

WELCOMING
DIVERSE DANCE
COMMUNITIES TO
THE PROPOSED
DANCE HUB AT
CANADA'S NATIONAL
BALLET SCHOOL
(NBS)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the Greater Toronto Area, the dance sector is ever-changing. In Summer 2023, Canada's National Ballet School (NBS) engaged Dance Umbrella of Ontario (DUO) in the community consultation planning conversations for phase one of a feasibility study for a potential capital project on their campus. In 2024, DUO initiated an independent qualitative exploratory study to capture insights from experienced dance leaders on a potential new dance hub.

DUO brought together 12 senior dance artists for a series of individual interviews. This research explores making the proposed space welcoming to diverse dance artists and dance styles, exploring new models of governance, and demonstrating the need for a dance hub in Toronto.

The main themes that emerged from the one-on-one interviews were **Affordability**, **Accessibility**, and **Cultural Competency**.



RESEARCH QUESTION

By capturing insights from experienced dance leaders in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and Ontario, this qualitative exploratory study is focused on a possible expansion of Canada's National Ballet School's (NBS) campus to offer space to the broader non-ballet-based dance sector in the downtown area.

The proposed campus optimization project may include offices, rehearsal spaces, and a black box performance space for artists to create, rehearse, and perform their work. These spaces would be offered at subsidized rates to dance artists and organizations that wish to be housed on campus.

This exploratory study builds on existing research conducted at NBS, to learn and discover what makes a dance hub, welcoming to diverse communities. Broader community consultation activities were led by the firm Monumental Projects in Fall 2023.

The main questions for this research were:

1. What makes a dance hub (including rentable community spaces like offices and rehearsal studios) welcoming to diverse and racialized communities?
2. What makes a space welcoming versus belonging? What makes a space trustworthy and fosters safety?
3. What governance models can Canada's National Ballet School look to in creating this new dance hub?
4. How does this new dance hub foster collaboration between dance organizations and individual artists?

METHOD

Key components of the method included: 12 one-on-one interviews, ranging from 30 minutes to 2 hours each. Interviews were conducted with experienced dance leaders in Toronto and Ontario. In addition to this, interviews with staff from the City of Toronto were also conducted to get the municipal government's perspective. The literature review consisted of desktop research and published articles and reports published by knowledge centres. Appendix I includes a list of questions used for interviews with dance leaders. Appendix II contains a list of resources consulted. A series of case studies of arts hubs from around the world, whose operating and governance models could be applicable to Canada's National Ballet School in making this new dance hub, are also provided.

LIMITATIONS

The purpose of this report is not to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the perspectives of dancers and organizations working in the dance sector in Toronto and Ontario. In this report, you will find a summary of the elements of research. We specify that the research draws on perceptions and real-life experiences shared during interviews with stakeholders in the dance sector. Given that this is a qualitative exploratory research study, this report cannot be used to generalize statements, nor can it be deemed to represent all perspectives. The desktop research was conducted concurrently with interviews and takeaways were refined as data were collected from interviews to align with the current desktop research.

METHODOLOGY

In terms of approach, the methodology behind the research is qualitative-interpretive, focused on dance-led perspectives and governance models. In essence, the research approach is discovery-oriented, looking at the bigger picture of a potential new dance hub, looking at case studies from around the world, and aiming to construct a way forward based on what people inside this system or situation say is working, what is needed and what they envision for a dance hub that is specific to downtown Toronto.

In considering the perspectives of senior dance leaders in Toronto and Ontario, having the research dance-focused allowed participants to model the way they envision sustainable dance infrastructure, within a framework that is inclusive of different identities, intersections and informed by the needs of the various dance artists and their practices. Those interviewed are artists who have training in diverse dance forms, have led a dance arts organization, and/or have worked in the dance sector in Ontario for several years. Participants may be from communities that include but are not limited to Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, or Métis), Black, racialized and/or LGBTQ2+, and/or Disabled (a person who has long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others). In taking a cultural-competency approach, this report aims to value the unique worldviews of different communities and affirm that artists and companies can develop their capacity and ability to work effectively across differences, working toward culture-specific awareness, knowledge, and skills.

This report builds off Dance Umbrella Ontario's Research Study and Needs Assessment on Dance Rehearsal Spaces in Ontario. This involved a wide constituency of dance companies, artists, and organizations. Three of the challenges with dance rehearsal spaces identified in the Executive Summary are Affordability, Operations and Physical Accessibility, and Inclusivity. This research is being used by Canada's National Ballet School (NBS) as part of their feasibility study for their campus optimization project.

NBS engaged Monumental Projects, a consulting firm dedicated to servicing the public good. Monumental engaged with community members from the dance sector, to receive the diverse dance sectors' input on NBS' campus optimization project which has a focus on creating space for dance artists and companies working outside the ballet form. In these community consultations, Monumental worked in alignment with NBS's strategic objective, specifically to "Advance Equity at NBS." As noted in NBS' Strategic Plan, Advance Equity at NBS means:

- Continue investments in equity to foster diversity of students and staff, bringing innovative talent to the school and making NBS a standout leader
- Challenge and strengthen NBS' organizational culture and artistic practices through new collaborations and authentic partnerships
- Evolve as a white-majority institution to an equity-informed organization driving sectoral change

What is important to note is that this Strategic Plan was released in 2022 so the progress of NBS in these objectives is ongoing. This report supplements these efforts to inform sectoral change and foster an environment of collaboration for NBS and other important stakeholders in the dance sector.

RESEARCHER BIOS

Josh Marchesini (he/him) is an arts worker and researcher based in Tkaronto/Toronto. He is a proud alum of Our Bodies, Our Stories, an artist-collective for queer/trans-Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour, mentored by Kama La Mackerel. His writing has appeared in venues like Articulation Magazine, article, Vie des Arts, Centre Skol des arts actuels, and Mass Culture. Josh has worked with theatre companies like Teesri Duniya Theatre, Purple Divine, Canada's Theatre Museum, and Theatre Passe Muraille. Currently, Josh is the Membership & Communications Associate at PACT and the Social Media & Content Coordinator at The Theatre Centre. He holds a Graduate Certificate in Arts Administration & Cultural Management from Humber College and a BA in Art History & Communications from McGill University.

Robert Sauvey (he/him) has an extensive background in arts and cultural leadership positions and is currently the Executive Director of the Dance Umbrella of Ontario. Before joining DUO, he was the Executive Director of Dancemakers, the second-oldest contemporary dance company in Ontario, recently celebrating their 40th anniversary.

At Dancemakers, Robert successfully developed and implemented a new curator-led operating model to position the organization for the future. His experience in dance also includes over five years as the Director of Touring and Artistic Administration for Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet.

His diverse cultural background includes leadership positions at Groundswell, Manitoba's longest-running new music series, and The National Screen Institute, where he managed creative film and television training initiatives and worked as the Head of Distribution for Video Pool Media Arts Centre, a non-profit, artist-run centre dedicated to the creation, exhibition, and promotion of independent media art. He has curated exhibitions for galleries, sat on National arts juries, and has been a board member for arts organizations.

His background also includes considerable experience in film and television working as the Manager of Development for a well-established film and television company, and running his own independent company developing and producing projects and winning a Canadian Screen Award for best-produced documentary.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section of the report is to give readers a sense of the existing research and tools available in making a dance hub. Making a dance hub is not a one-size-fits-all approach. It's important to consider one's context, history, and capabilities in making a dance hub welcoming and to take it a step further, trusting those outside of an institution.

In considering this campus optimization, disability should not be an afterthought. While not every access need can be met, this report outlines ways the proposed dance hub could consider the different abilities of potential users.

In their seminal 2017 text Building Access: Universal Design and The Politics of Disability, Aimi Hamraie delivers a comprehensive history of universal design and how it was constructed in politics, government, and American society. While this is a US-focused text, the principles outlined in this text can prove useful to those interested in building accessibility in a dance hub. Hamraie argues that “since the twentieth century, the project of designing a more inclusive world for everyone has taken shape through specific arrangements of knowing and making,” of which they call access-knowledge.[1]

As stated on the website of The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, “the 7 Principles of Design were developed in 1997 by a working group of architects, product engineers, and environmental design researchers, led by the late Donald Mace.” The 7 Principles of Design are as follows:

Principle 1: Equitable Use - The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities

- a. Provide the same means of use for all users: identical whenever possible; equivalent when not.
- b. Avoid segregating or stigmatizing any users
- c. Provisions for privacy, security, and safety should be equally available to all users
- d. Make the design appealing to all users

Principle 2: Flexibility in Use - The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

- a. Provide choice in methods of use
- b. Accommodate right- or left-handed access and use
- c. Facilitate user’s accuracy and precision
- d. Provide adaptability to the user’s price

Principle 3: Simple and Intuitive Use - Use of design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level

- a. Eliminate unnecessary complexity
- b. Be consistent with user expectations and intuition
- c. Accommodate a wide range of literacy and language skills
- d. Arrange information consistent with its importance
- e. Provide effective prompting and feedback during and after task completion.

Principle 4: Perceptible information - the design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.

- a. Use different modes (pictorial, verbal, tactile) for redundant presentation of essential information
- b. Provide adequate contrast between essential information and its surroundings.
- c. Maximize "legibility" of essential information
- d. Differentiate elements in ways that can be described (i.e. make it easy to give instructions or directions).
- e. Provide compatibility with a variety of techniques or devices used by people with sensory limitations.

Principle 5: Tolerance of Error - design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions

- a. Arrange elements to minimize hazards and errors: most used elements, most accessible, hazardous elements eliminated, isolated or shielded
- b. Provide warnings for hazards and errors
- c. Provide fail safe features
- d. Discourage unconscious action in tasks that require vigilance

Principle 6: Low Physical Effort - the design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue

- a. Allow user to maintain a neutral body position.
- b. Use reasonable operating forces
- c. Minimize repetitive actions
- d. Minimize sustained physical effort

Principle 7: Size and Space for Approach and Use -appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation and use regardless of user's body size, posture or mobility.

- a. Provide a clear line of sight to important elements for any seated or standing user
- b. Make reach to all components comfortable for any seated or standing user
- c. Accommodate variations in hand and grip size
- d. Provide adequate space for the use of assistive devices or personal assistance.[2]

How does this relate to campus optimization?

In thinking about accessibility in this new dance hub, this facility should interrogate its definition of what makes a space accessible to a variety of users. What may be accessible to one user may not be the same for someone else. Thus, the new dance hub should consider variances in usage.

As well, we should consider the different levels of accessibility that are possible in the creation of a new dance hub. Referencing The Centre for Community Organizations (COCO)'s Accessibility Guidelines for Organizers and Facilitators, these guidelines were created by community organizations based in Montreal, with the aim of cultivating people's autonomy.

As they state in the introduction, “[Accessibility] work must be premised on the idea that people know their needs best and must be empowered to make their own decisions with regards to how they move in and out of spaces, react to their personal experiences, and engage with material.”[3]

The Guidelines created by COCO are suggestions to consider for events, but they can be proven useful in considering the dance hubs' design to meet the various access needs.

In *A Place to Be Heard; a Space to Feel Held: Black Perspectives on Creativity, Trustworthiness, Welcome and Well-Being - Findings from a Qualitative Study*, the study conducted 50 open-ended interviews with 50 Black adults from the U.S. that covered a wide range of topics, including and outside the arts. As quoted in the report, “the qualitative approach we took for this study allows for a deeper exploration of people’s viewpoints, actions and conceptual framing. Because this method is not about quantitative measurement but about individual stories, we intentionally refrain from making conclusions about the prevalence of viewpoints or actions in a broader population; these fifty participants don’t represent “the Black community.”[4]

Like this report, theirs was exploratory and generative of experiences current to that moment in the pandemic. What is imperative is the findings moved beyond welcoming, to affirmations of trust and trustworthiness. The report “prioritized trustworthiness over trust because placing the responsibility of being or becoming trustworthy on the cultural or community organization (rather than placing the responsibility of trusting that organization on the community member)...When it comes to institutional change that signals trustworthiness, our participants emphasize that meaningful and consistent action speaks louder than words.”[5]

In the report *Creating Cultures and Practices for Racial Equity*, knowledge centre Race Forward released a toolkit of six racial quote tools: “These tools are designed for use in a collective and participatory manner, with colleagues, stakeholders, community partners, and leaders – with attention to full inclusion and active participation of marginalized Black, Indigenous, and people of colour. Racial equity is best undertaken collaboratively – the more you can engage with relevant stakeholders, the better. Additionally, misalignment, resistance, or reluctance from your staff is possible. If you think leaders with positional power might disrupt your racial equity efforts it might be worthwhile to engage gatekeepers, allies, and leadership strategically with these tools right from the outset. In doing so, you can better set up your efforts for institutional success and subsequent implementation.”[6]

Similarly, “*Shifting Power Dynamics: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in the Nonprofit Sector*”, a report released by Imagine Canada in 2023, looks at how Canadian charities are working to advance EDI in their organizations. Recommendations in this report included: holding discussions and education sessions, equity audits, developing equity plans that fit the organization, and creating structures to implement an EDI plan and track progress.[7]

As NBS is already engaged in this work, we suggest that this engagement with artists outside of NBS should be sustained and ongoing, ensuring core partners are consulted throughout the process.

Considering the context in Quebec, le Regroupement québécois de la danse (RQD) released a report in 2023 that looks at “qualitative research on equity measures geared to artists and cultural workers who have an immigrant background, are racialized or Indigenous. This study aims to help improve our understanding of the obstacles to inclusion across the dance sector, but above all - in a context marked, in recent years, by recommendations and new practices advanced by the community, and sustained measures established by funding agencies - to

identify promising strategies as well as challenges faced by organizations working to apply these measures.”[8]

This context is particularly interesting in the fact that many newcomer and immigrant artists view their positionality and context, as one that is local to Quebec. On a structural level, there are many EDI initiatives, but this does not translate to meaningful change in the dance sector. As the report outlines, no large dance companies have emerged from our ethnocultural diversity. The people interviewed identified hierarchies in the dance community that do not facilitate change: The big presenters don't move enough, major institutions and seminal companies receive the most support under the current system, and groups outside of Montreal have fewer resources and opportunities to welcome racialized dance artists and from Indigenous communities.

PERSPECTIVES FROM EXPERIENCED DANCE LEADERS

We interviewed experienced dance leaders from a range of communities, each bringing their unique perspective on what is needed in the dance sector in the GTA. Questions asked in these sessions were framed around five different themes: their relationship to dance, experiences where they felt welcomed in rehearsal spaces, challenges experienced in rehearsal spaces, logistics/booking systems, and finally, their needs/wants/dreams of rehearsal spaces.

Relationship to Dance

The interviewees' professional work experience ranged from 15 to 48 years. It's clear that these dancers have worked in Toronto and elsewhere for a considerable amount of time and have observed the ebbs and flows of Toronto's dance sector.

Some of the participants interviewed have ballet training. That being said, these leaders engage in various dance forms including but not limited to: contemporary, tap, flamenco, Kathak, Argentine tango, improvisation, modern, butoh, afro-caribbean, afro-contemporary, integrated dance, burlesque, Bharatanatyam, Indigenous dance forms, Caribbean folk, west African dance among others.

In rehearsal spaces, the dance leaders stated that they have worked with groups as small as duets to 40 or even 50 dancers at a time.

Feeling Welcomed in Rehearsal Spaces

These participants expressed what made them feel welcomed in a space. Participants gave examples of dance spaces in Toronto and across Canada:

- **Mad for Dance**, a now defunct space on 263 Adelaide Street West available mostly for flamenco, tap as well as other social dances.
- **Canadian Contemporary Dance Theatre**, located at 509 Parliament Street. The dance company is performance-centred and intergenerational, connecting young dancers with established and emerging choreographers, composers, designers, and instructors.
- **Citadel + Compagnie**, a dance company with a building in Regent Park focusing on intimate performances of classic works and new creations, with a special focus on remounting works and preserving Canadian dance work.

- **The Theatre Centre**, located in West Queen West, is a live arts incubator and community hub. The work presented and developed there transcends disciplines and genres, pushing boundaries on what is considered “art.”
- **Centre for Indigenous Theatre & Native Earth Performing Arts**, both located in Toronto, were outlined as examples of spaces that took careful consideration to Indigenous forms of contemporary performance.
- **Anmitaagzi**, a multidisciplinary artist-run company based in Nipissing First Nation, nurturing historic Indigenous arts practices between professional and community arts, exploring how to carry forward practices into the contemporary context.
- **Great Canadian Theatre Company (GCTC)**, based in Ottawa, produces theatre focusing on Canadian life and has resident artists that include dance artists and organizations.
- **Dovercourt House**, based in Toronto is an artistic hub that offers communities and artists a space for cultural expression including dance, music, or lovers of art.
- **Jumblies Theatre**, based in Toronto, is an organization that produces work outside of specialized arts venues and places radical inclusion in its work, giving equal attention to a production at every stage.
- **National Ballet of Canada’s Open Space** was cited by several participants, speaking to artists’ existing engagement with The Walter Carsen Centre.
- **The Dance Centre**, based in Vancouver, is an organization that offers a range of activities dedicated to Canadian dance, including presentations, events, artist residencies, studio rentals, and networking opportunities. Currently, Toronto does not have an equivalent to this cited example.

This is not a comprehensive list but cited by participants. What made these spaces welcoming? Participants cited the accessibility of a space, where dancers can enter and not experience barriers from the outset. For people with disabilities, accessibility includes having a cleared ramp at the entrance as well as a functional elevator that can take you to a given rehearsal or performance space.

Spaces are welcoming when dancers are given the necessary tools to create their works: wide rooms, high ceilings, a floor that is right for their dance form, and soundproofing, among other amenities. One participant cited their experience with low-tech spaces as they felt most taken care of, as the people working in the venue were easy to get a hold of fostering a sense of community. Participants outlined that their preferred spaces were those that fostered “a natural social situation,” where artists engaging in different dance forms can come together in a space and learn beyond their artistic practices. In dreaming of a new dance hub, participants raised the question of what the hub looks like and where are the opportunities in the physical space for that cultural exchange.

Some of the quotes from participants about their preferred dance spaces:

“Really love an atmosphere where artists can meet each other and have a level of social interaction, exchange.”

“Easy to get into. Space is comfortable. Changing rooms are nice to have, but contemporary dancers are used to changing in the studio.”

“A certain camaraderie, and shared common values that are in the space. Ability to smudge or engage with cultural practices as part of rehearsal.”

“Shared a common goal for having a space for as many people as possible. Nurtured an environment for artistic expression.”

Feeling Unwelcome in Rehearsal Spaces

Participants expressed a range of experiences of moments where they felt like they were not welcome in a rehearsal space. These moments included **negative interactions with booking, or security, barriers to accessing the space physically, poor physical conditions** of a space, and **lengthy processes** that deter users from booking a space.

With regards to security and physical barriers to a space, one participant expressed that in the middle of a drumming workshop with dancers, security was called into their studio after receiving a complaint from someone who didn't take the time to learn about what they were doing in their studio.

In booking a space, participants expressed the barrier of requiring dancers to sign a contract and have their own insurance. As well, they expressed that if the process to obtain a rehearsal space is too lengthy or if the person over the phone is asking unnecessary questions, they will not choose to continue to engage in the booking process.

As one participant outlined, **“when people with racialized last names call to make bookings, they were questioned more about whether they are going to do smelly things, messy things.”** Again, this does not speak to all dance spaces in Toronto but is an example of what happens when the expertise of these dancers is not considered in the booking process.

With those who experienced physical barriers to space, participants expressed how the buildings they had used were not accessible. Another common barrier that participants expressed was that **the building they booked a space for was locked and that they would have to go through various steps to enter their rehearsal space.** For disabled dancers, oftentimes their transportation to and from a rehearsal space varies, and are sometimes only able to come at unorthodox hours.

Considering the winter season, participants expressed that they would like to **see a way they can access the space so that they are not waiting for security to open the door for them while waiting in the cold weather.**

Regarding the physical conditions of studios, participants expressed an inconsistency in the quality of studios, including dirty floors, or floors that were not the right type for their dance form. Differing opinions were in favour or against marley floors, but what is important is that this new dance hub offers different uses for different spaces for all dance forms. Participants also expressed the lack of a good sound system.

Often participants had to bring their own speaker, where bluetooth quality is not as good, and the unreliability of WiFi requires participants to have the music file on their computer. Storage was another thread in this section of the report, where having all the materials/equipment in the studio takes away from space to move around and that a separate room to store equipment for periods at a time, would be instrumental in participants' ability to use that space to its maximum capability.

“I enjoyed the studios at the National Ballet of Canada but the floors were tough, we had to use shoes that didn’t have rubber material. Marley floors tend to absorb the sound but we need to hear it in a certain way.”

“Yes, if I find a space challenge, I don’t go there. If the process to obtain a rehearsal space is too lengthy or if the person over the phone is condescending, I just rather not go through that process. If that tone starts in that intake, it will transpire once we are in that rehearsal space.”

“We had security called on us during a drumming workshop with dancers, when people with racialized last names call to make bookings they were questioned more about whether they are going to do smelly things, messy things.”

“Some organizations make you feel like you’re just another theatre group to fill their season or a sense that they don’t have an interest in what you’re doing.”

“The main entrance had many steps that people with wheelchairs can’t use. The alleyway is not considered the safest given its close proximity to a shelter.”

“...there should be clarity upfront on what dancers can do in a given space.”

What makes these participants want to enter a rehearsal space? Participants expressed a range of ideas:

“Consignment store that could sell various dance materials to dancers of different genres. If their products are sold, a commission could go to a space and the artist/school could keep the rest.”

“Is there a document that tells you how you can get there? I’ve been at NBS where I’ve had pushback but I work in the EDI parts of that space. The receptionist should be aware of the kind of people who come into the space and the caliber of people who come into the space.”

“Generation of excitement when entering a space, hearing people and hearing music.”

“The waiting room is open, the reception desk may be on the side, where the doors are open.”

Bookings/Logistics

Regarding booking spaces, participants expressed different preferences for booking systems. Participants understood that “some dance forms cannot use certain spaces, but there should be clarity upfront on what dancers can do in a given space.” What is important in this section is flexibility: to offer different touchpoints for booking a space, as well as making sure that these touchpoints are facilitated in a way that can be partly automated, but also in part having a human perspective:

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“I think an intake form and email communications are good. “The online form should offer as many options and details that are specific to my needs, whether that’s I’m going to use music, like drums.”

“It is helpful to see an open calendar and what is available. Saving time to not have to inquire. Either look at the system and compare it to what we need or have a human who can be there to answer those questions.

“Not confident in online booking systems, would prefer talking to somebody.”

“Your booking system will be designed depending on what the building becomes.”

Needs/Dreams/Wants of Rehearsal Spaces

The biggest takeaway participants had regarding their needs, dreams, and wants of rehearsal spaces was **affordability**. One participant stated, **“once you start paying \$20 and over, it becomes a barrier.”** Making these spaces accessible and low cost guarantees long-term use, which in turn increases engagement with NBS. The benchmark needs to include emerging dance artists creating new work at the beginning of their careers. Funding is scarce, and even established artists struggle to find affordable space within their project’s budget.

Participants expressed wanting to have studios that adapt to holding virtual classes and digital presentations with natural lighting, comfortable floors, and walls designed for acoustics. For glass walls, opinions differed from positive to be able to have privacy at their discretion when creating new work.

Beyond the rehearsal spaces, participants expressed that a potential new dance hub should be vibrant and full of colour. To be more specific, the lobby and hallways should feature artwork reflective of Toronto’s diverse dance community.

As one participant described, **“part of the hub and part of belonging is also having a space where people can hang out...What happens in and around the building is equally important if not really healthy for the community. It’s not just rooms that are isolated from each other. Yes, these rooms can be soundproofed and give folks privacy to work in their own space but it’s also important to have a space where they can stand and talk.”** As we’re still experiencing the effects of the pandemic, third spaces outside of work and home are growing scarce. Space outside of the studios where artists have access to WiFi, refreshments and do administrative work. This type of space allows artists to reflect, and meet with each other and students and staff at NBS.

In considering NBS’ position in the dance sector at large, participants stated: **“Look at the sector and see how impoverished it is. They need to not look at just successful organizations but those that are coming up. It’s hard to get funding, even if you’re talented.”**

“What exactly is the nature of the space? Is it for presentations/performances or creative inquiry, creative exploration, leading to innovative performances?”

“It’s all still this patchwork quilt like none of us have what we need to make the whole picture. So we have little relationships with different organizations that are taking their existing resources and sharing with as many artists as possible...I think the next step is brokering those direct conversations and maybe even having brainstorming sessions.”

“Different cultures train differently and they learn differently...Making sure that we are bringing people who are skilled in regalia and pow-wow dance, same with youth. They are often looking at more of a drop-in style relationship... they don’t necessarily want to take part in a structured workshop, more to work on it on their own and ask for support when they need it.”

CASE STUDIES

The following are case studies of arts hubs, primarily in the West that have emerged over the years and have demonstrated sustained support for artists through shared governance, pathways to ownership, and creative opportunities to further refine their artistic practice. This section considered arts hubs more broadly, where NBS and readers can draw on to create their own models, specific to their local communities.

1. Cultural Land Trust (Vancouver)

2. 221A Vancouver

BCA (formerly BC Artscape and 221A Vancouver) are looking to create a Cultural Land Trust: An entity that would acquire land for art spaces ensuring stable rents, long-term leases and pathways to ownership especially for IBPOC artists. These spaces could include non-market housing, artists' studios, exhibition spaces and performing venues. The proposal is that the CLT would be run by a non-profit board made up of tenants, arts organizations and other stakeholders. As highlighted in 221A's website: The "land trust" model is well established in a number of countries, mainly for protecting community residential access and for nature conservation purposes. 221A is supporting the research and planning of a Cultural Land Trust for the particular challenge facing arts and culture organizations, centered on the lower mainland. In November 2019, 221A completed an Idea Validation Report that reviewed the core concept of a Cultural Land Trust in Vancouver. The Idea Validation Report gathered key data on comparable municipalities, input from local artists and art organizations and demonstrated preliminary viability for the CLT, with a particular focus on relief for non-profit cultural organizations located in Vancouver."^[1] According to their website, the CLT has gone through different phases: Idea validation, Incorporated into City Policy, developing a Business case, incorporation, defining governance and acquiring seed funding. They plan to start up in Spring 2024 and begin acquisition and development in Summer 2024.

3. Community Arts Stabilization Trust (San Francisco)

CAST — the Community Arts Stabilization Trust — is a community-centered real estate organization committed to ensuring artists and cultural workers can stay anchored where they create. Similar to the CLT in Vancouver, CAST emerged from the tech boom that occurred in San Francisco in the early 2010s. They steward and secure spaces for creative and cultural expression, with programs helping smaller arts organizations build pathways to ownership, enabling artists to secure long-term leases. They offer three streams of programming: Community Engagement & Knowledge Building – a community engagement process that centres artists and cultural workers most impacted by rapid gentrification and displacement. The intent here is to help bridge the gap between arts/culture with real estate. The second is Real Estate Solutions, working with small to mid-sized nonprofits and individual artists or creative entrepreneurs to: Securing Space for acquisition or long-term leases, offering flexibility in what an organization can pursue based on their capacity and needs. Stewarding Space, takes this a step further by providing services focus on operations and positioning the real estate asset for long-term sustainability. CAST hosts a variety of events including exhibition openings, artist talks, film screenings, book launches and more! Most of these events now take place at 447 Minna, CAST's HQ and hub in San Francisco for community creation and inclusion.

Important facts to consider:

- CAST became a nonprofit in 2013, receiving \$5 million in seed funding from the Kenneth Rainin Foundation.
- Counter Pulse and The Luggage Store Gallery were two pilot projects and CAST later acquired those buildings, long before 447 Minna.
- Their now hub 447 Minna, was donated by Brookfield Properties as part of an agreement with the city of San Francisco.
- Recently celebrated their 10th anniversary, investing in the community and expanding their portfolio to other areas in the Bay Area.

4. ACME London (UK)

Acme has existed since 1972, providing affordable studios, work/live space and a programme of residencies and awards. They are a lead provider of new-build artists' studios in mixed-used residential schemes and housing associations, currently have 15 different buildings. This model is slightly different as there is one entity managing the buildings and tenants who rent them out for a period of time. The residencies/awards programs have existed since 1987 focusing on early-career, mid-career and established artists, and includes over 700 alumni artists.

– Their departments are Artist Support, Property and Operations. Their work/live programme was restructured in 2022 after the program went under review to better respond to artists' needs, provide flexible and affordable tenancies and fair allocation of these spaces. Read more: <https://acme.org.uk/about/our-research/>

5. Creative Land Trust (London)

a. <https://creativelandtrust.org/research/>

Similar to ACME London, Creative Land Trust in London provides long-term affordable space for artists and creatives. Their funding comes from donors, investors and grant-givers that sustain the studios through freeholds/long leases, gifts and asset transfers. They have three different spaces some with mix use while others focused on workspaces. An important resource for NBS to consult is the Creative Space Design Guide. In brief, “The Creative Spaces Design Guides have been developed to give creative practitioners, property owners, developers, architects, local councils, designers, builders and more expert advice on how to establish a creative space. The free guides provide detailed information about how to design and build creative spaces that are fit-for-purpose, reflect global best practice and have a long and sustainable lifespan.” Read more: creativelandtrust.org/research/

6. Cultural Space Agency (Seattle, WA)

a. <https://www.culturalspace.agency/links-resources>

The Cultural Space Agency is a real estate development company chartered by the city of Seattle. With community partners, they secure long-term affordable commercial cultural space, build community wealth through direct investment of property and creating opportunities for ownership of commercial cultural space. Through partnerships with other arts organizations, CSA acquired 5 different properties throughout the city. They also offer the Build Art Space Equitably (B.A.S.E) Certification Cohort that brings 20 participants to learn through a curriculum examining the intersection of arts and commercial real estate. They also have a Cultural Space Handbook, geared toward smaller organizations looking to acquire their own properties.

Since 2003, Urban Land Conservancy has been using a somewhat different approach compared to the other case studies. They acquire properties in the metro Denver area using dedicated low-interest funding sources, as well as accepting donated property. The community land trust are held under 99 year leases to ensure permanent affordability and property preservation. Community development partners include schools, affordable housing, community centres and nonprofits with facilities or in need of facilities. They have multiple funds that support building acquisition and facilities management.

7. Workshops and Artist Studio Provision (Scotland)

Stylized as Wasps_, WASPS is the UK's largest provider of workspaces for artists and the creative industries. Out of all the case studies, they have 21 unique buildings across the country not just in Glasgow or Edinburgh. They are a registered charity and are defined as a community interest company. Not only providing space, Wasps also provide opportunities for artists to exhibit their work and sell their artwork online all in the same platform, generating revenue for these artists' work. Their core operations are self-sustaining through rental income but they fundraise for capital developments and work required to ensure new projects are embedded in their location's communities.

LEARNINGS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Three common themes were prevalent in the discussions with the experienced dance leaders interviewed in this study. NBS can learn from these three themes and can inform future studies on this potential new dance hub:

Affordability

- Rising costs and inflation has made spaces less affordable and close down, but this speaks to finding new models of shared governance and not reverting to ways of working before 2020.
- Keeping studio rental prices at a low price allows for a broader part of the Toronto dance sector to engage with the dance hub. Offering in-kind space as well as opportunities to create/explore new dance hub, stabilizes the dance sector and fosters sustained projects that tour across the country and beyond.
- Artists are often creating multiple projects at once and this new dance hub would contribute to a sustained pipeline of innovative, dance works created in Canada, allowing artists to plan for years at a time.
- In engaging with communities around the hub, NBS positions itself as not separated from Downtown Eastside Toronto but engaging with community dancers and communities wanting to engage with dance on a broader level.

Accessibility

- Frameworks exist in incorporating principles of design into the construction of this new dance hub. Disabled users of this hub are instrumental in ensuring that barriers are minimal to accessing this space.

- For bookings, there should be a streamlined process to rent a space. At the same time, there should be flexibility about how dancers/organizations book a space (i.e. an online calendar, email and phone).
- The new dance hub should be clear on the services/spaces it offers from the outset, ensuring that the hub will be used by the people who need specific needs for a studio rental.
- Artists should be given flexibility to book rentals at hours that work best for them. Some artists can only work at night or during the day because of a side job or have other commitments in dance education and dance research. In expanding hours of use, dancers/organizations can work at the hours best suited to their practice, fostering a deeper creativity/experimentation in their work.

Cultural Competency

- Like a museum considers visitor experience, the dance hub should consider client experience, from its website, to booking, to entering the space and returning to the space.
- A culturally-competent approach allows for generalizations to be made as a means to understand groups and offer a sense of access. With this in mind, the dance hub should clearly outline what groups NBS wants to engage with. With few precedents in Cultural Land Trusts, this dance hub has the opportunity to go hyper local and further integrate itself as part of its neighbourhood and those communities.
- Social interactions are cultural exchange. This new dance hub should consider how it considers dancers not just in the studio, but in all the administrative debris that occurs when creating new dance work. Where can dancers/organizations meet, collaborate and find inspiration from the community?
- Governance models should consider how dancers/organizations progress in their career, and the infrastructure that is missing to sustain that artistic practice?

APPENDIX 1. - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Rapport Building and Relationship to Dance

- How long have you been practicing your art form?
- Can you describe your dance style(s)?
- What is the largest group of dancers you have worked with in a studio?
- Other than solo work, what is the smallest group of dancers you have worked with in a rehearsal space?

Dance Rehearsal Spaces as Welcoming

- What have been the best experiences you have had in rehearsal and creation spaces?
- In the case of the best experiences in rehearsal spaces you have had, what made them welcoming to you and the dancers you worked with?

Challenges to feeling welcomed in dance rehearsal spaces

- What have been the biggest challenges you have had in rehearsal and creation spaces?
- Regarding the biggest challenges in rehearsal spaces, what made them unwelcoming to you and the dancers you were working with?
- When entering a building housing a rehearsal space you are going to use, what is needed to make the entryway feel safe, and welcoming for yourself and the dance artists you work with?

Logistics

- What is your favorite way to book rehearsal spaces?
- What types of booking and rental systems are your least favourite(s)?
- Have you ever rented or used any spaces at the National Ballet School? Can you tell us about your experience?
- How much time in advance do you need to book a rehearsal space?
- What should NBS strongly consider when building these rehearsal and office spaces for dance companies?

Needs/Dreams/Wants of Rehearsal Spaces

- Once built, what would make you want to rent a rehearsal space on the campus?
- Do building materials matter to you when entering a rehearsal space? (i.e.: wood, concrete, glass, etc.)
- Outside of the rehearsal space, what other amenities do you and your dancers need to feel comfortable and well taken care of?
- How would you feel if a rehearsal space you rented on the campus had a glass wall where students could watch you and your dancers rehearse?
- What is something you would like NBS to know about this project that would, in your opinion, make their campus expansion project successful?

Wrap-Up

- When this research paper is completed do you want to see this publicly distributed or can it remain internal?
- Do you have any final comments you would like to share about this project?

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