

Anti-Racism Update: March 2021

In March 2020, we hosted our third internal assessment / anti-racism working session. This conversation centered Production & Design. This session, and the document that follows, are not intended to be exhaustive, but are part of a path towards anti-racist theatre-making.

Participants joined from five different states and two different countries, and included past and present staff and collaborators. The group was composed of designers, producers, directors, actors, dramaturgs, and administrators. More than 50% of the participants were people of color.

>>Two anti-racism working sessions were hosted in December 2020: Performers and Organizational/Leadership. You may view those outcomes [here](#).

A note about our company: we are a fiscally sponsored non-profit established in 2008. We produce on a project-basis (not seasonal). Our annual budget is under \$20,000; it fluctuates when we are in production. We hope that these outcomes may be helpful to other similarly-oriented organizations.

These were our guiding questions, which were used as a lens through which to address various topics:

- How can we ensure the physical and mental well-being of the Black, Indigenous and people of color who are working with us?
- How do we pay design & production positions more equitably?
- Where does white supremacy live in our design, production and tech process? Where/how does it interfere with successful / fulfilling productions and designer relationships?
- How can we reduce or prevent harm in designer/performer working relationships and designer/production team relationships?

CONVERSATION OUTCOMES & POLICIES/ BEST PRACTICES (*in no specific order*):

❑ **Compensation**

We discussed the tendency in Indie theatre to push people to wear multiple hats; designers have been hired for one job and had multiple others added (e.g. sound designer / board opp). This leads to inadequate compensation and burnout.

Here are some solutions:

- ❑ Eliminating unpaid internships.
 - ❑ Beginning in 2020, we committed to taking this action. All positions are paid a small stipend.
- ❑ Establishing clear role descriptions + expectations, outlined in a letter of agreement or contract.
- ❑ Do not add additional roles to a job without additional compensation.

- Consider non-monetary compensation for a person who is asked to take on extra roles, etc., e.g. associate producer credit.
 - Assessing individual designer or production team roles to determine compensation vs. a flat fee across all positions.
 - Identifying hidden costs of a position (e.g. access to drafting technology, soft goods like thread) and work towards compensation.
 - Build in more pre-production time to reduce or prevent harm during tech and compensate accordingly.
 - Transparency in the budget: be transparent with the team about our financial capacity and our budgeting priorities / values.
- Harm Reduction/Prevention**
- Pre-Production
 - Set clear parameters and expectations at the beginning of the collaborative effort. That way people can communicate the needs of the production clearly and with respect.
 - Taking into account the unique needs of each artist and designer.
 - Develop a mutual “language” ahead of tech, so that under high stress, you don’t end up harming each other.
 - Include designers in venue selection, if possible
 - Also: survey the designers for questions they have about the venue, etc.
 - Rehearsal
 - Don’t devalue artist / designer time.
 - E.g. Being called to a rehearsal when you aren’t being utilized for anything. This is demoralizing.
 - Tech
 - Approaching tech with the mindset that things won’t be “right” the first time and that’s ok.
 - Director (and other leadership) setting the tone for tech with a sense of calm
 - Emphasizing problem solving as a team, not as an individual sport.
 - Build in flexibility for the needs of technicians
 - Reduce harm by better check-ins during breaks

Identifying White Supremacy Culture in Production & Design

We approached this portion of the conversation with the acknowledgement that: “Tech is the culmination of all of white supremacy culture.” Just as true is that having a bigger budget doesn’t necessarily solve all of these problems!!

Here are some observations as to where White Supremacy Culture commonly shows up and how to avoid or counteract it:

- ❑ Perfectionism
 - ❑ Perfection finds its way into situations like tech
 - ❑ Getting it right can bring out our worst selves/triggers/etc.
- ❑ Paternalism
 - ❑ Definition: Decision making is clear to those with power & unclear to those without it”
 - ❑ Being mindful of who makes the final say and why, how to include people in the decision making
- ❑ Urgency:
 - ❑ Runs in tandem with paternalism; the urgency of final days in tech and we feel the need to make decisions on the spot
 - ❑ Shifting focus to emphasize the process and quality of how things are done.
- ❑ Worship of the Written Word
 - ❑ Plans are great but we need to be flexible and responsive to reality.

FUTURE STEPS:

- We will be scheduling a session with the current acting ensemble and creative team members to discuss actors and design, especially costume design, hair and makeup.
- We will be developing a **Design/Production Values Statement** which will be shared with all staff / artists. This document will contain clear information about:
 - Communication channels & decision making
 - Conflict resolution and reporting
 - Sustainability goals / values
 - Preferred vendors (developing a list that centers BIPOC businesses)
- We will create an **intake checklist** for designers and/or other production staff; this could be completed online or used as a conversation guide between director and designer to create a foundation for successful collaboration.
- Create a **Tech Guiding Principles document** to hang and share at tech rehearsals to keep ourselves accountable.