



AURORA THEATRE COMPANY

CONFRONTING AND DISMANTLING OPPRESSION: AURORA'S COMMITMENTS AND ACTIONS Update February 2022

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, and our second in August 2021. This is our third 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.
- 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.

There will be no 30th Anniversary Fundraising event or Supernova in 2021/2022. We hope to restart this commitment in 2022/2023.

IN OUR LOBBY

- Our **Theatre For Everyone** statement, posted in our lobby, our programs, and on 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've added a new bullet point addressing audience reactions, and posted an updated and redesigned version in our lobby.

- We will continue regular **anti-bias and anti-oppression training** for front-of-house staff, including bystander intervention training.
Our next training for front-of-house staff is now being scheduled, and will happen prior to opening of our next production.
- We will create **clear guidelines for front-of-house staff** for responding to microaggressions, racist behavior, and questions about our policies.
Revised Commitment:
 - *We have created a new set of guidelines for front-of-house staff for responding to microaggressions, racist behavior, and questions about our policies, and have incorporated them into the training process for front-of-house staff.*
- 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.
- At least three of the six plays we produce each season will be **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**.
- We will continue our commitment that at least three of the six plays we produce each season will be **directed by women**.
For our 2021/2022 season, we are producing only five plays, three of which are written by BIPOC playwrights, three by women, and three directed by women. Our 2022/2023 Season will feature four plays, two by BIPOC playwrights, two by women, and two directed by women. Our production of THIS MUCH I KNOW is counted among the five plays of the 2021/2022 Season despite its rescheduling to September of 2022.
- 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 2020/2021 Originate+Generate commission recipient, and will be presenting the world premiere of his commissioned play, THE INCREMENTALIST, this spring, following multiple developmental readings and workshops. We will be presenting one world premiere of a play by a BIPOC playwright in 2022/2023.*
- We will increase the percentage of **BIPOC designers and production staff** working on our productions. *We are taking steps to recruit more BIPOC designers and production staff, including reaching beyond our usual network. Slightly more than 50% of the designers in our 2021/2022 Season are BIPOC.*
- 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 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. *The racial diversity of the board has increased by one new member so far this season.*
- 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. *In 2021/2022, World Trust provided a short series of workshops with the Aurora staff. We are planning a board training in spring of 2022 as well as a new round of mediated conversations with staff to address issues specific to our organization.*
- We have replaced the phrase “Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion” with “**Confronting and Dismantling Oppression**” (CDO) 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 **CDO 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 plan 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 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 engaged a BIPOC-led search firm to help us find our next Managing Director through a process that deliberately worked against white supremacy culture.

- 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 and 990s are accessible on our website [here](#).

- 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 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.