

**Notes- Dance Complex Community Meeting #1  
forthcoming**

**Notes - Dance Complex Community Meeting #2  
10/23/18  
7:30 - 9:30pm  
Studio 7**

**Attended by some staff members, board members, work-study volunteers, and teaching artists.**

Key points from last meeting that were recalled were:

1. Investment in teaching artists relationship
2. Community investment - how do we let the community know what we do so that they can get behind us if they want to see it thrive
3. Internal investments
4. External partnerships

*Questions posed:* What binds us together as a community? The DC mission boiled down is that we are dedicated to the STUDY, CREATION and PERFORMANCE of dance. Because we recognize the broad spectrum of dance, the question becomes what is our binding principle that unites us... that's where the Next Deep Step theme comes in.

**Board Member:** Jumping off from strategic framework, shared that individual donorship to a nonprofit is important because it shows larger donors that the community does its part; also these funds support daily operations

**Teaching Artist:** How much of the budget (%) is from rentals and how much from donors + organizations?

**Staff Member:** About 50-62% of income from rentals, but changes/fluctuates

**Teaching Artist:** Searching for inefficiencies within the organization, i.e. are some primetime classes running with low enrollment? Would a rental split encourage a better alignment of incentives b/t Teaching Artists and administration? Does not feel that the groups' incentives are currently aligned.

**Work Study Volunteer:** Split system is difficult on a practical level - would take lots of thought and work to instigate. Also if classes are low-enrolled, feels uncomfortable giving a teacher something very small, i.e. \$5, as had happened in the past. How to do this and honor the work that a teacher has done?

**Staff Member:** Some splits in the past may have had particular arrangements, been part of a larger deal.

**Staff Member:** Question to Teaching Artists: do you feel that DC prioritizes publicizing high-enrolled classes?

**Teaching Artist:** No, but that the priority goes to classes whose teachers have access to the necessary resources - i.e. media, or contact with the staff on a regular basis, or who have an established network. In an ideal scenario, admin and TAs should be equally invested in class enrollments and doing equal work. Too much burden on TAs to do this work when they would rather, or should rather, focus on bettering their pedagogy/teaching?

**Staff Member:** Bring us back to the idea of a spectrum - can we also train TAs, artists, others to be both good teachers and entrepreneurs? Can we/they do both? Can we hold space for more than one model here?

**Teaching Artist:** It wouldn't be too hard or costly to have a photographer or videographer come around to all classes, would it?

**Board Member:** Not all TAs have the money, but we are already serving that function in some capacity. (i.e. we do have some photos and videos of classes already.) How do we make the best use of interns? (a takeaway/thought)

**Staff Member:** Identifies that TAs should tell us their needs, and also that DC is responsible for letting TAs know what opportunities we offer. Emphasizes that there needs to be two-way communication on this.

**Staff Member:** Asks the group, what sinks in when you get an email from DC? How do we engage you (TAs and workshop instructors)? What is the community we aspire to be?

**Teaching Artist:** Asks how to better promote classes, get support from staff?

**Board Member:** Could we put resources for TAs on the website?

**Staff Member:** Could repeat the Communications workshops (and similar training sessions) for TAs if desired. Previously tried a "teacher toolkit" on Google Drive with resources, and it flopped. Also trying to revive the blog with TA input at this time - but it hasn't received the response that was implied during the group TA meetings!

**Work Study Volunteer:** TAs often don't have the time or energy to do these things; make it as easy as possible. Also, an ask/outreach has to be vaguely personal. Emphasized the importance of personal contact between staff and TAs. Google Drive may be useful at some point, so don't give up on it.

**Staff Member:** TAs, how do you learn about events here?

**Teaching Artist:** In-person contact is good. Email. Texts for emergencies.

**Teaching Artist:** Facebook and email.

**Teaching Artist:** Email updates have been good. Time is a barrier to increased communication. Suggested interviews w/ TAs, right before or after their classes, 2 minutes...

**Staff Member:** Recognizes that we've grown a lot. The ideal world would include 2 Communications Managers, though previously there were none. Also trying to increase connection with the Central Square Business Association. Not just development in the funds sense, but also "people-raising."

**Teaching Artist:** Comes back to incentives alignment.

**Board Member:** Sort of a chicken-and-egg problem. Hears that DC puts a lot of effort into communication about development, but in a way, we've also been shielding TAs from this type of comm. by "sharing the burden," i.e. each person does their own part - whether staff, or TAs promoting their own classes, etc.

**Teaching Artist:** Top-down vs. bottom-up approach.

**Staff Member:** What obstacles are there for getting people here at the table? Have tried various things - individual, then small group, then large group meetings, all scheduled at different times of day/days of week - what else is keeping people from showing up?

**Staff Member:** Thinking of having small-group think tanks to explore topics deeper. What are some other models for TA rentals? Pay teachers per head in class? What would the metrics look like? The history is that we have always been a rental house in this regard - the TAs have always paid a flat fee and been responsible for whatever they did in that time and space.

**Board Member:** Right now, the model means that we back the TAs no matter what, regardless of the number of students per class.

**Board Member:** Affirmed this.

**Staff Member:** We want to keep and protect classes that aren't perceived as "popular."

**Teaching Artist:** Have paid a lot of money in rent to the DC over the years; now has to cut down to 1.5 hours instead of 2 for the first time in that length of time. Paying more (including liability insurance policy), but has to cut back on classes to make it work. Scared of a model where the DC would pay teachers or do splits. Yes, huge and small classes co-exist. Would a split model be better? Large classes would be angry about it though.

**Staff Member:** Explains the split model in greater detail.

**Staff Member:** Who are we serving and how do we invest in these communities? Performances - we are teaching people how to produce themselves. How much training do we offer and how much do we do?

**Work Study Volunteer:** Is bigger really better? Obsession with growth - what does that mean?

**Teaching Artist:** Sometimes we pay rent and no students show up; this becomes expensive. A split or shared incentives may be helpful. How do we connect with other outside organizations?

**Staff Member:** The triple nature of TAs - teachers, artists, performers. What is the ecology of Boston and New England dance? Explains NEFA IDEA Swap - trying to get the word out to presenters so they see who you are and what you do (TAs).

**Staff Member:** One of the ways that was suggested by TAs to increase awareness of classes is to hold a 2-day Open House in lieu of Class Exploration Week.

**Teaching Artist:** Yes, great idea!

**Staff Member:** During Festival of Us?

**Staff Member:** No - this should be separate to really highlight the TAs (feedback from them suggests this).

**Teaching Artist:** Affirms that because it really needs to promote the TAs. Should ask ourselves why we are promoting them. A full day of dance would allow potential students to really explore, and would give people freedom to focus fully on the TAs and classes.

**Staff Member:** When he first started, received the advice that “festivals!” would bring people in the door. We can change this, but we also need to make sure that all - or a majority - of the TAs will be on board with a change like Open House vs. Class Exploration Week. We should try to live in a world of “and” as much as we can. Festival isn’t wrong, maybe just not right timing for everything.

### **Went around the table for final thoughts:**

- Encourage more dialogue b/t TAs and staff. Maybe a mandatory meeting is necessary to get people to the table!
- Frustration comes from a lack of understanding. We need to continue communicating to each other what we need, what we do, and what we can offer.
- I love the idea of a dance weekend.
- It’s a great idea to get everyone to the table. It’s important to hear each other and work together.
- Dance that we are making here: for whom, by who? Some have stopped taking class here because all of the teaching artists that they have encountered have been transphobic in some way, and they are tired of training teachers.
- Accessibility: using the lift is not the best option for those with physical limitations.
- There seems to be an obsession with bigger and growth - is it better? What about the quality of the classes and experiences here?
- A nonprofit doesn’t have to function like one; it could adopt business-like practices to improve efficiency. Think about why people aren’t coming to the table. Perhaps some of the TAs have been here for a long time and have said what they’d wish to say many times over.
- It’s great to hear TAs’ perspectives; vital. Recognizing that asking for money isn’t dirty - grappling with how to request shame-free donations for The Dance Complex. Fundraising is everyone’s responsibility who is part of this community to give what they can, how they can - skills, time, money. Continuing to move is important.
- How do we invest in the DC? If we took \$5 from each person who comes in each week, we’d improve financially. Appreciates the growth that has recently happening, and is continuing to happen.
- There is huge value in relationships/ How can we utilize this value? I.e. annual TA meetings to discuss contracts - how can we use those meetings to their maximum potential?
- What roles do staff play in building those relationships? Recognizes the complexity of being part of an ecology. Trying to balance the imbalances. How do help the ecology stay sustainable?

**IN PREPARATION for NEXT MEETING:**

Notes from meeting #1, #2; and summation of Teaching Artists small roundtables from summer 2018, major ideas will be coalesced into 4 or 5 question areas.

*At meeting #3:*

Guest facilitator Jim Stiles, a new board member of The Dance Complex with facilitation, mediation and higher ed curriculum development background, will lead the group for input into the major 4 or 5 areas identified.