

Public Policy Memo

There should be support targeted to increase the number of journalists who identify as Native American/Alaskan Native. Indigenous journalists are underrepresented in newsrooms. According to the News Leaders Association 2019 Diversity Survey, Indigenous journalists represent less than 0.25 percent of employees of daily print and online organizations nationally. Of those employed by Washington news outlets that voluntarily responded to this study, 1.2% of journalists—three of 243—identified as AIAN. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 1.6% of Washingtonians identify as AIAN alone, and 3.6% of Washingtonians identify as AIAN alone or in combination with another race. It is broadly understood that newsrooms should reflect the diversity of their audiences, and the quality and reach of news coverage suffers when news outlets do not employ individuals with lived experience. Lived experience is knowledge based on someone's perspective, personal history, and background beyond their professional or educational experience.

A number of Indigenous-led organizations have developed guidance and resources for journalists covering Indigenous issues. First and foremost, is to increase the number of Indigenous reporters, news room staff, editors and writers inject an authentic reflection of Indigenous America into our news sources- print, on air and online. Other guidance includes developing relationships and trust with tribal communities, learning more about the history of colonialism and government violence against Indigenous people, understanding tribal sovereignty, and using a survivor-centered approach to reporting. Overall, the goal is to provide a news source that is accessible to Indigenous citizens and their communities, by delivering coverage of issues and movements in a culturally humble and diversity minded format. This can be accomplished by hiring hire Indigenous reporters, who can accurately and authentically provide an Indigenous voice and perspective, informed by lived experience.

To accomplish this goal, the Legislature should establish a journalism fellowship program to address the underrepresentation of Indigenous people in Washington newsrooms and to support accurate and authentic reporting on tribal issues. The fellowship program should provide meaningful financial support and experience to journalism students or journalists early in their careers who are members of federally-recognized tribes. This fellowship should be modeled on the public-interest journalism fellowship program established by the Legislature in the 2023 session.