



**WHITE PAPER ON ACHIEVING A
SAFE AND INCLUSIVE
BAY AREA THEATRE-MAKING ENVIRONMENT
BY KATHLEEN ANTONIA TARR**

theatre
BAY AREA

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INTRODUCTION

This past year has brought a series of stunning developments here in the Bay Area, across the nation, and around the world. As we crafted the programming for our 2018 Annual Conference, we aimed to address both the serious challenges and promising opportunities these local and global changes present our community.

Our conference theme, “Seismic Shifts: Embracing a Changing Theatre Ecology,” speaks to the enormity of change and the potent mix of anxiety and hope we face in today’s theatre-making environment. The Annual Conference provided a chance to confront together those “seismic shifts” and to learn from each other new ways of navigating change and embracing the future.

The Bay Area theatre community’s expertise and perspective is essential for shared learning. As such, this white paper resulted from the Closing Plenary “Creating a Safe and Inclusive Theatre: What will it Take?” moderated by Kathleen Antonia Tarr with audience breakout groups facilitated by panelists Jamila Cobham, Margo Hall, Radhika Rao, Jon Tracy, and Claire Warden. Modeling itself after the Women’s Media Summit/Women’s Media Action Coalition’s “White Paper on Gender Inequality in Film and Television,” The Plan delineated in these pages offers a tremendous opportunity for action.

Seismic shifts can leave destruction in their wake; they also offer a chance to rebuild in ways that are better and stronger. The changes shaking our community and our world give us an opportunity to create a better, safer, more equitable theatre-making ecology.

Take time to celebrate this work, and let’s imagine what it will take for all of us, working together, to build a better theatre and a better world.



Brad Erickson
Executive Director
Theatre Bay Area

THE PROCESS

On April 30, 2018, Theatre Bay Area's Annual Conference convened at Freight and Salvage in Berkeley for a one-day gathering of hundreds of theatre-makers from around the region and far beyond.

The offerings of the conference included sessions on Understanding Sexual Harassment, Policy as Cultural Transformation, and Intimacy Direction as well as leadership, career building, and branding.

The Closing Plenary "Creating a Safe and Inclusive Theatre: What will it Take?" included panelists Jamila Cobham (Production Manager, California Shakespeare Theatre), Margo Hall (Actor and Educator), Radhika Rao (Theatre Maker and Educator), Jon Tracy (Artistic Facilitator, TheatreFIRST), and Claire Warden (Intimacy Director, Intimacy Directors International). Moderator Kathleen Antonia Tarr began the session by calling on each panelist to briefly share their vision for achieving a safe and inclusive environment within the Bay Area theatre-making community. Panelists then became facilitators of five audience breakout groups which each focused on one particular challenge area: financing, hiring, workplace culture, audiences, and education. The facilitator-panelists then returned to the stage to share takeaways with the larger group.

Dr. Tarr – Actor, lawyer, and Stanford lecturer who also serves as the University's Public Policy Writing Specialist – then culled facilitator notes, drafting this white paper.



THE CHALLENGE

Nationally, Whites amass 74% of Actors' Equity Association stage management contracts and 71% of AEA principal contracts, males procuring close to 60% of all AEA on-stage contracts. While females are more likely than males to receive stage manager contracts, female stage managers report lower earnings than males. Females are generally employed on agreements with lower minimums, negotiate lower overscales, and earn lower average contractual salaries than men. (Equity 2020, 2017).

Off-Broadway, females are 30% of playwrights and 33% of directors. (Steketee 2015). In Chicago, females write only 18.8% of plays produced. (Women Arts, 2010). Los Angeles reports similar numbers of female playwrights to those of Chicago at only 20%. (LAFPI, 2015).

New York's Broadway season hasn't witnessed a change in the percentage of plays written by females in a century: 12.6% in 2008/2009 compared to 12.8% in 1908/1909. (Sands, 2009). The 2015-2016 season saw 0% Latinx in Broadway plays and only one Asian actor, cast in an ensemble role. From 2006–2016 seasons, Whites amassed 76% of Broadway roles while constituting only 44% of the New York population. (AAPAC, 2016).

Valerie Weak's Counting Actors project highlights local inequities based upon sex noting females are only 27% of playwrights whose work is produced on Bay Area stages, are 42% of directors, and secure fewer jobs than males as union and non-union theatre Actors. (Weak, 2015). There are additional challenges to equitable working conditions given race, disability, gender, and other bias.

A 15-member planning group of Bay Area theatre workers convened a February 26, 2018 town hall meeting to bring regional theatre-makers and creatives together to "make space for the conversation around sexual harassment in our field and in our local community."

Those in the room expressed concern that Bay Area theatre leaders haven't always "walked the walk," failing to address the intersecting ways patriarchy, racism, and economic struggle work in conjunction to affect theatre productions. (Tran, 2018).

These challenges intersect with financing, hiring, workplace culture, audiences, and education.

FINANCING

Budgetary issues are paramount. EDI (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion) trainings are important to engage in order to address challenges to safe and inclusive theatre making, but given potential costs, the question becomes how to make certain every

theatre has access to such trainings. Communication across theatres around organizational culture and climate is a primary concern.

HIRING

The employee pipeline, limited budgets, time, and limited thinking are the most significant challenges to safe and inclusive hiring in Bay Area theatre. Issues also include how the community might agree upon a definition of “safe,” how to discuss and attract the “best” candidates, conventional perceptions of qualifications and “authenticity” in casting, and specific language to employ without offending. The current environment is pressurized for people of color and challenged for both those who are job candidates as well as employers.

WORKPLACE CULTURE

Conscious and unconscious biases greatly challenge safe and inclusive workplace cultures. Bay Area theatre workers feel unsafe given our society’s prolific gun violence and physical assaults. Exacerbating these challenges are the theatre community’s culture of self-sacrifice and pushing oneself too far (*the show must go on*) and a lack of knowledge which as consequence denies inclusion and accessibility for all. Many in the community seem bereft of the dedication and motivation to make change.

AUDIENCES

Challenges include a dearth of resources to create an audience base that is diverse. Investment in audience development has financial consequences, and different kinds of theatre face different hurdles. It is also difficult to understand how a theatre creates a safe and inclusive environment that can attract an ideal audience without alienating existing patrons. Lastly and perhaps most profoundly, the process itself is challenged in that there is not agreement about what is an ideal audience, what is “safe,” and for whom the theatre environment is inclusive.

EDUCATION

The absence of mandatory EDI training for all theatre companies significantly challenges a safe and inclusive theatre making environment. The Bay Area in general needs theatre training in all educational institutions beginning in middle school and individual awareness of one’s community including simple Census data.

THE PLAN

Closing Plenary facilitators identified several actions the Bay Area community should take to create a safe and inclusive theatre-making environment.

FINANCING

EDI trainings should take priority when budgeting for a season. Generally, there needs to be more **communication across theatres** around organizational culture and climate. **Pooling resources** of different theatres would help: neighboring theatres might be invited to a company's training (whether fee charged or free), trainings could rotate throughout the Bay Area, and/or trainings could be in **partnership with tech companies** who have strong EDI mission statements and initiatives. The result would be a healthier theatre ecology, more shared awareness around equity within the theatre community, safer theatre spaces, more diversity in audience members, and more diversity in artists.

1 Year Goals

- Establishment of **frequent trainings** over the course of one year that at least one staff member from each Bay Area theatre can attend. This opportunity should be offered to staff members at various levels within a company.
- TBA sponsored **study/survey** to assess local theatres' financial priorities and strains. The goal is to demonstrate challenges that theatres can solve together.
- **Increased promotion** of TBA EDI activities.
- Focused outreach promoting **philanthropy** to support Bay Area theatres.

5 Year Goals

- **Livable wages/stipends**, not just minimum wage.
- **Educate audiences** about what it costs to produce a season.
- **Studies** that quantify the impact of Bay Area theatre on children and adults.
- **Collaborative subscription model** across select theatres.
- **Bay Area Theatre Festival** with full participation from as many theatres as possible with the goal being to develop new audiences.
- **Partnerships** with tech companies interested in incorporating new technologies into the theatre going experience.

HIRING

Hiring in Bay Area theatre will be improved with shared **lists of affinity groups** such as the "Black Women Directors List" (Google Docs), an **ecology of equity**, and **representation beyond optics**. We also require **shared vocabulary**, clearly defined within a company's structure. The result will be companies that represent the community we have and the community we care to promote.

1 Year Goals

For each company:

- Job searches that are supported by **non-insular outreach**.
- **Identification of opportunities and values** within a specific company.
- **Dropping certain traditional restrictions** from job descriptions including coded language.
- **Change who** is doing the hiring.

For the community:

- Creation of a **shared network** of referrals and recommendations.

WORKPLACE CULTURE

Bay Area theatres' workplace cultures will be improved via **immersion of different identities** with the goal of education and enlightenment, prioritizing areas of focus.

1 Year Goals

- A **checks-and-balances team** to challenge bias in ourselves and our peers.
- A **specific safety officer** for each project.
- A **barter system** for training.
- **Partnership programs** between diverse companies.

5 Year Goals

- Theatre Bay Area will create a **program** to regularly offer training resources to independent contractors and smaller companies.

AUDIENCES

In order to truly engage new audiences, we may need to evolve our concept of what theatre does.

Goals

- **Further dialogue** within the Bay Area theatre community around resources, what "safe and inclusive" means, and what the world actually *is* along with its potential.
- More **ushering jobs** for young people who can't afford theatre.
- **Student tickets**.
- **Conversations** with current audiences and the audiences we want to attract.
- More constructive use of **social media**.

EDUCATION

Goals

- **Mandatory EDI training** for all Bay Area theatre companies.
- **Theatre training** for all public and private educational institutions beginning in middle school.
- **Educating people** about who actually lives in their communities.



CONCLUSION

There are recurring themes: the desire for communication and collaboration across Bay Area theatre companies along with widespread training. The next steps are making these goals reality. If you are interested in offering time or other resources to achieve this Plan, please contact Theatre Bay Area.

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