

SEATTLE OPERA

RACIAL EQUITY PLAN 2020–2023



A Seattle Opera joint event with Gallery Onyx, a Seattle organization that focuses on Pacific Northwest artists of African descent. Seattle Opera artists Jermaine Smith and Brandie Sutton join dramaturg Jonathan Dean listening in to Onyx docent Antoinette Reed discussing painting "Speak To Us Now" by Sonja Griffin Evans which was on display in the gallery.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Seattle Opera cares deeply about eradicating institutional racism and engaging with our community in a way that centers social impact within our art form and beyond. We believe in being leaders in racial equity work among our opera peers nationally, while keeping an open mind to learning and growing in areas where our company needs improvement.

It is important for us, as individuals and as a company, to deepen our knowledge of the perspectives of our audiences, particularly communities of color. It is imperative that the work we produce onstage and in our local communities be reflective of our diverse world and preserve the dignity of those whose lives and perspectives are historically, and currently, most easily marginalized in our society.

Genuine thoughtfulness and care in this work goes a long way in generating public trust, interest, and support for our artistic work. We believe that a deepened and detailed level of equity work will be the cornerstone of our organization and will greatly enhance our ability to develop meaningful community partnerships, increase audience participation, and cultivate future patrons who find value in both our art form and our social impact.



Photo © Philip Newton

Soprano Tess Altiveros in *The Falling and Rising*, Seattle Opera's first chamber opera in Tagney Jones Hall.

FY20–23 RACIAL EQUITY + SOCIAL IMPACT PLAN

In FY19, Seattle Opera embarked on its first Racial Equity and Social Impact company assessment. The methodology included an internal assessment via racial equity survey, SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis, semi-structured interviews of key staff, and significant input from the staff-led Equity Team.

In addition, an external scan included comparative information from community sources such as the King County and City of Seattle Racial Equity plans, Seattle Center Racial Equity Cohort, Opera America, and reports on institutional equity and social impact, such as Equity in the Center's 2018 *Awake to Woke to Work* report and ArtsFund's 2018 *Social Impact of the Arts* study, among others.



Photo © Sunny Martini

Frederick Ballentine and Angela Brown share a scene from Charlie Parker's *Yardbird*, in February 2020.

During this process, the Board of Directors began racial equity trainings and both staff and board had meaningful dialogue in order to deepen their knowledge of how this critical work impacts our art form and community.

Following data analysis and distillation, the assessment's outcomes were reported to the General Director and Board of Directors, with recommendations for annual organizational goals, objectives, and outcome measures.

Ultimately, our goal is to integrate racial equity and social impact holistically into all aspects of Seattle Opera's work, and develop mindful efforts that can be made consistently in moving the company forward along the continuum toward becoming an anti-racist and multi-cultural organization.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #1

- **FORMALIZE AND IMPLEMENT RACIAL EQUITY + SOCIAL IMPACT PRACTICES AND POLICIES ACROSS ALL STAKEHOLDERS AND DEPARTMENTS OF THE COMPANY.**

DESIRED OUTCOME

- **SEATTLE OPERA COMMITS TO THE PROCESS OF INTENTIONAL INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION BASED UPON ANTI-RACIST ANALYSIS AND IDENTITY.**

SUPPORTING INITIATIVES

- 1.1** Ensure that Racial Equity + Social Impact (RESI) goals are an integral part of the company's Long Range Plan.
- 1.2** Ensure that department level RESI goals are implemented, executed, and reported to the General Director.
- 1.3** Create budgeting protocols in the accounting system that identify, track, and monitor racial equity and social impact contributions and expenditures.
- 1.4** Monitor RESI plan progress via the Long Range Planning Committee and periodic staff reports to the board.
- 1.5** Develop, quantify, and track a list of current and potential contributors who factor racial equity into their funding requirements.
- 1.6** Evaluate facility and work environments from an equitable and accessible lens and implement a plan to be inclusive to employees/visitors from vulnerable groups.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #2

- **INCREASE THE PERCENTAGE OF STAKEHOLDERS WHO UNDERSTAND AND PARTICIPATE IN SEATTLE OPERA'S RACIAL EQUITY + SOCIAL IMPACT WORK.**

DESIRED OUTCOME

- **SEATTLE OPERA STAKEHOLDERS HOLD A SHARED VISION OF AN INSTITUTION AND WIDER COMMUNITY THAT HAS OVERCOME SYSTEMIC RACISM AND ALL OTHER FORMS OF OPPRESSION.**

SUPPORTING INITIATIVES

- 2.1** Create and execute a calendar of year-round Racial Equity + Social Impact trainings, workshops, and activities to be shared across company stakeholders and departments.
- 2.2** Provide training to all visual artists (lighting designers, wig technicians, make-up artists, etc.) to successfully prepare artists of color, specifically Black artists, for the stage.
- 2.3** Create a Racial Equity toolkit for all company stakeholders, particularly board, staff, volunteers, hiring managers, contract employees, and union partners.
- 2.4** Develop and add a RESI resource page to the company website.
- 2.5** Ensure that hiring managers, in collaboration with Human Resources, have the tools and support needed to resolve workplace issues involving interpersonal and institutional racism.
- 2.6** Ensure that Racial Equity + Social Impact issues and perspectives are included in department level meeting agendas throughout the year.
- 2.7** Ensure that all CBA, part time, contract, and seasonal employees have access to company RESI trainings and toolkit.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #3

- **INCREASE THE COMPANY'S RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY ACROSS ALL STAKEHOLDER GROUPS TO REFLECT THE DIVERSITY OF THE PUGET SOUND REGION.**

DESIRED OUTCOME

- **ANTI-RACIST MULTICULTURAL DIVERSITY BECOMES AN INSTITUTIONALIZED ASSET.**
- MEMBERS ACROSS ALL IDENTITY GROUPS ARE FULL PARTICIPANTS IN DECISIONS THAT SHAPE THE INSTITUTION, AND INCLUSION OF DIVERSE CULTURES, LIFESTYLES, AND INTEREST.**

SUPPORTING INITIATIVES

- 3.1** Implement internal hiring processes and trainings that ensure successful selection of diverse job candidates.
- 3.2** Increase board diversity through strategic recruitment practices.
- 3.3** Increase the racial and ethnic diversity of Creative Teams and Artists.
- 3.4** Develop a plan to increase diversity in BRAVO membership and activities.
- 3.5** Develop and execute the Seattle Arts Fellowship for career development of BIPOC and ALAANA opera administrators.
- 3.6** Ensure that Seattle Opera programs are rooted in RESI work, and include diverse perspectives and topics.
- 3.7** Increase and expand learning programs in diverse communities, and increase participation by communities of color.
- 3.8** Increase the percentage of operas and works by racially and ethnically diverse composers and librettists in the season planning pipeline to ensure that diverse perspectives are included in our mainstage works.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Land Acknowledgement:

We, along with the people we serve, live and work on the land of the Coast Salish people. We must continue to show recognition and respect for the Indigenous peoples who have been and continue to be stewards of this land.

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Equity Team Lead, Assessment Facilitator, and Plan Developer

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