

SEATTLE OPERA

RACIAL EQUITY & SOCIAL IMPACT PLAN

2025



Attendees pose for a photo in the lobby during the Opening Night of *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X* in February 2024. Behind, a sign welcomes audiences to Seattle Opera in multiple languages including Spanish and Chinese.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Seattle Opera cares deeply about addressing systemic racism and engaging with our community in a way that centers social impact within our art form and beyond. We believe in being leaders in racial equity work among our opera peers nationally, while keeping an open mind to learning and growing in areas where our company needs improvement.

It is important for us, as individuals and as a company, to deepen our knowledge of the perspectives of our audiences, particularly communities of color. It is imperative that the work we produce onstage and in our local communities be reflective of our diverse world and preserves the dignity of those whose lives and perspectives are historically, and currently, most easily marginalized in our society.



Photo: Philip Newton

OUR PURPOSE

In 2020, Seattle Opera debuted the first goals, objectives, and initiatives to shape the company's commitment to Racial Equity & Social Impact (RESI) and efforts toward becoming an [antiracist multicultural organization](#). We expect that subsequent updates to the company's RESI goals and practices will continue indefinitely with the plan reviewed and revised every five years, and public reports on progress shared every two years. To learn more about Seattle Opera's Commitment to Racial Equity and progress to date since 2016, please visit seattleopera.org/equity.



Photo: Sunny Martin

Above: Kabir Mokamel, Co-Founder and Creative Director at ArtLords, guides community participants through painting a collaborative mural portraying a woman holding the country of Afghanistan during Seattle Opera's February 2023 Jashin event.

LEADING WITH RACE

Driven by the City of Seattle's [Race and Social Justice Initiative](#), this document leads with race. We understand that historically and currently marginalized identities are not separate qualifiers in the lived experiences of people and that our community members may be experiencing oppression based on many different axes of marginalization. We believe that, by leading with race, we will be able to address multiple axes of systemic oppression. Our decision to lead with race does not exclude work to address sexism, queerphobia, and ableism, and there are specific initiatives and ongoing efforts within this document intended to address multiple axes of oppression.



Photo: Seattle Opera

Above: Quodesia Johnson reads a letter from Black Administrators of Opera to Leontyne Price during a stage dedication event in 2024.

Seattle Opera board members Ghaddra González Castillo and Aimee Mell with former staff Elton Torres at the 2024 Pride Parade.

TERMINOLOGY USED:

BIPOC

Defined as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, this term is used throughout this document to center diverse voices. We acknowledge that the term is colloquially understood in our community, but is not a comprehensive nor universally agreed-upon description of individual racial identities. Language evolves, and we anticipate this term may shift in the future.

MINORITY-OWNED/LED

This is a government term that specifies how the ownership or leadership structure of an organization is held by an individual with a specific racial, ethnic, or gender identity.

RESI

Leading with race, Seattle Opera's Racial Equity & Social Impact (RESI) lens includes internal and external perspectives of our organization, our work, and our impacts.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #1

- **FORMALIZE, IMPLEMENT, AND EVALUATE RACIAL EQUITY & SOCIAL IMPACT PRACTICES AND POLICIES ACROSS ALL STAKEHOLDERS AND DEPARTMENTS OF SEATTLE OPERA**

DESIRED OUTCOME

- **SEATTLE OPERA COMMITS TO INTENTIONAL AND CONTINUOUS INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION TOWARD BECOMING A FULLY INCLUSIVE, ANTI-RACIST, AND MULTICULTURAL ORGANIZATION**

SUPPORTING INITIATIVES

- 1.1** Establish, maintain, and update RESI goals for each department with clear processes and deadlines for implementation and reporting.
- 1.2** Allocate a new budget for the Equity Team.
- 1.3** Create a new budget report that tracks support of community partner organizations through expenses.
- 1.4** Support integrating RESI goals into the work of Seattle Opera's board of directors and assist in diversifying Seattle Opera's board through intentional and strategic recruitment practices.
- 1.5** Identify and assess Seattle Opera's current practices to reduce environmental impacts and increase sustainability.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #2

- **PROVIDE COMPANY-WIDE RESOURCES AND TRAINING TO ESTABLISH A SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF SEATTLE OPERA'S RACIAL EQUITY & SOCIAL IMPACT WORK**

DESIRED OUTCOME

- **MULTICULTURAL DIVERSITY CONTINUES TO BE A PART OF SEATTLE OPERA'S IDENTITY AS AN ANTI-RACIST ORGANIZATION**

SUPPORTING INITIATIVES

- 2.1** Create and execute a calendar of year-round RESI trainings, workshops, and activities.
- 2.2** Maintain a digital library of evergreen RESI learning resources and provide a directory of available affinity spaces.
- 2.3** Ensure that Human Resources has the tools and support needed to resolve workplace issues involving interpersonal and institutional racism and other modes of oppression.
- 2.4** Prioritize Seattle Opera's mission, vision, and values in every stage of the company's hiring practices. Expand the network in which job postings are seen in order to broaden candidate pools.
- 2.5** Ensure opportunities for meaningful input from the Equity Team in leadership hiring processes.
- 2.6** Encourage professional development opportunities for all positions, and open channels to empower and promote talent from within the organization.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #3

- **PARTNER WITH MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES TO FOSTER A SENSE OF BELONGING AND OWNERSHIP THROUGH COLLABORATION AND CO-CREATION**

DESIRED OUTCOME

- **MAXIMIZE THE IMPACT OF OUR RESOURCES BY SUPPORTING THE BROAD GOALS AND VISIONS OF OUR COMMUNITY. MEMBERS OF DIVERSE CULTURES, LIFESTYLES, AND INTERESTS ARE FULL PARTICIPANTS IN DECISIONS THAT SHAPE THE INSTITUTION**

SUPPORTING INITIATIVES

- 3.1** Ensure Seattle Opera experiences are broadly welcoming and accessible to our communities.
 - a. Maintain an Audience Code of Conduct.
 - b. Continue and expand financial accessibility programs, such as Pay What You Wish.
- 3.2** Seek broad input locally from any underrepresented communities portrayed in a work before committing to present it.
- 3.3** Develop an inclusive model of season planning that allows an opportunity for meaningful input from staff members.
- 3.4** Maintain a Community Advisory Committee that includes perspectives from the broad and diverse cultures of King County.
- 3.5** Develop marketing and promotional plans for increasing program visibility among communities of color.
- 3.6** Infuse community-centric fundraising principles within Development operations.
- 3.7** Increase and expand Seattle Opera activities in diverse communities through meaningful, two-way partnerships with BIPOC-led community groups.
- 3.8** Prioritize initiatives that aim to support, uplift, and show up for communities of color over work that aims to have communities of color show up for Seattle Opera.
- 3.9** Create a policy for tracking staff time investment at community events.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #4

- OFFER PROGRAMMING THAT REFLECTS THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ALL PEOPLE WITHIN THE PUGET SOUND REGION

DESIRED OUTCOME

- SEATTLE OPERA BROADENS COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES AND DRIVES THE INDUSTRY FORWARD BY CHAMPIONING STORIES THAT EXPAND CURIOSITY

SUPPORTING INITIATIVES

- 4.1 Showcase the rich diversity of top-tier artists both onstage and in creative teams working on opera locally, nationally, and worldwide.
- 4.2 Ensure that Seattle Opera public programming is rooted in RESI work and includes diverse perspectives and topics.
- 4.3 Ensure that diverse perspectives and experiences are represented in our mainstage works.
- 4.4 Expand the programming and development of works by composers and librettists from diverse backgrounds.
- 4.5 Become a leader among regional performing arts organizations by improving accessibility.
 - a. Partner with local accessibility organizations to understand audience experiences and implement improvements.
 - b. Maintain and expand accessible services for audiences.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Land Acknowledgement:

We acknowledge that we at Seattle Opera and our audiences are working, performing, and experiencing opera on the land of the Coast Salish peoples. Since time immemorial, the Coast Salish peoples have been stewards of this land and its waterways and continue to shape the Puget Sound region today. This acknowledgement does not take the place of authentic relationships with indigenous communities, and it is our collective responsibility to honor, preserve, and know the land we are on.

Seattle Opera Equity Team Members as of January 2025:

Robert Babs	Betsy Heimbürger*	Jay Rozendaal
Gemma Balinbin	Aric Lee	Mariana Sandoval*
Marissa Betz-Zall	Sara Litchfield	Symone Sanz*
Michaela Calzaretta	Marjoram Lynn	Elizabeth Schultz
Erin Cunningham	Kaitlin Losansky	Meg Stoltz
Julia Curns-Welch*	Kristin McCarthy	Lauren Superville*
Arryn Davis	Erica McIntyre	Hank Tian*
Aren Der Hacopian	Alex Minami*	Isabel Thomas
William Ekstrom	Emma Ming Wahl	Kathleen Trott
Will Faulhaber	Kristina Murti	Rachel Walrath
Joshua Gailey*	Paula Podemski	Chloe Woodward
Angela Gist*	Emma Potter	Diana Wu*
Glenn Hare	Dennis Robinson, Jr.*	Corrie Yadon

*indicates Seattle Opera RESI 2.0 Subcommittee Team Members

RESI Survey Administrator: Symone Sanz

Leadership: Christina Scheppelmann (2019–2024) and James Robinson (2024–present)

Department Directors: Marissa Betz-Zall, Chris Burkett, Aren Der Hacopian, Angela Gist, Kristina Murti, and Dennis Robinson, Jr.

This RESI plan was created by a subcommittee of the staff-led Equity Team with input from Seattle Opera’s staff, external input from past staff members who participated in Equity Team work, and feedback from audiences and the general public, captured through participation surveys, social media, and direct comments. Intentionally, Seattle Opera’s board of directors does not hold positional power over the document’s contents or approval, but instead shares in the values and guidance this document provides for the organization.

This work is emotionally demanding, particularly for individuals already experiencing oppression. As an organization, our goal is to share this emotional labor, especially the emotional burdens historically and disproportionately carried by folks of color engaged in this work.

SPECIAL THANKS

to past Seattle Opera staff whose work on the Equity Team shaped and molded the company’s first RESI plan, and whose feedback and observations in the years since have helped to shape this Racial Equity & Social Impact plan.