



**CONFRONTING AND DISMANTLING OPPRESSION:
AURORA'S COMMITMENTS AND ACTIONS
August 2022 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 fourth report.

The text of our commitments is presented first, with updates added in *Blue 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 the Bay Area Women's Theatre Festival, hosting a series of BAWTF staged readings in our space. We also deepened our relationship with UC Berkeley's Future Histories Lab, with students attending our production of THE INCREMENTALIST and the director (Dawn Monique Williams, who also leads our Community Partners Program) holding discussions with the participants. Susan Moffat, the head of the Future Histories Lab, has joined Aurora's Advisory Council.
- 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.
After two years of not holding an annual gala due to COVID and related challenges, we are acknowledging our failure to make good on this commitment

and retiring it from this list. We hope to reinstate it in some form in the future, particularly if we plan to return to the Supernova model, or in some other form.

IN OUR LOBBY

- Our [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 have expanded our Theatre For Everyone statement based on our learnings since originally posting it in 2019.
- We will continue regular **anti-bias and anti-oppression training** for front-of-house staff, including bystander intervention training.
We held two trainings for front-of-house staff over the course of this season, which included policies for responding to microaggressions in our space. We are planning our next training for ushers and front-of-house staff prior to the opening of the 22/23 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.
Before and during the pandemic, we held two [Town Halls on Audience Interactions](#), exploring what theatres can do to discourage microaggressions, including microaggressions among our audience members. These Town Halls inspired the guidelines and trainings noted above. We will continue to actively consider and explore what we can do to discourage microaggressions.

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 are continuing to share the updated policy sheet per this commitment.

- At least three of the six plays we produce each season will be **written by BIPOC playwrights**.

In our 2021/2022 season, including one play which has been moved to our 2022/2023 fiscal year due to Omicron, we are producing five plays, three of which are 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 2021/2022, three of our five playwrights are female. In 2022/2023, two of our four 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 2021/2022, three of our five directors are 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 have read some 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](#).

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

Cleavon Smith, a Black playwright, was our most recent Originate+Generate commission recipient, and we produced the world premiere of his commissioned play, THE INCREMENTALIST (formerly titled THAT'S WHAT WE'RE WAITING TO FIND OUT), in our 2021/2022 Season following extensive developmental work. In 2022/2023, we are presenting 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 last year.

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

The overall percentage of BIPOC designers and production staff greatly increased in our 2020/2021 Season, but that was a season with many fewer positions and we were not able to maintain that year's percentage when we

returned to full production in 2021/2022. We are taking 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.

OR

The overall percentage of BIPOC designers and production staff working on our productions has increased greatly 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 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.
At the end of the 2020/2021 Season, the percentage of BIPOC board members increased to 31%. At the end of the 2021/2022 Season, the percentage of BIPOC board members is 42%. We will continue this commitment in the 2022/2023 Season. 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 have scheduled staff workshops with a new consultant for this Fall. We did not hold a board training in Spring 2022; 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 are having a conversation about the phrase “Confronting and Dismantling

Oppression” (CDO) that we adopted when initializing these commitments. “Confronting” and “dismantling” focus on the negatives we’re trying to move away from, and not the positives we’re trying to build. “Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion” is focused on the positive, but has become a catchphrase that is often used to oversimplify this work.

- 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 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 strategic planning process was delayed by the pandemic and the departure of some key staff members, but it will begin again this fall.
- 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.
Our new employee handbook was finalized this month. We will continue using an anti-racist and anti-oppressive lens when evaluating and updating all of our policies.
- 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. *Financial information is accessible on our website [here](#).*
- Artistic Director Josh Costello and Managing Director Francesca Gabourel commit to listening without exhibiting defensive behavior when we are called out for failing to embody anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices.
- Josh and Francesca 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.