



CONFRONTING DISMANTLING OPPRESSION: AURORA'S COMMITMENTS AND ACTIONS

February 2021

In 2020, Aurora announced a series of commitments towards confronting and dismantling oppression in our organization. As we were drafting this first semiannual update and report on those commitments, our nation's Capitol was attacked in a brazen and treasonous threat to our democratic process under direction from the former president, including complicity and participation from law enforcement personnel and members of congress. We are struck by this example of white supremacy, which manifests itself in all aspects of our society -- the political, the social, and the interpersonal.

By confronting and dismantling systems of oppression within our organization, we seek to leverage our position as storyteller to our community to contribute to the dismantling of systemic oppression throughout our society.

The original 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 entered into a new Community Partnership with Laney College's FUSION Theatre Project, though meaningful work is still forthcoming. We've taken early steps towards building relationships with other community organizations through Aurora Connects and our Advisory Council. Plans are in the works for the Community Partners program to be closely involved with our next Originate+Generate Commission, a new play from Cleavon Smith.*
- Our 2020 annual fundraiser surpassed its income goal, and we will **donate a percentage of that surplus income** to organizations dedicated to anti-racism

and anti-oppression. 10% of past-goal income will go to the Fund for Black Theatre in the U.S., and 10% to Black Futures Lab.

- **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 plan to continue this commitment by donating a percentage of post-goal income from our 2021 annual fundraising event to community organizations.

IN OUR LOBBY

- We will continue to center our [Commitment to the Community](#), which is intended to discourage microaggressions in our lobby and theatre so that everyone feels welcome in our space. We will review and revise the text of the Commitment as our understanding deepens and our situation changes.
 - **Revised commitment:**
*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 will continue regular **anti-bias and anti-oppression training** for front-of-house staff, including bystander intervention training.
 - *This remains our plan, but we have temporarily deprioritized trainings for front-of-house staff because it will still be many months before we have audiences in our space. We have temporarily diverted the funding that we would have spent on these trainings towards other work with a consultant around our strategies for confronting and dismantling oppression.*
- We will create **clear guidelines for front-of-house staff** for responding to microaggressions, racist behavior, and questions about our policies.
 - *This remains our plan. We have engaged a consultant to help with this and all our strategies for confronting and dismantling oppression.*
- 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 will be hosting a follow-up conversation about microaggressions in public spaces, including virtual spaces, as an episode of [Aurora Connects](#) this spring.*

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.
 - *[A preliminary version of this](#) has been completed and implemented. As a part of this work, 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 has been 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. This commitment remains in place for future seasons.*
- 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 is female, and the novelist and adaptor are both female. This commitment remains in place for future seasons.*
- 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 is directed by a woman. This commitment remains in place for future seasons.*
- 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.*
- 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.

- **New commitment:**

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.
 - *We have added no new board members since making this commitment. Potential BIPOC board members are being cultivated.*
- 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 have engaged a new consultant for this work, with initial strategy meetings currently being scheduled. 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.
- 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 and is currently working on the We See You White American Theatre Demands and other projects.*
- We will report on and discuss anti-racism and anti-oppression activities as a regular part of our staff and board meetings.
 - *This has been happening and will continue.*

- 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. We hope to restart this process within this calendar year.*
- 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.
 - *We are in the very beginning phases of this process and hope to proceed with substantive work on this in 2021.*
- We will review and revise our **job posting language and hiring policies** through an anti-racist and anti-oppressive lens.
 - *We hope to accomplish this in 2021.*
- **New Commitment:**
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.
- [Artistic Director Josh Costello](#) and [Managing Director Julie Saltzman Kellner](#) commit to listening without defensiveness when we are called out for failing to embody anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices.
 - **Revised Commitment based on feedback:**
[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.
- Josh and Julie commit to not using our fear of getting it wrong as an excuse to stay silent.
 - *Josh and Julie have continued to engage with this work. We have certainly gotten things wrong, and we've done our best to make things right. We will continue.*
- 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.
 - *This is our first update. Expect another in the summer of 2021.*