

THE HUNTINGTON Anti-Racist Strategic Action Plan August 2021

In this last year, renewed demands for racial justice in the US have led to a reckoning with the concept of white supremacy. In all aspects of American culture and daily life, including the American Theatre, we must seek to confront and grapple with the myriad ways—both implicit and explicit—in which supremacist systems and structures deny and denigrate the humanity of one group in order to advance the opportunities of another.

The Huntington is an organization that values and takes pride in our ongoing commitments to raise the voices of BIPOC playwrights, hire BIPOC artists, and serve BIPOC students. However, we recognize there is much work to do. Catalyzed in large part by the call to action of the [We See You White American Theatre](#) (WSYWAT) initiative, we as an organization looked inward to begin the work to unlearn and disengage from the operative modes white supremacy requires.

We know the composition of our staff, executive leadership, and board does not reflect all of communities we seek to serve;

We know not all BIPOC artists and staff members we have employed have felt embraced and supported by the organization;

We know BIPOC patrons and audience members who come to our productions do not always feel welcome or safe in our venues;

We know not all individuals feel The Huntington is a place that is accessible to and/or open for them.

If we are to live our core values as an institution and sustain a commitment to anti-racism, inclusion, and equity, these and other aspects of our organization must change.

In the spring of 2021, The Huntington began development of the **Anti-Racist Strategic Action Plan (ASAP)** which outlines an initial series of goals and initiatives which we believe will help us begin to build up our staff, board, and leadership team to reflect the rich diversity of Greater Boston and cultivate a welcoming and equitable culture for all our stakeholders and community members. This work, supported by our Board EDIA committee, is staff driven through internal departmental reviews and the collaborative efforts of the HEAR Task Force, a non-hierarchical, multi-racial coalition of staff members at The Huntington.

The Huntington is committed to doing the hard, uncomfortable, and necessary work to foster systemic change and become an actively anti-racist organization. Informed by the voices of those who must be centered in this work, we intend on being a steward of transformative change in our sector and region. We know this is a commitment all Huntington stakeholders expect us to keep and we must hold ourselves accountable.

ANTI-RACISM

In October 2020, The Huntington engaged **The Wellspring Group** (www.thinkwellspring.com) in a 12-month consultancy designed to create sustainable anti-racist practices as well as expand professional development opportunities and human resource capacities at The Huntington. Through May 2021, this work has included:

- An anonymous, confidential *Psychological Safety & Racial Equity Readiness Audit* administered to staff in December 2020 to develop a baseline understanding of the level of psychological safety in the workplace – an assessment comprised of self-reported measures of consent and respect – and the level of readiness to discuss concepts related to racial identity and equity.
 - This research helped identify institutional patterns of behavior which could serve as barriers to achieving racial equity at The Huntington. Having identified these behavioral barriers, Wellspring customized learning and development workshops and curriculum which could directly address these problematic behavioral patterns.

- In January and February 2021, 79 staff members and 18 board members participated in a three-part *Racial Equity Journey* workshop series designed to provide The Huntington community with the foundational historical context and mindset necessary to commit to anti-racist principles. Participants were introduced to key terms, definitions, and solution-oriented steps they could take to engage with marginalized communities in the movement for racial justice.
 - Members of staff and board had the opportunity to brainstorm and develop solutions to some of the key barriers to racial equity which were identified in the *Psychological Safety & Racial Equity Readiness Audit*.
 - The workshops also marked the launch of an online learning portal available to staff and board at all times as a resource to continue the work and discussions.
- Wellspring provided Huntington staff the opportunity for 1:1 Racial Equity Growth Coaching over the course of 12 weeks (March to May 2021). This coaching is a self-selected activity offered as part of the *Racial Equity Journey*. As of June, 17 staff members have completed the coaching program; a new cohort will participate in summer 2021. The Growth Coaching curriculum is designed to
 - expand awareness of the ways in which one's racial identity awareness impacts relationships with colleagues and stakeholders,
 - demonstrate how these interactions impact overall workplace culture, specifically the psychological safety in workplace culture, and
 - develop the cultural competency and self-awareness necessary to leverage
 - their knowledge of their racial identity development and
 - identity development as a method for promoting a more psychologically safe work environment.
- The Wellspring Group will soon begin training a cohort of staff members to ensure that anti-racism remains a core part of the organization moving forward. These trainers will create ongoing anti-racist training opportunities each year for The Huntington community and work with new hires as they come into the organization.
- The HEAR Task Force was provided with Facilitative Leadership training for a period of nine weeks to ensure the group remained a sustainable community of practice into The Huntington's future.

- During this training, Wellspring supported HEAR in the initial development of the Anti-Racist Strategic Action Plan (ASAP), which will be used to plan, implement, and monitor policies and practices that promote racial equity and model anti-racist behaviors throughout The Huntington community.
- The Huntington's Department Heads are all participants of *The Leadership Journey*, a six-month Executive Leadership program composed of monthly workshops facilitated by Wellspring.
 - Wellspring co-designed the program in partnership with the Department Heads Team of The Huntington to prioritize and develop the executive skills necessary to connect culture to values, values to habits, and habits to behaviors for the individuals and teams they lead.
 - The initial workshops are designed to promote principles which help support the development of their individual team members – no matter what level of skill or seniority they may have – and leverage sound change management practices to help teams accomplish complex tasks in fast-paced environments where effective delegation and communication strategies are necessary.

To continue and deepen the work begun with Wellspring, we will initiate and/or implement the following measures:

- Over the course of this year, we will create or update existing training handbooks for all patron-facing jobs to include a section dedicated to anti-racism and de-escalation.
- We are developing policies centered on providing ongoing support, growth, and professional development to new and current BIPOC employees; this includes a newly established mentorship program for new hires.
- We will reaffirm our core company values and commitment to anti-racism at the start of all institutional meetings and gatherings (staff and board meetings, first rehearsals, events, etc.).

HUMAN RESOURCES

- To decrease incidents of implicit and unconscious bias in the hiring of new employees, we have initiated the practice of Interview Committees to support hiring managers for full-time positions. The committee consists of an intentionally diverse and inclusive panel of current staff.

- We are reviewing job descriptions to expand opportunity, create transparent criteria, and avoid credentialism (for example: when pertinent, we will eliminate unnecessary educational requirements which could discourage applicants lacking these criteria).
- We will expand hiring transparency by creating an equitable salary grade system which will be made available to all staff and job applicants, and we will engage a consultant in the creation of a pay equity study during the coming year.
- HR will be provided with the resources necessary to expand its outreach on job searches to diverse websites and to work with recruitment agencies to help meet our goal of hiring more BIPOC staff.
- The Huntington's Apprenticeship Program will be re-conceived during the 2021-2022 season, with the expectation that overall programmatic administration will be primarily facilitated by the Education dept.
 - This may include the creation of a new position within Education which will oversee the implementation and facilitation of the revamped program in partnership with HR.
- In the 2021-2022 season, The Huntington will continue its commitment to education across the institution through training opportunities and internships that are separate from the Apprenticeship Program.
- In 2019, we began hosting Brighter Boston students in paid internships in our Lighting Department so as to expand awareness of production staff opportunities for BIPOC young people; we continued this partnership into the 2020-2021 season for a season-long residency at the Calderwood Pavilion. We plan to expand the Brighter Boston placements moving forward as we look for more ways to leverage outreach opportunities that will increase awareness of production career paths.
- During the 2021-22 season we will work to establish and implement a 360-review process for leadership and key managers.

ARTISTIC/PRODUCTION

- In order to reduce the burden on individuals and teams, we have expanded our rehearsal period by shifting the 6-day rehearsal week to 5 days and eliminating "10 out of 12s" (the longest technical rehearsal days, with actors working 10 hours and other staff members working even more in support).

- Hair and wardrobe staff participated in a virtual workshop with ActTRESSES Hair Consulting's Nikiya Mathis (Wig Designer for The Huntington's 2018 production of *Skeleton Crew*).
 - Topics included addressing the lack of natural hair education that persists in hair design and coaching on the styling & design process when working with actors of color. We will continue to seek out training opportunities to further and build upon these skills.
- The Huntington is expanding its engagement with BIPOC-led theatre companies by cultivating reciprocal relationships and partnerships with local institutions as well as deepening continued collaboration with peer institutions nationally.
- We will ensure our artists have access to counseling for productions that engage topics of racialized experiences, especially racialized trauma.
- When pertinent, we will hire cultural consultants who can advise on stories of the BIPOC community, Trans individuals, and persons with disabilities. We will ensure these individuals are properly credited for their work.
- When pertinent, the Line Producer will hire Intimacy Consultants and Fight Coordinators who have competency in supporting the psychological safety of BIPOC artists or who will engage in such training before they begin their work at The Huntington.
- We will create a system to track how projects are selected for the season and how each creative is identified and hired, so that larger trends can be seen and addressed.
 - We will also begin to monitor and document how Guest Artists engage with our Code of Respect in order to determine the possibility for future engagement with The Huntington.
- Moving forward, for all remaining 2021-2022 season hires and beyond, we will proactively disclose all confirmed creatives to additional team members as offers go out, as well as expand the distribution of the internal casting/artist update emails to include confirmed artists.
- Beginning with this season, we will reaffirm our core company values and commitment to anti-racism at all first rehearsals.
- We will create a clear and transparent structure by which artists will be compensated for additional duties outside of their jobs, such as promotional activities that take place outside of their contractual work week.

AUDIENCE/MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

- We have made subscription model changes to extend access, affordability, and flexibility to a broader audience.
 - We have recast subscriptions as season tickets, lowered the entry point to 3 plays, eliminated zones/series, flattened pricing, and introduced more expansive payment plans in order to make our productions more accessible and our seating policies more equitable.
- In the next fiscal year, we will increase and expand access to the best seats for all productions:
 - We will implement new sales practices that expand access to early seating and presales beyond donors and patrons with higher financial capacity; we will begin by incorporating our Huntington Community Membership Initiative members into presales and removing the boundaries attached to our special access and discounted ticket programs (i.e., our 35 Below and student ticket programs).
- Our Community Engagement Manager and Promotions & Community Specialist will work cross-departmentally to communicate the value of The Huntington in the community to underrepresented audiences, tracking events and performances that we host in different neighborhoods as we assess our development of relationships outside of our theaters. Through this work we will create a long-term vision for how to support BIPOC audiences both in and out of our spaces.
- When pertinent, we will hire consultants who can advise on show positioning, artwork, and overall strategy to responsibly market stories of the BIPOC community, Trans individuals, and persons with disabilities. We will ensure these individuals are properly credited for their work.
- We will prioritize the raising of a broad range of voices from throughout the organization, particularly those of BIPOC artists/staff, in promotional materials and in press opportunities.
- We have instituted an Institutional Access Contingency Budget for the coming season to ensure The Huntington can build the infrastructure to make every event accessible.
- We will restructure our security positions and practices to focus on both welcoming and providing security for everyone walking through our doors. We will also implement a “Code of Respect” for our venues to be shared in rental agreements, lobbies, programs, tickets, pre-show communications, and on our website.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

We understand that there must be mechanisms in place which hold The Huntington accountable for these stated commitments.

- The HEAR Task Force will generate six and twelve-month progress reports on our work, distributing these to the community along with regular updates.
- We will create a protocol for honoring tribal sovereignty and self-determination through spoken or posted land acknowledgments in our spaces, at first rehearsals and at other official meetings.
- We acknowledge our ignorance about enslaved people who may have toiled on the land where our venues stand. We will find an organizational partner to help us with research of the history of the grounds and determine ways to recognize and acknowledge enslaved persons connected by this history.
- We will post each fiscal year's approved Form 990 on our website to create greater financial transparency.

BOARD RECRUITMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The Huntington Boards of Trustees and Advisors recognize that there are many ways in which members can provide institutional leadership, support, and value.

- While philanthropy will continue to be a critical tool in achieving the Boards' responsibility for the fiscal stability of The Huntington, the Boards will build a more inclusive cohort of members through outreach to a broader group of theatre proponents who reflect the diversity and cultural richness of the Boston community.
- The Nominating and Governance Committee has begun to decentralize wealth as the primary driving factor in the Boards' nominating process, expanding the scope of recruitment to include candidates who offer knowledge, community affiliations, wisdom, and service as primary components of their commitment.
- The Boards will commit to recruiting members of the BIPOC and Access communities through networking and outreach in order to build and foster equitable representation.
- The integration of new programs and processes which aim to practice and promote racial justice and equity will be included in the Board Handbook and future Board orientations.

- All incoming members (both Trustees and Advisors) will be assigned a mentor to ensure that these objectives are addressed and that new members are updated on best practices undertaken at the staff and institutional levels.
- The Chair of the EDIA Committee will continue to sit on the Nominating and Governance Committee and lead coordination of the Boards of Trustees and Advisors with the HEAR Task Force. In addition, the Chair will continue to play an integral role in communicating the execution and the evolution of the ASAP to executive leadership and the Boards, as well as facilitating ongoing education and guidance that will create a more cooperative, value-driven culture consistent with The Huntington's mission.