



★ Cleveland, Ohio ★

8 MUST-SEE SPOTS The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame is only one of them. Where to go while in Cleveland. **PAGE 5**



EASY LANDING About 3,000 NABJ members gather in Cleveland to network, do some business and relax. **PAGE 6-7**

THURSDAY, AUGUST 07, 2025 • WWW.NABJMONITOR.COM/2025

NABJ EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CROWNED



Newly appointed Executive Director Elise Durham hugs a fellow Atlanta Association of Black Journalists member at the announcement press conference



ARMANI ROSS/ NABJ MONITOR

Amid transparency concerns, former convention director Elise Durham takes the helm, but some are divided about the process. **STORY ON PAGE 8.**

Cleveland Convention Draws Low Numbers

Registration for 2025 conference, about 3,000, pales compared with past 3 years

By JACQUELINE MUNIS

As members arrive to celebrate NABJ's 50th anniversary, this year's convention may feel emptier compared to last year's record turnout in Chicago.

The 2025 NABJ Convention, being held in Cleveland, faces funding challenges, with registration more than 1,000 lower than the number of attendees last year and fewer sponsorships publicly posted.

NABJ Executive Director Drew Berry said at a board meeting Tuesday that registration stood at about 3,000 attendees, though the official count won't be known until Saturday, when registration closes. NABJ's 2024 convention in Chicago drew 4,336 registrants and the 2023 convention in Birmingham, Alabama, drew 3,606 guests. The organization's Miami convention in 2019 set a record 4,105 registrations.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



★ Cleveland, Ohio ★

2025 MONITOR STAFF

ASSIGNMENT DESK

GABRIELLE BARNETT
CHRISTIAN THOMAS

BROADCAST

BRYANNA HOWARD
CHRIS-ANN BENNETT
NATHAN MUTALE
ABIGAIL CHACHOUTE

DIGITAL

JORDAN BANKSTON
IZZY SY
BRANDON HENRY
LIZABETH NYOIKE

NEWSPAPER DESIGN

ANEYA RAYNOR

PODCAST

SIGOURNEY BELL
SHIMEI RICKS COOK

PHOTOGRAPHY

JOE THOMPSON III
ARMANI ROSS
NICOLE NEAL

PUBLIC RELATIONS

MACKENZIE WILLIAMS
KYRA WILLIAMS

PRINT

LEAH CLARK
KRISTEN BANNERMAN
JACQUELINE MUNIS
JADEN PERRY
KIMORA WONG-SING

NEWSLETTER

MORGAN NORRIS
NICHOLAS BASS

PRODUCERS

BELLA MAY
CHRISTIN FLUELLEN

Many Reasons Given For Staying Home

CONTINUED FROM COVER

Nearly 60 of last year's sponsors did not return and only 17 new sponsors replaced them, according to an analysis by The NABJ Monitor. Other high-level sponsors who committed over \$100,000 in the past committed less money this year.

The convention is a key revenue generator that sustains NABJ year after year. However, this year's lower turnout and sponsorship losses are raising alarms about NABJ's fundraising strategies as Berry announced a budget shortfall of between \$600,000 and \$800,000. on Tuesday.

"[I am] surprised that this year doesn't have as much turnout as last year or the years before, because this is the 50th anniversary, and [I] feel like given the history of NABJ, this would be the year that people would want to show up," said Shanae Hart who is attending her fourth convention.

Some pointed to this year's location as one reason they didn't attend.

"If you ask me, are you going to go to Cleveland or are you going to go to Atlanta? I'm going to go to Atlanta," said Ruth Allen Ollison, a longstanding NABJ member.

Ollison typically attends the convention, but she "couldn't pull away" from her business that was affected by DOGE cuts, her outreach ministries and her grandchildren. "It just wasn't enough for me to leave my



JOE THOMPSON III/NABJ MONITOR

The Huntington Convention Center.

family and my responsibilities," she said.

Others pointed to just not being able to afford to attend. Asar John works part time at Skylight, a nonprofit media startup, and also works as a freelancer. He attended two conventions as a student and hoped to go to

the convention this year. After he didn't get a grant, he couldn't afford it.

"I definitely feel like I'm missing out on some great networking opportunities because I really did want to attend this year," John said.

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS



NABJ Founders Talk Back,
Shaquille Brewster,
moderator.

9-10:30 a.m. Grand Ballroom,
Huntington Convention
Center, to be livestreamed.

**Money Matters:
Resilience, Revenue &
Reinvention in the
Modern Media Economy,**
NABJ Leadership
Academy Powered by
ABC News Group & Disney
10:45-11:45 a.m., Room 207
B&C (Atrium Floor 2)

**Pivoting With
Purpose: Finding
Stability Beyond
Traditional Media**

11 a.m.-noon, Room 23
(Exhibit Hall Level)

**Write Like You
Mean It: Reclaiming
the Craft of Writing
in the Age of AI**

12:30-1:30 p.m., Room 21
(Exhibit Hall Level).

**Board of Directors
Candidates Forum**
2-4 p.m., Room 14
(Exhibit Hall Level), to be
livestreamed.

**Off the Record: A
Conversation With
News Legends, Black
Male Media Project
Powered by BET
Media Group**

3-4:30 p.m., Room 01
(Concourse Level)

**Generations of
Grit: Resilience
Lessons from NABJ
Founders and
Media Trailblazers,**
Presented by the
NABJ Wellness
Task Force.

3:30-4:30 p.m., Room 21
(Exhibit Hall Level)

**A Toast to Belonging,
Community & Culture
Reception, Powered
by Democracy & Power
Innovation Fund.**

6:30-8 p.m., Room 10
(Exhibit Hall Level)

The NABJ Monitor



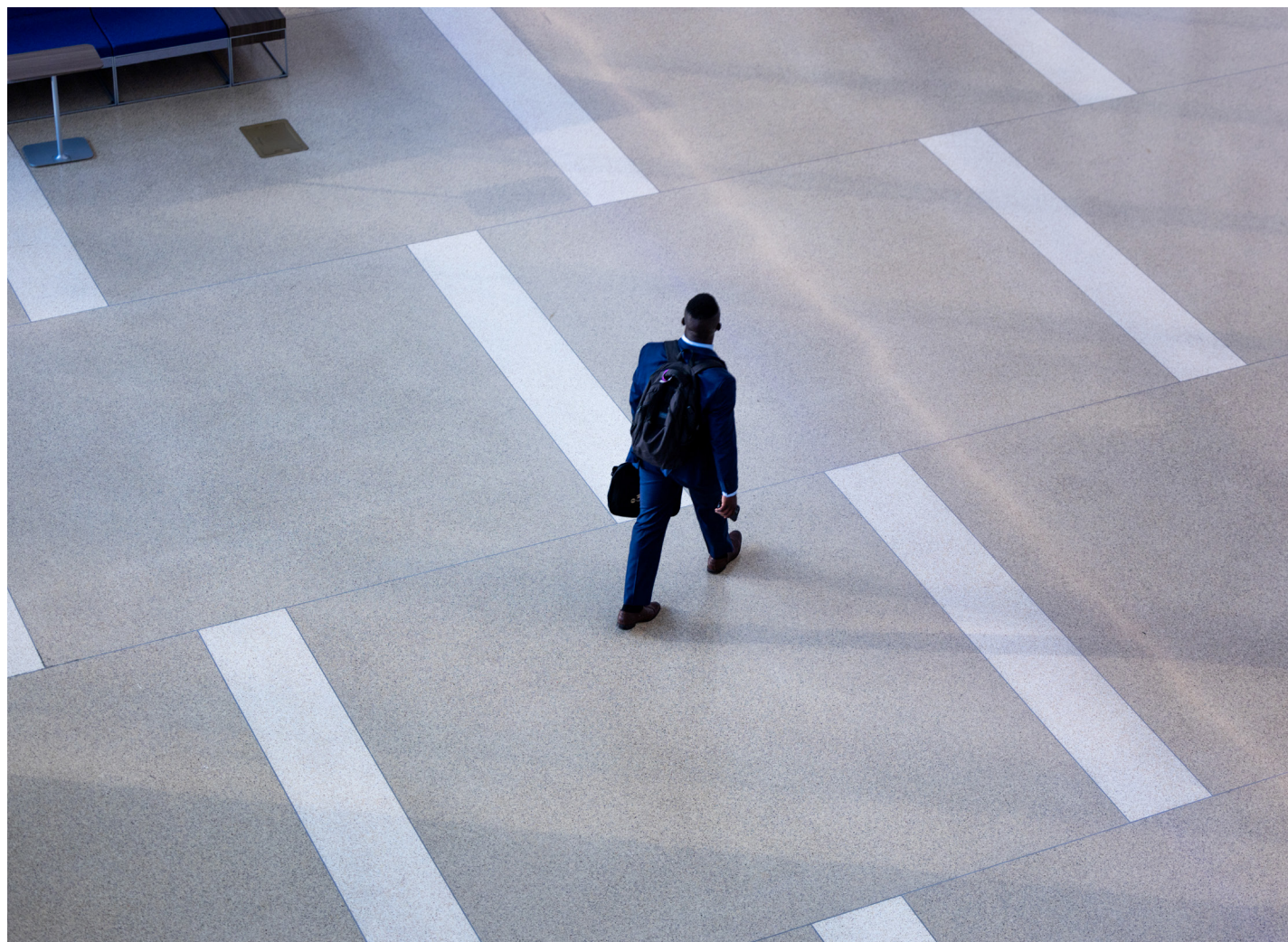
To read more news articles
from students visit
nabjmonitor.com/2025

Convention App



To access convention app,
download Event Pilot
and use code NABJ25

Berry cites anti-DEI measures and large settlements paid by networks for lackluster numbers and revenue



JOE THOMPSON III/NABJ MONITOR

A man walks through the Huntington Convention Center at the 50th annual NABJ Convention.

Alma Gill, who has attended NABJ since the 1990s, said she found the conventions in Birmingham and Chicago disappointing. She noticed more no-show panelists and said it felt “segregated” between print, broadcast and digital reporters compared to previous conventions.

She also saw people walk by founding members without acknowledging them, which made her believe that there was not enough “respect for elders” or the history of the organization.

“I just didn’t feel like I would get my money’s worth or be satisfied,” she said, adding that many attendees are still dear friends and colleagues.

Berry said he was aware of affordability issues and said he was working toward

alleviating barriers toward attending. He pointed to “heavy anti-DEI headwinds” and companies paying for fewer employees to attend as sources of lower turnout.

Berry said the organization has been meeting with media companies and foundations. He added that fewer companies are sending their employees for financial reasons, in part due to some companies “paying ransom to the government,” referring to recent settlements between the government and the parent companies of ABC and CBS.

Comcast NBC Universal, CBS, CNN, Nexstar and the New York Times all have leveled down their sponsorships, according to NABJ sponsor lists.

NABJ declined to comment on the num-

ber of sponsorships lost or retained.

While NABJ will not know how much over budget they will be until the end of this year, Berry is “not freaking out” he said, adding that NABJ is in the “best financial shape in the history of this organization.”

Berry declined to comment on specific fundraising strategies NABJ is using to adjust to lower revenue “because we’re not going to tell our competitors what we’re doing.”

Despite this year’s shortfall, NABJ has not cut any programming for members and has a \$5 million “rainy day investment fund,” he said. A full financial report will be released on Saturday ahead of the business meeting.

CONVENTION TURN OUT OVER THE YEARS

3000

NUMBER OF ATTENDEES IN
2025 (CLEVELAND)

*Numbers as of Wednesday 6.

4336

NUMBER OF ATTENDEES
IN 2024 (CHICAGO)

3606

NUMBER OF ATTENDEES
IN 2023 (BIRMINGHAM)

2519

NUMBER OF ATTENDEES
IN 2021 (VIRTUAL)

4105

NUMBER OF ATTENDEES
IN 2019 (MIAMI)

* 2022 and 2020 was a joint
convention with NAHJ.

NABJ faces up to \$800K 'revenue shortfall'

Leaders remain confident in the organization's nest egg

By JADEN PERRY

National Association of Black Journalists Executive Director Drew Berry said the organization will likely face a "revenue shortfall" of \$600,000–\$800,000 following the Cleveland, Ohio, convention. However, Berry remains confident in NABJ's reserves as it is in the "best financial shape in the organization's history."

"We don't have the specifics of the revenue shortfall," Berry said during Tuesday's board meeting, adding concrete numbers won't be available until the fall season.

NABJ leadership cited the decrease in funding for the year after presidential elections and President Donald Trump's attack on organizations supporting diversity, equity and inclusion (D.E.I) programs.

"So it's important that you have that dialogue and that you don't put the organization at risk by not providing context," Berry said.

When Berry stepped into his interim executive director role in 2018, the organization was coming off of a much rougher financial situation — a situation that Lemon said would not have been ideal for dealing with the financial hurdles of today. The organization has closed the year in debt eight times, according to data from tax documents filed from 1997 to 2013.

"I think that we're in a better shape to weather any storm than we've ever been," Lemon said.

Since then, the organization has worked to secure a stable budget, which includes a \$2 million operating budget and \$5 million in back-up savings, called the "rainy day fund."

"Our brand equity is so high, yet we've never asked our members to give back to the organization that's given so much to them."

ELISE DURHAM,
INCOMING NABJ EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

With the possibility of a \$800,000 deficit likely looming, Berry and his successor, Elise Dunham, remain confident in the organization's ability to attract donors, even during challenging financial circumstances.



ARMANI ROSS/ NABJ MONITOR

Top: President Ken Lemon speaks in a board meeting the day before the NABJ conference at the Hilton Cleveland Downtown on Tuesday, August 5, 2025. Bottom: NABJ Executive Director Drew Berry engages in a board meeting at the Hilton Cleveland Downtown.

es circulating through the nation.

Berry declined to provide strategies, citing the competition to secure funding, — and only hinted at a vague and broad plan called the "win, win, win."

"If you don't get a win, if there's no value, why would you even engage with us? So everybody we engage with, we talk about win, win, win," Berry said. "What is it in for them? We punctuate that. That's why we're so successful, too."

Berry mentioned NABJ receiving "hundreds of thousands" of dollars of revenue from organizations, which are constantly sought out by the executive director. On Wednesday, Berry mentioned a recent meeting with Deborah O'Connell, ABC News Group and Disney Entertainment Networks, as a prospective funder.

That same day, Lemon mentioned meetings with "a couple" of philanthropic organizations to discuss funding throughout the week. He declined to provide details, citing confidentiality concerns.

Elise Durham, who was confirmed as NABJ's new executive director in a Tuesday press conference, believes there's



more revenue streams to tap into — the first being NABJ members.

"Our brand equity is so high, yet we've never asked our members to give back to the organization that's given so much to them," she said. "I think we need to change that."

Durham proposed creating an annual fund, which is a one-year campaign in which an organization asks their membership to donate. Acknowledging the heavy preparation required for such a campaign, Durham said such a strategy couldn't be implemented by 2026.

Beyond financial contributions, Durham

proposed encouraging members to give in other ways to the NABJ community such as service, support and mentorship.

"It's important for us to invest in the very organization that continues to keep our history thriving. So they can do more in that regard," Durham said. "And I'm gonna ask them to do more, you can print that."

Despite the confidence of the current and previous executive director, Rodney Brooks, a former NABJ treasurer and current financial committee member of the NABJ, disagrees with the lax attitude of the two directors.

"As a finance guy, if you have a deficit, then you have concerns," Brooks said, confirming the financial blow that anti-DEI sentiment has dealt to organizations nationwide.

"I think it's too late to reduce the deficit, my recommendation was next year, that we have to start thinking about next year," he said.

8 Must-Visit Places in Cleveland

By KRISTEN BANNERMAN

Welcome to Cleveland! As NABJ hosts its 50th annual convention, take time to explore the city locals know as The Land. You can find a thriving arts and music scene, gorgeous landscapes and tasty eateries. Here are eight recommendations from a Cleveland local.

1 ROCK AND ROLL HALL OF FAME

0.5 MILES FROM CONVENTION

The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame is a destination museum nationally for music lovers and hub locally for weekly live performances and events. In 2024 the museum inducted legendary voices including but not limited to Mary J Blige, Cher, Kool & The Gang and A Tribe Called Quest. It's best to purchase tickets in advance and visit the site to learn more.

2 CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

7.1 MILES FROM CONVENTION

Ranked the seventh best art museum in the U.S in 2024 by Washington Post, the Cleveland Museum of Art remains a stand-out attraction. In the heart of the University Circle neighborhood—home to many cultural and educational institutions—the museum is surrounded by the Fine Arts Garden, which includes beautiful sculptures and walkways bordering a relaxing lagoon. The museum offers a diverse range of global collections spanning from Africa to Europe, and admission is free. When taking a break, stop by the Provenance Cafe and restaurant for a bite to eat before heading to view one of the many special exhibitions. These displays include “Takashi Murakami: Stepping on the Tail of a Rainbow,” “Refocusing Photography: China at the Millennium,” and “Karamu Artists Inc.: Printmaking, Race and Community.”



ARMANI ROSS/ NABJ MONITOR

3 CLEVELAND BOTANICAL GARDEN

7.3 MILES FROM CONVENTION

The Cleveland Botanical Garden serves as an oasis for nature lovers and an escape from city life. Sitting on 10 acres, the location includes both indoor and outdoor attractions. The glasshouses feature exotic vegetation and animals from Costa Rica and Madagascar. The outdoor areas have specially curated gardens including a Restorative, Japanese and rose garden.

4 MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART CLEVELAND

7.9 MILES FROM CONVENTION

Looking to immerse yourself in artwork that is innovative and thought provoking while promoting diversity? Visit MoCa Cleveland. This non-collecting museum functions as a prime location for the display of contemporary artwork from emerging and regional artists. Visitors can enjoy self-guided tours or attend Target Talks everyday at 2 p.m., where an engagement guide will lead deeper discussions about the gallery's work. Admission is free for Ohio residents and \$10 for non-residents.

5 WYNE TASTING AND COCKTAIL BAR

2.5 MILES FROM CONVENTION

Wind down from a day at the NABJ convention with a visit to the Wyne Tasting and Cocktail Bar, just a five-minute Uber ride from the Huntington Convention Center. This intimate space offers a selection of 32 wines dispensed through a tech-savvy wine preservation and pouring system. Additionally, customers can enjoy handcrafted cocktails and shareable sweet and savory bites ranging from \$3–\$26.

6 HOUSE OF CREOLE

1.1 MILES FROM CONVENTION

Located in the heart of downtown Cleveland, House of Creole offers a taste of the Southern kitchens of Louisiana. The menu includes flavor exploding cuisines, ranging from delicious bayou rolls to melt-in-your-mouth shrimp and grits. This Black-owned restaurant offers a warm and inviting atmosphere, making it a must-visit location for visitors.

One of the six Destination Cleveland script signs, created in 2016, sits at Edgewater Park as the sun begins to rise over the city on Wednesday.

7 THE LAKEHOUSE

0.9 MILES FROM CONVENTION

For scenic waterside views of the Cuyahoga River and a casual dining experience, visit The Lakehouse in Cleveland's Flats East Bank District. The menu features shareable firecracker shrimp, pigs in a blanket and a renowned smashburger. Reservations and walk-ins are welcome. Check out the website for operating hours.

8 REJUV EATERY

0.6 MILES FROM CONVENTION

Committed to nutritious eating, Rejuv Eatery serves food that not only tastes good but also feels good. This eatery provides an expansive breakfast and lunch menu: freshly pressed juices, smoothies, salads, sandwiches and more. And good news for many: Rejuv has a robust menu for customers who are vegetarian, vegan or gluten-free.

WELCOME BACK TO NABJ

Photos By Joe Thompson III



Top: Wall Street Journal swag covers their table at the Career Fair during the 50th annual NABJ Convention on Wednesday, August 6, 2025. Above: Raygene English and Paris Flannigan converse about convention activities.



Clockwise from left: Taylor Anthony and Maria Morales converse; Attendees settle in and make their way to the Career Fair; Angela Reighard-Rand converses with Jason Spear.



Durham 'humbled' to lead in new role

BY LEAH CLARK

As thousands of attendees flock to NABJ's 50th anniversary convention in Cleveland, they are arriving to a fresh announcement of a new NABJ executive director, drawing both celebration and concern.

NABJ President Ken Lemon announced the selection of longtime NABJ member Elise Durham as the new executive director in a Tuesday evening news conference. Durham, as NABJ's top administrative officer, will be in charge of the daily operations of the organization.

She assumes the role following the announcement of current Executive Director Drew Berry's retirement in May. Berry assumed the role in 2018 after serving as an interim twice then as a consultant for two years. Berry is the longest-serving executive director in the organization's history, serving under five presidents.

"When our past executive director decided to step down from this post, we began to very seriously ask the questions about what it means to replace somebody who has left very big shoes to fill," Lemon said of Berry.

He praised Durham's qualifications for the job.

"This is an individual, upon having the opportunity to speak with this individual, we had great certainty that they knew NABJ, NABJ culture," he said. "That they understood what it might take to be able to fundraise out of a situation that we're in right now, and that they'd be ready to step in and lead the organization forward."

Durham comes to the organization with 30 years of experience in television news management and strategic communication. She is currently the assistant general manager of marketing, communications and public affairs for Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. Durham previously served as a program chair and a past convention chair for NABJ.

"When it comes to knowing the culture and understanding how to operate in it, I feel comfortable," Durham said. "I am so humbled that the trust has been put in me to



ARMANI ROSS/ NABJ MONITOR

help lead this organization forward for the next 50 years."

Berry said he plans to help Durham during a transition period. Durham is slated to begin her position this fall. Berry declined to tell The NABJ Monitor the date his contract officially ends. NABJ board member Amir Vera told the Monitor Berry's contract ends Oct. 31.

"It's important for me to have a smooth transition," Berry said. "I will be here during a transition because [she] needs to know... But I will share information about culture and financial things that are critical."

CONVERSATIONS BREW

Berry's tenure slowed a revolving door of NABJ executive directors. Many of the selections were steeped in controversy over transparency, similar to the current situation, despite Durham's qualifications and continuous presence in the organization.

The hiring of Durham comes as many NABJ members, including former founders

and presidents, voiced concerns regarding the lack of transparency throughout the selection process. A group of longtime NABJ members who have previously held board positions and one who applied for the executive director role held an emergency meeting to discuss the matter and make sure Lemon heard them.

Concerns about the selection process for Berry's replacement began when a job listing for the executive director position was posted on LinkedIn a week after Berry made his retirement announcement in May.

Two weeks before the convention, social media chatter grew when NABJ announced via an email to members that Lemon had assembled an Executive Director Search Advisory Committee on July 23.

The next day, former NABJ President Vanessa Williams posted on Facebook her surprise at the timing, coming more than a month after Berry's retirement announcement, and the lack of explanation on how the candidates would be assembled. "This feels

like a Mitch McConnell move. What's the rush?" she wrote. "And where is the transparency?"

Williams said while she applauds the achievements and service to NABJ of the search committee members, she was concerned about its make-up, finding it "doesn't reflect the professional diversity of our membership."

NABJ Founder and former President DeWayne Wickham said he believes a search firm should have been hired for the process. In past hirings of executive directors, firms were occasionally used.

"We've got some fine people on our board," he said. "We need people to make good judgments about how our leadership moves forward with these kinds of decisions."

Hiring a search firm would not guarantee selecting a person qualified for the position, Lemon said.

"I talked to other individuals who have gone through the process before with this organization, and they said oftentimes you go through that and you end up with individuals who don't work," he said. "One person who told me that said we've spent \$120,000 in search firms for individuals who didn't last a collective four years on the job."

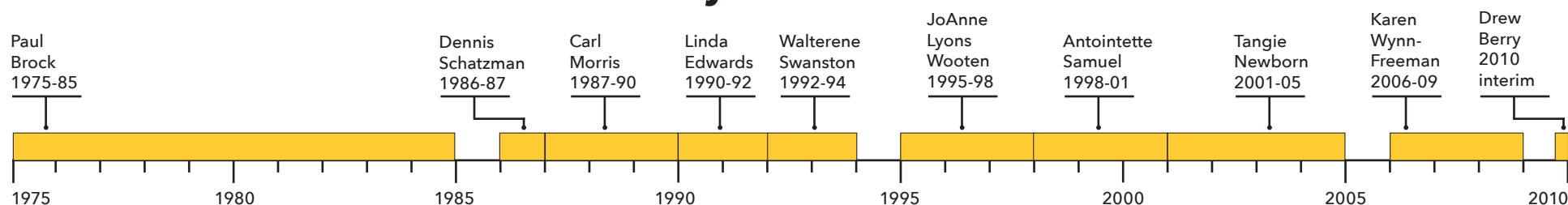
CANDIDATES SPEAK OUT

On July 26, eight candidates for the NABJ Board of Directors, including Lemon's two challengers for president in Friday's upcoming election, Errin Haines and Dion Rabouin, posted a joint letter to the current board asking to halt the executive director search until after the election.

The hiring of Durham leaves less than a week between newly elected leadership, but is still in line with the organization's Constitution.

"The Executive Director must work closely with the President and Executive Board. Incoming leaders should have a say in choosing the person they'll collaborate with," the letter stated. "Finalizing this hire before they take office is inappropriate and unprecedented."

NABJ executive directors over the years



The letter also called Berry's involvement in the hiring process "a clear conflict of interest."

When asked if he was involved in the selection process, Berry said he had no vote in the decision to hire the new executive director but gave feedback and added that releasing a list of final candidates could jeopardize their positions at their current places of employment.

"It would be stupid not to get feedback. [I'm] the most successful ED financially in all of that, programming, all of that...so of course, there's been some dialogue," he said. "I mean, I love this organization, too, and I'm not just going to close my mouth up."

The week before the convention, on July 27, a group of NABJ founders, former presidents, former board members and lifetime members held a Zoom meeting and discussed bringing their concerns to Lemon. Wickham and Williams attended the meeting, as well as former president and executive director applicant Gregory Lee, and founders Allison L. Davis, Sandra Dawson Long Weaver and Joe Davidson.

NABJ's Strategic Planning Committee, Finance Committee and finance director made proposals to Lemon and the board to hire a search firm that were not met, one board member confirmed to The NABJ Monitor.

Lemon said the possibility of using a search firm was considered, but ultimately leaders felt an advisory committee was the best process. He said the committee did not work together, but separately scored candidates based on a rubric and whittled them down to a smaller pool.

"I can tell you this effort began not long after the executive director stepped down," Lemon said during Tuesday's news conference. "This is something that wasn't done in just a few days, but it was done over months before."

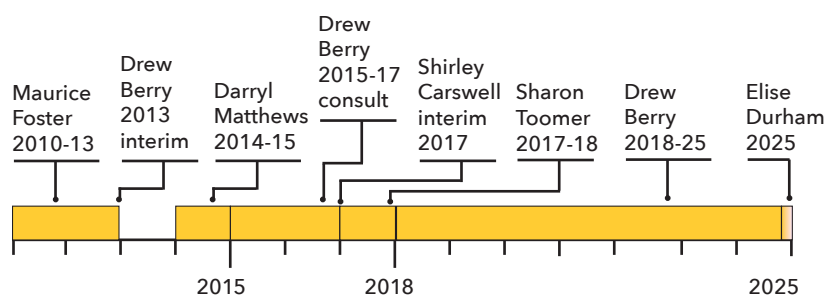
Despite Lemon's satisfaction with the selection process, Wickham said the reason for a lack of transparency was power.

"It's about power. It's about holding on to power. It's about clinging to power, and it's about their definition of power," Wickham said. "For this board, apparently, they divide power in terms of its ability to control the selection process down to the basics."

"When it comes to knowing the culture and understanding how to operate in it, I feel comfortable."

ELISE DURHAM,
NEW NABJ EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Newly appointed Executive Director Elise Durham speaks during a press conference with NABJ President Ken Lemon at the Hilton Cleveland Downtown on Tuesday, August 5, 2025



NABJ members react to selection of executive director

BY LEAH CLARK

The announcement of NABJ's new executive director at the start of the 50th anniversary convention welcomed Elise Durham but also took veteran members by surprise, stirring a mixture of responses.

"It was clear from the beginning that there was really no timeline or any other very important details that I unfortunately can't get into," Amir Vera, NABJ's vice president-digital, said. "This wasn't a political issue. It was more of a process issue, and I don't think it was fair to the candidates involved."

On July 24, Vera put forth a failed motion in a personnel committee meeting to halt the executive director search. Vera said he believes the number of board positions that are up for election should have been a factor in the search's timing.

"The majority of the board could be different by the time the week ends," Vera said.

Following Vera's motion, eight NABJ Board of Directors election candidates posted a joint letter to the current board asking to halt the executive director search until after the election. Roland Martin, a candidate for vice president-digital who signed the letter, was disappointed at the process.

"I have known Elise for years, longtime member. My issue has nothing to do with her. The fundamental problem that I have is this entire process has been trash," Martin said. "Our executive director, our president, our board have grossly failed to communicate to the membership."

The NABJ Strategic Planning Committee wrote an official statement to the board for a search firm in June. According to its chair, Sheila Brooks, Lemon said he would take the statement into consideration.

Brooks said in her experience, including two NABJ executive director search committees, the committees worked with the board and search firm to find the best candidates.

"I believe an executive search firm has the credentials, the experience, the expertise to identify the right type of leader that our organization needs. Someone that not only knows about journalism, but someone who is a fundraiser. We've been under attack like everyone else with DEI and loss of funding."

Brooks said publicly sharing the hiring process would have quelled a lot of concerns and theories amongst members. Despite her concerns with the process that she calls "unfortunate," Brooks said she wishes Durham the best as she takes on the position.

In a Tuesday evening press conference, Lemon said he felt it was important to complete the process, so Durham can meet with media executives, partners, and organizations to fundraise and strategize ahead of the next year.

Former NABJ president Bob Butler said Lemon's reasoning for hiring Durham before the convention should have cleared up most member concerns.

"A lot of it has to do with getting ready for Atlanta, and you want to have your executive director on the floor of the career fair talking to your partners," Butler said. "Most of these companies do their budgets in the third and fourth quarter, and for some companies, we're in the third quarter. So you want them to include you in the budget. It makes perfect sense to have her here." Butler said he believes there was no reason for the search to wait, seeing as the Constitution gives the board the authority to hire an executive director.

"Now, because this is an election year, that may be part of why we're seeing this kind of reaction, but all the people complaining about the search and the process, they don't have a role in hiring the ED," Butler said. "The executive board hires the ED, and it's their decision and their prerogative on how they do that. So anybody who's complaining about process and lack of transparency, they don't have standing."

Butler said he has never seen an executive director search with this much opposition. According to NABJ founder Joe Davidson, there have been controversies in the past, but this is "significantly more contentious and troublesome" than he expected.

"For most members, this isn't an issue...This is an issue for a number of very serious members who are particularly well informed about the governance of NABJ. For the most part, the majority of members I don't think this issue is going to distract from or complicate this convention," Davidson said.

"In the end, I'm sure that the members will pull together," he said.

New journalism grads face tough job market

Job-seekers have degrees but few openings available

BY JADEN PERRY

Recently graduated journalists are in a tough predicament. As the U.S. job market loses vitality and the journalism industry faces constant changes, aspiring reporters try their best to weather the storm and land their first job.

One of those job seekers is Kahwit Tela, who graduated in May with his master's degree in journalism from Georgetown University and now submits at least 15 applications weekly.

"With job searching, it's really just like a gamble, like 50/50. You either get the job or you get an interview or you just, you don't," Tela, 26, said. "It can be demoralizing."

With a desire for stable pay and health insurance, among other things, the Nashville resident feels pressed for time to find a full-time job. Still, the job market isn't getting any easier.

According to a national report by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, June saw a nearly 2% gap in unemployment between recent graduates and all degree holders, just months after March experienced the widest unemployment gap between the two groups since the 1990s, excluding the COVID-19 pandemic. As of June, employer hiring is experiencing one of its lowest dips since 2014.

This presents a grim outlook for entry-level job seekers, but it looks even grimmer when changes in the journalism industry are thrown into the mix.

Since 2005, over 3,200 print newspapers have "vanished," according to the 2024 State of Local News Report. Along with these shutdowns and mergers, layoffs have also increased. In 2024, nearly 5,000 journalism jobs were cut, a 59% increase from the previous year.

These numbers lead many journalists to believe the industry is shrinking, but Shirley Carswell, the executive director of the Dow Jones News Fund, would disagree.

"Shrinking is, I think, probably not quite the right word," Carswell said. "I think transforming is a better word."

A 'transforming' news industry

Year-round, Carswell and her team visit multiple journalism conventions, universities and sponsored trainings, all while reviewing thousands of applications for the News Fund's internship program. One of

the major factors contributing to the industry's rough job market, Carswell said, is the budget constraints facing newsrooms.

"You'll see chains like Gannett, McClatchy [and] Dow Jones, to some extent, hiring people and then eight months later they have layoffs," she said. "And so there's like an inconsistency in the business."

Another reason she gave was the increased demand for social media savvy and "support roles" — including data journalism, audience engagement, photography and videography.

Though Carswell believes traditional reporter roles will continue to be in demand, she believes these other supporting roles will continue to crop up as the media landscape changes. The challenge for students, she added, is whether or not their education is preparing them the skills needed to stay competitive in a changing market.

"It's also hard to gain all those skills in a typical four-year college environment," Carswell said. "So I think that's where campus media comes into play."

What recruiters are looking for in candidates

Out-of-class reporting experience could be a starting point for journalism students preparing to enter into the job market, but the same can't be said for students like Tela.

During his time as an undergrad, Tela decided to pursue journalism during his junior

"With job searching, it's really just like a gamble, like 50/50. You either get the job or you get an interview or you just, you don't. It can be demoralizing."

year at Lipscomb University. Before then, he considered English and computer science majors, but after covering a Pride event in Nashville, Tela locked in his decision to pursue journalism.

"One of my friends was just like 'Well, I guess you're a journalist,' and that was like the light bulb moment for me," Tela said.

After graduating, Tela dove into community service and volunteered with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps for a year. There, he helped



VIA ANNA GIBBS

Kahwit Tela, 26, pursued a master's degree in journalism to better cover human rights issues.

the unhoused community and registered people to vote — an experience that ignited his desire to address human rights issues both nationally and internationally.

"I wanted to report on that," Tela said. "[And] that inspired me to go back to school at Georgetown."

Since then, Tela has stacked his resume with a variety of reporting opportunities. Alongside a mix of internships and freelancing gigs with outlets like NPR, Nashville Scene and the Recording Academy, Tela also gained a variety of experience through freelance photography and campus publications.

Cameron Belcher, a recent graduate of Georgia Southern University, is in a similar predicament as Tela. After receiving his bachelor's degree in 2024, Belcher moved through a chain of internships and short-term reporting opportunities. Since May of this year, he's back in the job hunt for a full-time position.

"I wouldn't be able to give you a number because I'm on LinkedIn every day looking for jobs to apply to," Belcher said. "Some are production assistants for a sports company, some are to be a sports editor, some are to just help out with content just in general."

As an aspiring sports journalist, Belcher faces the added struggle of searching in the highly competitive sports journalism market. Another challenge, he said, is the seemingly unrealistic expectations for entry-level positions, something Tela agreed with.

"They're trying to say that people need to have five years of experience or three to five years of experience," Belcher said. "Most of the time, they're not really counting your experience of what you've got in college."

Jackie Ramsay, the talent acquisition manager for Politico, defined entry level as 0–3 years of professional, full-time experience, clarifying that it depends on the position.

Having hired over 200 people at Politico, Ramsay's ideal candidate is a strong, "punchy" writer with subject matter expertise. She listed a variety of reporting roles and leadership experience as other factors that help candidates stand out.

"For this industry, all the experience matters, like even before you get on the job market," Ramsay said. "And that's really hard."

Ramsay suggests graduates try standing out in other ways. Attaining a mentor to review a candidate's work is one — independent projects and freelancing is another. Applying for training programs, such as Politico's Journalism Institute, would give candidates added guidance and experience to help beef up their resumes.

Ramsay also suggests job-seekers look into smaller markets, rather than the "hot-spots," like New York City and Washington D.C., that new grads tend to flock towards. She acknowledges that not all graduates have the resources to do so.

Carswell, who offered similar solutions to Ramsay's, identified another major factor for applicants to consider — timing.

"Unfortunately, for a lot of students, summer is a bad time for hiring because you have interns," Carswell said. "Lot[s] of companies have interns on the books. So they're not looking to really hire in the summertime for full-time jobs."

By the end of the fiscal year, she said, companies have a better idea of their budget — and the positions that need filling.

"Trust the process, believe in yourself"

Belcher said he is determined to find his first full-time gig. And, as that process continues, he's still applying to other jobs to keep himself financially afloat.

"I started looking at just a couple of gas stations here and there," Belcher said. "I know I may be working with my local news stations again."

Still, he remains hopeful that a position will open up soon — and so does Tela.

"I mean, it could happen now, but maybe things that you want to happen now may not happen right away," Tela said. "Just trust the process, believe in yourself and just keep on doing the work. Journalism is very important right now in times [when] we're under threat."

'Always Tired': Gen Z Is Over Hustle Culture

Social media adds another layer to success: Constantly proving productivity

BY KIMORA WONG SING

Twenty-two-year-old Jamannie Morgan wakes up early to brainstorm content, send emails and push creative projects, all before class. The Morgan State senior says he often sacrifices sleep and health just to keep up.

"Sometimes it feels like you're working just to prove you're trying," he said.

For many Gen Zers, born between 1997 and 2012, the pressure to be productive and monetize hobbies is reshaping how they view work, rest and success. Hustle culture, once seen as ambition, now feels like burnout waiting to happen.

Hustle culture glorifies constant productivity, side gigs and self-sacrifice, a Forbes Business Council post says. Once praised as ambition, it now takes a mental and physical toll, leading Gen Z to question whether the grind is worth the emotional cost. Some say they feel burned out before they even enter the workforce.

"I'm always tired," said Malik Thompson, a shift manager at Bloomingdale's. "With how expensive everything is, hustling feels like the only way to stay afloat."

Others say hustle culture isn't about ambition anymore—it's about survival.

"People get comfortable," said Isaiah Nisbett, a 21-year-old security supervisor. "Time doesn't wait. You have to take control."

There are also many in Gen Z who say

hustle culture isn't just always about ambition but has now blended with the need for some to always grind for monetary survival. They don't believe in "sob" stories. Everyone has one. What matters is how you push forward.

Nisbett stated that he doesn't have strong feelings about the direction of hustle culture because he feels that if it leads to a successful future, it can be worth it.

"You gotta want better for yourself and your family," Nisbett said. "Everyone has a story, but at some point, you have to take control."

While mental health breaks are often encouraged, younger generations struggle with the idea. Isaac Davis Jr., a computer engineering student at Howard University, said taking a break doesn't feel like an option.

"Even resting feels like I'm falling behind," Davis said.

Nusi Addae, a senior at Morgan State University, added, "I'm in class Monday through Friday, then work weekends to support myself. It's hard to rest without feeling guilty or like I'm slacking."

Social media often intensifies these feelings as people scroll through curated images of productivity and perfection. Many people find it hard not to compare their lives to those of influencers or peers who seem to have it made.

"Everyone looks successful online," said

Jared Still, a recent graduate of Morgan State. "You don't see the skipped meals or late nights, just the Instagram highlights. But comparison is the thief of joy."

Older generations say that Gen Z experiences hustle culture differently. The blending of work, identity and online life creates new pressures they didn't face.

"To us, hustle meant doing what was necessary, not proving it constantly," said Angela Reed, a millennial project manager.

Carlos Jennings, a retired electrician, added, "You worked, saved money and minded your business."

Mental health professionals warn of the long-term cost of burnout. Dr. Erin Burke, who works in adolescent medicine at Mount Sinai Health Center, said relentless hustle culture affects emotional regulation and increases stress.

"Rest must be normalized as essential, not seen as a weakness," Burke said.

Some Gen Zers are pushing back by embracing online movements like "quiet quitting" and "soft life," which promote peace over relentless productivity.

"Choosing peace over productivity isn't laziness," said Dr. Audrey M. Walker, a psychiatrist at Montefiore Einstein Medical Center.

Davis said he's learning to protect rest the same way he protects his work.

"I treat it like a reset," he said. "When I

don't rest, my performance suffers."

Still said balance is something he's learning to practice, and it's not yet perfect. "Even when I'm relaxing, I feel like I should be doing something," he said. "I'm learning that balance means knowing what can wait."

Technology makes the struggle harder. The constant connection makes it difficult to truly log off.

"When we clocked out, we clocked out," said Reed, the millennial project manager. "Now people reply to emails late at night or edit content after hours. There's no off switch."

She added, "But I admire how open Gen Z is about therapy, burnout and mental health. They're tackling issues we never talked about out loud."

Older generations also believe Gen Z's awareness could spark broader change.

"They're confronting hustle culture's downsides sooner," Reed said. "That could lead to a more sustainable future."

Still recalled a moment with his niece that shifted his perspective. "She said, 'You're always at work.' That hit me," he said. "I don't want to miss the moments that matter."

For many young adults, success is shifting from wealth and prestige to peace and purpose.

"I used to think success was about money and fame," Davis said. "Now it's about consistency and doing what really matters."

HUSTLE CULTURE over the years

The timeline of how ambition, overwork and social media are reshaping the way people define success.

2008-2010

The Great Recession normalized overwork as economic survival became a necessity.

2011-2014

Social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube made personal branding and side hustles mainstream.

2015-2017

Hustle culture became a lifestyle, fueled by influencers promoting nonstop productivity and self-made success.

2018-2019

Burnout officially recognized as a workplace issue.

2020

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted traditional work routines and led many to reassess their relationship with productivity.

2021

The rise of "quiet quitting" reflected growing disillusionment with hustle culture.

2022-2023

The "soft life" trend emerged, with Gen Z prioritizing peace, rest and boundaries over constant work.

2024-2025

Success is increasingly defined by flexibility, mental health and meaningful balance.

KALAMAZOO GAZETTE Muskegon Chronicle THE FLINT JOURNAL lehighvalleylive.com The Saginaw News

RED CLAY MEDIA THE EXPRESS-TIMES JACKSON CITIZEN PATRIOT THE BAY CITY TIMES IT'S A *Southern* THING
South Jersey TIMES HEADLINE NYup.com gulfive.com silive.com MASS LIVE

THE ANN ARBOR NEWS PENNLIVE Patriot-News The Republican. PRESS-REGISTER

The Times mosaic The Huntsville Times syracuse.com THE POST-STANDARD

The Star-Ledger m nj OREGONLIVE Staten Island Advance
The Oregonian LIVE .com THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS AL.COM
The Birmingham News

THE PLAIN DEALER © cleveland.com

ADVANCE LOCAL

Advance with us.

Learn more about
careers at Advance.

advancelocal.com/careers



Send your résumé to
recruiting@advancelocal.com

Come meet with us in booth #310

