



Active Voice 2017-18 Fellowship FAQs

Q. What is Active Voice?

A. The story behind Active Voice starts in 2014 during the Student Press Law Center sponsored Tinker Tour. The tour was a civics pep rally on wheels, where student free expression advocate Mary Beth Tinker spoke at schools and colleges across the country about the value of student voices.

SPLC executive director Frank LoMonte traveled on a part of the tour. He was struck by the number of students who would come up to Ms. Tinker and share their stories about censorship and intimidation. And as he visited high school newsrooms, he was struck by something else: almost everyone in charge was female.

With this and other anecdotal evidence leading us to believe that censorship is gendered, we tried to find research about the gender composition of student newsrooms. But it was essentially impossible to find. We decided the next step was to put our hypotheses to the test.

In partnership with researchers from the University of Kansas, we surveyed over 400 high school journalism convention participants in North Carolina. Of those who responded, 78% were female. Girls were twice as likely to be censored – by school officials outright or anticipating a negative reaction – than boys. If they had been told by a school official not to publish something, 88% of the girls obeyed. These startling results reinforce the idea that **censorship is gendered**.

Active Voice will encourage and empower teenage girls to speak up and talk back on issues of political and social concern in their student media that are important to them. Some of the most censored topics from the survey were LGBT issues, drugs and marijuana, religion, and other “controversial” issues considered “too mature.”

We also believe there is a link between the lack of women leaders in newsrooms and the toxic climate of censorship that has existed for decades in K-12 schools. Women have made up at-or-near 60% of college graduates in communication or journalism fields since the early 1980s, according to data from the Department of Education. But despite this, research by Indiana University faculty Lars Willnat and David H. Weaver found only one-third of journalists with twenty or more years of experience were women.

While there are many “roadblocks” for women on the path to leadership, stopping young women from fully believing in the power of their voices is something the SPLC can help fix. Because we know student media isn’t simply another extracurricular activity. Editing a student newspaper is like running an entrepreneurial small business and its lessons can be applied to any future career. When schools censor student journalism, they’re not just stopping readers from learning new ideas – they’re stopping inquisitive young people from **realizing their potential**.

Q. What is the Student Press Law Center?

A. The SPLC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that has defended the First Amendment rights of student media since 1974. We provide free legal advice through a hotline and produce educational materials related to the law of student media.

Q. What will fellows do?

A. Fellows will design and implement a project to improve conditions for journalists in K-12 schools to address serious issues of public concern. Their project will focus on empowering the voices of female student journalists. The focus is on these young women because as discussed above, they are twice as likely to experience censorship or intimidation by school officials – and to comply when faced with those demands. Schools are teaching their most civically motivated young people at a formative time in their educational lives that their voices aren't important.

The fellows' projects will build a lasting and growing network of press freedom advocates at the local level to support all young journalists, especially young women, striving to keep substantive, issue-oriented journalism alive.

Throughout the project, the fellow will produce content (approximately once a month) for the Active Voice website and our partner organizations – for example, blog posts, videos or other communicative media.

Q. What support will fellows receive?

A. As an organization with over 40 years of history, the SPLC has extensive partner relationships with scholastic, collegiate and professional journalism organizations. From this network, we have built a committee of mentors for Active Voice who will work with the fellow to design, plan and implement their project. In addition to the mentors, the fellow will have access to a dedicated SPLC staff member for day-to-day questions and as the main point of contact.

Q. Do fellows get paid?

A. Yes! In addition to a \$6,000 stipend, fellows will have a \$1,000 expense account.

Q. Are there in-person meetings during the fellowship?

A. Yes. Fellows must attend a pre-fellowship two day training in August (location and dates TBD – last year's training was in Chicago) and a post-fellowship presentation in Miami in April. Transportation and accommodations will be paid for by the SPLC and are separate from the fellow's expense account.

Q. What are the start and end dates?

A. While the training is in August, we understand most fellows will launch their projects in September when they return to campus and go through March or mid-April.