



Source Diversity Tracking Review

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Background

KUOW partnered with Impact Architects (IA) in 2021 to create a baseline of source demographics and recommend a system for sustained source diversity tracking. This work was part of the newsroom's efforts to better reflect the communities they serve in the voices they include in their coverage. The newsroom has continued to pursue this goal, and in fall 2024, KUOW again partnered with IA to review the newsroom's existing source tracking practices, provide recommendations for streamlining the process, and develop a methodology for tracking sources for additional content areas that are not currently tracked, specifically newscasts. KUOW currently tracks sources for features but does not track breaking or spot news.

This report outlines IA's findings and recommendations based on our review of data and conversations with staff, in addition to our new analysis of sources in KUOW's newscast content. We explored existing data, practices, and documentation regarding KUOW's current source tracking process. We conducted three interviews with staff across the newsroom to help identify common questions, strengths, challenges, and suggestions for the source tracking process and data. We also examined KUOW's existing source tracking data and dashboard.

IA's 2021 retroactive source audit of content from six programming areas (digital presentation of News/Enterprise stories from the KUOW newsroom, Seattle Now, The Record, Speakers Forum, and the podcasts Radioactive and The Wild) published in 2020 helped inform editorial strategy for future tracking and set a baseline for perspectives included in the newsroom's content. This new analysis surfaced questions about the process as well as opportunities for expanding source tracking and increasing compliance in the data collection process.

Topline Findings & Recommendations

Developing guidelines

for KUOW staff to track sources could increase consistency in who and what is tracked.

Sharing best practices

for KUOW staff to ask for source demographics could help increase compliance.

Articulating KUOW's goals

for source diversity and how source data is informing that could help staff understand how tracking fits into KUOW's strategy.

Revising the Looker Studio

that summarizes and displays source data will increase usability for editors and other staff.

Tracking newscasts' sources

will provide more insight into representativeness but will require some work to address duplicates.

Audit data

indicated a large proportion of newscasts focused on politics and government and drawing on sources from those areas.

Topline Findings & Recommendations

Staff would benefit from additional guidelines or other documentation for how to track sources.

Interviewees expressed some confusion about what kinds of content are included in the source tracking process, what information is tracked, and who qualifies as a source that should be tracked. Circulating a detailed guide on who and what is tracked — as well as best practices for navigating the process of asking sources for their information — could help increase compliance for content that is already tracked and help pave the way for tracking additional content categories.

Additional information from leadership about how KUOW is using source data to inform its strategy could increase buy-in and help underscore how the source-tracking process is helping the newsroom meet its goals.

Notably, clearer messaging about how collecting source information helps KUOW be more representative of the voices and perspectives in their community could also help reporters explain to sources why collecting the information is so important. One approach could be soliciting internal use cases from newsroom staff about how the information was used to produce higher quality or more representative content.

Adding newscast sources to the tracking process could help KUOW understand who they are representing in a significant content category, but it will also require setting guidelines around duplicate sources.

Adding newscasts to the content categories that are tracked will require KUOW to consider how to handle duplicates, since spots are sometimes turned into web stories that are already included in the current tracking process.

Newscasts analyzed in the retroactive audit were often focused on politics or government — with more than half of all sources falling into the “Government official/politician/staff/PIO” category.

This could be an indicator of differences between currently tracked content categories and newscasts, and/or it could point to the significant influence of the 2024 election on coverage topics.

Analysis

Retroactive Audit

A retroactive source audit served as one piece of IA's work to understand KUOW's current source tracking process and practices and how newscast content might fit into it. We know that asking sources for their information is the most reliable way to collect this data, and the purpose of our audit was not to develop a new method for retroactive source tracking, but rather it was to gain a general understanding of what sources in newscasts look like, identify potential challenges with collecting information for this content type, and recommend best practices.

APPROACH

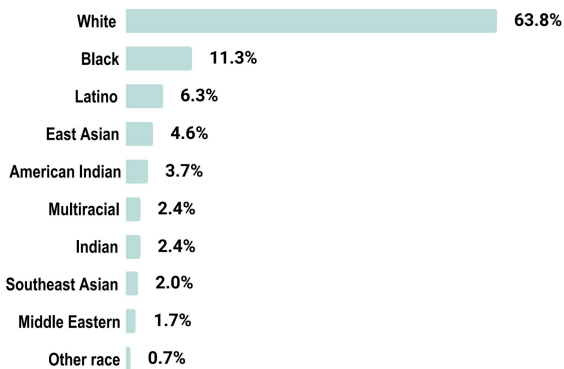
IA conducted a source audit of 45 randomly selected newscasts that aired between March 2024 and the end of August 2024. IA then coded all sources with whom a KUOW reporter had direct contact, meaning that the voice or read quote are in response to an interaction with the KUOW reporter. Given this definition, we did not code KUOW reporters or reporters for other local radio stations that spoke about a story on air.

FINDINGS

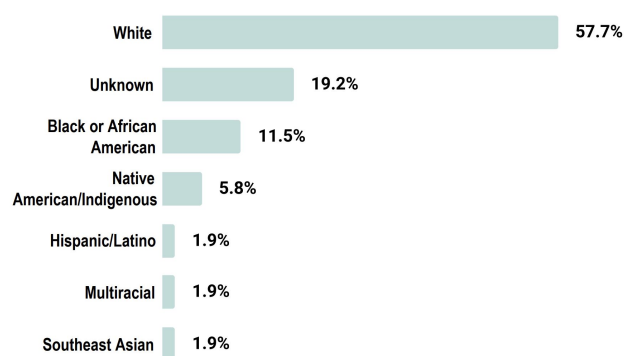
- Of the 45 newscasts we coded, most had at least one source.
 - 26.7% of newscasts did not contain a voice or read quote that was clearly in response to an interaction with a KUOW reporter.
- "Government" and "politics" were the two most common topics among newscasts that contained a source, at 19.2% and 17.3%, respectively.
 - This differs from KUOW's tracking data, where "News" and "Arts & Life" are currently the top two topics, at about 14% each. This discrepancy could help illustrate a difference in the kinds of stories that are more often included in newscasts compared to tracked content like features, but it also could be due in part to the fact that the content we audited was from an election year.
- The "Government official/politician/staff/PIO" category was the most commonly coded primary role by far, at 55.8%. The next most common was Business leader/spokesperson with professional/financial interest," at 13.5%.

- We coded more male sources (59.6%) than female (38.5%) — a stark contrast from KUOW’s existing data.
 - This could also have been impacted by a disproportionate number of politics and government stories in an election year, including coverage of a gubernatorial race where the top-polling candidates were four men.
- Data on race for white and Black interviewees looks similar to KUOW’s existing data, though data for other racial groups looks different. Notably, we had a significant percentage of “unknowns” for this coding question.

Race (KUOW tracker)



Race (retroactive audit)



- Newscast sources tended to be 35 or older, similar to KUOW’s existing data. We were able to collect age range information retroactively for all but seven coded sources.

TAKEAWAYS

There may be opportunities to add to the currently tracked categories across all content types, though this depends on use cases for the data. Interviewees highlighted how the data could be useful for identifying the specific people or types of sources that are overrepresented in their coverage. Adding source names would allow KUOW staff to see which specific sources appear most frequently in their coverage. In some cases, returning to the same source might be unavoidable — reporters don’t have a choice in who to interview when it comes to gubernatorial candidates, for example — but this could still help reduce reliance on the same sources in situations where it would be easy to add a new voice or perspective. Adding a primary role category could similarly help. We included both of these fields in our retroactive audit. To provide an example of how the primary role field could be used, we filtered for “white,” “male,” “government official/politician/staff/PIO” and found that about a quarter of all sources fell into this group. Few sources appeared more than once in our sample, but the addition of source names allowed us to identify that gubernatorial candidates Dave Reichert and Semi Bird each appeared twice. The addition of a name and primary role category could also help KUOW staff find sources they might want to return to when reporting a story.

Opportunities

1. Share guidelines for source tracking

Our review of existing documentation and conversations with KUOW staff indicated that the newsroom might benefit from an in-depth guide about source tracking. Interviewees highlighted common points of confusion, including what kinds of content are included in the current system, what kinds of information is tracked, and who qualifies as a source. Many noted that they believe tracking is being done differently throughout the newsroom — with some, for example, tracking any source that influenced a story, while others are tracking only sources that are directly quoted or named.

2. Create a list of best practices

A list of best practices and strategies for asking sources for their information could also be helpful for ensuring KUOW has as accurate a picture of their source demographics as possible. These kinds of guidelines could also help with collecting information for categories like age, which KUOW flagged as one area that has been particularly challenging to get.

KUOW may also want to outline scenarios in which a reporter might not ask for source information, such as when speaking with a source on background or who wants to remain anonymous, when covering a protest or other fast-moving situation, or if a source only has a few minutes to speak to a reporter.

Another consideration is whether KUOW might want to incorporate some retroactive gathering of source information in their process to help cover demographic categories that are often left blank. However, we know this kind of research can be time consuming and is not the ideal way to collect source demographic information, so it should not take priority over other strategies.

3. Articulating goals and uses for the data

While interviewees said that the act of collecting source demographic information is a good reminder that they should be working towards a more representative set of voices in their work, there are still opportunities to clarify overall organizational goals when it comes to source tracking. Setting concrete goals and providing updates on how data is being used to further organizational goals for representativeness could help underscore the importance of tracking and increase compliance, and it could also help reporters articulate to sources why it's important for them to share their demographic data.

4. Expanding tracking to new content categories

Newscasts represent a critical way that KUOW’s audience interacts with the station’s content. Including this content in the source tracking process could provide insight not only into the degree to which sources are representative of the communities KUOW serves but also how newscast listeners perceive the representativeness of the station. However, newscasts present a challenge in that tracking could lead to “duplicate” sources when a newscast is also turned into a tracked web story and sources are tracked for both.