



10 Steps Toward Greater Cultural Competency

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With the feedback of many trusted colleagues

As theatre-makers and artists we dedicate our lives to the examination of our individual and collective humanity. We are storytellers who cannot only reveal the world as it is, but must also create the new world we imagine. This fundamental commitment to our exploration of being human, of being alive, calls us to participate in dismantling the longest tradition of inequality in our society--racial injustice. As we deepen our commitment to the intersections of art and social transformation, we know our success depends on our ability to hold space for complexity with both courage and compassion.

Engaging across lines of difference is difficult and necessary work. We must be prepared to “call in” instead of “call out”- to hold our institutions and ourselves accountable as we struggle together towards a better future. The Every 28 Hours project team is committed to cultural competency in all aspects of this project. We consider a culturally competent approach to be the ability to work effectively across lines of difference, with specific awareness of identities, perspectives, and values which may be different than your own (either individually or institutionally). Although certainly not exhaustive, we offer these 10 steps in hopes that the process of producing, performing and engaging in dialogue around these plays will embody the very change that is called for by the plays themselves.

Pre-Process

1) **Prioritize the identification and creation of opportunities for leadership by people of color, youth, community partners and those directly impacted by racism and police violence.**

Those who are impacted most by the issues we are discussing should be guiding the process as much as possible. Challenge yourselves and your institutions to expand what is possible. Some key areas for leadership include: directing, producing, marketing, audience development and facilitation of community dialogues.

2) **Consider the role, size, scope, and expertise of your organization in order to build effective collaborations in your community.**

- a. Are you a larger organization with a predominantly white and/or middle and upper class staff and audience base? Is community engagement a small part of your overall programming? If so, we encourage partnerships with local organizations working with folks most directly impacted by racial injustice and/or organizations and individuals with experience facilitating community dialogues.
- b. Are you a smaller organization concerned about production logistics? Or are you predominantly organized around a specific, identity-based politic? If so, we encourage partnerships with larger organizations to utilize their resources and build a unified vision for collaborative engagement. Additionally, we encourage collaborations with other small organizations to cultivate an intersectional approach while keeping an analysis of anti-black racism at the center of the conversation.



3) **Plan in advance for casting needs and audience cultivation.**

Accurate race and gender casting are integral to the majority of the plays and may require advance planning in smaller, predominantly white organizations or communities. We encourage predominantly white organizations to set up collaborations where they are engaging intentionally with a nearby community of color. Similarly, we encourage organizations to engage in additional outreach to cultivate a diverse audience to witness the plays and contribute to the dialogue. These questions are helpful to consider:

- 1) Who is here and why?
- 2) Who is not here and why?
- 3) Who needs to be here and why?

4) **Learn the current and historical context of racism and police violence in the community you are working with.**

Part of what will make this project impactful is if it creates space to consider how the issues raised by the plays reflect the dynamics of our own communities. Particularly for those of us who have not been aware of the long-standing impacts of racism and police violence, it is important to educate ourselves and each other so we do not depend on others to do that work for us. Invisibility compounds the impact of racial injustice, because there is a concerted effort to deny or ignore the traumas that have been enacted upon communities of color for generations. Racial healing requires that those who have been allowed to deny or ignore racial violence do our own work to educate ourselves, rather than expecting those who have been traumatized to take on that work for us. That said, it is also important to listen when community members share information that may deepen or shift your understanding of the context. We want to come into the process having learned as much as we can, and then put that learning in conversation with community members who have access to particular insight about how these dynamics play out in their lives.

Process

5) **Create strong foundations for communication in early phases of your work.**

When things start to move quickly towards production, it is important to be able to keep feedback loops open. Process is just as important as product on this project. The plays are an entry point for deep and rigorous dialogue, which should exist in your planning and rehearsals, not only in your performances.

6) **Foster mutual respect and inclusion in your rehearsals and performances.**

Consider how “theatre culture” intersects with “community culture” when working in hybrid groups. Be mindful that everyone brings a different kind of expertise and no one should feel belittled, marginalized or disrespected because they carry a different kind of expertise. We encourage the creation of community agreements at the first meeting to help unearth expectations or norms folks bring related to age, gender, racial dynamics, physical ability, personal triggers, etc.



7) **Maintain rituals for self-care and support during the process, and listen for how needs may be different depending on one's background.**

Encourage all participants to identify friends, family members, and/or other allies who can support them as they navigate the experience. The material we are engaging with is challenging and may be triggering in various ways, and because the process is so fast-paced it is important to have additional support for things you are unable to process in the shared space. It is also important to remind participants to maintain or integrate any self-care practices that are supportive for them on their own time, so we are all able to bring our best to the group process. Last but not least, part of creating supportive space is standing for the safety of all participants, and listening for the potential risks of involvement. There are many spaces where it is not safe to be outspoken about these issues, and even if it appears to be safe there may be precautions that certain community members need to take to avoid conflict with abusive power structures. It is important to listen and honor any discomfort that may arise for those who are most vulnerable, and to understand that only they can determine what is safe for them. For those of us in positions of privilege it can be useful to move through that discomfort, but for those who are not in positions of privilege we must listen for the nuanced ways that this work can put them at risk in their communities and professional environments.

8) **Hire an experienced facilitator for your post-show engagement, who has a background in diversity work and is able to hold powerful space even if they are triggered.**

The plays create an emotionally charged experience for the audience and performers, and that "charge" is where the work happens. A skilled facilitator can guide that energy into productive conversation and follow-up outside of the theatre. In our experience, it is preferable to have a facilitator of color whenever possible to help shift the dynamics of white voices feeling more empowered to speak. Co-facilitation involving a partnership between a white facilitator and a facilitator of color is also encouraged.

9) **Be willing to be moved, challenged and transformed by this work.**

Allow your focus to be on your own capacity to change, just as much as it is on others' capacity to change. Whether this is your first time engaging with the work of racial justice or you have been doing work around these issues for years, the process will be far more successful if you open to how this process can change you. If you approach the work with that level of humility, you can create a space that is truly transformative and less likely to be de-railed by the defense mechanisms that arise when we feel challenged in our work.

Post-Process

10) **Make time to debrief.**

Reflecting on the process is a necessary step of the work but is often compromised for the sake of time. Find time to bring your collaborators together to discuss successes and areas for continued growth. This is also a wonderful opportunity to celebrate your team's hard work and discuss any ideas for further engagement.