

RACIAL EQUITY PLAN

2023-2027



PORTLAND
OVATIONS



Dan + Claudia Zanes, 2021

Statement of Purpose



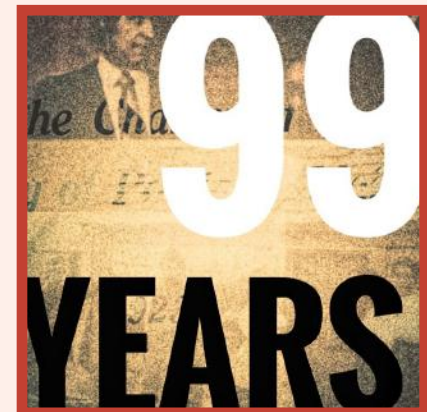
Daniel Bernard Roumain
En Masse, 2018

Portland Ovation is committed to advancing racial and cultural justice through the arts. From the artists we present from around the world to the networks we participate in across the country and beyond, Ovation is part of a global community. The goals and aspirations in this Racial Equity Plan reflect that larger global perspective and are not limited to Maine's predominately white demographics and systems which have in part, contributed to its history of racism*.

Our Racial Equity Plan lays out the organization's ongoing endeavors to foster anti-racism and racial equity across all facets of its activities onstage and off such as governance, programs, patronage, operations, and community/civic involvement. The Plan functions as a roadmap, aiming not only to propel Ovation's dedication to racial equity but also to inspire comparable endeavors in the arts and cultural sectors in Portland, Maine and the field.

Ovation is in solidarity with movements that strive to better the lives of marginalized communities and put an end to the systemic oppression sustained by white dominance in the United States. As the landscape of racial justice progresses, this plan remains a living document that shall be modified as necessary.

**To learn more about this history of racism in Maine, listen to "99 Years" podcast by artist Samuel James.*



Racial Equity Statement

At Ovations, we recognize that promoting racial equity and anti-racism in the arts and culture sectors is essential to showcasing the brilliance and artistry of diverse and multicultural communities from around the globe and contributes to a more just society. Our commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity and access (IDEA) extends to all aspects of our organization, including governance, operations, programming, and community engagement. We aim to include all voices, stories and perspectives in our programs, decision making and inspire similar efforts in the Portland, Maine area, resulting in a more just and equitable society where people feel welcome, safe and everyone's contributions are valued.



Antonio Rocha: *A Slave Ship Called Malaga*, 2023

...racial equity and anti-racism in the arts and culture sector is essential to showcasing the brilliance and artistry of diverse and multicultural communities...



Wabanaki Stories, 2022

Mission

Portland Ovations propels the artistic, social, educational and economic wellbeing of communities through the power of the performing arts.

Vision

Portland Ovations inspires a curious and imaginative community where the experience of the performing arts is a vital part of everyday life.

Core Values

Portland Ovations ...

- celebrates the power and brilliance of the performing arts.
- commits to being anti-racist.
- continues to evolve governance, operations, finances and programs to embody inclusivity, diversity, equity and access.
- nurtures a staff, board and collective culture that is compassionate, committed and enthusiastic.
- collaborates with other arts organizations, nonprofits, education systems and the business sector to promote lifelong learning through the arts.

Statements from Leadership



“ At its core, Portland Ovarions’ mission is to inspire and to make the enjoyment of the art accessible to everyone regardless of economic status, race, gender, age, disability, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation or caste. We have a responsibility to uphold, at the highest level, and in a systematic fashion our key values of inclusivity, diversity, equity and access. The purpose of this racial equity plan is to empower our staff, our board, and our community with the tools and the framework to achieve this very important mission that we must carry out at all times. We are committed to make room for all voices within the community, and tell everyone’s story. ”

- Syad Moudachirou, Co-chair of IDEA Task Force, Board President



“ The arts have the power to give voice and visibility to communities and cultures who are and have been silenced or marginalized. Live performance provides a shared experience where differences are honored and similarities celebrated. But it is not enough to present Black and Brown artists on our stages. We must also dismantle the systems of colonization and oppression, further perpetuated by the non-profit structure – otherwise racial equity will never be achieved. This is why a Racial Equity Plan is imperative to our work at Ovarions. From my early days in the theater producing plays by Amiri Baraka to Ovarions’ world premiere commission of Wabanaki Stories, I’ve dedicated my life and vocation to the performing arts because of its power to make change happen. ”

- Aimée M. Petrin, Executive & Artistic Director, Co-chair of IDEA Task Force



“ The pandemic placed racial injustice front and center. We could no longer delay the work long past due. Acknowledging, owning, feeling the discomfort - which systematic change demands, needs to happen now. It must be based on the past - bringing to light what had been hidden. The true narrative must be told, so history, which is being made every day, is built on truth. The arts allow us the opportunity to bulldoze a new path of transformation, so hearts and minds are engaged. Let us be bold. Let us be brave. Let us surrender so others at last may join in what truly is opportunity - equal for all. Through this lens, let the history of racial equity move forward. The time is now. ”

- Mary Allen Lindemann, Past Board President

Racism in the Performing Arts

Racism in the performing arts is a long-standing problem in the United States. As noted by Joe Dziemianowicz in his [2020 *New York Times*](#) article: systemic racism in the theater is a problem of who gets to tell the story. People of color have long been marginalized and excluded from opportunities to create, produce, and perform. [The *American Theatre*](#) article “Not a Moment, but a Movement: Toward an Anti-Racist American Theatre” argues that the theater industry must work toward becoming anti-racist, and this requires not just individual action but systemic change. The authors write, “The work of creating an anti-racist theatre will require every person involved in theatre, and every theatre as an institution, to actively confront and dismantle racism in all of its forms.” Perhaps the initiative [We See You, White American Theater](#) provided the most exhaustive and impassioned callout of the industry, including its audiences, in its 2020 statement of the same title.

In New England, artists and scholars are discussing and working to navigate structural racism in the performing arts. On-going conversations acknowledge the ways in which racism is built into the very structures and systems of the performing arts industry. They are seeking to create spaces and opportunities that center the voices and experiences of people of color, and challenge the industry’s status quo. As one artist interviewed in an article published by 2022 [Brown Daily Herald](#) notes, “We have to actively work against the way the industry is set up, which is to say we have to dismantle it and create something new.”

Efforts to combat racism in the arts in Portland are also visible. In May 2021, for example, the Portland Press Herald reported on a photo project aimed against racism in which residents of Maine took a knee in solidarity with protests against police brutality and racial injustice. The [Portland Press Herald](#) article notes that the project “drew attention to the continued struggles for racial equity in Maine and beyond.”

Live performance too can be a powerful tool for challenging systemic racism. [Temple University News](#) reported on an on-campus production of the play “Pipeline” that explored issues of race and education. The play was part of a larger initiative aimed at addressing systemic racism through the arts. As one of the production’s co-directors’ states: “We believe theatre is a vital tool for challenging systemic racism, and we want to inspire our audiences to be part of this important work”

As all of these articles make clear, presenting BIPOC artists and/or their stories is not enough in and of itself to end systemic racism in the performing arts and beyond.

The Process: Designing the Plan

This plan represents the next stage in Ovation's ongoing efforts to be a more just and equitable organization. Through an inclusive process, every Ovation's staff and board member was invited to contribute action items that were reviewed and integrated into the plan as appropriate. The Inclusion Diversity Equity Access (IDEA) Task Force, composed of Ovation's employees and board members, worked for several months with a consultant to develop this Racial Equity Plan complete with SMART Goals that align with Ovation's strategic plan, prioritizing BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) individuals, and establish a culture of anti-racism in the organization at every level.

This plan is a continuation and deepening of work and shared learning in which Ovation is already engaged. From February 2018 through today, the Board, Executive & Artistic Director and staff have participated in inclusivity, diversity, equity and access learning via workshops and retreats facilitated by Nicola Chin, Maine Intercultural Communications Consultants (Deb Breiting and Liz Greason); taken the Intercultural Development Inventory and discussed its findings both individually and collectively; engaged with TYA/USA's Anti-Racist and Anti-Oppressive training; participated in Michael J. Bobbit's anti-racism syllabus and workshop, and explored the implications of Nina Simon's cultural handbook "The Art of Relevance".

Acknowledging the strides towards racial diversity already present in Ovation's programs, the plan is intentionally top down, recognizing that in order to affect true change, systems and power dynamics must be disrupted. This includes board composition and governance, philanthropy, hiring processes, vendor relationships, community partnerships, and front-of-house operations.

Furthermore, Ovation recognizes the importance of intersectionality in addressing racial injustice and aims to develop a framework for subsequent plans that will address other inequities such as those related to disability, gender and sexuality. The use of the term BIPOC acknowledges the fluid nature of language and the intersectional justice and equity movement's ongoing redefinition of terminology, without erasing or excluding any group. The use of the term BIPOC is inclusive of other non-white communities and not meant to erase or exclude.



Step Afrika!, 2022

THE PLAN

Following is the action plan of tactical strategies across governance, operations, programs and audiences that support Ovation's goal of being an anti-racist organization while advancing racial and cultural justice through the arts. The plan, as noted, continues to evolve, as does the action steps needed in executing.



ONGOING TASKS & GOALS

OPERATIONS

Front of House

- To ensure a welcoming environment, familiarity and comfort of BIPOC patrons, work with venues to recruit and hire front-of-house staff (ushers, city of Portland staff, box office, concessions, house managers, etc.) that are at least equal representation BIPOC/Non-BIPOC.

Finance

- To ensure that racial equity and anti-racism is embedded into planning, budget for completion of racial equity goals workshops, training, consultants, recruitment, planning, etc.
- To support potential needs of BIPOC artist, create a contingency budget.

Human Relations & Governance

- Include anti-racism training as part of all new staff and board member onboarding.

FISCAL YEAR 23 TASKS & GOALS

BOARD

- To ensure the value of BIPOC voices are infused in governance, intentionally prioritize and cultivate BIPOC Board Members until the stated goal is achieved or exceeded in.
- To ensure and advance an antiracist and racially equitable culture, the following will occur:
 - Board members and staff will participate in antiracism/racial equity learning annually
 - additional pertinent equity learning is included at regular board meetings and correspondence, as needed;
 - updates on the Racial Equity Plan progress are provided at every board/committee meeting and shared publicly;
 - racial equity training will be added to new Board orientation and reviewed, revised and updated, annually.

OPERATIONS

Front of House

- To support the care of BIPOC artists and audiences and reduce the burden of their lived experience, hire and compensate cultural consultants and culturally competent facilitators for discussions, talkbacks, pre-and post-show engagement, marketing, ASL interpretation.

Human Relations & Governance

- To build a more diverse staff, create a recruitment plan that reaches and attracts BIPOC candidates.

PROGRAMS

Live Performances

- To ensure an awareness of anti-racism and perpetuate our culture as an anti-racist cultural organization, include anti-racism expectations in all artist contracts.

Outreach

- To increase the value of BIPOC engagement and ensure BIPOC voices are infused in Ovations' racial equity actions, deepen BIPOC community engagement augments (programming partnerships, meeting space usage, pre-show gathering, etc.) intentionally expand the IDEA Task Force to include more BIPOC voices from the community to review new policies/plan, actions, and further engage BIPOC community members as potential audiences of Ovations.

FISCAL YEAR 24 TASKS & GOALS

BOARD

- To ensure and advance an antiracist and racially equitable culture, a Board of Directors Anti-racist Code of Conduct will be created.
- To ensure anti-racism/racial equity in governance, all governing and organizing documents and policies will be reviewed and revised from an IDEA lens.
- To ensure antiracism/racial equity is a part of every committee's work and purpose, annual racial equity goals will be added for the board and every committee.
- To ensure racial equity, implement a consultation and consensus process with the IDEA Task Force on Board membership, the hiring of Ovations' leadership and policy advancement prior to decision.
- To reduce barriers of participation BIPOC board prospects and to embody an anti-racist/racial equity perspective, review and revise trustee qualifications, responsibilities, orientations, onboarding interviews, evaluations and nominating processes.

OPERATIONS

Front of House

- To create a sense of belonging for BIPOC communities, revise Ovations' section of Portland Presents layout to maximize the visibility of our anti-racism/racial equity statement.
- To ensure the safety of BIPOC patrons, require racial equity training for box office staff, concessions staff, ushers, house managers, volunteers – especially bias intervention and de-escalation.

Human Relations & Governance

- To enable racial justice, repair and ultimately eliminate acts of racism, create and use a Racism Incident Report and devise a “next step repair process”.
- To reduce barriers to engagement, review and revise all HR practices from antiracist/racial equity lens. For example:
 - removing exclusionary language and requirements in job posting.
 - lead with racial equity statement on Job description.
 - build racism harassment policy (separate from anti-harassment policy).
 - add “advancing racial equity” to everyone's job description, evaluation and interview process.
- Add orientation/ongoing racial equity and bias awareness training.
- Create a “welcoming” process for new BIPOC employees (name pronunciation, itemizing and recognition of special cultural holidays, resource packet, etc.).

Marketing

- To ensure Ovation's BIPOC audiences and new BIPOC prospective patrons see themselves, utilize "look alike" marketing techniques (faces of BIPOCs are prominently shown in marketing, radio ads feature BIPOC voices, etc).

Development

- To increase the awareness of BIPOC donor needs, integrate and focus two readings/trainings, annually, on wealth disparity, systemic oppression, the history of fundraising, 501c3 laws, inclusive fundraising practices, contributions beyond financial gifts, equity in finance for board(s) and staff.

PROGRAMS

Live Performances

- To elevate the contributions of BIPOC peoples to our communities, program a minimum of 50% of Ovation's presentations to feature BIPOC artists as captured in the Know Thy Programming matrix.
- To highlight anti-racism and racial equity into Ovation's full "performance" experience, incorporate Ovation's anti-racist values into each presentation and share as many as five ways with patrons via audience-facing engagement tools (director's notes, inside look, dramaturgical display, talk-backs, discussion panels, "meet the artists", playbills, conversations for the ride home, etc.) how the values intersect.

FISCAL YEAR 25 TASKS & GOALS

BOARD

- To enable maximum participation of BIPOC Board members, review scheduling, timing and location of board and committee meetings on a every-other-year basis both in-person and digital.
- To ensure anti-racism in governance, empower the IDEA Task Force and any other board member to request “reconsideration of board action” or exercise VETO power prior to adoption, if the potential for inequitable/racist outcomes is perceived. Note: the board should exercise and expense whatever resources are needed to resolve concerns and come to consensus.

OPERATIONS

General

- To center the value of BIPOC voices and perpetuate an anti-racist/racial equity community, Oventions will hold quarterly, cross-sector (arts, non-profits, business, education) gatherings to address, learn and collaborate on IDEA issues specific to community.

Human Relations & Governance

- To prioritize and promote Oventions as an anti-racist organization, require all vendors, consultants, interns, part time staff, donors, and volunteers to pledge acknowledgment of Oventions’ anti-racism policy.
- Create a Rubric of Accountability (per Strategic Plan), which vets vendors, consultants, interns, part-time staff, donors and other relationships in alignment with Oventions’ core values and commitment to anti-racism.

Development

- To ensure equity in development and benefits and equitably celebrate the contributions of BIPOC donors, re-evaluate and revise Membership and donor program benefits/decenter incentives for privileged/affluent ticket buyers.
- To eradicate exclusion of BIPOC donors/donor prospects and mitigate the marginalization of people who can’t afford to donate more, revise/rework tiered benefits.

PROGRAMS

Live Performances

- To perpetuate Ovarions as an anti-racist organization, ensure that any arts organization or other entity that Ovarions partners with shares Ovarions' commitment to anti-racism in formal agreements.

Outreach

- To ensure racial equity, anti-racism, diverse perspectives and maximum engagement of BIPOC constituents, review and revise outreach/audience development (relationships with BIPOC organizations and groups) from an antiracism/racial equity lens.

Audiences

- To promote Ovarions as an anti-racist organization and increase the “safe-feeling” need of BIPOC patrons, add Patron Anti-racist Code of Conduct and Patron “Know Your Rights” manifesto at point of purchase and registration in pre-performance email, pre-performance announcement, know before you go and ticket receipt.
- To increase audience learning and center the value of BIPOC constituents and artists, add regular anti-racist resources in your audience communications (e-blasts, inside look, artistic displays, know before you go, post show email, discussion panels, etc.).
- To build and promote Ovarions as a welcoming and safe space, build and brand Ovarions' Office as a Safe Space Sanctuary.
- To build a welcoming environment and deepen the relationship for BIPOC community members, build augment offerings (i.e.: keep the theater open after the show for impromptu conversation and bonding, create 'questions for the ride home', create and use Land Acknowledgements, support patrons giving other patrons rides home, etc.).
- To ensure the maximum engagement and increase BIPOC patronage, collect self-reported racial demographic data at the point of purchase.

FISCAL YEAR 26 TASKS & GOALS

BOARD

- To ensure that Ovations' governance is infused with the valuable input of BIPOC voices, elevate BIPOC member(s) to leadership by appointing:
 - at least equal representation BIPOC/Non-BIPOC committee chairs of the Board
 - at least equal representation BIPOC/Non-BIPOC committee members of the Board
 - at least equal representation BIPOC/Non-BIPOC Executive Committee of the Board
 - at least equal representation BIPOC/Non-BIPOC of the full Board
- To enable maximum participation of BIPOC Board members, remove Board financial giving as a requirement of Board participation.

OPERATIONS

Human Relations & Governance

- To elevate the value of BIPOC people, work towards equal representation of BIPOC/Non-BIPOC vendors, consultants, interns, part-time staff, volunteers.
- To ensure anti-racism/racial equity in every aspect of operations and program, create equal representation of BIPOC/Non-BIPOC on working groups and task forces.
- To support BIPOC staff needs about racialized trauma, radical self-care, internalized racism, learning, etc., fund and make space (physical and time) for BIPOC affinity groups.

Marketing

- To expand reach to BIPOC communities, design fifteen new ways of expanding brand awareness through the use of print/digital media, advertise/promote/sale tickets, targeted press/editorials, and partnership/sponsorships.

PROGRAMS

Audiences

- To ensure a safe environment and reduce racist incidents, for BIPOC constituents, staff, volunteers and board members, create a racism incident report, tracking process and post-incident repair follow up for use by all.

References & Resources

Glossaries

[Racial Equity Tool Glossary](#)
[Council Office of Racial Equity](#)

Other Resources

[Racial Equity Tools](#)
[White Supremacy Culture](#)
[The Power of Art: Creating Space for Racial Justice Roundtable.](#)
Presented by the College of Liberal Arts, University of Minnesota
[New Study Shows Audience's Hearts Synchronize At The Theatre,](#)
Broadway World
[How to Be Antiracist](#), Ibram X Kendi
[TYA/USA's Anti-Racist & Anti-Oppressive Futures for Theatre for Young Audiences: An Interactive Guide](#)

Acknowledgements

[Portland Ovation Board](#)
[Portland Ovation Staff](#)
IDEA Task Force
Sayad Moudachirou, co-chair
Aimée M. Petrin, co-chair
Rachael Alfond
Mike Boyson
Katie Day
Luisa Deprez
Jack Lufkin
Nyamoun Nguany Machar
Mary Noyes
Tania Powers
Michael J. Bobbitt, Consultant

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We See You White American Theatre
<https://www.weseeyouwat.com/>

