



Needs and Perspectives of the Minnesota Dance Community

Key Findings and Recommendations from Engagement Efforts

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Executive summary

WHAT ARE THE MOST PROMINENT NEEDS OF THE MINNESOTA DANCE COMMUNITY?



Spaces to experiment and create with others in community

Dancers want more low-stakes opportunities to showcase work at all stages, get exposure to different kinds of dance, and gather with community “without an agenda.” Minnesota dance creators are hungry for more support for existing and new spaces not just for developing their dance practice, but also to build the community, trust, and relationships necessary for a thriving, sustained dance ecosystem.



Audience development within and beyond the dance community

Dance artists are struggling to build and maintain audience bases and are looking for creative, collaborative approaches to expand their audiences. Community members suggested increased cross-pollination and cross-promotion and developing accessible opportunities to engage the general public.



Opportunities for community-wide connections and affinity group gatherings

While there are challenges that impact the dance community as a whole, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Each community is best fit to identify their unique needs. There is a desire for more administrative support for affinity group gatherings, as well as large-group convenings.



Increased understanding and respect, especially for marginalized and invisibilized groups

There is a need for deeper engagement and learning among dancers themselves, as well as broader arts spaces, funders, and the general public. Artists in greater Minnesota want to generate increased understanding around their unique lens and conditions. BIPOC artists described experiencing a lack of recognition around their discipline and limited perspectives of what kinds of work are seen as valuable.



Cultural shift around the dance ecosystem and expanding the notion of what dance is

Many community members shared questions around how the conception of dance can be expanded, uplifting the inherent worth of dance. There was ample conversation around how, despite the scarcity of resources, the dance community can lean into and embrace “ecosystem thinking.”

WHAT PRIORITIES SHOULD A SERVICE ORGANIZATION WORK TO ADDRESS?

- ✓ Act as a **connector** to uplift existing community strengths
- ✓ Engage in **relationship-building** with existing arts institutions
- ✓ Engage in **relationship-building** with funders, cultural organizations, schools, and local governments
- ✓ Provide **administrative support** for both community-wide and affinity group gatherings
- ✓ Prioritize generating **low-stakes performance** and learning opportunities
- ✓ Strive to **develop audiences** both within and outside the dance community
- ✓ Commit to interrogating and **dismantling white supremacy culture** within the dance community

WHAT STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS SHOULD A SERVICE ORGANIZATION INCLUDE?

Rotating board to lead community-building efforts

- ✓ Board members act as a connector between communities and support with facilitating community-wide and affinity group gatherings for discussion, fellowship, and group decision-making.

Umbrella entity to expand the dance-related services of other organizations

- ✓ Leaders or working groups build relationships and liaison with organizations across the state to explore how to build out their capacity and resources to provide targeted services for dancers.

Engagement hubs across Greater Minnesota

- ✓ Leaders or working groups spearhead “satellites” of the service organization in different regions across Minnesota in order to create targeted spaces and resources for rural dance while being structurally connected to a central organization.

Funding source for the broader dance community

- ✓ The organization raises funds through grants and donor development and disburses through multiple mechanisms that ensure equitable sharing of resources across Minnesota dancers.

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Introduction and background

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Following the announced closure of The Cowles Center for Dance and the Performing Arts in February 2024, many in the Minnesota dance community recognized the need for increased collaboration and dialogue on how to best support and sustain the local dance ecosystem. From this desire emerged several community gatherings supported by the Minneapolis Department of Arts & Cultural Affairs and the MN Arts Coalition. These gatherings eventually led to the creation of Minnesota Dance Task Force (MNDTF), as community members affirmed the need for a more centralized entity focused on addressing prominent needs of Minnesota dancers and creators. Officially launched in July 2024, the Task Force holds bi-monthly meetings that are open to all community members professionally involved in dance. On July 15, 2024, the Task Force stated its intent to work toward the development of a service organization/entity for the dance community based on the constituency and needs of the broader dance community in Minnesota while drawing from the experience of the former Minnesota Dance Alliance as well as current discipline-based service organizations.

Fiscally sponsored by ARENA Dances, the Task Force obtained grant funding from the McKnight Foundation and contracted with Wilder Research in July 2025 to implement and facilitate a series of community engagement activities and mechanisms for feedback on community perspectives, needs, and desires in the context of a potential service organization.

ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

Because of the size and timeline of the project, Wilder adhered to several key goals to help define the scope of the work:

- Bring the community together into generative spaces in which all parties can dream creatively and are dedicated to the uplifting and advancement of the dance discipline in Minnesota.
- Identify the most urgent individual and community-wide needs of dancers and creators in Minnesota and gain preliminary insight into the service models that could best meet these needs.
- Create intentional space for marginalized and underserved communities to discuss their needs and perspectives and prioritize their voices throughout the engagement process.

Wilder's community engagement work is intended to be the first step of a more robust series of conversations, action steps, and evaluation efforts. Next steps for continued engagement are discussed further in the recommendations section.

With these goals in mind, Wilder Research staff worked with Task Force members to develop an engagement plan that included several multi-modal approaches for gathering insights and feedback from dancers and creators from across the state.

■ **Key informant interviews**

In the planning stages of the community conversations and focus groups, Wilder staff carried out preliminary key informant interviews with several BIPOC leaders in the dance community. Wilder requested feedback, insights, and suggestions around how to better hold diverse ideas and perspectives in the same conversation. Community leaders also shared some of their own findings and learnings around needs from convenings they had previously hosted. These leaders were recommended by multiple sources as knowledgeable and deeply respected by the broader community. It is with their help, guidance, and deep wisdom that we approached this work at all.

■ **Community conversations**

The central component of this engagement process was a series of convenings in September and October 2025 that welcomed dancers, artists, choreographers, directors, teachers, administrators, and development staff from across the state. There were three convenings in total – two were hosted in Minneapolis with a hybrid option, and one was hosted virtually. Participants were split into small groups by role or geography, in which they discussed a series of questions regarding needs, community culture, and service models. In-person attendees also participated in several engagement activities described below.

■ **Graffiti wall**

On a large paper, in-person attendees of the community conversations were asked to write or draw responses to the following questions: What does a thriving, supportive dance community look like to you? What features do you envision for a dance community service and support organization?

■ **Storybanking**

Storybanking is a qualitative data collection method that gathers stories, either audibly or visually, from which prominent themes can be identified. In-person and virtual attendees of the community conversations were asked to record a short response to one of three prompts about needs, mentorship, and support. Those who could not attend the community conversations were also given the option to submit a recording asynchronously.

■ Survey

In-person and virtual attendees of the community conversations were asked to complete a seven-question online survey regarding effective offerings and operations of a service organization, as well as needs across the Minnesota dance community and perspectives around prioritizing anti-racism. Those who could not attend the community conversations were also given the option to complete the survey. Full survey questions are included in the appendix.

■ Focus groups

Acknowledging the unique needs and disparities faced by certain groups of dancers and creators, as well as existing tensions wrought from experiences of inequity and exclusion, Wilder facilitated two virtual focus groups for dancers in greater Minnesota and dancers of the Global Majority. These focus groups were intended to provide a space for participants to connect with one another and share their perspectives on the dance community in a safe space.

ANALYSIS

This project was a mixed methods design. Each method of data collection required its own specific analytic approaches, resulting in an array of different data sets across various modalities. Ultimately, we aggregated and synthesized several key themes and recommendations across the sources, through coding, sorting, categorizing, and refining. Additionally, some data components, such as quotes from storybanking and focus groups, trends from the survey, or illustrations from the graffiti walls, were pulled out separately to support triangulation and improve credibility and validity of the outcomes. The resulting findings are presented below.

Community feedback

The themes in this section represent key findings about supportive infrastructure, prominent needs, equity, and organizational models. These findings were derived from all activities and methods utilized during the engagement process, including the community conversations, storytelling activity, online survey, and focus groups. Community members who participated in data collection activities embody a wide variety of roles, including administration, development, directors, dancers, and choreographers. Direct quotes from participants in the dance community are also included in this section. The full list of selected quotes is included in the appendix.

SUPPORTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE AND STRENGTHS

Members of the dance community provided their perspectives on what is currently working well within the Minnesota dance ecosystem and infrastructure, as well as the instrumental supports they have received in the past. These insights may be useful in helping a service organization build on and reinforce existing strengths.

I feel very grateful to be from here and grateful that Minnesota is able to be one of the best places that provides opportunities for artists and dancers in the country.

A common source of support and strength that was mentioned was the Minnesota dance and performing arts community itself. Community members shared their appreciation for the support and advocacy they have received from others in the dance community, as well as the community connections they have relied on to gain access to resources, relationships, and opportunities that contributed to the growth of their practice. Numerous anecdotes were shared about mentors and knowledge-holders that have expanded the scope of their artistic creation, as well as their professional capacity through skills around production, entrepreneurship, and administration. This reliance on community was especially evident during the rural and BIPOC focus groups, in which participants described how they derived strength and resilience from their peers despite facing unique barriers and challenges.

Several respondents to the storybanking activity also spoke highly about their experiences participating in fellowships and residencies and being commissioned by organizations in Minnesota, noting how validated and supported they felt pursuing their artistic vision.

PROMINENT NEEDS OF THE DANCE COMMUNITY

DANCERS WANT MORE SPACES TO EXPERIMENT AND CREATE

A common theme expressed throughout the engagement process was a desire for more low-stakes opportunities to showcase work at different stages, get exposure to other kinds of dance, and gather with community “without an agenda.” Some community members shared that they are looking for accessible, casual spaces in which the goal is not formal performance, but rather to gather people and allow them to connect deeply with one another and freely explore dance and movement. Several artists also noted that these spaces should be experimental, with a stated purpose of getting exposed to and increasing understanding of different types of dance.

Community members commonly emphasized the importance of accessible co-presentation in creating a supportive space for feedback and deep engagement of creators’ work. Many people uplifted existing opportunities, such as Red Eye Theater, as well as institutions that no longer operate but would greatly benefit the dance community if similar models were revived – namely Patrick’s Cabaret, Intermedia Arts, and 9x22 Dance/Lab.

We want a hub! More empty spaces to gather and truly connect. Possible co-creation residences, opportunities to exchange and work with others.

Throughout the engagement process, some community members also floated the idea of a touring network or circuit to exchange performances and workshops between dancers across Minnesota. This concept was explored more in-depth during the greater Minnesota focus group, in which a touring model was described as going in multiple directions, to both encourage travel between greater Minnesota and the Twin Cities metro area and between cities within greater Minnesota. Focus group participants emphasized a “spider web” model in which networks are nurtured across the state, rather than a “spokes on a wheel” model in which activities emanate out from the Twin Cities.

Minnesota dance creators are hungry for more support for existing and new spaces focused on informal experimentation and crafting of work, not just for developing their dance practice, but also to build the community, trust, and relationships necessary for a thriving, sustained dance ecosystem.

INCREASED AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT IS NEEDED WITHIN THE DANCE COMMUNITY AND ACROSS THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Dancers and creators are struggling to build and maintain their audience bases and are looking for increased support for creative, collaborative approaches to expand the

community of people who know about and attend their performances. Community members noted that some of this expansion can occur within the dance community itself. Participants in the community conversations suggested increased cross-pollination and cross-promotion of each other's work. Some discussed performance-based strategies, such as cross-discipline shows, as well as more administrative strategies like creating a central audience database. Many community members held the perspective that artists and disciplines are generally siloed, which limits audience bases as a result, and questioned how dancers and artists can show up for each other and care for one another across these silos. Several people also mentioned increasing collaboration between dance and other performing arts, such as theater and music.

It is important to note, however, that complete cross-pollination of audiences should not be the goal, as not all performance is intended for all audiences equally. While creators with marginalized and invisibilized identities may strive to reach more of their community, they may lack the institutional support to fully do so as a result of legacies of systemic discrimination. As one participant of the BIPOC focus group shared: *"I'm not necessarily speaking to non-Black folks when I create or express or present, but I would appreciate for non-Black people to spread the word to others who could benefit from knowing that this work exists and where we are, giving us traffic."*

Another approach to audience development that was commonly mentioned is developing creative, accessible opportunities for the public to attend performances and get exposed to artists' work. Community members uplifted a variety of ideas, including a dance season pass, dance "art crawl," a summer festival that showcases dancers from across the state, and an audience-facing resource to help prospective viewers find shows they are interested in. Participants in the greater Minnesota focus group noted that audience development looks different based on geography and may require alternative strategies and further intentionality when aiming to bring dancers together.

[I want a] world in which dance is seen, known, and respected by those who dance and those who do not.

Community members mentioned wanting to see more family-friendly performances in public spaces, such as parks, museums, and skyways, to increase visibility among the general public and generate interest in dance among non-dancers. Many educators discussed the importance of promoting dance education in schools and providing opportunities for youth to engage in and see themselves in dance. Lastly, in order to build a strong audience base that cares about dance, some artists suggested increasing communication between audiences and performers and facilitating more opportunities to interface with artists about the work itself.

DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES KNOW WHAT THEY NEED BUT ARE SEEKING CONNECTION AND COMMUNICATION

While there are challenges that impact the dance community as a whole, there is no one-size-fits-all solution that works for every dancer, genre, or group. Those in a certain community are the best people to identify their unique needs and figure out what path forward would work best for them. Throughout the engagement process, there was an expressed need for more **administrative support** to facilitate gatherings and discussions both for the dance community overall, as well as for **affinity group conversations** based on role, identity, style, or location. A few community members noted that these smaller conversations can allow for more in-depth discussion around the questions or issues specific to each group.

This feels like a big transition period for dance in the Twin Cities. People generally know who each other are but aren't necessarily collaborating or in conversation more deeply.

Additionally, many community members emphasized the importance **of in-person community-wide gatherings** and noted the opportunities it creates for connection, resource-sharing, and idea generation, including those located in greater Minnesota. There is an expressed desire for more administrative support around facilitating large-group convenings to “connect the dots” between various affinity groups and discuss community-wide needs. Some community members suggested holding an annual in-person conference for the dance community that moves to a different region of Minnesota each year. Also discussed by several people was the creation of a **Minnesota dance directory, database, or mapping resource** to make it easier to find and connect with others in the community.

DANCERS ARE SEEKING UNDERSTANDING AND RESPECT

Many community members expressed a desire for increased understanding of and respect for their work, their community, and dance as a whole. There is a need for deeper engagement and learning among dancers themselves, as well as broader arts spaces, funders, and the general public to develop and communicate narratives that truly reflect dance creators and their work. Some community members described wanting to build an appreciation of dance among the public and non-dancers and a recognition of the role of dance in people's daily lives. Others said that a “better orientation towards dance as an art form” is needed among funders and arts organizations such as regional arts boards and councils.

The need for more respect and understanding was a prominent theme throughout the focus groups in particular. Attendees of both focus groups mentioned that they feel funders lack sufficient knowledge of their modality or style, resulting in their work being overlooked. Dancers and creators in greater Minnesota discussed wanting to generate increased understanding among the Twin Cities dance community regarding rural dance as a whole, but also the unique lens through which rural artists create and the conditions under which rural dance is happening.

Participants in the BIPOC focus group also described experiencing a lack of recognition of their discipline from many audiences and other dance artists, as well as a limited perspective of what kinds of work are seen as valuable. One participant talked about the complexities of towing the line between creating dance inside and outside of institutions – while there is an understanding that participating in certain conventions can allow more access to more funding and mainstream recognition, it is difficult to “try to institutionalize something that wasn’t created in an institution,” nor should that be the goal. Some focus group attendees also discussed feeling as though work that challenges white supremacy and dominant culture, asks difficult questions, and interrogates power dynamics is not supported, but is also not protected by institutions and people with the privilege to do so. BIPOC dancers are looking for respect, but they are also seeking the safety and backing to be able to express themselves fully through their art.

It's about [being able to] create empathy and connection across the community when the dominant worldview is not centered. Culture-shifting is being able to move communities towards the perspectives, worldviews, and foundational pillars of the ways people of color make work. We need the versatility and flexibility to be able to appreciate, lift up, honor, and receive work that is not necessarily in the dominant worldview.

Lastly, dancers, particularly those who create and perform outside Western aesthetics, need more support with building narratives through a lens that aligns with the one with which the work was created. A few community members mentioned wanting to see more writers engage with the local dance landscape to bring more visibility to the art, but also to help audiences connect and understand more deeply with performances and artists, but also with other communities and people more broadly.

THE DANCE COMMUNITY IS IN NEED OF A CULTURAL SHIFT

Throughout the engagement process, there were several themes that emerged centered around shifting community perceptions in terms of how the dance community operates, but also what “counts” as dance and how dance can move beyond the paradigm of performance. Many community members shared questions around how the conception

of dance can be expanded. One community member mentioned wanting to build a “holistic view of dance as an art and spiritual practice,” noting the “value of movement independent of money.” Others shared similar sentiments, uplifting the inherent worth of dance as a practice everyone can participate in and benefit from independent of traditional markers of success.

Attendees of the BIPOC focus group in particular highlighted the work they have done to deconstruct both what achievement means to them and “what it is to be seen.” Several community members also emphasized the idea of expanding the types of spaces dance can take place beyond proscenium stages.

Also discussed by many dancers and creators was a cultural shift around how the dance community supports itself. There was ample conversation around how, despite the scarcity of resources, the dance community can lean into and embrace “**ecosystem thinking.**” Though it seems that the majority of dance artists are engaged in constant struggle for the means to create and sustain their practice, there is a desire among many to work towards a community in which resources are more readily pooled and people are more heavily invested in others’ success. However, because systemic barriers have resulted in unequal distribution of resources, this collaborative mindset will also necessitate deeper interrogation of existing power structures to truly uplift those who have been overlooked and underserved by institutions.

A way to culture shift to really think about it as an ecosystem and that we need each other. [Thinking about] what you have to change personally, or what do you have to cede for communal thriving.

ADDITIONAL NEEDS MENTIONED

The following section describes needs that were elevated by community members but were not discussed as frequently or as in-depth as those listed above. These themes are nonetheless important to include to communicate a more comprehensive understanding of prominent community needs. They are summarized below.

Role-specific mentorship and training

Mentorship and training were cited by many community members as integral to success for those who received it and a significant need for those who have not. There were several specific roles that were elevated as those that would benefit greatly from targeted support, mentorship, training, and facilitated discussions. These roles included dance educators, administrators, presenters and curators, and newcomers to Minnesota. Along these lines, general dance-focused career support was also mentioned by several

Organizational models

There are a variety of service models an organization can pursue, and it is important that the model utilized is informed by the community to ensure effectiveness and sustainability. During the second and third community convenings, attendees were asked to discuss potential service models and share preliminary perspectives based on the expressed needs of community members. Small groups were given a list of models and asked to choose one or two models, or identify a model not listed, and discuss the pros and cons of each in terms of how effective they would be at addressing core issues and needs of the dance community. The findings for each potential model only include the perspectives of the groups that chose to discuss that model and, thus, may not represent the opinions of the entire group.

Please note that because these discussions occurred early in the overall process during the phase of identifying needs, these findings are not intended to be prescriptive, but rather to provide initial insight into what internal structural elements of a service organization are important to community members. Further conversation should be had before moving forward with a specific service model, as noted in the recommendations section.

ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS DISCUSSED

MODEL 1 – ROTATING BOARD OF 8-10 PEOPLE TO LEAD WORK

Leaders are nominated by their own communities and would uplift their communities' needs within the organization

Attendees that discussed this model emphasized the need to create buy-in from community members for effective leadership to occur. Some suggested that boards have a minimum term so that they can build buy-in. One group noted that service on the board would have to be framed in a way that helps community members feel as though it is an important part of their self-advocacy as artists and creators. People also saw potential in a rotating board allowing a variety of perspectives and backgrounds to be present on the leadership team but foresaw challenges in ensuring the board is as representative of the diverse Minnesota dance community as possible and that leaders are not tokenized for their identity.

Challenging to ensure that everyone is represented, but it would be the dance community in those roles.

A representative model is healthy because our dance community is diverse. We could have cohorts that represent different populations.

MODEL 2 – AFFINITY GROUP/WORKING GROUP MEMBERSHIPS

Working groups focus on carrying out work in a certain area (funding and grant writing, marketing and promotion, arts-based partnerships, etc.)

Participants felt a potential benefit of this model is that it could allow a variety of perspectives to emerge in each facet of the work. Some expressed concerns about capacity and sustainability without an existing framework to support the work of multiple working groups. They were also concerned that meeting times and decision-making structures would be inaccessible and favor the schedules of certain artists over others.

Wide range of values could emerge and expand notions of who gets to dance, what dance is, what dance is doing.

Have concerns about capacity. Without a pre-existing organizational structure, it would be really hard.

MODEL 3 – CO-OP

Membership-based co-op in which all members have access to certain shared resources and have equal voice in making decisions and setting priorities

Those that discussed this model enjoyed the idea that everyone would have an equal voice and equal decision-making power, which could help uplift less recognized and underserved groups or artists. Attendees also liked the possibility of shared resources and administrative support through a co-op model. One group suggested a small annual membership to give people a sense of ownership and accountability. However, there were also concerns brought up about the unequal distribution of labor falling onto certain people tasked with upholding and sustaining the co-op structure.

Consortium model – the idea of having dance-centered cooperatives that share resources, expertise, audience development, and fundraising.

Would the co-op be used as a form of holding space or holding space to take action? What would good facilitation of a co-op model look like? How do we engage folks who are not currently engaged? Mapping the ecosystem of dance, acknowledging where it feels relevant for folks to step in and out of the "dance community."

MODEL 4 – PARTNER ORGANIZATION MANAGEMENT

Centralized dance “hub” is created and housed under an existing organization. Dancers and/or leaders work with organization staff to provide resources and opportunities for development and community-building

Attendees listed a variety of pros to this model, including that it offers the opportunity to build from existing structures and organizations rather than creating something from scratch, as well as that it encourages partnership and collaboration with other entities in Minnesota. Potential partner organizations mentioned include Springboard for the Arts, DanceMN, Arts Midwest, and the regional arts councils. Small groups also brought up concerns about this model such as a lack of transparency around decision-making and the hurdle of generating sufficient buy-in from organization leaders to commit to building out support specifically for dance.

[This model] may be the most feasible. It would be easier to utilize the resources that are already there rather than building something totally new.

There are leaders in communities all over the state. Can we use a system that already exists (like regional arts councils) to connect the dots? Regional art councils already know who's in their community.

OTHER MODELS DISCUSSED

Participants also came up with other suggestions for service models, with some hybridizing multiple of the above models by incorporating elements of each. One prominent idea that emerged was the creation of chapters or branches of a service organization in different areas of the state, similar to the structure of the regional arts councils. This arrangement, according to attendees, could allow for each geography to engage and co-create locally, while also being connected to an umbrella organization that addresses statewide needs and shares resources across all regions.

Connected with cultural community centers statewide, centered (physically) in cities.

“Satellite” idea – different arms that are connected.

CONCERNS ABOUT A SERVICE ORGANIZATION

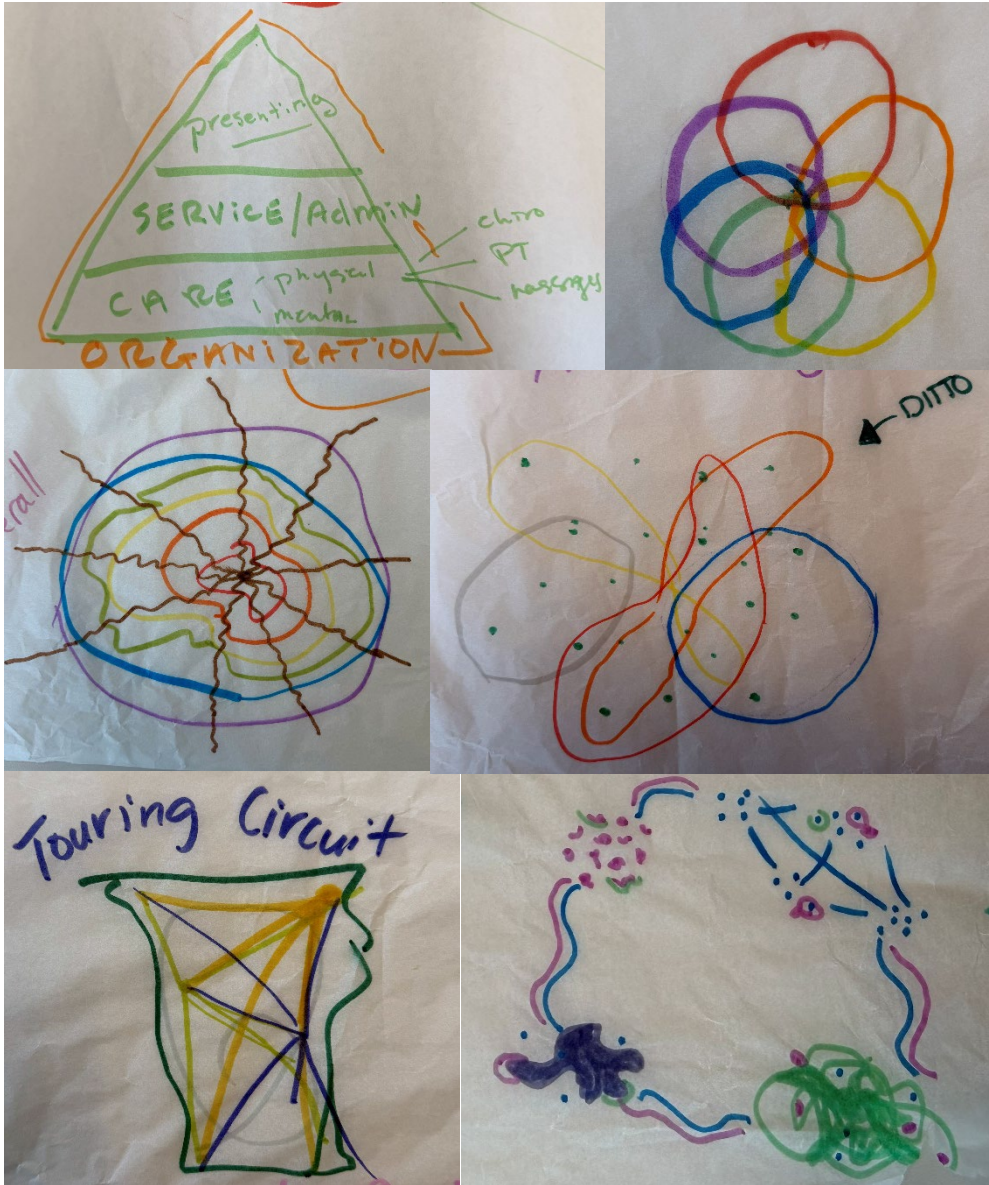
Throughout the discussions about models, some also expressed broader concerns about the creation of a dance service organization. Several community members reported feeling wary that the development and maintenance of a new organization would divert needed resources away from artists themselves. Similarly, a few people were apprehensive that a service organization structure would be unbalanced and result in creators in the community not receiving funding granted to the organization. Another concern was the limited capacity of many in the dance community presently and the potential for a service organization to add additional labor and stress.

Some of the community members with these sentiments noted their preference for building upon and expanding the capacity of existing organizations and institutions in Minnesota and strengthening current systems rather than creating a new organization. Further discussion is needed to chart a path forward that best services the Minnesota dance community and is most effective at meeting prominent needs.

[Focus on the] system rather than a service organization.

We want to support with capacity, but many dance artists work in the gig economy and/or have their own artistic commitments, so we don't have the capacity to lend to another organization.

No one organization could adequately serve all communities - Twin Cities, greater MN, BIPOC, others. Costs of starting up one singular organization would be exorbitant.



Drawn responses to the graffiti wall activity. Participants were asked: What does a thriving, supportive dance community look like to you? What features do you envision for a dance community service and support organization?

Recommendations

SCOPE, PRIORITIES, AND FOCUS

Through the engagement process, a wide variety of needs and wants were expressed by approximately 100 community members who provided feedback in some way. It is clear that no one organization can address every need or solve every issue that dancers are currently facing. Based on community feedback, Wilder offers several recommendations for actionable, realistic priorities an early service organization can pursue.

- **Act as a connector to uplift existing community strengths.** The Minnesota dance landscape remains a vibrant, caring community that has important resources. However, these resources may not be well known or are not invested in. A common sentiment that became apparent throughout the convenings was that people learn about and share resources when they have the opportunity to connect with one another. Rather than focusing on developing new services from scratch, a service organization should take stock of the resources, networks, and spaces that already exist and work to expand their reach to those that could benefit from them.
- **Engage in relationship-building with existing arts institutions.** Community members were energized by the idea of expanding upon the services of existing arts organizations, such as the Springboard Tool Library, DanceMN newsletter, and infrastructure of the regional arts councils. A service organization should identify people to facilitate conversations with arts institutions to make the case for increased targeted support for dance and what internal support would be required to build organizations' capacity to do so.
- **Engage in relationship-building with funders, cultural organizations, schools, and local governments.** The Minnesota dance community has a strong sense of how dance and movement benefits people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds. A service organization should develop a core narrative that promotes a deeper understanding of dance and use it to deepen the perceived value of dance to both arts and non-arts funders, local cultural organizations, schools and universities, local governments, and the state legislature. This outreach could be done by liaisons that lay the groundwork for increased support and investment from these organizations.
- **Provide administrative support for both community-wide conversations and specific affinity group gatherings.** Continue the momentum of the three community convenings by facilitating spaces in which people can connect with one another, but also gather with an expressed goal of getting feedback on a specific topic or coming to community consensus on important questions. Partner with different organizations in order to host discussions at a variety of locations, times, days of the week, and

modalities to ensure convenings are as accessible as possible. Additionally, a service organization should provide administrative support for regular affinity group gatherings. Perform targeted outreach to see which groups are interested in developing affinity groups, as well as which groups are already convening regularly and offer support where needed.

- **Prioritize generating low-stakes performance and learning opportunities.** A service organization should seek to ensure all dancers feel they have spaces to experiment, nourish their creativity, and cross-pollinate with other artists. Work to identify spaces that could facilitate casual events, with a focus on spotlighting less-established artists and creators with marginalized or underserved identities and genres. Additionally, a service organization should uplift spaces that are already doing this work in their communities. Ensure that support offered is informed by community leaders and aligns with their creative vision.
- **Strive to develop audiences both within and outside the dance community.** Facilitate conversations with dancers, company directors, and curators to establish community-wide goals to develop audiences within the dance community, with an objective to increase exposure to different types of dance. Prioritize directing resources towards amplifying and supporting smaller companies, non-Western styles, and performances located outside the Metro area. Work to build relationships with trusted community-based journalists and writers to cover these performances. Additionally, a service organization may want to engage in outreach with local parks and governments to put on free or accessible dance events for the general public. These relationships, along with relationships with other arts organizations and funders, may lay groundwork for the development of larger dance festivals or season passes.
- **Commit to interrogating and dismantling white supremacy culture within the dance community.** A service organization should encourage and facilitate regular gatherings and activities for white spaces to engage in difficult conversations about breaking down dominant narratives about success, credibility, and prestige. Increase opportunities for diversity and anti-racism training for dance leaders. These efforts should be made with the objective of producing a tangible outcome in which those with more power and privilege utilize their resources to benefit marginalized artists, such as through the creation of a mutual aid fund or a commitment to promoting lesser-known artists in their networks.

ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL

Further discussion, visioning, and planning are needed to identify an effective model for a dance service organization. However, based on the community perspectives gathered, Wilder can offer preliminary recommendations about the structural elements of an organization that may be best oriented towards the expressed goals and needs of the dance community. Please note that while these recommendations are being made within the framework of a traditional service organization, as this was the context in which this project was developed, Wilder is not recommending this as the sole pathway forward and recognizes that through future conversation, the community may decide against the development of a new service organization.

- **Implement a rotating board to lead community-building efforts.** Develop a nomination process for leaders to be uplifted by their communities and install a one-year minimum length of service. Define board responsibilities such as acting as a connector between communities through administrative support; strengthening relationships and understanding between different groups; and facilitating gatherings for discussion, fellowship, and group decision-making. Board members should be committed to cultivating an anti-racist dance community, fostering awareness of power dynamics, and minimizing disparities in resources and support in the context of the service organization.
- **Create an umbrella entity that works to expand dance-related services through other organizations.** Identify leaders or working groups to build relationships and liaison with organizations across the state such as arts-based nonprofits, arts funders, and local governments to explore how to build out their capacity and resources to provide services specifically for dancers. Leaders should work with the rotating board to ensure resources are effectively communicated and that individuals and communities are connected to needed services.
- **Develop engagement hubs in greater Minnesota.** Identify leaders or working groups to spearhead “satellites” of the service organization in different regions across Minnesota to create targeted spaces and resources for rural dance while also being structurally connected to a central organization. Assign liaisons from both the Twin Cities metro area and greater Minnesota to exchange dialogue and maintain relationships to and from each region.
- **Serve as a funding source for the broader dance community.** Raise funds through grants and donor development and disburse through multiple mechanisms that ensure equitable sharing of resources across Minnesota dancers.

TRANSITION TO ACTION PHASE AND CONTINUAL ENGAGEMENT

As stated previously, this engagement process is intended to be a first step towards the creation of a dance-centric entity that serves artists and creators from across the state. Further engagement is needed to build upon the needs identified through this step of the process and begin to take action based on community input. Wilder can offer the following recommendations for next steps:

- **Host follow-up community conversations to gather feedback on the findings and recommendations included in this report.** Create space for community members to react to the report, share agreements and disagreements, and include additional considerations. Facilitate discussions with the goal of coming to a consensus on preliminary priorities and goals of the service organization.
- **Initiate community dialogue to identify people who can commit to leading the next phase of work** and develop a method for leaders to be vetted by community.
- **Engage in intentional relationship- and trust-building with BIPOC and rural artists.** Ground conversations in shared values and goals while acknowledging past harms and validating others' experiences. Take stock of who is and is not present in spaces and commit to understanding why.
- **Identify people to evaluate other models locally and in other states.** Assess what didn't work about past models and identify elements to emulate from successful organizations.

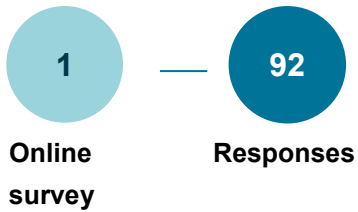
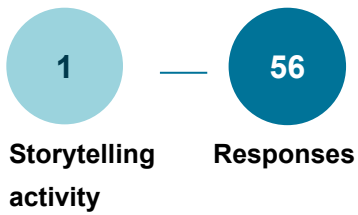
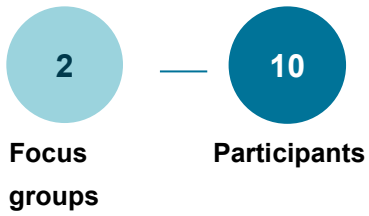
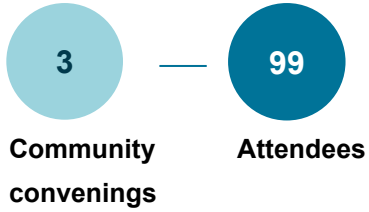
Generosity [is] to be the heart of this future organization.

We have to light the fire. Our sticks are too far apart to catch the spark. We need more spaces (kindling), money, and flames to fan!

More events like this [community conversation]. In-person fellowship and support. We are strong when we remember our common goals, loves, and can inspire each other.

Appendix

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT BY THE NUMBERS



QUOTES BANK

The following section contains selected quotes from throughout the engagement process that provide additional insight into community members' perspectives on the key findings identified in the report.

SUPPORTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE AND STRENGTHS

[The] dance community cares for each other.

I feel very grateful to be from here and grateful that Minnesota is able to be one of the best places that provide opportunities for artists and dancers in the country.

When I have felt most supported was when an organization is willing to support not just me, but the community that I work with. That is when it has felt the richest. I'm able to push the boundaries of the dance form.

[My mentor] always highlighted my gifts and encouraged me to continue to use those gifts. It was very important as a woman of color to have another woman of color who was supportive.

DANCERS WANT MORE SPACES TO EXPERIMENT AND CREATE

We want a hub! More empty spaces to gather and truly connect. Possible co-creation residences, opportunities to exchange and work with others.

[There used to be] hubs where you could go and experiment. There were new curators every week, always something to see and do. I felt like I was chewing on dance and was in conversation about dance. Now, dance kind of feels like a hobby. [There were places] I was able to ... be seen and witness and process, not just as a product.

Would love ... to try on other people's movement ideas in a low-stakes way. There's a sense of feeling disconnected/not rooted as a community right now and a desire for ... more innovation and spaces to challenge one another and address sociopolitical challenges.

Where are the longer processes? Focusing on making and growing rather than producing and product.

INCREASED AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT IS NEEDED WITHIN THE DANCE COMMUNITY AND ACROSS THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Genres are siloed - jazz supports jazz, modern supports modern.

Dance is the baby of the arts and very fragile. Can we connect the silos?

The dance community feels pretty siloed in terms of different styles of dance and connection to other arts like theater. [Feels] like an outsider to the broader Twin Cities dance community despite trying to show up to community events. The audiences feel small at many events. It can be hard for [non-Western styles] to appeal to the broader community.

[I want a] world in which dance is seen, known, and respected by those who dance and those who do not.

More community involvement. I want to see more people going to shows that know nothing about dance. More involvement in schools. I want to see the general public excited about dance.

There is more to do to reach people to engage in the work. Especially if there is cultural specificity. In my work that's very vectored, there's many layers. It often feels lonely when there's no deeper engagement in your work.

DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES KNOW WHAT THEY NEED BUT ARE SEEKING CONNECTION AND COMMUNICATION

Trust the spaces that are already working to build communities of color in dance, and multiracial communities. They have knowledge and experience on the ground.

We need intentional community gatherings. There is a lot of opportunity in communication when [we come] together.

This feels like a big transition period for dance in the Twin Cities. People generally know who each other are but aren't necessarily collaborating or in conversation more deeply.

Administrative support and space to facilitate conversation and discussion between different organizations so that we are able to build better pipelines for performers and teachers of the next generation.

DANCERS ARE SEEKING UNDERSTANDING AND RESPECT

Funders lump all arts [together]. More dialogue between funders and artists/companies.

[We need] education on what dance is and could be. Funding panels don't have enough information to evaluate dance. [We face] challenges with regional arts councils that are not familiar with our form.

There's this narrative that, if you want to be successful you get out of rural Minnesota. We're not in these places because we're failed artists. We choose to be in these places.

Everything I do as an independent artist is facilitated by my place. Rural folks are super resourceful and innovative. The way we design projects is very different. Community relationships are a huge factor for the success of your work. My work is site-specific, and I wouldn't choose to do it anywhere else.

Rural dance ... practice is rigorous. Our artistry is strong and impactful. I wish people would intentionally curate rural artists. I want my work in rural spaces, but I also want folks in the Twin Cities to see my perspective through my art. ... Greater Minnesota is not a place that needs to be saved or have the service of your tour. I want to see us celebrated.

When we write a grant, we have no idea who's reviewing it. Sometimes I see diversity, [but] a lot of times we get overlooked because of a lack of understanding and connection to our work, our culture.

I think we're in a day and age where the attention span is smaller. People want things to be flashier. Exploring something in depth is not as popular because people's desires for it is not as high. There is not as much support, even though that's the kind of work that is pushing what dance is and expanding what people should be taking away from art.

It's important to think about where we're at in terms of our perspectives and what is considered beautiful. What do we do to ask questions in our work? How do you flood the industry or our communities with different kinds of voices to amplify intercultural exchanges? Even if we are in a predominantly white institution, you can still be unapologetically yourself. [What are] the lineages that have created the systems that need to be disrupted? It's not even exclusion, it's erasure.

It's about [being able to] create empathy and connection across the community when the dominant worldview is not centered. Culture-shifting is being able to move communities towards the perspectives, worldviews, and foundational pillars of the ways people of color make work. We need the versatility and flexibility to be able to appreciate, lift up, honor, and receive work that is not necessarily in the dominant worldview.

Partnering with cultural organizations to support the networks that generate dance forms, instead of just inviting individuals to join white dance spaces.

THE DANCE COMMUNITY IS IN NEED OF A CULTURAL SHIFT

Having folks in rural areas be open to their definition of dance changing. What does it look like, and who gets to do it? Having that invitation or excitement. A draw to stepping out of your comfort zone. Some kind of recognition for doing that work. A space that we can seek out as its own valuable, worthy thing.

The ability to break away from conventional norms about who should or who may dance, and where and when. All the hours that schools and shopping malls are sitting empty could be shared spaces for the arts, not just dance. Unusual uses of space and time would invigorate other populations, say nursing homes, public libraries, prisons, or shelters.

Thinking about how people turn spaces that are not necessarily meant to be "dance spaces" and make things happen in them. There is less funding and communal support in [other places] but also more people just doing things they want to do artistically, rather than trying to fit within the framework of what seems possible.

Dance is happening everywhere, all the time. Not just in studios but on the street, in school, in the grocery store, everywhere!

I do feel there is a need for some education of what dominant culture in dance is, how we participate in it, how people are implicated in it, what it means to cede, what it means to use the resources you have to benefit people of color.

A way to culture shift to really think about it as an ecosystem and that we need each other. [Thinking about] what you have to change personally, or what do you have to cede for communal thriving.

[I want to see] collaborative resourcing (funding, venues, initiatives) for the goal of greater impact and visibility beyond the dance community take precedent over competition for opportunities and funding inside the community.

I would change how we compete. Resources are scarce and competition is stiff, and the culture needs to appreciate the abundance and find where we can share things with each other.

SURVEY QUESTIONS AND DATA

Some percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

A1. What are aspects of community-building that a dance advocacy organization could offer that you feel would be effective? (N=90-92)

	1 (Not effective)		2		3		4		5 (Very effective)		Overall rating
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Dance calendar/newsletter of upcoming shows and events	6	7%	6	7%	13	14%	15	16%	51	56%	4.1
Affinity group gatherings for different roles in the community	3	3%	6	7%	13	14%	24	27%	44	49%	4.1
Contact list/directory to facilitate networking	4	4%	5	5%	18	20%	22	24%	43	47%	4.0
Monthly community-wide dance gatherings for networking	4	4%	9	10%	30	33%	20	22%	28	31%	3.6

Note. Respondents were asked to rate each option from 1 to 5, where 1 is not effective and 5 is very effective.

Key findings

90% of respondents rated affinity group gatherings a 3 or higher.

90% of respondents rated a contact list or directory a 3 or higher.

85% of respondents rated monthly community-wide gatherings a 3 or higher.

A2. How would you want to regularly give input and suggestions to a dance advocacy organization? (N=90)

	#	%
Short pulse survey	62	69%
In-person town hall or gathering	58	64%
Virtual town hall or gathering	49	54%
Host discussion with your organization, submit input as a collective	35	39%

Note. Respondents were asked to select all options that apply.

A3. What community-wide resources would be most effective for a dance advocacy organization to offer? (N=82-84)

	Rank 1		Rank 2		Rank 3		Rank 4		Overall ranking
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Maintain ongoing relationships with other arts-based institutions	32	38%	21	25%	19	23%	12	14%	1
Offer educational programming on arts-based survival strategies	24	29%	25	30%	17	20%	17	20%	2
Gather and share grant/fellowship opportunities	21	25%	18	22%	24	29%	20	24%	3
Gather and share information about available spaces/venues	10	12%	18	22%	22	27%	32	39%	4

Note. Respondents were asked to rank all options from top choice to bottom choice, where rank 1 is most effective and rank 4 is least effective.

Key finding

63% of respondents ranked maintaining relationships with arts-based institutions as their first or second priority.

A4. In what areas should a dance advocacy organization focus on promoting and sustaining dance? (N=85-86)

	Rank 1		Rank 2		Rank 3		Rank 4		Overall ranking
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Advocacy for public funding at the legislature	34	40%	26	31%	18	21%	7	8%	1
Marketing of dance in broader arts and culture spaces	27	31%	32	37%	12	14%	15	17%	2
Dance education in schools, studios, parks, etc.	15	18%	15	18%	30	35%	25	29%	3
Continued education for dance professionals	11	13%	13	15%	25	28%	36	42%	4

Note. Respondents were asked to rank all options from top choice to bottom choice, where rank 1 is most effective and rank 4 is least effective

Key findings

71% of respondents ranked advocacy for public funding at the legislature as their first or second priority.

69% of respondents ranked marketing of dance in broader arts and culture spaces as their first or second priority.

A5. Express in one or two words: What does the Minnesota dance community need more of? (Open-ended)

A6. What kinds of opportunities or actions would you want to participate in or see offered in order to promote anti-racism within the dance community? (Open-ended)

A7. Besides more funding, if you could wave a magic wand, what is one thing you would change or add to the Minnesota dance landscape? (Open-ended)

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