

3rd Blog Post, September 2017 - The Findings

We have just returned from a retreat on the future of dance service organizations in Canada, hosted by CDA and facilitated by [Intervene](#), where we were delighted to present the findings of our research to an audience of representatives from across the dance sector and its service organizations. This blog is the last in our series, through which we've tried to keep you updated as the research has progressed.

Our first blog post outlined what we aimed to do and learn through this research. Our second blog post provided a digest of previous research into the dance sector and dance services in Canada, as well as an invitation to complete our survey. Here in our final blog post, we present the results of this survey research and reflect upon what we heard at the retreat. Our full presentation from the retreat can be downloaded via the link at the bottom of the page.

Before continuing, it's worth going back to our original research question:

How relevant is the Canadian dance service ecosystem and its dance service organizations to the needs of the Canadian professional dance sector, particularly historically underserved parts of the sector such as Indigenous dance, racialized dance, disability dance/integrated dance, and regionally underrepresented dance?

We tackled this research question using a three-pronged approach: a review of existing literature and data, a series of interviews with key stakeholders in the dance service ecosystem, and an online survey that canvassed the opinions of the wider dance sector about the current state of dance services in Canada.

The key findings from the research can be summarized as follows:

Although the dance sector has been the subject of extensive research and mapping, this is the first and largest study to look specifically at dance services in Canada: understanding what the dance sector wants and expects of its service organizations.

Respondents to the survey were split on the issue of whether dance service organizations are “open, inclusive, and reflective of Canada’s identity.” However, many of those who agreed with this statement did so conditionally, saying that there has been good progress in this area but acknowledging that there is yet more work to do. There was a widely held feeling that the current ecosystem was designed to support Western dance forms in major cities and that it does not always work for other parts of the sector.

Dance service organizations themselves also recognize this problem. They are broadly aware of the historic biases in their services, and many have made incremental changes in recent years to reach out to underserved parts of the sector. Although they show a desire and willingness to change, each organization is

at a different stage of this journey, and good intentions are often hampered by limited capacity and resources.

Nonetheless, dance service organizations are nearly universally valued across the sector. Their passion and commitment to the sector, and their advocacy work are especially valued. In fact, people are hungry for more advocacy, particularly for marginalized dance forms. This reflects the feeling that there is a need for greater equity, inclusion, diversity, and accessibility within the dance service ecosystem.

With regards to CDA's statement of intent, there is strong support for the Reimagining Service Organizations: Decolonizing Canadian Dance project, with some pockets of resistance. Some within the sector are put off by the language around decolonization, and it's likely that some are fearful about losing their privileged position within the sector. Overall, there is good faith in the intentions of this project but skepticism that real change will occur. The project also highlights a tension between dance service organizations and their members: are they supposed to be serving the sector or leading the sector—or a harmonious combination of the two?

These findings are only one element in a mix of data and evidence that informed and influenced discussions at the retreat. It was important to us that retreat participants understood what the wider sector thought about the issues under discussion, but that they also retained confidence in the expertise acquired through their lived experiences as dance professionals and leaders of dance organizations in Canada. Notably, we heard back from many participants that these findings affirmed and validated their experiences within the sector.

We hope that these findings will provide the evidence needed to make informed decisions about the future of dance services in Canada. Moreover, we hope that these findings will resonate with you and help you to reflect on what you want from your service organizations so that they can provide the leadership that you need.

-James Doeser and Melissa Wong