



Best Practices for Engagement

AICP provides its members and the industry with resources and guidelines to promote good business practices, which provide the best possible environment for creativity and ingenuity.

The AICP and its membership are actively committed to working across the advertising and marketing ecosystem to making the industry at all levels more inclusive and diverse. Change will happen by providing access and opportunity to under-represented groups. Many AICP members, marketers, agencies and others have stated goals and commitments to increase representation across the board, which is a significant step. AICP and its members are working to create tools and resources that will help various entities meet their goals and honor commitments to change.

Committees of members created by AICP have already collaborated with many agencies and marketers through a series of roundtable discussions to find out how we can partner to strive for a more representative industry. We used these sessions to solicit candid feedback from dozens of agencies on the problems and practices that inhibit our overall commitment to diversity. Those discussions created the foundation of this process.

Under the auspices of its Equity and Inclusion Committee, the AICP has created the following Best Practices Guidelines as we all work to change the demographics of our industry to reflect the overall population. As we work to create more opportunities for people of color across all aspects of the creative process, and allow for new perspectives and approaches that will be to the benefit of all, these are essential guideposts for all involved in production and post-production. It is our hope that these Best Practices will be a constant reference and ‘gut-check’ of sorts as we all work to achieve goals for diversity, inclusion, and equity across our industry.

The Best Practices found below are evolving and will be updated. If you have any questions or input, please contact sheilab@aicp.com.

GENERAL NOTES

While these considerations are offered as helpful tools, the hope is that participation by all will be embraced, and the industry will work together to set a new standard for best practices moving forward.

- Diversity, equity, and inclusion should be considered and prioritized across the board. From production, through editing, through finishing, through audio, the approach must

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take a 360 view of a project from concept to completion to bolster a more representative industry and level the playing field.

- To be consistent across the ecosystem, be sure to look at all aspects of a job both behind the scenes and on-screen - does the approach and the desire to increase representation carry through at each phase of a project.
- Hold yourself and others accountable by asking essential questions early on, such as:
 - “Are we considering the positions, perspectives, and interests of individuals different from ourselves?”
 - “Have we done everything in our power to outsource work to businesses owned by minority/marginalized individuals? Including people of color, LGBTQIA+, and women” and
 - “Am I making assumptions that BIPOC talent is upcoming and ignoring the established talent currently out there?”

BIDDING

Agencies and marketers are issuing requirements and goals to achieve a higher level of inclusion across race, gender, and orientation in the workforce that creates its marketing communications. Production and post-production companies are working to provide more opportunities for underrepresented talent across their ranks.

As we all work together to achieve these goals, there are some items to keep in mind when engaging a company in the bid process:

- Don't ask for a bid if the only objective is to check a box. Bids take time, resources, and money to craft, and if someone is not going to be seriously considered for a project, do not engage.
- Communication is vital - be as transparent as possible about the scope of the project, including budget, expectations, and who all is included in the bid pool. Knowing this information from the onset of engagement is immensely helpful when considering the next steps.
- Prioritize transparency and be explicit if a project is underfunded, or a director/editor/colorist/artist is a last-minute addition to the bid pool; this will better assist the production and post-production companies in deciding if it's a project they wish to engage on.
- Be open. Underrepresented talent does not mean inexperienced talent. Many directors/editors/post-production artists have established careers in film, television, music videos, etc. Providing access can mean bringing a new look and perspective to a project and expanding the talent pool. We all started somewhere too.
- Know that if a production or post partner recommends talent represented by their company, there is full apparatus surrounding that person to ensure a project succeeds.

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- Many companies are very willing to have one of their more established commercial directors/editors/artists shadow someone new to the commercial production process to ensure the project's success.
- In a multiple bid situation, someone is not going to get the project. Often the conversation ends for the company that wasn't awarded the job - setting precedence for engaging in an open and honest conversation with the production company and director and/or post company and EP about why they didn't get awarded the project is advisable. These conversations can help all involved approach future projects from a more robust and more informed place.
- When producing commercials targeted at BIPOC Communities, it does not mean that it should have lesser resources. Do not allow a scenario where there is an assumption that these projects can be critically underfund and do not perpetuate this misnomer by asking your production and post partners to work pro bono on a project for a for-profit entity. Presenting these low-budget projects as 'incredible opportunities' undervalues the work of the creatives you are reaching out to. Expecting people of color to work for less on projects targeted at specific community initiatives will not move the industry forward. Simply saying that an issue is important and worthy of attention is not enough; there must be more effort to support its value.
- Respect relationships and credentials. Do not appropriate the work or reputation of a company or talent to bolster your own company's reputation and/or present a picture of greater company diversity to a potential client.

CREWS

Increasing access for underrepresented communities to the commercial production industry is paramount when ensuring opportunities and careers. Diversity in crew make-up is achievable with thoughtful consideration and effort.

- Look to expand access to leadership positions, not just entry-level positions. Initiatives like Double the Line can help.
- Seek out resources and databases for experienced talent from other fields. AICP maintains a list, which can be found [here](#).
- Set goals rather than mandates but create a system of checks and balances to ensure best practices were considered and utilized when appropriate.

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EMPLOYMENT DATA

All sectors of the marketing and advertising industry are setting goals to increase diversity in their companies. Some have issued mandates - for instance, 15% of a crew must be people of color; others have set goals with deadlines; many are interested in seeking data on race, gender, and orientation so they may track change. These are all goals everyone can get behind to help change the industry's demographics, but employment and privacy laws surrounding hiring and data collection can make this a complicated endeavor; so making sure that all of the realities are understood.

- Many marketers and agencies ask production and post-production companies for data on their crew and office employees to track goals for diversity and inclusion. Be transparent and detailed about these requests, and have frank discussions about the possibilities.
- While many larger companies (those with 100+ employees) are required to report race, ethnicity and gender, and the data can be collected from the employee or as an observation from an employer, this is not the case for smaller companies (less than 100 employees). Please be aware that production and post companies cannot simply provide that data for their crews.
- Employers can ask employees to self-report race, gender, ethnicity, and orientation, but cannot mandate they do so or do so on their behalf. Encourage conversations with employees about the importance and relevance of gathering this data - the decision is ultimately theirs to make. Still, context is always helpful, and the issues are important to acknowledge.

CASTING AND SCRIPTS

Start considering casting choices as early as possible in the process. Consider the following:

- Avoid stereotypes at all costs.
- Unless specified, avoid mention of race, ethnicity, gender, and orientation - be open to all for all roles.
- Expand casting resources and agencies to get a wider pool of talent.
- Make sure that scripts are vetted to avoid stereotypes and problematic imagery/dialogue/situations.

We are encouraging all agencies to take a look at a casting guideline created by [Hire Higher](#), a group of Canadian Directors who are working to make casting better.

POST PRODUCTION

All of the above should apply and/or impact post-production, but there are several other vital factors to remember when finishing your project.

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- Be mindful and intentional with edits and representation so as to feel authentic and not mandated with what ends up on the screen.
- Engage diverse and untested talent from top to bottom, including leadership.
- Credit new and diverse post artists in your public relations materials and social media, as visibility and familiarity are paramount in our relationship-based business.

CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

There are several certifications for companies owned by members of an under-represented group. To view a list of AICP member companies who have self-reported their certifications, please [click here](#). The page also contains an overview of the types of certifications available to qualified companies.

Many federal, state and local government advertisers will mandate that companies with particular certifications be part of the project's bid pool. Certifications are not transferable to other companies or agencies. Asking a company to act as a third party is unacceptable and delegitimizes the whole premise of the certifications. It is not only a bad business practice to recommend appropriation of a company's certification or credentials, but it is also likely illegal.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- There is a difference between lack of talent and lack of opportunity – in order to increase representation, underrepresented groups should not only be welcomed into bid pools – but they should be given access to work on the projects that will further their careers.
- In order for true change to happen, a holistic approach to diversity, equity and inclusion is needed. It's not enough to just focus on just one area, like casting or directors.
- Be open to learning, asking questions, and make sure conversations are transparent.

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