

MINNESOTA DANCE ADVOCACY TASK FORCE
MEETING Notes
Wednesday, July 23, 2025 – 11am-12PM – (hybrid)

In attendance:

Baraka de Soleil, Gary Peterson, Mary Harding, Sally Rousse, Kenna Cottman, Molly Olson, Beatrice Rothweiler, Mathew Janczewski (notes), Michael Pettee, Elsie Martin, Jim Lieberthal, Kim Konikow, Lelis Brito, Lana Aylesworth, Kathleen Spehar, Kari Schloner, Tamara Nadel, Dave Moore, Alys Ayumi Ogura, Eve Schulte, Khary Jackson, LaTia Childers, Javan Mngrezzo, Julia Gallagher, Elayna Waxse, Judith Brin Ingber and special guests Danielle Robinson-Prater of Zenon and Jenna Papke of Arts' Nest (new co-operators of the Cowles Center for Dance and the Performing Arts). 29 in attendance; apologies if I missed anyone.

Quick Recap:

The MN Dance Task Force convened to discuss developments within the dance community, particularly focusing on the upcoming initiatives at the Cowles Center. There were 29 Attendees, commitment to fostering a collaborative and inclusive environment was expressed widely, reinforcing a shared purpose among the diverse participants.

Danielle Robinson-Prater presented the collaboration between Zenon and Arts' Nest, which will manage the Cowles Center's operations and ensure it remains a supportive space for the dance community. The primary goal is to maintain the center's functionality through a subsidized rental program and educational initiatives. A lease agreement with the city of Minneapolis has been established, initiating a planning process that may last up to six months. Looking to open in Fall 2026. Concerns were raised regarding the rental program's accessibility for local nonprofit organizations and the potential implications for artists outside of Minneapolis.

The meeting also addressed the need for improved communication within the dance community, with discussions about establishing a platform for updates and information sharing specific to the Cowles. Danielle Robinson-Prater mentioned efforts to secure the Cowles Center's domain for email communication. On a separate note, Mathew Janczewski provided updates on hiring the Wilder Foundation for the MN Dance Task Force focus group gatherings aimed at understanding community needs. Lelis Brito advocated for reimagining dance spaces to promote cultural ownership, while Michael Pettee suggested flexibility in scheduling future meetings, leading to the next meeting to August 21st at 9:00am.

Chapters & Topics:

Introduction to Jenna Papke of Arts' Nest and Collaboration with Zenon's Danielle Robinson-Prater discussing the partnership, highlighting the role of community input in their plans. Arts' Nest will operate the facility, aiming to create a welcoming space for the dance community. Jenna also mentioned the intention to start as a rental venue while seeking funding for more programming.

Operational Plans for the Cowles Center and Dance Community Engagement

Danielle Robinson-Prater discussed the goal of maintaining the Cowles Center's operations with a focus on the dance community, supported by a subsidized rental program and educational initiatives. The city of Minneapolis has agreed to a [lease](#) with Arts Nest, leading to a work planning process expected to last around six months. During this time, Zenon will work on building educational dance programming and will seek input from the community to shape these initiatives.

- * Plans for educational programming and community engagement at the Cowles Center.

Cowles Center Operations and Funding Discussion

Danielle Robinson-Prater explained that the Cowles Center's rental program aims to be sustainable while providing access to local dance artists through a subsidized tier. Barak expressed concerns about the exclusivity of the rental model and the focus on Minneapolis-based artists, highlighting the need for broader support. Robinson-Prater reassured that the program is designed to be inclusive and that feedback from the community is welcome.

- * Discussion on the operational framework and rental structure for the Cowles Center.

- * Financial sustainability and funding sources for the Cowles Center.

Progress on Development

Danielle Robinson-Prater outlined the upcoming stages of agreements needed for the project, which includes approvals from the city and state. Judith Ingber referenced John Cowles' vision of the venue as a space for both dance and performing arts, expressing hope for a viable model moving forward. The anticipated rental rates for dance and the ongoing discussions with unions regarding the theater's operations were mentioned by Mathew Janczewski as a concern.

Update on Hennepin Center for the Arts Ownership

Elayna Waxse sought confirmation about Artspace's role with the Hennepin Center for the Arts, which Danielle Robinson-Prater clarified by stating that Artspace is looking for a buyer for the building. Danielle noted that this has persisted for about 20 years, and communication from Artspace has been limited. Jenna Papke added that potential renters were offered a year-long lease, indicating uncertainty about the future. Mathew pointed out that current leases are month to month.

Updates on Community Engagement and Focus Groups

Danielle Robinson-Prater highlighted the importance of establishing a communication line for the dance community, with plans to set up emails through the Cowles Center.

Discussion on Community Dance Spaces

Lelis Brito discussed the potential for transforming dance spaces like the Hennepin Center for the Arts and the Cowles Center to better serve diverse communities. Lelis stressed the importance of building relationships and creating iterative experiences in dance, rather than just hosting traditional performances. Brito expressed willingness to contribute to this vision.

Updates on MN Dance Task Force Community Gathering Focus Groups
Hiring Wilder Foundation is complete and the planning and scheduling of five focus group gatherings to engage various segments of the dance community is underway. The focus groups will help identify community needs and will likely be hosted at the McKnight Foundation.

Scheduling Future Meetings

Michael Pettee asked for feedback on the new meeting schedule, leading to a conversation about the best times for participants. Mathew Janczewski suggested trying a meeting on Thursday, August 21st at 9 a.m.. The group agreed to this time, with the understanding that future meetings will continue to shift to accommodate wider participation.

Next Steps:

- * All who attend, read minutes and have a vested interest in dance in MN, please attend meetings when possible and share in discussion or making people aware of the group.
- * Danielle Robinson-Prater will share an executive summary of the proposal for the Cowles Center with the task force via email/minutes
- * Jenna Papke will work on establishing a subsidized rental program for local dance artists at the Cowles Center.
- * Danielle Robinson-Prater will send contact information for herself and Jenna Papke to Matthew Janczewski for distribution to the task force.
- * The task force will organize five focus group gatherings to engage different segments of the dance community. These will happen in September/October

Pertinent CHAT conversation from the gathering:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1GS6cs_h0cKSk2rDQYmSWUKGjeblyEd-LMA_1dBtyq9k/edit?usp=sharing

NEXT MEETING by Zoom:

Thursday, August 21

9:00am - 10:00am

(8:45 am welcoming to new attendees)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83761379116?pwd=rr579WayAFVkbkL4lwWetz287vhxjk.1>

Meeting ID: 837 6137 9116

Passcode: 279341

Resources:

New Operator of Cowles Center for Dance and the Performing Arts (lease use agreement info)

<https://lims.minneapolismn.gov/file/2025-00773>

Arts' Nest

<https://www.phoenixtheatertmpls.org/about-arts-nest>

You can email me Jenna Papke for now at cwles@artsnest.org

Zenon Dance School

<https://zenondance.org/>

Grant:

Midwest Arts GIG Fund grant portal open

https://artsmidwest.org/get-support/gig-fund/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=14666618620&gbraid=0AAAAABOa4gECYhwche10fBt8M2F-ZIWeb&gclid=Cj0KCQjwklLEBhDeARIsAL--pJx3Y7L4eftimD6om9EUB6lOl7i_yxJCyOays2NSEoVlitmMXnq-91waAt3oEALw_wcB

MNDTF Timeline for the initiatives with Wilder Foundation:

July

- Confirm meeting dates and secure locations

August

- Market meetings via earned media, social media, community newsletters, and printed fliers
- Collaborate with consultant to outline the structure and goals for community conversations

September / October

- Host five community conversations, led by the consultant (with support from the Engagement Committee):
 - Three in the Twin Cities
 - One in the Duluth area
 - One in the Alexandria area

November

- Consultant compiles findings from the community conversations and presents a comprehensive summary to the Engagement Committee
- Engagement Committee begins outlining possible next steps

January

- Engagement Committee shares findings and outcomes with the dance community