



Expressing our intent to be an anti-racist organization was an important step in Steep's ongoing work to create a truly welcoming and inclusive space for theatre and conversation. It is also a critical part of how we see our role as a community-focused arts organization. Like any goal, becoming an anti-racist organization isn't something that happens simply by stating a desire. Over eighteen months, a group of Steep ensemble, board, and staff members, with the help of a wonderful consultant, explored every thread in the fabric of our operation with an eye towards anti-racism, anti-bias, and inclusion. The result of that work is a series of 134 specific action items that support 32 organizational commitments, allowing us to live our values every day while we build new practices and dismantle ideas we once took for granted. This is our script for the years ahead, and we are grateful to be doing this work.

This plan is a living document. It is thorough, and it is imperfect. It will take years to implement, and over that time it will evolve and grow as we work and learn together. We are developing, and will continue to refine, internal methods of holding ourselves accountable to this work and to live up to the commitments that we make to ourselves, to you, and to every artist and audience member who joins us in our artistic home and in our art.

We welcome your input, questions, and feedback, now and long into the future. We look forward to keeping you up to date on our progress and our challenges as we build a more equitable, inclusive, and anti-racist Steep.

-Steep Theatre

Commitments and Action Items

Organizational Structure

Commitment 1: Create company structure and a five-year plan to build out staff in support of ensemble's artistic goals and to promote ensemble leadership.

1. Create a multi-year staffing plan that includes the creation of new paid positions, including at a minimum: Artistic Director, Associate Artistic Director, Production Manager, Marketing Manager.*
2. Define the volunteer expectations are for ensemble members, including flexibility in commitment, by evaluating models of ensemble membership that allow for different levels of engagement and expectation.*

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3. Consider eliminating the expectation of ensemble volunteer labor.
4. Create ensemble bylaws to include Artistic Director succession plan and hiring process; new ensemble member selection and onboarding process; articulation of roles and expectations; and detailed organizational structure allowing members to understand who to approach for what, and what roles are available to take more leadership within ensemble.
5. Create an Associate Artistic Director position, and ensure that the Artistic Team (including Artistic Director and Associate Artistic Director(s)) includes at least 50% BIPOC representation.
6. Create a system for ensemble management, communication, and engagement.
7. Articulate and codify the role of the Ensemble Council.*

Commitment 2: Level power dynamic in ensemble culture by committing to de-centering ensemble status in service of the art, paying particular attention to de-centering whiteness, cis-ness, heteronormativity. Acknowledge that ensemble culture is, by its nature, exclusionary and take active efforts to create an equitable space by decentering ourselves in the process, while supporting the work of the play.

1. Craft language for first rehearsals to articulate this commitment to guest artists.*
2. Establish clear shared language among the ensemble around diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, and accessibility (DEIBA) work and expectations around ensemble support of a process with yearly meetings to support continued growth and focus on our shared anti-racism values.*
3. Maintain the process of selecting a Non-Equity Deputy from outside the ensemble to insure a safe pathway of reporting of potential wrongdoing within the process.*

Commitment 3: Provide regular DEIBA training and accountability throughout the organization.

1. Provide and require annual theatre-focused DEIBA education for the Board, Executive Director, and Artistic Director and develop an accountability mechanism to record and ensure annual participation.*
2. Require theatre-focused DEIBA education for all ensemble members prior to their participation in a Steep production and develop an accountability mechanism to record and ensure annual participation.^
3. Make DEIBA education available to guest artists and contractors at least once per production.
4. Include status reports on this action plan in the agenda for all company and board meetings.*
5. Write an organizational anti-racism statement to be published online and read at all first rehearsals, board meetings, and ensemble meetings.*
6. Continue regular anti-racism learning group meetings, which are open to ensemble, board, and staff members.*

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Commitment 4: Codify processes for transparency, safety, and harm acknowledgement.

1. Create intervention/disruption protocols for harmful moments. These protocols will be applicable both within and outside of production work.
2. Expand our production-specific concern resolution path to support non-production-related concerns - create safe and effective channels within the organization for support and resolution.*
3. Publish our annual budget online.**
4. Post the results of our annual vendor audit online including the percentage of the budget spent with BIPOC-led businesses compared to white-led businesses and the total earned by BIPOC artists and staff compared to white artists and staff.**

Commitment 5: Engage in equitable hiring practices and succession planning.

1. Create a transparent process for establishing staff compensation levels and increases.
2. Create a transparent process for leadership (Artistic and Executive Director) searches. If using a search firm, ensure that the firm has BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and/or other historically marginalized representation.
3. Create and implement an annual 360 review process for Executive and Artistic Directors. Ensure BIPOC representation among participants in the review.
4. Develop succession plans for Executive and Artistic Directors.*
5. Publish salaries for all posted positions.*
6. Develop and implement anti-racism and anti-bias procedures for new Ensemble member nominating and voting processes.

Board of Directors

Commitment 6: Make space on the board for new board members.

1. Convene the Membership Committee.**
2. Identify two board members who will step aside, and create those vacancies by August 2021.**
3. Establish board membership term limits to generate urgency in board recruitment efforts and create organic leadership turnover.**

Commitment 7: Improve transparency with the ensemble.

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1. Put together a presentation and materials about the purpose of the board, what it does and does not do, and a summary of why people serve on boards (what they bring to non-profits boards and what they get out of it).*
2. Work with ensemble members to create a plan to improve communication and collaboration between the board and the ensemble.*
3. Explore the creation of Board and Ensemble Liaison positions.*
4. Begin or continue communication with recently-identified candidates for Board membership.*

Commitment 8: Actively recruit diverse candidates for board membership with the goal of adding two new board members per fiscal year.

1. Update materials regarding the guidelines and expectations for board membership including materials about the purpose of the board, what it does and does not do, and the benefits of membership.*
2. Update/post online content about board membership and recruitment (VolunteerMatch, Steep's website, etc.).*

Commitment 9: Develop an anti-racist structure of board governance and operations.

1. Review and revise board rules and processes regarding board membership terms and expectations.*
2. Evaluate the impact of Robert's Rules of Order and consider alternative meeting procedures.
3. Re-establish an ongoing process of including ensemble members in board meetings (an updated version of the "ensemble guest").*

Commitment 10: Work toward Board membership demographics that reflect the diversity of Steep's neighborhood and the City of Chicago.

1. Maintain ongoing board recruitment activities with the intention of adding two new members to the board each fiscal year.*
2. Create a detailed action plan for new board member recruitment efforts in order to build a pipeline of prospective members.*
3. Regularly update the self-reported census of board member demographics.*
4. Consider creating board seats to be held by ensemble members.
5. Expand board recruitment activities according to the created action plan.

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Artistic Programming

Commitment 11: Establish an expanded timeline of artistic and production decision-making in order to prioritize an inclusive process.

1. Articulate script-selection, budgeting, hiring, and pre-production deadlines.**
2. Provide all directors with this action plan and ensure that they have the time to review the plan prior to committing to a production.**

Commitment 12: Achieve diversity in script selection across the season with a commitment to intersectionality by programming plays outside cis-white-able-bodied centered stories.

1. Ensure that at least 50% of all plays produced, workshopped, or otherwise presented are written by BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and/or other historically marginalized playwrights.^
2. Connect with literary agents who represent more BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and/or other historically marginalized playwrights.*
3. Make script selection intentions known to agents we have relationships with, ask for introductions to BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and/or other historically marginalized playwrights we may not know.*
4. Forge relationships through Steep playwriting classes.*
5. Support ensemble writer projects with workshop opportunities.
6. Structure a process for new relationships to become more established, exploring what Steep can provide and how we can be of service.
7. Commit to intersectionality by programming plays outside cis-white-able-bodied centered stories - prioritizing the programming of plays centered on BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and/or other historically marginalized stories.*

Commitment 13: Achieve diversity in artistic and production hiring across the season with a commitment to intersectionality by cultivating ongoing relationships with BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and other historically marginalized artists and by dismantling barriers to entry based on ideas about professionalism and industry standards.

1. Ensure that at least 50% of all plays produced, workshopped, or otherwise presented are directed by BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and/or other historically marginalized directors.^
2. Create and maintain a directory of designers, directors, dramaturgs, and other production personnel with whom we are developing relationships.
3. Create opportunities for ensemble members to attend shows and showcases and share names of artists with Steep for consideration and relationship-building.

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4. Initiate regular and ongoing conversations with BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and other historically marginalized designers, stage managers, and other production personnel.*
5. Develop meaningful and reciprocal relationships with BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and other historically marginalized directors.*
6. Debrief with assistant designers and directors as part of the post-mortem process, asking about their experiences on the production and their interest in future work at Steep.*
7. Create an opportunity to direct a reading for each assistant director after the conclusion of their assisting work.
8. Develop a process for providing transparency about current cast and artistic team membership whenever new offers are made.*

Commitment 14: Restructure the casting department with a focus on equity and inclusion, creating capacity for year-round work of attending workshops and shows, and de-prioritizing higher education as an artist selection criterium.

1. Create two paid casting positions, ensuring that at least one is BIPOC.
2. Codify commitments to attending showcases/shows, prioritizing those that feature historically marginalized and otherwise underrepresented artists.
3. Create a written Inclusive Casting Commitment to be co-signed by the Artistic Director, Casting Team, and Director for each production to ensure that all roles are being considered through an inclusive lens.

Commitment 15: Honor the cultural specificity of BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and other historically marginalized stories and honor how BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and other historically marginalized artists want to tell these stories.

1. Yield power in the rehearsal room to those who share a cultural context with the work.*
2. Support the training of interested ensemble members in the cultural consultant role.*
3. Hire cultural consultants when programming BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and other historically marginalized stories, particularly when directed by someone from outside of that cultural context.^

Commitment 16: Create transparency and ensemble inclusion in season selection process.

1. Establish a process of formal communication around season selection, which will include sharing scripts and introducing playwrights. Discuss this process with the ensemble in order to identify knowledge gaps and artistic hopes as well as managing expectations.*
2. Hold an annual "vision board" / creative retreat in the late summer; and a meeting around project planning in January.

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Production Process

Commitment 17: Support artists of color working on culturally sensitive material.

1. Hire violence and intimacy choreographers with cultural sensitivity training, prioritizing BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and other historically marginalized representation.^
2. Connect with violence and intimacy choreographers we know and support their training.
3. Initiate conversations with new violence and intimacy choreographers, specifically those who prioritize anti-racism and anti-bias work in their practice.

Commitment 18: Support equitable budgeting across and within productions.

1. Create a checklist for Production Managers to use to determine a play's budgeting and staffing needs and ensure equity across departments.
2. Adjust pay schedules to increase frequency of fee payments to align with union requirements.**
3. Create a budgeting system designed to be responsive to the specific needs of each production rather than budgeting materials and support equally across all productions to ensure that new work and plays requiring additional consultants or expertise get the support they need.*
4. Solicit ensemble input in the annual budgeting process.*

Commitment 19: Prioritize supportive working conditions for all production departments.

1. Provide a copy of this anti-racism action plan to all guest artists at the time of contract offer and again during artist onboarding.*
2. Clarify and put limits on time commitment requirements (i.e. limit post-show production meetings to 45 minutes and eliminate 10/12 days).*
3. Update the artist welcome packet to include language around consent, intimacy, violence, and physical engagement.*
4. Update the guest artist onboarding process to include collection of self-reported demographic data.*
5. Ensure that all concern resolution paths include points of contact who represent BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and other historically marginalized identities.
6. Create an EDI Officer position as a part of the production team, articulate this position's roles and responsibilities, and hire someone in this position for all productions.

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7. Create a protocol for giving BIPOC performers input into their hair and makeup design and for providing Black performers with necessary hair and makeup products. Communicate this intent in production artist onboarding.*
8. Budget for necessary hair and makeup products and technicians for Black artists.*
9. Ensure that all costume and/or hair and makeup designers have experience and training in working with Black hair and/or that a qualified assistant or hairdresser is hired to support this work.
10. Budget for design assistants and/or technical labor support for all design departments.

Commitment 20: Hold ourselves accountable by prioritizing ongoing evaluation and learning.

1. Conduct a post-mortem evaluation for each production with particular attention paid to anti-racism, anti-bias, and DEIBA commitments.*
2. Maintain practice of conducting annual anonymous experience surveys of guest artists.*
3. Report out on post-mortems and surveys at regular ensemble and board meetings.*
4. Ensure that all production meetings include time to explore opportunities to more effectively support anti-racism commitments and goals.*

Audience Experience

Commitment 21: Acknowledge past harms.

1. Create a physical land acknowledgement in the lobby of the new space.
2. Research the migration of Black and Indigenous peoples within Chicago, specifically the history of the neighborhood we will be moving into.
3. Research meaningful ways to recognize the history of unpaid Black labor.*
4. Print a land acknowledgement and an acknowledgement of unpaid Black labor in production programs. Both can be responsive and dynamic based on each production.*
5. Develop relationships with Indigenous organizations in the community around the new space.
6. In collaboration with Indigenous organizations, find ways for our space and programming to be of service to Indigenous people.
7. Include a land acknowledgement at the beginning of all first rehearsals.*
8. Issue a public statement about this plan, including the items we plan to accomplish this year. Make the full plan available online.*

Commitment 22: Create an anti-racist, anti-bias bar and lobby experience.

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1. Write an anti-racism action plan for bar operations.
2. Prioritize vendors that are owned and/or led by BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and/or other historically marginalized individuals.

Commitment 23: Cultivate anti-racist relationships with journalists.

1. Include an anti-racism statement in press kits.*
2. Get more information from directors earlier in the process about what the show is about so that we can set expectations and frameworks for reviewers.
3. Write a policy for responding to reviewers who make problematic comments in reviews.*
4. Write an internal statement about our relationship with the media.

Commitment 24: Eliminate perceived dependence on influential white journalist(s) and similar gatekeepers.

1. Identify BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and other historically marginalized reviewers writing about theatre, music, etc. and develop relationships around both plays and Boxcar shows.
2. Figure out ways to cultivate and empower young BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and other historically marginalized folks who are interested in pursuing arts criticism.
3. Give exclusives and early access to information to BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and other historically marginalized reviewers.*
4. Consider not submitting ourselves for Jeff awards. If that decision is made, re-allocate those comps to BIPOC audiences. This decision will include research about Jeff award perceptions and impact among artists.*

Commitment 25: Expand upon our long-held commitment to accessible ticket pricing by ensuring an equitable distribution of comp and discount tickets.

1. Maintain the Access Ticket program, which offers 10% of all ticket for \$10 to anyone seeking a discount.*
2. Review the distribution of Access Tickets to maximize impact/equity.
3. Create affinity performances with discounted tickets and supplemental programming for different groups based on the content of each show.
4. Create monthly discounts for various marginalized groups.
5. Create standing discounts for community partners and other groups.
6. Offer free tickets to members of the American Indian tribal community on whose traditional homelands our theatre sits.

Commitment 26: Expand reach of paid advertising in order reach a more diverse audience, and support BIPOC-run journalism.

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1. Identify newsletters and other outlets reaching specific communities within our new neighborhood and purchase ad space therein to promote plays and other events.
2. Contact community groups, churches, and other organizations and build relationships with these groups.
3. Identify neighborhoods for specific outreach, and identify newsletters and outlets that reach those neighborhoods
4. Do not advertise in major media outlets until they achieve racial parity in theatre reviewers.*

Commitment 27: Include more diverse voices in the graphic design process.

1. Contract BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and other historically marginalized graphic designers and/or local artists.
2. Include playwrights, directors, and cultural consultants in the show-specific graphic design process.*
3. Create limited edition artist buttons for each show as a way to engage BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and other historically marginalized visual artists.

Commitment 28: Make audience seating areas welcoming to all.

1. Cap the number of reserved seats for all performances to create a welcoming space for general admission audiences.*

Commitment 29: Prioritize accessibility in creating our next venue.

1. Plan for consistency and flexibly for accessible seating.
2. Focus on universal design throughout both public and artist spaces.

Commitment 30: Prioritize inclusivity in creating our next venue.

1. Ensure BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and/or other historically marginalized representation on all design/creative teams working on the new venue.
2. Establish a process for reviewing design decisions through an inclusivity and accessibility lens, including as many perspectives in this process as possible.

Commitment 31: Promote inclusivity and experiential diversity in the lobby experience.

1. Create space for multiple types of experience (larger group, smaller group, solo, etc.) when designing the new lobby.
2. Train staff, ensemble, and board members in strategies to help guest artists out of unwelcome conversations
3. Train staff in strategies to help prevent audience members from policing one another and other safety interventions.

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4. Print something in the program to help prevent audience members from policing one another.*
5. Create a non-public "back" exit (stage door) for artists who don't want to engage with audiences post-show.

Commitment 32: Revise photo policies with a focus on inclusion and consent.

1. When choosing prior show photos to display inside the theatre, selected images that represent the diversity of our casts to make sure that BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and other historically marginalized artists feel welcome.
2. Get permission from non-ensemble artists before using their images in a promotional (monetized) capacity beyond the original production.*
3. Collect photo releases from all ensemble members for using their images in Steep promotional and fundraising materials.*
4. Credit pictured artists in displayed photos whenever possible.*

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