

Minnesota Theater Foundational Standards for Safety and Accountability

Written by: Twin Cities Theater Makers

For more information on the how the Minnesota Theater Accountability Coalition (MNTAC) developed this living document, please visit www.MNTAC.org

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PURPOSE STATEMENT

The Minnesota Theater Foundational Standards for Safety and Accountability—or The Foundational Standards for short—serve as a tool to band us together as one united theater community. These [standards](#) are forged by the artists who create, produce, and teach performing arts in Minnesota. We are publicly committed to the well-being of everyone who engages in our theater industry.

The MNTAC community acknowledges that each individual contributes to the shape of our [culture](#), both passively and actively. This document is a demonstration of our commitment to actively [shift our culture](#) in theater making and education to one that centers the physical, mental and emotional well-being of everyone above all else. Our coalition created The Foundational Standards as a resource and guide to [best practices](#) for [production](#), training and day-to-day operations. The language and strategies within are meant to be practiced, quoted, used as a reference and shared widely. We invite you to join us, and to find your own ways to actively contribute to a cultural shift toward safety and [accountability](#).

The Foundational Standards document launched on October 9th, 2021, and will be in circulation through August 31, 2022, during which time the editors will gather feedback from the community. In the summer of 2022, the editors will review feedback for future versions of the document. To provide feedback as an individual or as an organization, click [HERE](#)

For an audio version of this document, please visit [MNTAC.org](https://mntac.org)

SETTING THE STAGE

OUR COMMUNITY

“A community can be measured by the questions its theatre asks.” - Liviu Ciulei

We recognize the synergy between the theater and the community it serves — theater only exists when there is someone to experience the story. We aim to foster intentional and inclusive ways of engaging with the public by honoring the needs of our multifaceted community, as well as the health and longevity of our theaters. We bear in mind that the greater theater community includes not only performers, technicians, and [creative teams](#), but also volunteers, educators, staff, board members, and those who complete the circle — the audience.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

We acknowledge that we all engage with language based on our own life experience and perspectives. The work we have done to create this document has involved multiple voices, and we made great effort to understand each other as we worked. Because language is important, we want to provide definitions as you read this document, in an attempt to ensure that we are all on the same page. The online version of this document will provide highlights of defined words and phrases with links that will take you directly to the definition section. If you are reading a hard copy of this document, you will have to do it the old fashioned way, by turning the pages. Definitions come from Oxford, Merriam Webster and other reputable sources, unless otherwise cited.

HISTORY

Our Minnesota theater community has had a strong history of valuing collaboration and diversity of expression. We also have an established history of sexual abuse of minors, unchecked sexual [harassment](#) and abuse, rampant exploitation of off-stage collaborators, [misogyny](#), and the suppression of differences and dissent via imbalanced [power structures](#), [racism](#), and [white supremacy](#). These harmful aspects are woven into the fabric of our theater community and continue to thrive, in part, through the use of

spoken and unspoken values of stoicism, conflict avoidance, and "being nice". We must do better.

In the summer of 2019, a small group of theater makers began talking about how we, as artists, could help to create a working environment in Minnesota theaters and educational institutions, where individuals and organizations would adhere to and uphold a transparent and common set of [best practices](#). This small group grew in numbers over time, and became The Minnesota Theater Accountability Coalition (MNTAC): a large collective of theater practitioners which includes artists, staff, volunteers, designers, crew, stage managers, performers, directors, technicians, artisans, [front of house](#), [producers](#), administrative managers, educators, students of all ages, and parents of students and youth performers.

Through a series of public conversations with the larger community, four main themes rose to the surface as most important— **Safety, Transparency, Accountability, and Oversight**. We recognized that [accountability](#) and [transparency](#) are not only destinations, but skills to practice. The Foundational Standards were developed as a tool to practice those skills and amplify the need for safety. They would help us to transcend the invisible barriers between institutions, providing a common language to foster a community based on trust, acknowledgement of harm, accountability, and a commitment to be our better selves as artists and people.

To start, we looked to similar documents from other theater communities for guidance, such as Chicago, Cleveland and New York. These documents were a fantastic base for us to develop more content to address the harm specific to our community. Our grassroots endeavors led a group of committed volunteers to use those existing documents as a template and build upon them to develop our own [standards](#), which give direct support to performers, production staff, [artistic teams](#), educators, youth, and parents of young artists.

The creators of this document decided that The Foundational Standards would ensure that *all* [participants](#) feel valued and empowered to break the cycle of silence, giving them agency to speak up for their own personal safety, as well as the safety of those around them. The Standards are available to all theaters in the state of Minnesota, regardless of organizational age, size, experience, budget, or artistic mission.

We recognize that much harm has happened in our theater community, and we hope that these standards, created with input from multiple perspectives and voices, will help prevent harm and foster a community committed to [equality](#), safety, transparency and accountability for future generations of theater makers. We acknowledge we don't have all the answers but are committed to finding them.

MISSION

The Minnesota Theater Accountability Coalition (MNTAC) is an alliance of theater practitioners, which *leverages its collective strength* to advocate for the safety of each individual involved in the Twin Cities and Greater Minnesota theater industry. We believe that there is strength in banding together as one theater community collective, made up of different artistic visions.

VISION

We are committed to serving and supporting individual theater practitioners in Minnesota, across the spectrum of age, cultural background, [race](#), [socioeconomic status](#), [class](#), gender identity, gender presentation, sexual orientation, abilities, religion, work area, career stage, and employment or student status.

We are further committed to advocating for and [centering](#) those who have historically been under-supported and under-represented. This includes our [BIPOC](#) and [LGBTQIA+](#) community members. We acknowledge and understand that these terms are ever-evolving.

Safety is our ultimate goal. It sits at the core of everything we are trying to accomplish with The Foundational Standards. We declare that everyone involved in the craft of theater making or theater education deserves a safe and [trauma-informed](#) working environment based on:

- **TRANSPARENCY:** We need [transparency](#) in order to cultivate an environment of trust and accountability.
- **ACCOUNTABILITY:** Accountability is an invitation to do better, in all areas of our lives, not just the workplace. From the beginning it's about who you build plans with/consider/hold close **before** we even reach a place where we make mistakes. When we make mistakes — and we will — we will treat accountability as a verb rather than a noun, making it a practice to acknowledge harm rather than shy away from it. No theater is too big or too small to be held accountable.

COMMITMENT TO EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The MNTAC Community that has created this document, and those that sign onto it, declare our commitment to dismantling the unhealthy [power dynamics](#) that have upheld destructive societal [norms](#), including but not limited to: [racism](#), [sexism](#), [ageism](#), [ableism](#), [homophobia](#), [transphobia](#), and [xenophobia](#). We believe they have no place in an industry that relies on its community to survive. As our understanding evolves as to how power has been used to control participation, so must our willingness to see our own participation in it, whether active or passive.

Core Standards of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion:

The existence of racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia is not up for debate. These must be recognized and rejected.

- **Organizations must focus on [equity](#), not [equality](#).** Equality is treating each person the same. Equity is treating everyone according to each person's unique needs.
- **[Diversity](#) won't make a difference without [inclusion](#).** Diversity is who we are and inclusion is what we do. Inclusion is an active practice. Your organization can be diverse but not inclusive. Or inclusive but not diverse. Both must be present in order to foster a culture of belonging.
- **Inclusion is a shared responsibility between organizations and individuals.** Each individual must actively choose inclusive behaviors, and organizations must create an environment that supports and champions inclusion.
- **Everyone benefits and thrives within accessible and inclusive cultures.** [Accessibility](#) and inclusion don't just benefit certain people; they benefit *all* people.
- **Each voice must be valued, respected, and supported, and deserves equal access.** In order to foster authentic, transparent, and inclusive engagement, we must seek out and eliminate barriers to access.
- **Representation matters.** Not just on stage and in the stories we tell, but also in who is crafting those stories, who is choosing the stories, who is financing the stories, who is steering the organization telling those stories, and who is in the audience.
- **Not taking action *is* taking an action.** Inaction supports and perpetuates the status quo. In order to do the work to dismantle systems of oppression, those who benefit from [privilege](#) in those spaces must demonstrate [allyship](#) with those who do not.

Commitments:

We value the visible and invisible qualities that make a person who they are and

appreciate that every person has a unique perspective and experience. We commit to making intentional choices that acknowledge, respect, and support each person's various intersections of identity. In order to advance our mission and continue our fight for the health, safety, education, and financial stability of every person in every community, we are committed to the following;

- **We will practice** these equity, diversity, and inclusion [standards](#) in our daily work.
- **We will commit** to using these practices for our businesses and our communities.
- **We will actively engage** and compensate those from historically underrepresented and undersupported groups as writers, composers, actors, directors, cultural consultants, choreographers, musicians, technicians, managers, designers and more. It is not enough to engage and hire them if the structures in place do not support them and/or set them up for failure.
- **We will foster** a process that provides the time, resources, and expertise from outside sources to create work with [cultural competency](#) (including reflection and discussion around dangerous [stereotypes](#)), and a deep understanding of the community or communities that a given work represents.
- **We will prioritize** diversity and access in all areas of the organization: in our board recruitment and selection, in our creative teams, in our [audition processes](#), and in our hiring practices.

We will hold each other accountable to honor these commitments in the rehearsal room, the office, the theater, and the board room.

COMMITMENT TO [ANTI-RACISM](#)

We acknowledge that our history is full of examples of segregation and structural [racism](#), which directly affect our theater community. While we may have a diverse collective of theaters, racism continues to persist. The wisdom found in writings such as [We See You White American Theater](#) and [The Living Document](#) have shone light on the negative and harmful impacts of [white supremacy](#) in our industry, and these voices are critical to necessary change.

- **We recognize** that structural racism and ethnic discrimination have contributed to persistent disparities which we seek to [dismantle](#).
- **We understand** that these disparities have existed in the past and persist into the present.

- **We acknowledge** that these inequities are the result of policies and practices that work to marginalize entire populations of people.
- **We unequivocally denounce** racism and ethnic discrimination because it undermines the well-being and vitality of our communities.

The following sources were used as the foundation to create the EDI and anti-racism standards for MNTAC.

Sources: WSYWAT (<https://www.weseeyouwat.com/statement>), The Living Document (<https://www.bipoclivdoc.com/>), United Way (<https://www.unitedway.org/about/diversity-and-inclusion#>), Theater Latte Da (<https://www.latteda.org/idea>)

UNDERSTANDING POWER AND INFLUENCE

Power is the ability to influence the choices and actions of others. It impacts how and to what extent we are able to participate and engage with each other.

We recognize the presence of various [power dynamics](#) within the process of creating theater. Additionally, one person may find their own power changing based on the space they are entering. Our understanding of how power has been used to control participation (i.e. ‘[gatekeeping](#)’) continues to evolve. In order to foster safe and healthy power dynamics, we must recognize how much influence (active or passive) we bring into each room or interaction.

Power can be used to contribute to an inclusive environment, but it can also be used to exploit and abuse. We all hold personal responsibility over how we use our power. From an organization’s operational structure to one-on-one interactions, choosing to leverage our influence in an inclusive way is imperative to working toward a culture of healthy power dynamics.

Examples of Power Dynamics

We recognize that there are many ways that people leverage power in our industry, both healthy and harmful. Examples of power dynamics include:

- Recognized power - Someone who is acknowledged as the leader and/or final decision-maker in the spaces they occupy (e.g. director, stage manager, executive director, artistic director, board of directors)
- Expert power - Someone who has specific expertise in one area (e.g. choreographer, costume designer, lead electrician)
- Experiential power - Someone who has longevity in an organization or team (e.g. those with seniority, longest tenure, most credits)

- Referential power - Someone who has the ability to offer access to certain people or resources (e.g. talent agent, collective bargaining units responsible for overhire calls, contractors in charge of sub lists)
- Coercive power - Someone who may threaten negative [consequences](#) to gain compliance from another (e.g. “If you don’t do this, I’ll blacklist you”)
- Reward power - Someone who is able to offer rewards or benefits for desired behavior (e.g. “If you do this, I’ll give you this”)

SAFETY FOR YOUTH

It is the responsibility of the theater community to provide an environment in which young people have agency, a voice, tools to engage and an understanding of what to expect. Young people have the right to healthy relationships with each other and with adults, and the right to feel safe in the collaborative work of theater.

Because there is a de facto [power structure](#) between adults and young people, children enter into any room at a systemic disadvantage. They can lack power, knowledge, and the tools to advocate for themselves - emotional and physical [boundaries](#) are often not clear or can be manipulated. This can make young people vulnerable targets in our theaters. Parents/guardians are also entering into an unfamiliar world - they may not understand the rules and [hierarchy](#) - which puts them at a disadvantage to advocate for their children.

It is essential that we teach our young people what they have a right to expect and that all adults are committed to creating a safe, welcoming and accountable environment.

To that end, we must commit to these principles of safety:

- No child will ever be left unattended.
- The theater will enforce the Rule of Three:
 - No adult will ever be one-on-one with a child in a private space.
 - Doors to all spaces must be left open, creating a public space.
 - If doors need to be closed for any reason, there will always be at least three people in the room.
- All adults working with young people are required to have a background check.
 - The theater will recheck any adults working directly with young people every 3 years.
 - When the theater evaluates the background checks, they will consider what constitutes a crime, who is policed, how they are policed and whether the crime committed affects the individual’s ability to work with

youth (e.g., crime did not involve children or put them at risk.)

- Model [transparent](#) communication by educating parents/guardians about policies and expectations, provide access to information and personnel, and encourage them to ask questions.
- Educate adults to be aware of power imbalances: between adults and children, which can lead to grooming, and between children, which can lead to bullying. Ensure that there is a clear reporting structure to address these issues.

SAFETY IN LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

We recognize the importance of safety in the relationship between a person who guides another in the process of discovery and learning. This can happen anywhere, from a rehearsal hall to a private studio, in a group or one-on-one.

The nature of learning requires personal vulnerability, so the process of learning combined with the inherent [power dynamics](#) between student and teacher can leave the learner even more vulnerable. We name this to give greater agency to learners. We seek to redefine the unhealthy power dynamics that caused harm in the past by prioritizing a culture of safety that includes [accountability](#), transparency, and oversight. We invite people in positions of power to examine the way they use their power in these delicate relationships.

CORE STANDARDS

The Core Standards are principles that put the physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing of *all people* front and center, before the product, process, or interests of an institution. We hold these rights at the core of our efforts to protect everyone in the community:

- Healthy Communication
- Culture of Consent
- Harassment Free Environment
- Work-Life Balance
- Safe and Healthy Physical Environment
- Equal Access and Accommodation

HEALTHY COMMUNICATION

GOALS

Effective communication practices are essential to mindful and efficient working environments. We are committed to establishing and maintaining strong lines of communication that work for everyone, at every level of the organization. Sharing information puts us on equal footing, giving us all the tools we need for healthy collaboration.

CONCERNS

Information is not a commodity, it is the driving force of the work we do. Poor communication is costly and erodes trust. [Transparency](#) is key to healthy forms of communication. Sometimes communication is challenging because of insufficient ways of sharing information, lack of training, generational variations and/or misinterpretation that can inhibit true understanding and open expression.

STRATEGIES

- Before sharing a written communication, ask yourself "Who else needs to know this?"
- Communication goes both ways. Avoid the sense of urgency that is embedded in our society and take the time to make sure all lines of communication are open and working properly. Solicit and listen to understand others' ideas and perspectives.
- Ask for help. And offer help.

- If you are a leader in the room, establish particular times within your process for checking in. This can make the sharing of information and thoughts routine practice rather than a problem.
- Be mindful of your non-verbal communication. What messages are you intentionally or unintentionally sending via non-verbal communication (e.g. body language, facial expressions, etc.)?
- There are many ways that we communicate in a collaboration (e.g. email, text, phone call, etc.). Ask your colleagues, “What is your preferred method of communication?”
- Adjust your communication content and style to meet the needs of all involved. Avoid using jargon or acronyms that may not be known to the people you are in conversation with.

CULTURE OF CONSENT

GOALS

Each one of us participates in shaping [culture](#), and are collectively responsible for upholding a culture of [consent](#) and creating a better work environment. We identify consent as freely given, reversible, informed, engaged, and specific, and believe that every person inherently has agency to set their personal [boundaries](#). When we are secure in the knowledge that our boundaries will be respected, we open ourselves to take greater risks, make more innovative choices, and create healthier art. Our goal is to foster a [trauma-informed](#) consent culture by genuinely valuing the people we interact with, both casually and professionally, and always treating one another’s personal boundaries, both emotional and physical, with respect.

CONCERNS

The shared experience of making theater is often rewarding, but also risky, as it occasionally can lead to emotional vulnerability and poorly defined boundaries. Theater by nature is created in a collaborative and unconventional work environment. When a culture of consent is not fostered, the inherent [power dynamics](#) can lead to a toxic environment where [harassment](#) and abuse go unchallenged and abusers perpetrate harm without [consequences](#).

STRATEGIES

- It is incumbent upon the organizational leadership to foster a culture of consent through transparent communication, training, and tools for a healthy work environment.

- Set clear expectations and boundaries regarding consent in advance, revisiting agreements as concerns arise.
- Honor everyone's individual agency to decide what a safe boundary looks like for them, allowing them the opportunity to communicate those boundaries at any time they are able and without justification.
- Recognize that boundaries will look different for everyone and may change.
- Always believe someone when they say their boundaries weren't respected.
- If consent is compromised and moves into harassment, treat the situation seriously and use proper protocol for addressing harm.

HARASSMENT-FREE ENVIRONMENT

GOALS

Every person has the right to live in a world free of [harassment](#), be it of a [sexual](#), [racial](#), [cultural](#), [socioeconomic](#), [gender](#), [ableist](#) or [generational](#) nature. Everyone does their best work when mutual respect is at the core of a working environment. In order to combat our culture of [complicity](#) each of us must commit to the personal and cultural daily eradication of harassment, harm and abuse.

CONCERNS

Too often, those who suffer from the impact of harassment are underrepresented members of society. Language and innuendo have been brushed off as unimportant, and the impact of harm goes unaddressed. The #MeToo movement brought conversations about harassment and abuse to the forefront of our cultural conversation in and outside of the work space. These issues impact people's well-being and we must address them with the gravity and seriousness they require. We must acknowledge that we all carry with us the capacity to harm ourselves and one another. Using [trauma-informed](#) practices, it is important that we are able to identify harm in ourselves and the organizations we are engaged with. Our culture of complicity needs us to commit to the daily eradication of harassment, harm and abuse that continues to live in the shadows.

STRATEGIES

- Adopt and enforce a stance of No Tolerance for sexual or emotional abuse, harassment, manipulation, or disparagement. There are [consequences](#) for these offenses at all levels of harm, including dismissal.
- Provide resources for and training on Trauma-Informed policies and practices.
- Any person reporting an event must be taken seriously immediately, and proper organizational procedures must be in place to address the issue.

- Each organization must provide a written version of their anti-harassment policies and procedures to every employee and volunteer. Don't assume that just because it is provided that it will be understood or followed. Find creative ways to keep people engaged in the conversation.
- Boards of Directors must actively endorse policies and procedures, and must understand that the policies apply to everyone, including the board.
- Empower [bystanders](#) by providing intervention training to staff in order to build a collective understanding on the distinctions and often subtle nuances of harassment and how to safely interrupt harm when they see it happening. If financial resources are limited, materials can be provided in written form.
- Physical, emotional and sexual abuse are not harassment— they are crimes and must be treated as such.
- Once harassment has been identified, practice institutional accountability with due diligence and zero tolerance. Attend to the person who has been harmed and address the harm with the offender.
- Establish a process for handling whistleblower complaints that protects them against retribution.
- For a list of potential resources to accomplish these goals, please visit the MNTAC.org [Community Resources](#) page.

WORK/LIFE BALANCE

GOALS

Everyone has a right to integrate work into their life in a sustainable, enjoyable, and meaningful way. We assert that in the work-life balance equation, our personal well-being takes precedence over work.

CONCERNS

“The show must go on” and “artists must suffer for their art” are antiquated notions that no longer apply. We seek a [cultural shift](#) that rejects these sayings and prioritizes the wellbeing of the people above the work itself. Theater-makers do more with less and manage to meet unrealistic deadlines, but just because something has “always been done that way” doesn’t mean it’s right or sustainable. We must embrace the needs of the whole person, recognizing that proper work-life balance makes people happier and more effective.

STRATEGIES

- Consider resources and budgets that prioritize the wellbeing of workers while planning projects. This is not an afterthought to squeeze in later. Consider major religious holidays when scheduling.
- **Everyone** should have a minimum of 12 hours of turn around time before the next work day, including technical and [artistic teams](#). Management should maintain a schedule without expectations that people will work beyond the agreed ending time. This includes meetings!
- 10 out of 12's can be physically, mentally and emotionally damaging to everyone in every area of theater [production](#) and performance. Planning and reallocating time normally spent during tech week will make this exhausting and unsafe practice a thing of the past.
- Because teams have different time restraints and labor support, managers should pay attention to and respect the variety of needs that often go unnoticed. Be proactive: check in with people regularly for what they might need—don't assume they have all the resources they require.
- No one person should shoulder an unhealthy or overwhelming responsibility. Provide assistants or teams to keep workload sustainable or accept that less work will happen. Celebrate your team working at their capacity, not beyond it.
- Some people prefer an intense pace, while others need more flexibility to sustain their wellbeing. Find ways to learn and honor the needs of all members of your team. Encourage everyone to find the balance that works for them so they can do their best work. Remember to also give yourself the same encouragement.

SAFE AND HEALTHY PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

GOALS

All theater workers and patrons have the right to feel confident and protected in their physical surroundings. A safe, sanitary and accessible environment provides a solid ground on which people can work and play.

CONCERNS

To produce our craft, people must feel safe and secure. When we feel unsafe or have to experience unnecessary physical risks, it not only interrupts the vulnerable creative process, but could also cause liability issues. Additionally, if an audience member feels unsafe, it takes them out of the storytelling experience and doesn't allow them to be fully present to the performance. Theaters have a responsibility to promote basic health and safety practices for everyone.

STRATEGIES

- Theater spaces must be [ADA](#) compliant, adhering to all city building and fire codes.
- Work and public spaces must be clean and well-maintained (including outdoor areas exposed to the elements: snow, ice, etc.).
- Restrooms must be functional and clean.
- Water Access: Provide access to drinking water or disclosure of lack of availability (e.g. when working on a site-specific show outdoors).
- Theaters must provide a reasonable working temperature, ideally with a properly functioning HVAC system or the equivalent of one. Avoid inclement weather and unsafe temperatures outdoors.
- Dimly lit areas must have lighting suitable for the work being carried out, including necessary safety lights.
- Floors and traffic routes should be free from undue obstructions and tripping hazards. Provide glow tape on steps/risers and include taped floor arrows for traffic patterns exiting backstage/front of stage.
- Provide a well marked, easily accessible and fully stocked OSHA approved first-aid kit. If AED equipment isn't already onsite, it should be acquired.
- Provide protective equipment, including but not limited to: earplugs/muffs, safety goggles, gloves, masks, coveralls, etc.
- Hold an insurance policy that covers on-site injuries.
- The theater must adhere to CDC and MN Department of Health guidelines regarding COVID-19 and other public health risks for audiences, artists and staff.
- The theater must post a diagram of all fire exit locations and functional firefighting equipment and proper procedures in case of fire. The theater shall consult with the local fire and/or police departments to formulate safety procedures.
- The theater should be able to provide an up-to-date list of medical services including doctors, dentists, mental health professionals, and hospitals, especially if you have out of town artists.
- Staff training is critical to maintain safe and sanitary environments.
 - o Staff must have familiarity with OSHA [standards](#).
 - o Staff will be properly trained in emergency procedures and the theater will schedule regular fire, severe weather and evacuation drills.
 - o We encourage having targeted staff within the organization who have basic safety training (e.g., [CPR](#), [AED](#), [basic first aid](#)).

EQUAL ACCESS AND ACCOMMODATIONS

GOAL

We envision a world where everyone of all abilities is in the room, literally and figuratively. Theater is a place where all people belong, where all creativity is valued, where we must practice strategies to continue to honor, protect, and include people. These strategies must take into account both the vulnerability and agency of people with [disabilities](#). Inclusive environments require constant reflection on how, who, and to what extent we celebrate everybody's creativity and contribution. Continual vigilance on centering the voices and choices of those who have been historically excluded from our work is vital.

CONCERNS

Cultures of [Ableism](#), [White Supremacy](#), and [Elitism](#) are pervasive in our world and in our field. These forces create barriers, power imbalances, and harmful [hierarchical structures](#), diminishing the quality of our work. Barriers can manifest in architecture, communication, policies, attitudes and perceptions. We must recognize and acknowledge all the ways that [race](#), [class](#), gender, and other forms of [oppression](#) intersect with disability. Theater needs new kinds of leadership and decision-making structures to unlearn and remake how we create and share work that values and uplifts the breadth of human capabilities, rather than makes incremental [accommodations](#) to business as usual. *[Accessibility](#) can't be an afterthought.*

STRATEGIES

- Embody access as a mindset and regular practice. Identify and address barriers.
 - With [ADA](#) compliance as a foundation, implement solutions that address barriers to physical access.
 - Using [Disability Justice](#), [Universal Design](#) and [Belonging](#) as frameworks, cultivate a culture of access and [inclusion](#).
- Build accessibility into the budget, timeline, and wellness planning. Resources will always be tight, but planning for it is how you act on your commitment.
- Transportation is part of accessibility - for both employees and audience - and may create a barrier to participation. Build it into your budget to ensure that everyone has a safe way to get to/from your venue, rehearsal space, or meeting.
- Budget time to build relationships and immerse yourself in the community. Get to know your audience. Figure out who isn't in the room and why.
- Tailor accessibility needs for disabled [participants](#) to meet the needs of the individual during rehearsals, meetings, or work shifts. For example, if rehearsals are fast-paced and time-pressured, disabled actors may not be able to participate.

- People need different things to fully participate. Be proactive and ask what you can do to support participants to show up as their best selves.
- Cultivate a culture of responding to and learning from your own failure. You'll know you're progressing when people are actively engaging with suggestions about how you can improve.
- Actively seek representation in your work. Center people with a diversity of abilities, ages, races, genders, even if it means stepping aside to create more opportunities for others. For example, if you're only including white disabled people, your work is incomplete.
- Open your mind about how people with differences can contribute in the storytelling; audience, onstage, backstage, and in leadership. Take a hard look at your hiring practices, job requirements, performance expectations, and opportunities for advancing people.
- Get everyone on board. Commit across the organization. Organizational buy-in is critical.

THE FOUNDATIONAL STANDARDS TOOLKIT

MNTAC is in the process of developing a toolkit to assist organizations and individuals in addressing specific issues that occur in the day to day work of creating theater and educating. The anticipated completion of the Toolkit is Fall/Winter of 2021. The Toolkit will include:

Area Standards: These address specific needs, taking a closer look at issues that are of concern for people in individual areas of theater making and education. They zero in on the ideal goals, acknowledge concerns, and give practical strategies to address concerns.

Standards in Action: These offer action steps for applying the Area Standards. They provide specific practices and offer resources for healthy engagement of the principles set forth within the document.

To view the status of The Standards Toolkit, click [HERE](#)

Resources: In order to accomplish the efforts laid out in The Foundational Standards, The Educational Standards and The Standards Toolkit, a Community Resources page has been created on the MNTAC.org website to assist individuals and organizations in attaining their goals. To access these important resources, click [HERE](#)

If you would like to investigate strategies and implement [best practices](#) right away, there are documents in existence with resources. You can access them using these links:

[Chicago Theatre Standards](#)

[Cleveland CLEAn House Standards](#)

[NYC Toolkit](#)

[LA Anti-Racist Theatre Standards](#)

THE EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

Centrally and especially important to this work is the safety of youth in our theaters. This also includes educational spaces where people are asked to explore personal vulnerability where implicit and explicit power dynamics exist between learners and educators.

MNTAC has developed a set of standards specifically pertaining to work in all areas of education -- whether in formal school settings, extracurricular classes, or private one-on-one sessions with a coach. These standards were created to ensure that in spaces where the power dynamic of teacher and student are at play, we are establishing safe and healthy boundaries and processes.

To access the Educational Standards, click [HERE](#).

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

SIGNATORIES

The signers of this document, both individuals and organizations, agree to use its contents as a beacon for [best practices](#) and healthy change in our industry. We acknowledge not everyone who works in the field of theater making and education will agree with everything that is said in this document, and may choose to opt out of signing onto the commitments we have declared to uphold.

By signing onto the document, individuals and organizations agree:

- **To value** the policies in this document and hold ourselves answerable to them and to the people they are written to protect.
- **To hold true** to these ideals for everyone who works in our industry, *whether or not an individual artist signs onto it*.
- **To commit** to safety, and the physical and mental well being of all theater makers, educators and students, centering on the safety and wellness of people above the art they produce.
- **To embrace** the practice of [accountability](#) in order to foster safety and [transparency](#) in our transient work spaces, knowing the process is ongoing and complicated.

Audience Members and Theater Patrons: Theater doesn't exist in a vacuum: audiences are integral partners in the theatrical experience. If you support safety and accountability in the theater community, make your voice heard. To endorse our efforts, please go to this page and add your name.

These commitments to safety and wellness are not contingent on agreement of philosophy or politics.

To see who has read and agreed to uphold the principles of The Foundational Standards put forth by the community, please visit [MNTAC.org Endorsements](https://mntac.org/endorsements)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

This glossary is meant to be used as a reference when reading The Foundational Standards. It includes vocabulary used in discussions of Equity, Inclusion, Diversity, Gender, Harassment and more. What is offered is the denotation of a word.

It is based on the following descriptions:

- **Glossary** - a list of terms in a special subject, field, or area of usage, with accompanying definitions, explaining, or defining difficult or unusual words and expressions used in the text.
- **Definition** -1 a: a statement of the meaning of a word or word group or a sign or symbol dictionary definitions. b: a statement expressing the essential nature of something. c: a product of defining.
- **Denotation vs Connotation** - A **denotation** refers to the literal or primary meaning of a word. In contrast, a **connotation** is an idea or feeling that is suggested by or associated with a word. For example, the word “home” is defined as a structure where one lives, but the word has the connotation of a nation, a place of warmth, comfort, and affection.

The following resources were used in the creation of the Glossary:

Random House Unabridged Dictionary - Dictionary.com
Collins English Dictionary - collinsdictionary.com
American Heritage Dictionary - ahdictionary.com
Cambridge Dictionary - dictionary.cambridge.org
New Oxford American Dictionary - oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/
Merriam-Webster Dictionary - merriam-webster.com
Oxford English Dictionary - oed.com, Lexico.com
Human Rights Campaign Terms (hrc.org)
Stonewall.org.uk
Metropolitan Regional Arts Council (MRAC)
Avarna Group on Equality, Inclusion & Diversity
Anti-Defamation League
National Center for Cultural Competency - nccc.georgetown.edu
Britannia.com
Brown University Sheridan Center -www.brown.edu/Sheridan
University of British Columbia, Canada - open.library.ubc.ca
Medium - medium.com
Vanderbilt University - <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/>
Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (OCADSV) -
<https://www.ocadsv.org/>
Centering Voices Workgroup
Art and Popular Culture Encyclopedia

Ableism - is the bias or discrimination against people with disabilities. It is either individual or institutional actions and language that disadvantage or disempower people with disabilities, people experiencing disabilities, or disabled people. It can take many forms: employment, housing, institutional discrimination, lack of accessibility, stereotyping/ableist language, lack of media portrayals or stereotyped depictions of people with disabilities, bullying, low expectations, isolation, and pity.

Accessibility and Accommodation - these two are strongly related to [Universal Design](#), the process of creating environments that operate within the widest possible range of situations, providing safety and support for all. Accessibility means that a space is always, 100% of the time, welcoming to people with disabilities. Accessibility means that “accommodations” are integrated into a space and are not particularized to an individual — but rather created for our society as a whole.”

Accountability (General) - the obligation of an individual or organization to account for its activities, accept responsibility for them, and to disclose the results in a transparent manner. “Accountability is variable depending on the level of harm. It is made up of four basic parts: Self-reflection, Apology, Repair, Changed Behavior.” -- Mia Mingus
<https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com>

Accountability (Societal) - it is essential for an organization and a society to reinforce a system of Accountability, as it is difficult for people to assume ownership of their own actions if they believe they will not face any consequences.

Accountability (Personal) - being willing to answer - to be accountable - for the outcomes resulting from one's choices, behaviors, and actions.

Active Bystander and Upstander - an Active Bystander observes a conflict or unacceptable behavior and takes steps to make a difference, assessing the situation to determine what kind of help might be appropriate, evaluating options and choosing strategy for responding. An Upstander is a person who speaks or acts in support of an individual or cause, particularly someone who intervenes on behalf of a person being attacked or bullied.

ADA - The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became law in 1990. The ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the public, ensuring that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. The ADA guarantees civil rights protections to individuals with disabilities based on race, color, sex, national origin, age, and religion, providing equal opportunity in public accommodations, employment, transportation, state and local government services, and telecommunications. Resources: [ADA National Network](#), [ADA.gov](#)

Allyship - Allyship is an active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person holding systemic power seeks to end oppressions in solidarity with a group of people who are systemically disempowered. Since everyone holds systemic power in some areas and lacks it in others, everyone has areas in which they can practice allyship.

Ageism - prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of a person's age.

Anti-racism - the policy or practice of opposing racism and promoting racial tolerance. "In a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be anti-racist" -- Angela Davis
<https://www.bmcc.cuny.edu>

Artistic/Creative Team - develops new productions from existing or new works. This includes directors, musical directors, and choreographers, as well as designers of sets, props, costume, lighting, and audio-visual media, who may be freelance or based at the venue, with additional specialists being brought on as required.

Auditions - a short performance to show the talents of someone (such as an actor, singer, dancer, or a musician) who is being considered for a role in a play, a position in an orchestra, etc.

Audition Announcements - provide information about the theater, the play and dates for auditions, rehearsals, and performances of the production. It also contains the rules or criteria necessary for the audition: what to prepare, what to bring, eligibility requirements, and time allotted. These announcements list salary or stipend, roles available, character descriptions, diversity policy, intimacy or nudity factors, content warning, and other information such as contact person(s), COVID protocols, means of communication, venue.

Belonging - the feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity for a member of a certain group. It is when an individual can bring their authentic self to work.

Best Practices - a set of guidelines, ethics or ideas that represent the most efficient or prudent course of action in each business situation. Best practices may be established by authorities, such as regulators or governing bodies, or they may be internally decreed by a company's management team.

BIPOC – An acronym for Black, Indigenous, and [People of Color](#).

Boundaries - our way of communicating to others that we have self-respect, self-worth, and will not allow others to define us. Personal boundaries are the physical, emotional, and mental limits we establish to protect ourselves from being manipulated, used, or violated by others.

Centering - Uplifting, trusting, and valuing the lived experiences of the people most impacted by the issue(s) and inequity(ies) you want to address. This includes working towards approaches where those that are most impacted are a part of leading, identifying solutions, setting priorities, creating policy agendas, and shifting narrative.

Class - how much wealth you have access to through property, inheritance, family support, investments, or other perceptions of wealth not directly associated with wage earning. It is different than socioeconomic status.

Complicity - The state of being an accomplice; a partnership or involvement in wrongdoing. Silence communicates complicity.

Consent - A direct communication or agreement of one's willingness to participate in an activity, or do something.

Consequence - 1. a result or effect of an action or condition 2. having important effects or influence

Culture - A set of shared ideas, customs, traditions, beliefs, and practices shared by a group of people that is constantly changing, in subtle and major ways.

Cultural Competence(y) - The ability to interact effectively across various facets of diversity, to flex with differences. Cultural competence is what we need to be inclusive. It requires (1) being self-aware of your own culture, assumptions, values, styles, biases, attitudes, privilege, etc.; (2) understanding others' cultures, assumptions, values, styles, biases, attitudes, privilege, etc.; and (3) based on this knowledge, understanding your potential impact on others, and interacting with them in a situationally appropriate way.

Culture Change/Shift - permanent changes to the shared ways of thinking, beliefs, values, procedures, and relationships of the stakeholders. Culture is not static but dynamic. It also undergoes change. Examples: generational challenges, technology advancement, religious or political philosophies, global interaction, leadership changes, economic status, social media.

Dismantle - 1. To take apart; disassemble; tear down. 2. To put an end to in a gradual systematic way

Disability - A mental, emotional, or physical difference that limits a person in everyday activities. Increasingly, disability is being discussed as a social construct, meaning that the mental, emotional, and physical norms from which we then determine what is different or what is a disability are arbitrary.

Diversity - the differences among us based on advantages or barriers we experience in accessing opportunities and resources. Race and ethnicity is not the only way in which we are diverse as a group. There are countless visible and invisible facets of diversity.

Elitism - Elitism describes a privileged social class which endorses the exclusion of large numbers of people from positions of privilege or power. It is a socially engineered characteristic attributed to individuals by other individuals. It is a form of discrimination.

Equality - Ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents.

Equity - An approach based in fairness to dismantle systems that privilege some and disadvantage others based on their identities. In practice, it ensures everyone is given equal opportunity to thrive; this means that resources may be divided and shared unequally to make sure that each person can access an opportunity. Equity takes into account that people have different access to resources because of system of oppression and privilege. Equity seeks to balance that disparity.

Ethnicity - a group of people who identify with one another, based on shared culture.

First Aid/CPR/AED - Theaters seek to provide safety for their patrons, performers, production teams and volunteers. The goal is always to be prepared for any danger, risk, or injury. Training in the following techniques is encouraged: **First Aid**, you gain the ability to respond to specific

situations and use the contents of a basic First Aid Kit, which will help care for people in crisis as they wait for medical professionals to arrive; **Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)** is the manual application of chest compressions and ventilations to patients in cardiac arrest, done to maintain viability until advanced help arrives; An **Automatic External Defibrillator (AED)** is a portable defibrillator designed to be automated such that it can be used by persons without substantial medical training who are responding to a cardiac emergency.

Front/Back of House – These phrases refer to the places and personnel who support the production. “Front of house” is everything and everyone working from the front door to the theater to the audience seating area (box office, lobby, concessions, rest rooms, gift shop, coat check, audio assist equipment, closed caption equipment and all other public areas). “Back of house” is everything and everyone working from the stage to the back wall of the theater and stage door (stage, wings, dressing rooms, rest rooms, green room, orchestra pit, costumes room, booth, prop storage) and all related non-public areas.

Gatekeeping - the activity of trying to control who gets particular resources, power, or opportunities, and who does not.

Harassment - Discriminatory, offensive, or unwelcome behavior all falls under the scope of harassment, including behavior that is repeated after a request has been made for the behavior to stop. Typically, harassment is splintered into the categories of sexual harassment, gender harassment, racial harassment or harassment based on a trait such as age, ability, or status.

Hierarchy - A system or organization in which people or groups are ranked one above the other according to status or authority.

Homophobia - The fear, hatred, discomfort with, or mistrust of people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

Inclusion - Celebrating, valuing, and amplifying perspectives, voices, styles, and identities that have been marginalized. Inclusion is not merely tolerating or accommodating differences; it's about actively valuing and honoring them. Inclusion is also not about surmounting, overcoming, or transcending differences to focus on “our common humanity.” Diversity is what we are, and inclusion is what we do.

LGBTQIA+ - An acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual. The + represents and encompasses a multitude of other forms of gender, romantic, and sexual diversity.

Misogyny - Hatred of, aversion to, or prejudice against women.

Norms - The opposite of stereotypes, norms are based on observable experiences within a community, are not necessarily negative and can be complex. They are often qualified by words such as “often,” “sometimes,” and “may.”

Oppression - The combination of prejudice and institutional power which creates a system that discriminates against some groups (often called “target groups”) and benefits other groups (often called “dominant groups”). Examples of these systems are racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, ageism, and anti-Semitism. These systems enable dominant groups to exert

control over target groups by limiting their rights, freedom, and access to basic resources such as health care, education, employment, and housing.

Participant/Theater Maker - Engaged by a producer to participate in, administer, or support making theater. This includes actors, designers, directors, production staff, box office staff, board members, volunteers, donors, and anyone else involved in the work of the theater.

People of Color (POC) - This term in its current colloquial context was coined by [Loretta Ross](#) and other activists not merely as a blanket term for non-white people, but specifically with the intent and connotation of solidarity among disparate groups.

Power Dynamics - A power dynamic is the way different people or different groups of people interact with each other and where one of these sides holds more power than the other.

Power Structure - An overall system of influence between any individual and every other individual within any selected group of people. A description of a power structure would capture the way in which power or authority is distributed between people within groups such as a government, nation, institution, organization, or a society.

Privilege - Privilege operates on personal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional levels and gives advantages, favors, and benefits to members of dominant groups at the expense of members of target groups. Privilege is characteristically invisible to people who have it.

Producer - A person or organization (theater company) responsible for mounting a production, who oversees the overall financial and managerial functions of a production or venue, raises or provides financial backing, and hires personnel for creative positions.

Production - A theatrical undertaking that results in one or more public performances.

Race (versus [Ethnicity](#)) - Race is a false construct that conflates skin color and ancestry with behavior, intelligence, and culture. Though race is a false construct, it has real consequences for all people.

Racism - "Racism is any prejudice against someone because of their race when those views are reinforced by systems of power." -- Ijeoma Oluo, *So You Want to Talk About Race*

Sexism - 1: prejudice or discrimination based on sex, especially discrimination against women; 2: behavior, conditions, or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex.

Socioeconomic status - The amount of money you earn in wages each month or year. This can change rapidly.

Standards - Documents created to address awareness and systems that respect and protect the human in the arts. Tenets include communication, safety, respect, and accountability.

Stereotypes vs. Norms - Stereotypes refer to the widely held, oversimplified ideas we hold about a person based on their identities (real or perceived). Usually, stereotypes are based on assumptions, popular opinion, or misinformation, are generally negative, are sweeping and simple, and are often characterized by words such as "always" and "never." Compare to Norms definition.

Transphobia - The dislike of or prejudice against transgender people.

Transparency - A method of operating in such a way that it is easy for others to see what actions are performed. Transparency implies openness, communication, and accountability. Transparency is practiced in companies, organizations, administrations, and communities.

Trauma-informed - Trauma-informed means working towards an understanding of the impact of trauma on the whole person and understanding that the work environment is a place where re-triggering of traumatic symptoms is likely.

Theater Related Unions - Theatrical unions or professional organizations include:

AEA: Actors' Equity Association (www.actorsequity.org)
AFM: American Federation of Musicians (www.afm.org)
AGMA: American Guild of Musical Artists (www.musicalartists.org)
AGVA: American Guild of Variety Artists (www.agvausa.org)
CSA: Costume Society of America (www.costumesocietyamerica.com)
IATSE: International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (www.itatse.net)
SDC: Stage Directors and Choreographers (www.sdcweb.org)
TCMU: Twin Cities Musicians Union (www.tcmu.com)
USA: United Scenic Artists Association (www.usa829.org)

Universal Design (UD) - This seeks to identify obstacles and mitigate barriers so that spaces, products, and services can be enjoyed by all. Importantly, it not only *makes* these changes, but communicates them clearly and intuitively so the *perception* of access is readily transparent to everyone. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) extends these concepts to further education and cognitive development. Applying UD and UDL principles improves access in theater spaces (performance, rehearsal, production) for all current and potential theater-makers and theatergoers.

<http://universaldesign.ie/what-is-universal-design/>,
<https://www.cast.org/impact/universal-design-for-learning-udl>

The 7 Principles of Universal Design: Equitable Use, Flexibility in Use, Simple and Intuitive Use, Perceptible Information, Tolerance for Error, Low Physical Effort, Size and Space for Approach and Use. See Definition of Universal Design (link to Access Core UD definition, Cite - Ronald Mace?)

White Supremacy - 1. The belief that the white race is inherently superior to other races and that white people should have control over people of other races. 2. The social, economic, and political systems that collectively enable white people to maintain power over people of other races. Along with this, it is important to consider how **White Supremacy Culture** impacts all aspects of our lives, institutions and society and the collective work needed to dismantle it. For reference please see the following resources about dismantling racism [here](#) and a defining list of white supremacy characteristics [here](#) as stewarded by [Tema Okun](#).

Xenophobia - An aversion or hostility to, disdain for, or fear of people from different cultures, or strangers.