

**YANCEY
CONSULTING'S
CONDENSED VERSION**

**T DOCUMENTING
THE
AMERICAN
REPERTORY
THEATER'S**

**2021 ANTI-RACISM AND
ANTI-OPPRESSION
COMMITMENTS
AND PRIORITIES**

**INCLUDING
RECOMMENDATIONS,
PRIORITIZATION,
FRAMEWORKS, AND
LINKS TO OTHER VITAL
MATERIALS
JULY 2021**

Developed in collaboration.

Written by

LISA YANCEY AND JUSTINA CRAWFORD.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was born out of the courage and conviction of American Repertory Theater's (A.R.T.) People of Color Affinity Group. In a climate of racial uprisings, an unprecedented global COVID-19 pandemic, and a groundswell of callouts and demands related to the white American theater industry's inequitable practices regarding Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, the A.R.T.'s People of Color Affinity Group organized. Focusing on the theater and communities that they called home, they documented patterns and systemic behaviors that yield disparate treatment, investments, opportunities, agency, and visibility for people of color throughout the A.R.T.'s ecosystem.

The People of Color Affinity Group's courage to activate an

institutional call to action via a list of demands to the A.R.T.'s leadership allowed other members of the A.R.T.'s staff, boards, and Harvard partners to lean into their courage—instead of formulating a defense—and embrace the demands with an intent to do something about them. Where we are today is the result of courage and collective action. The journey is not over, for in many respects, it has only just begun. We acknowledge and honor the people who made this beginning possible. Every spectacular ending has a start—and in this beginning, courageous stewards are catalyzing

an institutional ethos that they want to endow for future generations. We look forward to this list of catalysts expanding as the A.R.T. continues its journey of becoming an anti-racist and anti-oppressive institution.

We first acknowledge and honor the members of the A.R.T.'s People of Color Affinity Group.

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| Alexandra Daniels | Lorraine Kanyike |
| Kaylah Dixon | Gayeon Lee |
| Elyza Sharai Dottin | Julia Schachnik |
| Medhanit Felleke | Jonah Toussaint |
| Latiana "LT" Gourzong | Adriana Lucia Zuñiga-Acevedo |
| Lama El Homaïssi | |

We now acknowledge and honor the individuals who actively participated in unpacking and exploring distinct areas where the A.R.T. can align its culture and practice with anti-racism and anti-oppression values. These members took the thoughts and feedback gathered from the entire

A.R.T. community and, in thirty-one meetings, did the work to excavate root issues, to affirm that the issues named were data supported, and to collectively develop recommendations and strategies to resolve what emerged as priorities.

MEET THE MEMBERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN YANCEY CONSULTING’S SIGNATURE KITCHEN CABINET AND BUILDING AND WEAVING TEAMS.

KITCHEN CABINET

- Bethany M. Allen
- Thabiti Brown
- Priscilla H. Douglas
- Sumner Ellsworth
- Jonathan Glazer
- Latiana “LT” Gourzong
- Lori Gross
- Sharlyn Heslam
- Tracy Keene
- Mark Lunsford
- Noreen Major
- Dayron J. Miles
- Diane Paulus
- Julia Schachnik
- Jane Wolfson

BOARD AND EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

- Diane Borger
- Julie Carroll
- Rebecca Curtiss
- Priscilla H. Douglas
- Joe Lorenzen
- Dayron J. Miles
- Christine Noah
- Andrew Ory
- Justin Paice
- Alma Reyes

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN AND BUILDING PROJECT

Pete Atkinson
Paul Battenwieser
Ann Gund
Tim Hall
Tracy Keene
Jeremie Lozier
Noreen Major
Susan Malaab
Dayron J. Miles
Rick Noble
Ken Okonkwo
Myran Parker-Brass
Diane Paulus
Fay Shutzer
Steve Tompkins

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL INVESTMENTS

Sophie Ancival
Diane Borger
Lindsay Child
Skip Curtiss
Joseph Fanning
Anna Fitzloff
Jonathan Glazer
Susanna Jackson
Mark Lunsford
Noreen Major
Irv Plotkin
Steve Showalter
Nick Tosches
Emily Wilson

PROGRAMMING AND ENGAGEMENT

Bethany M. Allen

Laurie Burt

Miguel Ferreira

Alex Giorgetti

Mark Lunsford

Alycia Marucci

Ryan McKittrick

Bob Murchison

Brenna Nicely

Sara Porkalob

Emma Putnam

Alma Reyes

Sarah Schofield-Mansur

Joel Zayac

DECISION- MAKING PROCESSES

Paolo Abelli

Jeffrey Burrows

Joseph Fanning

Anna Fitzloff

Latiana "LT" Gourzong

Sarah Hancock

Sharlyn Heslam

Linda Hill

Jonathan Hulbert

David Jewett

Blair Laurie

Fatimah Mateen

Megan Minger

Rick Noble

Emma Watt

Pat Romeo-Gilbert

Stephen Wuycheck

MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

Matthew Adelman
Heather Conroe
Leo X. Crowley
Robert Duffley
Lori Gross
Jerry Jordan
Gayeon Lee
Tim McCarthy
Heather Morris
Julia Schachnik
Julia Smeliansky

WORKPLACE CULTURE

Sophie Ancival
Sumner Ellsworth
Kate Gellert
Latiana “LT” Gourzong
Donna Heimlich
Yvette Layne
York-Andreas Paris
Julia Schachnik
Mike Sheehan
Kat Sistare
Matt Spano
Mariya Sudarska
Michael Winn
Jane Wolfson

We are grateful to all of the members of the A.R.T.’s ecosystem of staff, boards, and Harvard University partners. You may find them [here](#).

CONTEXT

The American Repertory Theater's (A.R.T.) mission is to expand the boundaries of theater by transforming how work is developed, programmed, produced, and contextualized, always including the audience as a partner. In the late spring and early summer of 2020, amid a groundswell of racial uprisings reminding the world that Black Lives Matter, and an unyielding global health pandemic, this mission was called into account.

In Yancey Consulting's estimation, the word **how** in the phrasing "how work is developed, programmed, produced, and contextualized," as assessed within the A.R.T., was collectively scrutinized and cataloged by members of the organization's People of Color Affinity Group. Many may presume that this mission is externally facing. Contrarily, everything that follows the word **how** is determined by the A.R.T.'s leadership, including its incubating partner Harvard University. Documenting historical patterns of disparate treatment and meager representation of

Black and Indigenous people and people of color (BIPOC) throughout the A.R.T. (from the boards to the executive leadership and positions dispersed across chief areas of theater production), the People of Color Affinity Group created a statement of demands. These demands ignited an internal examination of how the organization's leadership buttressed or institutionalized oppressive practices that resulted in undue burden on and harm to BIPOC staff and creative partners.

The demands explicitly called for "the predominately white leadership, staff, and board of the American Repertory Theater at Harvard University" to be held accountable and responsible to all Black, Indigenous, and POC employees; that is, they will "openly and loudly affirm that they [BIPOC employees] are safe at work from racism and discrimination and create programs in order to protect them." In articulating the crux of the demands, the POC Affinity Group members shared:



In the A.R.T.'s most recent statement [circa June 2020] about Black Lives Matter, the theater made the claim that this organization is committed to dismantling white supremacy, however many Black and other employees of color have not experienced the safe haven that the A.R.T. is supposed to facilitate. In order for the A.R.T. to make this claim, we demand tangible steps in this process in lieu of vague language. We have taken the time to sit down and articulate our thoughts, experiences, and subsequent ideas. However, it is important to stress that these ideas are not new. PoC employees at the A.R.T. have been voicing these concerns since many of us were hired. We recognize that some actions have been taken, but they are not enough. They are NOT enough. We want this statement to be used as a springboard for change in order to ensure the safety and protection of PoC employees of this institution well beyond our departure.

THE LEADERSHIP'S RESPONSE

ON JUNE 24, 2020, WITH THE SUPPORT AND INVOLVEMENT OF ITS TOP LEADERSHIP, THE A.R.T. AVOWED THE FOLLOWING: IN COLLABORATION WITH STAFF, EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS, AND AN EXTERNAL CONSULTANT, THE A.R.T. IS COMMITTED TO

- ensuring transparency and accountability with all staff
- facilitating institutional support for BIPOC employees
- hiring a consultant/firm with expertise in anti-racism to work with the A.R.T.
- instituting a company-wide, step-by-step, required curriculum of anti-racist training
- activating a collaborative process for articulating shared values with anti-racism as a core value
- auditing practices and commitments to anti-racism with internal and external stakeholders
- activating collaborative decision-making
- ushering the A.R.T.'s boards and philanthropic partners in anti-racism practices
- revising recruitment and hiring strategies
- evaluating and increasing investments in staff development
- cultivating safe space for employees to report racist behavior or incidents
- prioritizing relationship building with audiences and awareness of barriers to participation
- developing new programming and decision-making processes to include internal and external BIPOC voices
- ensuring BIPOC representation in the creative and stage management teams for all A.R.T. productions
- evaluating and increasing resources for the A.R.T.'s community engagement program
- guaranteeing that anti-racist language and practices are included and modeled in all pedagogy and capital campaigns

Yancey Consulting's engagement was an output from these commitments. And YC's values and ecosystem-activation practices aligned with stated commitments to instituting collaborative processes, maintaining transparency and accountability, building relationships, and codifying shared values.

CONSULTANCY

This consultancy’s purpose was to engage Yancey Consulting (YC) as a thought partner to the American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.) in designing and stewarding actionable pathways toward becoming an anti-racist and anti-oppressive organization. For the A.R.T. to become an anti-racist and anti-oppressive workplace, YC expressed that it must undergo a culture shift that involves staff, boards, Harvard University partners, and community stakeholders. This was not “checklist” work. This was culture-change work.

PURPOSE

Endemic to how YC operates, the firm developed a comprehensive process that included multiple entry points for the A.R.T.’s staff, boards, and Harvard partners to engage if they were so inspired. The output is an actionable planning document that outlines priorities and recommendations and assesses the financial implications of realizing the plan.



THE PROCESS DESIGN

Yancey Consulting's process design was integrative. Working in partnership with the A.R.T., we created opportunities for communal sharing, breath, questions, learning, and feedback. YC utilized every opportunity to model behaviors and practices to build relationships and steward transparent communication for replication within the A.R.T.'s workplace. YC's process used mixed modalities, such as surveys, small- and large-group meetings, one-on-one conversations, and online communications. To ensure that the A.R.T.'s boards and staff were up to date, YC sent bimonthly updates to the entire A.R.T. staff, and board while remaining available for questions and meeting requests. Group meetings were intentionally intergenerational and involved staff and board members at all levels of the organization.

As part of the planning process, members of the A.R.T.'s ecosystem participated in YC's signature Ecosystem Activation Model, which incorporates ***Kitchen Cabinet and Building and Weaving Teams***. These teams root in collaborative ideation and consensus

building. As the core stewards, the Kitchen Cabinet was responsible for mapping a viable plan to embed anti-racism and anti-oppression values and practices within the A.R.T.'s workplace culture and for presenting the final recommendations to the board for consideration. The Building and Weaving Teams were responsible for collectively ideating on a specific topic area of focus with supporting data to make clear and time-defined recommendations on actions for the Kitchen Cabinet to consider.

Once engaged in fall 2020, YC designed and organized ***Building and Weaving Teams*** under the chief areas that emerged from the ***People of Color Affinity Group*** demands, the A.R.T. leadership's response to those demands, and an anonymous board and staff survey.

BUILDING AND WEAVING TEAMS:

In addition to developing recommendations, Building and Weaving Teams determined how to build consensus as a team, including transparency and accountability.

Working remotely proved an opportunity for YC to engage the most participants possible. All meetings took place on Zoom, including large, small, and one-on-one conversations. In addition, YC recorded each session to ensure all board and staff could participate at their leisure due to changing schedules. Lastly, YC shared PowerPoint presentations and meeting notes with the boards and staff after each meeting.

- Mission, Vision, and Values
- Workplace Culture
- Decision-Making Processes
- Programming and Engagement
- Board and Executive Leadership
- Internal and External Investments
- Capital Campaign and Building Project

ADDITIONS TO THE PROCESS

Yancey Consulting remained an active thought partner to the A.R.T. beyond the anticipated engagement in the original scope of work. As related issues emerged for the A.R.T. in real time, YC made space for counsel. Since December 2020, twenty-two meetings, in addition to the thirty-one Kitchen Cabinet and Building and Weaving Team meetings, have transpired.

WHAT WE ACCOMPLISHED TOGETHER

Building upon the conversations between YC and the A.R.T.'s various individuals, committees, and groups, by the end of 2020, most of the participants for YC's signature Kitchen Cabinet and Building and Weaving Team process were identified, and an anonymous survey was launched. The survey captured perspectives on the A.R.T.'s workplace culture, institutional priorities, People of Color Affinity Group demands, and decision-making processes. The results were distilled and anchored in all future meetings.

On January 5, 2021, YC designed and facilitated the *Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Fundamentals Webinar* for 135 A.R.T. boards and staff members. The results from the anonymous survey, plus additional small-group meetings, informed the content of this session. Approximately 76 percent of the boards and staff (127 responses) completed the survey. Later that month, YC met with Harvard University leadership and stakeholders to understand Harvard's work and values that align with anti-racism and anti-oppression to assess where the A.R.T. and Harvard align as partners regarding this work.

We then assembled the Kitchen Cabinet composed of visionaries and frontline doers and Building and Weaving Teams consisting of individuals who brought different perspectives and content experience to focused areas of exploration. Throughout thirty-one meetings from February through April 2021, Building and Weaving Teams developed recommendations based on prioritized issues and intentions to disrupt the root causes of white supremacy culture and oppression. Recommendations were shared with the A.R.T. boards and staff for open comments from March 19 to April 26, 2021, for further discussion and refinement.

The Kitchen Cabinet met three times between April and June 2021 to review, organize, and determine how to activate the recommendations. Once the recommendations were vetted and agreed upon, YC created this document, which includes a list of recommendations and next steps for the Kitchen Cabinet to review and approve in preparation for the boards' consideration.

PRIORITIZED ISSUES FROM BUILDING AND WEAVING TEAMS

MISSION, VISION, VALUES

- We need **a shared understanding and vision** that binds us collectively on what anti-racism and anti-oppression mean in practice throughout the A.R.T.
- We need to **see and prioritize staff's well-being**, understanding the physical, emotional, and psychological tolls that staff currently endure because of racist, oppressive, or inconsiderate practices. We see focusing on the well-being of our staff as an extension of our commitment to advancing public health.
- We need **clear internal communications** to strengthen relationships among boards and staff to build a unified vision for the A.R.T. as a theater.

WORKPLACE CULTURE

- We need to develop **clear internal and external transparent communication practices with feedback loops** to strengthen relationships among the board and staff, break down departmental silos, and ensure transparency and accountability.
- We need **a workplace culture that prioritizes staff's overall health and well-being by creating a psychologically safe and supportive work environment that advances a culture of accountability** through anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices.
- We need to **improve our hiring and onboarding practices and create equitable mentoring and professional development opportunities that apply to all staff throughout their tenure with the organization.**

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL INVESTMENTS

- We need to **address a lack of specific anti-racist and anti-oppressive fiscal and investment policies for all departments, create a framework for an audit** of current and past practices, and **analyze how changes to our future investment practice** will impact our business model.
- We need to **practice advanced budget planning guided by anti-racist and anti-oppressive organizational values** and **mission** instead of budgeting practices from the previous year.
- We need to **enhance our compensation** to artists and staff, **improve payments** to the ecology of theater workers that we engage, and **create equitable investments** in staff across the organization—with an intentional focus on disparities experienced by BIPOC employees, including professional development and career growth planning.

DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

- We need to **identify and assess** through an anti-racist and anti-oppressive lens the A.R.T.'s current decision-making processes, culture, protocols, and guidelines to **establish a values-aligned** decision-making process that builds accountability and trust across the organization.
- We would like to address the A.R.T.'s **lack of transparency in decision-making** within the organization, across departments, and with Harvard. We need a decision-making process where **staff at all levels have agency** and **voice**.
- We would like to address how **untimely decisions are made by management**. Delayed decisions negatively impact staff time and create excessive workloads and a constant state of urgency.

BOARD AND EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

- We need a **shared understanding** of what is meant by “leadership” and who is involved to get clear on roles, responsibilities, commitments, and the A.R.T.'s relationship with Harvard.

- We need **clear internal communications** to strengthen relationships among boards and staff to understand how and what decisions are made.
- We would like to address the **A.R.T.'s lack of succession planning at all levels of the organization** to ensure staff support during transitions and BIPOC representation within the staff, the boards, and executive leadership in adherence to the A.R.T.'s anti-racist and anti-oppressive values.

PROGRAMMING AND ENGAGEMENT

- We need to **profile the A.R.T.'s current programming and engagement culture** to **prioritize hiring and centering diverse stories from BIPOC communities**.
- We **lack advanced planning**. We need to **create better protocols for communication, scheduling, and budgeting of creative projects** in consideration of staff's time, preparedness, and well-being.
- We **need to build coalitions with new and existing and local communities** for creative projects.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN AND BUILDING PROJECT

- We need to **address a lack of shared understanding** and a **diminished culture of accountability that fosters** anti-racism and anti-oppression practices throughout the A.R.T.
- We need to **map all the power centers** of the capital campaign and building project with those who will be impacted (with degrees of impact) to **assess how white supremacy culture has shown up** (or could show up) in this project.
- We need to **develop clear internal and external communication practices** to build long-term relationships with identified communities and external partners, including those that will be impacted.



you
DID THAT.

You identified the
issues, excavated
root themes, and
prioritized your
most pressing
concerns.

WELL
DONE!



**IN ADDITION
TO THOSE
SPECIFIC
TASKS, YOU
LAID THE
GROUNDWORK
FOR A NEW
CULTURE TO
EMERGE. YOU
DID SO BY**

- ▶ working together toward a common cause (anti-racism and anti-oppression) across departments, employment status, and boards and with Harvard departments that support the A.R.T.'s administration;
- ▶ listening to cultivate empathy toward experiences that you may not have identified with or been aware of;
- ▶ recognizing the critical need for transparent, complete, and responsive internal communications because of the repeatedly stated need for trust building; and
- ▶ working through differences of opinion to consider different perspectives while resisting groupthink.

Now it is time to apply what you said. Without an unwavering commitment and conviction—most championed by the boards and executive leadership—to adopt into practice the harvest of this work together, the foundation created over these past six months will lie bare.

FINAL WORDS FROM

YAN CEY

Every day is history in the making. But not all history warrants reference. What you are doing right now—pending your follow-through—is the kind of history making that marks a critical juncture in what you become as an organization. Although we have reached a milestone where you came together as a team to identify and prioritize what you aim to change within the A.R.T., it is not the destination. For me, the destination is when the changes you seek are no longer outstanding. They are simply how you are as an organization—standard operating culture. What is that, precisely? Personally, when I know that I am about to give my all to something (like starting two ventures or writing a book), especially over an undefined time period, it is important for me to see and feel the end goal. Consistency diminishes over time without a clear, desirable vision. The desire to stave off the erosion of energy and conviction concerning this work is why codifying a vision narrative is listed as **Now Work** in these recommendations. The A.R.T. must galvanize around a clear vision, and that vision must evoke vigor, desire, and passion for its manifestation throughout the organization. People have to see it, feel it, and believe it's possible—even though it's hard. Hard is expected. You are traversing uncharted paths.

Our nation is in the process of determining whether we will finally dislodge the fierce grip of white supremacy culture as the primary feature of how we treat and see diverse races, ethnicities, and cultures within our society. We can't deny the broad **recognition** of insidious racial disparities and treatment in the United States that was catapulted into public view in 2020 after the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and countless other sons, daughters, fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, partners, and

community residents. What awaits revelation is whether this recognition is the precursor of a **sustained reckoning**. Will the institutions and individuals that make up our society adopt, model, and enforce policies and practices that are just and equitable for those historically and perpetually disenfranchised? Will the prevailing modus operandi of our societal system no longer be propelled by the offsprings of white supremacy culture? Will we transform?

My hope—better yet, my ambition, for hope alone is not a strategy—is that the future that we are seeding now will no longer need diversity, equity, inclusion, and access training. In that future, differences will be eagerly sought, not treated with circumspection and judged along a false spectrum of what is deemed normal. Homogeneity will feel weird and deficient. Our muscles for engaging in disparate views will allow us to bridge greater consensus—because we choose listening to solve the disparities over silencing and marginalization. That's the future I hold.

As you close this chapter of the A.R.T.'s foundational journey of becoming an anti-racist and anti-oppressive organization and start the next voyage of adoption and implementation, know that there will be loss in the short term. Some people will depart, and others may ask if your values of anti-racism and anti-oppression—which are active commitments—align with where they unapologetically stand as stewards or representatives of this institution. And if there is not alignment, they

should have space to opt out. But rest assured, embedded in any short-term loss are future gains. You can't have change without changes. You also can't be shallow in your follow-through. Just because the leaves drop in the fall doesn't mean a tree won't bloom abundantly in the spring. Let the leaves fall where they may. Spring is coming.

My hope—better yet, my ambition, for hope alone is not a strategy—is that the future that we are seeding now will no longer need diversity, equity, inclusion, and access training.

My final words: lead with vigor, courage, and conviction. Keep the vision front and center in all that you do. Don't be paralyzed by fear of loss. Listen with humility and the intent to do the best you can to make it better for all. Make the invitation for the collective journey toward your anti-racist and anti-oppressive vision, but don't sojourn too long for those who

resist or are not yet ready. Abstain from assuming that everyone with actual or perceived power is fighting to keep it—or those presumed to have little power or influence automatically desire the recommendations outlined herein. Withstand grouping and conflating with arbitrary identifiers. If you remain open, people will surprise you. You may even surprise yourself. Model in your own behaviors and leadership what you want to see in others. Work the plan. I can't say this enough. So many people get to the place where they have all the tools and information they need to act with diligence and persistence, and then stall. That's why there is so much call for accountability. People simply don't follow through and do what they said they would do. Don't be those people.

BELOW ARE SOME AREAS WHERE PEOPLE OFTEN FALTER:

- Failing to work the plan. Letting this work sit on the proverbial shelf.
- Falling into the lure of fatigue as an excuse for inaction.
- Thinking the work is over once the goals and priorities are developed and documented.
- Lacking power and accountability to advance and ensure implementation.
- Presuming that adoption automatically translates into implementation. A policy is paper without action and enforcement.
- Treating this work as transactional—something to check off the list of things to do—as opposed to instigating behavioral and policy transformations.
- Falling back into norms as the fervor of visioning a future abates.
- Treating values-based work as an addition to your work, not central to everything that you do.

REMEMBER,

THE FUTURE

IS NOW.

YOU ARE THE

STEWARDS.

**I BELIEVE IN
YOU.**



YANCEY CONSULTING



Designed by
RAID 'N KOLOR