



**CONFRONTING AND DISMANTLING OPPRESSION:
AURORA'S COMMITMENTS AND ACTIONS
October 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 sixth report.

This report is late; due to various factors we were unable to prioritize writing this report in a timely manner; see below for more on this.

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 second half of our 2022/2023 Season, we held a BIPOC Poetry Night in conjunction with our production of CYRANO, and a LGBTQIA+ Affinity Night, partnering with PFLAG, in conjunction with our production of HURRICANE DIANE. We continued our partnership with the Bay Area Women's Theatre Festival

So far in 2023/2024, we partnered with the California Shakespeare Theatre around our production of BORN WITH TEETH, with Phillipa Kelly from Cal Shakes serving as dramaturg on our production. We held a Theatre Community Night with Clive Worsley of Cal Shakes and Melissa Hillman of Theatre Bay Area speaking about the need for collaboration between theaters at this continuing moment of crisis. We held our first Aurora INsights town hall event, with leaders from the Berkeley Public Library discussing Art under Authoritarianism.

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.
The statement posted in our lobby is overdue for an update; it does not reflect our current mission and the updated statement. We hope to update this signage soon.
- We will continue regular **anti-bias and anti-oppression training** for front-of-house staff, including bystander intervention training.
We did not hold a live training for Front of House staff during our 2022/2023 Season, but we did implement online trainings on microaggressions and cultural competency for all Aurora employees, including front-of-house staff.
- 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.
- At least three of the six plays we produce each season will be **written by BIPOC playwrights**.
In our 22/23 Season, we produced four plays, two of which were written by BIPOC playwrights. In our 23/24 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 2022/2023, two of our four playwrights were women. In 2023/2024, three of our five plays are 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**.
In 2022/2023, two of our four directors were women. In 2023/2024, three of our five directors are 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 commissioned hip hop theatre troupe Felonious, with 50% BIPOC members, to write an original piece for Aurora through our Originate+Generate new play development program. Felonious will be performing as our 2023 Cabaret production, including pieces being written for their commission.
- 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 implemented online **Microaggression and Cultural Competency trainings** for all Aurora employees. We will include the board in these trainings going forward.*
- 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.
Due to scheduling challenges, the CDO Task Force has not met since early last spring; we will be meeting in November and we have a new plan to ensure that quarterly meetings will happen going forward.
- 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 Strategic Planning process is on hold for now due to sustained uncertainty.
- 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.

This update was due in August, and is late. We are still planning to release an update twice each year.