



AURORA THEATRE COMPANY

CONFRONTING AND DISMANTLING OPPRESSION: AURORA'S COMMITMENTS AND ACTIONS August 2021

In 2020, Aurora announced a series of commitments towards confronting and dismantling oppression in our organization. We released our first report on those commitments in February of 2021. This is our second report.

The text of our commitments is presented first, with updates added in *italics*.

Here are the steps Aurora has taken and the commitments we make in the service of dismantling the systems that feed racism, anti-Blackness, and other forms of oppression:

IN OUR COMMUNITY

- We will continue our **Community Partners** program, which builds meaningful two-way relationships with new segments of our community, leading to more authenticity in our work, new audiences in our theatre, and new representation in our Advisory Council and eventually on our board.
We continued our Community Partnership with Laney College's FUSION Theatre Project and Holy Fools, hosting an online reading of a new play presented by Holy Fools. We announced the world premiere of Cleavon Smith's THAT'S WHAT WE'RE WAITING TO FIND OUT, a play with strong possibilities for Community Partnerships; we are seeking those partnerships now. We also continued our Community Partnership with Berkeley High School, presenting 'student matinee' performances of TONI MORRISON'S THE BLUEST EYE and sending the director and members of the cast into virtual classrooms for workshops related to the production. Alan Miller, our Community Partner representative from Berkeley High, has joined the Aurora board. We co-presented a community conversation on gentrification in partnership with the Future Histories Lab at UC Berkeley, in connection with our production of Dael Orlandersmith's STOOP STORIES.
- Income from Supernova, our 2020 annual fundraising event, exceeded its goal, and we donated \$2500 to the Fund for Black Theatre in the U.S. and \$2500 to Black Futures Lab. We plan to continue this commitment by donating a percentage of post-goal income from our 2021 annual fundraising event to community organizations.

We canceled our 2021 annual fundraiser, but we hope to continue this commitment for our 30th Anniversary fundraiser in spring 2022, pending board approval.

Revised Commitment:

- *Income from Supernova, our 2020 annual fundraising event, exceeded its goal, and we donated \$2500 to the Fund for Black Theatre in the U.S. and \$2500 to Black Futures Lab. We did not present Supernova in 2021, but we hope to continue this commitment by donating a percentage of post-goal income from our 30th Anniversary fundraiser in spring 2022 to community organizations, pending board approval.*

IN OUR LOBBY

- Our **Commitment to the Community** statement, posted in our lobby, our programs, and our website, is intended to encourage a culture free from microaggressions in our lobby and theatre so that everyone feels welcome in our space. We will update this statement for our work in virtual spaces, and rename it to **"Theatre for Everyone"** to avoid confusion with this list of commitments. Our next update will include specific information on how we are creating a culture free from microaggressions in our virtual spaces.

We have updated our Theatre For Everyone statement with its new title and a new bullet point reminding audiences that different reactions to a performance are to be celebrated.

Since our last update, we partnered with Calling Up Justice, Theatre Bay Area, Z Space, and Shotgun Players to present a Town Hall on audience interactions in virtual spaces. As a result, we have created a list of community agreements to be shared at the beginning of virtual events to discourage microaggressions.

Revised Commitment:

- *Our **Theatre For Everyone** statement, posted in our lobby, our programs, and our website, is intended to encourage a culture free from microaggressions in our lobby, theatre, and online, so that everyone feels welcome in our space.*
- We will continue regular **anti-bias and anti-oppression training** for front-of-house staff, including bystander intervention training.
This remains our plan, but we temporarily deprioritized trainings for front-of-house staff because we did not have audiences in our space. We plan to implement these trainings for Front-of-House staff prior to reopening for in-person audiences.
- We will create **clear guidelines for front-of-house staff** for responding to microaggressions, racist behavior, and questions about our policies.

We are creating new guidelines for Patron Interactions and will incorporate them into the training process for front-of-house staff as we move towards reopening.

- We will continue the conversation begun and act on the discoveries made in **Welcome To Our Space?: A Town Hall On Audience Interactions**, exploring what theatres can do to discourage microaggressions, including microaggressions among our audience members.

We hosted a follow-up conversation about microaggressions in public spaces, including virtual spaces, as an episode of Aurora Connects this spring. We will continue these discussions internally and continue to identify changes to our policies and practices that would discourage microaggressions.

Revised Commitment:

- *We will continue the conversation begun and act on the discoveries made in our in-person and virtual **Welcome To Our Space?: Town Halls On Audience Interactions**, exploring what theatres can do to discourage microaggressions, including microaggressions among our audience members.*

ON OUR STAGE

- We will create an **anti-racism policy** sheet, to be shared with all artists and production staff and discussed at the first production meeting and first rehearsal. We will update the sexual harassment policy already shared in this manner. *We created a combined anti-racism and anti-harassment policy sheet, and have been sharing and discussing it at the first rehearsal and first production meetings.*

Revised Commitment:

- *Our updated anti-racism and anti-harassment policy sheet is shared with all artists and production staff, and discussed at the first production meeting and first rehearsal as well as in the onboarding process for new Aurora hires. We have improved and clarified our system for reporting instances of harassment and oppression*
- At least three of the six plays we produce each season will be **written by BIPOC playwrights**.
In 2020/2021, our primary season was reduced to two audio dramas. One is co-written by three playwrights, one of whom is Black, and the other is an adaptation of a novel from a Black novelist by a Black playwright. For our 2021/2022 season, we are producing five plays, three of which are written by BIPOC playwrights.
- We will continue our commitment that at least three of the six plays we produce each season will be **written by women**.
In 2020/2021, one of our three co-playwrights was female, and the novelist and

adapter were both female.

In 2021/2022, three of our five playwrights are female.

- We will continue our commitment that at least three of the six plays we produce each season will be **directed by women**.

In 2020/2021, one of our two audio dramas was directed by a woman.

In 2021/2022, three of our five directors will be women.

- We will actively seek out plays by **transgender, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming playwrights**.

While this is in progress and we have read some plays by transgender, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming playwrights, we aspire to do more. We invite transgender, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming playwrights to submit to Aurora.

- We will continue to **commission and develop scripts by BIPOC playwrights**.

We named Cleavon Smith, a Black playwright, as our next Originate+Generate commission recipient, and have announced the world premiere of his commissioned play, THAT'S WHAT WE'RE WAITING TO FIND OUT, in our 2021/2022 Season. We presented a developmental Zoom reading in June 2021 as a fundraising benefit with all proceeds going to increase the development and production budgets for this project. Also in 2021, we presented a Zoom reading of COLONIALISM IS TERRIBLE, BUT PHO IS DELICIOUS by Dustin Chinn, an Asian-American playwright.

- We will increase the percentage of **BIPOC designers and production staff** working on our productions.

The overall percentage of BIPOC designers and production staff has greatly increased in our 2020/2021 Season, but this is a season with many fewer positions and this year's percentage may not be sustained when we return to full production. We are taking steps that should lead to an improvement relative to past seasons, including reaching beyond our usual network to actively search for and recruit BIPOC designers and production staff.

- We will continue our longstanding policy of “favored nations” for our artists, paying the same rate to each actor, the same rate to each director, and the same rate to each designer, regardless of union status.

IN OUR ORGANIZATION

- **In the 2020/2021 Season, every new board member will increase the board's racial or ethnic diversity.** Additionally, we will work with our community to develop and implement strategies to further diversify our board.

In the 2020/2021 Season, we added two board members, both of whom are BIPOC. At the end of the 2020/2021 Season, with some board members stepping down after long service, the percentage of BIPOC board members is

increasing to 31%, though the percentage of female board members has decreased. For the 2021/2022 Season, every new board member will increase the board's racial, ethnic, or gender diversity.

Revised commitment:

- *In the 2021/2022 Season, every new board member will increase the board's racial, ethnic, or gender diversity. Additionally, we will work with our community to develop and implement strategies to further diversify our board.*
- We have eliminated the minimum financial contribution for board members and will continue to work to diversify the board across socioeconomic lines, making the board more representative of our whole community.
- We will continue regular **anti-bias and anti-oppression training** for our staff and board.

We engaged a new consultant for this work, and held trainings with staff and board. Our current budget allows for annual trainings; we are actively seeking additional funding to increase this work.

- We're replacing the phrase "Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion" with "Confronting and Dismantling Oppression" throughout our organization.

Revised commitment:

- *We have replaced the phrase "Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion" with "Confronting and Dismantling Oppression" throughout our organization, to reflect that this work is an active, intentional, and ongoing process.*
- We will continue holding monthly volunteer **Confronting and Dismantling Oppression meetings** with staff and board participation.

This has become a monthly Community CDO Meeting, with participation from board, staff, advisory council, and Aurora artists.

Revised Commitment:

- *We will continue holding monthly **Community CDO meetings**, with participation from staff, board, leadership, artists, and Advisory Council.*
- We have created a **Confronting and Dismantling Oppression Task Force** composed of staff and board members, including the Artistic and Managing Directors and a member of the board Executive Committee.
The Task Force has been meeting monthly to set priorities, allocate funding, and implement plans for Aurora's CDO work, with inspiration from the [We See You White American Theatre demands](#) and the [Bay Area Accountability Workgroup](#)
- We report on and discuss anti-racism and anti-oppression activities as a regular part of our staff and board meetings.
- We will view our **strategic planning** process through an anti-racist and anti-oppressive lens, and will include a section on anti-racism and anti-oppression in our new strategic plan.

The formal strategic planning process has been on hold due to the uncertainties caused by the pandemic and by the departure of our Managing Director. We hope to restart this process after our new Managing Director is in place.

- In July 2020, we adopted a new **mission and values** statement that includes a commitment to anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices.
- We will review and revise our **employee handbook and all internal policies** through an anti-racist and anti-oppressive lens.

This has been delayed by the departure of our Managing Director. We hope to proceed with substantive work on this as soon as possible.

- We will review and revise our **job posting language and hiring policies** through an anti-racist and anti-oppressive lens.

We have reviewed and revised our job posting language and hiring policies through an anti-racist and anti-oppressive lens. For our current Managing Director search, we have engaged a BIPOC-led search firm to assist us in ensuring an equitable process.

Revised Commitment:

- *We commit to a continuous evaluation of our job posting language and hiring policies, to foster an anti-racist and anti-oppressive lens in all of our hiring practices.*
- We commit to demonstrating more transparency on how our values are manifested in our work, beginning with making our [audit reports](#) easily accessible on our website, and continuing with posting our overall annual budget. *Our audit reports are accessible on our website [here](#). We have not yet posted our 990s or our overall annual budget, but we hope to do so soon.*
- [Artistic Director Josh Costello](#) and [Managing Director Julie Saltzman Kellner](#) commit to listening without exhibiting defensive behavior when we are called out for failing to embody anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices.

Revised Commitment:

- *[Artistic Director Josh Costello](#) and [Interim Managing Director Sharon Dolan](#) commit to listening without exhibiting defensive behavior when we are called out for failing to embody anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices.*
- Josh and Julie commit to not using our fear of getting it wrong as an excuse to stay silent.

Revised Commitment:

- *Josh and Sharon commit to not using our fear of getting it wrong as an excuse to stay silent.*
- We commit to reviewing and evaluating our progress at least twice each year and sharing the results publicly, holding ourselves accountable to the commitments in this list.