

February 26th, 2021

To Newsroom Leadership,

Over the past year, WHYY's newsroom has done remarkable work. We've stayed on top of the coronavirus pandemic through every twist and turn, helped steer the conversation through a racial reckoning, and held our ground at the center of an unprecedented election.

While the dedication of our staff has managed to yield a fine product, many of us feel these accomplishments have been achieved without a clear vision, transparency, or communication of editorial priorities. The result is a newsroom where the drive to turn stories quickly, regardless of quality or format, has led to unsustainable workloads and frustration for many. Inspiration, communication, and morale are low, while burnout, siloing, and attrition are high.

In light of this, we wanted to offer some constructive feedback with a shared goal in mind: to help both rank-and-file employees as well as management work more efficiently and effectively.

Much of the opportunity to enact these policy recommendations rests in whoever is chosen to lead our newsroom. We hope you will seriously consider these suggestions when reviewing candidates for the position.

- We ask newsroom management to begin engaging in a monthly dialogue with newsroom stewards in order to receive regular feedback about newsroom operations.
- We ask management to develop a short mission statement clearly outlining the newsroom's editorial priorities, needs, and goals for content generation based on our current resources and staff. We should all be on the same page about what we choose to cover, when, and why. If and when those priorities shift, we ask that the reason for the change be articulated in a forum where people can ask questions and make suggestions.
- We request a reexamination of beat assignments across verticals, including Billy Penn and PlanPhilly, driven by reporter feedback and in line with the above mission statement. We believe serious consideration of a dedicated newsdesk for spots, short web pieces, and breaking news should be included in this planning.
- We expect communication and partnerships among staff across all departments to be encouraged, not hindered, so that we can all play to our strengths and avoid redundancies.
- We request more autonomy in determining assignment scope, depth, and length, allowing space for more of the deeply reported and investigative work that keeps both employees and audiences engaged. We ask for trust when we say something is a story — or isn't.
- We request that management perform an honest audit of scheduling, hours and resources for each department, and where necessary adjust workloads, training, and or/staffing to accommodate those who are working unsustainable hours or don't have appropriate skills or gear to perform their duties.

- We applaud efforts to diversify our newsroom workforce; at the same time, we recognize that equity doesn't come from hiring new staff alone. We ask that leadership commit to ongoing honest conversations about how we cover race: who is assigned to which stories and how; who are they for, and why. We ask that leadership commit to identifying unconscious biases that may contribute to systemic disadvantages for staff of color, rather than simply increasing source diversity numbers or checking boxes.
- We request a consistent, rigorous audio editing process that takes seriously the quality of the work we put on the air. We request that the station emphasize creativity, craft, and excellence when considering the future of our audio product, as well as digital.

Staff desire a newsroom director who embodies the qualities outlined in these recommendations: transparency, vision, commitment to anti-oppression, and a collaborative spirit. We're grateful for your consideration of these suggestions, and would be even more grateful for the chance to continue an ongoing dialogue in a way that makes newsroom staff feel included, valued, and heard.

We respectfully request a response to each of these recommendations within the week.

Sincerely,

Sojourner Ahebee  
Taylor Allen  
Cris Barrish  
Laura Benschhoff  
Ryan Briggs  
Robby Brod  
Miles Bryan  
P. Kenneth Burns  
Hannah Chinn  
Ximena Conde  
Kenny Cooper  
Peter Crimmins  
Evan Croen  
Elizabeth Estrada  
Nina Feldman  
Joe Hernandez  
Layla A. Jones

Xavier Lopez  
Jennifer Lynn  
Max Marin  
Katie Meyer  
Aaron Moselle  
Darryl C. Murphy  
Kimberly Paynter  
Susan Phillips  
Zoe Read  
Erin Reynolds  
Emily Scott  
Joy Soto  
Alex Stern  
Liz Tung  
Michaela Winberg  
Avi Wolfman-Arent  
Alan Yu