



June 1, 2021

On August 21, 2020, the RVA BIPOC (Black & Indigenous People of Color) Project sent an open letter to leadership at the Coalition Comedy Theater, outlining their specific demands to better “foster a community that invests in the diversity, equity, and inclusion of BIPOC students, performers, and staff.” This resulted in the formation of the Coalition’s Action and Accountability Committee (AAC).

This sequence of events happened in the context of several internal and external occurrences that impacted the Coalition Theater. The Coalition Theater is located within the Jackson Ward neighborhood, a historically Black community; it has since undergone many changes to its demographic makeup, including being broken up by the construction of the Richmond-Petersburg Turnpike, and decades of gentrification. The Coalition Theater recognizes that it is now part of this neighborhood’s history and story.

Additionally, the Summer of 2020 experienced events that brought about a nationwide reckoning with systemic racism. This included the improv comedy theaters across the United States, institutions historically dominated by cisgender, white men. In reality, the art form is for everybody. Across the country, many improv and comedy theaters were confronted with their own participation in racist practices in determining leadership, booking performances, and accessibility of their educational programs. The Coalition Theater recognizes its role in the oppression and exclusion of BIPOC in improv comedy.

To that end, the Committee will work with the theater board and membership to build an explicitly anti-racist Coalition Theater community that prioritizes the inclusion of BIPOC students, performers, and staff:

Whereas, The Coalition Theater recognizes that historically, BIPOC have been marginalized through systemic, generational racist practices and policies and that this racism is both overt and covert;

Whereas, The Board recognizes that the current makeup of the Coalition membership has an underrepresentation of BIPOC students, performers, creators, and in leadership positions;

Whereas, a Board that reflects the diverse composition of the overall Coalition Membership and the surrounding community is essential to its long-term success and stability as an organization;

The Board recognizes that successful, consistent implementation is directly tied to the increase of BIPOC members of the theater from students to leadership, and will pursue steps outlined below (e.g. free classes, more transparent scholarships, better promotion and recruitment), as well as others that may be developed in consultation with the Action and Accountability Committee or other committees as appropriate, to increase the overall BIPOC Coalition Membership.



As part of an intentional, anti-racist effort to correct this disparity, we will implement the policies outlined below, while actively striving to prevent these policies from promoting tokenism or causing burnout in BIPOC members.

Specifically, and as outlined in our mission statement, the committee will work to:

1. Create the Statement of Intent, below, that outlines the steps that the theater will take to address the issues of inclusion and equity, as outlined by the letter sent by the RVA BIPOC Project,
2. enact the implementation plan as outlined in said statement, and
3. communicate with the Board, the Coalition, and other stakeholders on the progress of the ongoing plan, the evolving needs of the community, and the adoption of any amendments therein.

I. Coalition Leadership and Public Representation

1. It is the intention of the Board that at no time should leadership positions at any given level be held solely by white persons. Leadership positions in the Coalition include both paid and volunteer roles, including but not limited to the following levels:
 - a. the Coalition's Board of Directors and Board Committee Members;
 - b. the Education Director, the Artistic Director, the Operations Coordinator, Communications Coordinator, and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Liaison;
 - c. House Managers;
 - d. Teachers, TAs, House Team Coaches, and Show Directors;
 - e. and will include future roles that develop as the Coalition grows and changes over time.
2. The Board will take the following steps to achieve the goal of greater representation:
 - a. The Board will ensure that the representation of BIPOC Board members sitting at any time is reflective of the Jackson Ward community and surrounding regions.
 - b. Over time, the Board intends to grow, and new additions to the Board will actively pursue not only racial but also gender, sexuality, ability, and other representation.
 - c. Expectations of Board membership shall be made clear to potential members before they choose to join, and shall account for differing abilities, assets, and resources.
 - d. Leadership will empower BIPOC Theater members and students to apply for higher positions within the Theater and will provide training opportunities, including but not limited to mentorship, apprenticeship, and internal or external workshops.
 - e. To ensure that public communications associated with the theater are inclusive, considerate of, and relevant and accessible to the diverse audience that they reach, BIPOC creative professionals will be included in the planning and execution of messaging on social media, promotion, and marketing. In practice,



this may entail the formation of a particular committee (e.g. a communications committee, a review committee, a diversity and inclusion committee), or an expansion of the design and social media teams.

II. Historical Impact of BIPOC Structural and Income Inequality.

1. Countering the pervasive manifestations of this racism requires the implementation of ongoing, actively anti-racist policy in education programs, including free class spots, scholarships, and internships.
2. Affirming that low BIPOC membership in the Coalition is due in part to this structural inequality, the Coalition will:
 - a. Reduce economic barriers for BIPOC-identifying students through scholarships, internships/ and other programs.
 - b. Improve the Coalition Scholarship program by ensuring opportunities are clearly communicated on the Coalition Theater website, including specifics about eligibility and the application process.
 - c. Restructure the Coalition Internship program to prioritize applicable skill and leadership development over operational support. The internship experience will be clearly defined in a public document.
 - d. Build promotional recruitment material to communicate all educational offerings, including but not limited to free BIPOC student slots, scholarships, and internship programs, to the audience of potential Coalition students, with a focus on BIPOC-identified groups.

III. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Training

1. The Board, in conjunction with the Action and Accountability Committee, will identify third-party professional Diversity, Equity and Inclusion training sources. Such training will be implemented for all levels of theater membership.
2. The Board, in conjunction with the Action and Accountability committee, will create an anti-racist best practices document for staff and an anti-racist code of conduct for theater students and members. This documentation will be reviewed and amended as appropriate. This documentation will be publicly accessible from the Coalition website, or a shared document repository accessible by all members of the Coalition.
3. The Board, in conjunction with the Action and Accountability Committee (and other committees or groups in the theater as appropriate), will draft a policy for the compliance of all Coalition theater members, which will include provision of Code Of Conduct material and regular Diversity and Inclusion training opportunities.



4. Consequences of violating the Code of Conduct will be developed in conjunction with the Action and Accountability Committee, and will be published along with the Code of Conduct.
5. This Document will outline processes for reporting incidents, repairing relationships, suspension, and expulsion.

IV. Diversification of the Theater at All Levels

1. The Board recognizes that the current makeup of the Coalition membership has a disproportionate underrepresentation of BIPOC performers and creators.
2. All new house teams will be cast with a significant representation of BIPOC members, in order to better reflect the surrounding community. New systems will be put in place to offer support to new performers during their onboarding.
3. All shows will be curated with a significant representation of BIPOC performers, directors, producers, and writers in order to better reflect the surrounding community. All quarters of the year will contain shows developed by BIPOC creators.
4. Coalition coaches and directors will be required to cultivate casts and teams that include BIPOC performers.
5. The Artistic Director will schedule shows that align with the mission of the A&A Committee and the theater at large, and will be required to be transparent in the rationale behind their decisions. The Artistic Director will partner with the A&A Committee, or any subcommittee developed to support show scheduling. In addition, the Artistic Director will be required to prioritize BIPOC creators in each quarter's schedule. All showrunners will be provided support throughout the process with the intent of increasing inclusion and representation in programming.
6. The Board, in coordination with the Action and Accountability Committee, and other committees as appropriate, will work to develop promotional materials to reach and cultivate a more diverse and inclusive Coalition-going audience. This may entail research into what other theaters have done successfully in this area, audience and theater member surveys, bringing in touring acts, or data-driven experiments to help develop consistently successful promotional materials.

V. Third Party Mediation and Conflict Resolution

1. The theater will identify a neutral party whose role serves to receive and mediate conflicts, complaints, and other issues from theater members. Theater members will be provided clear procedures for contacting the mediator.



2. This neutral party will either have received training in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, as well as trauma-informed care, or will receive that training as part of their onboarding into the role.

3. In the event that the mediator leaves their role, the Coalition members will be notified via a Slack post and email distribution list within two business days, and the Board will fill the role with a qualified candidate as soon as possible.