



*“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time.
But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let
us work together.”*

*—Aboriginal activists group,
Queensland, 1970s*

Dear OUTWORDS community,

In our June 2, 2020 newsletter, I stated my conviction that both I and OUTWORDS can and must engage in a deep, thoughtful, and sustainable process of reflection on how White supremacy functions in the lives of people and organizations. I urged myself and other White Americans to “lay down our privilege in a hundred ways, large and small.”

I wanted to update you on how OUTWORDS has been engaging in this work over the past four months. At the outset, please let me emphasize that *these actions are a beginning, not an ending*.

As a first step and a roadmap for our journey towards racial justice and equity, OUTWORDS has signed the [Anti-Racist Small Business Pledge](#) (more on this pledge [here](#)). The pledge has five tenets:

1. Name White supremacy and the impact of racism on both our personal and professional lives.
2. Engage in anti-racist education for our team.
3. Commit to open conflict and allow discomfort.
4. Invest a portion of our monthly company budget to the Black community.
5. Express our sincere, long-term commitment to becoming an anti-racist organization.

What does this mean for OUTWORDS?

What is White supremacy?

“White Supremacy is an historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by White peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of

maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege.” (Definition by the *Challenging White Supremacy Workshop*, San Francisco, CA)

You can learn more about White supremacy [here](#) and [here](#).

How is White supremacy showing up at OUTWORDS?

Here’s where White supremacy — the perpetuation of a system where White people are valued, make the decisions, and take home the money — shows up most clearly:

- 100% of our ongoing paid staff of 4 are White.
- 76% of our interview subjects are White. 24% are people of color.

Here’s where White supremacy is less dominant, but we can still improve and aim for racial parity as we grow:

- 7 out of 12 of our directors of photography are White. None is Black.
- 5 out of 8 of our current freelance staff are people of color. 1 is Black.
- 60% of our 5-person board of directors are people of color (including 1 Black, 1 biracial, and 1 Latinx board member).

These are some of the quantifiable ways that White supremacy shows up at OUTWORDS. There are harder-to-quantify ways that are just as pernicious, if perhaps more so, for being harder to identify. We are working at uncovering, naming, and addressing these layers of White supremacy as well.

I also want to acknowledge the inescapable truth that White privilege is part of what enabled me to launch and lead OUTWORDS in the first place. If I were Black, the path would have been far tougher. Therefore, White supremacy — the system whereby Whiteness serves as an automatic emblem and endorsement of a person’s character and trustworthiness — is inescapably embedded in OUTWORDS’ founding and success as an organization.

How is OUTWORDS committing to anti-racist education?

In the realm of combating racism within OUTWORDS, my first step was to acknowledge that this is an area crying out for reflection and action. My next step was to enroll our team in [The Adaway Group’s Whiteness At Work](#) summer series. Our four permanent, ongoing staff watched the four webinars in this series, and held meaningful, substantive conversations about the content of the webinars, and the ways in which we (both individually and as an organization) are exploring and internalizing the content. As individuals and as a team, we are committed to continuing and deepening our learning.

How will OUTWORDS create space for open conflict and allowing discomfort?

This is something we are still grappling with. A jumping-off point we’re starting with is these [Agreements for Multicultural Interactions](#) (adapted from Visions Inc., “Guidelines for Productive Work Sessions”). We have strived to

encourage open discussion in our staff meetings and events, and are investigating how we might make these environments even safer containers for conflict and discomfort.

How are we investing in the Black community?

Investing in Black individuals and Black-owned businesses takes work. OUTWORDS does not at present have a clear system for assessing what percentage of our annual operating budget is invested in the Black community. Without this assessment, we will not know how to improve. We are committed to undertaking such an assessment by January 1, 2021.

OUTWORDS is projected to record 40 new interviews this fiscal year (July 2020-June 2021). For the first time, we are committed this year to a 1:1 ratio among cisgender/White interview subjects and trans/BIPOC interview subjects. In future years, we will maintain or amplify this ratio.

We have recently expanded our team of producers/interviewers to include two women of color (neither of whom is Black), who will direct at minimum 25% of our interviews over the current fiscal year. We are committed to increasing both Black representation among our team of producer/interviewers, and also the percentage of interviews conducted by BIPOC individuals.

We are looking for opportunities to buy products from Black and Black-led vendors, including the above-mentioned [Adaway Group](#). We are exploring moving OUTWORDS' primary bank account from a large national bank to a Black-owned community bank. We will continue to seek other ways to invest our business in Black-owned businesses and Black individuals.

How are we expressing our long-term commitment to becoming an anti-racist organization?

This is another question we will continue to understand more deeply over time, but one possibility is to revise our non-discrimination and diversity policy to make it more explicitly anti-racist. Here is our policy as it currently stands:

OUTWORDS actively seeks candidates from diverse backgrounds and traditions, who vary by their race and ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, nationality, culture, religion, and physical and mental abilities. In our workplace as well as in our interactions with outside individuals and groups, we seek to foster an environment where new, unpopular and/or controversial ideas are safely expressed; and we encourage the exchange of such views in a spirit of mutual respect.

We invite your suggestions on how we can strengthen this policy. (For example, the word 'diverse' almost certainly merits revisiting, as it has perhaps been watered down through over-use.)

Other questions we're asking ourselves:

- What Black-led orgs does it make sense for us to partner with, and how? How might we go beyond tokenizing these organizations? How might we

pass the mic?

- Whose voices are not currently represented amongst our interview subjects?
- What parts of our interview process might be made more equitable and/or sensitive?
- How do we currently exploit our BIPOC interview subjects to “demonstrate” (or even parade) how “inclusive” we are? This is a fundamentally unacceptable tendency on the part of many White-majority organizations. We pledge to examine this tendency on the part of OUTWORDS, and work to minimize it and eliminate it.

If you have thoughts on any of this, suggestions, or resources you'd like to share, just hit “reply” and let us know; we're listening.

Thank you for joining us in the lifelong process of fumbling toward equity and justice, imperfectly and wholeheartedly. It's an honor to be on this journey with you.

Sincerely,

Mason Funk,
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