

# 2024 LAB ARTISTS PROGRAM

Program Details and Application Guidelines



2023 Lab Artist, Benji Hart  
Photo by William Frederking

# Overview

---

Chicago Dancemakers Forum's Lab Artists Program is the most substantial source of support for individual dancemakers working in the Chicagoland area with an open call process. In 2024, four local dancemakers will each receive a grant of **\$25,000 USD along with a year of tailored support.**

The Lab Artists Program is designed for dancemakers at an important juncture in their career and/or artistic trajectory, actively taking risks and experimenting, and poised to invest in their artistic practice with greater depth or scale. Rather than having a fixed approach, the Lab Year is an experiment in itself, responsive to each artist's individual goals, timeline, and changing needs.

Eligible artists have until **September 18, 2023 at 5pm CT** to apply. A panel will select 10 Finalists who will each receive \$500, the option of public recognition, and professional development resources. The four 2024 Lab Artists will be randomly selected from the pool of Finalists in November.

Past Lab Artists are diverse in age, gender, race, local geography, and dance discipline, working in Tap, Bharatanatyam, Chicago Footwork, dance for the camera, Voguing, contemporary, modern dance, and more. Many of these artists have built national audiences and international recognition since receiving support from Chicago Dancemakers Forum and, collectively, represent the distinct power of dance made in Chicago.

This 21st year of the program is open to all eligible dancemakers but will prioritize artists that we recognize have historically been underrepresented in the program – Indigenous, Immigrant, Trans and Non-Binary, Parent/Caregiver, and/or Disabled Artists.

# About the Program

---

## **UNRESTRICTED GRANT**

During the Lab Year (January to December 2024), the \$25K grant can be spent fully at the discretion of each grantee, with funds covering living expenses, research activities, travel, fair pay for dancers and collaborators, and other expenses that support the artist while continuing their creative practice or making new dance work. The grant amount was recently increased in an effort to help cover support services throughout the Lab Year, such as childcare, therapy, personal or administrative assistance, audio description, ASL interpretation, specialized equipment, grant proposal writing, and mentorship/coaching. Lab Artists may also choose to invest, save, and/or donate a portion of their grant funds. While Lab Artists are encouraged to plan and track their grant spending, at no point are they required to submit receipts to Chicago Dancemaker Forum.

## **PROGRAM GOALS**

The Lab Artists Program is designed to provide financial support that is significant enough to fund the creative process and to minimize some of life's day-to-day stressors so that artists have the time and capacity to invest in their artistic practice with greater depth or scale. The Program provides professional development and cohort support to help strengthen, expand, and develop long-lasting professional relationships in the field.

Long-term goals for participants:

- Dancemakers continue to make the work that they want to make.
- Dancemakers stay engaged in the Chicago Dancemakers Forum network and broader dance community.
- Dancemakers understand the importance of their artistic voice.

# Eligibility

---

Chicago Dancemakers Forum invites individual dancemakers working in improvised, communal, or choreographed forms who identify with the following statements to apply:

- Age 21 or older at the time of application.
- The majority of my dancemaking practice happens in the [Chicago–Naperville–Elgin, IL–IN–WI Metropolitan Statistical Area](#) (Cook, DeKalb, DuPage, Grundy, Jasper, Kane, Kendall, Kenosha, Lake, McHenry, Newton, Porter, or Will County). Note: Lab Artists are asked to gather quarterly in the city of Chicago during the Lab Year.
- I have developed a distinctive trajectory in my dancemaking and am ready to invest in my artistic practice with greater depth or scale.
- I am able to effectively make use of my time for creative experimentation, artistic research, and/or development of new work.
- I can manage a budget of \$25K to support my dancemaking and to work with collaborators in an environment of fairness, transparency, consent, and open communication.
- I have the capacity and the time to benefit from, and contribute to, an environment of artistic interchange with a cohort of Lab Artists, and I am in position to make this a priority in 2024.

## RESTRICTIONS

- Lab Artists must reside in the [Chicago–Naperville–Elgin, IL–IN–WI Metropolitan Statistical Area](#) during the duration of the calendar year of 2024. Applicants with dual-residency will not be considered.
- Students enrolled in degree programs at the time of application are not eligible for the Lab Artists Program.
- Artists previously funded through the Lab Artists Program are not eligible.
- Staff and administrative contractors who have received \$5,000+ from Chicago Dancemakers Forum in the 12 months prior to the application deadline are not eligible to apply.

# Application Timeline

---

July 6 - September 17, 2023: Open Call for Applications

July thru September: Info Sessions and Support for Applicants

**Monday, September 18, 2023 at 5pm CT: Applications Due**

October 2023: 10 applicants will be selected as Finalists. Each will receive a cash stipend of \$500 and the option of public recognition.

October 21, 2023: Professional Development Gathering of Finalists

Early November 2023: The four 2024 Lab Artists will be randomly selected from the pool of Finalists.

Mid-November 2023: Public Announcement of the 2024 Lab Artists

January 2024: Celebration and Launch of the Lab Year

 [bit.ly/LabArtistsProgram](https://bit.ly/LabArtistsProgram)



2022 Lab Artist, Starinah Dixon | Photo by William Frederking

# Selection Criteria

---

A competitive application for the Lab Artists Program demonstrates the following:

- **BODY OF WORK (40%):** Applicant provides evidence of an established body of work as a dancemaker, as demonstrated in their resumé/bio and work sample(s). The submitted video(s) and optional supplemental files showcase the dancemaker's strong demonstration of the use of dancemaking elements: time, space, and energy in concert with clear conceptual content. Improvised, communal, and choreographed forms are equally evaluated.
- **DISTINCTION (30%):** Application demonstrates a distinctive artistic voice, experimentation, risk taking, and a compelling area of artistic inquiry.
- **TIMING (30%):** Artist demonstrates readiness for the program, shows that they are at an important juncture in their career and/or artistic trajectory, and is poised to invest in their artistic practice with greater depth or scale.



2020 Lab Artist, Christopher Knowlton  
Photo by William Frederking

# How to Apply

---

1. Create or update your **Submittable** account.
2. Prepare your application materials including
  - a. Resumé/bio highlighting your dancemaking experience
  - b. Up to 15min of Work Samples showcasing compelling movement choices and strong demonstration of dancemaking elements. Applicants are strongly encouraged to include captioning and audio description.
  - c. Narrative addressing the questions below within a single written essay (suggested 1000 words) OR a video (suggested 5 minutes). Our goal is to make this process of-benefit to you; to that end, we have narrowed the questions to the critical information (without word counts or duration limits).
  - d. Proposed Lab Year budget. No required format, but a template is provided.
3. Complete the online form in Submittable and upload or link to your application materials. Some video files may take a significant amount of time to upload.
4. Submit your application no later than **Monday, September 18, 2023, 5PM CT**. Late submissions will not be accepted. We encourage artists to apply early in case of technology hiccups or personal emergencies.



## NARRATIVE QUESTIONS

- How do you describe the dance you make and/or your processes for making dance?
- What do you want to do during your 2024 Lab Year with tailored support and \$25K? How will you spend your time and why? What do you need in order to experiment and deepen or expand your practice as a dancemaker?
- What is your hope for your artistry and career going forward? Describe your future ideal.

2022 Lab Artist, Diamond Hardiman  
Photo by William Frederking

# Q & A cont.

---

## **WHAT IS MEANT BY "INDIVIDUAL DANCEMAKER"?**

The Lab Artists Program is designed to support an individual person no matter the context in which they make dance: as an independent artist, as part of an unincorporated collective or partnership, as artistic director of a company, as a freelance commissioned choreographer, etc. We fully understand that most body-based performance is created in close collaboration with multiple people. With that understanding, this program is intentionally designed to uplift individual practitioners within Chicago's dance communities. If you feel strongly that applying separately from your collective or crew would be problematic for the ecosystem of your practice, you can choose to apply as an artistic collective. However, the grant funds and programming are NOT designed to directly support the general operations of dance companies or nonprofit organizations.

## **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE READY?**

Applicants decide their individual readiness for this program. For Chicago Dancemakers Forum, applicant readiness is based on a self-identified point in the applicant's career/practice and could be defined in a number of ways based on dance form, career/artistic goals, and industry. All applicants should have an established body of work, a distinct voice as a dancemaker, experimenting and taking risks, and be in a position to invest in their artistic practice with greater depth or scale.

Examples of readiness could include:

- 2+ years out from a dance degree program and its artistic influences
- 5+ years of participation in battles, festivals, cyphers, etc.
- Successful management of 2 or more funded dance projects



# Q & A

---

## WHO SELECTS THE LAB ARTISTS?

Voting panelists change each year. In 2024, the 10 Finalists will be selected by a panel comprised of two national and two local dance professionals, including former Lab Artists. Chicago Dancemakers Forum makes every effort to engage with panelists who identify with the program prioritization categories and align with the organization's values.

## WHAT DO THE 10 FINALISTS RECEIVE?

- \$500 USD stipend
- A half-day retreat on **October 21, 2023**, gathering the 10 Finalists for professional development, networking, resource sharing, and consultation
- Opt-in opportunities for **promotion** throughout the year on Chicago Dancemakers Forum's social media and monthly newsletter
- Consideration for other opportunities and relationship building in the industry

## HOW DOES THE RANDOM DRAW WORK?

The four 2024 Lab Artists will be randomly selected from the pool of Finalists. The random draw is conducted through a computerized platform and witnessed by panelists and Board members to ensure integrity of the process. Finalists will be welcome to observe the drawing.

Once a group of Finalists are selected through a competitive process, randomization helps reduce the impact of curatorial gatekeeping that can happen with short lists.

# Q & A

---

## HOW DOES THE PRIORITIZATION WORK?

The 2024 Lab Artists Program is **open to all eligible dancemakers** but the selection process will prioritize artists that we recognize have historically been underrepresented in the program – Indigenous, Immigrant, Trans or Non-Binary, Parent/Caregiver, and/or Disabled Artists. There are checkboxes on the application for applicants to self-identify according to the following definitions.

- **Indigenous Artist:** Indigenous, Alaska Natives, American Indian, or First Nation Individuals with Tribal Affiliation, Enrollment, or Membership;
- **Immigrant Artist:** Refugee, asylum seeker, SIV, migrant, LPR, or other status -- including first-generation immigrant, but not second-generation. Note that Lab Artists must provide either a Social Security Number (SSN) or Employee Identification Number (EIN) and report the \$25K grant as income on the tax filing for the associated entity;
- **Trans or Non-Binary Artist:** Inclusive of artists who are Trans, transgender, transmasculine, transfeminine, genderqueer, genderfluid, GNC, gender diverse, gender variant, gender expansive, or non-binary;
- **Parent/Caregiver Artist:** Currently supporting a dependent child, family member, and/or other person(s) with living expenses and care needs; and/or
- **Disabled Artist:** Living with a physical, mental, or medical condition that substantially limits one or more major life activities, or a Neurodivergent artist with a diagnosis of Autism, ADHD, or a learning disorder.

Prioritized artists will receive a set number of additive points in the panel voting process, and in cases when two or more applicants receive similar scores, prioritized artists will be selected.

# Q & A cont.

---

## **WHAT DO LAB ARTISTS RECEIVE?**

- \$25,000 USD (distributed in three or more installments). These funds can be paid to an individual, business, fiscal sponsor, or non-profit organization through paper check or ACH wire transfer/direct deposit. The disbursement schedule is set by the grantee and can take public benefits into account. Chicago Dancemakers Forum staff are available to discuss options and taxation implications.
- Support in finding free or discounted rehearsal space, presentation venues, and/or residency opportunities. Although not guaranteed for all Lab Artists, most receive some form of space support.
- Access to invitation-only events for dancemakers.
- A Retreat and Quarterly gatherings for dialogue, feedback and peer support. These may be held in-person in Chicago; if you prefer to participate virtually, please notify staff.
- Regular one-on-one check-ins with Staff.
- A shared works-in-progress / studio critique session (if desired)
- Professional/Artistic development support tailored to each individual artist
- Promotion throughout the year on ChicagoDancemakers.org, social media, monthly newsletter, and media releases.

## **WOULD I RECEIVE THE \$25K ALL AT ONCE? IS IT TAXABLE?**

Grants funds are generally distributed over three installments during 2024, but this structure is flexible and can adapt to an artist's individual concerns with public benefits and other financial implications. Grant funds are taxable by law. If a Lab Artist chooses to receive their grant funds through a fiscal sponsor, they are still responsible for filing taxes based on their individual earnings.

# Q & A cont.

---

## **WHAT ARE LAB ARTISTS ASKED TO DO?**

The Lab Artists Program is a one year commitment – January to December 2024.

- Sign a program contract and completion of Quickbooks online form including a up-to-date signed IRS W-9 form.
- Attend the the 2024 Lab Artists celebration.
- Engage in an extended period of creative experimentation, artistic research, and/or development of new dance work.
- If applicable, make plans to self-produce the new work or to collaborate with a presenting partner to premiere the dance work.
- Meet quarterly with fellow 2024 Lab Artists, contributing to an environment of artistic interchange with the cohort.
- Make use of my time for creative experimentation, artistic research, and/or development of new work.
- Manage a budget of \$25K to support my dancemaking and to work with collaborators in an environment of fairness, transparency, consent, and open communication.
- Submit a mid-Lab reflection in June 2024.
- Report grant to the IRS during tax filing.
- Participate in program evaluation.
- Acknowledge Chicago Dancemakers Forum per the language in the program agreement.

# Q & A cont.

---

## **WHAT ADVICE DOES CHICAGO DANCEMAKERS FORUM HAVE FOR THE NARRATIVE?**

- Remember that your application will be scored on Body of Work, Distinction, and Timing. Address all three when responding to the questions.
- Be specific, especially if centering your application on a trending theme. Avoid submitting common responses by using details and examples.
- As peer dancemakers will be reviewing your application, there is no need to complain about the industry or over-explain the general situation for artists. Stay unique to you.
- Honesty, vulnerability, transparency, and clarity will go far. For each what, where, and when you talk about, dig deeper into the whys and hows.

## **WHAT ADVICE DOES CHICAGO DANCEMAKERS FORUM HAVE FOR THE WORK SAMPLES?**

A strong work sample...

- is an authentic representation of the artist's work and the context in which it is presented .
- clearly connects to the story/statement video or written narrative by providing visual evidence.
- is well lit with limited editing so that the movement can be seen (unless it is a digital work where editing is important to the applicant's artistry).
- showcases compelling movement choices and strong demonstration of dancemaking elements: time, space, energy in concert with clear conceptual content.
- includes captioning and audio description for accessibility purposes.

# Q & A cont.

---

## **WHO DO I CONTACT IF I NEED HELP APPLYING?**

If you have questions about the Lab Artists Program or need support during the application process, please contact Shawn Lent, Programs and Communications Director, via email at [shawn@chicagodancemakers.org](mailto:shawn@chicagodancemakers.org).

## **INFO SESSIONS AND APPLICANT SUPPORT**

### **Tuesday, July 18**

10:00 - 11:30 AM

Virtual on Zoom - Recorded event, Open captioning

Hosts: Mitsu Salmon (2019 Lab Artist) and Kia S. Smith (2022 Lab Artist)

### **Monday, July 31**

3:30 - 5:00 PM

Center on Halsted

3656 N Halsted St.

Host: Fabulous Freddie (2022 Lab Artist)

### **Monday, August 21**

7:30 - 8:30 PM following DanceChance

Harold Washington Cultural Center / M.A.D.D. Rhythms

4701 S Martin Luther King Dr, Use 47th Street Entrance

Wheelchair accessible via elevator

Hosts: Nico Rubio and Ayesha Jaco (2018 Lab Artists)

### **Wednesday, September 6**

12:00 - 1:30 PM

Virtual on Zoom

Host: Anna Martine Whitehead (2018 Lab Artist)

### **Week of September 11**

Office Hours To Be Announced

# About the Organization

---

For 20 years, Chicago Dancemakers Forum has responded to the evolving needs of Chicago dancemakers. It is Chicagoland's only organization dedicated solely to artistic advancement for dancemakers, as well as the largest source of support for local dance artists with an open call process.

We believe. . .

- Dance matters.
- Artists are the heart of a thriving society.
- Dance in Chicago merits broad recognition.
- Dancemakers need support structures that are tailored specifically to them.
- Artistic process is as valuable as artistic product.
- Advancing a multitude of voices and genres gives dance its fullest expression.
- Connectivity and collaboration are key to growth and progress.



Pictured, l-r: Eryn Jones (intern); Bob Faust and Dahlia Nayar (board members); La Mar Brown, Shawn Lent, and Joanna Furnans (staff); and Adia Sykes (board chair) at the Chicago Dancemakers Forum office inside the Harris Theater.