

Behind the Scenes

ttie

Think Tank
for Inclusion
& Equity

In partnership with
Geena Davis Institute
on Gender in Media

The State of Inclusion and Equity in TV Writing



Spring 2022



EQUITY OF ADVANCEMENT: *the practice of ensuring equal opportunity for continued employment and promotion*

EQUITY OF ADVANCEMENT

Equity of advancement is integral to ensuring historically excluded TV writers have the same opportunities to advance their careers as non-marginalized writers.

Staying in the Game

Breaking into TV writing can be tough. Maintaining a career, moving up the ranks, and getting the skills one needs to become a showrunner present their own set of challenges.

There is one piece of good news, though. There's been a notable decline (-12%) in historically excluded writers repeating staff writer since TTIE began spotlighting this issue in 2020.



Sustaining one's career, however, takes more than just title advancement. It also requires the financial means to make it through periods of unemployment. 93% of white writers were able to get through lean times by drawing on personal savings. It's a much different story for unemployed historically excluded writers. **52% of Disabled writers had to rely on family support and 72% relied on public support** (e.g., unemployment). Although many BIPOC writers (87%) were also able to draw on savings during employment gaps, a disproportionate amount of them (47%) had to take jobs outside the industry to make ends meet, compared to only 37% of their white writer counterparts.

The Stacked Deck

The emergence of the mini-room may be contributing to these inequities. A third (32%) of historically excluded writers surveyed worked in a mini-room in the last five years. Only 39% were paid above WGA scale. Broken down by gender, men respondents (55%) were paid above scale more often than women (35%), and **no non-binary writers were paid above scale.**

Furthermore, 41% of respondents said their mini-rooms did not get picked up. This can leave writers with no screen credit for their resumes, less money in their pockets, and no production or post-production experience, all of which can negatively impact career development.

In fact, **55% of all lower-level writers and 59% of all mid-level writers did not get to cover set on their most recent show.** In addition, 65% of lower-level and 52% of mid-level writers did not run the room for their episode on their most recent show, missing out on developing key leadership skills.

Per the recent WGAW Inclusion & Equity Report¹³, BIPOC writers make up over 50% of employed writers from staff writer to co-producer (i.e., lower- and mid-level). But this up-and-coming cohort of writers is often unable to build the vital skills they need to eventually run their own shows. An upper-level Black woman writer from our focus groups said:

"I don't think it's a coincidence as just when we're demanding more inclusion and more equity and more representation in terms of writers in and across the board, the studios and upper-level showrunners and gatekeepers are being like, 'Oh, no, writers don't need to go to set!' ...I think it's setting up a pipeline for those maybe more experienced...EP-level cis het white guys to say, 'Well, they need us, because we have all the production experience.'"

Accessibility and Advancement

For Deaf and Disabled writers, workplace accessibility issues hamper advancement throughout their careers. Another positive result of the shift to Zoom writers rooms is improved opportunities for Disabled writers. As one focus group participant noted: **"Zoom has helped disability hiring; they can't see you're in a wheelchair."**

In our new COVID-reality world, Zoom rooms are not just an advantage for some writers, they're a necessity. In fact, they can be the difference between life and death, as one focus group participant described:

"For me, I'm severely immunocompromised. I cannot go back to [an in-person] room because if I catch COVID, I'll die... [The Zoom room] is working pretty good for me, but it's like everybody else's conversation is 'I'd be more comfortable in a live room. For social comfort.' I'm like, 'I'll die, or I won't be able to work.'"

Why Equity of Advancement Matters

Denying historically excluded writers the tools, access, and experience they need to run shows hinders their advancement to the showrunner ranks. Story decisions are made at the top. Without historically excluded writers in these positions, authentic stories about their communities will continue to be filtered through the lens of outsiders.

¹³ Writers Guild of America West (2022). *Inclusion & Equity Report 2022.*

ACTION ITEMS

Systemic issues require a systemic response. Following are concrete recommendations for all facets of the industry.



ACTION ITEMS

Many advertisers¹⁴, audiences¹⁵, and TV industry stakeholders agree Hollywood needs to tell more inclusive stories that better reflect the world we live in and its unique communities. To put our collective words into action, we must enact specific, targeted initiatives that are well-developed and properly funded. In this section we provide recommendations to help achieve the goal of more authentic, inclusive, and responsible storytelling by setting up historically excluded writers for success and fostering safe work environments for all TV writers.

Networks/Studios/Streamers/Production Companies

#1 Invest in historically excluded talent to help promote authentic, inclusive, and responsible storytelling.

- Hire and promote historically excluded creative executives and empower them to shepherd and greenlight projects by historically excluded creators.
- Center the voices of historically excluded writers and executives from project inception and build story around their input, rather than bringing them in after the project is already in progress.
- Pay historically excluded writers for development and *greenlight* their projects to series.
- Empower experienced historically excluded writers to run their own shows, especially taking into account transferable skills (e.g., prior management experience).

#2 Create safe, equitable, and inclusive work environments.

- Institute and uphold a code of conduct for showrunners and all working writers.
- Establish and fully fund a widely accessible training program for new and experienced showrunners and co-executive producers, which includes both traditional management skills and guidance on running diverse and inclusive writers rooms.

- Help showrunners find historically excluded talent through alternative methods (e.g., reaching out to WGA Inclusion and Equity Committees and referring to curated databases available online) to encourage them to hire writers they don't already know.
- Hire and promote historically excluded writers equitably, especially regarding title and pay.
- Track which shows consistently experience turnover of historically excluded writers, investigate root causes, and implement protections.
- Institute third-party confidential exit interviews with every writer to help identify unsafe work environments and remove bias and/or discrimination in the hiring/firing/rehiring process.
- Hire support staff from historically excluded backgrounds and pay them a living wage. Create and communicate a clear path toward advancement.

#3 Improve writers room accessibility and access.

- Gain input from Deaf and Disabled community members to increase accessibility across workspaces.
- Maintain Zoom and hybrid writers rooms to ensure better access, especially for Deaf and Disabled writers and writers from low-wealth and low-income backgrounds.

¹⁴ Umoh, Ruth (2020) Streaming Platforms Are Driving Diverse Representation In Television. *Forbes.com* 12/03/2020.

¹⁵ Nielsen (2021) Seeing and Believing: Meeting Black audience demand for representation that matters. *Nielsen.com* 10/2021.

Showrunners

#1 Hire inclusively and nurture the career development of all writers on your staff.

- Hire and promote historically excluded writers equitably, especially regarding title and pay.
- Increase the number of upper-level writers from historically excluded backgrounds and be deliberate about involving them in decision making.
- Assign mentors to mid- and lower-level writers to set them up for success in the room and to help foster professional relationships and career growth.
- Prioritize room-running, production, and post-production experience for writers at all levels to ensure they acquire the skills to run their own shows.
- Hire support staff from historically excluded backgrounds and pay them a living wage. Create and communicate a clear path toward advancement.

#2 Create a safe, equitable, and inclusive work environment to promote authentic, inclusive, and responsible storytelling.

- Establish and uphold performance expectations and room guidelines for all writers on staff.
- Listen to and believe the story concerns of historically excluded writers on staff, especially those about their own communities.
- Use community/issue factsheets and enlist cultural consultants to help inform and guide stories about historically excluded communities. Avoid referencing past TV and film because many contain harmful stereotypes that shouldn't be perpetuated.
- Provide multiple safe avenues for staff to communicate challenges and issues faced in the writers room.
- Gain input from members of the Deaf and Disabled communities to increase accessibility across workspaces. Give special consideration to Zoom and/or hybrid writers rooms for this purpose.

Agents/Managers

#1 Invest in historically excluded talent.

- Increase the number of agents/managers from historically excluded backgrounds to help support and grow your diverse client roster.
- Pitch experienced historically excluded writers, especially those with transferable skills (e.g., prior management experience), as capable of running their own shows.
- Advocate for title bumps, equitable pay, and paid development for historically excluded clients.
- Hire support staff from historically excluded backgrounds and pay them a living wage. Create and communicate a clear path toward advancement.

#2 Protect and support your clients to help ensure career longevity.

- Listen to and believe the concerns of historically excluded writers, especially regarding their projects and work experiences.
- Track which shows consistently experience turnover of historically excluded writers. Inform clients if they are entering a challenging work environment.

Guilds/Unions

#1 Prioritize inclusion and equity internally (i.e., within the guild/union) and externally (i.e., in the industry).

- Hire a career inclusion professional whose sole responsibility is to continually evaluate and improve equity, inclusion, and antiracism efforts internally and externally.
- Listen to and believe the concerns of historically excluded members to learn how best to serve their communities, support their careers, and promote solidarity.
- Collect, track, and review TV writers room inclusion and equity data to cover as many of the following identifiers as possible: race/ethnicity, gender, LGBTQIA+, Deaf, Disabled, Muslim, immigrant, those with large body types, and lower-level individuals age 50+. Analyze data to discount clustering of historically excluded writers on shows about their communities to better gauge inclusion on shows with majority white leads/casts. Make this data publicly available on an annual or biannual basis.

- Educate showrunners on alternative methods of finding historically excluded talent (e.g., reaching out to WGA Inclusion and Equity Committees and referring to curated databases available online) to encourage them to hire writers they don't already know.

#2 Champion safe and equitable work environments for all writers.

- Create, circulate, and uphold a code of conduct for showrunners and all working writers.
- Establish an industry-wide third-party reporting system for harassment, discrimination, and bullying. Improve resolution programs to provide stronger protections and better outcomes for all TV writers.

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We're here to help.

TTIE provides consulting services for writers, producers, studio and network executives, representatives, HR departments, and EDI managers looking to make the TV industry a more inclusive, authentic, equitable, and accountable space. Offerings include:

● GROUP TRAININGS AND BRIEFINGS:

We curate and share vital information and action items in engaging, efficient, and interactive ways for various industry audiences.

Topics: Behind the Scenes Report Data and Insights Sharing; Building and Running Inclusive and Engaged Writers Rooms; Navigating Staffing Meetings and Writers Rooms as Historically Excluded Writers.

● COACHING AND CONSULTING:

Private small group and 1-on-1 sessions for showrunners, upper-level writers, and executives expanding on the lessons from our trainings and briefings.

Custom-designed sessions to support participants and provide tools necessary to apply best practices in writers rooms, executive suites, and/or throughout your company.

A Partial List of Topics and Elements:

- Ask Us Anything: We design teams around specific EDI or authentic storytelling needs.
- Program Design: We share insight and expertise as you plan and develop mentoring, pipeline, and other programs.
- Problem-Solving: We uncover why things aren't working and present targeted solutions.

Additional Tools and Resources

#WriteInclusion Factsheets

Research-driven one-pagers to help guide writers rooms, writers, and all content creators toward better representation of historically excluded communities in their stories.

Writers Resource Page

Looking to hire historically excluded writers? TTIE amplifies the efforts of many grassroots initiatives that compile TV writer lists by community.

Behind the Scenes: The State of Inclusion and Equity in TV Writing

Annual data from *hundreds* of working TV writers shared with the industry to provide insight into what is and isn't working and where the paths to change lie.

Learn more about our mission and programming:

[WriteInclusion.org](https://writeinclusion.org)

Or email us and we'll be happy to get back to you:

info@writeinclusion.org

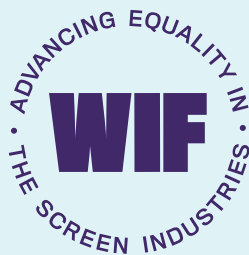
Authors and Partner Organizations



THINK TANK FOR INCLUSION & EQUITY (TTIE) A consortium of working TV writers from historically excluded communities, spanning emerging writers to showrunners and working across various segments of the TV industry (network/cable/streaming, drama, comedy, animation, etc.). By increasing inclusion in TV writers rooms and improving working conditions for all TV writers, TTIE seeks to empower historically excluded writers and transform the industry into one in which all writers and all stories can thrive. In 2018, TTIE became a grantee of the Pop Culture Collaborative and a collaborative project of Women in Film (WIF). writeinclusion.org



GEENA DAVIS INSTITUTE ON GENDER IN MEDIA Founded in 2004 by Academy Award Winning Actor Geena Davis, the Institute is the only global research-based organization working collaboratively within the entertainment industry to create gender balance, foster inclusion and impede negative stereotyping in family entertainment media. seejane.org



WOMEN IN FILM (WIF) Founded in 1973 as Women In Film Los Angeles, WIF advocates for and advances the careers of women working in the screen industries—in front of and behind the camera, across all levels of experience—to achieve parity and transform culture. We work to change culture through our distinguished programs, including mentoring, speaker and screening series, a shorts production lab, writing labs, producer training, a sexual harassment help line, and an annual financing intensive. WIF advocates for gender parity through research, education, and media campaigns. And, we build a community centered around these goals, anchored by our signature events, including the WIF Annual Gala and Oscar Nominees Party, along with programs honoring the achievements of women in Hollywood, like the Legacy Series. Membership is open to all screen industry professionals and more information can be found online at www.wif.org.

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