

## TESTIMONY ON THE RECOVERY EFFORTS OF NEW YORK CITY'S DANCE SECTOR

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### Testimony on the Recovery Efforts of New York City's Dance Sector

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*Testimony to the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations and the Select Committee on Libraries, on the Recovery Efforts of the City's Libraries and Cultural Establishments*

I submit testimony on behalf of New York City's dance community, both to provide insight into its recovery from Hurricane Sandy and to underscore the acute need for continued investment in this process of recovery and in the infrastructure of the dance field generally.

Dance/NYC is deeply grateful to the City of New York for its efforts to shore up the cultural sector following the hurricane. These included the timely distribution of a needs assessment survey; the provision of nonprofit recovery loans and, through the Materials for the Arts Program, of equipment, building materials, and other badly needed supplies; and work with service organizations like Dance/NYC to centralize communications about the resources available to impacted artists and arts groups.

Effective disaster recovery requires the commitment and collaboration of all relevant stakeholders and, in this spirit, I am pleased to report on the current state of the City's dance space. In the days following the hurricane, Dance/NYC acted as an arts responder and collected testimony from a diverse range of constituents, and on doing so it identified a field-wide need for emergency support.

In response, the Mertz Gilmore Foundation established the NYC Dance Response Fund, which was administered by Dance/NYC and ultimately disbursed grants totaling \$200,000 to 51 different dance-focused entities throughout the five boroughs.

In the process of administering the Fund, Dance/NYC heard stories both of devastating loss and of incredible perseverance. Many facilities incurred substantial damage to technical equipment, rehearsal and performance spaces, and irreplaceable, historic costumes and sets. Applicants also reported significant losses of earned income, and a variety of unanticipated space rental, travel, and marketing costs. As we dialogued with grantees, we saw the parameters of their losses shift and widen with time—pointing to a need for further investigation of the hurricane's impact over the long term.

We were also heartened by numerous reminders of the critical role that dancemakers play in strengthening and sustaining the City during times of crisis. One lower Manhattan-based, youth dance program resumed operations just days after the hurricane, despite a lack of electricity and heat. The program's participants, eager for a safe space and a creative outlet, attended anyway and danced in their winter coats. Another company opened its doors for a performance that, because of electrical and transportation issues, it could not collect tickets for. The house was full—and, due the venue's proximity to a Sandy aid site, it included a mix of community members and disaster-relief volunteers.

The dance community stands to make an important contribution to the City's recovery from what the Mayor described in his recent State of the City address as "the most devastating environmental disaster in [its] history." We know that the arts are uniquely capable of helping communities rebuild; they provide comfort and aid to those in need of it, and they are integral to the local economy.

At the same time, we must be cognizant of the field's reciprocal need for sustained, strategic support. Moreover, we should seize this opportunity to address the lessons learned from this disaster and others, and engage in an ongoing, action-oriented discussion about effective approaches to emergency preparedness and response for dance.

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