



## **Practicing Accountability: A Food & Beverage Media Town Hall**

### *Event Recap*

Since mid-2020, we've been hosting conversations with editors at various food media outlets, to discuss new systems of equitable representation described in our initial [Toolkit for Recognizing, Disrupting, and Combating Tokenization in Food Media](#). While we are excited to continue our work with editorial and organizational representatives, one of our core tenets as a [community-driven think tank](#) is to continuously connect with, and respond to, the demands of the wider food & beverage media community members. In particular, we aim to uplift the needs of those most marginalized in this industry.

On May 13, 2021, we hosted our first-ever Town Hall as a forum for these conversations. Over 50 people – from editors-in-chief to staff writers to freelancers – joined and shared the insights and actions collected in this document. From here, we will continue reiterating key requests in our conversations with editorial leadership and sharing these ideas with our wider network. We hope implementing these regular town halls will be an invigorating and useful part of the change process.

For more content like this, head to [our Resources Library](#).

### **Part I. How should food & beverage publications respond to social movements and national crises (e.g., BLM, Atlanta murders, Capitol insurrection)?**

#### Proposed Actions:

- Dedicate a visible, accessible section of the publication's website to DEI policies and processes, including how the publication is hiring more BIPOC talent and actively

standing up against racial violence. This text should be evaluated and updated on a regular basis, such as once a month.

- Care for both your employees and your audience during a crisis
  - Pause all automatic social media posts
  - In a publication's messaging both internally and externally, center and acknowledge those who were harmed. Also acknowledge how the publication may have participated in or perpetuated harm to those groups.
- No matter how well-written a post may be, the people behind a post are just as important. Tell readers who are writing these posts to help humanize them.
- Integrate social justice coverage into regular social / public-facing messaging. If a publication consistently produces content with a social justice angle, responding to a crisis will seem more natural and aligned with the publication's brand.

## **Part II. How should food & beverage publications respond to mistakes or missteps they have made, either in the past or recently?**

### Proposed Actions:

- Acknowledge the mistake and create a public record / reflection of the incident that is accessible from the publication's website. Describe the incident, how the organization has responded, and any follow-ups to watch. This builds public accountability and confidence in the brand's words.
- Avoid tokenizing someone for the sake of a mistake or apology. A BIPOC person should not be arbitrarily brought forth to "correct" for issues they were not previously involved in. Instead, find ways for the entire team to learn from the mistake and discuss proactive measures to avoid having the issue happen again.
- For recipes: ask the recipe developer or contributor to specifically give you the contexts in which they are comfortable sharing and using the recipe. If a mistake, misstep, or misrepresentation has occurred in relation to an individual, center the impact on and response of the individual. For example, in [their statement](#) on a Mole

Verde recipe they misrepresented, *Food & Wine* highlighted their mistake and quoted the recipe developers' responses.

- Connect individual edits and changes to overall DEI goals. While individual edits should be mentioned on individual webpages, articles, or recipes, they don't need to be announced publicly every time. Instead, readers want to know how these edits fit into ongoing strategies or larger content audits, and how publications are putting financial resources to these changes and shifts.

### **Part III. What does public accountability look like for food & beverage publications?**

*In this section, participants asked editors to answer the following questions:*

- What do you think is feasible in terms of public accountability at your organization?
- Can you describe the process for sharing feedback with editorial leadership when something public facing is not well received?
- What efforts are your publications taking within the diversity/equity/inclusion space? How does your organization determine your DEI priorities?
- What are the parameters that help you decide what content is 'worthy' and what steps do you take to make sure those decisions aren't made in unconscious bias / perpetuating inequity?
- How should publications handle employees bringing up an ethics complaint?

Key Themes:

- ERGs and anonymous internal platforms have worked at some publications as ways to share feedback with editors. There should exist regular ways for writers and *freelancers* to offer constructive feedback without fear of retribution.
- Publications need to put money where their mouths are through publicly accessible rate sheets. Writers don't deserve more money because they have been in the field for a long time, but because of their capabilities.
- Publications are gradually committing to hiring more diverse staff and freelancers, by implementing policies like the Rooney Rule. They are also investing more in newer writers. Multiple editors mentioned that they recognize the importance of

working with a freelancer for multiple articles, to widen the gates and lower barriers to entry.

- Digital publications are beholden to SEO and traffic, but editors should also consider the stories that can build brand trust and appeal to the publication's core audiences, current and future. Editors should ask themselves what stories might not make it elsewhere due to SEO demands.
- There often is no one way to address internal personnel issues, as it varies from company to company, case by case. However, it's important to recognize that HR is not there for the employees; it's there to protect the company's best legal interests. Employees can be suppressed/silenced by HR because it is in the best interest of the company's public image. What are other ways that employees and freelancers can communicate when harm is done?
- Sometimes, the best form of accountability is public (e.g., having a public statement of ethics, or a clear mission statement for a publication's content).