



AURORA THEATRE COMPANY

CONFRONTING AND DISMANTLING OPPRESSION: AURORA'S COMMITMENTS AND ACTIONS FEBRUARY 2023 UPDATE

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 fifth 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.

In the first half of our 2022/2023 Season, we continued our partnership with UC Berkeley's Future Histories Lab, including a UC Berkeley night with a professor as guest speaker for our production of COLONIALISM IS TERRIBLE, BUT PHO IS DELICIOUS. We also plan to continue our partnership with the Bay Area Women's Theatre Festival, hosting readings in spring 2023. We worked with AAPI Youth Rising, a potential new Community Partner, on our AAPI Night for COLONIALISM IS TERRIBLE, BUT PHO IS DELICIOUS, and YouthSpeaks for our African Diaspora Affinity Night for PARADISE BLUE.

IN OUR LOBBY

- Our expanded **Theatre For Everyone** statement, posted in our lobby 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.
We shared the video of our most recent Front of House training with our new box office staff, and reiterated our CDO-related policies to our volunteer usher pool, but we have not yet held a live training for Front of House staff this season.
- We have created **clear guidelines for front-of-house staff** for responding to microaggressions, racist behavior, and questions about our policies, and we will continue to update and revise these guidelines based on new learning and information.
- 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

- 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.
We received feedback from BIPOC artists that the sharing of this policy sheet led to a feeling of Aurora as a safe space.
- At least three of the six plays we produce each season will be **written by BIPOC playwrights**.
In our 22/23 Season, we are producing four plays, two 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 2022/2023, two of our four playwrights are women.
- We will continue our commitment that at least three of the six plays we produce each season will be **directed by women**.
In 2022/2023, two of our four directors will be women.

- We will actively seek out plays by **transgender, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming playwrights**.
While this is in progress and we are reading more plays by transgender, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming playwrights, we aspire to do more and we are actively searching out such plays. We invite transgender, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming playwrights to [submit to Aurora](#) – and we recognize that this invitation in itself does not satisfy this commitment.
- We will continue to **commission and develop scripts by BIPOC playwrights**.
We presented the world premiere of COLONIALISM IS TERRIBLE, BUT PHO IS DELICIOUS by Dustin Chinn, an Asian-American playwright, following a zoom reading of the script during the pandemic shutdown. We brought Dustin to Berkeley for the entire rehearsal process, including an extra week made possible by the Edgerton Award.
- We will increase the percentage of **BIPOC designers and production staff** working on our productions.
The overall percentage of BIPOC designers and production staff working on our productions has increased since the pandemic began and since we made this commitment. We have taken steps that should lead to improvement (particularly relative to pre-pandemic 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 2022/2023 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.
If you or someone you know is interested in board service, please contact us at info@auroratheatre.org.
- 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 held staff workshops with a new consultant in fall of 2022, focusing on avoiding burnout. We have not held a board training in some time; we are working to build a sustainable model for regular/ongoing trainings.

- 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 **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 meets 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 are currently switching from monthly CDO Task Force meetings to quarterly meetings, to reflect members’ availability. We plan to cover as much ground in the quarterly meetings as we have been in the monthly meetings, and will supplement with increased communication between meetings.
- 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.
Our Season Planning process began with a retreat that included staff, board, and members of our Advisory Council. This process is on hold due to staff turnover.
- In July 2020, we adopted a new **mission and values** statement that includes a commitment to anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices.
- We have reviewed and revised our **employee handbook and all internal policies** through an anti-racist and anti-oppressive lens.
- 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 Artistic and Managing Directors commit to listening without exhibiting defensive behavior when we are called out for failing to embody anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices.
- Our Artistic and Managing Directors 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.