

Wisconsin Public Radio
For Immediate Release
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Wisconsin Public Radio Releases Results of Internal Study on Guest and Source Demographics

(Madison, Wis.) Wisconsin Public Radio's (WPR) approach to broadcast and digital content relies heavily on outside voices, what journalists call sources – guest experts, authors, scientists, elected officials, artists, business owners and more. Sources provide context, experience and perspective on the issues and news WPR covers every day. In the past twelve months alone, more than 3,700 individual sources appeared on the statewide network of 38 stations.

In 2019, WPR began to request demographic data through a short survey sent to everyone who appeared on air or was interviewed — including WPR employees who appeared as experts and guests. A new report, shared online at wpr.org/sourcing, outlines 12 months of data from that survey. While it includes some positive news — such as near equal representation of males and females and generally strong geographic representation of sources statewide — it also shows that WPR turns to white sources in nearly nine out of 10 instances.

“We’re releasing the report because it raises a number of questions about our sourcing process and we want to be transparent and accountable to the public,” noted WPR Director Mike Crane. “We’re continuing to explore various factors that contribute to a lack of racial diversity in our sourcing, and we plan additional analysis to better understand the issue,” he said. WPR is also appointing a source librarian who will work with the newsroom to diversify the contacts database and seek out experts and others who WPR has overlooked.

WPR began collecting data on the race/ethnicity and gender of guests on its talk shows in 2015. Like others in public media, the station was concerned that their sources were white and male at levels that far outweighed their representation in the population as a whole, but it didn't have an effective way to gather accurate demographic information. “We were making educated guesses,” Crane said. “We are far more confident in the results of this research,” he added.

The public report comprises data from August 2019 through July 2020 with nearly 50 percent of sources surveyed responding. “With some baseline data in hand, we’re better prepared to set some benchmarks and evaluate different methods to achieve them,” Crane said. “This research and public reporting on our sourcing is part of the changes we are making to create a space that is welcoming and reflective of everyone in our state,” he concluded. The station plans to continue the survey project and release results on an annual basis.

Find results of WPR's year-long “Source Demographic Report” online at wpr.org/sourcing.

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About Wisconsin Public Radio

For over 100 years, Wisconsin Public Radio has served the people of Wisconsin with quality news, music, talk and entertainment. On air, online and in the community - we work for Wisconsin. WPR is a service of the Educational Communications Board and University of Wisconsin-Madison. Listen, learn more and donate at www.wpr.org.