

2021
**ANNUAL
REPORT**



CONTENTS



A NOTE FROM THE CHAIRMAN	03
ABOUT THE TV PARENTAL GUIDELINES MONITORING BOARD	04
STREAMING TASK FORCE	05
TV RATING SPOT CHECK REVIEWS	06
PTA BACK TO SCHOOL ACTIVITIES	07
ANNUAL MONITORING BOARD MEETING	08
2021 CORRESPONDENCE SUMMARY	10
CONCLUSION	12
ADDENDUM: FACT SHEET	13

A NOTE FROM THE CHAIRMAN



I am honored to have served as chairman this past year and grateful for the opportunity to highlight the important work of the TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board (Monitoring Board). This is an incredibly important moment for our industry: children's television viewing has skyrocketed since the pandemic began as parents increasingly rely on TV and streaming platforms to keep their children connected, informed, and entertained. The networks and organizations that comprise the Monitoring Board once again met the moment and provided families with valuable information about the content and age-appropriateness of television programming.

Since 1996, the Monitoring Board has been committed to helping parents make the most informed decisions about the shows that are most suitable for their families. Today, we maintain our unwavering commitment to ensure that the TV Parental Guidelines (often referred to as the TV ratings system) are accurate and applied consistently. To that end, many of the activities that we undertook this year reflect our responsibility to uphold best practices and further educate the public about the TV ratings system.

Key priorities include:

1. Creating the Streaming Best Practices guidelines to ensure a consistent ratings experience for families across traditional television networks as well as streaming platforms.
2. Partnering with Monitoring Board member, the National PTA, for 'PTA Back-to-School Week' in September to keep parents and educators informed about the TV Parental Guidelines ratings and descriptors as well as the Streaming Best Practices.
3. Conducting quarterly spot-check reviews of the TV ratings across programming on Monitoring Board members' networks.
4. Being responsive and timely in our communication with the public regarding their questions and concerns about television and streaming programming.

Although the pandemic curtailed some of our planned activities, our 2021 Annual Report highlights the broad range of activities that we were still able to pursue over the past year. The Monitoring Board is proud of what we were able to achieve and we are excited to build on these initiatives in 2022, while continuing to provide parents with useful information to guide their programming decisions across traditional channels and streaming platforms.

I thank the Monitoring Board for its continued work to make the TV Parental Guidelines an invaluable resource for parents, and I look forward to working with our dedicated group of industry and public interest leaders during my tenure as chairman.

Sincerely,

Charles Rivkin
Chairman of the TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board
Chairman and CEO of the Motion Picture Association



ABOUT THE TV PARENTAL GUIDELINES MONITORING BOARD



The TV Parental Guidelines were created in 1996 to help parents make informed decisions about what programs are suitable for their children. Designed by leading organizations of the TV industry, in consultation with representatives of a broad range of children's, medical and other interested stakeholders, the TV ratings are easily recognizable and easy to use. The ratings work in conjunction with parental control technology such as the V-Chip, built into most televisions, as well as cable set top boxes, allowing parents to block programs they determine to be inappropriate for their families.

TV ratings are available both for television programming designed for children and for programming intended for general audiences. The ratings provide information about the content and age-appropriateness of programs and apply to most television shows. Some programs, such as news, sports, religious and most home shopping programming, are not rated. The ratings information is prominently displayed at the beginning of – and often after commercial breaks in – all rated programming. Ratings information also is available in the TV listings of many newspapers, in other printed and online program listings and on numerous websites.

In conjunction with the ratings, the television industry established the Monitoring Board to help ensure that ratings are applied on a consistent basis across networks and programs. The Monitoring Board provides oversight by constantly reviewing and updating its practices in light of feedback; reviewing and responding to complaints and other public input and facilitating discussion among members of the Monitoring Board to ensure that ratings are being consistently applied from program-to-program. The Monitoring Board meets at least once annually to consider and review correspondence sent to the Monitoring Board, discuss current research and review any other issues relevant to the TV Parental Guidelines.

The Monitoring Board is comprised of up to 24 members: the chairman (the head of the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), NCTA – The Internet & Television Association (NCTA) or the Motion Picture Association (MPA) on a rotating basis), as many as 18 industry members from the broadcast, cable and creative communities appointed by the NAB, NCTA or MPA and up to five third-party groups with an interest in children and media appointed by the Monitoring Board chairman. The chairman serves for a two-year term.

CURRENT MEMBERS OF THE MONITORING BOARD:

- A+E NETWORKS
- AMC NETWORKS
- AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS
- CALL FOR ACTION
- DISCOVERY, INC.
- ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRIES COUNCIL
- FOX CORPORATION
- HULU
- LIFETIME NETWORKS
- NATIONAL PTA
- NBC UNIVERSAL
- SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT
- THE WALT DISNEY COMPANY
- WARNERMEDIA
- UNIVISION
- VIACOMCBS





In 2020, the Monitoring Board created a task force to review how TV ratings are utilized across the wide array of video streaming services that have launched and/or are in the process of rolling out. The task force was also established to more formally engage with streaming services that do not currently participate in the TV Ratings and create best practices for how to apply ratings consistently in the streaming environment. The task force is comprised primarily of Monitoring Board members who have or are in the process of launching a streaming video service including, among others, Discovery+, Disney+, HBO Max, Hulu, Paramount+, Peacock, and Tubi.

The decision to establish the task force came in part from results of the [2020 biennial TV Parental Guidelines survey](#), which revealed that 84% of children are watching some TV shows via streaming service. Further, the Monitoring Board has seen an increase in correspondence related to programming on streaming services.

Over the past year, the task force, who met quarterly, engaged in conversations with Monitoring Board members that operate video streaming services and initiated informal discussions with non-member streaming services about how they are applying ratings to their own content. The result of these conversations was the Streaming Best Practices guidelines, [new ratings guidance for streaming services](#) designed in an effort to help ensure parents and families encounter a consistent ratings experience across traditional television networks and streaming platforms.

Examples of some of the Streaming Best Practices include the following recommended best practices:

- » For all streaming video content that is rated, streaming services should display TV ratings (or MPA movie ratings when applicable) on-screen at the time that a consumer initiates the playback of video.
- » Video streaming services should apply TV ratings to all content that has been shown on television with ratings and all content that is originally produced for the streaming environment, including on an episode-by-episode basis for episodically rated programs (other than with respect to news, sports, advertisements or promotional materials, promotional materials or movies rated by the MPA).
- » Video streaming services will continue to study ratings capabilities and, if practicable in the future, apply TV ratings to additional content, including, for example, archival content that originally was shown on television prior to the adoption of the TV Parental Guidelines.

The full Streaming Best Practices document can be found [here](#).

The task force plans to continue its efforts to engage with streaming services in 2022 and is exploring other ways to increase consistency in ratings among network and streaming programming.

TV RATING SPOT CHECK REVIEW PROCESS



In keeping with its commitment to ensuring that TV ratings are applied to programs on an accurate and consistent basis, the Monitoring Board voted at its 2019 Annual Meeting to formally establish a spot check review program. The program is designed to assess whether television programs are receiving accurate and consistent ratings across different networks and time slots. This concept was piloted in 2019, formally rolled out in January 2020 and continued in 2021.

To conduct the spot check reviews, the Monitoring Board established four groups, with one group meeting each calendar quarter. The Monitoring Board's public interest board members were each assigned to one of the four groups, allowing the process to take into account broader perspectives and feedback.


To ensure that the spot checks encompassed a wide variety of content and intended audiences, programming was selected from each of the Monitoring Board representatives' networks at a randomly predetermined time on a specific day each calendar quarter. For instance, one group reviewed programming shown during early morning hours, which is often intended for younger children. Another group reviewed late night programs, which are typically intended for adult audiences. Two additional groups evaluated programs that appeared on television during the daytime and at primetime hours. All 2021 groups and programming times were different from the 2020 spot check groups.

For their reviews, the groups used the publicly available descriptions of the TVY, TVY7, TVG, TVPG, TV14 and TVMA ratings, as well as the accompanying content descriptors – D for suggestive dialogue, FV for fantasy violence, L for coarse or crude language, S for sexual situations and V for violence.

After reviewing their respective programs, each group met to determine if it agreed or disagreed with the rating assigned to a given program. The spot check review program was designed so that if a group determined that it disagrees with a rating, a dialogue is initiated with the network that showed the program. If the network disagrees with the review group's determination, the matter will be brought to the Monitoring Board chairman to determine appropriate next steps, including consideration before the full Monitoring Board, which has the authority to adjudicate disputes in the event that consensus discussion does not resolve the question.

The 2021 spot check process indicated that, generally, age ratings and descriptors were applied consistently and accurately to all reviewed programs. However, in the few instances where the ratings were questioned by review groups, a dialogue was opened up between the applicable group and network, resulting in the network agreeing to add a descriptor to, or change the rating of, the TV show or TV movie in question. The process this year did not require any program to be brought to the chairman for resolution of any ratings disagreement.

The spot check review process worked as intended – reinforcing that the vast majority of content is rated correctly while also providing Monitoring Board members with the opportunity to engage in helpful discussions with one another about the application of ratings and use of descriptors. These conversations will further facilitate all networks' ability to hone their decision-making about which ratings to apply and when and how to use descriptors consistently going forward.



Audience: Indicates the audience for which a television program is appropriate.

Content Descriptor: Indicates a show may contain violence, sex, adult language, or suggestive dialogue.

The Content Descriptors
TV Parental Guidelines may have one or more letters added to the basic rating to let parents know when a show may contain violence, sex, adult language or suggestive dialogue.

- D** - suggestive dialogue (usually means talks about sex)
- FV** - fantasy violence (children's programming only)
- L** - coarse or crude language
- S** - sexual situations
- V** - violence

PTA BACK-TO-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES



The TV Parental Guidelines was excited to partner with the National PTA, a Monitoring Board member, during Back-To-School Week to provide parents and educators with the resources they need to ensure an enjoyable and appropriate television experience. This included the launch of the Streaming Best Practices guidelines discussed above.

In partnership with National PTA, [the Board wrote a post](#) that was published in National PTA's One Voice blog and promoted across [the official Twitter account of the National PTA](#). The blog focused on the release of the new Streaming Best Practices guidance and provided additional information and background about the TV Parental Guidelines ratings and descriptors.

The Monitoring Board is looking forward to our continued partnership with the National PTA and aims to attend their annual Convention and Expo in 2022 at the National Harbor in Maryland, June 14-19, 2022.



ANNUAL MONITORING BOARD MEETING



On October 20, 2021, Chairman Charles Rivkin and MPA hosted the Annual Meeting of the Monitoring Board via video conference due to COVID restrictions. The purpose of the Annual Meeting is to bring together Monitoring Board members to review yearly activities, discuss correspondence and ratings complaints, and plan for the year ahead. The Annual Meeting supplements multiple informal meetings in which Monitoring Board members gather – either over video conference or by phone – throughout the year to discuss ongoing work. The following presents an overview of the 2021 Annual Meeting.



REVIEW OF 2021 ACTIVITIES

The Monitoring Board reviewed various activities completed in the 2021 calendar year. Among these efforts were the completion and promotion of the second Annual Report; release of the Streaming Best Practices document and quarterly meetings of the Streaming Task Force; continued implementation of the ratings spot check review program; and participation in the National PTA Back-to-School week. The Monitoring Board acknowledged the impact of the COVID pandemic on this year's activities, including the cancellation of the 2021 National PTA Convention and Expo, but remains hopeful about participation in additional events next year.

More information about these specific activities can be found on page 07 of this report.



TV RATINGS SPOT CHECK

The Monitoring Board reviewed the second full year of the TV Ratings spot check review program, the goal of which is to spot check programming on the networks of Monitoring Board members to ensure accurate and consistent use of the TV ratings system. During the Annual Meeting, representatives from each of the four spot check review groups presented on their findings. Overall, the Monitoring Board members expressed consensus that this process serves as a valuable way to better understand the application of the TV ratings, helps public interest Monitoring Board members gain insight into the ratings process, and ensures that age ratings and descriptors are being applied consistently across networks and during different time slots. The Monitoring Board agreed to continue with the spot check review program in 2022 and will look at ways to improve the program going forward. More information about the spot check review program can be found on page 06 of this report.

ANNUAL MONITORING BOARD MEETING



STREAMING TASK FORCE

The Streaming Task Force reported on its activities throughout 2021, in particular the release of the Streaming Best Practices. This document is designed to help ensure parents and families encounter a consistent ratings experience across traditional television networks and streaming platforms. Following a presentation of recent task force activities, a moderated panel discussion on the ratings for streaming services was held featuring Monitoring Board members from NBC (Peacock), Discovery (Discovery+) and ViacomCBS (Paramount). They discussed their respective network's streaming services, challenges they each face when applying ratings to a streaming programming, and the different types of ratings and content descriptors used by their respective streaming platforms. A question-and-answer period followed the panel discussion.

The Streaming Task Force will meet quarterly throughout 2022 and will continue conversations with streaming services. More information about the Streaming Task Force can be found on page 05 of this report.

MENTAL HEALTH PRESENTATION

The Entertainment Industries Council, a Monitoring Board member, presented on a new mental health tool being implemented that is designed to report on suicide guidance, share resources, and identify best practices to reduce the risk of additional suicide. The tool was developed by Cisco and Save.org. Several members of the Monitoring Board will participate in a demonstration of the tool and how it can be used for programming in 2022.

REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS AND CORRESPONDENCE

Prior to the Annual Meeting, a summary of all correspondence and complaints received by the Monitoring Board since the previous meeting was shared with Monitoring Board members. During the meeting, Monitoring Board members reviewed the year's emails, phone calls and letters. As has been the case for several years, the majority of correspondence received related to commercials, the subject matter of program content or scheduling changes, rather than complaints about the accuracy of ratings. More information about complaints and correspondence can be found on pages 10-11 of this report.

PREVIEW OF 2022 ACTIVITIES

In addition to committing to continue the spot check review program and regular meetings of the Streaming Task Force, the Monitoring Board agreed to explore opportunities to raise greater awareness about the TV Parental Guidelines online, to continue to be more visible through press outreach and events such as the National PTA Convention & Expo, and to ensure continued and effective correspondence with the public. 2022 is also a research year for the Monitoring Board and discussions began about the survey of parents that will be conducted in late summer 2022.



2021 CORRESPONDENCE SUMMARY



One of the primary roles of the Monitoring Board is to address complaints about the ratings on specific programs. The Monitoring Board does this by reviewing complaints and other correspondence, facilitating discussion about the application of the ratings, and working to resolve concerns as expeditiously as possible.

In 2021, the Monitoring Board continued an enhanced policy of responding to all correspondence, which it initiated the previous year. Ratings complaints are now shared with a broader team of representatives from the applicable network to ensure greater awareness of the ratings complaint and to facilitate a timely response. Further, the Monitoring Board has improved its correspondence tracking system to allow for better complaint processing and status tracking of each complaint. When complaints about ratings are received, the Monitoring Board works closely with network representatives to determine why the show was given a particular rating and to communicate that information to the viewer. In some cases, based on viewer feedback, a network also agrees to modifying its rating. In 2021, the Monitoring Board also began sharing all complaints and feedback about TV commercials with network representatives as an additional way to keep Monitoring Board members apprised of correspondence about their respective networks (although commercial and other advertisements are not under the jurisdiction of the TV Parental Guidelines).

From January 1, 2021, through December 31, 2021, the Monitoring Board received 547 public comments – 458 emails and 89 phone calls. Of this correspondence, 182 were about the general content or casting of shows, 109 were about commercials, 46 were about scheduling changes and 25 were complaints specifically about the TV Ratings. In addition, 14 content creators reached out to the Monitoring Board asking for information on how to apply ratings to their shows. The Monitoring Board connects content creators with standards and practices professionals at participating Monitoring Board networks to aid them in the process of ensuring their shows are accurately rated and use the correct descriptors.

Other correspondence received in 2021 included viewers offering positive or negative feedback on programming, marketing requests, requests for information from content creators looking to start a show, customer requests for assistance with their streaming service setup, generic questions about the TV rating system (icon specifications, ratings and descriptors and the like) and other miscellaneous questions and comments as well as spam e-mails. The largest volume of complaints received in 2021 not related to the TV rating system focused on the Pride Month and LGBTQ+ characters in programming, political advertisements or commentators, the title and plotline of programs, award shows and various Black Lives Matter commercials, specials or banners airing on networks.

Of the 27 ratings complaints, 15 were directed at broadcast and cable television networks or streaming services that participate in the TV Parental Guidelines, while the remaining eight complaints related to programming on streaming services that do not participate in the TV rating system or were about creating additional ratings for same-sex relationships. Ratings complaints about programming on a broadcast or cable network or streaming service that participates in the TV Parental Guidelines are sent to those respective industry representatives as they are received. Industry representatives then review the ratings internally and respond to the viewer either directly or through the Monitoring Board with further information about the rating and/or to resolve any discrepancies. All ratings complaints are also shared with representatives from the NCTA, MPA and NAB as well as the Streaming Task Force on a monthly basis along with a summary of all other correspondence.



BELOW ARE A FEW EXAMPLES OF COMPLAINTS ABOUT SPECIFIC PROGRAMS THAT THE MONITORING BOARD RECEIVED THIS YEAR, ALONG WITH A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE ACTIONS TAKEN TO ADDRESS THE COMPLAINTS.

In January, six viewers wrote to the Monitoring Board expressing concern for the TV14 rating listed for an animated show that was available on various streaming services. The viewers demanded it be given a higher rating due to the content of an episode involving a young girl giving birth. The complaints were shared with Monitoring Board members from the respective networks who stood by the show's TV14 rating. The Monitoring Board responded to the viewers with guidance on the TV14 rating which indicates that the program contains some material that many parents would find unsuitable for children under 14 years of age. Parents are strongly urged to exercise greater care in monitoring this program and are cautioned against letting children under the age of 14 watch unattended.

In April, one viewer asked why some episodes of a show were rated TV14 and others were rated TVMA. The Monitoring Board explained that programs are rated on an episode-by-episode basis and, therefore, may carry a different rating based on the content. The viewer was very appreciative of this information.

In May, a viewer complained about a commercial for Trojan condoms being shown. The Monitoring Board explained that while it does not control commercials or advertisements, networks aim to pair commercials with similarly rated shows. The complaint was then shared with the network representative, who passed it along internally.

In June, a content creator reached out requesting guidance on rating episodes for their show. The Monitoring Board sent along the TV Parental Guidelines icon specs and guidance on the ratings and descriptors and offered to connect the creator with a Monitoring Board members' standard and practices network personnel. The creator thanked the Monitoring Board and took it up on its offer to connect with a network representative for further guidance.

In October, one viewer wrote to say the G rating on a children's show was inappropriate due to violent themes and it should be rated at least TVPG. The Monitoring Board thanked the viewer and shared that we passed along their complaint to the applicable Monitoring Board member network representatives. The network representative looked into the rating and felt that it was correct and explained the network's rationale for the rating which was conveyed to the viewer. In addition, the network representative noted that they have not received any complaints about this episode since it started airing in 2017 and did not think most parents would feel the episode requires parental guidance.

In December, a viewer reached out requesting the addition of a Same Sex Relationship (SSR) descriptor to the TV Parental Guidelines and asked that gender neutral or nonbinary characters be included under the L (coarse language) descriptor. The Monitoring Board thanked the viewer for reaching out and explained that at this time, the Monitoring Board is not considering a descriptor for same-sex situations as we feel that the current descriptors accurately reflect the content on television and public opinion polling regularly shows that the TV rating system is providing families with the tools they need to make appropriate viewing choices for their households. The Monitoring Board explained that the TV ratings are not an indication of the social value or importance of a show, nor are they meant to cast moral judgments or prescribe social policy. Thus, it is not the Monitoring Board's place to distinguish between same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. The Monitoring Board further explained that TV shows that contain various types of sexual activity are rated more maturely, and an additional "S" descriptor may be added to indicate sexual situations.

In 2021, the Monitoring Board continued its work to promote, expand and enhance the TV Ratings. This year, the Monitoring Board worked to assess whether ratings are being applied accurately and on a consistent basis both on traditional cable and broadcast channels as well as on streaming services. The Monitoring Board focused its attention on increasingly-popular video streaming services, strengthening the internal Streaming Task Force and created best practices guidance while conducting outreach to streaming services. The goal of these efforts is to ensure that parents are aware of the tools available to help them make informed decisions about what programs are suitable for their children and ensure uniformity among the ratings across platforms. The Monitoring Board remains committed to continuing to evaluate its efforts and improving in the year ahead and looks forward to the results of the parent survey in Q3 of 2022.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT WWW.TVGUIDELINES.ORG.

TV Parental Guidelines



THE TV PARENTAL GUIDELINES
MONITORING BOARD