

INDIVIDUAL WELLBEING IS CRITICAL TO ORGANIZATIONAL WELLBEING

Friday, May 1, 2020

Individual Wellbeing Is Critical to Organizational Wellbeing

By Alejandra Duque Cifuentes and Rosemary Reyes for Grantmakers in the Arts

► [Share](#) | [Print](#) | [Download](#)



Grantmakers in the Arts
Supporting a Creative America

Individual Wellbeing Is Critical to Organizational Wellbeing

Submitted on May 1, 2020

From Dance/NYC by Alejandra Duque Cifuentes and Rosemary Reyes

Reflecting on: What are grantees asking for? How can funders listen and respond accordingly?

As a major service organization for dance in the metropolitan New York City area, Dance/NYC had to move quickly to address the needs of all of our constituents when COVID-19 arrived in March 2020.

As city-mandated closures and social restriction measures were enacted, the deleterious financial impact this would have on the dance community — in particular, organizations and artists dependent on income from in-person gatherings, like classes and performances — became clear. Additionally, as artists and cultural workers without ready access to healthcare and wage protections (and limited access to equitable funding and cash reserves), we were likely to feel the impact exponentially. We also knew, thanks to [previous workforce data](#), that African, Latina/o/x, Asian, Arab, Native American (ALAANA), disabled, immigrant, women-identifying, elderly, and immunosuppressed artists would be at an increased risk and face additional obstacles accessing critical resources.

It is against this backdrop that Dance/NYC began disseminating a [Coronavirus Impact Survey](#) to gauge the needs of our constituents, and on March 24th launched the [Coronavirus Dance Relief Fund](#) for individual freelance dance workers and dance-making organizations. The responses to both the Survey and the Fund affirmed four major ideas that artists, organizations, and the people they serve have been advocating for within the grantmaking community for a long time.

1. Artists want to be heard, and not forgotten, in the midst of this crisis.

Survey respondents and Fund applicants are seeking platforms to share their stories and want to prevent being further anonymized. At this time, it is crucial for grantmakers to listen and respond more equitably to the needs of their constituent base — the grantmaking landscape normally operates in contrast to that reality. Too often, we see grantmakers rewarding already well-resourced grantees who are able to fit into a narrow set of qualifications that already align with the grantmaker's interests. Artists and art workers need to be supported and heard, whether or not they fit into the constraints of the grantmaking structure's desired norms.

2. Artists are rarely considered dignified laborers with vital needs.

Dance/NYC's relief efforts are focused on support in two areas, which have yielded different responses: individual freelance dance workers and dance-making organizations with budgets between \$25,000 and \$500,000. While both are vital, we encourage the grantmaking community to stretch their reach beyond supporting organizations to aid individual artists, as well.

The public and the funding community often overvalue the individual artist's final works and prominence, leading to an inequitable funding landscape that has failed to consider the value of their process and personhood — access to healthcare, liveable wages, unemployment benefits, etc. At the same time, while individual workers are asking for support to meet their basic needs (rent, food, and other essential expenses), small-budget organizations are asking for the very same thing.

As evidenced by our survey data, organizations are requesting general operating support to address cash flow challenges, in order to keep their facilities and continue paying living wages to contractors and staff. In the wake of this pandemic, what's at stake for organizations is the loss of communities and critical parts of cultural ecosystems. Though organizations are critical, there is still a deeper urgency on the individual level, because what's at stake is an artist's ability to survive. We need to create funding structures that value artists and art workers, too, as essential members of our society and workforce.

3. A speedy and thoughtful response is critical to recovery.

In the short month since this crisis began, Dance/NYC's efforts have resulted in nearly 1,000 valid survey respondents, with [live data updated weekly on our website](#). This data not only confirmed our initial forecasts of how the community would be impacted but has also allowed us to engage in further advocacy on behalf of the sector at large. While our fundraising efforts are ongoing (with a minimum goal of \$1 million), we have been able to raise \$695,000 to date through a coalition of foundations that includes the Howard Gilman Foundation, the Mertz Gilmore Foundation, the Arnhold Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the Jerome Robbins Foundation, and the Harkness Foundation for Dance.

As of April 13, we've been able to distribute 160 grants of \$500 to freelance dance workers, with an estimated 450 freelance dance workers and 50 dance-making organizations to be served by the end of June — from an applicant pool nearly 5 times larger. Our speed in response and recovery is largely the result of three key commitments: remaining true to our [values of justice, equity, and inclusion](#), working in deep accountability to and in relationship with our community and funding partners, and remaining adaptable and ready to learn as we go.

To act on these commitments, Dance/NYC structured the Coronavirus Dance Relief Fund to consider a variety of factors when determining the final grantee pool, including the needs of its applicants and their demographic makeup, as a part of a pseudo "first come, first served" approach. We're dedicated to ensuring that our grantee pools are a reflection of the city we serve and support those with the least access to institutional support. We worked in partnership with Dance/NYC's existing committees, task forces, and partners to guarantee that the communities impacted by our work have seats at the table where decisions are made.

We also formed a coalition of sister funds that include [The Indie Theater Fund](#), [The Dance Union](#), [NYC Low-Income Artist + Freelancer Relief Fund](#), and [New York Foundation for the Arts](#). It also includes community organizer-led GoFundMe campaigns and small- to medium-sized service organizations that are consistently sharing their resources, administrative support, fiscal management, and applicant lists. This level of reciprocity and communication has allowed us to remain responsive and extend support as widely as possible, with one fund covering gaps of another.

The coalition has enabled accountable interdependence, the ability to funnel resources where they are most needed, and artists being served as quickly as possible. It has also affirmed that grantmakers need to work collaboratively to reduce the barriers to entry for grantees, instead of clinging to the competitive culture that currently exists. It's time for us to work in a coalition — not in competition.

4. We must consistently ask ourselves: How can we make this easier? Who are we missing? How are our institutional and individual implicit biases showing up?

Lastly, as Dance/NYC continues to administer the Fund, we've made improvements to upcoming applications in response to feedback and worked to remove barriers. We've also mirrored, where possible, the application questions and structures of sister funds (and/or existing coronavirus-related funds in the field) to allow applicants to reuse information and content.

It's unfortunate that it has taken such unprecedented circumstances to force the grantmaking community to make short-term accommodations that will have far-reaching benefits. Grantmakers need to have the confidence that their grantees, particularly individuals, will utilize funds for what will sustain and enrich their artistry most, whether that means the direct costs of an artistic project or rent. It's time to establish reciprocal models of trust and support. Other recommendations for long-term shifts in funder-grantee practices include:

- Working through alternative platforms (like electronic systems) to make payments fast and simple.
- Considering supporting fiscally sponsored groups, artist-led LLCs, or sole proprietorships and collectives.
- Removing requirements connected to citizenship and/or U.S. residency status.
- Providing more time for application submission, particularly for applicants who may identify as disabled or elderly, or for those who may struggle with access to technology to submit their application.
- Providing technical assistance for application submission, including sample and/or blank applications in advance of opening applications.
- Lifting funding restrictions, making applications more accessible, and/or removing requirements that are not essential to the grant determination process — like accepting existing applications to other grants, or perhaps a common application.
- Eliminating "first come, first served" application structures that do not consider inequitable access to technology and/or demography, or that do not prioritize support for critically under-funded communities.

As the grantmaking community lifts restrictions to funding, we are faced with the fact that we had the capacity to operate like this all along and have simply chosen not to. We exhort our colleagues in the grantmaking community not to forget the truths that this moment is illuminating: what did we learn when we asked ourselves how we can best value and trust our communities? How can we get support to where it is needed most, as quickly and easily as possible?

About Dance/NYC

Dance/NYC's mission is to promote the knowledge, appreciation, practice, and performance of dance in the metropolitan New York City area. It embeds values of [justice, equity, and inclusion](#) into all aspects of the organization. It works in alliance with Dance/USA, the national service organization for professional dance.

Written by Alejandra Duque Cifuentes, executive director, Dance/NYC, and Rosemary Reyes, Grant Writing consultant, Dance/NYC, in collaboration with Randi Berry, executive director, [The Indie Theater Fund](#); Nadia Tykulska and Shawn Escarciga, lead organizers, [NYC Low-Income Artist + Freelancer Relief Fund](#); Melanie Greene and J. Bouey, lead organizers, [The Dance Union](#); with copyedits by J. Soto, manager, Programs and Inclusion, Eyebeam.