

**August Wilson Red Door Project**  
**Final report to the Miller Foundation**  
**Portland Equity in the Arts Consortium (PEAC)**

*“We are intentionally talking about equity and committing to move it from the abstract into the actual. There is also a much stronger framework for having those conversations and for turning them into manageable action plans that are congruent with the mission and evolution of the Company.” Maureen Porter, Third Rail Repertory*

**I. Through the Red Door**

The mission of the August Wilson Red Door Project is to use the arts and dialogue to change the racial ecology of Portland in a lasting, positive way. Ecology is the science of how living things relate to one another and to their environment. Improving the racial ecology, therefore, means finding ways to enable positive relationships between people who are different from one another and creating environments where those relationships can flourish.

The Red Door chose the arts as a natural arena in which to begin this work because making change requires vast stores of creativity to plan for and successfully implement strategies in the face of inevitable resistance. The artists who create theatre, dance, music, literature, sculpture, and painting live in a constant state of flux, learning and problem solving. Their audiences, as well, are used to being transported to worlds quite different from their own. Art holds the mirror up to nature, as Shakespeare told us. When we sit in a dark theatre, stroll together in a gallery or communally find the groove at a jazz concert, we recommit to our common humanity and to community.

Because our name is the August Wilson Red Door Project, we have a special interest in that moment of collective transformation. Wilson introduced the "red door" as the entryway to the home of his character, Aunt Ester, who represents healing from the legacies of slavery and racism. Those who walk through her red door begin a journey of transformation and redemption. Our intention is that Portlanders walk through this red door together, and our values and principles derive from this commitment.

**II. PEAC: Why now? How?**

In 2012, the City of Portland announced that funding for the arts would come with obligations on the part of arts organizations to diversify their audiences, staff and boards. That mandate, which also impacts the budgets of small arts organizations, has been playing out through Regional Arts and Cultural Council grant requirements. With this Arts and Equity Initiative, which is part of the larger Equity Initiative and the creation of the Office of Equity and Human Rights, Portland seems to be broadening its ecological focus from creating a green city to include the importance of authentic, sustainable relationships between people who are different from one another and equitable relationships between all Portlanders and their local institutions.

The Red Door Project recruited and organized a small group of Miller Foundation performing arts grantees who were interested in being training and coached by the Red Door. We gave the project a name, Portland Equity in the Arts Consortium (PEAC), solicited information from the groups who said yes, and applied to the Miller Foundation for funds. We began work with Artists Repertory Theatre, Third Rail Repertory, hand2mouth, Profile Theatre and PlayWrite, Inc. and Portland Playhouse in June 2013.

*“We are practicing how to speak about diversity, and we have weekly staff meetings now where we keep everyone informed about what is happening with diversity. We learned that our focus needs to be internal, that we need to look at how welcoming we are to different people.”*

*—Brian Weaver, Artistic Director, Portland Playhouse*

### **III. PEAC Curriculum**

#### Learning Structure

We met as a group once a month for six months from June to November 2013 for three-hour training sessions. In between, each of our three consultants met with staff from two of the organizations in private coaching sessions. During each of the training sessions held August through October, two organizations presented specific challenges for the group to help solve. These “clinics” were very effective, not only in terms of group problem solving, but also for trust building, as participants learned their peers were facing similar challenges.

#### Coaching: From Self-Assessment to Action Planning

Participants began by completing a self-assessment, which is included as an attachment to this report. The assessment is built on current best principles and practices of audience development and contains three major objectives:

1. Understanding and Reaching Audiences Where they Are
2. Involving the whole organization
3. Creating a culture of experimentation and learning.

Guided by their coach, organizations prioritized challenges in each area and identified strengths and opportunities they could employ to meet those challenges. Over the six months, through training and coaching and learning from their peers, they were able to identify one or two priority strategies for each objective and map out an action plan to implement the strategy. (Visions and Action Plan strategies are included in Section V below. The plan template is included as an attachment. Contact individual organizations for their complete actions plans.)

#### Participation

The teams sent cohorts of from two to five people to trainings, and attendance was excellent. Participants included four Artistic Directors, one Executive Director, one Board member, four Managing Directors, one Dramaturg/Outreach Coordinator, one Education Director, one Audience Services Manager, one Development Director, and one Marketing and PR Director. Coaching sessions were with the same group of people, so there was a great deal of consistency

in the learning process. All organizations completed their plans, which demonstrated a sincere commitment to the work.

*“The experience and outcomes of PEAC were not at all what I expected. I went into this process with an expectation that we’d emerge with a formula for audience diversification. What resulted instead was a messier, but more meaningful work order to tend to the internal health of my organization. I look forward to doing that work to create a theater that embraces diversity in a meaningful, authentic way that’s true to our mission.” – Sarah Horton, Managing Director, Artists Repertory Theatre*

## Curriculum Content

### *Guiding Principles*

To meet the objectives of effective audience development, and to align with our mission and approach to changing the racial ecology of Portland, we operated on four guiding principles:

- 1) Diversity is not about identity (race, gender, sexuality, class or ableness, per se). Rather it is about innovation that comes from multiple perspectives.
- 2) Achieving diversity goals depends on leadership that can effectively lead and manage change.
- 3) Diversity is attained through authentic community engagement rather than one-time outreach for a specific event. Building authentic relationships through effective communication across differences is key.
- 4) In order to bring diversity into our organizations, (our “homes”), we must first make our homes welcoming and inclusive.

### *Specific learning areas*

Over the course of six trainings, and in coaching sessions, we offered content, guidance and resources on the following topics:

- 1) **Storytelling:** We began with participants’ personal stories of their history and expectations about diversity. We believe that all change starts at this level—with self-awareness and desire. We also noted that even though the group seemed homogenous, it was diverse in so many interesting ways. This set the stage for the conversation about diversity as innovation and the power of multiple perspectives.
- 2) **Contextual Leadership:** Leadership can be learned and constructed to suit different contexts. Leading and managing change demands a ready toolbox of leadership styles and competencies.
- 3) **Rank, Power and Privilege:** Leaders can learn to use their rank, power and privilege to foster diversity and equity efforts. Learning how to be an ally can bridge power differences.

- 4) **Effective Communication:** We all have working assumptions and conscious and unconscious biases. Becoming self-aware is the first step to examining our assumptions to understand how they help or hinder communication.
- 5) **Systems Theory:** Organizations are systems. All systems protect, expand and evolve. In order to make our organizations more inclusive and welcoming, we need to understand how we protect ourselves, how we resist change, and what to do about it to be able to evolve.
- 6) **Audience Development: Community Engagement—Beyond Outreach:** Effective community engagement depends on building long term, authentic relationships that result in trust, strong networks and community cohesion. Understanding how to map and mobilize community partners for mutual benefit is key to effective development.
- 7) **Strategic Planning from a Diversity Perspective:** Engaging the whole organization in participatory planning provides multiple perspectives to create a vision, think strategically about resources, opportunities, challenges and outcomes.
- 8) **Board and Staff Development:** How do we diversify staff and boards while avoiding tokenism? How can we effectively use bridge builders and connectors? How can we have challenging conversations with Boards, artistic companies and staff? How can we message to Boards regarding bottom line issues and diversity? How can we improve group functioning?
- 9) **Power of Personal Commitments:** At the last training, we brought the “diversity as innovation” conversation full circle with an activity entitled “Let it Begin with Me.” Each participant made a commitment to welcoming something or someone new into their lives.

*“Personally, I’m more fully living what I think is important, and organizationally, we’ve had a major sea change including rewriting our vision, mission and core values.” - Adriana Baer, Artistic Director, Profile Theatre*

#### **IV. Collaborative Opportunities and Activities**

Over the course of a number of training sessions, we provided time for collaborative planning. This was one of the potential benefits of working in a consortium rather than just individually, so we were intentional about creating the time and methodology to make this happen. PEAC organizations identified two major collaborative activities: 1) Joint research; and 2) joint program activities.

- 1) Joint research. The group is very keen on standardization across all organizations related to demographic data collection and analysis. To that end, they formed a committee to approach RACC to advocate for common survey development and data collection. They plan to meet with RACC and want to become part of the team that works on this effort.
- 2) Joint program activities. Several of the organizations have enhanced their relationships and identified ways they can work together. An example of this would be Third Rail’s decision to bring PlayWrite participants into their rehearsal process. This is the kind of thinking that happened in PEAC and represents a movement from “We are a white company with a specific artistic mission” to “How do we stay true to our mission and

find creative ways to bring others in?" The Red Door also has been approached with opportunities for PEAC participants. Minds Matter, an enrichment program for low income, high-achieving, high school students, has asked us to bring a theatre performance to their students on a Saturday in March. We will be working with two of the organizations to make this happen.

*"I can take conversations from PEAC into other settings; I'm becoming a leader in the room and in the community, stepping into my own rank and power. I'm also looking forward to collaborating with PEAC partners. There's value in the PEAC brand." – Jonathan Walters, Artistic Director, hand2mouth*

## **V. PEAC Plans**

The "product" of PEAC is the audience development plan, which is structured around and informed by the initial self-assessment. The plan reflects organizational learning in content areas and is designed to draw on resources and opportunities already in place as well as to identify resources needed to be effective. Many participants reflected that creating a plan helped to apply PEAC learnings and move theory into practice.

Following are the Audience Development Vision and key strategies for each of the six participants. Each is different despite the uniform template because they reflect the unique thinking, position and voice of each organization.

### **Profile Theatre**

**Audience Development Vision:** *We strive to engage audiences to have a deep experience with a writer's work by presenting productions of exemplary artistic merit and quality. The dramatists we profile have something significant to say about humankind in all its variety, complexity, humor, tragedy, anger and hope. We engage with our community to deepen understanding of our world and foster compassion for each other. We envision a Profile in which our organization mirrors the diverse demographics of the entire community we serve, inviting all to join in our artistic conversation.*

#### Key Strategies

### **1. Strengthen and Expand our Inside Out: Community and School Tour**

Profile's Inside Out: Community and School Tour program is already well established in several schools in the Portland Public School district (PPS). We plan to grow the program to include all PPS high schools, selected middle schools and targeted underserved schools/communities outside of Portland. For many Portland neighborhoods, the school is at the center of their community and we believe there is a significant opportunity to use the school as the connecting point for increasing our connection to those neighborhoods. We will employ evening and weekend presentations designed to attract community members and look for opportunities to have special events outside of the regular school day.

**2. Engage Board of Directors in making diversity and equity a high organizational priority in our audience development and strategic plans.**

Profile's staff leadership has embraced enhancing the diversity of our audience as a key value for the organization. A more diverse audience will lead to a larger and more sustainable base of support for Profile's financial future and anchor us more securely in our community thereby making our work more relevant and our organization more sustainable. The inclusion of "new voices" in our conversation will make our work more dynamic and nuanced. We have included the goal of having our organization mirror the demographic diversity of our community a part of our long-range plan.

**3. Increase Board and Staff participation in expanding In Dialogue programming**

As our Inside Out Tour will be a significant tool for engaging new audiences outside of our walls, our In Dialogue programs present a great opportunity to engage new audiences within our theatre. These strategies are designed to keep the entire organization involved in the In Dialogue process. Profile's singular mission of focusing on one playwright per season creates unique challenges in reaching out to a broader audience. Certain playwrights have a body of work that may not appeal to all communities or embrace the values in each community. By opening up the conversation to include different voices through our In Dialogue programming we are creating new avenues to engage different parts of the entire community we serve in our artistic conversation.

*"We've reframed our engagement approach from "You want and need this" to "there's something interesting and valuable for both of us in this." We've moved diversity from being an external goal to an integral part of our strategic plan. . It's been absorbed into our organization and integrated into our mission." Matthew Jones, Managing Director, Profile Theatre.*

**PlayWrite, Inc.**

**Audience Development Vision:** *Our audiences will be a rich reflection of our community—as diverse in culture, self-identity, wealth, and age as the neighborhoods in which we work.*

Key Strategies

- 1. Get to know our audiences** demographically through photographic storytelling and holding talkbacks following performances to get their feedback.
- 2. Grow our audience in size and diversity** by expanding our social media net to include culturally specific social entities and developing an advocate who will engage and invite new people to see PW's work.
- 3. Find a bridge and cross it! Involve the whole organization in development efforts** through Board members reaching out to and beyond their social networks to generate Fertile Ground attendance
- 4. Build community within our Board** through a Board retreat, team-building activities like speed-dating and joint attendance at shows that feature our staff/actors.

*“Stirrings have occurred. We just scratched the surface. We’re enthusiastic about the future. We want more! We have strategies for working with and diversifying our board.”—Bruce Livingston, Executive Director, and Teri Fitch, Board President, PlayWrite, Inc.*

### **Artists Repertory Theatre**

**Audience Development Vision:** Through our mission of producing challenging new work, make our theater a more inclusive home for staff, artists and audiences.

#### Key Strategies

1. **Use “house capacity campaign”** as opportunity to engage new audiences, learn more about interests. 25% remaining capacity in houses presents opportunity to host new audiences and intentionally engage them in communication about their experience.
2. **Offer PEAC Assessment** to whole organization
3. **Conduct Pre-retreat Board session** on rank & power
4. **Be intentional** about clarifying organizational leadership roles
5. **Program season** with an eye toward gender, race and age diversity. Use season planning process to identify organizational obstacles, unearth diversity in approaches to change.

*“Probably the biggest change in my thinking is rethinking how to “market” to diverse audiences. It really isn’t about marketing; it’s about learning and acknowledging the barriers to diverse audiences’ seeing themselves as theatre-goers. Then trying to reduce the roadblocks to their seeing theatre and learning about theatre.” Nicole Lane, Marketing and PR Director, Artists Repertory Theatre.*

### **Hand2Mouth**

**Audience Development Vision:** Two years from now, teenagers with limited opportunities to see theatre will regularly attend Hand2Mouth performances.

#### Key Strategies

1. **Use current production, Peptalk**, to pilot outreach/engagement strategies including identification of relevant community partners, pre and post show site visits to engage program participants and invitations for three community partners to attend shows at Shout House.
2. **Engage the core Company** in development activities by facilitating a session on PEAC learnings and audience development plans at Company retreat and inviting Company members to participate in community partner site visits.
3. **Involve the Board** by bringing similar session as conducted with Company to Board meetings and forming a Board outreach committee
4. **Develop resources to improve and sustain community engagement** strategies including identifying grants and forming an outreach committee

5. **Create a thriving** Artist in Residence and Apprenticeship Program by reaching out to colleges and universities to find interested applicants and creating both a young ensemble and a social practice strand in which young artists present work that engages neighborhoods.

*“Now we’re reflexively thinking about outreach in sync with our artistic projects, and we have more clarity across the organization about our mission. Working with PEAC has made us more able to articulate a specific strategic goal around increasing youth audiences. This helps with conversations with partners and funders.” –Jen Mitas, Managing Director, Hand2Mouth*

### **Portland Playhouse**

**Audience Development Vision:** To build an audience that reflects our neighborhood's diversity in its many expressions. This bold vision outlines the philosophy that forms the foundation of our commitment to Audience Development and will be used to guide the development of our core values, behaviors and attitudes as we go about the business of providing our product. It will also be used to establish future benchmarks and strategies.

#### Key Strategies

1. **Survey our audience after each production** through an e-survey sent to all attendees.
2. **Incorporate an equity and diversity lens into our existing workflow** by reaching out to our education partners, forming a strategic partnership with a local business owned by a person of color, and developing a program of individual hosts for each performance of August Wilson’s *Jitney*.
3. **Institute Weekly Staff Meetings** to improve communication in all areas including diversity and mitigate crisis management.

*“Our outreach programs with schools and local businesses have an equity lens now, and we are rewriting our mission to include a stronger focus on equity. We have had a strong focus on casting a diverse group of actors and local kids for this year’s production of “Christmas Carol.”—Brian Weaver, Artistic Director, Portland Playhouse*

### **Third Rail Repertory Theatre**

**Audience Development Vision:** Within three years, Third Rail Repertory will have sustained and ongoing practices in place for equity in audience development demonstrated by clear articulation.

#### Key Strategies

1. **Work in collaboration with PlayWrite** to create the opportunity for authentic community engagement with a younger and more diverse audience by making Third Rail’s rehearsal and performance process accessible and of service to student participants and building an ongoing, long-term relationship with Playwrite staff.



2. **Leverage content of plays** to engage specific groups we are not presently reaching in other ways. For each play in a season identify community groups outside TR's audience to engage with material specific to the piece, provide monetary and audience incentive enhancements, and sustain communication and engagement post production.
3. **Begin more robust and evolving conversation with Company and Board** overall about equity in arts and Third Rail's role. Make discussions about diversity and equity an ongoing agenda item. Utilize tools from PEAC to create deeper understanding within TR discussions about value in diversifying audiences and working consciously for equity in arts. Engage non "staff management" Company Members in advocating for audience development evolution

*"The idea of equity as a component of overall audience development as opposed to an end in itself is now a leading component in our conversations regarding audience development strategies. We are also looking at ways to better incorporate equity opportunities into our artistic process through play readings for season selection and broadening our vision for what a "Third Rail" play can be."—Scott Yarborough, Artistic Director, Third Rail Repertory Theatre*

## **VI. Participant Learning**

In addition to surveys following trainings, participants completed exit interviews regarding how PEAC has impacted their ability to read and manage change; increased their knowledge of skills, tools and ideas; and fostered organizational changes and challenges regarding diversity, equity and inclusion. Participants also were asked what they'd like to see continue or change about PEAC, if anything. The learnings below come from the surveys, exit interviews and discoveries in coaching sessions and trainings.

### Leadership

The idea of contextual leadership was new and important to most participants. They were excited to learn that there is an array of styles and competencies that are useful in different situations and contexts and, conversely that some are not useful. For many participants, the idea that they could lead and manage this type of change, and that they were, indeed, seen as leaders in the community because of their positions in their organizations, and, further, that it was important and necessary to step into this role, was new and challenging. Their final plans and interviews demonstrate forward movement as they gain comfort in having the conversations, conducting the planning and implementing development strategies.

*"I'm dreaming big and bold and leading conversations on diversity and equity out in the community. I'm excited to be working collaboratively with Matt at Profile on how to engage with RACC about standardized surveys. Feels visionary." – Jessie Drake, Dramaturg/Outreach Coordinator, Hand2Mouth*

### Skills, Tools, Ideas

New skills, tools and ideas mentioned by participants were: 1) Understanding that organizations have to work internally before they can successfully bring others in; 2) learning how to effectively communicate about diversity and equity and to lead these conversations; 3) being willing to make mistakes; 4) gaining understanding of rank, privilege and power and how to be an ally; 4) how important it is to build relationships; 5) the idea that systems aren't good or bad—that it is natural for a system (organism or organization) to protect itself, so resistance is inevitable; and specific skills such as finding demographic/data sets online, gathering community engagement histories, tips for engaging and working with Boards; and exposure to current resources/ideas in audience development.

#### Additional Aha's

Sometimes in coaching sessions and trainings, light bulbs went off. These are some of the aha's that accompanied these flashes:

- The idea of false choices, e.g. to impact the bottom line, you have to make a choice between young audiences vs audiences of color or diverse audiences vs. butts in the seat; or understanding that a company's core mission doesn't have to preclude change. Artists come together as creative souls, but without change, that creativity can calcify. There's always more than one way to solve a problem.
- Bringing one person who is different onto your board without internal preparation could be disastrous. Use bridges/connectors to take the first step. Find who has the passion for the work. Identify passions and interests rather than getting frustrated with what people aren't doing.
- Anticipate, plan for, and be willing to improvise around resistance to change.
- Audience diversity is part of a bigger discussion about keeping theatre relevant to new generations. Expansion depends on theatre being relevant to nontraditional theatre goers.
- There will never be enough time or money; thus, developing core values and prioritizing strategies that grow out of those values is key to planning.
- Having uniform data design, collection and analysis would be amazing, but having this data alone will not solve the problem. Nothing replaces real relationships within organizations and in their outreach.

#### Organizational Changes

Participants reported both structural and philosophical changes. Structural changes included: 1) Creating structures to accommodate a new emphasis on diversity and equity such as new weekly staff meetings and a recurring agenda item; 2) including concrete strategies for audience, staff and Board development in plans; 3) putting an equity lens on community partnerships; 4) creating new ways to diversity programming and casting; and 5) instituting demographic surveys and tools. Philosophically, there has been an increased understanding

that there is an artistic payoff in diversification, an important “aha” to making change in companies with specific missions and members. There also was a general consensus that, because of PEAC, change will result from more skilled organizational leadership regarding diversity and equity.

#### Main challenges:

- Getting the Board engaged is a goal of all the PEAC organizations. Several have identified specific strategies.
- How do we do this work and stay true to our missions?
- Capacity and Resources. Small performing arts organizations are “overwhelmed” by fundraising. This new focus can be a challenge but also an opportunity. This work takes leadership and dedicated staff. It also requires intention and attention to keep this focus.
- This change will take time and needs to be understood by all parties including funders, other organizations and the community at large. Are funders ready to fund this work?
- This change is very big. It has to do with the relevance of theatre in a world of screens and distractions. How do we stay relevant?
- Individual organizations are too small and under-resourced to effectively do the kind of demographic research being requested of them. PEAC will advocate for standardized data collection, analysis and reporting with RACC.

*“We need metrics and we need to know what the goal is. Until we actually know where we are, we don’t know how to make change. What are the numbers? We need to know our own data and where we are in relation to the community. This will help us find points of collaboration. We don’t have to invent the wheel. There are already seat surveys that collect data on every seat, every performance, every season. There are models of regional equity initiatives. We can’t do this alone. It’s too big.” – Adriana Baer, Artistic, Director, Profile Theatre Company*

#### Should PEAC continue?

Several participants thought that there should be a new PEAC cohort, and that alumni could serve as mentors. Many expressed a desire to continue the coaching element to help with implementation of plan. Several also asked to continue meeting as a group but less frequently (every other month or quarterly) for the purpose of checking in and building on collaboration as well as taking the training content deeper.

#### Improvements

Because the Red Door Project is a learning organization, all suggestions for curriculum improvement will be seriously considered. Suggested improvements included: Changing order in presentation of some material; more role playing activities to provide more skill practice; streamlining some material to make sure we accomplish everything we want; having each facilitator teach a different subject in a different room at each training and give participants the option what to learn; ask participants to choose three topics they are interested in for the next training; use more case studies; don’t assign any outside homework—we’re too busy;

and hold a big social event at the end of the project. We're looking forward to applying these and our own learnings to improve the curriculum.

## Conclusion

The initial phase of PEAC was a pilot. We had only six months to work with six organizations, a whole lot of ground to cover, and a healthy dose of initial resistance at the first meeting. It wasn't that participants didn't want to engage in the work or that they didn't think it was important. Rather they are leaders of small arts organizations leading overworked staff and anxious Boards, and, for the most part, were not certain how they would fold this new emphasis into their already overwhelming to-do list. We were intentional about trying to mesh PEAC ideas and activities into their everyday work. This not only included the creation of a practical plan that built on their strengths and resources but also "clinics" in which they could present their real-world challenges and gain peer and consultant support to solve them. We introduced theory but also gave them practical ways to experience what we were talking about. An example of this is our "lunchtime conversations" in which participants practiced ally-ship with one another outside of PEAC meetings.

We were delighted that attendance was consistent, and we definitely witnessed a growing trust among participants and between participants and us. The plans demonstrate that participants have applied what they learned in PEAC. Realistically, successful implementation could depend on ongoing support and, as one of the participants put it, the "willpower" to keep this work front and center. The closing commitments were stirring and edifying, so we would like to close with one of them:

*"I feel pretty strongly about what I've learned with this group as it has affected many aspects of my life, both in professional leadership and in my personal life. I make a commitment to deep and careful listening and trying not to react until I've considered what I've heard. This will keep me open to new perspectives rather than defending my own. Further, I will work to consider the person in front of me as a whole person who has a completely different life experience from mine, that like mine, comes to bear in every interaction. I make a commitment to respecting, even honoring, those differences, with the aim to really understand the exchange, the person I'm communicating with, and grow and expand myself and my worldview." –Nicole Lane, Marketing and PR Director, Artists Repertory Theatre.*