



March 12, 2021

An Update from Theatre Washington

Theatre Washington Community,

I wanted to update you on Theatre Washington's ongoing process to examine our workplace values, evaluate how our institution has operated to support structural racism and how to end those practices, and how we're working with partner organizations to create a more anti-racist and anti-oppressive community. These are the two primary components of that work:

- In August 2020, we contracted with Young Playwrights' Theatre, who have a program called AROW (Abolishing Racism And Oppression in the Workplace), to help us examine ourselves as an institution and to work with us in our capacity as a convener of the local theatre industry to examine other institutions and workplaces.
- In January 2021, 35 Washington theatres signed on for a new program, *The Community of Practice* – regular conversations and training about how to dismantle structural racism, led by AROW.

Like many institutions, we wanted to investigate how Theatre Washington could change systems and build new structures that serve our community more inclusively by looking at the values we hold and how we ensure those values permeate our culture and programs. As a tool for and as a result of these reflections, **Theatre Washington has done the following:**

- Conducted a survey of staff, board of directors, committee members, contractors, Helen Hayes Awards judges, and area theatre leadership to gather information about practices and policies related to Theatre Washington's organizational culture, leadership, hiring, and programs, to receive direct feedback about their experiences, impressions and receive recommendations for change
- Shared an initial report of those survey findings back to those stakeholders which offered many examples of how we needed to do better in particular if we were to help build a more inclusive and equitable theatre arts industry in the Washington, DC-region that reflects and engages the entire community
- Drafted and implemented a non-retaliation policy for employees and contractors
- Examining our institutional values to reorient as an anti-oppressive and anti-racist organization
- Committed to an examination of our structures including the Board of Directors, Advisory Board, Committees, and Helen Hayes Award judges – how they are formed, how decisions are made, and what their relationship is to one another and the community
- Building a new website, which will be a more responsive communication tool for the theatre community



On February 9, 2021, Theatre Washington and AROW held the first of six workshops for ***The Community of Practice series with 35 Washington, DC-area theatres to further develop anti-racist and anti-oppressive organizations.*** The goal is to work towards creating an accountable community that can actively address structural racism and oppression.

In the meeting, AROW provided a framework, thoughts, and tools for how to lead productive conversations about racism. They discussed levels of racism – personal, interpersonal, institutional, and structural and barriers to antiracism. Participating organizations self-evaluated their current state of change as performative, reflective, or productive. Before our next session, all 35 organizations, including Theatre Washington, have committed to a dialogue with their staff and Board about their position on the [*Continuum for Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization.*](#)

In upcoming sessions, we will talk about how to reduce the harm of oppression within office culture, rehearsal rooms, board rooms, and theater spaces. We want to develop deep, supportive relationships with peers and share a commitment to anti-racism and anti-oppression for the community. We want this to be a beginning of an exchange of resources and holding one another accountable.

As *The Community of Practice* continues and evolves, we are committed to providing an open update after each session, as we know that transparency and open communication is inherent in successful change.

In the meantime, I welcome you to share your thoughts, feedback, and questions with me. I can be reached at austin@theatrewashington.org.

In gratitude,
Amy Austin
President & CEO
Theatre Washington