

CHICAGO  
DANCE MAKERS  
FORUM

2023 GENERAL SURVEY

# Survey Report



*Philip "Phree" Wood , 2022 Lab Artist Finalist;  
Photo by William Frederking*

In March 2023, Chicago Dancemakers Forum issued a short online survey gathering anonymous information from local dancemakers for research, needs assessment, collective advocacy, and program planning purposes.

The survey was conducted through a 10 question Google Form that was open to respondents from March 10-19, 2023. Respondents were invited to participate through Chicago Dancemakers Forum's Instagram and Facebook channels reaching approximately 2,673 followers. The survey was also shared in an e-blast reaching 2,140 recipients with 76 unique clicks on the survey link. Upon completing the survey respondents could choose to enter to win a \$100 cash prize.

In 10 days we received 172 responses from dance artists working in over 100 self-defined styles of dance living in 51 different zip codes.

We recognize that implicit biases exist in most surveys and there is always going to be some unmeasured and unknowable error with all forms of public opinion research, including ours.



*Benji Hart, 2023 Lab Artist, by William Frederking*

In this survey we included three types of questions: ranking, multiple choice, and open-ended responses. Our multiple choice and ranking questions were necessarily limited in scope and reflected our specific understanding of the Chicago dance ecosystem. As a result, respondents may have felt obligated to choose an option even if it did not adequately represent their point of view. We included open response questions to encourage individual's to communicate their experiences in their own words.

The information collected in this survey is significant because it helps us understand both quantitatively and qualitatively a range of experiences, needs, and priorities of some of the dance artists in our community. This feedback is useful in determining the direction of our organization's programming and strategic planning and can serve as an overall "temperature check" on the health and well-being of the survey participants we were able to reach. To fully understand the complexities of the Chicago dance ecosystem, more tailored research and outreach is required.

This report shares some of the data and commentary collected as well as Chicago Dancemakers Forum's initial takeaways from the information gathered. Please contact [info@chicagodancemakers.org](mailto:info@chicagodancemakers.org) for further inquiry.



*Rachel Damon, 2010 Lab Artist, by William Frederking*

# WHO RESPONDED

## Dance Forms

When asked to describe the dance they make, survey respondents had 117 different replies.

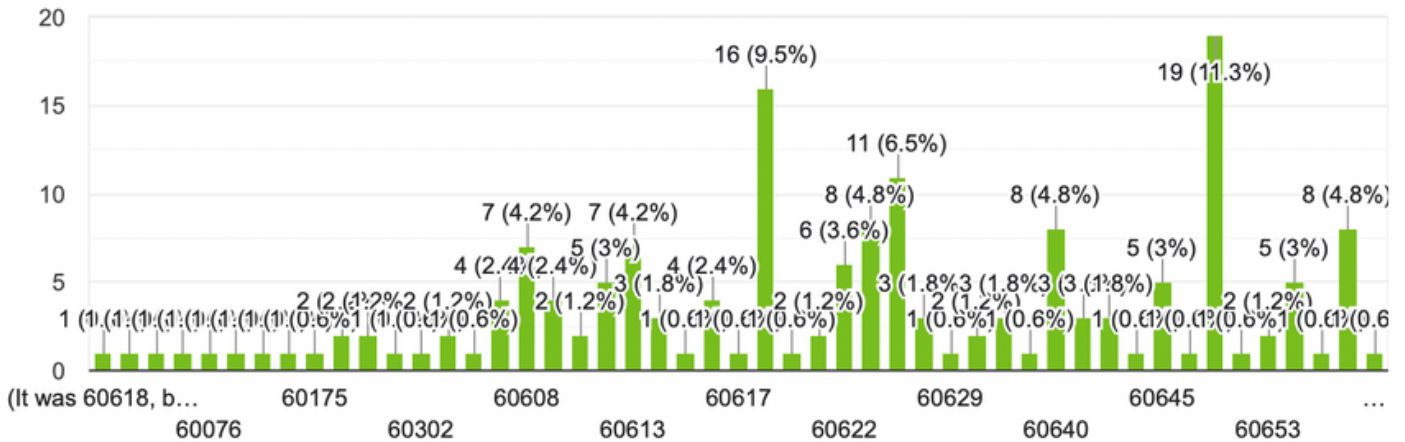
African Contemporary and Modern Dance	Folkloric dance
Afro-Contemporary	Footwork
Afro-Latin	Freestyle hip hop
Afro-Panamanian fusion	Hip Hop
All genres	Hip hop, comedic, improv, fusion expressionism
Augmented performance	Hiphop, contemporary , ballet
Ballet	Historical and contemporary
Ballet, Conetemporary, Modern, Jazz	Show choir
Ballet, contemporary	Contemporary work, product of the present time
Ballet, modern, contemporary	Improvisation
Bharatnatyam, indian folk, contemporary	Improvisation, multimedia performance, post-modern choreography, installation,
Bharatnatyam, contemporary, "fusion", Indian dances	Performance art
Butoh Improvisation	Inclusive Dance
Butoh-inflected clown	Indian/Bollywood Dance
Chicago Evolved Footwork	Interactive queer dance
Chicago Footwork	Japanese culture influenced modern
Choreographing- heels, Reggaeton, contemporary,	Latin
Classical indian dance (kathak and bharatanatyam)	Meta modern
Collaborate interdisciplinary contemporary, often site-specific	Modern
Commercial dance (hip hop, street jazz, heels)	Modern / cross-disciplinary
Community movement, choreography, performance, improvisation	Modern / improvisation / performance installation
Company Rep, Contemporary, Improv Freelance	Modern & Contemporary Dance
Conceptual	Modern Contemporary Performance Art Dance Theater
Concert Dance	modern dance, concert dance
Concert dance- contemporary/modern, dance theater	Modern, Contemporary, Improvisational
Contact Improv, postmodern	Modern, folk dance, contemporary, dance theatre
Contemporary & Aerial Dance	Modern, improvisational, experimental
Contemporary ballet	Modern, latin
Contemporary Ballet, modern, site specific, community activations ,	Modern/contemporary/multimedia/circus/silent theater
Contemporary ballet/postmodern	Modern/experimental
Contemporary concert dance	Modern/post modern dance
Contemporary dance	Movement-based cross-disciplinary queer performance
Contemporary Dance Theater	Multidisciplinary Dance-Theater
Contemporary dance, dance theatre, Release Based technique	Musical Theater
Contemporary Dance/Circus Fusion	Not quite sure anymore...
Contemporary dance/movement/performance	Peruvian Indigenous Dance
Contemporary jazz funk	Popping, boogaloo, tutting, waving, animation.
Contemporary Modern	Postmodern/experimental
Contemporary Modern Floorwork	Process based discussion
Contemporary Performance	Salsa, Afro-dancehall, jazz & hip-hop
Contemporary theater	Salsa, Bachata
Contemporary, dance theatre, and burlesque	Short-form performance work for variety stages.
Contemporary, pop, variety	Spanish Dance (percussive, ethnic)
Contemporary/ballet	Waacking
Contemporary/funk/ritual	Street Styles
Contemporary/Hiphop	Tap and ballet
Contemporary/Improvisational	Tap Dance
Contemporary/jazz	Urban contemporary
Contemporary/modern	Site specific, improvisation, dance theatre, dance w/performance art, flashmob,
Disability dance	Dance/movement films, dance/movement w/visual art installations
Experimental	Various Street Dance Styles
Experimental contemporary / movement based performance	Virtual and Digital and queer
Experimental modern dance	Vogue/street dance/modern
Experimental, improvisation	Voguing & Breakdancing
Experimental/exploratory/contemporary/improvisational/installation	West African
Flamenco	Wheelchair/integrated and inclusive
Flamenco modern	



# WHO RESPONDED CONT.

## Geography

Dancemakers responded from 51 different local zip codes; 45% of respondents are living south of Cermak or west of Western. The areas with largest response rates were Logan Square (11.3%) and Irving Park (9.5%).



## Geography of Respondents

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51 Different Zip Codes

Percentage of Respondents Living South of Cermak or West of Western



Ayako Kato, 2007 Lab Artist, by William Frederking

## RESOURCE PRIORITIES

To determine what local dancemakers need most in order to support their artistry at this time, we asked survey respondents to prioritize resources from a list of 10 options. Interestingly, we found that there were no noticeable trends among specific dance styles that correlated with specific resource priorities. Money to support the creation of dance projects and living expenses consistently ranked highest across all dance styles.

1. Money to support dance projects (75%)
2. Money to support living expenses (71%)
3. Opportunities to perform (57%)
4. Visibility, Promotion, Recognition (51%)
5. Community Networking (45%)
6. Professional Connections (41% TIE)
7. Space for rehearsal and performance (41% TIE)
8. Audience Building (40%)
9. Dance/Choreography Training or Coaching (37%)
10. Access to Information (18%)

### TOP FIVE Resource Priorities

*From a provided list of resources, prioritize your Top 5 and rank them by level of importance for your artistry at this time.*

- 1 Money to support dance projects (75%)
- 2 Money to support living expenses (71%)
- 3 Opportunities to perform (57%)
- 4 Visibility, Promotion, Recognition (51%)
- 5 Community Networking (45%)



## DANCE BUDGET SIZE

When asked how much artists spent on their dance work/practice in 2022— "The Year of Chicago Dance"— 60% reported spending \$5,999 or less. Note: \$6,000 is the current maximum grant size for individual artists from the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE), and \$4,000 is the maximum grant size for individual artists from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

23%: \$0 - \$999

**37%: \$1,000 - \$5,999**

15%: \$6,000 - \$9,999

13%: \$10,000 - \$24,999

6%: \$25,000 - \$49,999

3%: \$50,000 - \$99,999

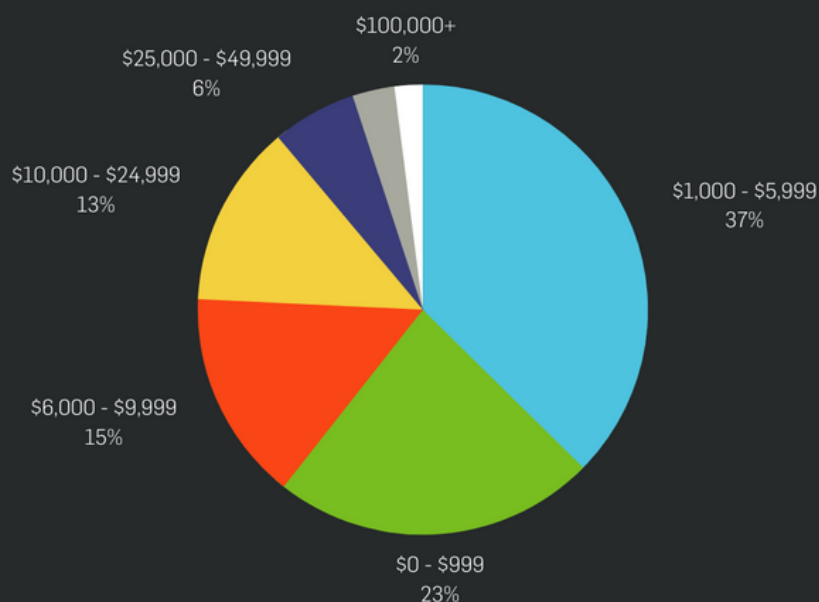
2%: \$100,000+

As budget sizes increased, we observed a noticeable decrease of diversity by dance style. Artists who identified themselves working in ballet, contemporary, contemporary/pop/variety/ballet, modern, site specific, community activations, experimental, exploratory/contemporary/improvisational/installation, and multiple forms reported having an annual dance budget of \$50,000 or more.

### Dance Budget Size

How much money did you spend on your dance work/practice last year (Year of Chicago Dance)?

Total all artistic project budgets and ongoing artistic expenses.





## SELF-FUNDING

Crucially, we followed the budget question with one that asked how much of their 2022 dance budgets came from their own personal or household income. The majority of respondents (73.8%) said "All" or "Most" with only 3.5% of respondents reporting "None." Despite extremely limited resources and the consistent need to self-fund their dance projects, dance artists continue to create:

*"I lack the resources to make work at the scale I'd like, but I'm eagerly experimenting with what I have at present."*

*"I am doing work, [and] financial budget scale is a barrier to realizing the full vision of the work that I want to make. However, I am committed to paying my collaborating artists equitably for their creative time and performances. I do not always pay myself, instead I prioritize the artistic collaborators and the production team that I bring together during creation and performance."*

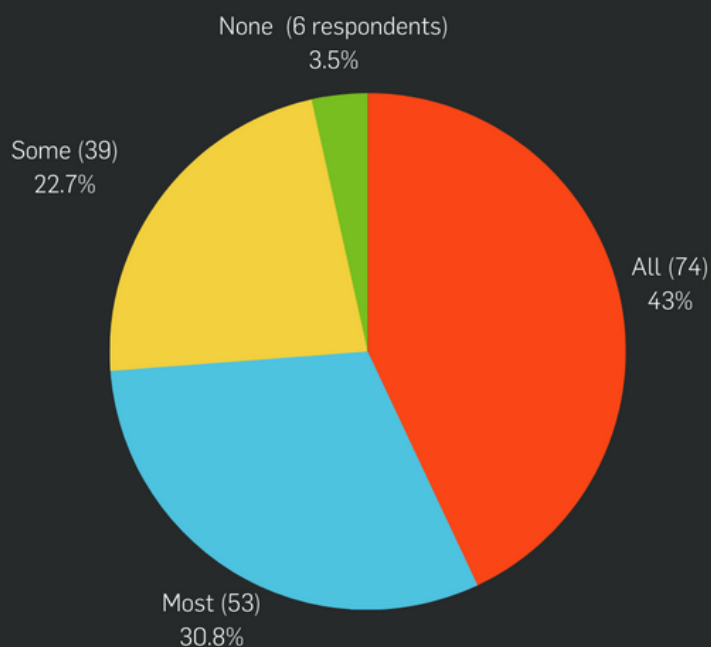
*"There is usually only enough resources to pay for collaborators for development of a work or to pay for production of the work or to invest in my practice, but never really at any point to do all of them."*

*"We have created great work that delights audiences, but have struggled to find donors, professional networks and affordable opportunities to put it on the stage."*

### Self-Funding

*How much of that money came from your own personal/household income?*

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## BARRIERS TO ARTISTIC FULFILLMENT

The survey included an open response question regarding artistic fulfillment. We received over 130 written responses, many expressing various obstacles and barriers to artistic fulfillment. Chicago Dancemakers Forum staff identified themes generally categorized by the following:

- Funding issues directly correlating to fair pay/ paying oneself and collaborators
- Lack of time due to competing responsibilities
- Lack of time in the creative process
- Lack of access
- Lack of space(s) or equipment
- Not having a body of work / work samples
- Lack of opportunities for early-career artists
- Lack of administrative support
- Dwindling audiences
- Lack of confidence / artistic development / choreographic knowledge
- Lack of commissions

### Artistic Fulfillment

*Artistically, are you doing the creative work you want to be doing?*

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## BARRIERS TO ARTISTIC FULFILLMENT CONT.

*"You somehow find the time, and scrap together the money, and build an audience, then after you present the work there is no new momentum unless you have the resources to build on the opportunity and there are so few resources that it is unlikely. So you kill yourself to make work people see once and even if the feedback is good it is difficult to grow that work, or that opportunity into a next thing."*

*"Right now my need to make money for living expenses is overtaking my ability to take time to be creative and make new work. I try to balance my 'money' job with teaching to have some creative outlet but it leaves me working 50-60 hours per week. All of this hinders the creative work I'd rather be doing."*

*"I do see a lot of advocacy for dance artists in more contemporary forms, and not as many grants/space residencies focused at street artists looking to grow, expand and or move into other stylistics or mediums."*

*"The few well-paying or consistent opportunities are highly competitive and/or have narrow eligibility requirements. There are plenty of un-paid or low-paying public performance opportunities that don't actually serve my independent or group artistic work."*

*"[We] need access to more reasonably priced space (or bartering for space), more venues for performance, and especially opportunities to be produced and presented."*

*"Making a 'life' doing my work within this particular culture and it's constraints vs. making a 'living' doing my work within this particular culture and it's constraints: the age-old conundrum. One seems to mean sacrificing the other. Making a life centered around my creative work and well-being has become more important, and at mid-life that scares the hell out of me."*

Note: All quotes are anonymous.



## PERCEPTION OF CHICAGO'S DANCE OPPORTUNITIES

We know that many of the hardships facing Chicago dance artists have been in place for decades; lack of funding and opportunities have been consistently reported both qualitatively and quantitatively over the years. We recognize that artists, funders, presenting venues, and arts organizations have been working to develop more resources to address these issues. In an effort to understand Chicago's dance opportunities from the perspective of the dancemakers themselves, we asked respondents to rank opportunities according to access barriers and pay.

*The results seem to indicate that Chicago's dance ecosystem is not necessarily lacking opportunities, but the opportunities themselves have high barriers to access and/or do not provide sufficient funding/resources to adequately support dance work.*

Further inquiry is necessary to determine why and how opportunities are inaccessible to Chicago dance artists. Interestingly, there was no discernible correlation between dance styles and perception of funding and/or access barriers for available opportunities; answers varied across genres/styles.

### Perception of Chicago Dance

*How do you perceive the opportunities available for dance in Chicago nowadays?*

*(select all that apply)*

#### Top Three Responses:

**36%**

LOTS OF OPPORTUNITIES, HIGHLY COMPETITIVE AND UNDERPAID / NOT PAID

**32%**

LOTS OF OPPORTUNITIES, EASILY ACCESSIBLE BUT UNDERPAID / NOT PAID

**30%**

DECENT NUMBER OF OPPORTUNITIES, NOT ACCESSIBLE TO ME



# FUTURE PRIORITY FOR CHICAGO DANCEMAKERS FORUM

Our final question in the survey asked respondents to determine what resources Chicago Dancemakers Forum should prioritize for the dance ecosystem going forward.

**70% Named “More Funding Opportunities” as Top Priority**  
**21% Named “Performance Opportunities” as Top Priority**  
**14% Named “Professional Development” as Top Priority**

Respondents had the option to list other prioritizations for Chicago Dancemakers Forum. Responses included:

*“Funding & resources focused for more street/community based dancers/orgs around Chicago.”*

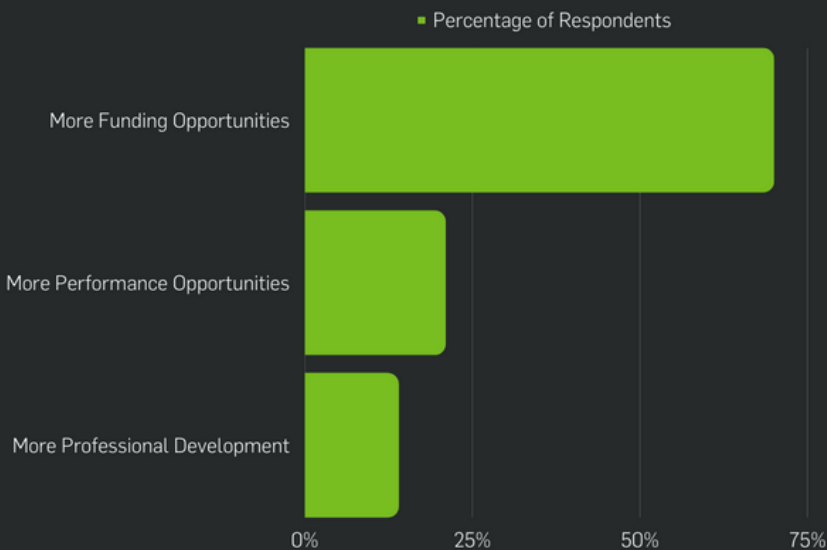
*“International funding support for residences, performances, collaborations, etc.”*

*“It seems the same people get chosen for performance opportunities. Would like to see more opportunities open to dancers and companies of all ages and cultural backgrounds.”*

## Future Priority for CDF

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What Direction Would You Like Chicago Dancemakers Forum to Go in the Future?



Ginger Krebs, 2016 Lab Artist, by William Frederking



## SURVEY QUESTIONS

**Please name the kind of dance you do/make:**

**From this list of resources, prioritize your Top 5 and rank them by level of importance for your artistry at this time.**

- Money to support living expenses
- Dance / Choreography Training or Coaching
- Community Networking
- Audience Building
- Professional connections
- Money to support dance projects
- Space for dance practice/rehearsal
- Opportunities to perform
- Access to information
- Visibility, Promotion, Recognition, Press

**How do you perceive the opportunities available for dance in Chicago nowadays? Select all that apply to you and your situation.**

- Lots of opportunities, easily accessible with sufficient pay
- Lots of opportunities, easily accessible but underpaid or not paid
- Lots of opportunities, highly competitive with sufficient pay
- Lots of opportunities, highly competitive and underpaid / not paid
- Decent number of opportunities, not accessible to me
- Decent number of opportunities, sufficient for my needs
- Few opportunities, slim chances of getting them
- Few opportunities, one-time-only

**Artistically, are you doing the creative work you want to be doing?**

- Yes
- Sometimes
- Not quite, I make do with what's available
- Nope

**Is there anything else you want to share about that?**

Do you have enough time to develop work; do you have enough resources to realize the scale of work you envision; are you fed by your creative team and the audiences you engage...?

## **SURVEY QUESTIONS CONT.**

**Are you living the way you want to live in regards to quality of life?**

- Definitely
- Almost/Not quite
- Mostly No.
- Definitely Not

**How much money did you spend on your dance work/practice last year?**

**Total all artistic project budgets and ongoing artistic expenses.**

- \$0 - \$999
- \$1,000 - \$5,999
- \$6,000 - \$9,999
- \$10,000 - \$24,999
- \$25,000 - \$49,999
- \$50,000 - \$99,000
- \$100,000+

**How much of that money came from your own personal/household income, rather than external sources?**

- All (100%)
- Most
- Some
- None

**Zip Code**

**What Direction Would You Like Chicago Dancemakers Forum to Go in the Future? (Rank 1-3, 1 is top priority)**

- More funding opportunities
- More performance opportunities
- More professional development opportunities
- (None of this. I have other ideas.)

**Other ideas:**

