

2025 LAB ARTISTS PROGRAM

Program Details and Application Guidelines



2024 Lab Artist, Helen Lee
Photo by Kristie Kahns

Lab Artists Program

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 2025, four local dancemakers will each receive a grant of **\$25,000 USD along with a year of tailored support.**

As the name suggests, the Lab Artists Program focuses on experimentation and research, through which dancemakers may choose to continue their current projects and practices or create new dance work. The program is designed for dancemakers actively taking risks and experimenting and poised to invest in their artistic practice with greater depth or scale. Rather than having a fixed approach, this build-your-own program is an experiment in itself, responsive to each artist's evolving goals, timeline, and needs.

Eligible artists have until **August 12, 2024 at 5pm CT** to apply. A panel made up of local and national dance artists and leaders will select 10 Finalists who will each receive \$1,000, the option of public recognition, and professional development resources. The four 2025 Lab Artists will be randomly selected from the pool of Finalists.

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.

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, Parents/Caregivers, and/or Disabled Artists.

About the Program

UNRESTRICTED GRANT

During the Lab Year (January to December 2025), 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 is designed 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 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 who identify with the following statements to apply:

- I am 21 years of age or older at the time of application.
- I reside 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 identify as a dancemaker, actively working in improvised, communal, and/or choreographed forms.
- 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 2025.
- I am NOT enrolled in degree programs at the time of application.
- I have NOT been previously funded through Chicago Dancemakers Forum's Lab Artists Program.
- I have NOT received \$5,000+ from Chicago Dancemakers Forum for administrative work or a salaried position in the 12 months prior to the application deadline.

Application Timeline

July 1 - August 12 16, 2024: Open Call for Applications; Info Sessions

Monday, August 12, 2024 at 5:00 PM Central: Application Deadline

 bit.ly/LabArtistsProgram

Mid-August through September 2024: Review Process including Round One, Round Two, Panel Discussion, and Random Draw

October 2024: Applicants Notified and Feedback Calls (offered to all applicants)

November 2024: Announcement and Program SetUp for the 2025 Lab Artists

January 2025: Launch of the Lab Year (including celebration and daylong retreat)



2024 Lab Artist, Aaliyah Christina | Photo by Ricardo Ademe

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 materials showcase the dancemaker's strong demonstration of dance / embodied practice, production, concept, and/or compositional elements like time, space, and energy. 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.



2024 Lab Artist, Nora Sharp | Photo by Ricardo Ademe

How to Apply

1. Create or update your [Submittable](#) account.
2. Prepare your application materials including
 - a. [Dancemaking Resume or Bio](#)
 - b. [Video Narrative - Artist Introduction](#) (approximately five minutes): Tell us about your body of work as a dancemaker. What do you make? With whom? Why?
 - Consider putting your work in the context of other dancemakers or dance styles, and why your work is distinct in those contexts.
 - Consider telling the panel who inspires or influences you as a dancemaker locally, nationally, and/or internationally.
 - Consider sharing what you believe to be your strengths as a dancemaker.
 - Consider detailing what it would mean for you to be making dance of greater depth and/or scale. What are your hopes or aspirations for your dance work?
 - c. [Written Narrative - Lab Year Proposal](#) (please address all three points):
 - What are you hoping to investigate or experiment with during your Lab Year and why?
 - How would you spend your time during the Lab Year (January - December 2025)? How are these choices of activities connected to your priorities, curiosities, artistic vision, and/or career goals?
 - What makes 2025 an especially good time for this investigation and experimentation, a significant moment in your artistic trajectory, and/or an ideal year for you to be making work of greater depth or scale?
 - d. [Lab Year Budget](#)
 - e. [Work Samples](#) (Up to 10 minutes in 1-3 videos)
 - f. [Supplemental Materials](#) (optional)

Submit your application by **Monday, August 12, 2024, 5:00 PM Central**. Late submissions will not be accepted. We encourage artists to apply early in case of personal emergencies or technology hiccups. Note that some video files may take significant time to upload.



Q & A

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.

WHO SELECTS THE FINALISTS?

Chicago Dancemakers Forum makes every effort to engage with panelists who identify with the program prioritization categories, who collectively cover an understanding of a large range of dance forms and practices, and who align with the organization's values. Voting panelists change each year. For the 2025 Lab Artists Program, Chicago Dancemakers Forum will engage six paid panelists; an increase from 3-4 paid panelists in recent years. Three of the panelists will be local/regional, including at least one prior Lab Artist, and three will bring a national or international perspective. Panelists will each be assigned a group of applications of which they are especially qualified to review. Each application will be reviewed by at least two panelists. To determine the 18-25 applicants that will be considered for Finalists, we will be adding an internal second round review. Panelists will each be assigned a certain number of applications to review, and then move forward three of the top scoring applications from their group. A representative of Chicago Dancemakers Forum (Board, staff, or Consortium) will also select one application per group. Applicants are not required to complete a second round application.

Q & A cont.

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, be 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

HOW DOES THE RANDOM DRAW WORK?

At the same meeting, after the 10 Finalists have been determined, the four 2025 Lab Artists are selected by computerized, anonymized, random draw. Once a group of Finalists are selected through the competitive process, randomization helps reduce the impact of curatorial gatekeeping that can happen with short lists. We are also able to spotlight a greater number of artists (10 rather than just 4) and communicate broadly their equivalent strengths. A random draw also reduced labor on behalf of Finalists needing to complete a lengthy second round application.

WHAT DO THE 10 FINALISTS RECEIVE?

- \$1,000 USD stipend; For the four artists drawn as the 2025 Lab Artists, this amount will be folded into their \$25,000 grant.
- Opt-in opportunities for public visibility throughout the year on Chicago Dancemakers Forum's social media and monthly newsletter
- Consideration for other opportunities and relationship building in the industry

Q & A cont.

HOW DOES THE PRIORITIZATION WORK?

The 2025 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 2025, 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 2025.

- 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 2025 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 2025.
- 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 VIDEO AND WRITTEN NARRATIVES?

- 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.

INFO SESSIONS AND APPLICANT SUPPORT

Monday, July 8, 2024

7:00 - 8:30 PM

Zoom

Co-Hosted by Mark Jeffrey, 2012 Lab Artist

[REGISTER](#)

Thursday, July 18, 2024

2:00 - 4:00 PM

Dorchester Art + Housing Collaborative

1456 E 70th St, Chicago, IL 60637

Wheelchair accessible

Co-Hosted by Benji Hart, 2023 Lab Artist

Monday, July 22, 2024

Rhythmhood x Snipes Studio

2643 W Chicago Ave Chicago, IL 60622. Suite 200.

Wheelchair accessible

Co-Hosted by Fabulous Freddie, 2022 Lab Artist and Erin Kilmurray, 2020 Lab Artist

Tuesday, July 30, 2024

9:30 - 11:00 AM

Zoom

Co-Hosted by Molly Shanahan, 2006 Lab Artist and Zachary Nicol, 2023 Lab Artist

[REGISTER](#)

Office Hours

August 7, 8, 9

About the Organization

For over 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.