

Stuck in the Middle

A story about fourteen mid-career dance creators in Toronto

Prepared by Shannon Litzenberger
for the Alliance of Mid-Career Dance Creators (AIM-CDC)
October 20, 2010

*"The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over
again and expecting different results."*

-Albert Einstein

Highlights

- The average Toronto-based, mid-career independent contemporary dance creator is 39, has worked professionally for 18 years, and earns \$18,130 – 78% of which is earned from dance-related sources
- 80% of artists function on a project-basis with a typical budget of about \$27,400 per cycle of activity. Half operate as charities, the other half as sole proprietors
- In their last cycle of activity, 14 artists engaged a total of 194 individuals and paid out over \$357,000 in salaries and wages
- Artists volunteer time in virtually every aspect of their business. For every paid hour, an additional 36 minutes of volunteer time is required to realize a cycle of activity. This does not include time volunteered by board members.
- Artists spend less than 50% of their time on artistic activity
- Artists have a relatively low profile outside of Toronto
- Nearly 60% of business revenues come from government sources
- Artists want and need two key things: more opportunities to promote and disseminate their work, including connecting more with presenters and new markets and an appropriate resourcing strategy and administrative support structure to facilitate a range of activities that support their artistic mandates
- Despite an ever-evolving working environment, artists are replicating an existing business model that isn't effectively supporting their artistic careers
- Conflicting values among important stakeholders is a key factor that impedes an artist's success

History

In December 2009, a group of eight mid-career independent dance creators came together to discuss challenges they were facing as artists living and working in Toronto. Through semi-regular exchanges they shared many stories and wanted to find a way to more formally identify common issues in order to share this information with funders, colleagues and other stakeholders in the community, and to explore new ways of working collaboratively.

In April 2010, their exchanges were formally organized as the Alliance of Independent Mid-Career Dance Creators [Toronto] or AIMCDC. Through strategic partnerships with key arts organizations in the Toronto dance community¹, they raised funds to commission Shannon Litzenberger to undertake a case study that would examine, in detail, the common challenges, needs and opportunities they and their peers were (and are) encountering in the advancement of their artistic careers. While the study was intended to focus on the situation of a narrowly defined group of artists, it was hoped that the results of the research would identify issues that are resonant with a wider group of stakeholders.

AIM-CDC is comprised of artists Kate Alton, Susie Burpee, Tanya Crowder, Allison Cummings, Susanna Hood, Sasha Ivanochko, Megan O'Shea and Heidi Strauss.

Methodology

Participation criteria for this study were developed by Shannon Litzenberger, in consultation with AIM-CDC. Participants must:

- Have been born between 1965 and 1975
- Have lived and worked in Toronto for at least five consecutive years
- Be a creator who aims to produce and/or sell their work
- Have actively pursued creation and/or production for a minimum of five years
- Have received at least two creation or production grants in the last five years from a public funding body

¹ Financial contributions were made by the Canada's National Ballet School, Canadian Children's Dance Theatre, Dance Ontario and the Dancer Transition Resource Centre. In-kind support was provided by Hub 14.

- Have a dance practice that is contemporary in nature (defined broadly as all forms of dance practice not traditional in nature)

With support from dance service organizations, considerable effort was made to contact potential participants. Over 31 participants were contacted, 24 of them were deemed eligible to participate and fourteen individuals completed the survey.

In this report, the respondents are referred to interchangeably as 'artists' or 'respondents'.

Statistics are provided where data was consistent enough to do so. Otherwise, responses are characterized empirically.

Limitations

It should be noted that this survey represents a small sampling of mid-career dance creators in Toronto. Objective participation criteria were developed specifically to limit participation to a relatively small group. The size of the sample has made it possible to gather in-depth profiles from each participating artist. It should not be assumed that the case study results are representative of all Toronto-based mid-career dance creators.

Context

To provide context for the results of this case study, consider the following statistics:

On Canadian Artists²:

- The low-income cutoff for Canadians living in a community of 500,000 people or more is \$20,800.
- The earnings gap between artists and the overall labour force increased from 23% in 1990 to 37% in 2005.
- Despite the fact that women comprise the majority of artists (53%), female artists still earn much less than their male counterparts. On average, female artists earn

² 2009. *A Statistical Profile of Artists in Canada*. Based on the 2006 Census. Hill Strategies Research.

\$19,200, 28% less than the average earnings of male artists (\$26,700). In the overall labour force, women earn, on average, 36% less than what men earn.

- Artists with university credentials at or above the bachelor's level earn \$26,800, which is 53% less than the average earnings of workers with the same education in the overall labour force (\$57,500). In fact, the average earnings of university-educated artists (\$26,800) are less than the average earnings of overall labour force workers with a high school diploma (\$28,000).
- At 42%, the percentage of artists who are self-employed is six times the self-employment rate in the overall labour force (7%).

On Canadian dancers³:

- 62% of professional dancers identify modern/contemporary dance as their primary form of practice.
- The average age of a professional dancer is 31. The median age is 29.
- 54% of dancers are self-employed, about one third are both self-employed and employed.
- Only 18% of dancers have practiced professionally for 15 years or more
- On average, professional dancers earned approximately \$18,000 from dance-related sources in 2004. The estimated *median* earnings from these dance-related sources were lower (just over \$11,000).
- On average, professional dancers earned approximately \$22,000 from all sources in 2004. The estimated *median* earnings from all sources are somewhat lower (just under \$19,000).
- Professional dancers' overall average earnings are 31% less than the overall Canadian labour force.
- 71% of professional dancers are women.
- Nearly one-half of professional dancers have income from non-dance related employment or self-employment.

³ 2005. *A Profile of Professional Dancers in Canada*. A study commissioned by the Dancer Transition Resource Centre, prepared by Hill Strategies.

On Toronto-based artists⁴:

- The concentration of artists in Toronto (1.6% of the local labour force) is double the provincial and national averages (both 0.8%).
- In the City of Toronto, exactly one-half of all artists have at least a bachelor's degree.
- The City of Toronto has 10,200 female artists, representing 46% of all artists in the city.
- In Toronto, the median earnings of artists are \$18,300, which is 36% less than all Toronto workers.

⁴ 2010. *Mapping Artists and Cultural Workers in Canada's Large Cities*. Based on 2006 census data. Prepared by Hill Strategies Research.

This is the story of fourteen mid- career dance creators in Toronto.

PART I – Personal Information and Artistic History

In keeping with the participation guidelines, survey respondents were born between 1966-1975. The average age was 39.

All respondents consider themselves to be contemporary dance artists. Other forms of practice cited include dance-theatre, Butoh, clown, improvisation, South Asian dance, cross-disciplinary, and physical theatre, among others.

Respondents reported between 13-25 years of professional practice (post pre-professional training), with the average number of years being 18. They have been living and working in Toronto specifically for between 11 and 25 years, with the average number of years being 17. Other locations some artists have lived and worked in include Montreal, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Kitchener-Waterloo, Ottawa and Edinburgh, Scotland.

The average annual income reported by respondents was approximately \$18,130.00. On average, they earn 78% of their income from dance-related activity, though notably, more than half of respondents reported earning 100% of their income from dance-related sources.



choreographers, dancers, rehearsal directors/assistants, administrators, mentors, dramaturges, editors, outside eyes, financial managers, bookkeepers, producers, tour managers, interns, assistants, webmasters, graphic designers and agents, videographers, board members and consultants, among others.

In their last cycle of activity, artists hired between 4 and 40 individuals and paid out between approximately \$2500 and \$103,000 in salaries for that cycle of activity.

Collectively respondents engaged 194 individuals and paid over \$357,104 in salaries. These figures include the respondents' time and fees.

Total reported hours were 14,377.

Volunteers

Overwhelmingly, respondents reported significant contributions of volunteer hours toward all aspects of their activity, both artistic and administrative. Some respondents expressed that they couldn't quantify their many volunteer hours, and responses were generally not consistent enough in how they were reported to provide an average number. However, in all cases where volunteer hours were reported, the artist's hours far outnumbered the hours of all other volunteers combined.

Respondents volunteer hours ranged from 175-1000 over one cycle of activity. Volunteer hours from others ranged from 20 to 380.

Total volunteer hours for all respondents totaled 8950.

Based on reported data, on average, for every one paid hour, an additional 36 minutes of volunteer time is required to carry on the artist's activity.

Respondents volunteered hours in virtually every aspect of their activity.

Volunteer contributions from others included fundraising and promotional assistance, website and graphic design work, artistic time, rehearsal, technical and production assistance, marketing, governance, and artistic and organizational advice, among others.

PART III – ACTIVITIES AND PROFILE

All artists reported engaging in the following **artistic activities** as part of their dance career or business:

- Regular training (dance classes, conditioning, voice work, etc.)
- Professional development (workshops, seminars)
- Dancing/Interpreting (for other creators)
- Creating work/Choreographing
- Performing or presenting work as part of a self-produced event
- Performing or presenting work, produced by a festival or season-based presenter

The one area of activity where responses varied was touring (as defined by 3 or more consecutive external engagements of the artist's own work). Only 4 artists indicated regional touring experience, 5 indicated national experience and 2 cited international experience. One artist indicated having several external engagements in regional, national and international venues within a season that were not coordinated consecutively.

All artists reported engaging in the following **administrative activities** as part of their dance career or business:

- Grant writing
- Fundraising
- Marketing
- Self-producing
- Professional correspondence
- Rehearsal coordination/scheduling
- Researching and applying for presentation opportunities
- Networking
- Self-promotion

Some artists cited additional activities such as acting as an outside eye, website design and maintenance, publicity, video editing, writing letters of reference for colleagues, and bookkeeping.

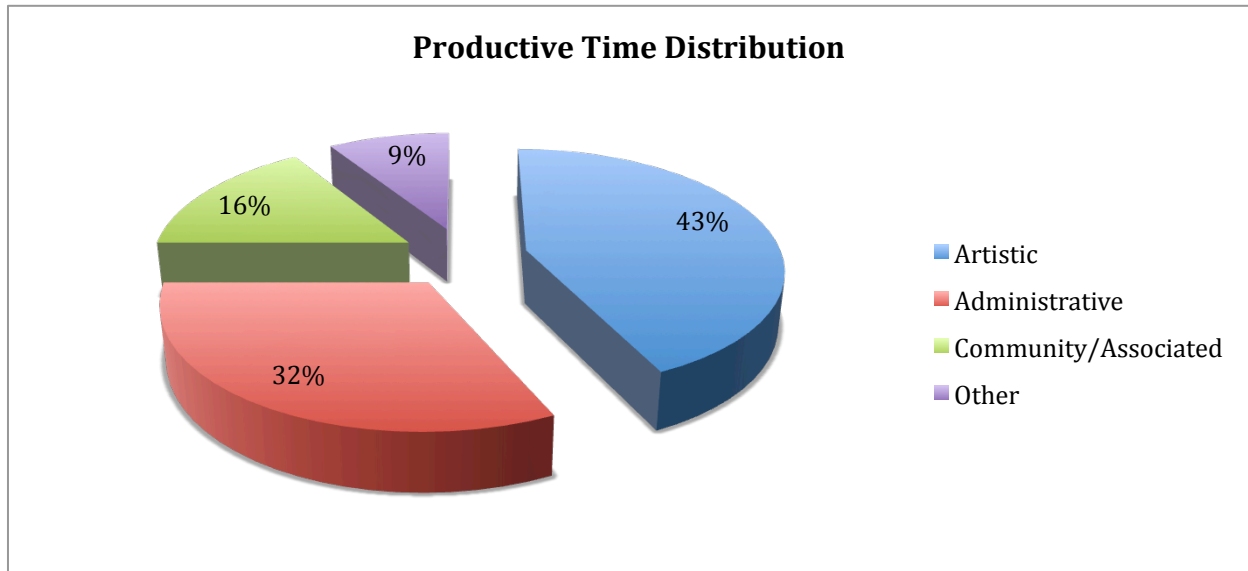
Most artists reported engaging in the following community and associated activities as part of their dance career or business:

- Community volunteering (ie –working on boards or committees, serving on peer assessment juries, etc.)
- Teaching
- Rehearsal Directing/outside eye/mentoring
- Advocacy
- Attending performances
- Organizing workshops or community events

Additional activities cited by some artists include music design/composition and volunteering for other artist’s projects, managing a rehearsal space and artistic programming and consulting

About a third of the respondents also reported other non-dance-related activities that contribute to their overall income. This work varied considerably from drumming in a band to making cupcakes.

On average, respondents estimated dividing their professionally productive time like this:



Profile

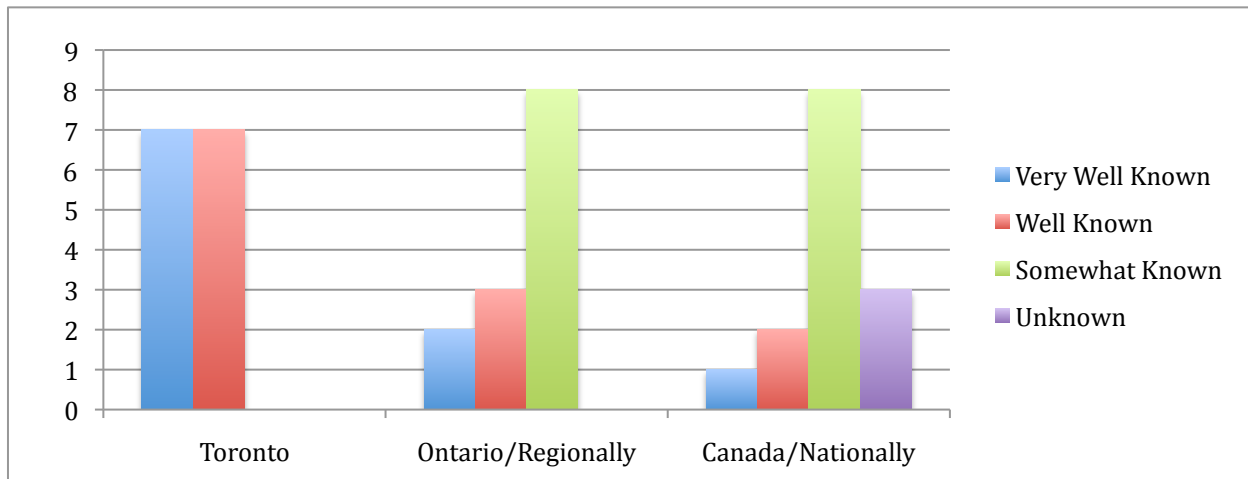
Most artists considered themselves to be well known or very well known in their home market of Toronto.

In their regional market (Ontario), more than half perceived themselves to be somewhat known, and five artists indicated they were well known or very well known.

Nationally, the group was split similarly as in the Ontario market with more than half indicating they are somewhat known. However, only three respondents considered themselves well known or very well known. Others indicated they were unknown in the national market.

Internationally, the vast majority considered themselves unknown and a few considered themselves somewhat known.

Artist Profile by Geographic Area



Next Career Steps

When asked about their next realistic career step, two key themes emerged in the responses. Artists discussed the need to:

1. expand their markets and find more presentation opportunities for their work, and to
2. find and develop the appropriate administrative or organizational infrastructure to facilitate their artistic activity.

These themes recur dominantly throughout the next section of the survey, which addresses challenges and opportunities in a variety of areas of activity.

When asked to identify potential support needed to achieve their next career steps, many artists discussed the need for funds to assist their transition between stages of growth – both artistically and administratively. In particular, respondents indicated that public investment is needed for quality administration, including agents, so the considerable

number of volunteer hours contributed by artists to their own dance businesses can be offloaded to arts administration professionals.

Artists also discussed the need for more work to be done to develop new and emerging markets for contemporary dance in general so that more presentation opportunities will exist.

"I have performed my own work outside Toronto...but isolated circumstances without real possibilities for sustained presenter/artist relationships"

"A lack of visibility that has come with touring cuts, few presenters and presenting opportunities means a lack of understanding of contemporary dance."

PART IV – CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Training

Artists reported a wide variety of ways in which they further their artistic development. Many cited the host of workshops and regular classes that are offered in Toronto and in nearby cities like Montreal. Many also reported developing their own professional development opportunities and physical training regimes that they practice at home or alone in a studio.

“Sometimes I create my own professional development opportunities by bringing [an artist] to town and creating a workshop for the community to participate in.”

There were also several respondents that commented on their ‘on-the-job’ learning.

“My greatest resource for artistic development is to work in collaboration with other artists. Living in Toronto, there is a treasure trove of amazing artists with stimulating and unique practices with whom to dialogue and share.”

“I have also inserted into my creative process the hiring of an outside eye or dramaturge, which helps me understand more about my own practice.”

Another theme that emerged from responses was a perceived lack of what was described as alternative contemporary training techniques.

“...there is little access to ongoing alternative forms of training within the dance community. The fact that the only daily classes are mostly a typical modern or ballet technique class feels out of sync with what many people are exploring in their own work or being asked to do in the work of others.”

“[I’m] very much enjoying West End [Love In] classes...great teachers with fresh and grounded ideas and principles.”

Creation

Most positive creation experiences were described as residencies where space, time and in some cases dancers, administrative support and monetary compensation were provided.

“Artist residencies have been so effective. Having space and resources are valuable but more than that, having opportunities to sit around the table with a group of exceptional thinkers has been propulsive.”

“These [residency] relationships offered me time, space, in some cases access to dancers, and in other cases fees and substantial contributions to the project as a whole (not just when I was officially in residence).”

“The luxury of the time available and going to the same space each day, to have a locker to leave props and costumes in, all contributed tremendously to the final stages of the work.”

In addition to residencies, many artists reported that having access to subsidized studio space was also very helpful. Many have developed relationships that allow them affordable or free access to space. However, some reported challenges in accessing clean, well-equipped spaces. They also often had issues accessing the same space consistently.

Other than time and space, some respondents commented on challenges related to the timing of funding and limitations in terms of the scope and scale of what they could achieve creatively.

“I find it challenging to keep momentum going on a piece while waiting for money from granting bodies.”

“The scope and scale of my work is limited to what I can afford to do.”

“Many of my works are large in vision. It is very rare to be able to see these ideas to full scale because of funding.”

When asked to describe what kinds of resources or support could help improve their ability to create work, many, again, cited affordable space and residencies that offer administrative support and financial compensation of some kind, as key.

“Toronto is becoming a more and more difficult place to find affordable, suitable space.”

Some respondents suggested a network for finding volunteers and collaborators.

Many also discussed how improved organizational infrastructure and administrative support would ensure that they have the necessary space to create and are proactively researching and pursuing existing opportunities. Some respondents described challenges in growing their activities and dance businesses to the next level, so that they can function in a more sustainable way, focusing more of their time and energy on creation.

“...having some kind of basic administrative and technical support – if only project based (like handling payroll, or sourcing materials) during an intensive residency period, could allow the creator to focus on what they are actually there to do.”

“If there was granting support specific for independent artists, or small collectives to find funding for ongoing administrative and strategic support, an increase in what we were able to do as artists, how our works was able to be seen, where, and by whom, all could be affected.”

“Without more administrative support, I do not have the time to properly pursue the things that allow for larger scale and scope of work.”

Self-Production

On the subject of self-production, almost all respondents described major challenges in private fundraising.

“Fundraising amongst a community that is starving is not pretty. I feel I have no access to people with money...”

“I don’t have the time or expertise to reach the people I don’t know with more [money] to give.”

“I find fundraising very challenging. I do not like asking friends and family for money.”

Some respondents tied fundraising challenges to a need for further audience development.

“I feel very strongly that the dance community relies too heavily on its own milieu to fill seats and also, often, for fundraising. I think it is VERY important to be looking to expand our audiences, and without money or expertise, I am not certain how this happens.”

“It seems like a connection to the potential audience is most important – filling seats.”

Other reported challenges include finding suitable and affordable performance venues, balancing producing and artistic responsibilities and securing public investment well in advance.

Most reported wanting to enlist the services of a good producer though expressed significant limitations in being able to do so at all, or as fully as is needed.

“...in self-producing, often without a production manager, it is the choreographer who organizes and manages all of these tiny aspects of the production.”

The more positive examples of self-production cited were actually described as co-productions where the workload was shared between more than one producer. Respondents also often illustrated situations where considerable volunteer assistance was provided.

“Self-producing is a shitload of hard work and it has been most successful when I have enlisted support in the form of partnerships with a diverse range of local arts or community groups.”

“Things that contribute to success in self-producing [are] knowing a lot of good people who have skills you don’t, and who are generous and able to donate their time and knowledge to your event...”

Presentation/Promotion

Artists unanimously expressed that building good relationships with presenters is key to securing presentation opportunities and expanding their markets. Many described their considerable efforts to engage in any and all opportunities to make these important connections.

They send packages, make follow up phone calls or send follow up emails, attend booking conferences, apply for showcase opportunities, etc.

“I build networks by inviting people to shows, meeting in person, sending videos and info, attending conferences, shows and festivals when possible.”

Some expressed a lack of understanding of how to further develop these relationships.

“The barrier is lack of knowledge and the sense of feeling that [presenters] are often inaccessible to me.”

However, promoting one's work was most often described as an ongoing challenge that affects potential presenter relationships, in part because of associated time and costs involved. Also, presenters often wish to see a work live, in its entirety before committing to a presentation opportunity, which poses further challenges to the artists.

"Time and again, even when a presenter sees an excerpt showcase of my work, they insist on seeing the full work live before booking it. Making this possible is a challenge."

Many suggested that having the support of an agent who could promote the work, help identify new markets, and help broker the relationship between artist and presenter would be helpful. Several respondents also suggested that there is a need for more showcasing opportunities and support for artists to develop quality promotional material reflective of the quality of their work.

"I find it extremely difficult to sell work that is personally very important to me. ...to have some distance from the promotion aspect of my work would help."

"Both having more local opportunities to present work in a forum that draws a national and international buying audience as well as having some expert, experienced and committed help in selling the work would be helpful..."

All respondents reported having been presented by external producers at some point. Most artists reported being presented fairly regularly by festival and/or season-based presenters.

Positive presentation experiences referenced by artists contained some key elements, such as an open and frank dialogue about the work, a decent fee, good communication with technical staff, strong marketing and publicity, support for audience development activities and potential assistance with related teaching opportunities.

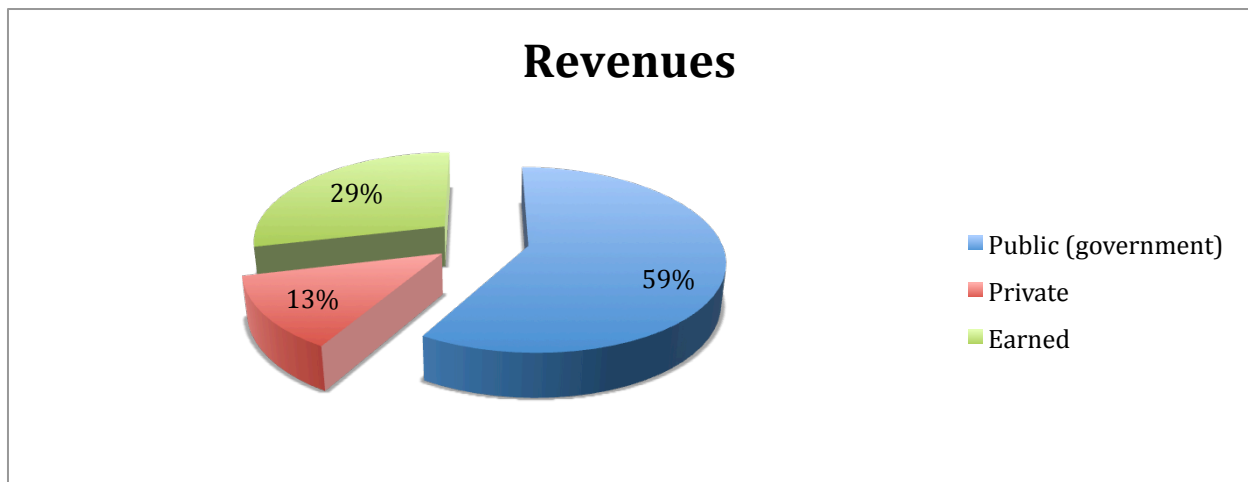
“A good example is when the producer is ‘fighting’ for you. They are involved, engaged and care about the work and the artist.”

“What makes the negotiating experience decent is when a presenter is able to speak candidly about the work and responds to communications in a timely manner.”

Artists also reported less positive presentation experiences, where the presenter didn’t acknowledge receipt of support material, or respond to emails or phone calls, where there wasn’t adequate tech time prior to a show, where venues turned out to be ill-equipped (carpeted or concrete floor, or missing basic equipment like a sound system, etc.), when audiences are misinformed about the work, or when fees were paid embarrassingly late.

Revenue Generation/General Administration

In the sector at large, the average arts organization generates 50% of its revenues from earned sources, 27% from government and 23% from the private sector⁵. For the last activity cycle, respondents reported revenues as follows:



⁵ *Finances of Performing Arts Organizations in Canada in 2006-2007*. Hill Strategies Research Inc. With data and financial support from Business for the Arts, November 2008.

On public investment:

Challenges in accessing stable, adequate and ongoing public funding is not a new challenge for artists. However, respondents attempted to drill down to some specific issues that could be addressed in order to improve the system by which limited public dollars are accessed. Here are some of their comments:

“In the current funding climate, as artists we are really only able to access enough money for one creation at a time, and it takes a long time to secure all the funds needed to go from [research and development] to production.”

“I believe the public funding system is not responsive to the way artists are living and working today. Applications [reflect] a company model.”

“...I’m not sure I want to be on operating funding. I just want some of the things it offers. I feel like there is a different model out there besides project vs. operating.”

“I’ve had to stop relying on [grant funding] to create my work...”

“Without operating funding, it can be extremely challenging to access the funds necessary to support adequate administrative and organizational support.”

“It often seems that it takes me 2 rounds per program to get the funding. The cycles are challenging.”

“There should be grants available for administration, production, tour management and promotion for choreographers.”

On private sector investment:

Many artists expressed significant barriers to accessing or growing private sector support, citing primarily a lack of fundraising experience, a lack of scope and scale to offer real incentives for donors or sponsors and a disconnect between potential individual or communities of supporters.

“I just accept that it is a long shot and hope to cultivate private individual donors through my board of directors.”

“It often feels like we are looking within the community for money. It would be ideal to have a forum where we could build relationships with philanthropic-minded individuals.”

“I would be interested in finding ways to improve levels of private investment, but I have no experience in that area...”

Some artists proposed a collective effort to raise private funds.

“...as a group potentially we could access more.”

One artist suggested an online resource that could help connect people and organizations willing to offer in-kind services or products to artists. *“...like an uncorrupted craigslist.”*

On earned revenues:

There was no shortage of creativity in how respondents reported earning income – whether their own personal income, or income specific to their projects or operations.

Box office, as well as teaching fees, presentation fees, and commission fees were common examples of how artists earned revenue. Some also reported selling merchandise, but noted that the effort isn't always worth the time and energy required.

Some expressed wanting to further diversify sources of revenues, but lacked insight on how to do so. A lack of administrative support was also cited often as a barrier.

"...my main earned revenue streams come from box office for performance, from teaching, and from commissions. I'm not sure that I have the human energy to take on more than that when I am also doing most of my own administration."

Administrative Services and Support:

Respondents reported accessing a wide variety of support services to improve their administrative capacity.

A few respondents reported having an ongoing, part-time or contract-based relationship with an administrator. Others indicated they've accessed project-based contract or volunteer support for administration.

Some artists are clients at the Dance Umbrella of Ontario and two artists indicated that they've received public funding support from the Ontario Arts Council's Compass Program.

One artist also accessed support for administrative planning and organizational development from the Department of Canadian Heritage's Capacity Building program, the Canada Council's Flying Squad program and the Metcalf Foundation's Strategic Initiatives program.

All artists expressed that their current administrative capacity needs to increase in order to support their artistic activities.

When reflecting specifically on the company model in relationship to public funding, there were varying comments that illustrated a lack of 'fit'.

"...being project-based limits my options in terms of some public funds I can access that might give me the help I need for my work to grow."

"The fact that I am not alone in the operational structure of the company is a benefit. The problem is that there is enough structure and support in place to appear like we can handle the workload, though in fact it is not a sustainable situation. ...in the end I am still doing 80% of the work and I can't keep up."

"The company model offers me more stability psychologically than working as an independent. [However], I am turning 40 this year and my hard core dancing years are running out. I don't believe I will achieve operating on a federal level before I stop dancing."

"I have larger and larger doubts about whether the small company structure really benefits us, or if it is just a whole extra work load. Boards, though helpful in many ways, need managing, recruiting, catalyzing, upkeep and education. ...there is not as much tangible pay-back as I would like."

"The cost of keeping a charitable organization...is expensive."

Building Audiences/Promotion

Most respondents reported employing a variety of outreach, marketing and promotional strategies to help build their audiences. These ranged from using tools like websites, social media applications and email lists to conducting workshops for schools and communities, producing free in-studio performances that target new potential audiences, hosting pre and post show chats and giving lecture demonstrations.

Some also mentioned that developing ongoing presentation relationships helped considerably to cultivate audience loyalty.

Target audiences referenced most often were art-going audiences from communities across a variety of disciplines like contemporary music, theatre and visual arts, for example. Some also discussed how they try to target a non-dance community audience, but weren't specific about what characterizes these other potential audiences.

Media Relations

Most respondents reported being reviewed fairly consistently by major newspapers such as the Globe and Mail, the Toronto Star and NOW Magazine, among others. However, many expressed concern that contemporary dance, in general, is under recognized by the media. Many referenced Paula Citron of the Globe and Mail and Classical 96fm as being the most consistent reviewer.

"...in the editorial fight for dance coverage, when it comes down to it, an independent artist self-producing in a smaller venue will lose out to a larger company or presenter in the pitch session."

Some also expressed concern for the overall quality of dance criticism.

"...much of the writing that goes on in relationship to dance criticism does not contextualize work, or help the form by educating through broadening discussion about the work."

Recognition

There were mixed feelings among artists about whether or not they feel they are recognized for the work they do. In the absence of sustainable financial reward, recognition for one's work becomes an important motivator for many artists.

"I believe that artists (independent, mid-career, multi-faceted) like myself are not recognized as cultural leaders. ...we are constantly moving through the dance community in different ways... we mentor, teach, and employ so many people..."

Suggestions on how artists could be better recognized would be to include them more often in influential committees, integrate learning about their work into more professional dance training institutions and to ensure they are financially compensated for their various roles.

Community/Associated Activity

When describing their role in the community, artists expressed significant volunteer contributions from participating on boards, panels, advisory committees, to speaking at conferences, engaging in advocacy activities, organizing community events, performing at benefits, and volunteering time for other artists in a variety of ways including mentoring, writing letters of reference and other artistic contributions.

"I feel that what we do as artists isn't limited to what we do in the studio or when we have funding. If we are engaged in what we do, we are committed to making things better all the time for the art form and our community, including making our own work better."

Most artists felt that their contributions were appreciated and reciprocated, though some expressed feeling an undercurrent of competitiveness in the community.

“A poverty of spirit doesn’t always arise from a poverty of circumstance, for sure, but one has to be pretty upbeat and extremely tough to keep going in this field.”

Service Organization Support

Membership to service organizations (out of a potential 14 respondents) is represented as follows:

- 6 DUO (have accessed services)
- 9 Dance Ontario
- 10 CDA
- 11 DTRC
- 10 CADA-ON
- 1 Toronto Alliance of the Performing Arts (TAPA)
- 3 The Actors Fund
- 1 Canadian Actors’ Equity Association (CAEA)
- 1 ACTRA
- 6 Dance Current (subscriber)

Artists noted examples of where these service organizations have helped them:

“I get a lot of information and advice from [Dance Ontario] about all sorts of things.”

“When I first moved to Toronto and volunteered at The Dance Current, it helped me find a voice in my writing, connecting me with the Toronto community.”

“The very existence of the CADA-ON Professional Standards in Dance (PSD) is positive in how I approach contracting my work and negotiating.”

“Through DTRC, I was able to access some much-needed career counseling at a pivotal moment of transition into being an independent creator.”

“CDA, go CDA!”

“Affiliation with TAPA has allowed me access to consideration for the Dora Mavor Moore awards – which, in my success there, has helped to give a greater public profile and perceived validity to my work.”

“CADA-ON’s insurance program saved me from poverty after a serious injury.”

“Career counseling through the DTRC helped me immensely in career planning around pregnancy and the early time with baby. As a result I have had more work and more artistically satisfying work since baby was born than I have in many years previously.”

“The Actor’s Fund saved my leg.”

Artists made some suggestions about how services could be improved.

“I think DTRC is doing a great job, but hope that they can focus more on in-career transitional support...”

“CDA has yet to find its purpose beyond advocacy...”

“I honestly think that streamlining some of these organizations and cleaning up areas of overlap would be a great move. Maybe a merger or two is in order!”

“I think that the staff [of service organizations] are made up of very busy individuals who are over-worked and underpaid. This creates a situation where organizations are unable to function as well as they should...”

“I feel that many of DUO’s resources are outdated.”

Final words

Several artists offered some concluding reflections.

“Our system requires artists to be business people... I believe that my track record shows that I am a good enough artist to deserve to work, but I cannot seem to effectively fit myself into the system as it exists...”

“I am an artist who has struggled for many years – working several (sometimes full-time) jobs outside of dance in order to make a career for myself and now trying to work primarily in dance in my mid-career, only to find myself in a situation where I am in huge financial debt, with no work opportunities except self-directed ones.”

“We need more opportunities for presentation...more agents and managers. We need there to be someone else taking up the cause to set up some models that work for us.”

Part V - Conclusion

Throughout the survey, artists identified repeatedly the need for more opportunities to promote and disseminate their work, including connecting more with presenters and new markets. Perhaps even more prescient, they articulated a pressing need to build an appropriate resourcing strategy and administrative support structure to facilitate a range of activities that support their artistic mandates.

By all accounts, artists appear to be stuck in a situation where the very model they are working inside is preventing their advancement. This model reflects a typical non-profit social enterprise, regardless of the artist's registered (or non-registered) business structure, where revenues are sourced from a combination of public, private and earned sources. Artists support their activities by generating revenues from public sources (government and arms-length funding agencies), the private sector (through sponsors, individual donors and foundations), and earned revenues, (comprised dominantly of presentation fees or performance ticket sales).

According to this model, artists have done everything 'right' over and over, and this has led them toward a perfectly unsustainable working model characterized by low wages, isolation, significant personal sacrifice and minimal opportunities to advance.

For the small-scale single-artist-led arts business, the process of building an effective support structure around the content they create seems to be a near impossible feat. Despite an ever-evolving working environment, they are replicating an existing model that promises increased government support with improved artistic quality, growth in infrastructure and activity. They are essentially working toward an unachievable situation and as they do, they are burning out. Their stories illustrate clearly that this model is ineffective, outdated and not supporting their practice - increasingly so as the sector continues to grow. The public funder can't keep pace to play the role it did two or three decades ago and it's inevitable that the pace of growth in the sector will continue to outpace the growth of available resources from government.

After nearly 20 years in the field, credible mid-career artists who regularly receive public funding are expressing considerable limitations in their own progress. They continue to struggle with basic business functions such as fundraising, promotion, distribution and market development, contributing major barriers to their growth. Without adequate, external, specialized administrative support to devise and implement an appropriate resourcing and public engagement strategy, artist efforts are inconsistent, limited to their knowledge and available time, and not effective enough to create a sustainable construct in which they can succeed.

While artists appear to be well equipped to source revenues from government and funding agencies, generating earned and private sector revenues requires a completely different skill set, set of relationships, and stream of supporting activity, primarily administrative in nature. Furthermore, conflicting values among these stakeholders make it extraordinarily challenging for the artist to simultaneously build and sustain the key relationships and streams of activity they need for their businesses to succeed.

For example, the arms-length peer assessment model of fund distribution upheld by public funding agencies values artistic excellence as determined by peers, the advancement of the art form, the development of the artist and artistic risk-taking. Funding decisions are made according to these values. Direct government investment is often tailored to specific political agendas and public mandates, such as economic stimulus or access to art in underserved communities, for example.

In the private sector, a corporation or business is more inclined to provide support based on whether or not an artist's (or arts organization's) work reflects their social/community mandate, and if the artist (or arts organization) can, in turn, provide the kind of profile or other reciprocal benefits the sponsor is seeking. An individual donor will likely contribute according to their personal connection, individual taste and values.

For dance audience members, their contributions as patrons will likely be dependent on their personal interest, curiosity and connection to the work, as well as based on their available time and whether they were made aware of any given performance.

For potential buyers, such as festivals and season-based presenters, the situation is more complex. Like the artist, they are negotiating the values of the public sector and the market, as well as their own curatorial interest and the interests of their specific communities when selecting work to present. Practically, their curatorial choices also depend on their budget and the scale of the theatres in which they present, among other logistical considerations. The presenter is both a champion and gatekeeper for artists relative to a given community. They play a very essential role in selecting dance content for audiences with a view to developing the curiosity and loyalty of a dance-going public. In addition to presenting artist's work, they also facilitate the relationship between artist and audience through residency, education and outreach programs. However, presenters are few relative to the available content they could produce, and therefore limited in their ability to support any particular artist on an ongoing basis.

Similar to the presenter, dance writers and critics also play a role in brokering the relationship between artist and audience. However, the values that drive the critic tend to be less considerate of the artist and more oriented toward a readership, with some exceptions.

The values upheld by the funder, the donor, the audience member, the critic and the presenter easily, and often, conflict. Artists struggle to present themselves and their work differently in service to these varying sets of values.

Not surprisingly, artists tend to give the most focus and attention to sourcing revenues from the public funder and to this end, shape their activity according to the values expressed by the funder. The focus on aligning with the public funder reflects the fact that this source of revenue represents, on average, more than half of their business income.

However, at a certain point, this source of revenue will no longer grow substantively or at all, either because the artist can't satisfy criteria set by the funder or because the public funder simply has no more money to distribute.

Where there is considerable room for growth is in the development of relationships with private sponsors and donors, potential audience members and presenters. However, without improved working capacity, and new approaches to fundraising, networking, promotion, dissemination, and market development, artists will continue to face disabling barriers.

It is also necessary to open a conversation among funders, private sector supporters and audiences to find greater synergy in the values that drive support for the creation, production and promotion of artistic work. It is in the interest of all stakeholders that the artist succeeds beyond simply creating quality artistic products. When an artist is creating quality work, the product needs to be supported, promoted, and find suitable markets. Without a reasonable amount of synergy between stakeholders' values and expectations, the creation and production of contemporary dance cannot evolve.

Part VI - Recommendations

Recommendation #1: To work with business experts, ideally from outside of the non-profit arts sector, to explore more viable business structures focused on supporting the artist's core activities. Financing models that diminish focus on the public funder and augment focus on the private sector and the market should be explored in order to facilitate sustainability and growth.

Recommendation #2: To explore collaborative working models and opportunities that move the artist away from the independent working environment and toward a more supportive, collaborative environment, reducing the feeling of isolation and burden associated with individually facilitating all aspects of an arts business. A collaborative model could lend itself to shared artistic and administrative activities, including access to high quality help for production, fundraising, networking, promotion, dissemination, and market development activities.

Recommendation #3: To spearhead a sector-wide effort to develop a Toronto dance scene, creating partnerships across all levels of infrastructure and career stages to promote and raise the profile of dance in Toronto. These efforts should be grounded in a spirit of solidarity, focused on raising the profile of the whole, rather than any individual artist. It should include things like multi-artist productions, collaborative promotional events and cross promotion, a linking-together of existing opportunities for public engagement in dance from classes to productions, advocating for more editorial space in key news publications, and the creation of and participation in online forums for dialogue such as blogs, editorials and comments in mainstream media, among others.

Recommendation #4: To open a dialogue with public funders, private sector supporters, and presenters, about how values can more closely align to better facilitate a fluid and viable working model and environment that supports the creation, production and promotion of new dance work, reflective of a contemporary context.

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