



## Considerations for EDI and Anti-Racism Work at Orchestras

Jessica Schmidt, Principal Consultant - *Orchestrate Inclusion*

August 2020

*Racism = race prejudice + social and institutional power*

*Racism = a system of advantage based on race*

*Racism = a system of oppression based on race*

*Racism = a white supremacy system*

**RACISM:** *Racism is different from racial prejudice, hatred, or discrimination. Racism involves one group having the power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society and by shaping the cultural beliefs and values that support those racist policies and practices. (Source: [Dismantling Racism Works Web Workbook](#))*

**ANTI-RACISM:** *Anti-racism is defined as the work of actively opposing racism by advocating for changes in political, economic, and social life. Anti-racism tends to be an individualized approach, and set up in opposition to individual racist behaviors and impacts. (Source: [Racial Equity Tools via Race Forward](#))*

A question that many orchestra staff, musicians, and board members might have after reading the League of American Orchestras' Statement on Racial Discrimination and in this current moment of reckoning and reimagining is "now what?" Many of us will want to name and engage in next steps in meaningful equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) work and toward becoming anti-racist in our own lives and at our own orchestras. It is important to remind ourselves that the work of EDI and anti-racism is necessarily (and sometimes, confusingly) ongoing and immediate. There is no "checklist" for success. Rather, lasting change requires daily learning, reflection, growth, and discomfort. It also requires humility. At the same time, we are witnesses to the life and death impact of a lack of immediate action; those of us who are white must remember our privilege of time and personal safety. For every moment we don't take action and make change, racism affects people of color in every aspect of their lives—including simply staying alive.

Fundamentally and importantly, the work of EDI and anti-racism is about empathy. It is about breaking established patterns of socialized injustice and inequity out of care for our interconnectedness and shared existence. In the orchestra field, it is also about acknowledging, understanding, and uprooting systems and traditions that have upheld white supremacy and advantage at the daily expense of marginalizing and oppressing BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) stakeholders. The practice of uprooting and reimagining at our own orchestras requires several broad preparatory and continued actions to be meaningful:



### **Do the Personal Work**

- Take time to learn about key EDI and anti-racism concepts; challenge your own assumptions about what you believe these concepts represent and be open to changing your beliefs and understandings. (My experience in the orchestra field is that this is especially important in regard to the concepts of white supremacy and white advantage/privilege.)
- Commit to applying this understanding and embedding the values of EDI and anti-racism into your organization's DNA internally and publicly, in every element of your orchestra's work.
- Make space for daily self-examination in regard to your own role in racism (and other "ism's" such as sexism, ableism, and genderism); observe and take note of your own internal narratives with a lens of curiosity. Notice where bias creeps in. Notice where racism appears. Use your observations to name areas for change and self-monitor your own growth.
- Seek and consult external resources such as the [League's EDI Resource Center](#).
- Make a list of your questions—what resources will you seek to help you to answer these questions? Below is a set of suggested personal reflection questions focused on the League's Statement on Racial Discrimination and your reaction to the statement:
  - Notice and observe your reactions to the statement. What does the statement cause me to feel as an individual? Why might this be?
  - Is this type of statement new to me or have I seen other examples of such statements? If yes, where?
  - What are specific concepts in the statement that are familiar to me and/or my orchestra?
  - Conversely, what are concepts that are unknown? How might I/we learn more about the unknown concepts?
  - How does systemic racism appear within my daily life? My orchestra?
  - What might my organization look like, post-pandemic, in regard to creating and modeling new systems of equity and inclusion?
  - What other questions do I have at this time? What type of support could be beneficial to me and to my organization in answering such questions?"

### **Place Focus on Your BIPOC Team Members Musicians, Staff, Board, and Community Partners**

- Listen actively to the experiences and needs of BIPOC team members. Make space for your BIPOC team members to seek the time and resources they need for their own mental, emotional, and physical health in this critical moment and beyond. Walking through the world as a person of color can mean carrying pain, fear, exhaustion, and



trauma in a way that those of us who are white can only begin to understand. This is especially true in this moment for people who are Black.

- Advance the learning and efforts of your white team members and **DO THE WORK**; do not ask BIPOC team members to take on the emotional and mental labor of your organizational EDI and anti-racism work.
- Provide space for participation and expression from your BIPOC team members if and when the BIPOC team members are prepared and willing to engage.
- Remember that BIPOC team members are individuals who have different experiences and viewpoints from other BIPOC team members. Their opinions should not be elevated or perceived as shared experiences/viewpoints based on one aspect of their identity.

### **Invest Financial and Human Resources**

- Create and commit to a budget line for this work on an annual basis. Starting this work and not sustaining it is damaging. Anti-racism is a value **and** an action. Organizational change requires hard work supported by financial and human resources.
- Consider applying for the [League's Catalyst Fund](#) to support an external consultancy.
- Consider how your organization will financially sustain this work in the long term.
- Work diligently to frame EDI and anti-racism work as owned by the organization as a whole as a central and organizational function. Refrain from silo-ing the work within the scope of one department.
- Build relationships with individual, foundation, and corporate funders who will invest in this work with your orchestra over the long haul; how will your orchestra sustain and advance EDI and anti-racism work via prioritization in fundraising?
- Identify reputable anti-racism trainers who might support organizational collaboration; consider pooling resources to open training to several partner organizations in your area to reduce costs.
- Research your local and state arts agencies; many provide anti-racism and EDI training on a regular basis through trusted facilitators/trainers.

### **Engage External Expertise**

- Seek external experts to guide your orchestra. This work is complex and benefits deeply from external expertise and facilitation. The presence of power dynamics makes it essential to find and secure a trusted external support(s) to lead conversations and walk the organization through its efforts, also holding it accountable to action.
- EDI and anti-racism are professional areas of expertise; engage with them and invest in them as you would with any other element of mission-based work.

### **Align Your Leadership**

- Make arrangements to allow and support musician, management, and board leadership to be present at EDI and anti-racism workshops and conversations. Modeling matters, as



does cross-functional collaboration at the highest level—Board Chair, Executive Director, Orchestra Committee Chair.

- Commit to meeting people where they are in their own learning; we all have different starting places. Every stakeholder in your organization will come to the table with a different set of lived experiences.
- Emphasize and embrace the intentional, long-term nature of this work at every opportunity.
- Be aware of power dynamics (positional and personal) between and within staff, musicians, and board members that could limit personal contributions to this work during shared meetings and discussions. Ask your consultant to help your organization to identify, examine, and change these structures as a part of your EDI work.
- Create and hold regular shared time and space, even during the busiest moments of your season, to come together to discuss changing needs, questions, and actions around EDI and anti-racism.
- Refrain from framing EDI and anti-racism efforts as a “project” or “initiative.” This work is a lifelong practice.

### **Be Strategic**

- Focus on INTERNAL change with help from your professional external consultant. Our field has often engaged with EDI by creating programs instead of examining and changing systems; little progress has been made, as such. Rather than jumping to program/initiative creation to serve the community (often a deflection technique), commit to digging deeply into the harder work of understanding and dismantling internal systems of racism and other “ism’s.”
- Ask your external consultant to help your orchestra to hold a mirror up to its current practices to better see and understand your unique needs and challenges.
- Articulate your organization’s specific “why.” Specifically articulate why a commitment to EDI and anti-racism is essential at your orchestra.
- With help from your consultant, commit to preparing and executing a strategic plan of action around EDI and anti-racism that includes goals, objectives, and measurements/timetables/responsibilities.
- Post your “why” statement and plan publicly and ask external partners for their help in holding you accountable for the goals you have set.
- Prepare to seek and receive feedback from people of many lived experiences, to respond directly to the person/people offering the feedback, and to change as an organization because of the feedback. Be especially open to learning about how your orchestra is truly perceived by your broader community and to responding to what might feel like potentially new information. “Listening” without an openness to change is an empty act.



- Embrace the act of making mistakes and learning from them; mistakes that lead to meaningful change signal movement

### **Involve Your Musicians as Key Thinkers and Partners**

- Prioritize the act of sharing EDI and anti-racism learning and work with your musicians. This work has the ability to connect musicians, board, and staff in a meaningful way. Be sure that your musicians are invited not only to attend workshops and meetings, but to share their unique lived experiences to help the organization to grow and sustain a commitment to EDI and anti-racism.

### **Embrace “Both And” Thinking**

- Practice noticing and leaning in to the natural tensions in EDI and anti-racism work. We have a need to take immediate action in our field AND we need to be intentional to create culture change. We can acknowledge and address our racism AND connect with our own goodness as people. We wish to be kind AND by nature, we will accidentally say and do hurtful things in the process of growing. Sitting with dichotomy in EDI and anti-racism work is a practice that is uncomfortable and necessary.

### **If You Are White, Spend Time Becoming Familiar With Your Whiteness**

- Consider where advantage based in whiteness comes into play in your everyday life. As a personal exercise, walk through a day noticing and documenting the moments of advantage you experience that a Black person would not experience due to race. How do you interact with strangers and how do they interact with you? What does it feel like to drive, shop, and spend time with your family in public? What resources and networks do you have access to—financial, personal, professional? How did/do legacy and whiteness play into access to such networks?
- Embrace your power to participate in the redistribution of wealth and power. Material change is at the core of EDI and anti-racism. For white people who work in the orchestra field, a shift in who has money and power can feel like loss since it means reexamining systems and redistributing unearned privileges that have benefitted us and our field over many years (“when you are used to privilege, equality feels like oppression”). Notice your reactions to the need to share wealth and power. If you feel a sense of loss, commit to working to shift your own framing toward an increase in curiosity and openness to what we will gain as a society from redistribution.
- Commit to engaging with this lifelong work with honesty and directness. Embrace discomfort; white people have the most work to do since we created and have upheld racism. At the same time, commit to gentleness toward yourself. Anti-racism work can be personally transformative and healing.