

# TESTIMONY TO CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES, AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

Friday, September 29, 2023

## Testimony to City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

By Dance/NYC

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Thank you to Chair Osse and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, for your consideration of this testimony, submitted on behalf of Dance/NYC, a service organization advancing the interest of the dance industry in the metropolitan NYC area through grantmaking, convening, and action-oriented research and advocacy. Dance/NYC reaches over 5,000 individual dance artists, 1,200 dance-making entities, 500 non-profit dance companies, and the many for-profit dance businesses based in the metropolitan New York City (NYC) area. Our diverse constituents include Black, Indigenous, People of Color, immigrants, and disabled dance workers and dance organizations, businesses, projects, and groups.

We acknowledge that there are challenges to keeping NYC's dance institutions functioning, and capable of providing a fair and equitable wage for its dance workers. Solutions to these problems require funds like the Cultural Development Fund (CDF) to responsibly distribute support.

Dance/NYC joins colleague advocates working across creative disciplines in thanking you for your leadership and calling on you to establish:

1. An earlier start to the grant schedule with award letters by August 1st with timely payouts
2. The creation of new separate budget lines for dance service and dance education organizations to create specific inroads and to NOT compete with presenting and producing entities.
3. A restructuring of the panel process to:
  - more successfully distribute funding across the geographic landscape of the city.
  - include more time for discussion of applications,
  - ensure that panels are more interdisciplinarily represented
4. The release of timely and accessible data on the distribution of CDF fund awards to facilitate more transparency
5. Prioritizing communities and projects that are consistently underinvested in the award process. This includes disabled, immigrant and BIPOC-led projects.

These recommendations are built on our own experience and from a 2023 CDF Impact survey that Dance/NYC conducted with A.R.T./NY which revealed in part that:

- 26% of arts service organizations in dance received decreases in funding
- 31% of arts education organizations in dance also received decreases in funding
- 79% of producing entities in theater received decreases as compared to 54% of all producing organizations
- 36% of dance organizations with budgets of \$250K-\$499K received decreases as compared to 14% of all respondents in that category

Meanwhile Dance/NYC's current research shows that:

- 61% of organizations/entities have budgets of less than \$250K.
- 36% classify their financial health as weak or very weak; 56% do not hold a reserve or savings; 87% do not have endowment or investment accounts.

These numbers draw a picture of a workforce that simply cannot afford opacity on how monies are distributed and needs strong support guided by the Arts and Culture community to keep this vital heart of the city pumping. Based on the National Endowment for the Arts' recent report we know that artists, performing arts organizations, and performing arts presenters have shown considerable growth in jobs from 2020 to 2021, but have not returned to pre-pandemic employment levels.<sup>1</sup> This is corroborated by Dance/NYC's research that 16% percent of dance workers had left the city (5% permanently and 11% left with hopes of returning) and 43% of dance workers were considering leaving the field.<sup>2</sup> Dance/NYC will continue our commitment to research with the soon to be released Dance Industry Census findings this December 2023.

As mentioned in the recent Cultural Funding Equity Letter to the Mayor:

"Arts and Culture are crucial to New York City's reemergence from the pandemic, as evidenced by our role in increasing tourism, one of the City's major drivers of economic recovery as well as our injection of activity to neighboring industries including construction and transportation to name but two. Every community and neighborhood in all five Boroughs needs robust cultural organization, whose presence has been proven to result in significant benefits to public safety, health, well-being and education. Frank acknowledgement that our existing budget process fails to allocate funding to the arts community in an equitable fashion is no longer controversial."

Dance/NYC joins the Arts and Culture sector in asking the City to support this vital and invigorating industry that strengthens economies, builds communities, crosses cultural divides and brings people together, where we belong. If we weaken our cultural sector we lose the heart of what makes this city a beacon to those who uphold it, visit it, and aspire to be a part of it. We ask that you listen to us and our arts and culture colleagues to create a more sustainable and thriving sector.

<sup>1</sup> National Endowment for the Arts (2023). *New data show economic activity of the U.S. arts & cultural sector in 2021*. <https://www.arts.gov/news/press-releases/2023/new-data-show-economic-activity-us-arts-cultural-sector-2021>

<sup>2</sup> Dance/NYC (2021). *Coronavirus Dance Impact Study Informational Brief*. <https://www.dance.nyc/uploads/Covid-Impact-Study-Brief-210316.pdf>

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