



EMERGING LEADERS IN DANCE TASK FORCE

The Emerging Leaders in Dance Task Force was formed to identify the most pressing needs for emerging leaders (artistic and administrative) in the dance field, gain an understanding of what programming and services exist for this group within the arts and nonprofit community, and create recommendations on how Dance/USA might support programs to respond most effectively.

From April 14 – 29, 2009, we received 113 responses to an online Survey Monkey tool distributed to individuals perceived to be emerging leaders in the dance field. This is what we have learned so far...

What it means to be an 'emerging leader'...

Almost 40% of survey respondents felt that individuals should be able to self-define as 'emerging leaders'. Many respondents favored some combination of factors including age (most defined emerging as under 35), number of years in the field (most defined emerging as under 10 years in the field) as well as definers such as 'intention' and 'potential'. The emerging leadership generation seems to draw little distinction between artistic and administrative and have a strong desire for programming and networking that is inclusive.

What is challenging emerging leaders...

A lack of opportunity for themselves and/or peers to move up in their careers (86%).

"I have a masters degree, but have a hard time finding mid-level positions. The postings are either for internships or executive directors. The industry seems to be contracting and many institutions don't post administrative openings using traditional web based channels, making it very difficult to find position postings."

Burn out or overwork due to lack of resources & infrastructure (83%)

Balancing life, family & career goals (78%)

"Being able to balance the creative aspects--(time to choreograph and take class) with the financial needs of my life-- I HAVE to teach to pay the bills. Can't take on a performance career or extra choreography gigs because they conflict with my teaching."

Difficulty getting current leadership to delegate responsibility to them. (75%)

"Lack of inclusion in meeting where big picture ideas are discussed. No annual review with management for feedback. Lack of development opportunities through my place of work."

Many also indicated that they have difficulty breaking into the networks of presenters, funders and other field leaders to access opportunities for advancement.

What is currently available to and being used by emerging leaders...

Not surprisingly, lack of time and financial resources are by far the greatest issues preventing emerging leaders from accessing programs that are available to them.

Currently, emerging leaders are accessing informal mentorships (95%), local convenings & workshops (92%), and peer networks in person or online (around 75%) to support their career development.

What emerging leaders want...

Clearly, what emerging leaders need and want most are the resources to establish and grow their careers in dance. For many current emerging leaders, as for previous generations, that comes down to financial resources and the time, attention and support of established leaders in the field.

Respondents of our survey ranked formal mentorship opportunities at the top, by far, of their wish list. Two other programs that also ranked highly were opportunities to interact and seek support from peers and access to a resource hub with information for emerging leaders. Much lower on the list were activities such as engaging in online dialog and interacting with leaders across sectors.

When asked what they would like to get out of an emerging dance leaders program, 86% of respondents prioritized connections to peers and mid-career/senior administrators, 78% indicated they would want to learn about best practices in the field, 72% sought leadership training & mentorship and 71% hoped to get skills training in areas such as fundraising, financial management etc.

When asked what activities they would personally participate in, the top four were a mentorship program, regional/local cocktail events, regional/local speaker series and discounts for national conference attendance.

In more detailed responses to questions around mentorships, it was clear that emerging leaders sought ongoing opportunities for direct access and feedback from established leaders. The majority of respondents (66%) believed that a formal mentorship opportunity would be most useful after working for 2-3 years in the field. However, two areas of need emerged – one, an immediate need, for anyone making a transition into the field from school, another career etc. and another for those who have a few years in the field and need new challenges and opportunities to advance their careers.

Communication

In building an emerging leaders network, the majority of respondents favored regular communication. Several indicated in write-in responses that they favored phone or in person communication and several cautioned not to reinvent or duplicate, but to use existing networks, work through local service organizations and use online tools to facilitate efficient communication. In addition, respondents suggested job postings, links to articles, discussions about dance work itself and a meet-up function to set up face to face gatherings on an emerging leaders portal or site would be very useful.

NEXT STEPS:

The Task Force is splitting into three working groups to discuss and develop program recommendations in three key areas of need identified in our research:

- Mentorship programs
- An information hub/communications network
- Access to national, local and regional convenings of peers and colleagues

In addition, we will continue to develop our research by undertaking focus groups and interviews to learn more about the specific needs and barriers for emerging leaders and we will expand our research to emerging leaders outside of major urban centers and to established leaders to better understand the career paths and perspectives of previous generations of leadership in the field.

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Information on the Emerging Leaders in Dance Task Force and research will be available on the Dance/USA website www.danceusa.org. If you want to get involved or receive more information contact a member of the Task Force or annedunning@rcn.com.