

State of NYC Dance 2023: Findings from the Dance Industry Census

KEY FINDINGS



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.

Visit Hub.Dance.NYC to engage with the full *State of NYC Dance 2023* report and the accompanying tools and resources.

FUNDERS

