

# Defining “Small-Budget” Dance Makers in a Changing Dance Ecology

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

In 2016, Dance/NYC confirmed a long-standing theory in our field—the smallest organizations and groups represent the majority of the dance-making sector but have disproportionate access to resources.

We learned that the smallest organizations have incredible capacity to adapt to changing conditions over time and that they better reflect the diversity of New York City than larger groups. As expected, these findings also uncovered many questions, which catalyzed *Defining “Small-Budget” Dance Makers in a Changing Dance Ecology*, a two-year initiative designed to complement Dance/NYC's Dance Advancement Fund and build on the *State of NYC Dance & Workforce Demographics* (2016) ([bit.ly/2016StateOfNYC](http://bit.ly/2016StateOfNYC)), as well as other previous studies.

The most important context for this work concerns the moment in which it was completed. Initially, this research was timed to inform the implementation of CreateNYC, New York City's first-ever cultural plan ([createnyc.cityofnewyork.us](http://createnyc.cityofnewyork.us)). Now, it has the potential to inform survival and reinvention strategies as the dance sector urgently responds to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and participates in social and racial justice movements inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement in response to the murders of Black people at the hands of a white supremacist system.

Within this research, the numbers tell a story – but the faces, voices, and lived experiences of these dance workers remind us that this numerically-defined segment of the field is comprised of human beings that create a unique community. Dance/NYC's hope is that these data and stories serve as a tool to advocate and reimagine the dance ecosystem as thriving and centered in justice. From private funders to public agencies, from individual dance workers to presenters and educational institutions, all of us can contribute to this new future.

## METHODOLOGY

These findings were developed over a 9-month period, October 2019 to June 2020, informed by three (3) opportunities for input and data collection that were scheduled and designed to occur iteratively.

### Defining “Small-Budget” Dance Makers in a Changing Dance Ecology Research Conference

Dance/NYC convened a group of 90 leaders of dance groups and projects with budgets of less than \$1 million for a day-long examination of how this segment creates work, addresses racism and inequity, engage community, and advances sustainability. Discussions were informed by review and analysis of existing data on dance makers.

### Survey of “Small-Budget” Dance Makers

An electronic survey focused on organization/project details, dance-making and presentation activity, artistic leadership, and demographics. Data was collected from 111 dance-making organizations and groups operating with budgets between \$25K and \$1 million. The size of this dataset is comparable to the number of 115 NY/NJ regional Cultural Data Project profiles received from SMU DataArts to provide context for this study. Previous research suggests that the survey results may reflect representative input from 15.8% of “small-budget” artistic leadership.

### Dance Advancement Fund Cohort Gathering

Dance/NYC convened 30 Dance Advancement Fund Grantees (2019 & 2020) for a three (3) hour gathering to discuss preliminary findings and recommendations, and explore key issues identified through research to date that required additional input and clarity.

### Essayists

Dance/NYC commissioned reflections from ten (10) dance workers, from “small-budget” dance makers to those working alongside them in the funding, administration and technology spheres. Their stories are integral to the research, enlivening the data and providing important insights on emerging themes and ideas to inform the future of “small-budget” dance.

In the design of this study, Dance/NYC prioritized depth and quality of input over volume of respondents. This approach informed the design of a mixed-method research process with two points of qualitative data collection scheduled on either side of an in-depth electronic survey. As is common in research efforts like this one, there were some limitations to the data. This study utilized snowball sampling and an internet-based survey tool, which impacted representation within the study sample. The survey also relied on self-selection and was administered between November 2019 and January 2020 (a time of year which could have impacted response).

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Defining “Small-Budget” Dance Makers in a Changing Dance Ecology

## KEY FINDINGS

### What are “small-budget” dance makers?

At the beginning of the study process, Dance/NYC explored the nature and background of this segment of the field, defined as organizations, groups, and projects with budgets between \$25,000 and \$1 million. The term “small-budget” was problematic, particularly given the vast difference between the low and high points of this range. The research quickly revealed that the dance makers do not consider their operating budget as a point of distinction or classification. They instead identify as resourceful, adaptable, entrepreneurial, strong, fluid, and community-focused, with unique freedom of creativity.

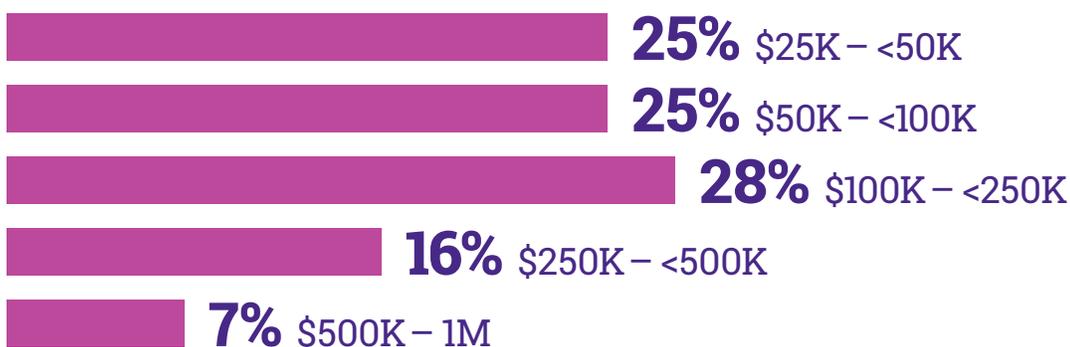
#### **BUDGET CATEGORY: “Small-Budget Is Actually “Very Small-Budget”**

*Most “Small-Budget” Dance Makers Have Budgets <\$250K*

Of 109 survey respondents, 78% have budgets between \$25K and \$250K, 16% have budgets between \$250K and <\$500K and 7% have budgets over \$500K. Study participants often indicated that working within the higher end of this budget range is remarkably different than the lower end. In addition, the \$25K to \$1M budget range is not inclusive of most independent artists.

#### FIGURE

### Most Small-Budget Dance Makers Have Budgets <\$250K



#### **BUDGET CATEGORY (n=109 survey respondents)**

Alt text: This bar chart shows the distribution of budget categories among survey respondents (n=109): \$25K-<\$50K (25%); \$50K-<\$100K (25%); \$100K-<\$250K (28%); \$250K-<\$500K (16%); \$500K-\$1M (7%).

## **STRUCTURE: Most “Small-Budget” Dance Makers Operate a Nonprofit Entity**

*501(c)(3) Nonprofit Is Most Common, Followed By Fiscal Sponsorship*

Most survey respondents, 74%, utilize a nonprofit 501(c)(3) operating structure, while 22% use fiscal sponsorship. A small proportion, 3%, are for-profit/commercial and 8% consider themselves to be independent of any structure. The survey allowed respondents to indicate more than one structure type (as many work with more than one entity simultaneously), which is why the total exceeds 100%. The research reinforced the sector’s lack of satisfaction with these structures, but also reveal some ambivalence, given a lack of viable alternatives and a need to continue to fundraise from philanthropic sources, many of which require 501(c)(3) status, affiliation with a fiscal sponsor, specific operating budget parameters, and even a bank account.

## **LONGEVITY: Majority of “Small-Budget” Dance Makers Have Endured**

*Most Have Operated for More Than a Decade*

The majority, 83%, of survey respondents work with organizations and projects that were established a decade or more ago, with 40% having been established 10 to 19 years ago. This suggests that the majority of dance makers in this part of the field have proved resilient and sustainable.

## **LOCATION: Majority Are Headquartered in Manhattan**

*More Based in Regional Areas of NY/NJ Than The Bronx & Queens*

About half of “small-budget” dance entities are headquartered in Manhattan. Just over a quarter are centered in Brooklyn. A notable portion, 11%, operate from regional locations beyond the five boroughs. This means that the respondent pool has greater representation in regional areas of New Jersey and Upstate New York than the boroughs of The Bronx and Queens, both with 6%. There were no respondents from Staten Island.

## **GENRE: Most “Small-Budget” Dance Makers Focus on Modern or Contemporary**

*National Origin/Ethnicity-Specific is Third Largest Genre*

The survey’s 108 open-ended responses included 28 different genres, which were then classified into larger categories, revealing that 56% of respondents primarily work in contemporary or modern dance. The next largest genre is national origin-specific/ethnicity-specific dance (12%), which includes 11 different sub-genres reflecting classical, traditional and folk dance practice from around the globe. Of organizations with budgets of more than \$250K, 72% identify ballet, contemporary or modern as a primary genre, while 64% of groups with budgets under \$250K do.

## **MARKETING: Social Media is Widely Used for Outreach**

*High Reliance on Digital Tools to Get Word Out*

Social media, an affordable and widely accessible marketing tool, is used by 97% of “small-budget” dance makers, despite the fact that it is daunting for some. There is an understanding that social media must be part of a broader communications strategy that includes traditional tools, as well as personal connection. “Small-budget” dance makers speak of other marketing challenges, as well, including limited access to imagery that effectively engages audiences and communities, and finding the time and resources to devote to marketing in the midst of wearing so many artistic and administrative hats.

## **FUNDING SOURCES: “Small-Budget” Dance Makers Maintain a Diverse Funding Mix**

*Highest Reliance on Individual Donors and Earned Income From Programs and Services*

Nearly all “small-budget” dance makers receive funding from individual donors (93%) or earned income (89%), while lower proportions raise funds from private foundations (73%), government sources (66%), and corporations (56%). Notably, 68% of “small-budget” dance makers that identify as ALAANA access grants from private foundations, as compared to 73% of all respondents and 82% of White (non-Hispanic) respondents. Similarly, 60% of ALAANA “small-budget” dance makers access government funding, as compared to 66% of total pool and 73% of White (non-Hispanic) respondents.

Three-quarters of survey respondents receive in-kind contributions on a regular basis, more than access foundation, government, or corporate sources. This reliance on in-kind support, along with individual donors and earned income, suggest that many “small-budget” dance makers focus on funding with lower barriers to access. In-kind contributions, individual donations and earned income also tend to have the fewest strings attached—allowing leaders to use the funds at their discretion. These sources have quickly dissipated during the pandemic leaving these groups highly vulnerable.

## Funding Needs: The Needs of “Small-Budget” Dance Makers Can be Addressed with Flexible Funding

### Funding for Salaries/Wages Remains High Priority

The majority of respondents express a need for funding for salaries/wages (95%) and funding for general operations (93%). These needs remain during the pandemic, with 84% of “small-budget” dance groups identifying salaries/wages as a critical funding need in *Dance/NYC’s Coronavirus Dance Impact Survey (2020)* ([Dance.NYC/covid-19/Impact-Survey/Overview](https://www.dancenyc.org/covid-19/Impact-Survey/Overview)). The prioritization of these needs differs from other Dance/NYC research where space-related costs were more of a priority.

#### FIGURE

### Funding for Salaries/Wages Remains High Priority



#### TOP 5 FUNDING NEEDS: % indicating Needed or Very Needed (n=107 survey respondents)

Alt text: This bar chart shows the distribution of Top 5 Funding Needs (Percentage of respondents indicating 'Needed' or 'Very Needed') among survey respondents (n=107): Salaries/Artist fees (95%), Operational Costs (93%), Professional development and training [marketing, financial management, strategic planning, booking and touring] (91%), Supplies and equipment [purchases or rentals] (89%), Community outreach/organizing (86%).

Prioritization of the most important funding need varies by demographic. Of all respondents, 56% identify salaries/artist fees, while 23% identify operational costs. More ALAANA (34%), LGBTQIA+ (32%), and respondents living in the Bronx (31%) and Queens (43%) identify operational costs as top priority, while more immigrant (64%), female (64%), and Manhattan-based (63%) dance makers identify salaries/artist fees as top priorities. In addition, 9% of immigrant respondents identify professional training and development as a top priority, as compared to 5% of the complete respondent pool.

Other needs include funding for organizations, groups and projects that have been in existence for less than 3 years, capacity building and temporary/flex resources to support flexible and nimble operating structures, affordable space for creation, and affordable artist housing. Perhaps most significantly, dance makers expressed a need and desire to move beyond “survival mode” to a more consistent and stable operating scenario—a place that they considered “thriving” over surviving.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Who leads “small-budget” dance?

The individuals leading “small-budget” dance are quite diverse.

*Note: These demographics represent the artistic leadership that responded, as opposed to the complete workforce of this segment of the field.*

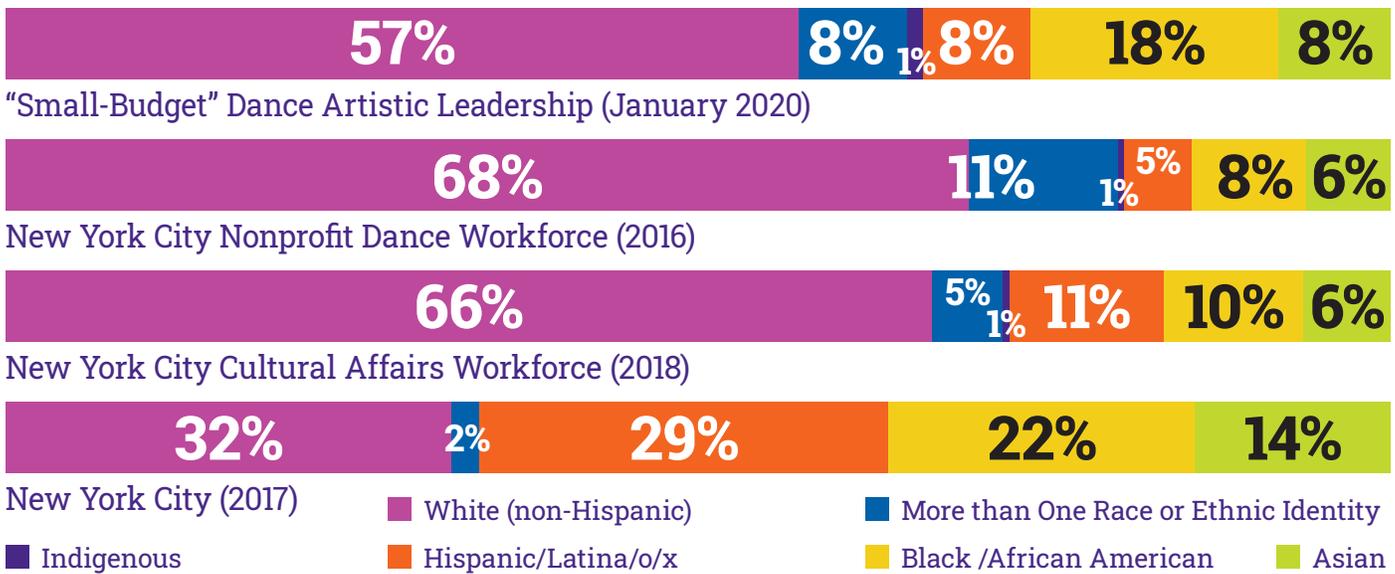
#### HERITAGE, ETHNICITY & RACE:

##### “Small-Budget” Leadership is More Diverse than the Field as a Whole

Of respondents, 57% identifies as White (non-Hispanic), 18% as Black/African American, 8% as more than one race or ethnic identity, 8% as Hispanic/Latina/o/x, 8% as Asian and 1% as Indigenous. With 48% ALAANA representation, “small-budget” artistic leadership is more diverse than the field-wide dance workforce studied in 2016, which was 32% ALAANA. However, the leadership of “small-budget” dance is significantly less diverse than the City’s population, which is at least 68% ALAANA.

#### FIGURE

### Nearly Half Identify as ALAANA (African, Latina/o/x, Asian, Arab, and Native American)



#### ETHNICITY & RACE (n=90 survey respondents)

Does not include respondents who declined to self-identify their race or ethnic identity since there is no equivalent in the U.S. Census data for New York City. All groups are mutually exclusive.

Alt text: This graph shows the distribution of Ethnicity & Race among survey respondents (n=90) in comparison to State of NYC Dance & Workforce Demographics (2016) data, DCLA Workforce data, and New York City data: Survey Respondents – Asian (8%), Black/African American (18%), Hispanic/Latina/o/x (8%), Indigenous (1%), More than One Race or Ethnic Identity (8%), White (non-Hispanic) (57%); State of NYC Dance & Workforce Demographics (2016) – Asian (6%), Black/African American (8%), Hispanic/Latina/o/x (5%), Indigenous (1%), More than One Race or Ethnicity (11%), White (non-Hispanic) (68%); DCLA Workforce 2018 – Asian (6%), Black/African American (10%), Hispanic/Latina/o/x (11%), Indigenous (1%), More than One Race or Ethnicity (5%), White (non-Hispanic) (66%); New York City – Asian (14%), Black/African American (22%), Hispanic/Latina/o/x (29%), Indigenous (0.2%), More than One Race or Ethnicity (2%), White (non-Hispanic) (32%).

## PLACE OF BIRTH:

### Immigrant Dance Makers are Significant in “Small-Budget” Dance

*Still Potential for Increased Engagement*

Just over one-quarter, 27%, of survey respondents were born outside of the US. These respondents were born in North America, Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, and East and South Asia. None were from Africa. This 27% is larger than the proportion of immigrant dance workers responding to Dance/NYC’s *Coronavirus Dance Impact Survey (2020)* (21%) as well as Dance/NYC’s *Immigrant Dance Workforce Demographics (2018)*, which estimated that 15% of the nonprofit dance workforce was born outside of the US. Even still, there is a notable gap between the “small-budget” respondents born outside of the US and that of the City’s immigrant population (37%).

These data are conservative as they only account for place of birth and do not include people born in the US with at least one parent from outside of the United States. Dance/NYC’s *Immigrants. Dance. Arts.* ([Dance.NYC/programs/research/2019/07/Advancing-Immigrants.-Dance.-Arts/](https://www.dancenyc.org/programs/research/2019/07/Advancing-Immigrants.-Dance.-Arts/)) research has defined immigrants to include people of multiple generations who also identify as immigrants.

## DISABILITY:

### “Small-Budget” Dance Must Elevate Disabled Workers to Artistic Leadership

*No Survey Respondents Identified as Disabled*

Previous Dance/NYC research shows that disabled arts workers are present in dance, however no survey respondents identified as disabled. Notably, 10% of sponsored dance respondents identified as disabled in 2017, 6% of the nonprofit dance workforce sample identified as disabled, and 3% of individual dance workers responding to Dance/NYC’s *Coronavirus Dance Impact Survey (2020)* identify as disabled. For context, 11% of New Yorkers identify as disabled, according to US Census data.

This survey was focused on artistic leadership. Dance/NYC’s knowledge of and experience in the field, through its *Disability. Dance. Artistry. Initiative* ([Dance.NYC/equity/disability/disability-initiative](https://www.dancenyc.org/equity/disability/disability-initiative)), reinforces this finding, suggesting that its support and increased activity has not resulted in more disabled people in artistic leadership. That work has confirmed that the disabled community is present in “small-budget” dance through organizations led by non-disabled artists, as well as organizations that are headquartered outside of New York City but work in the City.

## **AGE/GENERATION:**

### **“Small-Budget” Dance Maker Artistic Leads are Older than the Wider Field**

*Majority are Gen X*

Findings suggest the “small-budget” dance workforce is mostly adults aged 39-55 or Generation X. More specifically, 42% of survey respondents were born between 1965 and 1981, compared to 32% of the nonprofit dance workforce sample and 21% of New York City population, according to US Census data. Also worth highlighting is the lack of Millennial respondents (born between 1982 and 1999.). Only 26% of “small-budget” survey respondents fall into the Millennial generation while 49% of the City population does.

The age of the survey respondent correlates to the longevity of organizations. All of the artistic leaders of organizations in existence 40+ years are led by Baby Boomers or members of the Silent Generation. In addition, more than half (57%) of the large set of organizations established 10 to 19 years ago are led by members of Generation X. And the majority (63%) of those established less than 10 years ago are led by Millennials. Findings also suggest younger artistic leaders of “small-budget” dance reside outside of Manhattan, particularly in Brooklyn, and older members reside in Manhattan.

## **GENDER:**

### **“Small-Budget” Dance is Mostly Female**

*Majority are Female*

*but Less So Than the Wider Field*

In the aggregate, 61%, of “small-budget” dance maker respondents identify as female, 33% identify as male, and 2% identify as gender queer/gender nonconforming. No survey respondents identified as gender queer/non binary, intersex, trans man, or trans woman. New York City's population as a whole is 52% female and 48% male, according to US Census data. The US Census does not include any gender identity categories other than female and male. While “small-budget” dance leadership is majority female, it is less so than the nonprofit dance workforce, which was 65% female in 2016.

### **LGBTQIA+: The LGBTQIA+ Community is Well-Represented in “Small-Budget” Dance**

*Nearly One-Third Identify as LGBTQIA+*

Nearly one-third (31%), of “small-budget” dance makers identify as LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual), while 55% do not. The percentage identifying as LGBTQIA+ is higher than the 2016 nonprofit dance workforce (28%), 2018 DCLA Workforce (15%), and significantly higher than the percentage of the local population, which is 4% LGBTQIA+, according to a 2014 Gallup research study, the most recent data available for the LGBTQIA+ community.

## KEY FINDINGS

### What are the workforce dynamics of “small-budget” dance?

#### **ARTISTIC LEADS: “Small-Budget” Dance Demands Fractured Focus and Vast Skill Set From Artistic Leads**

*Almost Half Affiliate With Five or More Organizations or Projects Annually*

This research shows that 85% are affiliated with more than one project and just under 41% are affiliated with five or more projects. In addition to being in charge of the artistic side of their entity, 80% work on fundraising, 76% fulfill administrative roles, 74% function as the CEO and 64% work on marketing. Findings show that 48% of artistic leads fill four or more roles for their organization or project.

The majority of artistic leads—53%—do not earn a regular salary from their work in dance. While 21% do have a full-time job in dance, most piece together their livelihoods through a series of freelance and/or part-time positions in the dance field. Just over one-third (34%) have employment outside of dance, in addition to their work as an artistic lead. “Small-budget” dance makers express frustration around their need to carry such large and varied responsibilities, most of which are connected to the demands of the nonprofit model.

#### **VOLUNTEERS ENGAGED: “Small-Budget”**

#### **Dance Relies Heavily on Volunteers**

*Number of Volunteers Exceeds Avg Full-Time Paid Employees by 20x*

On average, survey respondents report engaging 1 full-time employee and 20 unpaid volunteers over the course of a year. The average annual value of volunteer labor is \$32,542. This value is highest for organizations with the smallest budget size, which report an average volunteer labor value of \$46,309.

Most survey respondents lead nonprofits that have boards of directors, which are an important part of the “small-budget” volunteer labor pool. Those boards tend to be small and “hands-on” with an average of 7 members that principally volunteer time and services. The average size of the board increases with the budget category, from 5 for the smallest budget groups to nearly 10 for the largest.

#### **DANCERS ENGAGED: “Small-Budget”**

#### **Dance Makers Prioritize Paying Artists**

*Most Dancers are Compensated But Paying Them a Living Wage Remains a Goal*

More than half of survey respondents (54%) engage 10 or fewer dancers annually and 89% of dancers receive some sort of financial compensation, though paying dancers a living wage remains a priority for “small-budget” dance makers.

## KEY FINDINGS

# What are the experiences of “small-budget” dance makers?

### (RE)DEFINING “SUCCESS”

#### *“Small-Budget” Dance Makers Define Success in Terms of Six Priority Areas*

Much like “small-budget,” the connotation of the term “success” was also widely debated and deemed problematic in study convenings. The research revealed that “small-budget” dance is frustrated with the typically held notions that an arts entity’s success is defined by audience size, number of commissions/engagements, positive reviews, and trajectory from small-scale to large-scale or from project-based to formal organization.

#### FIGURE

### “Small-Budget” Dance Makers Define Success in Terms of Six Priority Areas



#### TERMS USED TO DEFINE SUCCESS: Number of mentions (n=97 survey respondents)

Alt text: This bar chart shows the distribution of Terms Used to Define Success among survey respondents (n=97): Artistry (87%); Impact (70); Sustainability (63); Acknowledgment (58); Living Wage (21); Social Justice and Inclusion (19).

The study did not result in viable alternatives for the term “success” but revealed six areas of priority, that contribute to “small-budget” dance makers’ sense of value and worth including Artistry, Impact, Sustainability, Acknowledgment, Living Wage, and Social Justice and Inclusion.

The study revealed that “small-budget” dance makers are compelled to move toward definitions of success based on “process over product,” individuals over structures, depth of engagement over breadth of audience, community accountability over funder accountability, and social impact over economic impact.

## ADDRESSING RACISM & INEQUALITY

### *"Small-Budget" Dance Makers Are Negatively Impacted by Oppression, Racism & Implicit Bias*

"Small-budget" dance makers articulated challenges and barriers rooted in systemic racism and other forms of oppression which manifest externally and internally.

Externally, "small-budget" artistic leadership confront oppression and racism as they share and fund their work, engage audiences and donors, access funding from public and private entities, seek touring and performance opportunities, and advocate for themselves as individuals and organizations in the arts ecosystem and society. In convenings, "small-budget" dance makers describe external barriers being rooted in classism, racism, ableism, and xenophobia. The barriers result in difficulty attaining the recognition, independence, and trust necessary to be valued and supported, inequitable access to philanthropic funds, disparate levels of understanding and education around how to protect, manage and fund work, prioritization of resources to engage with and respond to funders, and limited opportunities for presentation and touring.

Internally, "small-budget" dance makers are impacted by racism and oppression in terms of the structural frameworks that drive the creative process, organizational management and oversight, and resource allocation. This internal racism and oppression results in a lack of ALAANA, immigrant, and disabled artistic leadership; work generated through oppressive structures; pressure to compromise artistry (and mission, for nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations,) to meet financial needs and expectations, and high reliance on volunteer and in-kind labor.

In response, many "small-budget" dance makers are centering their work on anti-racism and anti-oppressive practices. They expressed a desire to access structures and resources that will allow them to prioritize social justice and inclusion and pay artists a living wage. They long to reinvent the ecosystem to dismantle structures of power inherent in the creative process. And they are committed to establishing field-wide accountability and interdependence in response to oppression and racism. This work is beginning but requires more attention and action, both inside and outside of the dance ecosystem.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### HOW CAN WE MOVE “SMALL-BUDGET” DANCE MAKERS FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING?

The characteristics, inner-workings, and needs of “small-budget” dance are unique. This segment is more diverse, resourceful, and nimble than the field as a whole. It is focused on “process over product” and “value over volume.” These defining characteristics contrast starkly with the priorities of historical funding practices and the legal and operating structures in which “small-budget” dance works, as well as the capitalistic economic principles that govern art making in the US.

#### Framework for Recommendations

In order to derive recommendations from the data collected, many broad themes and historical contexts needed to be distilled into a usable filter. The findings, taken together with NYC’s current climate, gave rise to the following framework of analysis. The three (3) broad recommendations named below are influenced by:

#### **The pervasive impacts of racism and inequality.**

At the heart of each recommendation is a commitment to address the effects of white supremacy and its tactics of oppression—racism, ableism, xenophobia, to name a few—on the field, as well as the structures of power that were built on these tactics.

#### **The relevance of this moment and its impact.**

As this study progressed, so did the arrival and spread of the most significant public health crisis in more than a century. Dance/NYC’s *Coronavirus Dance Impact Study* (2020) will be published in the coming months. Preliminary findings suggest that “small-budget” dance is at risk, with the smallest organizations projecting average losses of 40% of their operating budgets, the most of any segment. While some of the following recommendations address issues that have long been discussed in the field, all are magnified with new depth, tone, and urgency.

#### **The need for collective action.**

“Small-budget” dance is doing the best it can under existing conditions but these findings suggest it needs more to thrive. These needs, and the ability to fulfill them, extend beyond the dance ecosystem and require cross-collaborative and intentional advocacy at the neighborhood, city, state, and federal levels.

The data and dialogues collected through this work, as well as the existing body of research, have identified a series of stakeholders with the agency to advance “small-budget” dance towards new definitions of success, resilience, and sustainability. These stakeholders include:

- Foundations, public agencies, and donors;
- Arts organizations, fiscally-sponsored projects, and dance-making entities of all types and sizes;
- Artistic and administrative leaders of organizations, groups, and projects;
- Dance presenters and venues with budgets over \$1M;
- Individual dance makers and dance workers;
- Educational institutions; and
- Service organizations.

Each recommendation includes action items for relevant stakeholder groups. These action items can be found in the full report and recommendations excerpts. With every stakeholder engaged in meaningful advocacy and action, “small-budget” dance will move from a place of surviving to thriving.

## Recommendation 1:

### Value “Small-Budget” Dance Workers As Dignified Laborers

The challenges facing individuals that comprise this segment include:

- Low, varied, and intermittent compensation which requires workers to piece together multiple gigs and projects (including work outside of the field for 34% of “small-budget” artistic leads);
- Inaccessible medical and mental health care;
- Lack of respect and provision for the rest and therapies required to care for the body as an instrument of dance work;
- The need to fulfill a wide and varied set of responsibilities that typically have no limits on the length of a workday and respect for work/life balance;
- The search for affordable and accessible space in which to develop and present work; and
- The related mental load of navigating a livelihood that is inconsistent, uncertain, multi-dimensional, and multi-faceted.

At the same time:

- The general public and funding community place value and focus on the “final product,” rather than on the process and people who create and deliver that process;
- Educational institutions provide artistic training, but the curricula do not consistently provide administrative or financial training to empower artists to effectively manage their work and career; and
- The sector, and particularly public agencies, advocate for the investment in the arts as an industry and economy, with little focus on the artists that work within it.

This all suggests that while the art is valued, the art maker is not. Artists are not yet considered necessary and thus are not compensated as such, despite their proven contributions to economic growth, quality of education, personal health and wellness, and community identity and pride.

Beyond the arts, research shows that dignity in work incorporates ideologies of recognition, trust, autonomy, and self-mastery.<sup>1,2</sup> People feel dignity in work from basic working conditions and treatment but also from what is gained from their work, such as feelings of self-worth, recognition, prospects for growth, and, most important in capitalistic society, monetary compensation. Many of the needs and labor concerns surrounding “small-budget” dance are connected to these issues, as well as societal structures that preclude worker groups and multiply oppressed communities from accessing living wages, affordable housing, healthcare, and other basic needs and rights.

In order to meet the needs of “small-budget” dance, the value of dance work must be redefined and accepted as dignified labor. That can then lead to necessary fair labor standards for the field’s workers, including wages, work conditions (duration, time of day, temperature, safety, equipment, and tools), working environment (culture, processes, structure, management), and more. These standards will re-center individuals in dance-making and allow “small-budget” dance to focus on consistency, sustainability, inclusivity, and equity.

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2. Sayer, A. (2007). *Dignity at Work: Broadening the Agenda*. *Organization*, 14(4), 565–581. [doi.org/10.1177/1350508407078053](https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508407078053)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Defining “Small-Budget” Dance Makers in a Changing Dance Ecology

## Recommendation 2:

### Create Infrastructure that Induces Long-Term Equity and Sustainability for “Small-Budget” Dance

“Small-budget” dance makers suggest that the dance ecosystem is flawed, citing critical issues inherent in many aspects of the field such as low wages, the basis of philanthropy, and structures of power and racism, all of which seem to be magnified by broader social movements such as the labor movement, anti-capitalism, and more recently Me Too/Time’s Up and Black Lives Matter. All of these issues connect to the structures through which dance is created, managed, supported, and shared.

“Small-budget” dance makers lament existing structures, particularly the 501(c)(3) operating model. They find the system unsustainable and inequitable, rooted in colonialism, capitalism, and slavery. They believe the dance ecosystem must be reimagined to be inclusive, not competitive, to eliminate resource hoarding. These ideas connect to the current movement around reparations for Black and Indigenous populations.

Until the ecosystem is reimagined or in support of its own reinvention, the issues related to structures can be addressed in two (2) ways:

**Via alternative structures:** There are a few imperfect alternatives to the 501(c)(3), such as fiscal sponsorship, B Corps, or the L3C (low-profit limited liability corporation).

Some arts groups create cooperatives or collectives (organized as LLCs, nonprofits or sometimes informal agreements) to bring small groups and individuals together to benefit from shared efficiencies, resources, and risks. There are also artistic leads and groups who work on a project basis, as individuals with a sole proprietorship, or as freelancers outside of the confines of the more formal and complicated organizational structures. These approaches mitigate access to funding opportunities due to the tax benefits associated with the 501(c)(3). Some members of the grantmaking community are working to eliminate barriers and no longer require applicants to be organized as, or affiliated with, nonprofits or show longevity.

**By modifying the 501(c)(3):** The second approach is to organize or participate in efforts to modify the 501(c)(3) to require training for people who establish and lead these entities, better distribute power, address race equity issues, limit pressure to fundraise, incorporate a periodic review process, and simplify mergers and closures. This is, of course, bound to require significant time and resources, given the work required to change tax laws and business structures.

Regardless of the approach, this research suggests that new or improved structures should:

- Limit the number of roles currently fulfilled by artistic leads;
- Combat anti-oppressive practices and inequities inherent in the ecosystem including racism, ableism, and xenophobia;
- Support reparations and build reparatory commitments of resources and programmatic focus into the entities' operations;
- Limit reliance on private philanthropy;
- Be lean and nimble, allowing an entity to expand and contract as needed through partnership or collaboration; and
- Include life cycles (or at least opportunity for renewal) and make it easier (and accepted) to merge, consolidate, or dissolve.

The field must provide training and resources around existing alternative structures (cooperatives, LLCs, etc.), create frameworks for dance-making entities interested in these structures, advocate for the establishment of new legal structures, and support other structures that advance dance-making and provide more means of production to artists, for example in connection with social entrepreneurship. We must also continue to advocate for the acceptance and advancement of these alternatives within the public sector and private foundations to the extent that artists earning profits are not considered wrong or unjust. Diversifying the set of structures that exist within the ecosystem has the potential to decentralize pools of resources, providing "small-budget" dance makers with more control over their process, product, and future.

## Recommendation 3:

### Coordinate Resources for “Small-Budget” Dance Makers

These findings suggest that this segment of the field needs administrative, fundraising, and marketing training and resources to support their artistry and aspirations while exploring the potential for new structures. Collaboration is a fundamental part of dance as an art form—it also has great potential to support sustainability. The pandemic has already inspired new collaboration in the field, as dance makers share resources to help one another navigate unprecedented challenges.

Training and centralized services specific to “small-budget” dance can help fulfill needs identified in this research, including:

- Training to support general operations including:
  - Data collection, organization, and best use practices to support dance-making, fundraising, advocacy efforts, and sustainable operations;
  - Administrative functions areas such as financial management, compliance, and human resources; and
  - Marketing and community relations strategy and tools, including community organizing and social media outreach;

- Consulting and training for entities and individuals to address systemic inequity toward:
  - Eliminating institutional and individual racism (organization and leadership-specific)
  - Robust diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility policies and practices
  - Reparations programs;
- Pools of human resources that help organizations and projects expand and contract capacity as needed, including access to dance ecology workers such as photographers, videographers, and massage therapists;
- A dance-specific leadership development pool of professional and volunteer human resources;
- Consistent performance opportunities and visibility for “small-budget” organizations and projects;
- Shared services that build capacity in functional areas such as marketing, fundraising, and financial management; and
- Affordable shared space.

These resources must be made available to those working within and outside of formal structures. One possible delivery mechanism might be for larger organizations to develop and provide these services to groups with fewer resources. Another delivery mechanism might be to close or merge organizations and redistribute resources, accordingly and appropriately.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

# Advancing a Research Agenda to Empower the Field In and Beyond This Moment

The characteristics and lived experiences of “small-budget” organizations, groups, and projects represented in this research suggest we must invest in the establishment of new mechanisms and frameworks that center the personal and professional well-being and prosperity of the individuals working within the dance ecosystem. Within new frameworks, “small-budget” dance makers need freedom from institutional and hierarchical structures, less reliance on historically inequitable funding practices rooted in white supremacy, and more equitable distribution of resources and knowledge, particularly for ALAANA, disabled and immigrant-led groups. These changes will support the individuals that make up the dance ecosystem and their ability to thrive. When the individual dance workers thrive, the collectives, groups, institutions, and practices they work within will also thrive.

This research reinforces and adds a new dimension to field- and sector-wide issues that impact “small-budget” dance, some of which are urgently dire. And it leads to important questions and considerations for Dance/NYC and the field as we look to the future. Dance/NYC is dedicated to engaging in research and advocacy that responds to highlighted issues as the field enters a new reality full of unprecedented challenges that also bring new opportunity and openness. Our efforts are deeply collaborative and rely on input from all parts of the field—please email [research@dance.nyc](mailto:research@dance.nyc) to submit feedback, questions, or ideas for the future.



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