

The Oregon Country Fair must create a community that is safe for all people, regardless of race, gender identity, or ability. We have set increasing the diversity of all aspects of the organization and community as one of our foundational goals.

The Oregon Country Fair Board clearly states that racist and discriminatory comments have no place in our work. It is one thing to say that diversity, equity and inclusion matter to us. It's another thing to demonstrate that importance in our community. We must get more comfortable calling out racism and discrimination the moment we see it, wherever we see it. Accountability to our stated goals and prioritizing this work is the only way we can truly ensure that we make the Fair a safe space for marginalized people.

Last month, at the Board of Directors meeting, members of a Board committee created a disturbance in the meeting process, and caused a disruption to the business of the organization. Because the Board has an obligation to complete the business of the Fair at its Board meetings, and because certain matters require confidentiality, ground rules for discussion were set at the start of the meeting. A representative of the Diversity Committee chose to use the Committee Reports section of the meeting to deliver a biased and persuasive presentation, including threats and calls for action that would have been deeply damaging to the organization. The confidentiality of personnel actions is not something we get to pick and choose; it affects the dignity of our employees and their right to not have job performance discussed in an open forum.

Committees serve at the behest of the Board to do the work of the organization, in the best interests of the organization. The best interests of this organization do not include threats, extortion and public shaming of any employee. In order to ensure that the Fair's best interests are represented by all committees, I hope we will consider several measures. To ensure that future Diversity Committee reports are given in a manner that is consistent with the Fair's best interests, I will exercise the authority given the president to preside over Board meetings, and for the time being I will only recognize a Board Liaison to the Diversity Committee for purposes of delivering any verbal report from the committee. The Board will be considering further action including a motion to encourage a revision of the Committee Best Practices work group to further define the work a committee must do to be in good standing. And, as Board President, I will be making a motion to support the supervision of the Diversity Committee to better align with their mission statement, the needs of the organization, and the recommendations of the consultants.

I invite the Diversity Committee and the Board to participate in facilitated sessions to heal some of the pain that has been caused by this and other recent incidents. I hope to draw on the principles of Restorative Justice in our relationship building going forward. The Board received a thoughtful apology from the Committee. I want to recognize the work that went into the apology, and I hold it as a prime example of taking accountability and acknowledging harms. And yet, the work of rebuilding has only just begun – we must make changes to ensure harms like this don't happen again in the future. That should not dilute the impact the apology had on me as an individual.

A male diversity committee member silenced women's voices by talking over or mocking two female Board members. This is misogynist and unacceptable. A Board member, who is a person of color, was called a "token person" by a white representative of the diversity committee. AJ has previously stated that that term is offensive and hurtful to him, and has asked for us to cease using it, as it devalues his lived experience.

AJ is a valued member of the community, whose contributions to this Board are instrumental in the work we do. He earned his place on this Board, and we respect what he brings to this organization, and to our event.

I also personally value the Diversity Committee and the individuals who serve us by volunteering their time doing this rough work for our organization. This work is hard, and it's been thankless at times, and I see you continuing to show up, and explain to us how we're falling short of the ideals that we say we're working towards. We need to center your voices in the work of dismantling the structural racism built into our community. I am committing to you now, more than ever, that I am doubling down on my commitment to you and this work, and I am looking forward to working with peace and dedication in my heart.

The Oregon Country Fair will continue to work on DEI issues in collaboration with the input of consultants, board members, the Diversity Committee, and other people from marginalized communities. The OCF Board continues to be committed to meaningful and lasting change, and recognizes that there is much work to be done. In 2022, I intend to lead us in examining ways to truly stand alongside POC, LGBTQIA2S+ folx, Disabled people and people with disabilities, and other traditionally marginalized communities. This work will be done in many fora, including working assemblies, listening sessions, and trainings, and will include invited professional consultants. In order to demonstrate the importance of this work, we will have to dedicate time and funding, prioritizing the difficult work of dismantling structural racism. We plan to begin a strategic planning process, and will keep DEI centered as one of our guiding principles. We recognize that all those efforts will also be only the start, for this work must be ongoing.

In the new year, I ask you to hold yourselves accountable to our Code of Conduct and to the Community Agreements. We on the Board will do the same. We will be continuing our work to become an anti-racist organization, with safe spaces for people representing a diversity of bodies, identities, and experiences. This work is hard, and it's not for the faint of heart. Please hold strong, and support your people - the work of conflict resolution and dismantling racism and oppression is hard. We'll need to support each other - because it takes every one of us to be the Oregon Country Fair.

With love and best wishes for the New Year,  
Lily