

**THE DIVERSITY/INCLUSION/GENDER PARITY**

**TASK FORCE REPORT**

Conversations For Change



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# Foreword

In June 2012 the TCG Conference was held in Boston. There was a strong Boston/New England presence at the conference, and I was talking to people at the closing reception, getting feedback on what panels they had attended, and what inspired them moving forward. One person was telling me about one session she went to about diversity, and I mentioned that I had a few other conversations about that panel, and how great it sounded. She remarked that she sick of conversations. “We’re all good at talking. Where’s the action?”

This was one of the contributing factors, amongst many, for us initiating the Diversity/Inclusion/Gender Parity (DIG) Task Force last fall. The goal of the three meetings was to identify DIG issues in all areas of theater (on stage, backstage, in the offices, in the board rooms, and in the audiences) create action steps for moving forward. I realized this was an enormous topic, and three conversations were not enough. But we needed to start somewhere.

These conversations were complicated, layered, and fractured. If anything, they got more difficult as the meetings progressed. But the appreciation that we were having the conversations, the wary support of trying to brainstorm action steps, and the desire by many to know what was next helped us push through. These conversations, together or in separate buckets, are very topical right now. Our challenge is to keep them topical, and identify or create the pathways to change for our sector. For change we must.

Boston is a majority minority city where minorities comprise 53% of the population. The country will be majority minority within thirty years. The theater sector does not reflect that changing America. And yet every person in that room, every member of StageSource, every member of the greater Boston and New England Theater community, every one of us is passionate about theater, and wants to see it continue to flourish. So where is the disconnect? How can we care so much about the field, but not worry about the lack of diversity, inclusion, and gender parity in it? Parse it however you like—as a business strategy, as the potential for cultural influence, as a community organizer—creating a sustaining model for theater, all theater, is important. But our efforts are falling short. Moving forward, we need to channel our passion for theater into creating a sector that reflects the whole of our society, not just a segment of it. There are challenges to creating this change:

- Some members of our community do not see the need.
- Some try their best, but fall back into the familiar when it is too “difficult”.
- Some worry that their existing audiences or boards won’t support change.
- Some do not feel included in the “traditional” theaters, but find support for their work and their theaters disappearing. Finances and funding are affecting different communities disproportionately.

There will always be theater. But how can we allow our work to become irrelevant, or marginalized, but continuing on paths that are shrinking our talents pools (on and off stage) and our audiences? The challenges of talking about, and affecting change around, diversity, inclusion, and gender parity, underscores its importance.

This report is just the beginning of a path to create changes in our sector. But it is a beginning.

Julie A. Hennrikus  
Executive Director  
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# Chapter One: Introduction

## *Framing the Conversations*

This conversation isn't a new one. A few of the participants noted "battle scars" from previous discussions about diversity. And there was universal frustration that we needed to have the "same" conversations "again, and again" with nothing changing. And yet, when we put the call out to our community, inviting anyone to participate in a three part dialogue about diversity, inclusion, and gender parity in the greater Boston/New England theater community, over thirty people responded. These participants were directors, playwrights, administrators, critics, actors, designers and technicians. Though a number of people worked for a company (or two), no one was asked to represent or speak for their employer. Everyone represented themselves.

Ground rules were set. Everyone agreed that:

The room was a safe zone for conversation. Everyone had the benefit of the doubt. The two caveats--understanding the need for change, and really wanting to create it--are what are brought us together.

The goal was to create pathways to change by asking four questions.

- What does the future we want look like?
- What are the steps we want to take to make that happen?
- What are the challenges to those steps?
- How can we meet those challenges?

The Call to Action read, in part:

There is a need for systemic change in all areas of theater, including on stage, backstage, in the offices, in the audiences, on the boards, and in the audiences. All areas of theater must remove barriers of entry, real or perceived. And all areas of theater must expand opportunities at all levels in order to create long term change. This work is difficult. And it will take time. But if we want to stay in business, and remain (or become, for some communities) a relevant art form, there is no other option but to change.

In order to create change, we require bold ideas, and a willingness to fail. Timidity does not serve our art, nor does it serve our community. If we should fail, we will try something new. Change requires focus, creativity, and hard work. These are three attributes we have for the work itself. Our challenge is to focus some of that energy towards diversity, inclusion, and gender parity.

Though the goal of this task force was to create action steps, we needed to spend some time with our histories, our experiences, and our expectations for the process. There were three conversations, all movement was not forward. It takes time to develop trust. This report reflects a beginning of a process, including thinking about the missions of this task force.

## ***Our Missions***

### **Diversity**

Boston, MA is already a majority minority city. Within 30 years, our entire country will be majority minority. And yet, the theater sector does not reflect that reality. Though there are many reasons for this (access, lack of arts education in the schools, etc), and these reasons are much discussed in the community, the fact is that our sector must start looking like the community we live in. America is changing. Theater has the possibility, the responsibility, to not only reflect that changing reality, but to help lead the way. By not addressing and setting up opportunities for change, by not addressing the lack of diversity in decision making positions and in the pipelines leading to those positions, we are neglecting our core value to society. Staying on this path, we will marginalize our work, and our business model will continue to break down. Theater is an inherently democratic art form, and must welcome all participants.

## **Inclusion**

Inclusion involves many communities, and feels like a sweeping generality that misses a great deal of important nuance. But while some elements of access are in place (and defined by the ADA); true integration is rare and limited. And yet, with our aging population, the needs for accommodation and inclusion are growing. One participant said that inclusion would be the final frontier of change in our community. Lack of opportunity for artists is an understatement. What are best practices that already exist, who is leading the charge, and what more can we do as a sector?

## **Gender Parity**

Women are 51% of the population. The theater community at large reflects that percentage (if not higher), yet women in management leadership positions, as directors and as playwrights on seasons, as a percentage of available acting roles, do not reflect that. How can doors of opportunity be open, and stay open, to women?

## **Why?**

Having different people, with their own points of view, life experience, and lens, in the room leads to innovation. It challenges the familiar, and may be difficult, but isn't that the greater purpose of theater? As a sector, we are challenged by funding, shrinking audiences, and a generation (or two) who have not been exposed to live theater on a regular basis. We need new thinking to take on these challenges. This work, and these conversations, are part of the dynamic that will result in changes in our sector.

Theater is too important not to "fix" the parts that are broken. We are an old art form, capable of at the minimum of telling stories, and at our greatest of changing lives and affecting social change. We are extraordinarily collaborative, reliant on our individual artists, our organizations, and our audiences to work together. No one is not well meaning or well intentioned when it comes to these conversations. But still, the barriers are in place, and must be removed. Until we make systemic changes to the way we all work, the decision makers in the room, and the stories we tell, we risk a future irrelevancy as an art form. As a community, we know that our work is too important to continue on our current path, and take that risk.

## ***The Report***

Every section of this report frames an area with the specific issues, existing resources or leaders in the specific areas, and some ideas for our community. Some of these ideas are simple. Others will necessitate greater community wide efforts. And still others require a real shift in our internal process. That we need to make a case for this work is an important first step, but a step that must be taken. It should be an easy case to make. As a business decision, this is a path that many in the private sector have already shifted towards, knowing that their customer base and employees need to reflect the community. As a strategic decision, this shift ensures that theater remains a relevant art form.

Much of our sector is based on subjective decision making. In order to make progress in the areas of diversity, inclusion, and gender parity, we must move out of our comfort zones, include different points of view (and lenses) in our decision making, and, in some cases, step aside so that others can play a greater role. We are an empathetic art form, but that does not mean we individually understand the needs of our entire society. Other voices need to be part of the conversation, and their contributions counted not as additions to our narrative, but as part of our narrative.

# Chapter Two: Strengthening The Sector

## *Definition*

The theater sector is inclusive of all types of theater and the people who do the work. We are non-profits, educational, commercial, community, producing, and presenting organizations. We are actors, designers, directors, playwrights, dramaturgs, administrators, technicians, stage manager, and educators. Most of us wear a number of different hats in the theater, and many work for a variety of organizations. Many, if not all, organizations are struggling with models of doing business, and how to adjust to the current financial climate. How can we work collectively to become agents of change for our sector, and reflect the changing demographics? If we want theater to look like the rush hour ride on the MBTA, how can we make a place for diversity, inclusion and gender parity in our vocation?

## *The Issues*

StageSource, with the community, has been tackling this problem for years. The challenge has been that this never “gets fixed”, or that we start out with good intentions, lose steam and stop the work. Other points of view identified through our conversations include:

- "These conversations always stop. They stop because people get pissed, afraid, don't know what to do. The challenge to the group is not to stop. When we hit a wall and we're up against each other, how do we get past it?"
- "People are biased, prejudiced and it doesn't do us any good to pretend it doesn't exist."
- "If we set up organizations as the ‘them’ that must be changed we have created another problem. The organizations have challenges of their own. We should think of organizations as partners. How do we reach them?"

- "Is theater about diversity? It's built around a group of like-minded people. Theater coalesces around like minded people and experiences. People have their cliques. It's what brings them together."
- "What limits us is when the circles (cliques) remain closed."
- "Every story is universal; we do not have to look like each other to understand each other. It is everyone's right to choose what kind of theater they want to make. If you are striving to make theater that is represented of your world you have to be willing to work harder to do that. It is also possible to work within a bubble if you are willing to expand your bubble."

There are many challenges to addressing this issue, not the least of which is getting the entire sector to understand that there is a problem, and we need to solve it. Diversity, inclusion, and gender parity cannot only be routes to funding, or boxes that get checked off. The issues and challenges around these topics were emotional and deeply rooted in experience as well as Boston's storied history of racial discord. Honoring these experiences while moving forward will be a delicate balance fraught with anger and hope, but move forward we must with great expectations for the future of Diversity, Inclusion and Gender Parity in New England Theaters.

## ***The Ideas***

The rest of this report was broken down into specific areas of focus, and specific areas of concern in each of these areas: On Stage, Backstage, In the Offices, In the Audiences, In the Board Rooms, and in the Audiences. But here are some proposals for sector wide initiatives.

## **Making the Case**

The theater sector has to learn how to create a value statement around our work. Why should people come to the theater, or to a theatrical production? What role do we play in the social discourse, compared to the role(s) we could play? Why does this matter so much to those of us who are practitioners? And how do we let people in on that value statement?

The conversations and work around the DIG Task Force could provide a way to reach out and have these conversations in a wider arena. Again, not all organizations are interested in participating. But for those who are, this is an excellent way of learning how to be more welcoming.

## **Increasing the Pool—Who Is Out There?**

StageSource is a membership service organization. While much of our revenue comes from our membership fees, we work hard to keep them low, and to keep the value of our membership high through our offerings. That said, we do not maintain that we have every theater organization as a member. Nor do we have every theater artist in New England. We recognize that some organizations aren't "counted" because they are under the radar. But others aren't "counted" because their work does not fit in our traditional definitions and models of theater. So we don't always know who we are missing. And that needs to be part of the work moving forward.

Who are we counting as theater organizations, or theater makers? What is the work being done under our radar? And how can the sector increase our lens to make sure this work, and these artists, are not only counted but supported? While it is important for ALL organizations to consider issues of diversity, inclusion, and gender parity, how can we better support organizations whose mission is to serve very specific communities? What are the opportunities for partnerships, for cohorts, for new models that help support the small companies that cannot sustain a traditional non-profit theater model?

In our conversations, some of these companies were referred to as heritage companies. There are many terms, but how can we identify them? And how can we support the creation and operations of other organizations dedicated to the work? Could they exist as subgroups of other organizations with similar missions?

Where is our Deaf West Theatre, serving the deaf community? Who is doing work with different cultural communities, celebrating and telling their stories? Organizations dedicated to liturgical work—are they on our radar screen? How about their artists and audiences? What work is being done that is performance based, but may not self-select themselves as theater companies? In order to assess the state of the sector, we need to ensure the entire sector is included in the conversation.

## **Opening Our Eyes**

Conversations around the issues of diversity, inclusion, and gender parity are difficult for a number of reasons. They speak to the lens of privilege, and how it impacts our world view and choices. In the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) system, throughout this country, there are only four Artistic Directors of color and zero Managing Directors. While there are many types of theater (commercial, fringe/small/mid/large non-profits, college, community, presenting orgs), the larger percentage of decision makers are white. And as our country becomes majority minority, and as our cities are already

majority minority, that this does not represent the community is an understatement. But the real impact of this must be addressed. That unless we diversify, we will become extinct, or at the very least a dismissible archaic art form that ceded its power in order to hold on to the lens of privilege. There are questions about whether everyone needs to do this work. We maintain that, from a business perspective if for no other reason, these issues must be addressed by the entire community.

We need to have conversations on a number of platforms about this lens, and how it impacts us. One step is to have facilitated workshops on how to have these conversations constructively. Others include panels, leveraging social media, partnering with traditional media to have conversations, and convenings large and small.

But the other step we must take as a sector is to recognize that we all need to take this step.

Without expanding our lens and the points of view in decision making roles, we cannot serve or reach new audiences effectively. Though diversifying audiences cannot be the only goal with this work, as a business proposition we need to expand our audiences, not keep diminishing them.

## **School Outreach**

We are two generations into underfunding (if funding at all) arts education. We need to reach out to high schools, and talk about careers in the arts. Offer opportunities for workshops, and internships. Discuss the value of creative thinking to all career paths, and how theater can feed that skill. And discuss the many skills that are required to put on a theatrical production.

Boston and New England have a significant number of colleges. Outreach to their theater departments is critical, and being done on varying levels. But what about marketing departments? Fundraising programs? Students studying communications, or accounting, or journalism? All of these skills are used, and needed, in the arts. And if students don't go into the arts directly, perhaps they will consider volunteering or working with smaller organizations, or joining boards. We need to populate the pipelines of management with a wider community, and this is one way to do it.

Steps to be taken immediately:

- Survey the organizational members of StageSource, and ask what their school outreach programs are. Compile that information for the community, and look for partnering opportunities. Also, look at what communities are being neglected, and work to fill those voids.

- Create a database with information from public and private high schools and colleges. And/or, find and use existing resources. Can StageSource play a role in communicating with these communities? What will that look like?
- What role can individual artists play? What existing opportunities are there for teaching artists, and which ones can/should be created? Can we have artists in all disciplines participate?
- Is there an opportunity for a cohort to be created, or a partnership between smaller organizations and larger organizations to expand on core services and expertise?
- How will we determine our effectiveness? This will require time, and patience, but we must establish some benchmarks to ensure we are creating change.

## **Access**

As stated before, access issues are significant. And must be addressed. Charlie Washburn of Very Special Arts (VSA) says that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) should be the platform on which we build our access programs, but many organizations fail to even reach those standards. Moving forward we must:

- Explore community wide funding for access. One idea was for StageSource to get funding that we could use to coordinate access and regrant to our member organizations. This umbrella funding would help expand the number of organizations who could provide access.
- Educate the field on best practices, the law, and resources. And we need to keep the education, and commitment, going.
- Broaden our lens on these issues. Physical access, wide aisles, ramps and handrails are not just for people in wheelchairs. We also have an aging population who need accommodation for mobility, hearing, and sight.
- Understand what inclusion means. ASL is one of the most used languages in the United States. Ranking goes from third to fourth to sixth depending on sources. That is extraordinary, and is not reflected on our stages.

- Create access opportunities for theater makers. While strides are being made to make theater accessible for audiences, we cannot neglect the theater makers. Organizations can broaden the pool of artistic talent by taking into account the needs of artists in the disability community.

## **The Rooney Rule**

One idea is to adopt a Rooney Rule for the theater community. From An Interview with Joseph Haj (<http://www.howlround.com/interview-with-joseph-haj-by-lauren-keating/>):

"The Rooney Rule was implemented in professional football in 2003. And, I should say up front that everybody hated it. It stated that when a head coaching position opened, there must be a minority candidate interviewed for the job. The owners hated it because they didn't want to be told what to do. Minority coaches hated it because they didn't want to be anyone's token. And now, here we are almost ten years later, and the Rooney Rule is an unqualified success. What happened was, these candidates of color would come, and impress, and the team would still hire the other guy, the white guy, they originally had in mind. But, a few years later, when the job opened up again, they'd come back to the impressive candidate whom they didn't hire the first time, and he'd get the job. There have been twenty-one black head coaches in the NFL; fourteen of those have been hired since the Rooney Rule came into effect. Today, one in six NFL teams is led by minority Head Coaches."

What would happen if a managing director or a board stopped before hiring staff and asked themselves "have I considered a candidate of color? Have I considered a woman? Have I been open to hiring a person with a disability?"

What would happen if every artistic director, when planning a season, asked himself "have I considered a playwright of color? Have I considered a female playwright? Does our season reflect another cultural lens? Have I considered a director of color, and a female?" And what systems can we put in place to measure accountability with an initiative like this?

## **Keep Talking**

The DIG Task Force will be expanded, with a group dedicated to meeting regularly and taking a measure of progress in the sector, while rethinking some new strategic initiatives for the entire theater community. StageSource alone cannot set goals for individual companies. But we can work with the entire sector at creating strategies around the ideas, and measuring success. We can also help facilitate

support for individual artists, and for under-supported organizations. And most importantly, we can take the lead on strategic partnerships with other non-profits to further this work. The theater community must get on the right side of these conversations. We have the skills (as storytellers) to create real change by creating work on stage that more accurately reflects our community, and making sure our organizations also reflect that community.

## Chapter Three: On Stage

### *Definition*

Actors.

### *The Issues*

During this 2012-2013 season there are a number of companies producing shows with great roles for actors of color. Anecdotally, in two cases artistic directors were concerned about the talent pool when they announced their season, but were surprised by the number of actors who auditioned, many of whom they had never seen before. While these stories, and these productions, are heartening, they are outliers in a challenging journey for actors. Some of these challenges include:

- Roles for people of color being cast by white actors in several recent productions.
- Though the 2012-2013 season has a rich variety of roles for actors of color, there is concern that this is an aberration, not a trend.
- In 2012, Company One did *Love Person*, which had a deaf actor and was partially in ASL. This season no one is serving that community of actors (or audiences) in that way. “What’s next?” asked on participant.
- When sending out casting notices, companies will add "white" as a qualifier as a default.
- Many actors of color will self-select out of audition that are not specifically targeted toward them.
- Some companies say that finding available actors of color is a challenge.

- Some actors of color feel that they are given roles that are “token”, and are not considered, because of their race or ethnicity, for “mainstream” roles.
- When an actor of color is in a production in a traditionally “white” role, it is an opportunity for a conversation about race. Too often the issue is skirted, and the majority lens is used when perceiving the character. How can we take these opportunities for a bigger conversation, and include others?

## ***The Ideas***

- Encourage actors to audition for any role for which they are suited. Do not self select yourself out of an audition.
- Encourage companies not to put qualifiers in their casting notices unless they are truly required for the part.
- Have an ASL interpreter available for the StageSource auditions.
- How do disabled people participate in the StageSource auditions?? Continue to include that community in the conversations and the action steps.
- Work on getting actors of color to join StageSource, and fill out their profiles so people can find them.
- In the community, who is doing this well? What are they doing? How do we share those best practices? How can StageSource help the entire community benefit?
- How can companies let actors know they are welcome to audition for them? Saying it isn’t enough.
- Can we start keeping methodical data about what is going on? In February 2013 the Asian American Performers Action Coalition (AAPAC <http://www.aapacnyc.org/>) released a study on casting trends in New York. Their methodology was interesting, and transferrable. Can we get support for capturing data, and including gender and inclusion in the numbers?

Actors have a role, and a voice, in these conversations. But many feel as though they do not. How can StageSource facilitate and empower this community? Casting is subjective. But asking questions

about roles, opportunities, casting decisions, and parts available are appropriate, and necessary, as we move forward.

## Chapter Four: Backstage

### *Definition*

For the purposes of this report, we have grouped “backstage” to include playwrights, directors, designers, technicians, dramaturgs, and stage managers. This is a broad pool of people, often lumped in the “creative” side of theater making.

### *The Issues*

Each of these areas has specific issues. For playwrights, how do we open up opportunities for different stories to be told on every stage? How can we help support playwrights, and build an environment that welcomes, supports, and demands new work?

For directors, where are their opportunities? How can a director help an artistic director broaden the lens of their company? What is the role of the director, particularly when we are talking about DIG issues, in broadening the perspective? How do we help support the career paths of young directors?

Designers are critical in creating the world of a play, yet finding a designer of color is challenging. How can we reach out to existing designers, and let the community know they are here? What is the role StageSource can play in centralizing this data? And how can we let younger people know about this career path, or opportunities for expanding their resumes?

In other backstage areas, how can we broaden the community of stage managers and technicians to include more people of color? Both of these areas (and others) are routes on a path to other work in the sector. How do we feed these pipelines with a broader community?

## ***The Ideas***

Backstage opportunities are artistic paths that many people aren't aware of. Additionally, stage management, design, and technical expertise are transferrable skills to other industries, both public and private. Yet these career opportunities are unknown by many, and explored by too few. Having different voices in the room, and different lenses creating work, may affect change. Or not. But what it will do is help our backstage reflect our community.

Immediate ideas include:

- In the greater Boston area there are 65 learning institutions. How can we partner with teachers to get students of all socio economic backgrounds to sit in on conversations to see who's making the art?
- Exposure, open houses. Gearing them towards students, young people. Focus on designers, admin; showcase the people you don't normally get to see.
- Work with communities to develop better resource lists. Use the centralized role of StageSource to help provide these personnel resources.
- Reach out to guidance counselors, drama clubs, culture clubs, and other school communities to help broaden the conversation about career opportunities in these areas.
- What opportunities are there for playwrights to have impact on these areas? How can we support new work, and new voices, telling these stories?
- Work on ways to have emerging playwrights meet and work with emerging directors.
- How do we reach possible technicians who can explore theater as part of their career path?

# Chapter Five: In the Offices

## *Definition*

Management, marketing, development, box office, front of house

## *The Issues*

In order to create a pathway to power (upper management in theaters), these jobs need to be opened up. One challenge is that careers opportunities other than on stage or backstage in the arts are not taught or discussed at the high school level. Not only are these opportunities there, but the need for different points of view are great. Additionally, it could be argued that these “traditional” jobs (which exist in other fields as well) are less subjective for hiring (than casting or play selection), and should more easily be open to a wider pool.

## *The Ideas*

Anecdotal evidence says that companies have trouble finding diverse candidates for their “office” roles. How do we change that? In this area the Rooney rule can and should be applied. These entry levels could lead to higher management positions, positions that help create and dictate the climate of an organization. While the LORT statistic of four Artistic Directors of color nationally is dismal, zero Managing Directors is as significant an issue. The business part of the sector is important to the future, and we need to reflect the community. Some ideas include:

- Reach out to guidance counselors and teachers to have conversations about arts career opportunities.
- Mentor students in other positions besides acting.
- Find resources to reach out to more diverse communities.

- Who does some of this work now in other sectors? Are there partnering opportunities?
- Reach out to non-theater college programs to reach students, and let them know about opportunities in the arts. Management programs, marketing programs, business programs could all be feeder systems into the arts.
- Learn from other sectors who do this well, and steal their ideas.
- Create sector wide support programs for these areas, and open up career paths.

# Chapter Six: The Boards

## *Definition*

Boards are the governing organizations for non-profits. In addition, for the purposes of this report, we are including donor pools.

## *The Issues*

Having a diverse group of decision makers and donors is important for the healthy theater ecology. It is also an opportunity for non-theater makers, but theater lovers, to support the sector. But how to reach them?

How can we let boards know that they need to be part of this initiative, to help widen the lens for the work of an organization? This is a ground up way of creating change within an organization. How do we reach different communities, and explain the opportunity inherent in board service?

And how do we reach potential donors, and help explain the necessity of financial support in theater? And the opportunities that arise in supporting a company or artist who reflects your life experience, and your lens?

## *The Ideas*

There are several routes for expanding boards, and supporting their (and our) work. They include expanding the resource pool, training opportunities, and reevaluating the role of the board in governance. Boards are volunteer positions, but central to the operation of non-profits. Expanding that pool is not only an opportunity, it is critical to creating change within an organization. If everyone looks alike, has the same life experiences, and the same lens, how can an organization see what changes need to be made, and bring new ideas on how to change them?

Here are some ideas for boards:

- Work with professional organizations, especially young professionals, to connect them to organizations.
- Use the examples of other industries.
- Have sector wide events and board development opportunities.
- Partner with other organizations for ongoing board training and development.

# Chapter Seven: In the Audiences

## *Definition*

Audience is complicated. Different shows, and different companies, have different audiences. But the overall percentage of theater audiences is thought to be shrinking. How can we reverse that? How can companies continue to cultivate and expand the audience they've captured when doing a culturally specific work? And how can we reach new audiences?

## *The Issues*

At our final DIG meeting one producer of a heritage company wondered if this (report/committee/goal) was about diversifying white theater, and not about strengthening heritage or culturally specific theater. Another concern was that the theater community's people of color and deaf communities were being asked to help diversify "white" theaters but were getting nothing in return i.e. jobs, connections, acting opportunities, compensation.

This is part of the issue. Who makes up these different audiences and what do we want from them and for them? Is theater for all? What does theater for all mean? At a time when heritage and culturally specific theaters are going out of business at a much higher rate than other theater companies, what happens to their audiences? Are we "counting" all the types of theater from different communities? Do we need to widen our lens, and consider other paths of opportunity? And rather than targeting audiences for specific shows only, what can be done to constantly market theater so that we can develop a wider general audience?

As a sector, we need to work on a value proposition for theater that reaches new audiences instead of preaching to the existing audiences. We all know the value of theater, which is why we are working in the sector. How do we tell that story more effectively?

So, is all theater for all? If the answer is yes, how can we make that true?

## ***The Ideas***

- Using social media and new technology to engage new audiences.
- Getting on the right side of technology.
- Have StageSource apply for a grant, which can be regranted to organizations for ASL interpreters and coaches.
- Create sector wide conversations to help engage audiences in new ways. We need to have a persuasive value proposition put forward. Why should audiences care?
- Marketing is a treadmill that goes from organizations to traditional theater going towns. Given budget constraints, this practice is understandable on one level, but it neglects the opportunities for reaching and developing new audiences. What can we do as a sector to break away from the treadmill and hit the open road? Can we think about cohorts of several organizations? Can we work on an app or platform that is available to all?
- There are community organizations that are doing work in the neighborhoods. How can we raise the profile of that work for our entire community? And what opportunities are there for partnerships?

## Chapter Eight: Action Steps

Ideas for action have been highlighted throughout this report. As a service organization, StageSource plays a unique role in the theater community. We connect individuals and organizations. Some of our programs (like our Circle of Friends card) also impact audiences. We have relationships with other arts service organizations. We also have connections to other communities. StageSource can spearhead initiatives, and work on finding funding to coordinate others. While we recognize that systemic change is going to take time, inaction is not an option.

Short term actions steps:

- Continue the conversations—in person, on panels, on blogs, via social media. The StageSource Theater Conference is scheduled for June 2013, and this conversation needs to be part of the programming.
- Identify the bright spots—who is doing what well? Are there opportunities to partner with them? Or to use their models for our sector?
- Identify who (theater companies, individual artists, colleges, other non-profits) is working with schools, and what they are doing. How can StageSource partner with these efforts to reach other students?
- The Asian American Performers Action Coalition (<http://www.aapacnyc.org/>) has produced an interesting report about the New York stages, and the diversity (or lack of) on them. This data gathering could be expanded to address gender issues and access issues as well. What would it take to gather that data for a season in the greater Boston theater community? What does it look like when we move to other communities? Getting some benchmarks drives the conversation forward.
- Who can help facilitate conversations around these topics? How can we have a conversation about the lens that most of our sector wears? Who can we partner with to help some big

conversations within the sector? This is an opportunity for using expertise in other sectors to have bigger conversations.

Longer term, there are other steps to be taken:

- Community accessible funding for ASL interpreters.
- An arts census so that we know about every theater organization, in every community.
- Convenings for organizations to discuss best practices.
- Expanded use of social media, traditional media, and other resources to have a constant conversation about these issues in our community, and our work to create systemic change.
- Identifying support systems within the community for individuals.
- Connect with organizations that can provide feeder systems into the theater sector. Young professionals for board positions? A wider pool of candidates for arts administration jobs? Training opportunities for underserved communities?

These are just some long term initiatives that will need support moving forward. Conversations are important, but are not enough. We must create the change we want to see in the community, and help those who do not see the need for change see the need.

## Chapter Nine: Resources & Information

This is a brief resource list for conversations or information. Please go to StageSource.org for the most updated Resource list. We will also be hosting conversations on our blog.

Cultural Access New England ([www.ca-ne.org/](http://www.ca-ne.org/)) is a consortium of organizations and individuals who provide seminars, trainings, and discussions. Sign up is available on their website. A great resource for best practices.

Very Special Arts Massachusetts ([vsamass.org/index.html](http://vsamass.org/index.html)) is the state organization on arts and disabilities.

The ArtsBoston ([www.artsboston.org](http://www.artsboston.org)) Audience Initiative is a data collection tool that helps arts organizations understand audience patterns.

The Theatre Communications Group ([www.tcg.org](http://www.tcg.org)) is a national service organization for the theater community. Last fall their Fall Forum was about diversity, and they continue these conversations on their site, and through their programming.

SAG/AFTRA ([www.sagaftra.org/EEODiversity](http://www.sagaftra.org/EEODiversity)), Actors' Equity Association ([www.actorsequity.org/benefits/diversity.asp](http://www.actorsequity.org/benefits/diversity.asp)), and other professional organizations have committees, initiatives, and reporting structures to help address some of these issues.

WomenArts ([womenarts.org/index.htm](http://womenarts.org/index.htm)) is a worldwide community of artists and allies that works for empowerment, opportunity, and visibility for women artists. It is an online resource.

The NOIR Network Boston ([www.facebook.com/NoirNetworkBoston](http://www.facebook.com/NoirNetworkBoston)) is a new organization described as “where New England black and diaspora artists, artisans and administrators in theater and the arts educate, cultivate, support, advance, and connect.” They post events and announcements for the community. They have also hosted round table conversations.

Advocacy is an important part of creating change for our sector. Artists Under the Dome ([www.artistsunderthedome.org/](http://www.artistsunderthedome.org/)) is an annual event where Massachusetts Artists spend a day in the State

House working on advocacy and meeting their representatives. MASSCreative ([www.mass-creative.org/](http://www.mass-creative.org/)) is a new organization that is working on advocacy efforts throughout the state. In order to raise awareness, and raise funding, for some of the issues outlined in this report, advocacy must be a tool we all use.

Several organizations, including ArtsEmerson ([www.artsemerson.org](http://www.artsemerson.org)) and the Huntington Theatre Company ([www.huntingtontheatre.org/](http://www.huntingtontheatre.org/)) are rolling out audience initiatives. We will keep you apprised of these programs, and also report on other initiatives by companies in the region.

The Asian American Performers Action Coalition ([www.aapacnyc.org/](http://www.aapacnyc.org/)) has reported on casting in New York City for the past two seasons. Their results are worth looking at closely, as is their methodology.

The Oregon Shakespeare Festival ([www.osfashland.org/en/about/diversity-and-inclusion.aspx](http://www.osfashland.org/en/about/diversity-and-inclusion.aspx)) is one of the bright spots in this conversation. Everything they do serves their commitment to diversity and inclusion.

There are many, many blogs that add to this conversation. A short (and not complete) list includes bloggers on ArtsJournal ([www.artsjournal.com/](http://www.artsjournal.com/)), including Clay Lord ([www.artsjournal.com/newbeans/](http://www.artsjournal.com/newbeans/)) and Diane Ragsdale ([www.artsjournal.com/jumper](http://www.artsjournal.com/jumper)) recently. Parabasis ([parabasis.typepad.com/](http://parabasis.typepad.com/)) and Mission Paradox ([www.missionparadox.com/](http://www.missionparadox.com/)) are two bloggers who address a number of issues, these included. We will add to this list.

## Chapter Ten: Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who participated in the conversations last fall. This page will be amended to name them all, but for now, a sincere thank you. Thank you for caring, for wanting to have the conversation, and for wanting to be part of change.

Conversations will continue on our blog ([www.stagesource.wordpress.com](http://www.stagesource.wordpress.com)), via our social media platforms (Twitter @StageSourceBos #NEthtrDIG, Facebook: [www.facebook.com/StageSource](http://www.facebook.com/StageSource)) and on our website ([www.stagesource.org](http://www.stagesource.org)). We will also be discussing this at the StageSource Theater Conference on June 29, 2013.

And any other opportunities for conversations around these issues are welcome. Contact Julie Hennrikus, Executive Director of StageSource at [jhennrikus@StageSource.org](mailto:jhennrikus@StageSource.org).