

FIVE STEPS TOWARD ANTI-RACISM ACCOUNTABILITY

Every organization, intentional or not, is culpable for perpetuating white supremacy and maintaining racist policies, practices, and cultures. It is an unavoidable reality. To be truly anti-racist, we must actively seek to create systems that are inclusive and safe for Black People, Indigenous People, and People of Color (BIPOC).

When responding as an organization to racism in your sector and community, simply releasing a statement of solidarity is not enough. It is only the beginning of the process. Effective accountability requires the development and implementation of an in-depth plan. This guide is for anyone looking to move beyond words into impactful anti-racist action within an organization.

REFLECT.

WHY IS ANTI-RACIST WORK IMPORTANT FOR OUR ORGANIZATION?

You must begin with self-reflection before you can start developing action items. Know why removing white supremacist culture is important for your organization, and how it relates to your work specifically. If public pressure is the biggest motivation driving your organization's anti-racism work, you'll need to find a more sustainable foundation to build lasting change upon. Value needs to be put on this work for it to thrive.

ARE WE BEING MINDFUL AND TAKING OUR TIME?

As Adrienne Maree Brown says, "there is always enough time for the right work." Reflection must take time. **Letting urgency take over your process is a barrier to thoughtful and considered decision-making.** It leaves issues unnoticed or unchecked, it doesn't allow you to gather the people you need in the room, and consequently, it furthers white supremacist culture.

In the wake of major events or calls from your community to do better, you may feel pressured to respond as quickly as possible. In these cases, a short-term response may be helpful to acknowledge the issue at hand, but it cannot replace a more thorough and thoughtful response, and should acknowledge that continued thoughtful action is required and upcoming.

WHO IS LEADING OUR ANTI-RACISM WORK?

Take note of who has been left out of important decision-making processes in the past, and be conscious of who is in the room during this process. Give not only full-time staff agency one this process, but also part-time staff, interns, contractors, and your community.

Facilitating anti-racism work requires careful balance. Everyone in your Equity Diversity and Inclusion Committee cannot be white. Additionally, it shouldn't just be BIPOC doing heavy and emotional labor. If the only people in your room are upper management and executives, you lose the viewpoints of those they are making decisions for. However, the people running your anti-racism work need to be informed on organizational systems and have actual institutional authority to actually drive change within your organization.

Credit and compensate the people working to dismantle white supremacy in your organization, namely BIPOC. Remember, even if the people running your anti-racism initiative are salaried, unless anti-racist consulting is something they were contracted to do, they should be compensated for their additional labor.

WHOSE NEEDS ARE WE CENTERING?

Make sure your anti-racism work isn't focused around white people, their experiences, and their feelings. If the needs of BIPOC aren't front and center in your decision-making process, reevaluate your work's true intentions and what its impact will be. This process is difficult, exhausting, and even **risky** for BIPOC people. Effort needs to be made to value the input of BIPOC and to support and safeguard them throughout this process.

This reflection must be intersectional in its scope. True inclusion requires the inclusion of BIPOC people from all identities, including parents, people with disabilities, the LGBTQ community, and beyond. All fights for equality are intertwined—those living at the intersection are often the most deeply affected and particular focus should be paid to their input.

HOW ARE WE COMPLICIT IN PERPETUATING RACISM? WHAT DO WE NEED TO MOVE FORWARD?

This reflection will be difficult. You must uncover not only your strengths but your weaknesses. It requires taking responsibility for the bias and harm your organization and those within it have perpetuated. If you've done similar work before, unpack moments of success, times where you've fallen short, roles that aren't being filled, and projects that require more resources. The purpose of this is not to create excuses but to demonstrate you understand the impact of your actions and their root causes. This phase will be uncomfortable, and if it isn't, you almost certainly are not going deep enough or are not being fully honest in how your organization perpetuates white supremacy. If you don't pay close attention to these gaps, you'll continue to fall into them.

WRITE.

Once you've reflected, it's time to begin drafting a plan. Don't expect your first draft (**or any draft**) to be perfect and complete. You will inevitably have gaps and mistakes, but that's what the revision process is for.

Take the input and insight you've gathered in reflection, and use it to shape action steps for your organization. These goals should integrate into every facet of your organization—every level, department, person, and project. It should also address outside parties who engage with your work—patrons, subscribers, donors, and media outlets.

As you move forward, reflection must run throughout every phase of planning. As you write, one useful mnemonic to reflect on your goals is to ask if they are SMART.

SPECIFIC — Be clear in articulating your goals, the actions taken to achieve them, and the purpose behind them. Don't just say, for example, "we will work with more Black artists." Be specific about how you are going to engage with your local Black communities, develop connections with the artists you want to work with, remove barriers from hiring them, make an inclusive environment they will want to continue working in, and what roles you are able to fill. State where you are now, where you hope to go, and the steps along the way to get there. Specificity also requires direct naming of the problem. If a person or policy has furthered white supremacy, say that, don't tiptoe around the issue.

MEASURABLE — Include benchmarks to get on the same page about what success looks like and to keep track of where you're falling short. Instead of, "we will work with more Black artists" consider, "50% of employees hired in 2021, onstage and off, will be Black." Also remember, just because something isn't directly quantifiable, doesn't mean it doesn't have value. Benchmarks can be based on qualitative feedback such as statements, experiences, emotions, and process changes.

ATTAINABLE — *Attainable does not mean easy.* You should push your organization with stretch goals towards long-lasting change. If you think a goal isn't achievable, ask yourself why, and dedicate time and resources to making change until it is. Conversely, if it's something you don't actually intend to do or are *truly* unable to accomplish, don't make that promise—it may cause more harm than good. If only 2% of the artists you hire in the average year are Black, 50% by next year probably isn't attainable, but also, a goal of 5% isn't meaningful. Shoot for somewhere in between that is possible, but still requires reevaluation, reprioritization, and restructuring.

RELEVANT — Each goal should be authentic to your organization. Don't just take cookie-cutter template statements and add your organization's name. The public notices when you do that and it indicates a lack of personal reflection. These goals should align with all the feedback you gathered in the reflection phase, such as organizational strengths and weaknesses and the needs of your community. There are numerous ways to incorporate more racial equity in your organization that are authentic to your mission and the values of the individuals working there. For example: if your organization is committed to producing new plays, commit to producing the work of more contemporary Black playwrights each season.

TIME-BASED — State when each step of these changes will occur. While some things can be done as early as tomorrow, don't expect to fully re-vamp everything in the next month. Hold yourself accountable to the public and to your staff with realistic deadlines. This plan should be a lasting roadmap into the future that addresses what you plan to do from day one through week two, month two, and year five. There is no end date to anti-racism work, it is ongoing in perpetuity.

REVISE.

Now that you've got your first draft, it's time to gather feedback on it. Go through it with a fine-tooth comb and see where it can improve. It is essential to create multiple avenues to gather feedback from all levels of your organization and any stakeholders. Remember to follow the same precautions from the reflection phase in ensuring BIPOC voices are front and center.

COMMIT.

Ensure that anti-racist work is not elective. Committing to the work of becoming an anti-racist organization is mandatory for every single person working with your organization—leadership, full-time employees, part-time employees, interns, board, independent contractors, volunteers, and beyond. Even outside of your organization, you need systems in place to hold the public accountable when they're in your spaces or discussing your work—regardless of how much revenue they provide your organization.

One key component of accountability is internal and external transparency with every aspect of your work. This means clear, continuous, and open communication throughout the process of decolonizing your institution. Transparency covers everything from how and when these decisions are being made, where you currently stand in your anti-racism work, what changes are upcoming, your successes, and missteps. Employees need to know how it will affect their work; the public, audience members, donors, media outlets, and potential future employees need to have access to this information as well.

Transparency mitigates the use of ignorance as an excuse for transgressions and ensures that every person interacting with your organization can be held accountable to the plan you've put in place. Just because someone is a visitor to your space, or is only employed for a short period, does not excuse side-stepping of anti-racism standards.

Likewise, publishing a comprehensive plan for all to see—on your website or social media for example—allows these same people to hold your organization as a whole accountable and help you achieve your goals towards racial equity.

RE-COMMIT.

Your plan should be a lasting and living document. Working to dismantle white supremacy is ongoing and cyclical. Your accountability plan should be revisited at least every quarter to reflect on progress and to reassess priorities. Go into your calendars and mark the future dates that your organization will reflect and reassess; incorporate this time into your schedule so that you hold yourself accountable for the long-term.

Your full organization should be a part of these check-ins, and like your initial commitment, they should also be transparent. It's okay to share your successes, but you must also be open—internally and with the public—about your failures, goals you weren't able to achieve, and ways your plan is shifting moving forward.

Ensure you have systems in place to keep anti-racist work moving forward, even when the public spotlight dims. Most change initiatives fizzle and die out once the people organizing them lose that initial burst of steam—how will your organization be different?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES.

[StageSource.org/anti-racism](https://stagesource.org/anti-racism)

A list of organizations, anti-racist action steps, mental health resources, plus information on racial justice, racism, privilege, white supremacy, and police & prison abolition.

[WeSeeYouWAT.com](https://weseeyouwat.com)

A letter written and signed by hundreds of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color theatre-makers, for white theatre-makers to acknowledge and challenge their complicity in white fragility and supremacy.

[HowlRound.com/we-dont-want-your-statements-american-theatre](https://howlround.com/we-dont-want-your-statements-american-theatre)

An essay on how theatres releasing anti-racist statements often falls short, and the solidarity Black artists actually need.

[ShowingUpForRacialJustice.org/white-supremacy-culture-characteristics.html](https://showingupforracialjustice.org/white-supremacy-culture-characteristics.html)

A list of characteristics of white supremacy culture which show up in organizations as norms and standards, including perfectionism, urgency, power hoarding, and defensiveness.

[LeavingEvidence.wordpress.com/how-to-give-a-good-apology-part-1-the-four-parts-of-accountability](https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/how-to-give-a-good-apology-part-1-the-four-parts-of-accountability)

Mia Mingus' notes on the four necessary parts of true accountability and what makes an effective and meaningful apology.

This guide was created by StageSource and written by the Mavis Joy Manaloto, John Meredith, Dawn M. Simmons, Rosalind Bevan, Geena M. Forristall, Jai'anna Gonzales, and Arielle Greenspan.