

MAKING NYC DANCE SERVICE NOW AND THE CASE FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Making NYC Dance Service Now and the Case for Entrepreneurship

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Our title to this thought piece is intended as a provocation: making New York City dance service now (like making dance) and making dance service matter is a case study in entrepreneurship.

By entrepreneurship, we mean creativity and resourcefulness. At a historical moment where change is constant, and change is needed, we mean action, and we mean strategy. We mean at the same time responding to shifts in constituent opportunity and the wider socio-economy and creating flexible structures through which we can continue to serve dance—and keep entrepreneurship alive.

Dance/NYC is reinventing its role as a voice and strategic partner to New York City dance as, we believe, New York City dance is reinventing itself—of necessity, and because there is opportunity to do so. Dance/NYC's programmatic foci—advocacy, research and convening—are all (hyper-)local, but its way of working may indicate paths for other local dance service entities, emerging, restructuring and re-emerging elsewhere.

To best serve dance in New York, Dance/NYC must be a change agent.

And here are 10 thoughts on how Dance/NYC can propagate change:

Crunch the data on dance to know your market. Collect data, quantitative and qualitative, to understand your constituency—its activity, impacts and opportunities. Use the data to drive advocacy, programs and operations. ([Click here](#) for Dance/NYC research, including the State of NYC Dance published in the fall.)

Be unique and be better. Be the best at what you do and don't do what others do better. Don't duplicate service provision. Don't be afraid to cut or change your programs, to risk or to fail. (For a May 2011 Dance/NYC conversation featuring 23 New York City-based service organizations—yes, 23!—with programs for dance, [click here](#).)

Have something to say and say it. Don't hide behind the scenes. Open the curtains and be transparent in all you do. Share your questions and your doubts. Focus and spend on PR and marketing. Call your legislative representatives, your funders and your press. As servants, we must be advocates, voices for dance at the table—every table.

But don't do it alone. Remember to listen, and go social already. Convene your constituency and spread conversation far and wide. Embrace new technologies, offline and on. Change can happen when you empower others—strengthening the collective voice for dance. Dance/NYC can be heard here: www.dancenyc.org, [@dancenyc](#), [@dancenycjcomm](#)

Partner. Work with local and national arts service organizations on advocacy and programs. Be a conduit, a hub and a way finder for your constituents to access relevant offerings. Help others make their programs better. Be creative—not competitive—leveraging partnerships to expand resources, reach and impact. ([Click here](#) for a New York City Arts Coalition advocacy campaign produced in partnership with Dance/NYC.)

Think bigger, across sectors and globally. Recognize and advance dance's role in education, community and the wider socio-economy. Network, travel, and let the guilt go when you skip a performance for a business summit. Shift your advocacy from cultural affairs to include, for example, transportation and economic development.

Diversify your income base. Be public/private. Know your funding community and be an advocate in directing funding to dance. Diversify your income portfolio to grow your base and minimize risk, but be sure all funding aligns with mission and organizational capacity for fundraising.

Barter and grow in-kind resources—win/win. Revisit your budget, assets (tangible and intangible), needs and hopes, and take a fresh look at philanthropy. Barter any range of services, from marketing to professional development. Solicit non-financial contributions and change the way giving gets done. (In April, Dance/NYC moved to subsidized space at the Mertz Gilmore Foundation, jointly creating a new home for dance.)

Pursue a variable cost model. Limit fixed costs and general operations to stay viable and responsive, scaling programs up when possible (and down when needed). Build a core of volunteers. Work with expert independent contractors. Have strong systems and contracts in place to maximize additional workforce capacity.

Hunt for opportunity. Where there is challenge there is opportunity. Service is a mindset, and positive-thinking can bring positive change. Service is a matter of doing. Look everywhere you can to find opportunity. Harness all the muscle you can to build it. Keep hunting, keep changing.

These thoughts underpin Dance/NYC's entrepreneurial approach to service, which favors process over product and allows the entity to act and re-act to needs and opportunities as they arise. In its operations and services to dance, Dance/NYC is and will remain in startup mode.

Join us. Be entrepreneurs. Be the change you want to see for dance.

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Dance/NYC is a branch of the national service organization Dance/USA. Its mission is to sustain and advance the professional dance field in New York City—serving as the voice, guide and infrastructure architect for all NYC dance artists and managers. The entity achieves this mission through industry advocacy, research and convening. www.dancenyc.org

Co-Authors

Lane Harwell became director of Dance/NYC in September, 2010. Prior to joining Dance/NYC, he was the director of development at New York's arts-wide advocacy group, the Alliance for the Arts. His lifelong history in the arts also includes training at the School of American Ballet, a performance career with American Ballet Theatre Studio Company, and management experience in diverse theater and service contexts. Lane attended the Professional Children's School while performing with ABT. He holds a BA in Philosophy from Princeton University and an MA in Performance Studies from the University of California at Berkeley. He is currently pursuing an MBA at Columbia Business School, focusing on the applicability of for-profit management approaches to the nonprofit sector. Lane chairs the Steering Committee for the New York Dance and Performance Awards (aka the Bessie Awards). He is also a member of the Steering Committee for the New York City Arts Coalition and of the Policy Leadership Circle for the Cultural Strategies Initiative.

Emma E. Dunch founded New York-based arts management consultancy Dunch Arts, LLC in 2008 and led the Dance/NYC strategic planning project throughout 2011. She has worked across the arts with the Aspen Music Festival, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Glimmerglass Opera, Jacob's Pillow Dance, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Joyce Theater Foundation, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestra of St. Luke's, Pennsylvania Ballet, San Francisco Symphony, and WNYC: New York Public Radio, among others. Her expertise includes hands-on transition management, revenue strategy development, executive search, organizational strategic planning, and board development. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and a Bachelor of Music Performance in Opera, and is a graduate of the League of American Orchestras' Orchestral Management Fellowship Program. In 2004, she was awarded the New York Foundation for the Arts' Richard Barteo Professional Opportunity Grant, and in 2010, she was selected for the City of New York's Marion Ewing Kauffman Foundation-funded FastTrac Growth Venture program, which fosters entrepreneurial leadership.

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