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## Our Strive Anti-Racist Strategy

In 2020, we started our journey as the Chol-Operative, in response to breaking free from traditional hierarchical structures, to create a more flexible and inclusive model. It came from a belief that all roles within the company are equally important, from leadership positions to community-based roles, recognising the unique contributions of each individual. Our company approach focuses on co-creation and a culture of care, where everyone's voice is valued and responsibilities are shared.

We believe that all roles are integral to the organisation's success. From strategic thinking to being on the ground delivering, each role plays a vital part in shaping who we are and the impact we make. This is why we committed to pay equity across the organisation.

Our Strive Anti-Racist Strategy is deeply intertwined with our company ethos, sitting within the broader Strive Framework to interrogate and eliminate racial inequity. The Strive framework informs all aspects of delivery, across our organisation, actively demonstrating our commitment to dismantling systemic barriers and promoting equity. This ensures that our culture of care extends to the mental and emotional wellbeing of all staff, and influences the impact and change we might have amongst those people we work with, from CYP beneficiaries, to freelancers and wider stakeholders.

Our mission is to create a workplace and environment where diversity is not just accepted but celebrated, with a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination. As with our organisational model, we acknowledge that our strategy is a living, working document. We recognise that we don't have all the answers but we are committed to continually learning, unlearning, evolving and improving our approach as we learn more.

We have created this strategy based on our ongoing conversations and understanding that addressing racial inequity is not only a moral imperative but can also support us in creating a healthy and thriving workplace. Following the Black Lives Matter movement, and lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic, we know progress has been made but it is nowhere near where we need to be, which is evidenced by the far-right riots in September 2024. Events like these are a stark reminder that systemic racism is unfortunately still very much prevalent in our society and everyday lives. Our response to this is to confront these disparities with intention and action-based enquiries.

We recognise the damaging effects and long-lasting impacts of racial inequities stemming from colonialism, slavery, segregation and discriminatory legislation and how these historical injustices have contributed to systemic barriers that have set back the progress of people of colour. Structural biases in hiring practices, decision-making and inequalities in access to networks and opportunities have exacerbated inequities for communities that have been marginalised and underrepresented. It is crucial to understand this history to inform effective and meaningful actions that need to be taken towards dismantling systemic barriers.

Our Strive journey is personal and unique to Chol. We don't see our approach as a one-size-fits-all solution for other companies, but as a dynamic process that evolves with our experiences and understanding. This commitment informs all our work, shaping how we engage with our teams, collaborators, and communities to ensure our values are embedded in every project. As we continue to grow, our focus remains on using our collective power to create a more inclusive and equitable future within the arts and culture sector.

# Definition of anti-racism, inclusion and belonging

**Anti-racism:** Anti-racism is a proactive approach aimed at identifying, challenging, and dismantling systems, structures, and ideologies that perpetuate racial discrimination and inequality. Unlike mere non-racism, which passively opposes racism, Anti-racism actively seeks to confront and eradicate racial biases, prejudices, and injustices. - definition sourced from Oxford Review

**Inclusion:** Inclusion is seen as a universal human right. The aim of inclusion is to embrace all people irrespective of race, gender, disability, medical or other need. It is about giving equal access and opportunities and getting rid of discrimination and intolerance (removal of barriers). It affects all aspects of public life. - definition sourced from Inclusion

**Belonging:** Belonging is the emotional connection and sense of acceptance individuals experience within a group, community, or organisation. It encompasses feeling valued, respected, and understood for one's unique identity, background, and contributions. - definition sourced from Oxford Review

# Our core principles and values - codes of conduct and ground rules

Our code of conduct and ground rules are designed to establish clear expectations for behaviour, ensuring a respectful and inclusive workplace for all employees, and the same in relation to project environments. These rules help set the standard for how we interact with one another and our wider stakeholders, outlining behaviours that are essential for creating a supportive environment:

1. **Commitment to continuous learning and unlearning:** Cultural competence is not a destination but a journey of continuous learning and growth. We encourage employees to seek out educational resources, participate in workshops, and engage in discussions that deepen their understanding of different cultures and experiences. By fostering a culture of continuous learning, we aim to enhance our collective cultural competence over time. We acknowledge that everyone carries implicit biases influenced by their cultural background and personal experiences. To combat this, we provide training that raises awareness of these biases and teaches employees how to recognise and mitigate their effects in decision-making, communication, and collaboration. This awareness is crucial for fostering a more equitable workplace.

2. **Zero tolerance for discrimination:** Any form of discrimination, including racism, is strictly prohibited. All employees are expected to treat one another with fairness, respect, and dignity.

3. **Respectful communication:** Creating spaces where open and honest dialogue can happen - whether verbal, written, or non-verbal. This includes being mindful of the words we use and understanding their potential impact on others.

4. **Accountability for actions:** Every employee is responsible for their own behaviour. If mistakes are made, we expect individuals to take accountability, learn from those experiences, and work towards better actions in the future. This also means all Chol staff being accountable to calling out if they witness any form of discrimination, internally and externally.

5. **Culturally inclusive practices:** We are committed to embedding culturally inclusive practices across all aspects of our work – from projects to policies and procedures. This means actively recognising and valuing the diverse cultural backgrounds, identities, and experiences of our workforce and communities. Our recruitment, retention, and professional development strategies are designed to reflect this commitment by being equitable, inclusive, and responsive to different needs. By fostering cultural sensitivity at every level of our organisation, we strive to create a workplace where everyone feels respected, supported, and empowered to thrive.

## In order to achieve this, we will:

1. **Actively listen:** Every individual's perspective matters. Employees are encouraged to actively listen, especially to those whose experiences may be different from their own, to build understanding and empathy, thus recognising the importance of personal choice in relation to identity.

2. **Constructively feedback:** Constructive feedback is essential for growth, and we recognise that sometimes that can be challenging for some people in some situations. We are committed to creating a culture, and environment where we can learn effective ways to give and receive feedback.

3. **Be empathetic, open-minded and intentional:** Employees are encouraged to approach interactions with all internal and external stakeholders with unconditional positive regard, leading to curiosity and a willingness to understand different viewpoints. This means listening actively, seeking to understand rather than judge, and appreciating the richness that diverse perspectives bring to our organisation.

4. **Be adaptable and flexible:** Being mindful of cultural differences in communication preferences, decision-making styles, and conflict resolution approaches. By being adaptable, we commit to being collaborative.

5. **Create intentional spaces:** We recognise that there is no such thing as a safe space for all people and are therefore committed to creating intentional environments that allow people to share their experiences, ask questions, and engage in conversations about culture, race, and identity without fear of judgement.

# Monitoring and evaluation

To demonstrate the impact of this strategy, we are committed to the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of our activities, both personally, and within each project strand, to ensure that we implement the core values outlined in this strategy.

With this in mind, we will implement a project contract that outlines our commitment to anti-racism within the context of the Strive Framework for each project, developed in partnership with the Project lead, Evaluation lead, and Strive lead prior to the project commencing.

During this time, we will develop targeted project-based action research questions to be shared with all project stakeholders, so that everyone understands the role and responsibility they have in respect of anti-racism and the wider Strive Framework.

These project-based questions will sit alongside broader employee and organisational monitoring as devised by the Chol-Operative, overseen by our Strive Lead.

More detail on these questions can be found in the "action plan" addendum and will be adapted as we learn and grow through the lifetime of this strategy, ensuring we remain proactive to personal, organisational and social change.

# Resources

Strive Resource List

We have developed the Strive Resource List which is a useful guide for our Strive learning.