

**MINNESOTA DANCE ADVOCACY TASK FORCE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**MONDAY, November 18, 2024 – 5-7PM – Zoom**

**In attendance:**

Mathew Janczewski (facilitator), Sarah LaRose- Holland, Louise Robinson, Elsie Martin, Eve Schulte, Zhané Jackson, Karen Charles, Kayla Schiltgen, Jim Lieberthal, Ricardo Torres-Rivera, and Raymond Terrill

**Quick recap**

The meeting began with participants sharing personal updates and welcoming new member Jinza, who introduced herself as the Artistic Director of Movement Architecture. Karen expressed her disappointment at missing the recent Choreographers' Evening, while Kayla and Arena praised Jess for fostering a supportive community atmosphere. The group encouraged everyone to share their names, pronouns, and affiliations to strengthen connections among members.

Karen inquired about the distribution of the Request for Proposals (RFP), Mathew noted that it was shared through various channels, including Kathy at MRAC and a paid advertisement with Springboard for the Arts. Mathew mentioned their decision to forgo the Midwest Arts Expo, and others due to fees to advertise. Karen offered to explore posting through the Minnesota Council on Nonprofits.

The discussion shifted to the development of a hiring rubric based on the RFP, with Karen advocating for a collaborative effort involving herself and other Hiring committee members. The group also considered the potential for a press article focused on community engagement, with Louise suggesting it should highlight upcoming meetings. Sarah raised the idea of issuing two articles for broader outreach, while Mathew emphasized the need for increased press coverage of the arts in Minnesota, mentioning ongoing discussions with city council members for support.

Mathew proposed providing a stipend for other national service organizations to present their history, work and facts for future meetings, which received support from attendees. Sarah suggested marketing these sessions as webinars to boost interest, while Kayla raised concerns about accessibility. The group discussed the importance of recording webinars for those unable to attend live and the need for a coordinated marketing strategy to promote the revitalized brochure.

Jim expressed concerns about the current meeting schedule, suggesting a rotation of days to enhance participation, while Zhané emphasized the importance of clear communication and soliciting feedback from those unable to attend. Overall, the meeting underscored the need for flexibility in scheduling and improved communication to foster greater involvement in the community.

## Action Items:

- \* Attend City Council Budget meeting DANCE! 6pm at Public Service Center, 250 Fourth St. S., Room 350
- \* Karen Charles will email involved parties to gather feedback on hiring rubric proposal after 12/9, before the application closes.
- \* Louis will email the hiring committee to schedule a meeting after December 9th.
- \* Mathew will reach out to Sheila Regan for more information on the article scope.
- \* Louise will resend the final RFP to Karen Charles.
- \* Sarah will collaborate with Matthew to formulate the webinar idea, possibly with MRAC or Springboard
- \* Sarah will develop and share language for photo sharing permissions to be used in outreach with Mathew
- \* Mathew will send out meeting details and Kristen's information as part of the minutes and agenda for the next meeting.

## Key Questions:

- \* What strategies can we implement to effectively promote the RFP to a broader audience?
- \* How can we ensure that the hiring process is transparent and inclusive?
- \* What topics should be covered in the upcoming webinars to maximize community interest?
- \* How can we gather feedback from those who are unable to attend meetings?

## NEXT MEETING -

Monday, December 16, 2024

Northrop Auditorium and Zoom

5:00PM -6:00PM (4:45 pm -5:00 pm; new visitors welcoming)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89181431855?pwd=ocJlxYoPtAxiUllgRqChVV7YwfP6xh.1>

Meeting ID: 891 8143 1855

Passcode: 361503

## Northrop Parking:

- **Church Street Garage** (80 Church St SE) This garage is connected to Northrop with entrance on the east side.
- **Fourth Street Parking Ramp** (1625 4th St SE) many Northrop staff park here, and it's a 7-10-min walk to Northrop. You'll walk down 17th Ave, which turns into Church St, and will lead you to Northrop's east entrance.
- **Washington Avenue Parking Ramp**(501 SE Washington Ave). This ramp is a 6-min walk to Northrop and takes you through Scholars Walk on the Northrop Mall, and you can enter from the Mall, or come around to the west side.

City Council Member/Mayor LETTER TEMPLATE:

Subject Line: Advocating for Dance Funding in 2025-26 City Budget

Dear [Name of City Council Person],

I'm a member of the dance community in Minneapolis, writing to encourage you to support funding for dance within the mayor's 2025-26 proposed budget.

I live/work in [ward and/or neighborhood]. [Share 1-2 sentences of background about your role in the dance community, organizational affiliations, etc.]

The dance community has organized to advocate for two specific funding recommendations in the budget proposal:

1. We encourage you to support "Cowles Center Operations and Programming" as part of the Downtown Assets Fund. The closure of the Cowles Center was a major event in our field, further limiting the spaces for dance artists to share their work publicly, creating a loss of revenue for local nonprofits as well as businesses downtown, and reducing access to arts education for students across the city and state. This new line of funding will be essential for the dance community to recover from this loss and sustain itself while the Cowles is being reimaged.
2. We also encourage you to continue supporting Arts & Cultural Affairs Funds and the newly established Department of Arts & Cultural Affairs, which has already become an important contributor towards cultural activity in Minneapolis.

The arts are a vital part of what makes Minneapolis a vibrant city and cultural destination. We are known for the strength and diversity of our dance community, yet dance in particular faces unique economic challenges. Public support for dance and the arts benefits the entire community.

We thank you in advance for advocating for the dance community in the upcoming budget approval process.

[Your name]

MORE INFORMATION:

This is the text proposed by the Department of Arts and Cultural Affairs, which details what is included in the initiative:

### **For the Budget Proposal - Description**

The City of Minneapolis is the owner of the Cowles Center, and as of April 1<sup>st</sup>, is responsible for maintaining the venue until a new operator is identified.

As part of our contract with the State, the City of Minneapolis is responsible for the delivery of a government program as it pertains to the Cowles. This may include dance, education, or performing arts. The proposed funding will mitigate the cultural loss from Arts Space leaving their role as operators of the Goodale Theater. Specifically, the funding will also help maintain a roster of dance-centered programs while the city seeks new venue management.

Based on the feedback of three public town halls, and convening of cultural stakeholders in the city of Minneapolis, the mayor recommends funding to support a series of essential interventions to stabilize the dance community and reimagine the Cowles Center as part of a revitalization strategy for downtown:

- Bridge fund for dance: Funding to sustain more than twenty companies to perform downtown annually until a new operator is identified. This will allow for artists to continue to bring their companies, audiences, and funders to downtown Minneapolis.
- Dance education program: Funding to ensure the dance education program, which provides dance to K-12 Public Schools, Parks and Recreation Facilities, and the Hybrid dance classes throughout the state, is sustained.
- Workforce & professional development equity incubator plan: Creation of an equity-based plan to inform development of a program to train a diverse cultural workforce at the Cowles focusing on venue management, production, administration, and cultural/dance presentation.
- Lobby enhancement and murals: Transform the lobby spaces and outside walls to better interface with the diversity of the community through murals and lobby enhancements. Utilize the venue as a Welcome Center for the Warehouse District and community convenings with a BIPOC focus.
- Feasibility study and RFP for new operator(s): Support engagement strategy for RFP/Call for Operator(s) plus conduct a feasibility study to examine business opportunities plan to support the Cowles to reach maximum potential.

Arts & Cultural Affairs, in collaboration with Community Planning & Economic Development and other City departments (as applicable), will work closely with the new operators and conduct financial reviews and audits of the facility to ensure success of the facility's ongoing financial sustainability.

### **CLARIFICATIONS/FAQ:**

- This came out of community meetings and dance town halls held since the closure of the Cowles was announced in March 2023, organized by the MN Dance Task Force, Minnesota Artist Coalition, and others, with involvement of many organizations and independent artists.

- The “Cowles Center Operations and Programming” as part of the Downtown Assets Fund is separate from the Department of Arts and Cultural Affairs, which has its own funding request.
- Despite the name, the “Cowles Center Operations and Programming” is intended to go directly to artists/companies producing dance in downtown, not to the incoming (yet to be determined) operator of the Cowles Center.
- The “Cowles Center Operations and Programming” guidelines will be developed after the budget is approved, and will be offered via a call for proposals and competitive grants process. Ben Johnson shared that the intention is for the funding to support artists to produce dance downtown in other venues (theaters or public spaces) before the new operator is named, and then to support artists to produce at the Cowles once a new operator is named.
- The [RFP](#) for the next operator of the Cowles is open now.

#### JOIN MEETINGS FOR THE MN DANCE TASK FORCE:

Contact [mndancetaskforce@gmail.com](mailto:mndancetaskforce@gmail.com) to be added to the email list and receive notices of upcoming meetings. The group meetings are every other Monday from 5-7 pm, with rotating locations and virtual options available. More information can also be found in the DanceMN newsletter.

MN Legislator letter template  
December 5, 2024

Dear Minnesota Elected Official,

As board members of {Name of Company, ie.Arena Dances} or As an independent dance artist and long-time contributors to Minnesota’s arts scene, we write to bring attention to an escalating crisis: the overall decline in financial support for Minnesota arts, especially dance, and its subsequent impact on the longevity of significant dance institutions in the state. Over the last five years, the Twin Cities has experienced tremendous losses in the structure of its dance community – from companies and organizations to presenting spaces and schools. James Sewell Ballet’s recent announcement that it plans to shutter operations compounds other recent closures, like Zenon Dance Company and Minnesota Dance Theatre – losses that impact far beyond attendees to shows.

Dance is vital to Minnesota’s arts ecosystem. We benefit from strong arts programming; small to midsize organizations like Arena Dances amplify the well-being of Minnesota citizens. But dance organizations are struggling to keep operations afloat during this financially-pinched economy. Many institutions did not rebound after the pandemic. Lower audience attendance and a shrinking pool of corporate and foundation opportunities have created a gap in funding support available to small and midsize cultural organizations, and as a result, many simply cannot secure enough funding to stay operational, let alone to let creativity flourish through new

works and outreach opportunities. The recent closure of the Cowles Center only exacerbates this sense of loss in the dance community.

Dance education in Minnesota has also taken a hit with many seven-county metro areas reducing dance programs in K-12 schools due to budget constraints. While Minnesota boasts one of the strongest dance education communities in the country as evidenced by policies and practices outlined in the Education Commission of the States 2019 Artscan at a Glance report, access to dance in public schools remains tenuous as districts face budget deficits and underfunded public levies. Dance in schools not only educates the whole child, but builds future audience members, too. To preserve public school dance education is to invest in Minnesota's future arts scene.

We implore you to work with local dance leaders to ensure the art form has a future in Minnesota.

Specifically, we'd like to see:

- 1) The Minnesota State Arts Board revise their giving guidelines to consider accommodation for dance organizations that have shown invaluable service to the community with historic ability, especially over a {number of years, ie. 29 year history in the arts. }
- 2) Minnesota elected officials publicly recognize and support dance organizations across the state by attending shows, introducing legislation that financially invests in dance across sectors (ie, professional performance venues, community-based organizations, public schools), and joining conversations happening right now with local dance stakeholders to determine the best way to support dance's future in Minnesota ;
- 3) New funding opportunities dedicated exclusively to dance organizations to create a sustainable structure that values long standing small to mid-sized organizations to uplift the value of the dance artist internally with stable employment within dance (not a pick-up project to project model, but long standing company stability) to secure local dancers leaving for other national opportunities, assist Minnesota dance artists to tour throughout MN (bring back the Touring Grant, but paid to artists, not presenters- put it in the hands of the artists to work with) and rebuild lost performance venues.

Thank you for hearing our concerns. We would be happy to further discuss our call to action in a meeting, so please don't hesitate to request a follow-up meeting.

Sincerely,

The Board of {title of organization or independent artist}