

# #WESEEYOUWHITEAMERICAN THEATER PROGRESS MATRIX

## MARCH 2021



On July 8, a collective of multi-generational, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) theatermakers released a “comprehensive but by no means exhaustive” list of demands for the White American Theater. This powerful call-to-action has been a guide over the last seven months in our Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion work. As a companion to our Transparency Report that outlines the values, infrastructure, and processes we will use in guiding our work, we are also sharing this progress matrix specifically addressing the #WeSeeYouWhiteAmericanTheater demands, and including the action steps, practices, and policies in place today at Ars Nova, what we’re working on, and what we’re still discussing and investigating. Like the Demands themselves, our matrix is also a “comprehensive but by no means exhaustive” reflection of all that needs to be done, and undone.

<b>OBJECTIVES</b> (IN ALPHA ORDER)	<b>CURRENT PRACTICES &amp; POLICIES</b>	<b>WORKING ON</b>	<b>INTERROGATING/INVESTIGATING</b>
<p><b>Build an Anti-Racist Learning Environment for Staff &amp; Board</b></p>	<p>Ars Nova’s administrative staff works with a professional consultancy, The Woke Coach, on quarterly anti-racism training for full-time staff, developmental coaching sessions with organizational teams/working groups, and one-on-one executive coaching.</p> <p>Ars Nova’s administrative staff participates in annual bystander intervention training.</p> <p>We have an affinity space for full-time staff that meets weekly for members who identify as BIPOC or Latine/x/a/o.</p> <p>An Equity, Diversity, &amp; Inclusion Task Force was established on our Board of Directors to guide their internal work and trainings.</p> <p>We created a resource center for our staff and board to engage with a collection of articles, podcasts, videos, and more around topics like racism, accessibility, intersectionality, and implicit bias. The resource center also includes our living glossary, providing a shared language for our team on terms like antiracist, accountability, and transparency.</p>	<p>Requiring anti-racism and bystander intervention training, and offering affinity spaces, for part-time employees on the front-of-house and production teams, once we are regularly hiring those positions again.</p> <p>Increase focus on present and historical anti-Blackness in America, and in the arts and entertainment fields, in our self-education efforts.</p> <p>Provide anti-racism and cultural competency training for our Board of Directors, and foster greater inclusivity and equity in the boardroom.</p> <p>Add a commitment to our anti-racism work and our equity, diversity, and inclusion goals to the Board Guidelines.</p>	<p>As new folks are added to the staff and board, how do we onboard them into our ongoing anti-racism training and learning environment?</p> <p>As a predominantly white institution (PWI), how are we in communication with our BIPOC staff about what an anti-racist learning environment means for them?</p>

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<p><b>Build an Inclusive Space for All Audiences &amp; Ensure our Press &amp; Marketing Strategy Serves BIPOC Artists &amp; Audiences</b></p>	<p>As a core tenet of our mission, we aim to keep tickets affordable, with standard tickets for Off-Broadway shows priced at \$35, and \$5-\$15 for Hub or Digital programming.</p> <p>We prioritize a welcoming environment for audiences as a central part of our ethos. All front-of-house positions are filled with paid part-time staff members, trained in our Core Values and standards of customer service.</p> <p>We deliberately seek out audiences who may not be regular theatergoers by undertaking face-to-face marketing initiatives and outreach.</p> <p>Journalist names are always credited alongside the outlet in pull quotes.</p> <p>All audience development and marketing consultants are credited in show programs and on our website.</p> <p>We engage core creative artists in conversation about the words and images they want to use to describe their work, and to identify the audiences they would like to invite/be in conversation with.</p>	<p>Develop a long-term comprehensive audience development strategy that goes beyond show-by-show basis to engage BIPOC audiences with our company at-large, and engage with BIPOC-led marketing consulting teams to broaden the Ars Nova audience base.</p> <p>When we return to in-person performances, we will prioritize interrogating and building more inclusive front-of-house practices including training staff in anti-racism &amp; bystander intervention, promoting cultural competency in audience services and needs, and integrating statements of inclusion for audiences. Audience Engagement Associate &amp; House Managers will undergo training for bystander intervention in online spaces for our digital programming.</p> <p>Ensure we are resourcing enough time and money to develop strategies and hire professionals to connect our artists' work with their intended audiences.</p> <p>When we return to Off-Broadway Productions, work with our press rep to build more intentional relationships with BIPOC outlets and writers to engage across our programming.</p> <p>When we return to Off-Broadway Productions, prioritize BIPOC outlets as part of the advertising strategy.</p>	<p>Historically, Ars Nova's value of centering the artists' impulse has extended to audience experience. How do our anti-racist values intersect and interact with our value to center artists? If there are competing needs, how do we balance and prioritize these?</p> <p>How do we define what constitutes an affordable ticket to the broadest possible audience?</p> <p>How do we partner with other theaters and service organizations to collectively change inequitable industry standards around press?</p> <p>Acknowledging the necessity of intersectionality in this work, how can we build capacity to increase accessibility as part of our inclusivity work?</p>
<p><b>Build a Safe Playground for BIPOC Artists</b></p>	<p>We are artist-led in terms of the content, themes, and form of work any artist chooses to pursue in our programs, and we proactively work to create an environment where BIPOC artists have the power to lead the conversation around any culturally specific needs of their work.</p> <p>Since 2018, we have asked all members of the Ars Nova community to uphold the commitments in our</p>	<p>When we return to in-person productions, provide a dedicated EDI officer for each Off-Broadway Production. Hire intimacy directors, consultants, and counselors as needed based on project content and artist needs.</p> <p>We will continue seeking out relationships with BIPOC generative artists, directors, designers, and actors so that there is a diverse spectrum of artists to be considered for each project.</p>	<p>How do we meet requests for culturally specific collaborators while ensuring we do not resort to institutional tokenism?</p> <p>How can we more explicitly state/summarize our anti-racist policies and practices in a way that builds on our extant statements to create a safer, more supportive environment for our BIPOC artists?</p>

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<p><b>CONTINUED -</b> <i>Build a Safe Playground for BIPOC Artists</i></p>	<p>Code of Conduct to foster an inclusive, respectful, and equitable workplace. This living document is displayed throughout our building, shared with everyone who works with us, and discussed at multiple points throughout longer processes. In 2021, we added a companion Art &amp; Equity Values Statement to this Code of Conduct.</p> <p>We center the needs and perspective of the artists, and openly acknowledge that as a PWI, there may be structures and systems in place that hinder cultural specificity in the development of new work. We strive to create open dialogue around what personnel or systems could be added or amended to center each individual’s work.</p> <p>In all casting and other creative team decisions, we honor BIPOC artists’ impulses and choices in identifying collaborators, and discuss what audition structures and formats are useful and appropriate.</p> <p>When staffing productions, we include information on who is on the current team whenever making an offer to join the team, and when possible circle back after a team has been wholly formed to get additional confirmation and consent.</p>	<p>Expand our pool of freelance casting directors to include more BIPOC representation.</p> <p>Provide anti-racism training for creative teams, crews, and other artists/freelance cultural workers that are part of the production process.</p>	<p>Does our BIPOC artist community have a desire for affinity spaces within Ars Nova, and are there resources we can provide besides space and time?</p> <p>How are the casting agencies we work with responding to the WSYWAT demands, and what can we do to support/encourage them in this work?</p> <p>When producing work with BIPOC artists, what are the culturally specific needs that our predominantly white staff may be missing in the budgeting and development process?</p>
<p><b>Create an Equitable Work Environment For Artists</b></p>	<p>We eliminated “10 out of 12” rehearsals in 2018; our longest tech rehearsal currently runs “9 out of 10.5.”</p> <p>We launched the Fair Pay Initiative in 2017 and increase our commitments to Fair Pay each year. For our current Fair Pay Guidelines click <a href="#">HERE</a>.</p> <p>We follow both the spirit and the letter of the “most favored nations” clause in artist contracts, never undermining them in riders.</p>	<p>Host facilitated community meetings and listening sessions with our artist community after the publishing of this document and our Transparency Report to engage in dialogue about how we’re showing up for them and where we’re falling short.</p> <p>Implement our Fair Pay Initiative more transparently.</p> <p>Ensure readers and review panels for our open submission programs are majority BIPOC, and ensure panel feedback is heavily weighted in the selection process.</p>	<p>How can we provide a more sustainable span-of-day during tech rehearsals for our entire team while meeting our deadlines?</p> <p>What would the operational impact of ceasing a 6-day work week for rehearsals and performances of Off-Broadway Productions be?</p> <p>How can we continue to further include those impacted most by artistic decisions in the decision-making process?</p>

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<p><b>CONTINUED -</b> <i>Create an Equitable Work Environment For Artists</i></p>	<p>We have fostered power-sharing curatorial and artist selection processes by intentionally including more voices beyond our Artistic staff, including significant influence from Vision Residents, CAMP Co-Directors, readers/selection panels for open submission programs, and <i>Showgasm</i> hosts.</p> <p>We consistently solicit feedback (via both direct conversations and anonymous surveys) from those impacted by organizational policy and artistic programs to evolve infrastructure and programs to better serve participants.</p> <p>We provide access to our spaces and inventory information as designers are hired, including walk throughs with members of the Production or Producing Team and time for them to spend in the space, if desired.</p> <p>Since at least 2012, Ars Nova has included a “windfall clause” in its author agreements that wipes out Ars Nova’s share of any future author profits until the author has made at least \$100,000. During that same time, Ars Nova has not received any subsidiary rights income from Authors.</p> <p>Beginning in 2020, images of artists in our Discover programs will be phased out of public use after no more than two years.</p>	<p>Create a more robust company management plan, with multiple pathways for the caretaking of BIPOC artists in process with us.</p>	<p>How do we continue to push back against a non-profit culture that makes more possible with less?</p>
<p><b>Create an Equitable Work Environment For Staff &amp; Crews</b></p>	<p>Anti-racism work is codified into every staff member’s job description and every team’s annual goals. EDI Working Groups are established to lead projects that require collaboration across teams, and each staff member serves on at least one working group.</p>	<p>Create more robust professional development opportunities for our staff, including gap training and a peer mentorship program with other organizations in our industry.</p> <p>Overhaul the annual review process to systemize multi-directional feedback.</p>	<p>How could we actualize the concept of compensating BIPOC employees for the emotional labor of working in a predominantly white institution in a legal and equitable way?</p>

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<p><b>CONTINUED -</b> <i>Create an Equitable Work Environment For Staff &amp; Crews</i></p>	<p>We launched the Fair Pay Initiative in 2017 and increased our commitments to Fair Pay each year. For our current Fair Pay Guidelines click <a href="#">HERE</a>.</p> <p>In 2018 we replaced our internship program with the Emerging Leaders Group, which pays up-and-coming cultural leaders \$525 for 35hr weeks. Subsequently, we began prioritizing serving emerging leaders historically underrepresented in our field.</p> <p>In 2020 we expanded the services and resources employees are provided to promote their overall health and wellbeing, including dedicated space and time in the work calendar for self-care and civic advocacy, the option of annual financial and retirement consultation, and a confidential Employee Assistance Program hotline with financial, legal, and work-life balance resources.</p>	<p>Implement transparent and consistent plans for staff salary increases, outside of promotions.</p> <p>Increase our health insurance premium contribution to 100% for full-time staff.</p> <p>Eliminate our Production Apprenticeship, which was an unpaid position for college credit, and replace it with paid opportunities on production crews.</p>	<p>How can we continue to evolve the Emerging Leaders Group program to best serve emerging leaders in our field? How do we ensure equitable pathways into arts administration field free of exploitative or exclusionary practices?</p> <p>How do we more quickly diversify our administrative staff with our current pandemic-related hiring freeze, and traditionally very low staff turnover?</p> <p>How can we keep pushing our hiring process to be more inviting and inclusive of folks with different backgrounds, experience, and identities?</p>
<p><b>Cultivate Representation Across Our Artistic Programs</b></p>	<p>We are committed to the breadth of our artistic programs serving a majority of artists who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).</p> <p>For Off-Broadway Productions, we require directors to meet with and consider BIPOC artists for every design role, and we are committed to at least 50% of the design team identifying as BIPOC. Additionally, we seek out BIPOC artists for all production positions.</p> <p>We prioritize cultural competency in the hiring of folks that directly consult with and/or touch BIPOC bodies and hair so that they can do so with cultural sensitivity and specificity (such as make-up and hair designers, dressers, and sound technicians that place body mics).</p> <p>We ensure that culturally specific voices are placed in decision-making positions on culturally specific shows.</p>	<p>Expand our outreach to and inclusion of Indigenous artists.</p> <p>We will begin deeper conversations with artists throughout their process to explore what kinds of consultants or overhire might need to be brought on to support cultural specificity in all aspects of producing the work.</p> <p>When approaching future co-productions or producing partnerships with other organizations, particularly with BIPOC-led theaters, we will weight the value of cultural competency as a factor in the contributions.</p>	<p>How do we take the burden of representation off of individual BIPOC artists in any given room?</p>

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<p><b>Ongoing Acknowledgement of The Ground On Which We Stand</b></p>	<p>All public performances on the Ars Nova Supra digital platform begin with a statement acknowledging the land we occupy, and the violent history of the removal of Indigenous peoples from that land and the legacy of slavery in building this country.</p> <p>We are committed to interrogating our current land acknowledgement language and crafting living land acknowledgements in conversation the Lenape People. We began this conversation with the living land acknowledgement workshop with The Lenape Center.</p>	<p>Develop a more robust living land acknowledgement, in conversation with The Lenape Center, for our physical spaces and in-person programming to honor the history of Lenapehoking and the Lenape People.</p> <p>Partner with The Lenape Center, and other Indigenous organizations, to find ways that Ars Nova can support them and their work.</p> <p>Research the history of the land we occupy on West 54th Street and Barrow Street, in order to better understand the legacy of our physical spaces.</p>	<p>How can we best incorporate the living land acknowledgement into our company’s programs, policies, and practices? How can we be in service to and in community with Manhattan’s Indigenous Peoples and their land? How can we include the artists in this acknowledgement?</p> <p>How can we most meaningfully recognize and acknowledge the history of slavery and anti-Blackness in our country, city, and industry?</p> <p>Explore how/if we can offer physical space to The Lenape Center for their workshops and programs.</p>
<p><b>Provide Transparency On Our Company’s Operations, Budgets, &amp; Values</b></p>	<p>Publish a Transparency Report annually with our organization’s budget, fair pay guidelines, community demographics, and guiding principles/values starting in March 2021.</p> <p>All grant funds raised for specific artistic projects are used to fund wages and materials for artists and their collaborators, with any overhead transparently detailed.</p> <p>All external publications will be examined to ensure that we are not overrepresenting populations in the photographic representations of our artists, staff, audiences, and donors.</p>	<p>Draft, share, and implement a multi-year Equity and Justice Plan to serve as a companion piece to our revised Strategic Plan.</p> <p>Add Alumni Artists to our Board of Directors to help center the voices of artists in board decisions.</p>	<p>How can and will we center BIPOC stakeholders in creating our Equity and Justice plan, and where is the line between asking BIPOC community members to do the work for us, and including their perspectives and voices in the conversation?</p>
<p><b>Steadfastly and Intentionally Diversify our Team until the Staff and Crew Supporting our Majority BIPOC Artists is No Longer Predominantly White</b></p>	<p>All job postings are reviewed with an eye towards promoting inclusivity, including disclosing salary range and stripping out nonessential prerequisites and industry jargon.</p> <p>We overhauled our hiring process in 2019 to ensure all staff hiring processes are conducted with consistency and rigor to limit unconscious bias, including: (a) determining ‘must-have’ and ‘good-to-have’ skills</p>	<p>When we are able to add new staff positions, restructure and expand leadership model to center more diverse lived experiences and specific expertise in anti-racism, anti-oppression, and inclusivity within organizational leadership.</p> <p>Complete formal succession plans for Executive Leadership.</p>	<p>How do we advance and make public commitments to this work while complying with the laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race?</p> <p>How do we take the burden of representation off of individual BIPOC staff in any given room?</p>

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<p><b>CONTINUED -</b>  <i>Steadfastly and Intentionally Diversify our Team until the Staff and Crew Supporting our Majority BIPOC Artists is No Longer Predominantly White</i></p>	<p>and qualities before the job is posted; (b) scoring each cover letter and resume according to a set rubric to select interviewees; (c) crafting a consistent list of questions asked of all candidates; (d) hosting a peer panel inclusive of BIPOC staff members and soliciting their feedback on candidates; and (e) making all final decisions according to the best fit in the predetermined skills and qualities outlined before we meet candidates.</p>	<p>Strive to fill the majority of all open positions with BIPOC candidates and create pathways for current BIPOC staff that increases their leadership, influence, and compensation.</p> <p>Achieve majority BIPOC representation in our full- and part-time administrative staff, front of house, and crews, with a specific focus on increasing representation in management and leadership level positions on both our full-time and production teams.</p> <p>Expand the pool of talent hired for our production crews, in part by deepening our relationships with CUNY and local vocational schools, and creating pathways outside of higher education institutions.</p> <p>Increase staff’s cultural competency to reduce the amount of harm BIPOC individuals may experience working with our PWI. Consider not only how to diversify our team, but how these individuals can safely show up in their full lived experiences.</p>	

Our gratitude to The Playwrights Realm and Roberta Pereira for developing this progress matrix template and graciously sharing it with us, and of course to the collective of BIPOC theater-makers that continue to shed light, share pathways, and hold White American Theater accountable to this work.