

# REFOCUSING DANCE EDUCATION A REPORT OF THE GATHERING

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All report images taken by Casie Wright.

Cover photo: A group of adults moving together within a well-lit dance studio. In the foreground, a person seated in a wheelchair is looking downwards. Behind this individual, three other people engaged in dance improvisation, with arms extended. Everyone is wearing face masks. The studio features a polished wooden floor and large windows on one side, allowing ample light to enter. A ballet barre runs along the left wall.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In October 2024, over forty dance practitioners, educators, advocates, and artists gathered in San Marcos, Texas for a three-day hybrid event titled Refocusing Dance Education: The Gathering, organized by Art Spark Texas's Dance Program. The event focused on reimagining dance education for dancers who are Deaf or disabled. This gathering represented a milestone in a three-year process that began in 2021 when Art Spark Texas received funding from the National Endowment for the Arts to research and address the significant gap in dance education programming for dancers who are Deaf or disabled.

The journey toward this gathering began with a fundamental recognition: before even reaching college-level training programs, youth who are Deaf or disabled have very limited opportunities to access and participate in the same quality and variety of dance training that nondisabled children and teens do. As a result, dance instructors who are Deaf or disabled face disproportionate structural barriers to becoming educators, and those who do break through these barriers often lack access to pedagogies developed specifically by dancers who are Deaf or disabled.

### HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

The Refocusing Dance Education project builds upon important precedents in the field, particularly the 2016 Future of Physically Integrated Dance in the USA convening led by Judy Smith. That convening established a model for national dialogue about physically integrated dance and continues to influence the field today. The current initiative expands this work by specifically focusing on dance education and access to dance education by envisioning regional gatherings as a pathway to sustained change.

### PROCESS AND EVOLUTION

This gathering evolved through a carefully designed three-phase process:

- Initial Research (2021-2022): Interviews with 25 field practitioners identified barriers, needs, and aspirations for inclusive dance education.
- Spring Insights (Early 2024): Focused exploration of professional pathways, structural reforms, and alternative learning models with diverse voices in the field.
- Summer Conversations (Summer 2024): Development of practical implementation strategies for curriculum development, regional collaboration networks, and accessible leadership pathways.
- Refocusing Dance Education: The Gathering (October 2024): A hybrid event bringing together practitioners to synthesize insights and chart actionable steps forward.

### PARTICIPANTS AND STRUCTURE

The Gathering brought together a diverse cross-section of the Deaf and disabled dance community, including established leaders in the field, emerging artists, educators and dance department leaders from various settings, and advocates with and without

disabilities. Participants joined both in person and virtually, with accessibility being central to the event's design. The structure intentionally balanced formal presentations with embodied practices, ensuring multiple modes of engagement.

## KEY THEMES AND FINDINGS

Four primary themes emerged through the process, each explored by a dedicated working group:

- **Innovative Pedagogy for Inclusive Dance Education:** Moving beyond adapting traditional methods to envisioning new approaches that center accessibility and the lived experiences of dancers who are Deaf or disabled.
- **Supporting Leadership in Dance and Disability:** Creating pathways for dancers who are Deaf or disabled to move into positions of influence as educators, choreographers, and directors.
- **Strengthening Collaboration and Shared Knowledge:** Fostering inclusive networks for resource- sharing and mutual growth across diverse stakeholders.
- **Visioning the Future of Accessible Dance Education:** Identifying systemic gaps and developing strategies for structural reform and innovative partnerships.

Throughout these conversations, tensions arose around representation, leadership, and structural barriers. Rather than avoiding these tensions, facilitators guided participants to reframe them as productive catalysts for change.

## OUTCOMES AND NEXT STEPS

**Refocusing Dance Education:** The Gathering produced a comprehensive roadmap for transforming dance education, with initiatives spanning from immediately actionable items to long-term systemic changes. Participants outlined plans to develop advocacy resources, launch mentorship programs, create a national directory of inclusive programs, establish regional collaboration networks, and build leadership pipelines specifically for dancers who are Deaf or disabled. These efforts will be supported by continuous evaluation and policy advocacy at institutional and governmental levels, reflecting the group's recognition that meaningful change requires sustained commitment across multiple timeframes and stakeholder groups. The collective vision emphasizes not just adapting existing structures but fundamentally reimagining dance education through the cultural lens that includes both Deaf and Disabled experiences — creating spaces where all dancers can thrive as both students and leaders in the field.

## PREFACE FROM THE ORGANIZER

This report is a milestone marker of three years of work in the field of Deaf and disability dance—work that has been shaped by inquiry, collaboration, and a commitment to deepening access to dance education. Since the beginning, we have sought to create spaces where participants could dream, express their hopes, and reflect on what they wish to carry forward for the profession.

Our process began with a simple question: What does the field of Deaf and disability education need to meet the current moment, and what do you need to effect change? From there, we engaged in critical reflection—identifying who was missing from the conversation, surfacing recurring themes, and fostering discussions around key issues.

This iterative approach led to the creation of a shared document that captured essential questions guiding our work. These questions remain at the heart of this report, serving as a compass for the movement toward a more accessible and equitable future in dance education.

At the core of our most recent gathering was a powerful dynamic: we met in a traditional dance institution—one that, at present, does not yet provide access to students with disabilities. And yet, the doors opened for us. We did not enter with a predetermined structure or rigid format. Instead, we designed participation with flexibility in mind—offering bean bags, mats, stools, chairs, hybrid access, and stipends—ensuring that engagement was possible in multiple ways. This approach acknowledged and embraced difference. It also allowed us to sit with complexity, including moments of tension.

Rather than avoiding difficult conversations, we leaned into them with care and intentionality.

Though Art Spark Texas and our collaborators provided the structure, the content of this gathering emerged organically from the participants. The questions, topics, and discussions were shaped by those in the room—by their lived experiences, knowledge, and perspectives. This felt meaningful because it demonstrated a model for how dance education can evolve—not just to include students who are Deaf or disabled, but to be created for them, by them, and from their cultural perspective.

The process itself has been an act of sustained commitment. Much like dance, it requires an understanding of time—how to move with and through it, how to sustain energy, and how to adapt. We have embraced what adrienne maree brown calls the speed of trust—a necessary pace for creating systemic change. In the current political climate, trust is vital. It is what allows us to continue moving forward despite uncertainty.

I want to express deep gratitude to my colleagues across the country, whose dedication and brilliance make this work possible. I also want to acknowledge and thank Judy Smith, whose leadership in the 2016 Future of Physically Integrated Dance in the USA convening laid the foundation for this work. That convening was a model of national dialogue, and its impact continues to be felt. Judy's commitment to fostering national and regional gatherings has inspired the direction we now take toward building a future where formal dance education is not just accessible, but fundamentally reimaged.

This report captures the insights, momentum, and potential that emerged from our gathering. It is a call to continue this work, to build on the energy we have cultivated, and to take concrete steps toward transforming dance education. The possibilities ahead are real, and the time to act is now.

Silva Laukkanen | Art Spark Texas

ORGANIZING THE GATHERING

Photo: A woman, seen from behind, with her hands resting on her lower back, wearing a shirt that has text printed on the back. The text reads from top to bottom: “Discipline, dance, determined, do, difficult, dedicated, dynamic, dream.” Her hair is tied back in a ponytail and she is wearing glasses. In the background, a large chalkboard is visible, covered with various words and phrases written in chalk: “PASSION,” “NATURE,” “KNITTING,” “ENERGY,” and “MOVEMENT.”

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past three years, practitioners in the field of Deaf or Disabled dance have engaged in a series of evolving conversations aimed at reimagining the possibilities for barrier-free dance education and professional practices. These discussions have emphasized dismantling systemic barriers, fostering leadership, and creating innovative pedagogical frameworks rooted in justice, equity, and accessibility. The 2024 Fall Gathering marked a milestone along this journey, offering a space for collective reflection, actionable planning, and envisioning the future of dance education.

Central to these conversations was the notion that dance, as a medium, transcends traditional boundaries by how it reflects the lived experiences of practitioners who are Deaf or disabled. This report captures the insights shared, lessons learned, and strategies developed through this collaborative effort. The explored themes— from strengthening collaboration to innovative pedagogy and leadership— demonstrate a commitment to equity and representation as guiding principles for systemic transformation. By documenting the outcomes of this hybrid Gathering, this report aims to serve as a resource for advancing inclusive practices within the field and beyond.

Photo: A group of individuals is gathered for a photo in a studio with a large projection screen displaying a video call with more participants. In the foreground, people are arranged in various poses, some kneeling or sitting on the floor, others standing. A few individuals are seated in wheelchairs or using mobility aids. Everyone is looking towards the viewer, many with fingers pointing at the camera. The background features a simple wall and the prominent screen showing eight video call frames.

## INITIAL RESEARCH AND CONVERSATIONS

Refocusing Dance Education: The Gathering represented three years of collective work, building on a series of interconnected conversations, research interviews, and collaborative efforts. The work began with an exploration of systemic challenges. It evolved through group conversations in the spring and summer of 2024 into insights and actionable strategies presented at the Gathering. The fall event also provided an opportunity to synthesize insights from prior phases and to focus on tangible steps for creating inclusive practices and equitable opportunities. The following summaries lay out the steps that led to the hybrid Gathering.

Quote: A lot of conferences don’t usually give monetary support to Deaf and Disabled [artists] to attend their conference or pay for flights and hotel accommodations. This convening did, it’s important to emphasize that clearly when giving the report to funders to ensure they will fund further convenings.

The groundwork for the Gathering was laid through interviews and small group discussions identifying key barriers within dance education and professional practice. These initial conversations highlighted gaps in access, representation, and leadership for dancers who are Deaf or disabled. Practitioners emphasized the need for mentorship, systemic reforms, and inclusive curricula. Early findings helped articulate foundational themes such as innovative pedagogy, collaborative networks, and leadership development.

#### SPRING INSIGHTS: FOCUSED EXPLORATION

Building on this foundation, interviews were held in the spring that delved deeper into these themes, uncovering specific challenges and opportunities. These sessions brought together diverse voices to examine professional pathways, structural reforms, and alternative learning models. Participants emphasized the need for mentorship networks, financial resources, and inclusive teaching practices tailored to the needs of dancers who are Deaf or disabled. This phase also prioritized identifying actionable steps to address entrenched systemic barriers.

#### SUMMER CONVERSATIONS: ADVANCING STRATEGIES

The summer group conversations expanded the dialogue, focusing on practical implementation and partnership-building. Participants explored innovative methods to integrate disability studies into curricula, foster regional collaboration, and utilize digital tools for accessibility. These discussions included detailed proposals for mentorship programs, accessible leadership pathways, curriculum development, and community-driven initiatives. The summer phase helped transform conceptual frameworks into concrete strategies, setting the stage for the final gathering.

Quote: I'm interested in creating atmospheres where every person in the room feels pure pride, self-dignity, and value for who they are exactly how they are. Nobody has to change to be better. Nobody has to make a change to improve themselves.

#### FALL GATHERING: SYNTHESIS AND ACTION

The Fall Gathering brought this iterative process to a major milestone, bringing together practitioners to reflect on progress and chart a path forward. Designed as a hybrid event, the Gathering featured movement sessions, presentations, and discussions to ensure diverse participation and accessibility. Sessions were structured to revisit key themes, share successes, and finalize strategies for implementation. Breakout groups facilitated deep dives into specific areas, such as curriculum development and leadership pipelines. Quiet spaces, multiple choices of seating, and hybrid options further demonstrated a commitment to inclusivity, allowing all voices to be heard.

Photo: A group of people gathered in a spacious, well-lit room with a wooden floor and large windows spanning the back wall. Several individuals are seated on the floor or on

low stools, one person standing in the background, facing towards a central area where a person is speaking. All participants are wearing face masks.

## TOPIC GROUPS

Photo: Three individuals are engaged in dance improvisation on a wooden floor marked with lines. Two individuals in the foreground are positioned low to the ground, with one in the middle leaning on the other for support. All three wear face masks.

The following topic summaries describe the evolution of the four primary themes that grounded the hybrid Refocusing Dance Education: The Gathering.

## INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGY FOR INCLUSIVE DANCE EDUCATION

Early discussions around innovative pedagogy explored how to reimagine dance education to meet the needs of dancers who are Deaf or disabled. Initial conversations identified the structural barriers that limit equitable access, emphasizing the need for inclusive teaching practices deeply rooted in justice. These discussions also focused on the need for practical strategies, including responsive training, body positivity, and liberatory teaching methods that celebrate diverse abilities and identities. Participants called for a paradigm shift—moving beyond adapting traditional dance methods to envision new approaches that center accessibility. Conversations consolidated these insights, advocating for creating inclusive curricula and degree programs that would build from the lived perspective and history of artists who are Deaf or disabled, thereby centering the disability experience.

Photo: A group of people engaged in a movement class within a spacious room with a wooden floor and a tiled ceiling. In the foreground, a person's arms are raised, with hands clasped, and the image is captured through the hole that the arms create. Several other individuals are visible in various positions on the floor, some lying down, some kneeling, and one person is seated in a wheelchair. A large projection screen is also present in the room.

## SUPPORTING LEADERSHIP IN DANCE AND DISABILITY

Early discussions on leadership highlighted the historical exclusion of dancers who are Deaf or disabled from positions of power and influence, such as educators, choreographers, and directors. Initial conversations underscored the need for mentorship and accessible pathways to leadership, while the spring discussions added a focus on incremental progress and the dismantling of ableism and financial barriers. Practical solutions proposed in the summer included mentorship networks, structural accommodations, and leadership pipelines that foster diversity and inclusion. The Fall Gathering emphasized disability-led initiatives, inclusive curricula, and digital tools to create accessible leadership pathways. These conversations stressed the importance of centering the experiences of people who are Deaf or disabled while building sustainable mentorship and leadership systems that ensure the contributions made by leaders are celebrated, and that their expertise is reflected in the future of the field.

Photo: Three people are gathered in a dance studio. On the left, a person is seated in a wheelchair, holding a phone and looking at the computer screen in front of them. Beside them, another person, barefoot, is seated on a large ball, also looking forward. Further back, another person, seated on a long bench, is writing on a clipboard. Next to this individual is their motorized mobility aid. On the right side of the frame, the edge of a computer monitor and keyboard setup is in the foreground, slightly out of focus. All individuals are wearing face masks.

Quote: Representation matters, and the future of dance will be shaped by those who have been previously excluded from the field leading its transformation.

## STRENGTHENING COLLABORATION

Discussions on strengthening collaboration centered on the idea of fostering inclusive networks for resource-sharing and mutual growth. Early conversations explored the importance of highlighting role models' work and building supportive communities to overcome systemic barriers such as funding, space limitations, and a lack of representation. Participants later emphasized creating partnerships across diverse stakeholders, addressing logistical challenges, and ensuring inclusive communication through shared language and trust-building. The Fall Gathering transformed these ideas into actionable strategies, including a proposed resource directory to connect individuals and organizations, mentorship programs, and regional collaborative networks.

Photo: Two individuals are standing on a wooden floor in front of a large screen displaying text. On the left, a person with a face covering and wearing a black shirt and white pants, is holding an open laptop. On the right, another individual with a face covering and wearing a patterned blue shirt and black pants is holding a phone and a cane, looking down at the phone. The screen behind them reads, "Neither one is more or less correct than the other,".

Quote: We have many in our community who are moving into eldership. We're seeing a changing of the guard and that feels important in this moment because these are times ripe for change.

## VISIONING THE FUTURE OF ACCESSIBLE DANCE EDUCATION

The theme of visioning the future for barrier-free dance education centered around ideas for creating a more inclusive and equitable field of dance. Initial discussions focused on identifying systemic gaps in access and representation, which evolved into strategies for structural reform and innovative partnerships. Key ideas included mentorship programs, financial support, and alternative learning pathways such as virtual platforms and community-based programs. During the Fall Gathering, actionable goals emerged, including developing inclusive curricula and leadership opportunities for dancers who are Deaf or disabled. The hybrid Gathering also explored making educational and professional spaces more accessible, both physically and culturally. These discussions underscored the urgency of reimagining the field with equity, representation, and justice at its core to transform into tangible steps toward systemic change.

Photo: Two individuals are seated with their backs to the camera, facing a laptop on a stand. The person on the right has their arm raised, gesturing towards the laptop, while the person on the left is seated directly in front of the screen. The laptop screen displays a video conference with multiple participants.

Quote: We have many in our community who are moving into eldership. We're seeing a changing of the guard and that feels important in this moment because these are times ripe for change.

## BRADFORD'S BOOKENDS

The Gathering opened and closed with guided movement exercises led by Bradford, designed to ground participants in their bodies, connect them to their surroundings, and prepare them for deep reflective engagement.

The opening exercise invited participants to connect with cardinal directions, beginning with North as a point of orientation toward the future. Through guided imagery, participants were encouraged to send their energy into the earth below them like tree roots, then rotate through each direction - East to gather the sun's energy, South to connect across the equator, acknowledging colonial histories while envisioning unity, and West to ground in their sense of home. This directional awareness created a container that honored both individual experience and collective purpose.

The closing exercise on Day 3 built upon this foundation, incorporating elements of releasing tension through playful imagery (like shaking ping-pong balls out of achy spots) and culminating in a long chain of bodies—physically present and virtual—moving together in their own ways while witnessing each other.

When they were done, participants reflected on areas of tension, release, and embodiment, emphasizing care and self-regulation and how the exercises helped to transcend physical and digital divides and foster a sense of collective presence and renewal.

Overall, Bradford's Bookends modeled inclusive facilitation and offered multiple ways to engage the space and each other, emphasizing that being present, witnessing, and resting were all valid ways of participating. Most importantly, this approach set the tone for the entire Gathering as a space where access and care were central to the community's work.

## KEY THEMES

Photo: An individual stands with their back to the camera, writing on a large chalkboard that is covered with various words in response to the prompt "Passions" such as: nature, knitting, laughing, the art of being together, sacrifice, shopping. They are wearing a short-sleeved top and trousers, and have their hair tied back. The chalkboard is set

against a wall with exposed brickwork, and a wooden floor stretches across the foreground.

Throughout the three-year process of discussing, visioning, questioning, and gathering, several key themes arose during the group conversations. The themes that united the conversations are outlined below, followed by specific proposed action items.

Quote: I experience tension in a non-productive way when people with disabilities are not in leadership roles, when assumptions are created and maintained by non-disabled artists.

### 1. SUPPORTING REPRESENTATIVE LEADERSHIP

Leadership and representation are critical for fostering inclusivity and equity in dance education and practice. Ensuring that dancers who are Deaf or disabled occupy leadership roles not only provides role models but also allows for authentic representation that challenges systemic biases and transforms the field. Disability/Deaf-led initiatives and visible leadership are essential to creating a truly inclusive dance culture.

- Establish leadership pipelines for dancers who are Deaf or disabled to become choreographers, educators, and company directors.
- Increase the visibility of leaders who are Deaf or disabled in mainstream dance and academic settings to normalize their presence.
- Support disability/Deaf-led initiatives in dance education to center voices from the disability/Deaf community.

### 2. FOSTERING INNOVATIVE CURRICULUM:

Inclusive pedagogy is a cornerstone for reimagining dance education. By integrating disability/Deaf studies into curricula and adopting innovative teaching practices, educators can create learning environments that value diversity and challenge outdated norms. These practices ensure that dance education is accessible, equitable, and empowering for students who are Deaf or disabled.

- Develop curricula that integrate and center disability studies, emphasizing techniques and histories of disability in dance.
- Shift mindsets in dance education to embrace fully inclusive practices rather than merely adapting traditional models.
- Offer structured, adaptive training programs to meet the needs of disabled, non-disabled, and Deaf students.

### 3. BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE:

Collaboration and community-building foster innovation and support within the field of inclusive dance. Strong partnerships among organizations, educators, and artists create networks encouraging resource sharing and collective growth. Genuine trust and shared goals ensure that collaboration is meaningful and effective.

- Foster partnerships between dance companies, disability/Deaf advocacy groups, and educational institutions.
- Create regional networks to promote localized collaboration.

- Create mentorship programs to connect established professionals with emerging dancers who are Deaf or disabled.

#### 4. FOSTERING SYSTEMS FOR PEER SUPPORT:

Peer support fosters growth, connection, and resilience within the inclusive dance community. By creating opportunities for dancers who are Deaf or disabled to share experiences, insights, and strategies, peer support builds a sense of belonging and reduces isolation. Peer support initiatives provide a platform for collaboration, helping individuals navigate personal and professional barriers and celebrate collective achievements.

- Organize skill-sharing workshops that allow peers to teach and learn from each other, fostering mutual growth.
- Develop peer-led mentorship programs to create accessible pathways for emerging dancers who are Deaf or disabled into leadership and professional opportunities.
- Utilize peer mentorship to bridge the gap for underrepresented groups in dance education.

#### 5. REDEFINING NORMS AND EXPANDING THE NARRATIVE:

Redefining traditional notions of dance challenges stereotypes and broadens the scope of what is considered a dancing body. By celebrating diverse expressions of movement, inclusive dance fosters creativity and challenges societal standards, making the field more representative of the world's diversity.

- Develop curricula that integrate and center disability / Deaf studies, emphasizing techniques and histories of dance and disability / Deaf culture.
- Highlight the unique insights and movement styles dancers who are Deaf or disabled bring to the field.
- Incorporate inclusive educational practices to expand the traditional definitions of a dancer.

Quote: There's still a deficit model around disability—but it's actually radical creativity and incredible innovation.

#### 6. FINDING OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN THE FIELD:

Naming innovative and inclusive educational approaches that include dancers with developmental and/or intellectual disabilities brings opportunities for collaboration within the field. By blending different inclusive dance practices, creative possibilities can be expanded, and performances can be made even more accessible to diverse audiences.

- Foster collaborations within the field to explore new creative opportunities.
- Utilize assistive technologies to enhance both education and performance across different approaches.

#### 7. EVALUATING FOR CONTINUOUS LEARNING:

Evaluation and continuous learning is vital for improving inclusive dance programs and practices. Regular feedback mechanisms and ongoing professional development

ensure that programs remain effective and responsive to the needs of participants. This commitment to growth enhances the sustainability of inclusive dance education.

- Implement ongoing feedback systems to assess the impact of inclusive programs.
- Share best practices and lessons learned through community events and publications.

## 8. CREATING ACCESSIBLE SPACES ON ALL LEVELS:

Accessibility remains a fundamental priority for inclusive dance education and practice. Ensuring physical and digital spaces are welcoming and accommodating for dancers who are Deaf or disabled enables more equitable and accessible learning environments. Accessible environments foster creativity and collaboration, making the field more inclusive.

- Incorporate digital tools for remote participation, making education accessible to geographically dispersed participants.
- Develop regional resource directories to connect communities with accessible programs and spaces.

Quote: How little opportunity there is for dancers with intellectual disabilities. This is an area we need to address with targeted recruitment and specific curriculum designs.

Photo: Throughout the room a group of people are either sitting on the floor, standing up, or sitting on chairs or a large bean bag.. Most people have their arms extended upwards. A large screen in the background displays a video conference with additional participants. The room features a wooden floor and a light-colored ceiling with fluorescent lighting.

## THE GATHERING TENSIONS

A pivotal moment emerged during the Gathering when participants grappled with tensions around representation, leadership, and the structural barriers of dance education. Rather than avoiding these tensions, facilitator Maggie Bridger guided the group through a thoughtful exploration of tension itself, drawing on definitions that ranged from “inner striving” to the necessary tension required in weaving, or tuning a musical instrument.

Through guided reflection and small group discussions, participants examined where they experience tension in their work, when tension becomes productive versus destructive, and what tools help address tension constructively. This exercise helped reframe tension as a potential catalyst for change rather than something to be avoided. One participant observed through the metaphor of musical instruments that tension is essential for creating harmony - it’s about “tuning the tension” rather than eliminating it.

Quote: When I dance with someone who has a lot of tension, I also have a lot of tension, and it’s very positive. When I dance with someone who has no tension, it softens my body in a different way.

Together, the conversations highlighted how tension can serve as a generative force when approached with curiosity and care. This framework later proved particularly valuable as the group tackled challenging discussions about disability/Deaf-led initiatives, resource allocation, and systemic change in dance education. It also demonstrated how thoughtful facilitation can help transform moments of conflict into opportunities for deeper understanding and collective growth.

## NEXT STEPS

Photo: Five people are kneeling or crouching around a large sheet of banner paper on the floor. They are all writing words on the paper. All are wearing face coverings.

## SHORT-TERM GOALS

### CORE MESSAGING:

- Collaborate with practitioners and leaders in the inclusive dance field to draft key messaging points emphasizing inclusive practice benefits, such as innovation, community impact, and representation.
- Include narratives and success stories that showcase the achievements of dancers who are Deaf or disabled and the transformative power of inclusive programs.

### MODULAR MATERIALS:

- Design templates for brochures, one-pagers, and presentations that practitioners can use in their communications about the field, and that can be tailored to specific audiences, such as universities, arts organizations, and community groups.
- Create a digital asset repository of visual materials representing diversity in dance, such as images of dancers with varying disabilities collaborating and performing.

### MENTORSHIP INITIATIVES:

- Launch a pilot mentorship program connecting established professionals in the field with emerging dancers and arts administrators in need of guidance.
- Create a peer support group that meets virtually to share experiences and resources.
- Identify and document potential mentors and mentees within existing networks to streamline program development.

### ACCESSIBLE RESOURCES:

- Develop a digital directory of inclusive dance programs categorized by regions and opportunities.
- Host a workshop to educate stakeholders about best practices in accessibility for physical and virtual dance spaces.

## MEDIUM-TERM GOALS

### CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT:

- Develop curriculum from the point of view and lived experience of dancers who are Deaf or disabled.
- Create a compilation of existing curricula to build on the work started by The Refocusing Dance Education working groups in the summer of 2024.
- Pilot body-positive and liberatory teaching methods in existing dance programs and collect feedback for refinement.

#### COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS:

- Establish regional networks to foster localized collaboration between dance companies, advocacy groups, and educational institutions.
- Host workshops that bring together professionals from within the inclusive dance community.
- Strengthen trust among collaborators through regular networking events and facilitate discussions to align goals.

#### FINANCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE:

- Seek funding to support mentorship programs, accessibility improvements, and inclusive curricula development across different educational environments.
- Engage community organizations in fundraising efforts to support scholarships for dancers who are Deaf or disabled.
- Create self-sustaining financial models for inclusive dance programs by developing sponsorship and membership opportunities.

#### LONG-TERM GOALS

##### LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:

- Establish leadership pipelines that support dancers who are Deaf or disabled in becoming educators, choreographers, and directors.
- Develop and promote disability/Deaf-led initiatives to ensure leadership roles are filled by individuals with lived experiences of disability/Deafness.
- Work with existing programs, such as the Integrated Dance Collaboratory leadership development model (at Rutgers University), the Choreo Lab, and programs with AXIS Dance, UCLA, and others.
- Create a global mentorship network to connect leaders and emerging talents across countries and disciplines.

##### SUSTAINABILITY AND EVALUATION:

- Implement ongoing evaluation frameworks to assess the impact of inclusive practices and programs, ensuring they evolve to meet participant needs.
- Facilitate annual gatherings to reflect on progress, share insights, and plan future steps for inclusive dance education.
- Advocate for systemic policy changes at institutional and governmental levels to support long-term funding and infrastructure for inclusive dance.

##### EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES:

- Develop residencies and fellowships that foster innovation and collaboration in inclusive dance.

- Create virtual and in-person learning hubs to reach dancers in underserved areas and provide access to quality education and professional development.
- Promote inclusive dance as a standard within the performing arts industry by collaborating with cultural organizations and influencers.

## SEVEN-SENTENCE STORIES

Photo: A blurred image that conveys movement, with a group of individuals in a spacious room with a wooden floor. In the foreground, a person in a wheelchair is seen from behind, with another individual standing nearby. Both appear to be in motion, with raised arms.

The “seven sentence stories” exercise invited participants to reflect on their experiences within the field of inclusive dance and articulate visions for change. The structure involved crafting short narratives following a seven-sentence format that mapped progression from a beginning state, through a moment of change, to a transformed ending. Participants shared these stories in individual and group settings, using them as tools for envisioning inclusive futures, identifying barriers, and imagining resolutions.

## STRUCTURE FOR THE SEVEN SENTENCES

1. “At the beginning...”
2. “And every day...”
3. “Until one day...”
4. “And because of that...”
5. “And because of that...”
6. “Until finally...”
7. “And from that day...”

Participants crafted stories focusing on leadership, inclusive pedagogy, and shared collaboration. Many stories (sometimes longer than 7 sentences) explored moments when a dancer or an inclusive initiative broke down silos, or reached a turning point due to mentorship, systemic support, or creative collaboration.

Participants also shared stories involving key figures or abstract concepts such as organizations, individual journeys, or collaborative networks. These stories included themes of overcoming ableist structures, and envisioning how inclusive dance programs could evolve when given the right support.

Claudia then performed a spoken word piece combining elements from multiple participants’ stories, weaving them into a larger narrative about transformation in dance education.

## STORY #1

At the beginning... there were many disabled artists who longed to dance, move, find accessible movement art forms.

And every day... non-disabled teachers didn't let them dance in their classes, even when they could offer their own accommodations - they were afraid of us.

Until one day... Cando Co created a fabulous dance video with BBC funding, and everybody (in the UK) saw it, and so many (like me) were so excited!

And because of that..., so many of us who can't do regular rehearsals, or can't perform in conventional ways are finding other ways of creating together, being embodied together, enjoying movement as an art form.

And because of that..., there are so many more disabled dance artists who long to know others, and to develop themselves in all areas of dance (stage, community, education, media, etc.).

Until finally... they decided to create a centralized resource where people could be linked (like AXIS did), and show videos, and maybe even create a kind of charter/ best practices document (at different funding levels), (and that might even include that they asked non-disabled leaders in the field to sign up to this charter, and to not work in/ boycott inaccessible venues).

And from that day.. young ones coming up in the field had a central resource to see who is out there, what is out there, in all domains of dance.

## STORY #2

At the beginning... there was a dance program at a large public institution that prided itself on being as inclusive as possible, but alas, very few disabled dancers/ students/ faculty/staff participated in the program in a regular and ongoing way.

With a few disabled student artists/practitioners/scholars speaking up (and being heard by the leadership in the department), things began to change. Not only did the department leadership listen more, but they invited more disabled artists and scholars to engage with and be part of the department community, programming, and classes in a truly meaningful way.

And every day... the studios were opened, and the teachers in the classes tried to learn more about inclusive practices and teaching.

Until one day... the department committed to hiring dance and theater practitioners and teachers, who specialized in inclusive teaching practices and methodologies, to come and lead specific training programs - that the whole department was excited about!

And because of that..., the department met incredible artists and scholars practicing in the field who wanted to come design, make, create, direct, and lead programs for the department.

And because of that..., more faculty with disabilities were hired by the department, and supported by the university's power structures.

Until finally... the department, and the campus, developed a strong and supportive mentoring culture to nurture an amazing team of new disabled leaders who became chairs, deans, and chancellors throughout a broad swath of public universities- leading for change within the systems of higher education. New embodied innovations that considered a much broader definition of “a body” were created and the “white supremacy able body” was not the only focus of dance and theater departments at major learning institutions.

And from that day..., disability-focused, and disabled scholars, artists, makers, designers, and directors were part of the fabric of the department and the university.

### STORY #3

At the beginning... maybe not the very very beginning, there was a large beautiful dance studio, with smooth sprung floors and golden barres and lovely shiny mirrors and big windows and high ceilings and new technology and a wonderful piano in the corner; and young passionate dancers could apply to come to study ways of moving and how to make dances.

And every day... while those young passionate dancers were going to classes there were other dances happening elsewhere - small dances, big dances, secret dances, joyful dances, shaking dances, sorrowful dances, dances with questions and many more – and these dances began to rattle the studio leaving a few cracks and chips in the walls.

Until one day... curiosity grew and decided they might want a different space so they let the crumbling wall tumble and they figured out how to build a ramp and an elevator and the place was transformed!

And because of that... more dancers came in and new dances were made, and it was incredible and very exciting.

And because of that... people became better listeners and the dancing got more expansive and detailed and they realized a different space was needed, so we took the ceiling off and looked up to see what we could imagine and dream.

Until finally... we pieced together an entirely different structure out of big trees and new technological inventions, and glorious messiness, out of singing voices, deep breaths, and beautiful dancing bodies and abundant resources.

And from that day... more and more people were dancing and we realized our imaginations could grow exponentially and they did.

### ADDITIONAL PARTICIPANT QUOTES

Quote: What I can't do is ask an artist with disabilities to come in and do what I do, without a salary. I can't ask someone to come in and mentor – learn to do what I do – and train them to take over the company when I can't pay them to do so.

Quote: If you include performances in your work, design the performances to transform the audience's idea of what dance can and should look like, and who gets to dance and focus on what your students can do, rather than thinking of limitations... amplify what they can do, and then build skills from there, fan the flames of everything available.

Quote: Remember and understand and believe...advocacy is not a sentimental statement... it is actually deeper access into the humanity of every single one of us. That access to that is why the arts matter in the first place.

## APPENDIX

Photo: An individual, seated on a wooden floor, cross-legged, and wearing a face mask, is engaged in writing in a notebook. A take-away coffee cup is on the floor in front of them. On the left, a person seated in a wheelchair is partially visible.

In this appendix, you will find summaries documenting the work of the four working groups that gathered throughout the project's life.

### WORKING GROUP#1

#### INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGY FOR INCLUSIVE DANCE EDUCATION

##### SUMMARY OF THE CONVERSATIONS

- Initial Conversations: The discussion focused on the structural barriers faced by dancers who are Deaf or disabled and the need for pedagogical practices rooted in accessibility, justice, and radically inclusive spaces.
- Spring Insights: Highlighted the necessity of consistent, tailored education, increased representation of educators who are Deaf or disabled, comprehensive dance training, and a paradigm shift toward entirely new approaches in dance education.
- Summer Discussions: Focused on practical implementation of inclusive pedagogy, addressing systemic barriers, body positivity, intersectionality, disability-centered training, and integrating liberatory practices into teaching methods.
- Fall Outcomes: Solidified actionable goals, including creating inclusive curricula and degree programs, balancing inclusivity and leadership by individuals who are Deaf or disabled, and implementing systemic changes for accessibility and representation.

### VISIONING THE FUTURE: EVOLUTION OF A CENTRAL THEME

#### INITIAL CONVERSATIONS

The initial conversations introduced the concept of innovative pedagogy as a response to the limited opportunities available to dancers who are Deaf or disabled, particularly within traditional dance education. These conversations highlighted significant structural barriers that prevent equitable access to high-quality instruction and professional pathways. The conversations underscored the need for teaching practices rooted in the lived experiences of dancers who are Deaf or disabled. Such practices emphasize accessibility and radically inclusive spaces that accommodate diverse bodies and abilities.

This foundational discussion also explored the tension between traditional dance methodologies and the inclusive practices emerging from integrated dance. It recognized the importance of dismantling ableist structures and rethinking what dance education could be in a fully inclusive context. The conversations framed the need for innovative pedagogy as both a technical shift and a justice-driven reimagining of dance as a practice and community.

## SPRING INSIGHTS

The Spring Insights expanded on the theme by focusing on the need for inclusive teaching methods that prioritize the diverse needs of dancers who are Deaf or disabled. The participants emphasized consistency in education as a cornerstone of innovative pedagogy, noting that occasional workshops are insufficient for sustainable growth. Instead, the group proposed regular, low-cost, or free classes tailored to dancers who are Deaf or disabled, which were identified as essential to fostering long-term development.

Representation emerged as a vital component of this conversation, with a strong call to support and promote individuals who are Deaf or disabled aspiring to become educators. Participants recognized that dancers and teachers who are Deaf or disabled bring unique insights into movement and pedagogy that enrich the field. The conversation also explored the necessity of comprehensive dance training tailored to dancers who are both disabled and non-disabled, highlighting the importance of flexible, knowledgeable, and self-reflective instructors.

Lastly, the group emphasized a paradigm shift in dance education. They called for moving beyond adapting traditional models to envisioning entirely new approaches that better serve all students. This shift included challenging entrenched biases and expanding career pathways for dancers beyond performance to include teaching, advocacy, and leadership roles.

## SUMMER DISCUSSIONS

The Summer Discussions built on previous conversations, emphasizing the practical implementation of innovative pedagogy in inclusive dance spaces. The cohort stressed the importance of creating environments that are both physically and culturally accessible, where dancers who are Deaf or disabled feel represented and valued. Conversations addressed systemic barriers, instructor biases, and the need for adaptive training opportunities tailored to diverse needs.

The group focused on body positivity and intersectionality as critical elements of inclusive pedagogy. Participants discussed the importance of recognizing and celebrating diverse bodies and identities while challenging societal standards of beauty and functionality. The conversation also introduced the concept of liberatory practices, which empower dancers with disabilities by dismantling traditional power dynamics in educational settings.

The group also discussed the need for innovation in teaching methods as essential for fostering creativity and inclusivity. Sharing curricula examples, participants called for updated university curricula that integrate disability/Deaf studies and mentorship programs that support educators and artists with disabilities and artists in their professional journeys. The conversation concluded with recognizing the need to fund and sustain these innovative practices to ensure long-term impact.

## FALL GATHERING

The Fall Gathering synthesized prior conversations, focusing on actionable steps to integrate innovative pedagogy into dance education. It emphasized the creation of inclusive curricula and degree programs designed to reflect the needs and experiences of dancers who are Deaf or disabled. Attendees explored strategies for ensuring accessibility across physical and digital platforms.

Conversations also explored the balance between inclusivity and leadership, stressing the importance of centering individuals who are Deaf or disabled in educational and professional spaces without tokenizing their contributions. Participants also discussed systemic change, identifying practical steps for creating genuinely inclusive environments that value the leadership and expertise of educators who are Deaf or disabled.

The Gathering concluded with a call for sustained efforts to develop innovative teaching practices and curricula that are authentic to the lived experiences of dancers who are Deaf or disabled. These efforts were seen as vital for advancing inclusive dance education and ensuring its growth and sustainability.

## WORKING GROUP#2

### PROVIDING INSPIRATION AND SUPPORTING LEADERSHIP

#### SUMMARY OF THE CONVERSATIONS

- Initial Conversations: Highlighted the historical exclusion of dancers who are Deaf or disabled from leadership roles, emphasizing the need for representation and empowerment through accessible training and mentorship.
- Spring Insights: Focused on building leadership pipelines, recognizing incremental progress, and addressing systemic barriers such as ableism and financial constraints that hinder dancers who are Deaf or disabled from attaining leadership roles.
- Summer Discussions: Explored practical solutions to create inclusive leadership opportunities, including mentorship programs, structural accommodations, and proactive planning to ensure equitable representation of leaders who are Deaf or disabled.
- Fall Outcomes: Solidified the importance of disability/Deaf-led initiatives, emphasizing mentorship networks, inclusive curricula, and digital tools to create accessible pathways for dancers who are Deaf or disabled to assume leadership positions.

## SUPPORTING LEADERSHIP: EVOLUTION OF A CENTRAL THEME

### INITIAL CONVERSATIONS

The initial conversations highlighted a pervasive lack of representation of dancers who are

Deaf or disabled in leadership roles within the dance community. Historically, dancers who are Deaf or disabled have faced systemic barriers that prevent them from ascending

to positions of power, including roles as choreographers, educators, and company directors. This marginalization has limited their individual opportunities and stifled

innovation within the broader field of dance. Participants emphasized the need for mentorship and training opportunities tailored to dancers who are Deaf or disabled, recognizing that accessible pathways to leadership require intentional design and sustained support.

These discussions also explored the cultural implications of leadership in dance. Participants noted that empowering dancers who are Deaf or disabled in leadership challenges entrenched notions of professionalism and creativity. By centering voices from the disability/Deaf community, the field of dance can embrace a richer, more inclusive understanding of movement and artistic expression. These initial insights laid the groundwork for a deeper exploration of how to create equitable and accessible leadership opportunities.

### SPRING INSIGHTS

The spring conversations built upon the foundation established in the initial discussions, where concrete steps were discussed for supporting dancers who are Deaf or disabled in leadership roles. Participants recognized incremental progress in representation, citing examples of university professors and choreographers who are Deaf or disabled who have begun to reshape the field. However, these advances were seen as insufficient to address the persistent structural barriers, including ableism, financial constraints, and a lack of accessible training programs.

Mentorship emerged as a key strategy for cultivating leadership, with participants advocating for programs that connect emerging leaders who are Deaf or disabled with experienced mentors. Discussions also underscored the role of allies—both non-disabled and cross-disability—in advocating for and supporting dancers who are Deaf or disabled. The discussion emphasized that by fostering a culture of collaboration and solidarity, the field can begin to dismantle systemic obstacles and create pathways to equitable and inclusive leadership.

### SUMMER DISCUSSIONS

Conversations over the summer shifted the focus to practical solutions for creating inclusive leadership opportunities. Participants emphasized the importance of mentorship programs that are flexible to the needs of dancers who are Deaf or disabled, offering guidance in areas such as choreography, teaching, and organizational management. Structural accommodations were also highlighted as essential, with calls for universities and dance companies to invest in accessibility measures such as ramps, ASL interpreters, and flexible rehearsal spaces.

Another significant theme was the role of proactive planning in ensuring accessibility for guest artists and educators who are Deaf or disabled. Participants stressed anticipating and addressing barriers in advance rather than responding reactively. Discussions also explored the broader concept of leadership pipelines, proposing initiatives such as choreographic commissions for artists who are Deaf or disabled and cross-disciplinary collaborations to support their growth. These strategies reflect a commitment to fostering an environment where leaders who are Deaf or disabled can thrive.

## FALL GATHERING

The Fall Gathering sharpened the theme of supporting leadership, emphasizing the importance of disability/Deaf-led initiatives and inclusive practices. Participants advocated for mentorship networks prioritizing representation and accessibility, recognizing that such networks are essential for nurturing the next generation of leaders who are Deaf or disabled. Discussions also highlighted the need for inclusive curricula that reflect the experiences and perspectives of dancers who are Deaf or disabled, incorporating elements such as disability/Deaf performance history and accessible choreographic practices.

Finally, the group identified digital tools as a critical resource for expanding access to leadership opportunities, particularly for dancers in geographically isolated areas. However, participants cautioned against relying solely on digital solutions, stressing the importance of maintaining in-person connections and support systems. The Gathering concluded with a collective commitment to building sustainable, equitable pathways to leadership that center the voices and experiences of dancers who are Deaf or disabled, ensuring their contributions are recognized and celebrated.

## WORKING GROUP#3

### STRENGTHENING COLLABORATION AND SHARED KNOWLEDGE SUMMARY OF THE CONVERSATIONS

- Initial Conversations: Explored the importance of creating supportive, inclusive networks to facilitate collaboration, resource-sharing, and mutual growth within the disability/Deaf-inclusive dance community.
- Spring Insights: What strategies can be implemented to provide comprehensive dance training that effectively integrates both disabled/Deaf and non-disabled dancers? Where have you seen good examples of educators tailoring their teaching methods to meet the needs of students with disabilities?
- Summer Discussions: What needs to happen for dance educators to more consciously deconstruct their biases and create a more inclusive learning environment?
- Fall Outcomes: What are ways in which the unique insights that dancers who are Deaf or disabled bring to the dance community can be more broadly communicated?

### STRENGTHENING COLLABORATION: EVOLUTION OF THE CENTRAL THEME INITIAL CONVERSATIONS

The initial conversations established the importance of strengthening collaboration in the disability/Deaf-inclusive dance community. Participants identified the need to create supportive networks where dancers who are Deaf or disabled, educators, and organizations could connect and share resources to overcome systemic barriers. Central to this vision was the recognition that collaboration requires a shift away from isolated efforts and toward collective action. The discussions emphasized that meaningful partnerships could address challenges such as limited access to rehearsal

spaces, inadequate funding, and the lack of representation for dancers who are Deaf or disabled in leadership roles.

Interviewees also noted the potential for collaboration to foster innovation within the field. By connecting educators, dancers, and advocates, the community could explore new ways to reimagine inclusive dance education, from redefining professionalism to developing accessible pedagogies. This phase of the conversation set the stage for a broader dialogue about how to create equitable and sustainable partnerships that support long-term growth and representation in the field.

## SPRING INSIGHTS

The Spring conversations built on the initial groundwork, offering concrete strategies for forging and maintaining partnerships. Participants highlighted the importance of building collaborative networks that unite diverse stakeholders, including dance companies, disability/Deaf advocacy groups, and educational institutions. Specific examples demonstrated how partnerships could overcome barriers. Participants discussed the value of partnerships in bridging gaps and creating new opportunities for dancers who are Deaf or disabled.

Discussions also addressed logistical challenges hindering collaboration, such as securing funding, accessing inclusive spaces, and navigating complex organizational structures. Participants advocated for creating systems that encourage trust and understanding among collaborators, recognizing that genuine partnerships require more than surface-level commitments. Proposals included hosting workshops and creating spaces for organizations to share resources and knowledge. This phase emphasized the critical need for trust-building and resource-sharing to establish a cohesive and inclusive network.

## SUMMER DISCUSSIONS

Conversations over the summer deepened the exploration of collaboration by focusing on the ethics of partnership and the role of inclusive practices in building stronger networks. Participants reflected on the importance of clear communication and inclusive language, noting that shared terminology could help bridge gaps between diverse stakeholders. For example, terms like “physically integrated dance” and “inclusive dance” were discussed as essential tools for fostering mutual understanding and advocacy within the field. The group acknowledged that language evolves and called for adaptability in how specific terms are used, and how these terms reflect the community’s diverse experiences.

Mentorship and experience-sharing emerged as vital components of strengthening collaboration. Participants emphasized the need for peer learning, skill exchange, and storytelling to foster empathy and mutual growth. One discussed idea highlighted the success of mentorship programs that connected newer members with experienced leaders, offering guidance and support to navigate the complexities of disability/Deaf-inclusive dance. The discussions underscored that collaboration is not just about

achieving shared goals but also about cultivating relationships that empower all community members to contribute meaningfully.

## FALL GATHERING

The Gathering in the Fall moved from discussion to action, focusing on tangible strategies to strengthen collaboration across the disability/ Deaf-inclusive dance field. Participants proposed creating a resource directory to connect individuals and organizations working in inclusive dance education. This directory would include categories such as educational programs, professional development opportunities, ongoing classes, artists, and teachers, ensuring accessibility and ease of use for diverse users. The group recommended a phased rollout of the directory, beginning with higher education programs or professional development listings to build momentum and refine processes.

Mentorship and leadership development were also central to the Gathering's discussions.

Participants emphasized the importance of representation in leadership roles, advocating for initiatives that elevate the expertise and experience of dancers and educators who are Deaf or disabled. The group proposed a regional model for the directory, which would allow for localized collaboration while maintaining a national scope. Sustainability was a recurring theme, with participants exploring funding sources and strategies to ensure the directory's long-term viability.

## WORKING GROUP#4

### VISIONING THE FUTURE OF ACCESSIBLE DANCE EDUCATION

#### SUMMARY OF THE CONVERSATIONS

- Initial Conversations: Focused on identifying gaps in access, representation, and inclusive practices in dance education, laying the groundwork for conversations on broader systemic change.
- Spring Insights: Prioritized structural reforms and foundational elements such as mentorship, financial support, and measurable pathways.
- Summer Discussions: Expanded conversations on practical implementation strategies, alternative learning pathways, and systemic partnerships to sustain inclusivity.
- Fall Outcomes: Solidified actionable goals, including new curricula and leadership roles, highlighting the importance of immediate steps toward long-term systemic changes.

## VISIONING THE FUTURE: EVOLUTION OF A CENTRAL THEME

### INITIAL CONVERSATIONS

The initial conversations set the stage for reimagining the field as more inclusive and equitable. These discussions highlighted a historical shift within the field, from marginalization to a broader embrace of intersectionality, representation, and expanded access. It underscored the necessity of redefining accessibility, not merely in physical terms but as a commitment to justice and equity.

The discussions identified an emerging momentum for systemic change through conversations happening with practitioners. It called for structural and pedagogical innovation, urging the field to move beyond traditional hierarchies that reinforce ableism. Central to this vision was the importance of uplifting voices from diverse backgrounds, particularly dancers and educators who are Deaf or disabled, and creating leadership opportunities that empower those historically excluded. The conversations recognized dance's inherent potential foster inclusive, community-driven practices that challenge conventional norms and offer new pathways for expression and connection. "Visioning the Future" emerged as a defining theme—an imperative to reimagine the field with equity, representation, and accessibility as guiding principles.

### SPRING INSIGHTS

Conversations in the spring built upon the themes of developing professional pathways for dancers who are Deaf or disabled. Participants examined the multifaceted obstacles that prevent full access to dance education, including financial constraints, administrative resistance, and structural and societal biases. These discussions emphasized the need for a holistic and inclusive pedagogy that adapts to the diverse needs of dancers who are Deaf or disabled.

Key to this vision was the development of mentorship programs and peer-learning networks, which provide critical support for emerging dancers. Participants also identified the importance of creating measurable career pathways supported by financial resources and accountability frameworks. The conversation emphasized that inclusivity does not require lowering standards but rather redefining them to embrace a diversity of movement, ability, and identity. These conversations advanced the theme of "Visioning the Future" by laying out the foundational work needed to build a sustainable and equitable ecosystem for professional growth.

### SUMMER DISCUSSIONS

Discussions over the summer deepened the exploration of "Visioning the Future" by identifying practical strategies and systemic reforms. Discussions centered on the limitations of traditional dance education and the importance of alternative pathways, such as community-based programs, virtual learning platforms, and mentorship networks. Participants called for systemic change, including embedding disability/ Deaf studies into curricula, forming partnerships with disability/Deaf dance organizations, and creating inclusive pedagogical practices.

The conversation also addressed professional development, emphasizing tailored training programs, increased visibility for dancers who are Deaf or disabled, and sustained funding to support their growth. By redefining norms around dance and community-building, the discussions highlighted the necessity of embracing diverse experiences and fostering inclusive spaces. Overall, these discussions advanced the theme by identifying actionable strategies to create a more inclusive and representative field.

## FALL GATHERING

The Fall Gathering synthesized insights from prior conversations and focused on actionable goals for “Visioning the Future.” Participants discussed the importance of creating accessible and inclusive environments in both educational and professional dance spaces. The Gathering emphasized addressing not only physical barriers but also cultural and systemic obstacles that limit full participation.

During the Gathering, significant focus was placed on developing new curricula and degree programs tailored to inclusive dance education—an urgent need identified by participants. Discussions highlighted the critical role of dancers who are Deaf or disabled in leadership positions, advocating for a future where those with lived experiences shape the direction of the field. The Gathering also explored strategies to make dance spaces more accessible. The session marked a pivotal moment in transforming aspirations into tangible steps toward a reimagined future.