

CHICAGO  
DANCEMAKERS  
FORUM



STRATEGIC PLAN



## BACKGROUND

For over 15 years, Chicago Dancemakers Forum (CDF) has been dedicated to nurturing artistic advancement in dancemaking. CDF was created in 2003 in direct response to key findings that Chicago's dancemakers needed multi-layered support to fulfill their potential. Through the Chicago Community Trust's "Excellence in Dance Initiative" key stakeholders in the field from the Museum of Contemporary Art, The Dance Center of Columbia College, and Links Hall came together to design and lead an initiative which was specifically intended to be a catalyst for innovative dancemaking and a means to increase dynamic interaction among Chicago's dancemakers.

Since this beginning, it has become the single largest source of support for individual dancemakers in Chicago which has an open call process. It has an impressive record of investing over \$1 million in aesthetically and culturally diverse dancemakers through its flagship Lab Artists program, which supports the evolution of these creators with an extended period of research, development, and presentation of new work; and its Greenhouse awards for emerging dancemakers. Additionally CDF provides programs that enable interaction and learning among the broader dance community and the public through professional workshops, public showings, and critical forums.

For its first 11 years, Chicago Dancemakers Forum was an unincorporated entity led and fiscally sponsored by its three founding Consortium organizations. In 2014, CDF incorporated as a 501(c)3 and in early 2015, Ginger Farley was appointed as its first full time director. It currently has a staff of three, a Board of eight, and an enlarged list of Consortium organizations which, in addition to its three founders, now includes the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, Deeply Rooted Dance Theater, High Concept Laboratories, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Pivot Arts, Rebuild Foundation and the Ruth Page Center for the Arts. During this transition, CDF successfully completed its Breakout campaign, raising \$1 million to fund the granting programs and associated costs for a multi-year period, allowing time for CDF to expand its Board, and strengthen its infrastructure and programming. In 2016, CDF undertook an initiative to engage its expanded leadership and the community in developing a shared mission and core beliefs, which created a foundation for subsequent organizational capacity building and set the stage for this strategic planning process. Simultaneous with the onset of this strategic planning process, Chicago Dancemakers Forum was accepted into the Chicago Community Trust's SMART Growth program, providing three years of significant general operating support and facilitating focus on organizational development.

To secure its legacy and enable it to effectively and relevantly support creators and Chicago dance, Chicago Dancemakers Forum has developed this strategic plan. The plan and planning process are rooted in its history, and have assessed its internal and external environments, embraced the involvement of its key stakeholders - Board, staff, artists, Consortium, partners, funders, and arts/cultural leaders, and looks toward shared aspirations and goals to lead it forward.

## MISSION

Chicago Dancemakers Forum catalyzes the growth and artistic fulfillment of Chicago's dancemakers by providing time and resources for in-depth exploration and creation. It builds broad support for the field of dance in Chicago by facilitating robust interaction among dancemakers and with the public.

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.

# 2025 VISION

## The Heart of Dance Innovation - Strong and Everywhere

IN 2025 CHICAGO DANCEMAKERS FORUM IS ...

—  
**known as the heart of experimentation** and creation of new work in every form of dance in Chicago, providing timely support to dancemakers at pivotal moments in their artistic lives and careers.

—  
Chicago's **foremost funder for dancemakers**, offering substantial dollars to stimulate research and development by artists that represent Chicago's diverse citizenry. Our successful funding model **inspires significant investment** from a wide base of individuals and institutions, locally and nationally.

—  
a leader in creating partnerships with aligned community, cultural, and professional entities, who collectively **cultivate an appetite for dance** in the city and a curiosity about new work and new dance forms. Our advocacy results in Chicago dance and dancemakers being known and respected locally, nationally, and internationally.

—  
a gateway to a **network of accessible spaces** throughout Chicago neighborhoods that are gathering places where any form dance may be created, practiced, taught, shared, and performed; conversations and connections happen; authentic relationships grow; and individuals feel love from and within a passionate and caring community.

—  
a **strong and flexible organization** with strategic approaches, robust financial resources, responsive and visionary leadership, and a resilient infrastructure that anchors and advances our vital work.

## GOALS

### PROGRAMMATIC GOALS

**Goal 1:** Maximize the value and impact of Chicago Dancemakers Forum's core programs to advance new dance creation through support for artists.

**Goal 2:** Expand opportunities for Chicago dancemakers to evolve their generative practice.

**Goal 3:** Elevate the recognition of Chicago as a thriving and diverse center of dance innovation.

### ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

**Goal 4:** Increase revenues to enable Chicago Dancemakers Forum to fund program refinement and expansion, fully compensated executive leadership and staff, and a cash reserve.

**Goal 5:** Strengthen Chicago Dancemakers Forum's governance and infrastructure to ensure continued delivery of impactful, quality programs and leadership in place to guide it forward.

# GOAL 1

Maximize the value and impact of Chicago Dancemakers Forum's core programs to advance new dance creation through support for artists.



## PROGRAMS AND ASSETS

—  
Granting and Mentorship Programs:  
Lab Artists and Greenhouse Program for  
Emerging Choreographers

—  
Info sessions and citywide outreach

—  
Learning for artists gained through the  
grants application process

—  
Network of former Lab Artists as  
leaders, advisors/mentors, resources,  
and advocates

—  
Consortium members as mentors  
and resources for Lab and Greenhouse  
Artists

## GROWTH STRATEGIES

*Priorities for 2020*

—  
Refine and communicate the criteria  
for artists best poised to take full  
advantage of Chicago Dancemakers  
Forum's core programs

—  
Increase financial award for Lab Artists  
from \$15,000 to \$20,000

—  
Re-envision the definition, composition,  
and role of the Consortium in facilitating  
Chicago Dancemakers Forum programs  
to effectively establish and maintain an  
intentional long-term commitment to  
CDF's mission and the artists it serves

—  
Facilitate relationship-building and  
deepened aesthetic and cultural  
understanding among artists, mentors,  
Consortium, and staff through integration  
of ongoing learning around equity  
and inclusion

*2021 and beyond*

—  
Incrementally increase financial awards  
for artists

—  
Restructure core program processes,  
elements, and expectations to insure that  
they are accessible, fair, and relevant

—  
Increase specific channels (financial and/  
or non-financial) for continuing support  
of Lab Artists and other awardees beyond  
the initial award period

## OUTCOMES

—  
Significantly more funds are available  
for dancemakers to conduct research and  
development through core programs

—  
Increased visibility and opportunities  
within Chicago and beyond for Lab  
Artists and other awardees during and  
after their award period

—  
Consistent and expanded access to  
resources for traditionally underserved  
dancemakers to experiment and work  
within and outside of their communities

—  
Role of the Consortium is clearly defined

—  
More dancemakers have flexible  
resources including significant time,  
connectivity, and funds to pursue  
individual artistic paths

# GOAL 2

Expand opportunities for Chicago dancemakers to evolve their generative practice.



## PROGRAMS AND ASSETS

—  
Ongoing development of new programs that respond to field trends and dancemakers' evolving interests and needs

—  
Workshops and symposia focused on artistic process and professional growth

—  
Regional Dance Development Initiative

—  
Special purpose funding, e.g. Travel grants

—  
Artists to artists gatherings: Greenroom Reunion

—  
Mini commissions, e.g. Natural Encounters 2020

—  
Regular e-mail and social media communication about available resources

—  
Growing network of programming collaborators that cross sectors

## GROWTH STRATEGIES

*Priorities for 2020*

—  
Broaden and strengthen networks, circles of connection, and working partnerships with organizations that have a shared interest in collaborating on specific projects and initiatives centered on dance incubation and related programming

—  
Facilitate relationship-building and deepened aesthetic and cultural understanding among artists, Consortium, and staff with ongoing opportunities for learning around equity and inclusion

—  
Research facilities and spaces for dance activity; develop a plan for decentralizing and increasing space accessibility and connect dancemakers with them including through the leveraging of partnerships

*2021 and beyond*

—  
Expand professional and artistic learning offerings in number, approach, content, and reach; identify avenues for fostering intergenerational exchange and regular opportunities for experimentation, development, showing and critique of work in progress

—  
Intentionally and regularly ask artists about their professional and artistic needs and directions to inform new program focus and development

—  
Develop criteria and method(s) for assessing the return on investment for non-core programs which include quantitative and qualitative measures and integrate this analysis into program decision making

—  
Extend Chicago Dancemakers Forum's capacity to support differing levels and demands of the dance development process by continuing to innovate and evaluate new programs and platforms

## OUTCOMES

—  
New avenues of funding that support artists in dance development have been developed and opened

—  
Increased and deepened opportunities and resources within Chicago and beyond to support dancemakers' generative practice, sharpen artistic rigor and professional growth, and share their work

—  
Dancemakers of different genres/forms, backgrounds, and stages of evolution throughout all parts of Chicago have the resources that they need to incubate and share work

—  
Dancemakers have entry into a network of available spaces for dance related activities (residency, rehearsal, presentation, teaching) in every part of Chicago

# GOAL 3

Elevate the recognition of Chicago as a thriving and diverse center of dance innovation.



## PROGRAMS AND ASSETS

— Regional Dance Development Initiative

— Presentations/showings of work by Chicago dancemakers to which the broader public is invited: Elevate Chicago Dance, Share-Out Natural Encounters 2020

— Out of state panelists used for adjudication of artists grants programs and engagement of national dance/performing arts leaders in program development and implementation

— Former Lab Artists as leaders and advocates

— Growing network of programming collaborators that cross sectors

— Regular e-mail announcements and social media posts that highlight current and former Lab Artists and awardees' activities

## GROWTH STRATEGIES

*Priorities for 2020*

— Re-tool Elevate Chicago Dance 2020 to serve as a more meaningful platform for Chicago dancemakers to share/showcase their work, engage national performing arts professionals, and attracts the public; develop and implement a framework for using what is learned in 2020 for future planning

— Initiate planning for building productive relationships for Chicago Dancemakers Forum with key national and international residency programs, presenters, and funders and ensuring that CDF is plugged into national and international networks

*2021 and beyond*

— Execute a plan for building productive relationships with key national and international residency programs, presenters and funders

— Provide leadership and collaborate with other Chicago dance service/dance interested organizations to collectively develop and implement strategies that build an enhanced profile for dance in Chicago and encourage broad public involvement

## OUTCOMES

— Chicago Dancemakers Forum has united a diverse group of cultural and community partners and artistic collaborators, curators and advisors to sustain and galvanize dance activity in throughout Chicago

— An expanded number of Chicago dancemakers are receiving prestigious grants/ fellowships, residency opportunities - nationally and internationally; their works are commissioned and presented on stages throughout the world

— National and international presenters, funders, and partners recognize the innovation, richness, and diversity of Chicago dancemakers and regularly provide generous support for Chicago Dancemakers Forum's work

## GOAL 4

Increase revenues to enable Chicago Dancemakers Forum to fund program refinement and expansion, fully compensated executive leadership and staff, and a cash reserve.



### GROWTH STRATEGIES

#### *Priorities for 2020*

—  
Engage a fundraising consultant to create an actionable tiered multi-year fundraising plan that includes feasibility assessment of broadened geographic support, identification of methods for targeting new sources and new avenues of support, re-invigoration of relationships and support from previous donors, development of case statement/messaging that builds compelling reasons to give, planned giving strategies, events, Board involvement, personnel and other resources required to implement; initiate implementation of the plan

#### *2021 and beyond*

—  
Make Board capacity to give and raise funds a high recruitment priority; determine a target percentage of total income annually that would be the Board's minimum contribution (e.g. In FY 2019 this might be \$15,000 , if a 5% of income formula was applied)

—  
Develop a plan to sustain, replenish, and increase a reserve to support granting programs and associated program expenses that build on the foundation set by the 2016 Breakout Campaign (\$1 million fundraising campaign to support Lab Artist program and dance community); set an increasing annual line item in the budget designated for the cash reserve

—  
Acquire and implement needed fundraising database systems

—  
Identify the distinct criteria/expectations for a CDF executive leader; research executive salary compensation to determine the range of funds needed to competitively compensate executive leadership; determine a specific annual budget target of increased funds in order to gradually build up the financial resources needed

### OUTCOMES

—  
Financial resources that facilitate programming and infrastructure grow in sync  
—  
Annual income goals are consistently met or exceeded  
—  
The \$25,000 Lab Artists awards are a catalyst for other opportunities that support different aspects of the creation/production process and artistic fulfillment  
—  
Secured at least two years of funds for executive leadership position at competitively compensated level  
—  
Increased number of Board members who "give and get" at the minimum expected level or more  
—  
Comprehensive fund development/fundraising plan is in place with personnel and systems to implement it completely  
—  
Cash reserve has been increased



# GOAL 5

Strengthen Chicago Dancemakers Forum's governance and infrastructure to ensure continued delivery of impactful, quality programs and leadership in place to guide it forward.



## GROWTH STRATEGIES

### *Priorities for 2020*

—  
Re-envision the definition, composition, and role of the Consortium in programming and infrastructure support

—  
Develop a plan to ensure that principles of equity and inclusion are consistently integrated into all aspects of the organization; provide annual and ongoing opportunities for learning among Board, staff, and the Consortium

—  
Conduct an annual Board/staff retreat for assessing progress on the strategic plan, evaluating Executive Director based on the plan's progress, recalibrating priorities and programs, and setting the annual plan for the coming year

### *2021 and beyond*

—  
Expand Board recruitment approaches into the networks and resources that are intentionally targeted to "get beyond who we know"

—  
Conduct an equity assessment to refine and improve ongoing diversity, inclusion, and equity activities

—  
Develop a multi-year staffing plan that provides ample capacity to implement core and new programs, handle increased administrative and fund development demands, and appropriate levels of time and compensation; reflect staffing plan in annual budgets

—  
Create and adopt a succession plan that addresses immediate leadership transition needs and positions the organization for planned leadership succession on the Board and staff levels

—  
Establish a home base for Chicago Dancemakers Forum; develop a long range plan to meet its administrative, artistic/creative, and convening space needs

## OUTCOMES

—  
Chicago Dancemakers Forum is fully staffed to carry out program and administrative activities

—  
The enlarged Board is racially diverse, has multi-sector representation, reflects Chicago, and members are active fundraisers/contributors

—  
Immediate staff leadership transition plan and long term staff and Board leadership succession plans are in place

—  
Role of the Consortium is clearly defined and members are actively involved in the organization

—  
Interrelated parts of the organization work together for the collective whole and the strength of the programs and operations

—  
Principles of equity and inclusion are integral to all aspects of the organization's activity

—  
The Board and staff conduct an annual retreat for assessing progress on the strategic plan and setting the coming year's annual plan

—  
Chicago Dancemakers Forum is housed in a place that reflects its identity and enhances its programmatic aspirations and fulfills operational needs

# PROCESS THAT LEAD TO THE PLAN

Our strategic plan is the result of a year-long process through which Chicago Dancemakers Forum (CDF) engaged key stakeholders through diverse avenues, participated in a formal organizational assessment through the SMART Growth program, and conducted national field research. It was overseen by Board member, Christopher Barrett Politan, and Executive Director, Ginger Farley, in partnership with consultant, Cheryl Yuen, Principal, Consulting for Creative Organizations. Learning and dialogue from the following activities informed the development of the plan and will guide our implementation. Our process is supported with a grant from Arts Work Fund.

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**smARTscope organizational assessment.** This assessment, a requirement of participation in the Chicago Community Trust's SMART Growth program to assist organizations to build organizational capacity, identified areas of priority to address in organizational development (July and August 2018)

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**Greenroom Reunion.** A gathering of CDF artists and invited guests at the Museum of Contemporary Art provided artists an opportunity to share work and receive feedback from peers, as well as dialogue about their needs and aspirations as artists (September 2018)

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**Board, Consortium and Staff Assessment Survey.** Insights on CDF's current state of the state (programmatically and organizationally) and future priorities were surveyed (January 2019)

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**Dancemakers Assessment Survey.** Survey distributed to artists who had participated in CDF's programs collected overlapping information to the Board, Consortium and Staff survey plus input on dancemaker's needs and aspirations (January 2019)

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**POC gathering.** Facilitated by former Lab Artist and Consortium member, Onye Ozuzu, Lab Artists self-defining as artists of color met at the Stony Island Arts Bank to discuss mutual concerns related to their Lab Artist/CDF experiences and provide feedback and recommendations (March 2019)

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**Peer organization research.** Field research (online and supplemented with selected interviews) was conducted on nine organizations who have interests aligned with those of CDF. Areas explored: equity, programming elements, support base, and infrastructure (March and April 2019)

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**External stakeholder interviews and written feedback.** Information from 17 field leaders from across the country provided a local and national context of understanding related to the needs of dancemakers, trends and changes in the dance field, and support systems for individual artists (April 2019)

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**Four documents summarizing perceptions and information gathered through surveys, interviews, artist gatherings, and research.** 1) Artists, Board, Consortium, and Staff Strategic Planning Assessment Report, 2) Field Landscape Report: External Stakeholders Perceptions; 3) Field Landscape Report: Peer Organization Observations and Research, 4) Notes and Recommendations from the People of Color Brunch (May 2019)

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**Visioning session.** An all day session with Board, staff, Consortium, and invited former Lab Artists/Consortium members provided an opportunity to dialogue around mission, vision, and values; the changing landscape in which CDF works; and priorities in moving forward (May 2019)

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**Evolution of written plan.** The draft was built through a participatory process that involved staff, Board, Consortium, and artists.

- 1) Input on a draft revised mission, values, and vision was solicited from visioning session participants.
  - 2) Staff and consultant developed draft of program goals, strategies and outcomes for review and comment by an ad hoc program planning committee of Board, Consortium, and artists.
  - 3) Select Board members, staff, and consultant developed a draft of infrastructure and fund development goals, strategies, and outcomes for review and comment by an ad hoc infrastructure/fund development committee of Board, Consortium, and artists. At every step the evolving draft was revised to reflect input (May to October 2019)
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**Draft plan review by Vision Session participants:** CDF Board, Staff, Consortium, and artists. Draft was revised incorporating this group's input (October 2019)

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**Adoption of the plan by the Chicago Dancemakers Forum Board** (November 2019)

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**Plan implementation:** Annual plans and budgets will be developed to guide strategic plan actualization and provide opportunities to evaluate progress and recalibrate strategies and projected outcomes (2020 to 2025)

*We appreciate the participation of artists, colleagues, and other stakeholders in various aspects of the planning process through the surveys, interviews, meetings, and gatherings. In particular, we acknowledge the commitment and thoughtfulness of the Visioning Session participants and their subsequent involvement throughout the evolution of the written plan.*

## VISIONING SESSION DREAMERS

**Board:** Ginger Farley (ex officio), Karen Fiorenza, Christopher Barrett Politan, Baronica Roberson, Jennifer Roche, Peter Taub, Andrew Thorrens, Angel Ysaguirre

**Staff:** LaMar Brown, Ginger Farley, Shawn Lent

**Consortium and Artists:** Ellen Chenoweth, Yolanda Cesta Cursach, Joanna Furnans, Kevin Iega Jeff, Ayako Kato, Julia Mayer, Margaret Morris, Julia Rhoads

*Adopted by the Chicago Dancemakers Forum Board of Directors on November 21, 2019*