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Diving in to the DEEP End at Gibney Dance

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It is really no secret that being a freelance dancer in New York City is a tough gig. It is commonplace that many dancers, even those who are employed "full time" by major choreographers, need to pick up odd jobs and short-term employment, often without benefits and a steady paycheck, in order to stay financially afloat. In a city that increasingly feels like a playground for trust funders and perpetual vacationers, one of the only things that relates us all-- as dancers, artists, people-- is the fact that the act of making a steady, decent paycheck can seem confounding, frustrating even.

It may not be able to offer steady employment or access to an endless vault of moneybags (which totally exists, right?!), but the Dancers' Economic Empowerment Project (or DEEP) is one recent initiative that has emerged to address the economic challenges facing dancers. Hosted by Gibney Dance, the project promises to investigate the ["points in an artistic career where dancers most need support and \[provide\] opportunities for learning and skill-building."](#)

Organized by Devin Oshiro, Gibney Dance Company Member and Artistic Associate, and Margaret Tudor, Programs Manager at Gibney Dance (and fellow Jr. Committee member), the first of six sessions occurred on Tuesday, May 3rd to an excited room of dancers-- most under the age of 30-- at the LuEsther T. Mertz Learning & Leadership Studio at 280 Broadway. This meeting was titled "Get a Job" and offered a loose format to meet six other dance artists who have day jobs that achieve (or, attempt to achieve) the tricky balance of both earning a consistent paycheck and benefitting from scheduling flexibility to navigate auditions, classes, rehearsals and performances.

The invited guests sat around the room and the participants were free to roam, chat and ask questions as they pleased. They included Angela, a manager at Lululemon; Jessica, a freelance video editor who works consistently with Nel Shelby; Rachel, an operations manager for a data management company; Alex, a food blogger, personal chef, and nutrition coach; Eric, one of Gibney's Operations Associates and a barista; and Margaret, Programs Manager and DEEP co-conspirator.

With the casual environment and lack of structure, many candid conversations were able to crop up. Around the room, I bore witness to dancers in a healthy tennis match of resource sharing and care taking. It was also heartening to hear so many numbers flying through the room: How much do you make? How many hours do you work? How many years did it take you to find this job? DEEP provided a space for us to remove the notion around this dialogue as being taboo or embarrassing-- an unfortunate judgment many of us place on conversations around money and work-- and allowed frankness and honesty to prevail.

"This is something we're talking about all the time, but we haven't come together as a community yet," Devin reminded us at the top of the session. And, she is not wrong; DEEP offers one method of coming together in order for these conversations to happen in an open, relaxed environment. I look forward to future sessions in their pilot season, including upcoming topics on contract negotiation and finding affordable housing. Fittingly, all sessions are free but RSVP is encouraged through the [Gibney Dance website](#).

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