

## DANCE WORKER DIGEST \*SPECIAL UNIONS EDITION\*

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### Dance Worker Digest \*Special Unions Edition\*

By Dance/NYC

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In August, Dance/NYC released an [address to the field](#) in solidarity with dance workers' rights to unionize. Here's what you need to know about unions for dance workers.

#### Unions protect workers by building power

A union is a group of workers who come together to improve their workplace. Unions rely on the collective strength of labor power. Union members recognize that there is no workplace without the labor of the workers. The right to unionize is protected by the National Labor Relations Act. Through organizing, collective bargaining, and utilizing the power of the strike, labor unions have won the workplace protections we now enjoy, including the 40-hour workweek and overtime pay.

When dance workers unionize, they are able to use their collective power to negotiate for things like fair pay, protections against discrimination and harassment, safe working conditions, audience accessibility, and more. Unions give dance workers the power to build better workplaces for themselves, their audiences, and their communities.

- [Review the Writer's Guild of America's Primer "A Union, Explained"](#)
- [Scan the National Labor Relations Act](#)
- [Learn more about how unions promote racial equity](#)

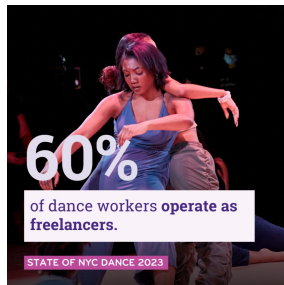
#### Dance workers are organizing for labor power



The [State of NYC Dance 2023 Report](#) found that despite 58% of dance workers believing they do not earn fair wages, 82% of dancers lack union protections. This, however, is shifting. The American Ballet Theatre voted to strike this past February, marking the first time that [American Guild of Musical Artists](#) has authorized a strike since 2018. In August, the unionized Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater performers won an increase in guaranteed workweeks, compensation increases, guaranteed meal access, and more. Also in August, the New York Live Arts workers successfully voted to form a union.

- [Review Dance Magazine's coverage on the unionizing boom](#)
- [Learn more about the Ailey artists' win](#)
- [Check out the ABT strike announcement](#)
- [Learn more about New York Live Arts Union](#)

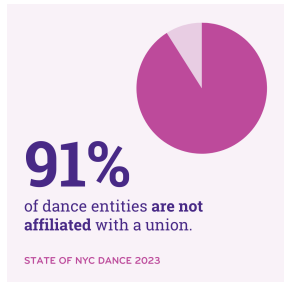
#### Obstacles to dance worker unionization persist



Forces that seek to undermine dance workers' labor power persist. After the Dallas Black Dance Theatre dancers voted to unionize earlier this year, the entire main company was fired in August. This is an example of the continued precarity in dance work across the industry. Furthermore, the majority of dance work happens on a freelance basis. This is significant because most independent contractors are unable to access union protections. A proposed law, the Protecting the Right to Organize Act (PRO Act), would change this by expanding the definition of employee to cover more independent contractors. If the PRO Act were to pass, it would significantly strengthen union protections for all. In the meantime, organizations like the Freelancers' Union highlight alternative pathways for freelance workers to collectively act.

- [Review Dance/NYC's address in solidarity with dance workers' rights to unionize](#)
- [Explore the Freelancers' Union](#)
- [Learn more about the Protecting the Right to Organize Act](#)

## Strong workers build strong organizations



The dance industry is [lagging behind other industries in terms of financial sustainability](#) and yet that is not a reason to curb union efforts. Protecting the workers who make dance possible is essential to building a sustainable, thriving dance ecosystem. When dance workers unionize, they enter a collective bargaining process with their employer that negotiates more than simply higher wages. Union organizing can pivot around improving: workplace conditions, scheduling and times of breaks, practices around racial equity, how to handle grievances and conflict etc. In non-profit organizations workers typically have a vested interest in the mission of the organization and both workers and employers want the continuation of the organization's work.

Research indicates that unions increase work productivity, reduce employee turnover, and create economic growth. When dance workers are empowered and protected, they can focus on excelling in their artistry and support the delivery of impactful experiences for their community.

- [The challenges and benefits of unionizing small nonprofits](#)
- [Learn more about how unions financially strengthen companies](#)
- [Explore how employers can benefit from respecting worker choice](#)

## How to form a union

The path to unionization starts with workers building relationships with each other. Dance workers interested in forming a union can assemble an organizing committee. They can also contact organizers at established unions like [AGMA](#), [Actors' Equity](#), [American Guild of Variety Artists](#) and [SAG-AFTRA](#) for support. Together, they can talk to their colleagues about working conditions and how a union can help. After building support, they can officially form a union either through their employer's voluntary recognition or by filing a petition for an election with the National Labor Relations Board. Once established, workers can use collective bargaining to negotiate their first union contracts.

- [Experience AGMA's Union Organizing the Dance World webinar](#)
- [Explore the Worker Organizing Resource and Knowledge Center's guide](#)

