

# State of NYC Dance 2023: Findings from the Dance Industry Census EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

In 2019, Dance/NYC began to conceptualize the fifth iteration of its research initiative the State of NYC Dance. While the organization had an established precedent for researching the dance sector and the inequities it experiences, previous studies only considered the sector through a nonprofit institutional lens, excluding individual workers and a subset of diverse financial structures (like sole proprietorships and LLCs) that are central to how the dance industry and its workers operate. This nonprofit-centric approach was a narrow lens through which to study the sector. Then in 2020, as organizational priorities shifted, the pandemic arrived, and a racial reckoning occurred, Dance/NYC even more strongly committed to centering individual workers in sector-wide initiatives.

As a result, the *State of NYC Dance 2023* report generated the *Dance Industry Census*, a first-of-its-kind effort to count every dance worker and dance entity in the New York City metropolitan area. The study's primary goal was to gather a critical mass of information on the economic realities of individuals and entities working in the sector, to better understand their relationships to one another, and to more accurately capture their stories.

**[The *Dance Industry Census* engaged significant proportions of individual workers and entities through its iterative mixed-method research approach. About 27% of the estimated 6,000 dance workers and 23% of the estimated 1,700 entities provided survey responses. In addition to survey input, nearly 250 dance workers provided input at seven in-person and two virtual roundtable events. The study was also supported by two advisory groups: The Dance Workforce Resilience 2022 Task Force and the 2023 DWR Advisory Group.]**

## KEY FINDINGS

The NYC dance industry is contending with systemic inequity, changing audience participation, and ever-evolving revenue models. Despite a level of fragility, dance workers, organizations, groups, projects, and businesses continue to create and share work with audiences and participants via many means, benefiting from strong connections to education and health sectors. Passionate dance workers persist in a project-based, freelance world, caught between opposing societal forces, navigating pandemic challenges, and enduring financial insecurity.

### 1. New York City dance is more diverse than the arts workforce but less diverse than New York City as a whole.

- The Census pool is majority Cisgender woman (74%), Millennial (65%), and non-Immigrant (83%).
- However, Census takers are more diverse than the New York City nonprofit arts workforce in terms of BIPOC (46%), Transgender/non-binary/not Cisgender (19%) and LGBTQIA+ (50%) representation, as per 2019 data collected by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. That research includes demographic data for 7,000 workers at a set of nonprofit cultural organizations funded by New York City.

### 2. Dance production, presentation, education, and administration are present in a broad diversity of virtual and physical places.

- While dance work occurs throughout the greater City and region, the vast majority of dance workers (70%) and entities (68%) continue to be based in Manhattan and Brooklyn, consistent with previous Dance/NYC research.
- While many entities are headquartered in dance worker homes (66%), more than one-third of dance workers (39%) commute nearly an hour for dance work.
- They are most often working in public spaces and performance spaces, and in the digital realm via virtual programs.

### 3. Dance continues to contend with systemic inequity.

- The Census reflects gaps in how NYC dance understands and responds to white supremacy.
- Immigrant dance workers earn 30% less and have 22% less savings than US-born workers. Transgender, non-binary, and not Cisgender dance workers earn 40% less than Cisgender men. Disabled and BIPOC dance workers also have less savings. And more LGBTQIA+, disabled, and BIPOC dance workers filed for unemployment.
- While the Census reflects progress, particularly in terms of BIPOC representation in dance leadership roles, there is still more work to be done. Many entities (40%), do not maintain DEI policies, and 30% do not provide accessibility accommodations. Others address these issues in very narrow ways.

#### 4. The dance industry is deeply interconnected with education, health care, and wellness.

- NYC dance has strong connection and mutual exchange with other human-centered sectors.
- For example, more than half of dancers (54%) are also dance educators. And the majority (83%) of all dance entity offerings are education-based. Half of entities present work at educational sites like schools, colleges, and universities. The majority of dance workers who are union-affiliated are part of education unions (28%).
- And, outside of dance, workers most often do paid work in human service fields like education (28%), health care and wellness (23%), and leisure and hospitality (19%). All of these connections often allow workers to maintain a multiplicity of roles and skills.

#### 5. New York City dance is evolving in terms of content, entities, and workforce.

- Since the *2016 State of New York City Dance* research, and through the pandemic, the field has become focused on the creation and presentation of new work with 75% of entities producing dance from the ground up. It has also welcomed an influx of new entities with 10% having been established since 2020. For context, 40% are more than 20 years old.
- At the time data was collected in 2022, participation was also different, with 54% participating digitally. The workforce has also changed since 2016 with more BIPOC (48% vs 32% in 2016), disabled (8% vs 5% in 2016), Millennial (65% vs 35% in 2016), and LGBTQIA+ (50% vs 35% LGBT in 2016) representation.

#### 6. The dance industry continues to navigate the effects of the pandemic with fragility.

- Financial data collected in 2022 reflects the prior fiscal year when many continued to receive pandemic relief. With that support, the number of entities that ended their fiscal years with balanced budgets or surpluses was consistent with the year prior.
- Even still, higher reliance on contributed income (63% of revenue as compared to 55% in 2016), limited cash liquidity (56% do not hold a reserve/savings), self-reported weak financial health (40% classify financial health as weak or very weak), reduced average budget size, and reduced spending reflect ongoing uncertainty.
- The arts sector is now enduring new challenges as relief funding has been discontinued, participation and funding patterns have changed, and the economy continues to be weak.

## 7. Dance is not financially sustaining for most of its workers.

- Dance workers earn \$22 per hour on average, which is below the New York City living wage of about \$26 per hour. And many workers explain that true hourly rates are much lower than that due to long hours, travel time, and childcare costs.
- Nearly half (41%) worked in dance without pay last year and more than half (54%) supplement their income with work outside of the industry in order to make ends meet.
- Dancers and choreographers earn an average of \$23,000 per year from dance, which represents about 60% of their total income. Their earnings are the lowest of any other role in dance, with CEOs or equivalent leads earning \$80,000 on average.
- Overall, 64% of all entities reported not paying all personnel a living wage.

## 8. Despite challenging conditions, dance workers find their work fulfilling and choose to persevere.

- Dance workers continue to work in dance despite low pay, unreliable income, and an ongoing need to access and afford basic necessities like quality and affordable mental and physical health care.
- For example, most do not have access to mental health care (82%) or dental coverage (59%), over one-third do not have medical coverage (37%), and over one-third have not taken off a week or more in the last year (37%). Just under one-third have worked five or more jobs (29%) in the last year.
- Yet, the majority (70%) consider dance to be a permanent career even with limited access to resources. This endurance is perhaps related to “psychic” benefits that are not financial, as many feel purpose, community, and anchoring in their work. In fact, 81% of feelings named about work in dance are positive.

## 9. Dance work tends to be project-specific, independent, and freelance, and occurs with minimal resources and protections.

- Dance is full of freelancers and independent business owners who organize work by project. Nearly two-thirds (64%) work outside of typical business, funding, and employment structures and pay for some of their work from their own pockets.
- Many dance workers enjoy the flexibility and control involved in gig work but are at risk due to a lack of contracts (44% work without them), union protections (82% lack them), and other provisions.
- Low wages force many dance workers to work more than they would like to or should. Even though nearly one in three are freelance by choice, they are not able to choose preferred gigs or profit from their artistic output.

## 10. The dance industry is caught between opposing forces that affect how dance exists in society.

- The Census reflects a tension that dance workers and entities feel as they navigate a system that names the arts as “common goods” yet also as products that must be created and delivered sustainably within a capitalist marketplace.
- Absent certain conditions, including education, training, and resources, dance entities and workers then struggle between
  1. operating as a business with a structure that does not rely on donors or philanthropic support to sustainably deliver work to the marketplace (43% of entities) and
  2. operating under the ethos that dance must be produced regardless of available demand or resources.
- This is apparent as workers earn low wages, take personal risks to work in dance, create new entities in the midst of very challenging times, and have trouble navigating financial structures.

## KEY FINDINGS: WHAT INSIGHTS HAVE WE GAINED?

These findings reveal that New York City dance is **[integral]**, **[interdependent]**, and **[seeking thriving]**. The data tells the story of individuals and entities who navigate fragility and inequity with passion for and commitment to the work they do.

While entities engage workers to make and support New York City dance, they do so in the midst of uncertain and challenging financial circumstances and are often unable to properly support or care for their workers. Critically, the health and sustainability of the sector depend on the health and well-being of its workers—and these workers need to be tended to in order to ensure they can survive and thrive in dance. In short, the New York City dance industry is not just or sustainable, and it will require sector-wide, concerted, and intentional effort from each and every one of its stakeholders to advance its vision for the future—one that is focused on tenets of thriving, sustainability, equity, and justice.

## A VISION FOR NEW YORK CITY DANCE

as informed by data collected through the course of the *Dance Industry Census*

New York City dance aims to build a sustainable, equitable, and just future where its workers and entities can thrive.

Our New York City Dance is valued and protected as an **[integral]** part of community vibrancy. It is a form of cultural expression, a reflection of history and society, a provider of health and wellness, an economic driver, and a common good. It is widely accessible, inclusive, and present in daily life, bringing meaning and joy to people who live, work, and visit here.

In Our New York City Dance, the people who lead, make, share, support, and experience dance are able to be in relationship with each other, the land, and their artistry in accountable, **[interdependent]** ways that honor ancestry, correct for historic harms, provide opportunities in the present, and protect the future of those who are to come.

Whether involved for days or decades, people who work in Our New York City Dance are supported and cared for through equitable, inclusive, worker- and human-centered policies and practices. They are able to focus on their dance practice near where they live, and they are able to maintain healthy work-life balance, including strong connections to friends and family, and the ability to care for themselves and their families without stress or strain.

Our New York City Dance is a just, attainable, and sustainable profession that leads to **[thrivability]**—a life that moves beyond survival to encompass comfort, security, and ease—for its entities and workers as they move through their time in dance. It is flexible and innovative, creating opportunities to enter and leave a life in dance by choice not force. It upholds an ever-evolving churn of producing, presenting, programming, preservation, education, and participation similar to the constant churn, buzz, and vitality inherent in Our City.

Our New York City Dance is a vibrant, diverse, and evolving ecosystem that strengthens the local fabric of civic life.

Our New York City Dance is built on the ability to thrive.

**[Our New York City Dance is \_\_\_\_\_]** (What is your vision of Our New York City Dance?)

**[Our New York City Dance is YOU.]** Will you join us in building it?

## TAKING ACTION: GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE

To build thriving, Our New York City Dance will require change on three levels:

1. the ground level with regards to individuals and entities;
2. the sectoral level across the dance and arts industries; and
3. the systemic level across broader societal issues that impact all industries and workers.

As we move forward, we must continue to acknowledge the environment in which we are working. White supremacy and capitalism are the undergirdings that affect present-day life in the United States. We must consider the country's relationship to art and culture, its relationship to work and production, and the ways in which it does or does not value, personify, serve, and protect people and entities. Most importantly, we need to name the pivotal nature of this moment for dance. While many industries have stabilized since the start of the pandemic, the arts are experiencing a different phase of life given:

1. the discontinuation of pandemic relief funds,
2. declining private sector revenue, and
3. increased costs due to inflation and other factors.

This work, and resulting change, is more critical now than ever before.

With that context, the dance industry must work across stakeholders to advance its vision for the future through a series of actions that address its obstacles and create the future we hope for—one that is focused on the tenets of thriving, sustainability, equity, and justice. Regardless of role, everyone who touches the dance industry must contribute and take action to advance the future of Our New York City Dance.

## IMPACT AREA 1 LEGISLATION & POLICY

Build public awareness and galvanize support for change around key issues that impact the sustainability and health of the dance industry, including the centering of individual and collective well-being.

Legislative and policy strategies are focused on advocacy, lobbying, and community organizing to build public awareness, principally at a government level, in support of the sustainability and health of the dance industry, its entities, and its people.

### STAKEHOLDERS WITH LEVERAGE

Individuals:

- Government Policymakers
- Elected Officials
- Program Officers, Donor Advised Fund Managers & Donors
- Dance Makers
- Artistic Leads & Entity Leadership

Entities:

- Public Agencies
- Dance Service Providers
- Private Philanthropies
- Large Dance Entities

#### STRATEGY

##### Advocacy

Build public understanding and cross-sectoral support for dance as a common good by communicating its value, challenges, benefits, inner workings, and depth of impact on individuals, economy, and quality-of-life measures.

#### STRATEGY

##### Lobbying

Organize and empower entities and people to influence legislation that positively impacts and reduces burdens on the arts sector and its workers, such as fair wages, use of alternative business structures, tax law changes, unemployment insurance changes, arts education access, and other government resources and support.

#### STRATEGY

##### Dance Community Organizing

Mobilize and empower the dance industry to advocate for individuals, entities, and industry-wide sustainability.



## IMPACT AREA 2 FINANCIAL INCLUSION

Enhance funding practices and policies to expand the pool of available resources, widen the distribution of funds, reduce barriers to accessing support, and support investments in space for individual dance workers as well as dance entities.

Financial inclusion issues speak to fundamental changes in the level, type, and distribution of contributed income needed to sustain the New York City dance industry and its workers.

### STAKEHOLDERS WITH LEVERAGE

Individuals:

- Government Policymakers
- Elected Officials
- Program Officers, Donor Advised Fund Managers & Donors

Entities:

- Public Agencies
- Private Philanthropies
- Educational Institutions
- Dance Service Providers
- Small Dance Entities
- Mid-sized Dance Entities

#### STRATEGY

##### Equity-Centered Practices

Prioritize equity and justice within funding systems and processes.

#### STRATEGY

##### Programmatic Design & Eligibility

Adjust funding programs to improve access and benefits for dance workers and entities working in any and all structures.

#### STRATEGY

##### Funding Allocations & Pathways

Create policies, resources, and connections that build available funding for dance and more easily connect available funds to the right beneficiaries.

#### STRATEGY

##### Individual Giving

Develop programs to support individual giving in dance.

#### STRATEGY

##### Capital Funding

Support investments in space to enhance access to affordable space for dance, and to specifically support youth participation, geographic distribution of activity and workers, and access for disabled people.

## IMPACT AREA 3

### MODELS & FRAMEWORKS

Support the evolution of legal and financial structures and models that are used to make and serve dance, specifically creating and/or modifying singular or combinations of structures with goals of centering individuals and artistry, and creating opportunities for dance workers to retain ownership of their processes, instruments (physical or otherwise), and outputs.

A significant amount of dance work occurs outside formal models and frameworks. These structures can evolve to more effectively benefit dance workers and organized entities.

#### STAKEHOLDERS WITH LEVERAGE

Individuals:

- Program Officers, Donor Advised Fund Managers & Donors
- Artistic Leads & Entity Leadership

Entities:

- Public Agencies
- Private Philanthropies
- Dance Service Providers
- Educational Institutions

#### STRATEGY

##### New Structures

Examine the feasibility of and then implement viable new structures, including hybrid (i.e., use of two or more structures, such as nonprofit and LLC) and co-op models, to reduce barriers to funding, reduce expenses, reduce labor, and broaden engagement and reach.

#### STRATEGY

##### Existing Structures

Reframe the use of existing legal, fiscal, and operational structures to benefit individual workers, eliminate oppression, elevate artistry, and consider life cycles.

## IMPACT AREA 4 WELL-BEING & QUALITY OF LIFE

Prioritize resources to support the essential needs of dance workers, including living wages; mental and physical wellness and care for dance workers and their families; and fair labor and accountability standards to ensure safe, fair, and transparent working conditions free from oppression and discrimination.

Dance worker well-being and quality of life can be improved by creating programs and pathways to access services, resources, and conditions necessary to care for themselves and their families.

### STAKEHOLDERS WITH LEVERAGE

Individuals:

- Government Policy Makers
- Elected Officials

Entities:

- Public Agencies
- Dance Service Providers
- Large Dance Entities
- Private Funders & Donors

#### STRATEGY

##### Wage Standards

Create and advocate for a wage standards and benefits system that ensures that dance workers can support and care for themselves and their families in New York City.

#### STRATEGY

##### Accountability Practices

Develop accountability practices that ensure that members (individuals and entities) of the ecosystem adhere to standards of care and support thriving.

#### STRATEGY

##### Standards of Care

Create standards (e.g., a bill of rights) that give individual dance workers tools to protect their rights and safety in work environments.

#### STRATEGY

##### Life Management Resources

Develop and fund services that help dance workers manage business, personal, and family life.

## IMPACT AREA 5 EDUCATION

Enhance education and training programs for dance students and workers to focus on broader realities of the dance ecosystem, including the roots and history of dance; realities of living and working in dance; managing a life in dance; leading, administrating, and producing dance; justice, equity, and inclusion in dance; and the foundation of dance as a common good.

The education sector has great potential to inspire systemic, long-term change in dance by enhancing the training and skills of the foundational pipeline of audiences, dance workers, and leadership.

### STAKEHOLDERS WITH LEVERAGE

Individuals:

- Government Policymakers
- Program Officers, Donor Advised Fund Managers & Donors
- Educators & Educational Leadership

Entities:

- Public Agencies
- Private Philanthropies
- Dance Service Providers
- Educational Institutions

#### STRATEGY

##### K-12 Dance Education

Develop tools that support dance instruction in the K-12 general and special education settings, arts integration, and introduction of dance as a common good.

#### STRATEGY

##### Financial & Legal Literacy

Provide training and professional development that enhances understanding and effective use of the financial, legal, and tax issues, and structures that are used within the dance industry.

#### STRATEGY

##### Justice, Equity & Inclusion Training & Resources

Provide training and resources to address an identified knowledge gap in diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and accessibility in the dance field.

#### STRATEGY

##### Higher Ed Dance Education

Enhance dance education curriculum at colleges and universities to better prepare students for work in the broader dance industry.

#### STRATEGY

##### Leadership Development

Provide training and professional development to build leadership in dance.

#### STRATEGY

##### Other Technical Assistance

Expand dance-specific technical assistance programs to enhance skills and resources required to manage individual work in dance as well as administer dance projects and entities.

## IMPACT AREA 6 KNOWLEDGE & RESOURCE SHARING

Coordinate and amplify resources for dance, including shared knowledge and services, data use and collection, community building, and space to efficiently and effectively support the work of individuals and organized entities in dance.

Many needs and priorities identified through this research can be addressed through partnerships, collaboration, and sharing.

### STAKEHOLDERS WITH LEVERAGE

Individuals:

- Artistic Leads & Entity Leadership
- Program Officers, Donor Advised Fund Managers & Donors
- Dance Workers

Entities:

- Dance Service Providers,
- Public Agencies
- Small Dance Entities
- Mid-sized Dance Entities
- Large Dance Entities

#### STRATEGY

##### Shared Services & Knowledge

Provide coaching and shared training and resources in areas of business operations, fundraising, DEI, and more.

#### STRATEGY

##### Data Use & Sharing

Continue to collect and share data, as well as educate the industry on how to use it for advocacy and fundraising.

#### STRATEGY

##### Coalition & Community Building

Build coalitions and community within and around dance to strengthen a collective voice and galvanize support.

#### STRATEGY

##### Shared Space

Establish partnerships and collaborate to address the ongoing issues of affordable production and presentation space.

## IMPACT AREA 7 SYSTEMS CHANGE

Work to mitigate the impacts that white supremacy and corresponding systems of oppression have on dance work and workers. Such systems create and exacerbate barriers to resources, such as disparate access to benefits for individuals, difficulties in accessing resources for entities, and a misunderstanding of the role and societal benefits of the arts for the general public. With these systems diminished, New York City dance will be better positioned to achieve thriving.

In this context, systems of oppression include but are not limited to capitalism, racism, ableism, xenophobia, transphobia, ageism, and climate crisis. Systems change relates to broader factors that impact dance and arts workers as well as many people across the country. In order for these changes to occur, the dance industry will need to inspire or join a larger movement across sectors and geographies.

### STAKEHOLDERS WITH LEVERAGE

Individuals:

- Government Policymakers
- Elected Officials

Entities:

- Public Agencies
- Educational Institutions

#### STRATEGY

##### Historic Harms

Combat systems of oppression to lessen resulting harms that continue to cause disparities and hardships for BIPOC, disabled, immigrant, and LGBTQIA+ people.

#### STRATEGY

##### National Social Infrastructure

Develop and enact policies and programs to provide affordable and equitable access to basic resources such as health benefits, educational opportunities, legal aid, and reliable affordable housing.

Visit [Hub.Dance.NYC](https://www.hub.dance.nyc) to engage with the full *State of NYC Dance 2023* report and the accompanying tools and resources.

## FUNDERS

