



## ANTIRACISM POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS OVERVIEW AND KEY FINDINGS

Delaware Shakespeare's vision is a world where people from all walks of life are welcome to celebrate and explore their shared humanity through the lens of Shakespearean works. In short, we aim to make Shakespeare for everybody – and establish an atmosphere of respect and joy for every artist, staff member, board member, volunteer, and audience member.

The killing of George Floyd in May 2020 and the national reckoning on race relations that followed this and other killings led Delaware Shakespeare (Del Shakes) to a period of in-depth introspection. It was clear that Del Shakes could do more to create a consistent atmosphere of respect and joy for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) who engage with this company.

In the ensuing months, Del Shakes took the following short-term actions to start the process of developing a formal culture of antiracism within the organization:

- Late May: Issued a [statement](#) in support of Black Lives Matter
- July: Shared a list [Antiracism Next Steps](#) for the company
- August: Launched an Antiracism Working Group (ARWG) to develop Antiracism Policy and Action Plan

This document will detail Del Shakes' process and key findings of the ARWG.

### COMMUNITY TOUR AS THE DEL SHAKES STANDARD -- ACCOUNTABILITY SCORE --

During our work with the Antiracist Working Group, it became clear that Del Shakes would have much further to travel in its journey to become an antiracist theatre company were it not for the launch of the Community Tour (CT) in 2016. The CT aims to share high-quality professional theatre with the full spectrum of humanity in our state by travelling to non-traditional locations such as prisons, homeless shelters, and community centers.

Owing to the diverse audiences we hoped to serve with the CT, we had a goal that our eight-person casts would be at least 50% BIPOC. The purpose of the casting goal was to allow audience members to see themselves represented on stage. Over the years, we have always met that 50% goal. BIPOC audiences have fluctuated between 40%-55%.

As Del Shakes employed more BIPOC artists and performed for more BIPOC audiences, a culture more supportive of antiracism began to establish itself.

During the Sharing & Recommendation Sessions with BIPOC Audiences and Artists held as part of the ARWG process, one thing came through loud and clear: the Community Tour was a homerun. There were many reasons for this, but the main one was a goal to build racial equity and inclusion into the process from the beginning.

We've talked a lot about applying the lessons from the CT to the rest of Del Shakes, but we have missed the most fundamental one: a commitment to racial equity and diversity in personnel and audience.

**We are committing to applying that lesson. The Community Tour will be the standard by which we measure our progress.**

Del Shakes seeks to achieve a critical mass of racial diversity at every level of operations. Earlier this year, we posted a [Diversity Dashboard](#) on our website that reports racial and gender diversity metrics in leadership, hiring, and audiences. We will continue reporting these data each year. And we are going to score ourselves.

If an area has 50% racial diversity, the score will be a "5." If an area has 10% racial diversity, the score will be a "1."

Our aim is to have a cumulative average score of at least "3," and that our score will improve or hold level each year.

We understand that human beings are more than numbers, and that a score can in no way represent the complexities of racial dynamics. The theory is the score will be a simple, clear tool to measure development.

By holding ourselves accountable in this way, Del Shakes hopes to foster an organization where BIPOC voices are heard, valued, and respected throughout the company – and not just on the stage.

## **LEADERSHIP & MEMBERS OF ARWG**

(Individuals marked with an asterisk are BIPOC members)

Del Shakes engaged Arreon Harley-Emerson\*, President and CEO of [Equity Sings](#), to serve as lead consultant guiding the process of developing antiracism policy.

The ARWG was organized as an activity of the Del Shakes Governance Committee, chaired by George Watson.

The additional members of the working group were:

Newton Buchanan\* (ad-hoc artist participant)  
Bi Jean Ngo\* (ad-hoc artist participant)  
Scott Matthews (Governance Committee)  
Julie Russ (Board chair)  
David Stradley (Producing Artistic Director)  
Todd Townsend\* (ad-hoc Board member participant)  
Marilyn Whittington\* (Governance Committee)

*Buchanan and Ngo were paid on an hourly basis for their participation in the ARWG.*

## **PROCESS**

Beginning on August 4, 2020, the ARWG met every two weeks until December 8, with an additional meeting on January 11, 2021. The ARWG:

- Determined structure and questions for two Sharing & Recommendation Sessions with BIPOC Audience and Artists.
- Reviewed historical BIPOC hiring and audience data.
- Reviewed potential templates for antiracism policies and action plans.
- Reviewed the [#WeSeeYou White American Theatre BIPOC Demands](#) for items to prioritize in Del Shakes antiracism policy.

In October, Arreon Harley-Emerson moderated separate Sharing & Recommendation Sessions with BIPOC Artists and BIPOC Audience members. These were BIPOC only spaces, and participants were offered \$50 for their participation in the sessions. (Harley-Emerson’s summaries of the two sessions can be found [HERE](#).)

Following an ARWG meeting to review the feedback gathered in the Sharing & Recommendation Sessions, members split into artist and non-artist subgroups to begin developing policy and action plans.

The ARWG reviewed an initial draft of Antiracism Policy documents in December, and a final draft in January. Policy was approved by the full Del Shakes Board of Directors in February 2021. Links to policy and action plan documents can be found at [HERE](#).

## FINDINGS

The data analysis and Sharing & Recommendation sessions revealed instances of personal and institutional racism within Delaware Shakespeare. Policy and action plans were developed to address and counteract historical patterns. The following are some of the ways that racism has manifested at Delaware Shakespeare and that the organization has been complicit in upholding structures of white supremacy. (As a reference, Del Shakes was founded in 2003.) In addition, BIPOC audiences and artists shared that the “BIPOC Burden” was very present during their experiences at Del Shakes, with individuals questioning whether race played a part in moments of friction that were not explicitly about race.

### CONTENT MATTER

- As a theatre dedicated to William Shakespeare that for most of its history has only produced one play a year, Del Shakes has never presented a full production of a play by a non-white playwright.
- There are elements of Shakespeare’s work, like that of his Elizabethan peers, that are racist or perpetuate racial stereotypes.

### PERSONNEL AND AUDIENCE

- First BIPOC board member was not appointed until 2017.
- First BIPOC year-round staff member was not hired until 2020 (Del Shakes year-round staff has typically been between 2-3 people).
- First BIPOC director was not hired for a full production until 2017.
- Audience for Summer Festival at Rockwood Park has typically been less than 10% BIPOC.

(For progress on diversity in hiring and audiences, please see [Diversity Metrics](#).)

### RACIAL HARM

BIPOC artists shared such incidents as:

- Racial microaggressions experienced from:
  - Donors and board members at special events and meet & greets.
  - Summer Festival audience members in the post-performance greeting line.
- Production directors staging moments of physical violence to BIPOC characters without awareness of impact of that violence on BIPOC artists or audiences.
- Production directors giving direction to actors in auditions that perpetrated racial stereotypes.
- Company members making racially insensitive jokes.
- Company management not providing clear and safe avenues for reporting racial incidents.
- Public statements made by company management that did not reflect a nuanced understanding of what racial diversity and equity meant to BIPOC artists.

BIPOC audiences shared discomfort at Rockwood Park due to:

- Unfriendly welcome/interactions with white audience members.
- A stately home like Rockwood Park not historically being a space where BIPOC were welcome.

## APPENDIX

*Delaware Shakespeare extends our sincere gratitude to the following individuals for their honesty and openness. We hope the results of the Antiracism Policy and Action Plan honors their participation.*

### **PARTICIPANTS IN BIPOC ARTIST SHARING & RECOMMENDATION SESSION**

Kirk Wendell Brown  
 Newton Buchanan  
 Joel Guerrero  
 Savannah Jackson

Marcellus McQueen  
 Eric Mills  
 Bi Jean Ngo  
 Leigh Paradise

Lindsay Smiling  
 Tai Verley  
 Satchel Williams

### **PARTICIPANTS IN BIPOC AUDIENCE SHARING & RECOMMENDATION SESSION**

Sujata Bhatia  
 Solange Ealy-Clarke  
 Sheridan Quarless Kingsberry  
 Glenroy Powell  
 Ronald Robinson

Irene Rodriguez  
 Dionna Sargent  
 Vanesa Bechini Simon  
 Tim Spaulding  
 Kathrina Stroud

Todd Townsend  
 Tomoke Werbe  
 Marilyn Whittington