

# **Notch Theatre Company Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Community Guidelines**

## **Vision and Mission**

There is a cultural deficit in this country as the civil liberties of historically underrepresented groups continue to face serious threat. How many Americans feel deprived of full cultural citizenship on account of ethnicity, religion, social class, ability, orientation, and other social exclusions? We must acknowledge and address the challenge of belonging and disbelonging in order to sustain a functioning civil society. We must invest in giving a platform to unheard stories.

Moreover, our country is stalled in an ever-polarizing inability to engage in productive dialogue. This troubling state of affairs requires us artists and cultural workers to seek out conversation with communities to which we might not normally find ourselves in proximity, to excavate the invisible barriers standing between us and civil discourse, and to provoke audiences with questions (old and new) about who is given access to our nation's promise of opportunity and who is systematically shut out.

Notch Theatre Company creates community-responsive theatre to drive change around the pressing social and health related issues of our time, offering countless communities a platform to tell their stories on stage and be their own change makers. Theater is able to connect with an audience in a deeply personal way, and we strive to push the boundaries of what that connection can achieve.

By collaborating with communities across the nation to tell their real stories on stage, this work engages populations that brick and mortar theaters are not reaching, personalizes important social issues for people on all sides of a conversation, raises awareness in a compelling way, drives change on a national scale, and prompts meaningful, lasting engagement at a grass-roots level.

## **Purpose of Document**

This document exists to establish Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion practices for Notch Theatre Company and to hold all leadership, staff, and artists accountable for sustaining those practices outlined below. This document will be distributed to anyone affiliated with Notch Theatre Company (including but not limited to staff, board, volunteers, artists, community partners, and vendors) as well as publicly accessible through our website.

## Definitions

For the purpose of this Policy, we use the following definitions:

- BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous and People of Color.
- EDI stands for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.
- An EDI Advocate is an elected member of a Notch project who acts as a sounding board for EDI issues on-site. They are the first avenue for Notch artists & collaborators to report EDI concerns. To quote [Amelia Parenteau](#), an EDI Advocate's presence is intended to "foster a rehearsal environment so that everyone in the room—actors, co-creators, stage management, designers, institutional and production staff—could feel safe in sharing concerns and thoughts, to feel ownership over the generative process, and to be present with their whole identities."
- Discrimination is the treatment or consideration based on class or category rather than individual merit. It can be used to privilege (special treatment in favor of) as well as disadvantage (special treatment against) a particular group or individual.
- Oppression is the use of power or privilege by a socially, politically, economically, or culturally dominant group(s) to disempower (take away or reduce power), marginalize, silence, or otherwise subordinate one social group or category.
- Systemic Oppression consists of practices, policies, laws, and standards that disadvantage a particular group or category of people.
- Individual Oppression is demeaning and oppressive behavior towards and treatment of a particular group or category of people, expressed through individual attitudes, beliefs, and values.
- Anti-Oppression is the work of actively challenging and removing oppression perpetuated by power inequalities in society, both systemic oppression and individual expressions of oppression.
- Anti-Blackness is the inability to recognize Black humanity. Stemming from the legacy of slavery, it locates Black people as property, inhuman, and disposable. Anti-Blackness is a fundamental component built into the culture, value system, and creation of the U.S. It incorporates society's hatred of Blackness and justifies violence against Black people (Reference: "Call it what is it: Anti-Blackness," Kihana Miraya Ross, New York Times, 2020)

## Policy Statement

Notch partners with artists, cultural workers, arts administrators, and other nonprofit organizations. Many individuals face practical barriers and oppressive experiences because of unequal power (both individual and systemic) related to race, ability, age, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, and immigration status. Since Notch is a reflection of the society in which we live, these uses of power may inexcusably exist within Notch as well.

Discrimination and oppression can prevent people from engaging with Notch in a way that fully reflects their ability, experience, and contributions. We recognize that understanding, acknowledging, and working to eliminate oppression is a learning process for us all. Different people can be at different stages in that process, and Notch is committed to creating opportunities for learning, both within the context of the work and within our organization's administrative infrastructure at large. Furthermore, Notch acknowledges that this learning can be fraught and challenging. Because everyone is expected to engage with these social issues as per Notch's mission, we encourage people who have historically held an unequal share of power to remain active in their discomfort. We believe that by leaning into that social discomfort we can advance the greater movement and carry this work forward together.

Notch strives to provide an opportunity for learning while not forcing historically oppressed groups to educate others or re-traumatize themselves. Notch recognizes that individuals and groups who experience discrimination have the capacity to make choices and act on their own behalf to bring about the self-determined change that will dismantle systems of oppression for themselves and others, and that our work is to support, uplift, amplify, and advocate for their self-determined work, not to prescribe or control it.

## **Commitment**

We are committed to anti-oppression principles in all areas of our internal and external work. This commitment is grounded in our belief that change is possible and that our work, and that of the artistic community as a whole, will grow stronger as oppression is eliminated.

Notch will therefore ensure that its work accurately reflects and uses the variety of knowledge of all peoples as the basis for all of our activities; that it recognizes how communities have been using their own technologies toward freedom for generations; that it recognizes the leadership of disenfranchised individuals and groups to bring about anti-oppressive change; and that it acknowledges the existence of discrimination and makes a conscious effort to challenge systemic inequities.

Notch will work to ensure that:

- Our partnerships accurately reflect the vibrancy of the arts community and our society as a whole;
- Notch's work is presented in an accessible way, so that our audiences can access the art in a manner free from obstacles, barriers, and oppression;

- Notch’s vendors and consultants are informed by the goal of identifying and countering the impact of the various and combined forms of oppression affecting our communities;
- Notch’s advocacy work with government, and our marketing and communications strategy with media and the public address the diverse and combined forms of oppression facing our communities and strive to offer practical solutions to eliminate this oppression;
- As informed by our community partners, we want to invest in the economic betterment of each community through our cultural work. We are committed to raising funds from individuals and investors that are seeking economic justice and not the exploitation of peoples oppressed by poverty. We are committed to engaging in transparent conversation with our community partners about our budgets. Finally, we are striving to allocate at least 40% of our funds to our community partners and participants;
- Our capacity and the capacity of our communities is strengthened to develop individual leadership and advocacy potential, and to challenge unequal power and biases that lead to oppression;
- Notch has an effective process for resolving concerns and complaints that may arise from communities’ experience of unfair, inequitable, or oppressive treatment within Notch;
- Every Notch project elects an EDI Advocate as a liaison to handle on-site EDI concerns and provide an immediate and present avenue for EDI reporting;
- All Notch artists and collaborators are made aware of the role of EDI Board Chair, Alexis Green, and provided with the contact information to report EDI concerns they feel cannot be addressed with the EDI Advocate. It will be made clear that should they need further support, they have a second avenue of reporting. If they need to discuss or report an EDI issue, Alexis can be reached at [AlexisAGreen@gmail.com](mailto:AlexisAGreen@gmail.com);
- A process is put into place to develop policies and practices that promote anti-oppression, and to implement, periodically review, and improve such policies and practices where necessary.

## Conclusion

These guidelines are a living document designed to evolve alongside shifting socio-political contexts. The conversation around these issues is happening in real time, and we must respond nimbly and with urgency. This document will be reviewed and updated by Notch’s Board of Directors (and any other parties as the Board deems appropriate) on an annual basis. Review will take place every December, and an updated version will be released every January, unless otherwise scheduled by the Board.

The theatre is able to hold up worlds we've never seen before and ask "... *what if?*" There is great power in collective dreaming. Our work can imagine into more just futures and rewrite falsely held historical narratives. Our work is the work of reaching toward one another, across that unknowable space between us, of getting proximate, shoulder to shoulder in the dark theater, all the stories on stage we may never otherwise visit.

"All the lives we could live, all the people we would never know, never will be, they are everywhere. That is what the world is. [...] We stumble on, bring a little noise into the silence, find in others the ongoing of ourselves. It is almost enough." —**Colum McCann, *Let the Great World Spin***

"A play is a blueprint of an event: a way of creating and rewriting history through the medium of literature. Since history is a recorded or remembered event, theatre, for me, is the perfect place to 'make' history—that is, because so much of African-American history has been unrecorded, dismembered, washed out, one of my tasks as a playwright is to—through literature and the special strange relationship between theatre and real-life—locate the ancestral burial ground, dig for bones, find bones, hear the bones sing, write it down." —**Suzan-Lori Park**

"The good news is that racist and antiracist are not fixed identities. We can be racist one minute and antiracist the next. What we say about race, what we do about race, in each moment, determines what—not who—we are." —**Ibram X. Kendi, *How to be Antiracist***

"The United States was founded on the principal that all people are created equal. [...] We have yet to achieve our founding principal, but any gains we have made thus far [...] in the realm of civil rights has been accomplished through identity politics: women's suffrage, the American disabilities act, Title 9, federal recognition of same-sex marriage. [...] Naming who has access and who doesn't guides our efforts in challenging injustice." —**Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility***

"Long, long ago the simple things come back to us. They rest for a minute by our ribcages then reach in and twist our hearts back a **notch** in our chest." —**Colum McCann, *Let the Great World Spin***