

# APAMC

Asian Pacific American Media Coalition

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## **ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN MEDIA COALITION ISSUES REPORT CARDS TO THE TV NETWORKS ON THEIR INCLUSION OF ASIAN AMERICANS**

*ABC matches its historic high from last year, while Fox gets an "F"*

The Asian Pacific American Media Coalition (APAMC)—the only organization to have issued grades for the top four television networks since 2001—issued its periodic Report Cards for the past 2017-18 season, grading the four major TV networks on their progress toward diversity and inclusion of Asian Americans on the air and behind the scenes. The Report Cards revealed some positives but also many areas in which the networks need to improve for Asian Americans to be able to enjoy equal opportunities and to be fully included in the entertainment industry.

Since APAMC began meeting with the networks in 1999 to advocate for greater diversity and inclusion of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (APIs), there have been gradual (though not consistent) increases in the number of Asian Americans represented in the categories of Actors (regular and recurring roles in prime time), Unscripted (host/judges and contestants), Writers/Producers, Directors, and Program Development.

This improvement has been due in part to the diversity pipeline programs that the networks implemented to fulfill the terms of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) that each network signed with members of a national, Multi-Ethnic Media Coalition (MEMC) comprised of the NAACP, the National Latino Media Council, American Indians in Film/TV, and the APAMC. Accordingly, APAMC also grades each network's Commitment to the Diversity Initiatives, as reflected in the effectiveness of their pipeline programs. This year, the Coalition is adding a separate grade for each network on its Diversity Department's Relationship with the APAMC, which previously had been included within the Commitment to Diversity category. This takes into account the APAMC's dealings with each network's Diversity department as well as the timeliness and quality of data the network provides.

On this metric, NBC received a C-, the lowest grade among the networks (other than Fox), for several reasons. For the first time since the APAMC began meeting with the networks in 1999 and 2000, NBC failed to schedule a meeting with NBC creative executives in a calendar year, skipping 2018. This contrasts with ABC which met with the Coalition during the Summer, and CBS, in the Fall. In addition, NBC's data was delivered late (in December 2018) and the January 2019 meeting--contrary to the network's agreement earlier in 2018 to return to providing separate executive meetings for each of the ethnic coalitions--was once again combined in a one-hour meeting covering African American, Asian American, Latinx, and Native American issues,

making the session too short to cover all of the issues important to the Coalition. These factors led to the longest historic delay in the APAMC issuing its report card.

Finally, despite the Coalition consciously adopting a positive approach to its dealings with the network, NBC's diversity team was surprisingly antagonistic, rendering the meeting less productive than it should have been. Given the obvious opportunities that the APAMC offers to partner with the network to advance our mutual diversity goals, we hope this was an aberration on NBC's part.

The letter grades for each network for various categories are based on data provided to the APAMC by the networks themselves as part of their MOU agreements with the MEMC; the final "overall" grade is compiled by averaging the category grades using a standard 4-point scale for each network. Grades for the four networks for the 2017-18 season are shown in the attached Report Card and described further below:

**ABC.** On the strength of its 24 API regulars (another historic high for all networks, 10.9% of all ABC regulars) and 27 API recurring (7.7%) actors in primetime television (up from 21 and 23, respectively), ABC once again scored an A- for Scripted Talent, which continues to be the highest grade the Coalition has ever given in that category. ABC also led the networks in the categories of Writers/Producers, Commitment to Diversity Initiatives (its Pipeline Programs include a new writers' database, training intensives for writers and directors, and a Creative Talent Session to update interested parties on the network's diversity efforts and to brainstorm how to better achieve them), and Diversity Relations.

However, ABC continues to receive a C for Unscripted Talent as that has remained fairly low and stagnant from the prior season, and its C+ grade in the Development category was lower than that for both CBS and NBC. This resulted in ABC receiving an overall grade of B, matching its grade for the prior season. It still remains the highest ever overall grade awarded to a network since APAMC began assessing the networks' progress some 17 television seasons ago (NBC also received a B for the 2010-11 season).

**CBS.** The number of API regulars rose from 16 to 21 (9.9% of all CBS regulars), but because many of them receive minimal screen time, their grade remained a B-. The network significantly improved in hiring more unique API directors (8 to 18; 3.5% to 8% of all CBS directors) to handle more episodes (18 to 37; 5% to 7%). So, their grade improves from B to B+, the highest of all networks on this metric. CBS also took top honors for Development (though sliding from a B+ to a B). CBS' Writers/Producers increased from 15 to 17 (5.4%) improving from a C to a C+ but that still places last among the networks (other than Fox). CBS also received the worst Unscripted grade, sliding from C to C-. They were graded a B for Commitment to Diversity Initiatives and for Diversity Department Relations. Overall, the network receives B- for the 2017-2018 season, which is the same score it received for the 2016-2017 season.

**NBC.** Though the number of API regulars held at 11 (6.3%), the number of recurring actors was almost cut in half (26 to 12; 8.8% to 4.7%), so NBC's Scripted grade fell from C+ to C. The network continued to slip in Unscripted API inclusion (C+ to C), as the number in the main cast (hosts, judges, or celebrity contestants) dropped to 3 (from 8 in the prior season), and the network continues to not provide data on non-celebrity contestants for its reality/competition shows. API Writers/Producers improved slightly from 20 (6%) to 21 (6.4%)—going from C+ to B-- because the series “Champions” boasted Mindy Kaling as its showrunner (the “holy grail” of producers). Nine APIs directed 10 (3%) episodes, down from 8 and 18 (5%) in the 2016-2017 season, which led to its Directors grade slipping from B- to C. Due in part to APIs in the Diverse Staff Writers Initiative dropping markedly from 45% to 18%, NBC's Commitment to the Diversity initiatives grade fell from B+ to B-. Overall, NBC dips from a C+ to a C, the lowest of the three networks that provided us with data.

**FOX.** For the 2017-18 season, Fox has once again failed to comply with its obligations under the MOU it signed with the members of the multi-ethnic media coalition (which includes the APAMC), by providing no data measuring its progress toward diversity goals. Fox has failed to provide complete diversity data to the Coalition since 2013. As a result, Fox has once again received an F/Incomplete grade in all categories. The Coalition hopes that with its new team in place in a restructured Fox Broadcasting Network, Fox will soon come into compliance with its obligations and take decisive steps to increase the inclusion of APIs on the network.

### **Observations of the current 2018-19 Season: Some bright spots but numerous missed opportunities**

**ABC.** At the urging of the APAMC, ABC added two API regulars (Will Yun Lee and Christina Chang, joining Tamlyn Tomita) to “The Good Doctor,” as it didn't make sense that a hospital in San Jose (where APIs make up 33% of the population) would have no Asian doctors working there. The series was also boosted by a story arc featuring Executive Producer Daniel Dae Kim as a recurring chief of surgery. Sadly, "Grey's Anatomy" continues to be hobbled by depicting a completely inauthentic hospital in Seattle (more than 15% API) without regular API staff members. The groundbreaking series "Fresh Off the Boat" with its six API regulars hit a milestone 100th episode, although its prospects for renewal are uncertain. A notable ABC series that features two APIs is "Splitting Up Together." And, as of this writing, 2 of the top 8 contestants on “American Idol” are of Asian descent: Laine Hardy and Alyssa Raghu.

**CBS.** The original 1980s “Magnum P.I.” included no APIs in its cast, a glaring omission, given that Hawaii is 60% API. Despite warnings from Coalition members to the network not to repeat this inglorious past, in the 2018 reboot, the top four roles went to non-API actors. The Coalition is glad the network added Tim Kang and Amy Hill to the cast, but it goes without saying that this

was a huge missed opportunity to build a series around an API star in an organic, authentic way. "Hawaii Five-O" is another drama that fails to take advantage of its setting and API talent. The APAMC had expressed skepticism that the three recurring APIs who were elevated to regular status would get significant screen time and sadly, Dennis Chun, Kimee Balmilero and Taylor Wily have usually appeared for under 2 minutes apiece if they appeared at all. And because Ian Anthony Dale was doing double duty on the summer drama "Salvation," he missed many episodes of the show as well. Finally, CBS has not taken full advantage of the cast's two Samoan actors (Beulah Koale and Taylor Wily) to explore the culture of Pacific Islanders, who are otherwise all but invisible in network TV. Bright spots: the sixth season of "Elementary" co-starring Lucy Liu, and the addition of Levy Tran to the cast of "MacGyver."

**NBC.** The Coalition lauds "I Feel Bad" as the first network television series revolving around a South Asian American (Sarayu Blue); the show also includes two other Asian Indian regulars. However, the show suffered with little promotion, and its fate is uncertain at best. "AP Bio," a comedy about high school students in a college prep biology class, still only features one Asian American student with any significant presence (Aparna Brielle), and only in a recurring role. More Asian Americans live in New York City than Los Angeles and San Francisco combined, and 22.6% of U.S. doctors are of Asian descent, yet NBC's new hit hospital drama "New Amsterdam" – which takes place in NYC – only features one regular Asian doctor (Anupam Kher). <https://datausa.io/profile/soc/291060/#demographics>

On the positive side, both critically acclaimed comedies "Superstore" and "The Good Place" continue to feature two prominent API cast members apiece, and "Saturday Night Live," infamous for its past exclusion of Asian Pacific Islanders--both as regulars and hosts--has been hosted this season by Awkwafina, Jason Momoa, and Sandra Oh, and now includes API writer Bowen Yang. Also of note, the winner of the all-star competition "America's Got Talent: Champions" was magician Shin Lim.

**Finally, a major concern:** Based on the data we've been given so far, the number of API writers/producers has fallen from 21 to 10 this current season, and four of them are on "I Feel Bad," whose fate, as stated previously, is uncertain.

## Report Cards for Networks 2017-18 Season

(Grades for 2016-17 in parentheses)

	<b>ABC</b>	<b>CBS</b>	<b>FOX</b>	<b>NBC</b>
	Grades	Grades	Grades	Grades
<b>Actors (regular/recurring)</b>	A- (A-)	B- (B-)	F/I*	C (C+)
<b>Unscripted (hosts/contestants)</b>	C (C)	C- (C)	F/I*	C (C+)
<b>Writers/Producers</b>	B (B+)	C+ (C)	F/I*	B- (C+)
<b>Directors (incl # of episodes directed)</b>	B (B+)	B+ (B)	F/I*	C (B-)
<b>Development</b>	C+ (C)	B (B+)	F/I*	B- (B-)
<b>Commitment to Diversity</b>	A- (A-)	B (B+)	F/I*	B- (B+)
<b>Diversity Dept. Relationship</b>	B+	B	F/I*	C-
<b>OVERALL GRADE</b>	<b>B (B)</b>	<b>B- (B-)</b>	<b>F/I*</b>	<b>C (C+)</b>

\*Incomplete, no data provided by network

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*The Asian Pacific American Media Coalition (APAMC) has been advocating for greater diversity and inclusion of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (APIs) in network television since 1999. It has agreements (Memoranda of Understanding, or MOUs) with ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC committing them to work to increase diversity on-screen and behind the camera. APAMC members include Asian Americans Advancing Justice—AAJC, East West Players, Japanese American Citizens League, Media Action Network for Asian Americans, National Federation of Filipino American Associations, OCA—Asian Pacific American Advocates, Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund, and Visual Communications.*