



To the Chicago Theater Community,

The past few weeks have been a dramatic demonstration of the power of a collective voice demanding change. Protestors standing for Black Lives Matter and calling for an end to social injustice in all aspects of life have shown conspicuous bravery and attracted worldwide attention. As we watch Chicago theater artists take center stage to bring attention to racism, and to promote equity, diversity and inclusion, we know that we, at the Jeff Awards, have not done enough to understand the challenges the Black community faces when telling their stories in Chicago.

Many theater presenters, producers and educators collaborate with artists both on and offstage to bring diverse and inclusive stories to life. Mere statements of solidarity with them may ring hollow. We have an obligation to help overcome our limitations to understanding what equity really means. For the Jeff Awards, we recognize there is much more work to do.

In the theater, intermissions give audiences a chance for reflection. There is a loud call now for a longer intermission to process what we are seeing and hearing so that we can go forward with defined actions and sustainable commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion. So, here is how we are using our intermission:

Listening and Learning:

We are committed to listen closely to the community we support, both what is being said now and what some have said in the past, and learn how we can be most effective in helping the storytellers in Chicago theater survive and thrive. The Jeff Awards invites you to share your feedback on how our organization can join with BIPOC communities to address systemic racism in Chicago theater and within our organization. See the link below to share your thoughts. We have started having open conversations with theaters and, as we continue this dialogue, we will include discussions on these important issues of social justice.

Sharing Resources:

For those interested in learning more and getting engaged, our website includes a list of local and national organizations working tirelessly at the forefront to advance equity, diversity and social justice. See our list for more information and/or how to donate to these important causes.

Expanding Our Own Diversity and Inclusion:

We have reignited our work on evaluating our current membership criteria, recruitment strategies and ongoing education to ensure our members represent and are sensitive to the communities we serve. We will also be exploring how these areas are reflected in our future awards programs.

We know this is just a start and must be an ongoing process where we will continue to seek input from the community. In the time ahead, we look forward to sharing more of our plans to ensure that Chicago is a rich, vibrant and equitable place to create. Again, if you have additional ideas for us, please take a moment to respond below.

Until we can gather again with you to celebrate excellence in Chicago theater, please stay safe, healthy and inspired.

With regards,

The Members of the Jeff Awards

Note: this week we will announce plans for celebrating the 47th Annual Non-Equity Jeff Awards. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and as restrictions on public gatherings began, a video program was recorded. Following the lead of the theater community, we postponed the video and announcement of recipients for reflection, conversation and action towards issues of social justice. We look forward to honoring excellence in Chicago theater, so watch for details .