

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

for equitable theatre creation

INTRODUCTION

If there was a pothole on your street that was damaging your car's tires day after day, wouldn't you want someone to repair it?

Potholes on a road are unavoidable and dangerous problems that are complicated and expensive to fix. While one solution is to replace the car or tire that was damaged, the only way to prevent future damage to other cars is to fix the pothole.

When evaluating the career path of a BIPOC artist in theatre, there are moments that can be viewed as "potholes" as they are continuous and repeated issues that can be extremely damaging and that have been ignored. It is the responsibility of the leaders of the theatre community to fill these potholes and **create a safer environment for BIPOC artists.**

The goal of this document is to identify some of these damaging moments and offer suggestions for repairing them and preventing other BIPOC artists from being negatively affected. This is not an exhaustible list by any means, and the intersectionality of racism, sexism, ableism, and so on are recognized. **This is a document to serve as a base and will continue to grow as more potholes are identified and creative solutions provided.**

WHERE DO I START?

- Click the questions below to get suggested action items and more resources
- [Click here](#) to let us know if you have other questions or would like to add resources.
- Share this list!

HOW CAN I FIND BIPOC ARTISTS?

HOW CAN I CAST MORE BIPOC ACTORS?

HOW CAN I HIRE MORE BIPOC ARTISTS?

HOW CAN I BUILD A DIVERSE COMPANY /STAFF

HOW CAN I PLAN A BETTER SEASON?

HOW CAN I BUILD A MORE DIVERSE AUDIENCE

Also includes:

- Board Management
- Budget Planning
- Fundraising
- Entry Level Staff
- Intern Management
- Ensemble and Membership

HOW CAN I FIND BIPOC ARTISTS?

- Use this list of [BIPOC Theatre Artists](#) in Greater LA.
 - To suggest an artist be added to the list [click here](#).
- Start building relationships with BIPOC artists and BIPOC theatre companies that are outside your current circle of collaborators.
 - Meet with every BIPOC Artist that applies or auditions for your company
 - Make an effort to see shows that have large BIPOC casts and collaborators

How can I...

CAST MORE BIPOC ACTORS?

Use this list of BIPOC Theatre Artists in Greater LA.

- To suggest an artist be added to the list [click here](#).

Don't always rely on your personal network.

- Don't always rely on paywall recruitment tools like Actors Access or Casting Agents, not all artists have access to those tools but are just as talented!
- Expand your personal network by seeing more shows that have diverse casts and creative teams. Make notes and build relationships with BIPOC Artists.

Organize your first interviews or general auditions over zoom.

- This helps people who have less-flexible schedules still be able to be considered.
- People don't have to worry about traffic, transportation, and parking (better for the environment too!)

Be intentional about providing real opportunities for BIPOC artists and pre-determine the specific needs for casting or the position.

- Casting a wide net of "all ethnicities encouraged to apply/audition" can feel performative and insincere, especially if BIPOC artists are continuously excluded even with "color-blind" casting.

Be considerate of actors that have Accents and/or English as a Second Language.

- They might need a little more time with the materials.
- Actors don't need to "sound" a certain way, and if audiences can understand Shakespeare they can understand someone with an accent.
- If you have a character that has an accent, try to hire someone that actually has that accent (Do not ask them to over emphasize their accent).

Does everyone cast in a family unit need to look alike?

- Remove the assumption that actors need to look alike for the audience to understand they are a family.
 - Theatre revolves around the suspension of disbelief. If two chairs can represent a "car" and keep the audiences engaged, then two people who don't look alike can be related.
 - Does it really affect the story if the siblings don't look exactly alike?
 - Removing this need will create far more opportunities for BIPOC artists, as when families have to look alike, it eliminates the people who are in the minority because there are less people that look like them.

How can I...

HIRE MORE BIPOC ARTISTS?

Use this list of BIPOC Theatre Artists in Greater LA.

- To suggest an artist be added to the list click [here](#).

Don't always focus on their resume!

- Give more value to an interview, Focus on the quality of work, not quantity of experience. A short resume could be a lack of opportunities, not a lack of talent!
- Consider an online form for application that focuses on passion, interests, and natural skills.
- Consider how traditional job requirements might be limiting the people who apply.
 - Not everyone has access to college or internships.
 - How many years of experience do they really need?

Offer on the job training/assistant positions to build your network.

- Specifically to specialized fields that are difficult to find training for (like puppetry).
- This way it opens up training and work experience to those that are not in college.

Share space, skills, and resources with BIPOC Artists and they will start to feel more comfortable working with your company.

How can I...

ENGAGE MORE DIVERSE AUDIENCE MEMBERS?

Hire more diverse artists!

- Use this list of [BIPOC Theatre Artists in Greater LA](#).

Look at the work you are doing

- When you say you are creating work for "the community" be more specific about who you are trying to connect with.
- Are you telling stories that the community around you connects with?
 - Does a predominantly Spanish speaking neighborhood need (or want) another Shakespeare production?
- Does your theatre company look like the community around you? If the answer is no, then how can you know what stories are important to them?

Connect with people outside of theatre.

- Talk to other local businesses in your area, build relationships with the non-theatre people around you. Go to other community events to get to know some of the community organizers.
- Consider offering discount tickets to the people who live in the neighborhood in which you are performing, keeping in mind you are either part of the neighborhood (if you have a physical theatre space) or you are entering their neighborhood (if you are in a rental venue).

How can I...

PLAN MY SEASON TO BE MORE EQUITABLE AND DIVERSE?

Go through continuous anti-racism and EDIA trainings (even if you think you don't need to). [LINK]

Pick plays written by BIPOC Artists, you can find new plays on [New Play Exchange](#) and a list of local LA BIPOC Playwrights [here](#).

Build rehearsals that are more mindful about artists having other jobs and responsibilities (like being a caretaker of children or elderly parents).

- 6 day workweeks and 10 hour rehearsals for tech for unpaid or low paying gigs that are inflexible eliminate artists that need to work or don't have access to childcare .

Start building a stronger understanding of cultural competency that supports BIPOC artists.

- Remove phrases that are considered racist from organizational vocabulary Provide proper costumes, makeup, and hair care for BIPOC artists.
 - “Nude” is based on light colored skin.
- Actors that use English as a second language or have an accent might need more time with certain materials but it doesn't mean they aren't capable of understanding it to the same depth as native English speakers.
- Remove creative stereotypes such as Women of Color being “sassy”.



How can I...

BUILD MY THEATRE COMPANY AND STAFF?

While it is understood each theatre company functions differently based on its company culture, infrastructure, and bandwidth, these are suggestions that can be applied to the various staff positions that could make up a theatre company.

BOARD

For non-profit theatre companies, the Board has final say over fiscal responsibility and in some cases, artistic decisions. In many cases Board members hold a significant amount of power in how a theatre company is run.

- Have the board go through anti-racism training before trying to recruit BIPOC board members. If you have board members that are against anti-racism training, consider if this board member is representative of the values of your organization.
- Actively recruit multiple BIPOC board members, not just one.
- Look at your give/get policy (if you have one) and recognize that might be a barrier of entry towards a more diverse board. They are not solely there for fundraising but also for leadership, and they may still have a lot to offer outside of monetary donations.

BUDGET PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

Budgets are considered to be values-based documents. When planning annual budgets and fundraising goals, make sure that competitive and equitable salaries are included in that.

- Check the priorities and values of the organization to ensure that artistic pay and anti-racism resources are part of budget priorities. If you want audiences to pay and value the art the company creates, consider paying and valuing the artists that helped create it. Is it your goal to pay artists? How can you make it a priority and achieve that goal?
- In your annual budget, include line items for Anti-Racism and EDIA Training.
- Increase staff salaries and create more paid positions if applicable, and incorporate those extra expenses into fundraising goals.
- Be transparent and upfront about the salary or payment of a project. There is no law that says salaries and payments need to be private.
- Don't always rely on getting the work done for free. Focusing on people who will do the work free or low-cost makes it more challenging to anticipate a clear budget on how much it actually costs to get the project done. By using free or volunteer labor, it excludes people who do not have the privilege to be able to work for free.
- When people say they cannot do the work for free, do not anticipate they care about the work less than someone who would do it for free. It just means they may have more responsibilities or less resources.

How can I...

BUILD MY THEATRE COMPANY AND STAFF? (continued)

FUNDRAISING

For most theatre companies, budgeting and fundraising go hand in hand, and there is a significant amount of pressure around donor relations.

"We don't think our donors would react well to a more diverse season."

- Inspire and recruit donors that believe and support a more equitable theatre sector.
- Using donors as an excuse to why you can't challenge your company to be more equitable keeps a company complicit in inequity.

"Our donors don't want to pay for overhead, they want to focus on the art."

- If we all push the narrative that overhead is an important part of creating ethical art, we can start to shift the mentality of donor cultivation.

"We had a show with a diverse cast last season, we invited them to our Gala and we put them on all our marketing materials to show how diverse we are, isn't that representation?"

- Does that really showcase what a majority of your season/staff looks like.
- Do you have relationships with these artists other than using them as a tool to prove your company is "doing enough."
- Producing one "BIPOC" show every other season is not enough, especially if you are using language like "diversity" and BIPOC artists in your marketing.
- Using BIPOC Artists as a fundraising or marketing tool is objectifying and performative activism.

ENTRY LEVEL / INTERNS

Access to **entry level jobs** has been getting more and more competitive as jobs are being underpaid or turned into internships/volunteer positions.

- Make sure to double check the expectations of the job description - does someone really need several years of experience or a specific level of education to get the job done? Is this something that they could learn on the job or have gained the skills in other ways?
- Make sure to set up entry level jobs for success by creating realistic expectations, especially if it is a new position.
- If the position grows into a larger role and the person is taking on more responsibility, make sure their hours, pay, and/or job title changes to reflect their new responsibilities.
- Understand that high-turnover of entry-level staff could be an indicator of organizational instability, either that the pay is not competitive enough or the positions expectations were not clearly defined.
 - If you have high-turnover rate, really ask yourself why people are struggling to stay with your organization.

Internships are meant to be educational opportunities for a student or very early career individual to explore career paths and learn more about certain parts of the industry. They are not meant to replace paid entry level positions or be unpaid labor.

- Make sure your internship program follows the [legal guidelines](#).
- Offer stipends or assistantship positions such as the [LA County Arts Commission](#) intern program or include the stipends in program budgeting.
- Do not always rely on recruiting students currently enrolled in 4 year universities.
- Continue to have active conversations with your interns about their professional development and career goals.

How can I...

BUILD MY THEATRE COMPANY AND STAFF? (continued)

ENSEMBLE AND MEMBERSHIP

Membership or ensemble based companies are very common, but they can also be exclusive and difficult to break into for BIPOC Artists.

- Look at your membership/ensemble recruitment strategy, how can it be more inclusive? How can you specifically recruit BIPOC artists? Who is missing from the table?
 - Evaluate how new members are brought in, do they need to be elected? Is it reference based? If your organization is predominantly non-BIPOC, it may be challenging for BIPOC artists to be elected or to get enough references.
- Look at your BIPOC member retention. It is not enough to recruit them, look at if they feel comfortable staying with your organization long-term.
 - Have exit interviews or reach out to BIPOC artists to see why they left your company. Do not get defensive, but actively listen to the feedback.
- Are your members accurately representing the values and mission of your company - specifically if the word “diversity” or “inclusion” are included in your mission statement or membership description.
- Really examine how you are supporting or hurting your BIPOC members, do they only get cast in certain “types” of shows? Does their work only get featured in culturally relevant moments? (ex: Black History Month)
 - Ask your BIPOC Members what support they need, or what they feel like is missing from your membership benefits.
 - Believe them when they say they don't feel supported and actively change what they are asking for.
 - Make sure your membership benefits are allocated equitably. Ex: If you promise audition slots to all members, ensure that BIPOC Artists are encouraged and have priority in the schedule.
- For Dues Paying Companies: Dues can be considered monetary dues/donations or time donations in the form of hours volunteered to support the company. Consider offering scholarships or stronger membership paths for BIPOC Artists that might not be able to donate the time or money.