

A LEGACY OF SUPPORT: MELLON, DANCE/NYC, AND THE REHEARSAL SPACE SUBSIDY PROGRAM

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By Dance/NYC

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For over two decades, the affordability of artistic space has been one of the most critical challenges facing New York City's arts community, particularly the dance sector. Studies dating back to 2001 have identified the high cost of real estate as a barrier to creative practice, with dance being disproportionately affected due to its unique spatial requirements.

In response to these persistent challenges, the Mellon Foundation established the NYC Dance Rehearsal Space Subsidy (RSS) Program in 2011, providing a much-needed resource for affordable and accessible rehearsal spaces. Dance/NYC has proudly served as a regранter for the program since 2018, advancing its mission to increase equity and accessibility across the dance sector.

Through its stewardship, Dance/NYC has prioritized:

- Expanding access to quality rehearsal spaces for artists across all five boroughs.
- Addressing equity in space distribution based on geography, budget size, and artist demographics.
- Strengthening sustainability for rehearsal space providers.

Dance/NYC's research has continued to reinforce the importance of this work. From *Defining "Small-Budget" Dance Makers in a Changing Dance Ecology* (2020) to the Dance Industry Census (2023), affordability of space has emerged as a top need for dance artists, particularly for marginalized communities. The pandemic further deepened these challenges, as studio closures and the loss of centralized resources like SpaceFinder left the sector in urgent need of support.

Program Evaluation & Learnings

In its redesign of the NYC Dance Rehearsal Space Subsidy (RSS) Program, Dance/NYC has focused on meeting the needs of individual dance artists while promoting equity and sustainability across the dance community. Key changes have—streamlined processes, reduced administrative burdens, and enhanced benefits for both artists and rehearsal spaces. The redesign also prioritized access for a diverse range of geographies, demographics, and genres, ensuring the long-term sustainability of participating spaces. These efforts have led to better experiences for artists and increased visibility for affordable, high-quality rehearsal spaces.

However, challenges remain in the sector. New York City's rehearsal spaces often lack quality, accessibility, and essential features like sprung floors or accommodations for percussive dance. Stakeholder feedback has highlighted the need for a centralized digital booking system, expanded funding, and stronger artist-venue relationships. These insights point to opportunities for systemic improvements, such as developing a replacement for SpaceFinder, supporting accessibility upgrades, and advocating for policies that prioritize artistic use of spaces over commercial rentals. Dance/NYC is committed to evolving the RSS Program to further amplify equity, access, and artistic development for New York City's dance community.

Balancing Immediate Needs with Long-Term Vision

With the generous support of the Mellon Foundation, Dance/NYC has been awarded a \$1.5 million grant to continue the Rehearsal Space Subsidy (RSS) Program through 2026. This funding positions Dance/NYC to address both the immediate and long-term needs of the dance community through a strategic extension of the program. Over the next two years, the RSS Program will be maintained in its current form, providing critical support to existing grantees and reflecting current funding levels as closely as possible. The Mellon Foundation's ongoing partnership underscores its steadfast commitment to Dance/NYC's mission and its invaluable service to the dance field, including through General Operating Support (GOS), which strengthens the organization's overall capacity.

This truncated extension serves as a necessary bridge, ensuring that dance artists and organizations, particularly those who have been part of the RSS Program, continue to benefit from subsidized rehearsal space while the broader vision for future programming is being ideated. It also provides Dance/NYC with the time needed to assess the evolving needs of the sector, engage in conversations about potential improvements, and explore ways to expand the program's reach to include a broader base of artists and organizations in the future.

In the meantime, Dance/NYC is streamlining the RSS Program's processes, including combined final reporting, renewal applications, and site visits for renewal evaluations. These actions ensure stability for current grantees, enhance operational efficiency, and gather valuable feedback to help refine the program and better address the field's needs.

Exploring Future Directions

For more than a decade, the Mellon Foundation and Dance/NYC have collaborated to address systemic challenges facing New York City's dance community. From advocating for equity in access to artistic spaces to strengthening sustainability for providers, this partnership has played a pivotal role in advancing solutions that meet the sector's needs.

This moment marks an important chapter in their shared commitment to reimagine how support for the dance field can evolve. As the affordability crisis and structural inequities persist, Dance/NYC and the Mellon Foundation are deepening their collaboration to address both present and future challenges for artists and venues. Over the next two years, we will continue fostering dialogue, engaging with the field, and shaping solutions that prioritize sustainability, equity, and access.

The Mellon Foundation's ongoing partnership is vital—not only as a long-time supporter but also as a thought partner and advocate for the dance community. Dance/NYC is encouraged by the continued collaboration and looks forward to working alongside the Mellon Foundation and the broader field to shape affordable space solutions for New York City's artistic community.