

Summary

On June 23 and 24, 2016, 24 senior leaders and board members from arts institutions across Canada gathered in Toronto to discuss opportunities for collaboration between and among Canadian dance service organizations. Over the two days, the group reviewed a case study of a successful merger in the UK dance community, heard and discussed data from interviews with eleven diverse dance professionals, and shared testimonials about donor and funder concerns, particularly the perceived duplication of services. The session concluded with a series of concrete designs and recommendations and since that time, members of this group have continued to explore the need and desire for mergers of dance service

Process

Representatives from various arts service organizations (See Appendix A) were convened by the Canadian Dance Assembly on June 23 and 24 at the National Ballet of Canada in Toronto, Ontario to discuss strategic partnerships in dance. On the first day, Caroline Miller, former director of Dance UK, presented her experience of mergers in the UK dance community. The group then reviewed and responded to the summary of interviews conducted prior to the session. On Day 2 the group used service design¹ principles to prototype structures for a consolidated body or bodies in dance. The day concluded with a set of questions about next steps, recommendations for additional action, and public commitments, all of which are contained within this report.

Conclusion

The conversation on June 23 and 24 was another important step in understanding both the present state of service organizations for dance in Canada and the future needs of a sector undergoing significant change. Nine recommendations offer both a summary of the two days of intense dialogue about the sector and a set of guidelines for moving forward.

A plan for future research to inform decision making, the generation of evidence that financial resources exist to support strategic collaboration, and a clear visual representation of the process and its intent will facilitate future progress. Limiting public disagreement and conflict among institutional partners, arguing for the importance of advocacy, and creating a standing body to steward this process should address the concerns and feedback of diverse actors within the dance milieu. Relaxing some of the traditional boundaries that define dance practice can help to overcome habitual patterns of inclusion and exclusion that limit broad engagement and participation. Clear and visual metrics of success will ensure that activity is tracking to intention. Overall, participants in the conversation and others engaged in this process need to share with their boards and staff the importance of consolidation in dance service organizations and a standing body should be created to steward the next steps in this difficult process. In the short time between the meeting and the production of this report, progress has already been made and dance is taking a leadership role in reinventing national service for its members and critically reflecting on the institutions that make dance such an important and vibrant part of Canada's cultural community.