DATE | 2026-04-16
CONTACT | John Armstrong
CONTACT EMAIL | John@armstrongstrategy.com

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Toronto Dance Theatre

Research Synthesis Report

TDT

Building back to *Transformational*

Executive Summary

Toronto's dance sector is facing growing pressure from rising costs, limited space, and constrained funding, reducing artists' ability to engage in research and creative development. This has contributed to a shift from exploratory, process-based work toward more transactional, production-driven practices, threatening the sector's long-term artistic growth.

This report draws on surveys, interviews, and community engagement led by the Toronto Dance Theatre (TDT) to examine challenges in accessing and managing dance spaces, with a focus on the Winchester Street Theatre. Key findings highlight affordability gaps, limited availability, administrative strain, and fragmented support systems.

To address these issues, the report emphasizes the need for financially sustainable and flexible space management models that balance accessibility with operational realities. Recommended strategies include clear financial planning, diversified revenue streams, targeted subsidy programs, and improved operational efficiency through technology and alternative labour models.

The report also stresses that strengthening the sector requires more than access to physical space. Investments in capacity building, visibility, networking, and coordinated advocacy are essential to support a more resilient and connected dance ecosystem.

Background

The face of Toronto's dance sector is changing, being increasingly shaped by interconnected issues around funding, access, and space. The ongoing closure of dedicated dance spaces and a growing demand for what remains, rising inflation and cost-of-living pressures, and persistent stagnation and strain on dance budgets, is creating pressure across the sector. At the same time, systemic barriers to access and a diminishing visibility of dance within Toronto's cultural landscape are compounding these challenges. Artists have fewer resources to dedicate to space rentals, while venues face increasing costs to maintain their facilities.

Within this context, artists are increasingly booking space only when a presentation date is secured. This approach is in conflict with the need for experimentation and refinement, essential to the evolution of dance as an art form. As previously identified by the Toronto Dance Theatre (TDT), this shift signals a move from dance as a transformative practice toward a more transactional model, raising concerns about the sector's ability to keep pace with national and international counterparts that invest more substantially in artistic development.

In response, and in alignment with its current artistic priorities, TDT has embraced the meaningful stewardship of its physical spaces as a key responsibility in supporting the vitality of the city's dance community. The organization's research efforts are focused on the effective management and maintenance of the Winchester Street Theatre, one of the few purpose-built dance spaces in the city. This space is viewed as a community asset, and must adapt to survive and thrive in the post-COVID reality of the dance sector.

TDT previously secured two grants, a Toronto Arts Council Open Door's grant supporting a subsidized studio rental pilot project, and a Phase I Catalyst and Transformation Fund grant to build on their current business model to best support the Toronto dance sector in light of the new "post-COVID" reality.

These grants and the associated projects both focused on the stewardship of the Winchester Street Theatre and supporting the dance community. Affordability, accessibility, and availability were key concepts underpinning these explorations. The two projects were run in parallel, and identified that members of Toronto's dance sector were directly impacted by critical gaps in sustainability, affordability, and equity, and revealed some of the complexities of stewarding a dance space in the current landscape.

This led to the current project, funded by a Phase II Catalyst and Transformation Fund grant. This project focuses on exploring how other similar dance spaces address these gaps and limiters for access within the sector. The end goal of this project is to develop a financially sustainable and adaptive model for space management, which would both provide artists in the Toronto dance sector space to meaningfully engage with, and support the long-term viability of the Winchester Street Theatre.

The priority is on creating a model that focuses on affordability, accessibility, and availability, is supportive of the dance sector and associated diverse needs, and is financially sustainable.

Methodology

Data Collection

During the first two projects, TDT collected a combination of qualitative and quantitative data through:

1. Post-rental surveys of individuals who utilized the pilot studio rental subsidy program for independent artists
2. Key informant interviews with space owners/managers in the local and national dance ecosystem with similar funding structures and facilities as TDT
3. A town hall session to discuss the local dance space landscape, experiences around stewarding spaces, and the challenges faced by both artists and space owners/managers

TDT used these three distinct data collection methods to gather diverse insights and perspectives from community members throughout Toronto's dance sector.

Analysis

The Armstrong Strategy Group then combined and distilled the previously collected data to identify key research findings. Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis framework, as outlined in Ahmed et al. (2025)[1], was utilized to analyse and consolidate the qualitative data. Phases of the research analysis include:

1. Familiarization with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Writing the report

Descriptive statistics were gleaned from the pilot studio rental subsidy program feedback survey and are used throughout the report.

Recommendations for consideration by TDT in the development of future space management models and actions plans, as well as for the dance community as a whole, are identified throughout the report and summarized at the end.

Nordicity's 2022 *Research Study and Needs Assessment on Dance Rehearsal Spaces in Ontario* (hereafter referred to as the Nordicity Report) was reviewed after themes were defined and named to identify similarities between the findings, but not to guide the analysis.

Themes/Key Findings

Financial Planning to Allow for Long-Term Sustainability

Effective financial planning and management are essential to the long-term sustainability of dance spaces, and must be realistic, transparent, and ongoing. It must also balance two often competing priorities, reducing financial barriers to access for artists while ensuring the financial viability of the organization and its facilities. This requires a clear understanding of the true costs associated with operating and maintaining the space, something that many of the space owners and managers noted was a steep learning curve. As Laurence Lemieux from The Citadel spoke to during the town, early expectations around space management were often unrealistic: "[M]aybe you start renovating, people are gonna come and give us money. But it wasn't exactly like that," and more bluntly describing the experience as "two insane artists deciding to renovate." Brandy Leary from Anandam described their space as "built on this wild model that just centers artists and it centers sustainability… [we were] literally just kids trying to pay the

[1] Ahmed, S. K., Mohammed, R. A., Nashwan, A. J., Ibrahim, R. H., Abdalla, A. Q., Ameen, B. M. M., & Khidhir, R. M. (2025). Using thematic analysis in qualitative research. *Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health*, 6, DOI: 10.1016/j.glmedi.2025.100198

rent and hoped that there was a little bit that we [could] put into a surplus". While these organizations were able to survive and become financially viable, this also highlights the need for realistic financial planning rather than optimism alone.

Establishing a clear cost baseline, including ongoing operations, staffing, and future renovations, allows organizations to set informed financial targets and determine how much rental rates can be subsidized without jeopardizing long-term sustainability. Transparency is also key, as noted during a key informant interview that being clear about the true costs to run a space, the current rates offered, and the subsidies available may be important to ensure the community understands the true cost of business. Without this clarity, a disconnect can emerge between what artists can afford and what it actually costs to maintain a space.

Physical infrastructure adds another layer of complexity. Aging facilities and the need for ongoing maintenance or future renovations can directly impact an organization's ability to offer affordable rates. Several organizations noted that financial pressures related to upkeep forced them to scale back or discontinue accessibility programs, reinforcing the reality that supporting artists cannot come at the expense of maintaining safe and functional spaces.

> *Recommendation: Complete a full budget analysis, including budget predictions and estimates for upcoming renovations and maintenance. Determine the true cost to keep the building running, and determine a target room rental rate.*

This disconnect is evident across the sector. The Nordicity Report found that while the average hourly rental rate for studio space in Ontario was approximately $42/hour, many artists reported being able to afford closer to $22/hour. Data from TDT's subsidized rental pilot confirmed this gap, with 75% of participants indicating they could generally afford between $10-15 per hour for rental spaces. At the same time, feedback from participants highlighted that subsidized space was a critical enabler of artistic development. As one artist shared, "It was extremely helpful to have access to subsidized space… I would not be able to access rehearsal space otherwise." Others emphasized the impact on the creative process, "because there wasn't a huge upfront cost, I felt less pressure to be 'productive'… This lent itself to genuine play and exploration," and "access to this space allowed me to focus… without the pressure of high rental costs." These reflections highlight that affordability is not only a financial barrier, but a barrier to creativity.

Other organization's experiences further illustrate both the importance and complexity of this balance. Groups that set rates too low too early often struggled with long-term sustainability and faced challenges adjusting community expectations over time. As multiple organizations noted, maintaining very low rates was not sustainable long-term, and increasing prices later proved difficult once community members became accustomed to below-market costs.

Organizations also highlighted that even well-intentioned accessibility programs could create operational strain. The Citadel previously ran an initiative offering free, last-minute studio rentals, but found that participants would book space and not use it, increasing staff workload while studios remained empty. TDT was cautioned about the potential for initial demand for accessibility programs, with low follow through or uptake. It was also recommended to have clear and strict criteria for subsidized and ultra-low rental rate programs to ensure they are sustainable and target the high-priority community projects for support. These recommendations highlight how accessibility programs should be intentionally designed to not be a burden on staff or on the artists trying to balance life and dance, so that programs don't have to be cut so quickly if they are underutilized.

Recommendation: Determine how prices will be subsidized, and for who.

Recommendation: Mindfully develop accessibility programs to avoid undue staff burden, so high uptake is not necessary for program continuation

Funding structures also play a significant role in shaping access. Non-profit organizations often described themselves as better positioned to offer subsidized or sliding-scale rates through grants and fundraising, enabling them to prioritize community access over profit. However, limited funding could still restrict the scale of these efforts. Conversely, for-profit organizations described having less flexibility to prioritize access due to the financial considerations, instead focusing on community support offered through partnerships or limited initiatives.

Rental models must balance being a service to the community with the operational realities of running a space. As one artist powerfully articulated, "right now, space is treated like a commercial good… something that can be monetized, rated by the hour. And for dance artists… it's our soil. Without it, nothing grows." This framing highlights the broader cultural importance of access to space, while also underscoring the need for sustainable systems to support it.

Diversified Revenue Streams

A potential option for TDT is to maintain multiple revenue streams with varying levels of stability, This allows more predictable income to support initiatives that may carry higher risk or lower revenue, or to subsidize costs for accessibility programs. This creates the ability to both sustain operations and expand access for artists.

Examples of organizations maintaining multiple revenue streams were identified throughout the key informant interviews and town hall. The Citadel balances an in-house project-based company with a curated presentation series, making it one of the most consistent dance presenters in the city, producing 65 shows annually. The Fifth pivoted to virtual ballet classes during the pandemic, which increased accessibility and made ballet less intimidating for participants. Xing Dance Theatre maintains a mix of professional programs, community classes, and rentals. The Dance Centre uses its space about 70% of the time for internal programming (workshops, artist residencies, and events) to ensure stability, reserving the remainder for single-use rentals that provide flexibility to external users. The use of multiple revenue streams was also identified in the Nordicity Report.

Recommendation: Build a space management model with multiple revenue streams

Flexible revenue strategies can also allow for more subsidizations, such as high-demand programs subsidizing lower-demand offerings. For instance, The Fifth noted that while morning classes see lower uptake, evening classes remain popular and allow the organization to offset other classes and rental rates. Similarly, Unity Charity maintains "anchor" tenants who regularly book the studio, then also rents the space to other groups who do not have the space for events. Unity Charity also runs regular programming to allow them access to operating grants, which can offset costs and allow the space to be offered at more affordable rates to other users.

Along these lines, TDT is exploring project-based grants to fund accessibility or subsidized programs rather than relying on operational funds. This approach provides flexibility and support for artists, though caution was advised to ensure that funding can be sustained long-term, as scaling back popular programs could be challenging if project-based funding diminishes.

Pilot program feedback highlighted multiple flexible options that artists would be interested in, such as: booking blocks of time at a reduced rate (14/16), purchasing a membership with a set number of studio hours (10/16), memberships offering priority bookings at preferred rates (3/16), last-minute or rush bookings at a reduced rate (8/16).

> *Recommendation: Identify higher vs lower earning revenue streams. Consider alternative ways rent can be subsidized.*

Determining how broadly to open rentals, and to whom, is a key consideration. The Citadel primarily rents to dance artists, limiting access to familiar or vetted community members. While expanding rentals could improve space utilization, town hall discussions highlighted concerns around space damage and misalignment with artistic intent, leading many managers to prefer renting "within the family." Other organizations take varied approaches. The Fifth extends beyond dance to select writers, and Unity Charity hosts diverse programming, such as puppy yoga and belly dancing.

> *Recommendation: Determine how wide a net TDT will cast for space rentals.*

Organizations are also able to build income streams through additional offerings and seasonal adjustments. The Citadel provides lighting and sound equipment for an added fee, which is often included in extended rental agreements and helps offset subsidized rates. Additional potential rental add-ons for TDT include projectors or technical support, both mentioned by participants in the pilot program. Anandam accommodates requests for winter rehearsal space, while Guelph Youth Dance manages fluctuating demand, with peak hours limiting availability and reduced summer demand providing opportunities for other rentals.

Yvonne Ng of Tiger Princess Dance Projects explained how a space's characteristics can either support or limit creative possibilities, particularly when it comes to storage. She described working with a large set that couldn't be easily dismantled; in spaces without storage, she had to spend significant time building and tearing it down, reducing rehearsal time. By contrast, Corpus Dance Projects, which shared a different building, could develop choreography centered on large-scale objects and elaborate sets because their space supported both the work and the storage it required.

Recommendation: Explore rental "add-ons" as additional income streams. Potential rentals include lights, sound equipment, projectors, technical support, storage

Recommendation: Consider daily, weekly, and seasonal fluctuations in potential demand, and create plans for how to compensate

By combining stable programming, flexible rentals, and targeted subsidies, dance organizations can create financially resilient spaces that still meet the diverse needs of the artistic community.

Getting Creative with Time and Resource Management Options

A consistent theme emerging from both the town hall and key informant interviews was that managing dance facilities placed a large strain on time and energy resources. Operating these venues requires a substantial and ongoing investment of labour, often carried by a very small team. As Simon Sylvain Lalonde of Xing Dance Theatre explained, "the building is only there since 1985 but still, to run a place, you have to do the work of 10 people." This highlights the intensity of administrative and operational demands, and the risk of burnout when responsibilities are not adequately distributed.

Finding a balance between active involvement in the day-to-day running of a facility and avoiding unsustainable workloads is critical, and administrative management continues to be identified as a major challenge across organizations. For example, Guelph Youth Dance reported that routine tasks such as cleaning, maintenance, renter orientations, and managing access consume significant staff time and energy. This is in alignment with the Nordicity Report, which indicated that labour was often the largest expense for dance and arts facilities.

Recommendation: Identify areas in the current daily flow of work that could be delegated, streamlined, or automated

In this context, technology, and specifically online booking systems, were identified as a major opportunity to decrease the administrative burden. Providing a platform where prospective renters could view availability and reserve space not only reduced the workload for staff, but also increased autonomy and flexibility for renters. This is especially valuable for short-notice bookings, which can be difficult to coordinate manually. Organizations such as Anandam and Guelph Youth Dance have already implemented online systems, noting substantial improvements in administrative efficiency and user access. In contrast, facilities like The Citadel, which rely solely on email-based booking without public calendars, face greater administrative demands and reduced transparency for renters.

Feedback from pilot program participants further reinforces the demand for streamlined systems, with over 80% expressing a preference for online reservation platforms.

At the same time, some operators expressed a preference for maintaining a more personal approach to bookings. Xing Bang Fu, for instance, emphasized the value of direct communication with renters, which allowed for greater understanding of individual needs and the ability to support artists who may face financial barriers. This highlights a tension between efficiency and relational engagement, and the need for organizations to determine what balance is right for them. Additional strategies to reduce administrative burden include dedicated roles, such as Mile Zero Dance's rental coordinator, which helps distribute workload more evenly across staff.

Recommendation: Implement an online calendar and booking system

Space owners and managers also identified potential improvements around automated access systems. For example, Guelph Youth Dance noted that their current system required staff to provide keys or be on-site, which limits flexibility and necessitates more selective booking practices. Mile Zero Dance also noted the logistical challenges of their old space, and issues around key management and complex access issues. Transitioning to code-based entry systems could significantly reduce these constraints while improving user experience.

Recommendation: Explore opportunities for automated access systems

Beyond technological solutions, many organizations were exploring alternative resource management strategies, including the use of "sweat equity." Mile Zero Dance offers a strong example through its member co-op program, where artists volunteer time in exchange for reduced rental rates. This model offsets labour demands, increases access to space, and fosters a sense of shared ownership. Similarly, their residency programs provide low-cost or free access in exchange for community engagement activities, strengthening connections within the local arts ecosystem.

There is also potential to expand these models further. For instance, pilot program feedback suggested the value of mentorship and peer feedback opportunities. Structured programs where artists contribute time as mentors/peers in exchange for subsidized space could simultaneously support artistic development, increase access to space, and reduce operational pressures.

Overall, sweat equity models offer multiple benefits, decreasing reliance on additional staffing, redistributing workload, enhancing community engagement, building networks, and improving access to facilities.

Recommendation: Identify areas in the work flow that could be shifted to "sweat equity"

Recommendation: Explore options for programs where artists can trade sweat equity for access to subsidized space rentals

Change What You Can, Accept What You Can't

No space will ever meet every need. The most effective approach is to understand what matters most to the organization and artists, focus on the "must haves", and accept or mitigate the limitations that cannot realistically be changed.

Feedback from pilot program participants reinforces this idea of prioritization. When asked what factors influenced their decisions when booking studio space, responses were as follows:

Factor	Responses
Geographical location	14/16
Studio size	12/16
Purpose build studio	11/16
Studio is well-equipped	11/16
Physically accessible	5/16
Security/staff	0/16
Storage/ability to leave materials	4/16

Geographical location and studio size ranked highest, as also seen in the Nordicity Report, yet these are often the least flexible elements. Changing them requires relocation or major renovation, which is unfeasible for many organizations. By contrast, whether a studio is well-equipped is more directly within the control of the organization, highlighting an area where incremental improvements can have a meaningful impact on renters.

Different forms of dance also bring specific space requirements. For example, Unity Charity focuses on street dance styles that can involve high energy and loud music, which can cause vibrations and noises that disrupt other tenants in the building.

Meanwhile, The Citadel benefits from having no other tenants in the building, removing concerns about noise and disruption entirely. Yet other factors, such as location and safety considerations, means they focus on renting to vetted members.

Some facilities are designed to support both rehearsal and performance, while others are not. Unity Charity's space, for example, is just under 700 square feet. While this limits large-scale events, it works well for rehearsals and smaller gatherings, and can also support other organizations who do not have the space for small events. Partnerships and collaborations like this can help artists access the necessary spaces for the entire lifespan of a dance project.

Geographical accessibility also shapes how spaces are used. Anandam noted how their close proximity to public transit and available parking was a large benefit to the organization and its artists. Xing Dance Theatre is situated at a highly visible and accessible downtown intersection, with street-facing, floor-to-ceiling windows not only bringing in natural light but also allowing the public to witness the artistic process, increasing visibility and connection to the community.

Some organizations have taken more unconventional approaches. Frog in Hand Productions developed an off-grid geodesic dome, creating a purpose-built environment that eliminates noise concerns and expands creative possibilities. However, this physical separation from the city also introduces a different limitation, with the owner noting a sense of distance from Toronto's artistic ecosystem.

Across these examples, a consistent theme emerges: each space has distinct strengths and constraints. The key is not to eliminate all limitations, but to clearly understand them, prioritize what is essential, and develop thoughtful strategies to mitigate challenges.

> *Recommendation: Reflect on the dance facility's strengths and weaknesses. Determine which weaknesses should be addressed for the efficient management of the facility and for the renters' experience, and create associated mitigation plans.*

Support Outside of the Physical Space

While access to physical space remains one of the more visible and pressing barriers in the dance sector, it is ultimately a symptom of a broader imbalance across the ecosystem. Addressing space limitations alone will not resolve the underlying challenges artists and organizations face. A more holistic approach that strengthens the surrounding dance ecosystem is essential to creating sustainable opportunities for the sector.

This includes investing in areas beyond bricks and mortar, such as building networks of practice, improving communication and knowledge sharing, increasing the visibility and findability of available spaces, and offering supports such as grant-writing assistance and broader capacity-building initiatives. These elements help ensure that artists are not only able to access space, but are also equipped to fully utilize it and sustain their practices.

Improving the findability of a space and expanding how dance venues are advertised is essential to reaching artists who are not already connected to existing networks. Feedback from the pilot program indicated that most participants discovered the opportunity through channels such as the TDT website or e-newsletter, which required artists to already be familiar with TDT or the Winchester Street Theatre. While effective for maintaining relationships with current users, this approach limits access for artists working outside of these circles, including emerging, independent, or culturally specific practitioners who may have the greatest need for affordable space. To address this gap, venues must cast a wider net by leveraging external platforms and more broadly used booking tools. For example, Unity Charity expands its reach by advertising through platforms like Dexter and PeerSpace, which connect with users actively searching for creative spaces. Increasing visibility through these kinds of channels, alongside targeted outreach and partnerships, can help ensure that available spaces are discoverable to a more diverse range of artists and communities. The Nordicity Report also highlighted the need for improving the findability of creative spaces, how SpaceFinder was able to improve this while it was active, and the need for a SpaceFinder-style infrastructure now that the platform has been retired.

Recommendation: Explore additional advertising opportunities for space rentals and specific subsidization programs

Capacity building is essential to the long-term sustainability of the Toronto dance sector, ensuring that artists and organizations are not only supported individually, but are collectively strengthened through shared resources, knowledge, and opportunities. For example, Anandam extends its impact beyond providing space by offering choreographic training and professional development opportunities. This type of programming strengthens artistic capacity and fosters a more resilient community.

Recommendation: Consider opportunities for capacity building within the dance sector

Equally important is the development of both formal and informal networks, and a shared culture of practice. Guelph Youth Dance emphasized the value of creating a welcoming, community-centered environment, highlighting how “lobby moments” and organic interactions in shared spaces can foster connection and mutual support. These informal and organic exchanges are often where collaborations begin and knowledge is transferred, yet can be ironically difficult to replicate without intentional design.

The demand for connection is clear, with over half of pilot program participants identifying networking opportunities as a valuable form of additional support. This points to an opportunity for more intentionally design spaces and surrounding systems to encourage interaction, whether through shared common areas, programming, or facilitated introductions.

These findings are directly supported by the Nordicity Report’s recommendation to formalize the dance sector to encourage relationship and community development. It noted that the community can be siloed across regional, community, or other lines, and highlighted the need for active work in encouraging networking, mentorship, and relationship building.

Recommendation: Plan for and support both formal and informal networking, prioritize the development of a culture of practice

There is also a role for clearer points of contact within spaces. In key informant discussions, several organizations raised the idea of having a host or designated contact person to support renter accessibility, navigation, and safety. Interestingly, none of the pilot participants cited security or staff presence as a deciding factor in booking space. This suggests an opportunity to better understand how support roles can be structured to meet artist needs without overextending limited human resources.

Recommendation: Explore what artists want and need when it comes to staff/on site point person. Plan to ensure identified needs are met without burden on human resources

Systemic barriers, particularly in accessing funding, also continue to disproportionately impact artists from diverse communities. The Dance Centre has begun addressing this gap through initiatives that provide guidance and resources to help artists navigate grant applications. This was further supported by a pilot program participant identified grant-writing assistance as a valuable form of support, underscoring the need for support navigating pathways to funding.

This finding is further supported by the Nordicity Report, which found that lack of awareness of funding programs for owning spaces, lack of accounting expertise in the sector and specific dance communities, and lack of time/resources to put applications together were all barriers to access for funding. These barriers are opportunities for capacity-building in the community.

Recommendation: Implement grant application support programs

Recommendation: Explore other capacity building programs for the sector

Taken together, these insights highlight that strengthening the dance sector requires more than increasing the number of studios or improving access to physical spaces. It involves building a connected, informed, and well-supported community, where artists can access not only space, but also the knowledge, relationships, and resources necessary to thrive.

Advocacy and Collective Action Throughout the System

There are clear opportunities for advocacy across the dance sector, which require coordinated, sector-wide effort to create meaningful and lasting change. Insights from key informant interviews and the town hall discussion point to a range of priorities: increasing infrastructure within the Toronto dance ecosystem, expanding funding for programs, revisiting how funding applications are designed and assessed, financially supporting space operators directly, and incentivizing non-dance venues to offer affordable rental opportunities.

Among these, advocacy for increased funding and access to space stands out as an immediate and tangible starting point. As Laurence Lemieux noted, the current landscape is far from sufficient for a city the size of Toronto, “The Citadel should be one of 25 in the city… we should be one in every borough… But that is an impossible thing to do without funding.”

Recommendation: Explore advocacy opportunities around funding and financial support

Advocacy efforts can also be strengthened by engaging more deeply with existing policy and legislative frameworks. Yvonne Ng of Tiger Princess Dance Projects highlighted how tools such as Section 37 of the City of Toronto Planning Act can be leveraged to support the creation of community cultural spaces.

Ng also emphasized a critical gap in current thinking, “what seems to be missing is a recognition that rehearsal studios are essential cultural infrastructure.” Positioning rehearsal and creation spaces not as optional amenities, but as foundational components of the cultural ecosystem, is potentially key for future advocacy, and there are emerging mechanisms that could support this work. During the town hall, participants raised the potential of initiatives such as a Cultural Land Trust to help secure and protect cultural spaces over the long term. Erika Hennebury, Senior Cultural Affairs Officer for the the City of Toronto, noted ongoing research, upcoming sector conversations, and programs such as subsidized rent initiatives, which all signal that there is movement within public institutions, even if constrained by limited resources.

> *Recommendation: Partner and work with the City of Toronto to identify ways that the dance sector can utilize the current legislative environment*

Long-term ecosystem challenges were also highlighted. Michael deConinck Smith of the Canadian Contemporary Dance Theatre reflected on a decades-long shift in the sector with the decline of mid-sized dance companies, driven by rising costs, limited funding, and difficulty maintaining stable access to space. In their place, smaller, project-based organizations have proliferated, which often operating with minimal resources and limited stability. He argued that the current “space crisis” cannot be resolved without funders recognizing and supporting the full ecosystem, including the sustainability of mid-sized companies and the spaces they rely on.

> *Recommendation: Explore ways to support mid-sized companies*

Despite a strong desire within the community to advocate for change, a key challenge around a lack of clarity about how to take action remains. During the town hall Q&A, when an audience member asked how they could get involved, there was no clear or unified answer. This points to a significant gap where interest and urgency are present, but the pathways for advocacy are fragmented and difficult to navigate.

There is an opportunity here to develop clearer tools and resources, such as actionable advocacy guides, centralized information hubs, or coordinated campaigns that can help unify efforts across the sector. The example of Quebec’s Le Regroupement québécois de la danse illustrates the impact of having a strong, centralized advocacy organization that consistently represents and fights for the sector at a policy level. Montreal's maisons de la culture, and the benefits of Toronto having an organization who would advocate for cultural infrastructure similar to other cultural hubs was also highlighted.

In Ontario, several organizations already contribute to this work, including the Canadian Dance Assembly, DanceOntario, Dance Umbrella of Ontario, and Why Not Theatre. However, advocacy efforts often remain distributed across multiple groups, with limited visibility to the broader community.

This fragmentation is compounded by broader funding constraints. A representative from the Ontario Arts Council noted that its budget had remained largely unchanged for 15 years, placing increasing pressure on grant programs and limiting their impact. She also cautioned against framing the issue in adversarial terms, encouraging the sector to look beyond “us versus them” narratives and instead consider the wider systemic conditions affecting arts funding and policy.

Overall, the Toronto dance sector currently operates within distinct pockets of advocacy, with many artists and organizations unsure of where to turn or how to contribute. Strengthening advocacy will require not only identifying shared priorities, but also improving coordination, communication, and access to information, ensuring that those who want to support change know how to do so, and feel empowered to act collectively.

> *Recommendation: Explore ways to create one "point of contact" for advocacy, improving coordination, communication, and access to information*

Recommendations

The recommendations laid out in this report are as follows:

1. Complete a full budget analysis, including budget predictions and estimates for upcoming renovations and maintenance. Determine the true cost to keep the building running, and determine a target room rental rate.
2. Determine how prices will be subsidized, and for who.
3. Mindfully develop accessibility programs to avoid undue staff burden, so high uptake is not necessary for program continuation
4. Build a space management model with multiple revenue streams
5. Identify higher vs lower earning revenue streams. Consider alternative ways rent can be subsidized.
6. Determine how wide a net TDT will cast for space rentals.
7. Explore rental "add-ons" as additional income streams. Potential rentals include lights, sound equipment, projectors, technical support, storage
8. Consider daily, weekly, and seasonal fluctuations in potential demand, and create plans for how to compensate
9. Identify areas in the current daily flow of work that could be delegated, streamlined, or automated
10. Implement an online calendar and booking system
11. Explore opportunities for automated access systems
12. Identify areas in the work flow that could be shifted to "sweat equity"
13. Explore options for programs where artists can trade sweat equity for access to subsidized space rentals
14. Reflect on the dance facility's strengths and weaknesses. Determine which weaknesses should be addressed for the efficient management of the facility and for the renters' experience, and create associated mitigation plans.

15. Explore additional advertising opportunities for space rentals and specific subsidization programs
16. Consider opportunities for capacity building within the dance sector
17. Plan for and support both formal and informal networking, prioritize the development of a culture of practice
18. Explore what artists want and need when it comes to staff/on site point person. Plan to ensure identified needs are met without burden on human resources
19. Implement grant application support programs
20. Explore other capacity building programs for the sector
21. Explore advocacy opportunities around funding and financial support
22. Partner and work with the City of Toronto to identify ways that the dance sector can utilize the current legislative environment
23. Explore ways to support mid-sized companies
24. Explore ways to create one “point of contact” for advocacy, improving coordination, communication, and access to information

A final recommendation is to caution against framing complex sector challenges as having simple, linear solutions. While the current ecosystem clearly produces systemic barriers to access, such as a static funding landscape that has not kept pace with inflation, the loss of dance spaces, rising operating costs, and a shift away from exploratory practice toward project-based use of space, these issues cannot be resolved through single interventions alone. There is a risk in relying on “silver bullet” arguments as laid out in funding applications and reports that suggest one action will generate broad, predictable outcomes.

For example, the idea that increasing paid presentation opportunities will create a trickle-down effect across the sector was included in grant applications and final reports. While additional funding may lead to more performances and a greater need for rehearsal space, it does not necessarily follow that audiences will increase or that engagement with dance spaces will grow proportionally. Moreover, this perspective does not fully account for existing constraints on space access. Without a corresponding increase in available and affordable spaces, heightened demand may simply intensify existing bottlenecks, placing further strain on artists and organizations already navigating limited resources.