplifyBlackSTEM](#) | [#BlackandSTEM](#) | [#BlackAFinSTEM](#) | [#BlackinAcademia](#) | [#BlackinAstro](#) | [#BlackintheIvory](#) | [#DisabledandSTEM](#) | [#DisabledinSTEM](#) | [#LatinxandSTEM](#) | [#LatinxinSTEM](#) | [#LGBTQSTEM](#) | [#MarginSci](#) | [#NativesinSTEM](#) | [#QueeninSTEM](#) | [#STEMDiversity](#) | [#STEMteenth](#) | [#WCWinSTEM](#) | [#WomenWhoCode](#) | [#WomeninScience](#) | [#WomeninSTEM](#) | [#WOCinSTEM](#)

Twitter Lists

- [BLACKandSTEM](#), by @ThePurplePage
- [Black STEM Influencers](#), by @BLACKSTEMUSA
- [Diverse scientists mentioned in the Ologies podcast's BlackAFinSTEM episode](#), by @Ologies
- [Diversity and Inclusion STEM Advocates](#) by @BLACKSTEMUSA
- [Diversity in STEM](#), by @umichOGPS
- [ErryonebutCISWhiteGuysSci](#), by @te_jenson
- [Green voices of color](#), by @MaryHeglar
- [Indigenous STEM](#), by @Napaaqtuk
- [People who've contributed bios to 500 Queer Scientists](#), by @500QueerSci
- [POC STEM professionals](#), by @DNLee5

Finding Diverse Sources Using Twitter Lists

One way to find additional diverse scientists, including those most relevant to specific beats, is to search for lists created by well-connected journalists and/or scientists who are active on Twitter; just click on the "More" (three dots) icon on a user's Twitter profile, then click "View Lists."

Find Affinity Organizations in STEM

Reporters can also seek sources through scientific affinity organizations. (Note: Some regard it as part of their mission to help connect journalists with diverse sources; others may not regard doing so as part of their responsibility.) Here's a small sampling of the [many](#) that exist:

- [Academics for Black Survival and Wellness](#)
- [American Indian Science and Engineering Society](#)
- [Association for Women in Mathematics](#)
- [Association for Women in Science](#)
- [Association of Black Anthropologists](#)
- [Association of Black Women Physicians](#)
- [Earth Science Women's Network](#)
- [Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals](#)
- [Latinas in STEM](#)
- [MAES \(Latinos in Science and Engineering\)](#)
- [National Association of Black Geoscientists](#)
- [National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers](#)
- [National Society of Black Engineers](#)
- [National Society of Black Physicists](#)
- [National Society of Hispanic Physicists](#)
- [Native American and Indigenous Studies Association](#)
- [National Latinx Psychological Association](#)
- [Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science](#)
- [Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers](#)
- [Society of Women Engineers](#)

Ask for Help

There's no shame in asking other people to help you find suitable sources. (Remember that people from historically marginalized groups should not be expected to take on the responsibility of doing reporters' research for them.) People who science journalists can turn to for source recommendations can include:

- **Sources.** Asking sources who else you should talk to is a standard interview technique. In doing so, it's a good idea to specifically seek out diverse sources—for example, by saying something like: "My publication makes it a practice to consistently include 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, can you recommend some additional experts I might talk with whose work is pertinent here and who are people of color or who are members of other historically marginalized communities?" Such a question can be a useful strategy even when interacting with

sources who are not able to make time for an interview. (Additionally, when reporting on [science that involves researchers in nations in the Global South](#), it's important to include those scientists as sources. If a U.S. institution has put out a press release about a study, it may not prominently include contact information for study co-authors outside the U.S., but U.S. sources should be able to help facilitate such connections.)

- **Colleagues.** Other journalists may be able to suggest suitable experts from diverse communities. Remember, though, that relying on other reporters to find sources can perpetuate the problem of the same few minority voices being heard again and again.
- **Press officers.** Public information officers at universities, scientific societies, funding agencies, and nonprofit organizations can help reporters find sources, and should be able to respond helpfully to requests for experts who are from underrepresented communities, when possible. As with any request to press officers, when making such requests it's helpful to be specific about what type of expertise you're seeking and on what timeline.
- **University-specific affinity groups.** Many universities have institution-specific affinity groups, which are easily searchable. For example, searching for "University of Illinois physics affinity groups" yields [this page](#).
- **Expert-referral services.** Expert referral services can sometimes fulfill journalists' requests for diverse sources.
- The National Science & Technology News Service (NSTNS) links journalists to Black scientists who have experience working with the media. Reporters can tweet queries to the group [@NSTNSorg](#).
- [SciLine](#), a free service supported by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, connects journalists with scientific experts. Sciline accepts requests for diverse sources and routinely seeks out sources from underrepresented groups.
- Requesting diverse sources through other referral services, such as [Newswise](#), [HARO](#), and [ProfNet](#), may also turn up good options.
- **Online discussion groups.** If you belong to an online discussion group of journalists—whether it be a private Facebook or Slack group or a discussion group such as those hosted by the National Association of Science Writers or the Society of Environmental Journalists—you can ask other subscribers if they can recommend potential sources with particular expertise, and specify that you're seeking diverse sources.
- **Twitter.** Asking for sourcing suggestions on Twitter can be helpful; again, be mindful not to expect that people from marginalized communities will do the work of finding your sources.

Find More *TON* Resources for Including Diverse Sources

- [Including Diverse Voices in Science Stories](#)
- [Covering Indigenous Communities with Respect and Sensitivity](#)
- [Including LGBTQ+ Scientists as Sources](#)
- [Writing Well about Disability](#)
- [The Do's and Don'ts of Community Engagement](#)
- [Gut Check: Working with a Sensitivity Reader](#)

- [Invisible Science: Why Are Latin American Science Stories Absent in European and U.S. Media Outlets? \(léelo en español\)](#)
- [The Science Byline Counting Project: Where Are the Women—and Where Are They Not?](#)
- [Diversity Style Guides for Journalists](#)
- More from the [Diverse Voices in Science Journalism](#) series

More Reading

- [Columbia Journalism Review: “Sourcing Diversity: WHY? and the Rocky Road to ‘Cultural Competency,’”](#) by Andrea Wenzel
- [Freedom Forum Institute/Power Shift Project: Do You Qualify as an Ally?](#)
- [Global Media Monitoring Project: Who Makes the News?](#)
- [International Journalists’ Network: 7 Resources to Make Your Stories More Inclusive](#)
- [National Association of Science Writers: “How Can We Solve the Diversity Dearth in U.S. Science Writing?”](#) by Danya AbdelHameid
- [NPR: New On-Air Source Diversity Data For NPR Show Much Work Ahead](#)
- [Seattle Times Guidelines for Inclusive Journalism](#)
- [Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy: “In the Shadow of Kerner: Fifty Years Later, Newsroom Diversity and Equity Stall”](#)
- [Society of Professional Journalists: Diversity Toolbox](#)
- [The Atlantic: “I Spent Two Years Trying to Fix the Gender Imbalance in My Stories,”](#) by Ed Yong
- [The Authority Collective: Photographer’s Guide to Inclusive Photography](#)
- [Undark: “More Inclusive Science Journalism Is Better Science Journalism,”](#) by Erika Check Hayden

Journalism Affinity Associations

- [Asian American Journalists Association \(@AAJA\)](#)
- [National Association of Black Journalists \(@NABJ\)](#)
- [National Association of Hispanic Journalists \(@NAHJ\)](#)
- [National Center on Disability and Journalism \(@NCDJ_ASU\)](#)
- [Native American Journalists Association \(@najournalists\)](#)
- [NLGJA: The Association of LGBTQ Journalists \(@nlgja\)](#)
- [South Asian Journalists Association \(@sajahq\)](#)
- [Women’s Media Center \(@womensmediacntr\)](#)

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