

2024-2028

STRATEGIC PLAN

Introduction

We at Dancers' Studio West (DSW) are delighted to launch our new strategic plan for 2024-2028. A result of community and expert consultation, we have adopted this plan to guide us through what is bound to be four transformational years ahead.

In this document, we articulate our current role in the dance ecosystem in Alberta and our aspirations for the future.

As we more fully realize our recent shift to be a support organization, this strategic plan ensures we can continue providing meaningful programming reflective of the needs of independent dance artists in Alberta.

At your convenience we invite you to connect with our Artistic Director, Rufi Oswald to explore DSW's strategic plan in more detail. Rufi may be reached at artisticdirector@dswlive.ca or by phone at (587) 372-3182.

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Acknowledgements

This plan is the result of the consultation, ideation, effort and expertise of many people.

Heartfelt thanks is due to the volunteer Board Members who led and informed the development of this plan: Alisa MacKinnon (Board Chair), Deanna Witwer (Vice Chair), Kevin Leiver (Treasurer), Kourtney Pratt (Secretary), Helen Cox, Jocelyn Hoover, and Heather Ware.

Thank you to DSW Staff for the administrative legwork required to complete this process and the eagerness to operationalize the plan laid out here: Ruffi Oswaldo (Artistic Director), Siobhan Cooney (Programme Coordinator) and Wendy Wastle (Business Manager).

We also express thanks to Mary Blais (Arts Consultant) who led us through the development of our strategic plan masterfully.

Many members of the dance community across Alberta contributed to this plan through stakeholder interviews and a community survey. These community contributions lent

integrity to this process and continue to provide relevance to this plan. We thank them for their tremendous contribution.

A special note of thanks to the Rozsa Foundation for facilitating our strategic plan through the Aspiration Grant program.

We also acknowledge the Canada Council for the Arts, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Calgary Foundation and Calgary Arts Development, for their ongoing partnership in support of Dancers' Studio West. In addition, our work would not be possible without the support and belief of our donors.



Alberta Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that what we call Alberta is the traditional and ancestral territory of many peoples, presently subject to Treaties 6, 7, and 8, namely: the Blackfoot Confederacy – Kainai, Piikani, and Siksika – the Cree, Dene, Saulteaux, Nakota Sioux, Stoney Îyâxe Nakoda, and the Tsuu T'ina Nation and the Métis People of Alberta. This includes the Métis Settlements and the Six Regions of the Métis Nation of Alberta within the historical Northwest Metis Homeland. We acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit who have lived in and cared for these lands for generations. We are grateful for the traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders who are still with us today and those who have gone before us. We make this acknowledgement as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we reside on.



Background

The last five years have been ones of incredible change. In 2018, DSW's vision shifted and we became a support organization, completely rebranding ourselves in the process. Since then, DSW has navigated a global pandemic, steered the community through a shifting artistic and social landscape, hired a new Artistic Director, and we've experienced important changes to the Board of Directors.

In response, we engaged in a governance review and strategic planning process to navigate our shifting landscape, leverage the opportunities of change, and ensure the long-term sustainability of the organization. This document describes the latter portion of this organizational review process, the strategic plan.

Approach

The strategic planning process began with community consultation, which took place between January and April of 2023, and was led by external consultant Mary Blais. Community consultation took the form of a series of one-on-one depth interviews and an online survey.

A cross-section of stakeholders engaged with DSW were interviewed by the consultant. Funders, Artistic Directors and others with deep knowledge of the dance community in Calgary and beyond were invited to participate in these conversations.

There were four main areas of focus for these conversations, namely impact, relationships, growth and development, and vision. Some sample questions are listed below:

- **Impact.** What are some of the ways in which the DSW's programs, services and supports have made a positive difference for independent dance artists? The dance community? What are some of the areas DSW should focus on going forward to have the greatest positive impact for our community?
- **Relationships.** What would your ideal relationship with DSW look like?
- **Growth and Development.** What are some of the greatest opportunities to support the future growth and development of dance artists in Alberta?
- **Vision.** What would contemporary dance in Alberta look like for independent artists if DSW achieved maximum impact?

A brief synopsis of the interview findings is available in Appendix C.

Concurrent with the interviews, an online survey (see Appendix A) was sent to individuals and organizations connected with DSW in the hope of hearing from as many individuals as possible on subjects of importance to the strategic planning conversation. Survey questions explored emergent needs, satisfaction with programs and services, and the vision for the future of DSW. For a synopsis of the online survey findings, please see Appendix B.

Engaging these communities in the strategic planning process impacted and informed an externally facilitated strategic planning retreat held in June 2023. The Board and Staff retreat framed the strategic landscape around a set of essential questions particularly focused on core purpose and ambition. The question set provided the planning frame and will also support both driving and evaluating the strategy as it unfolds in a dynamic and complex context.

A summary of the ambitions, aims and actions discussed in the retreat was sent to the Board for comment in August 2023 to ensure consensus. It will be submitted for approval in November 2023. Implementation of the strategic plan is the responsibility of the staff. Specific steps to support achievement of the aims of the strategic plan are detailed in the organization's operational plan.

Plan Structure

After considering the community input and significant discussion between Board and Staff, the result is 1) a list of organizational statements clarifying the direction of the organization (page 5), and 2) a three-tiered strategy, framed as a set of ambitions, aims and actions, as defined below.

- **Ambitions.** A set of three statements that we look to in terms of a long-term future for DSW. While complementary to one another, each individual statement stands on its own to give strong direction as to what the future could look like.

- **Aims.** One or more statements related to a specific ambition and designed to be achievable by the end of the plan. These statements are what will be monitored for meaningful change over the life of the plan.
- **Actions.** A set of specific actions in service of a particular aim. These are interventions, initiatives, programs and activities that will come to life in the operational plan of Dancers' Studio West and will drive the progress of the plan in the near and medium terms.

We acknowledge that while the three ambitions are the focal areas that call us to begin the work of change, these ambitions demand that we focus well into the future, as we move through the lifespan of the plan. There is no doubt that these ambitions will continue to guide DSW along a path for some time after the official end of this plan.

Organizational Statements

Core Purpose. DSW exists to support independent dance artists in Alberta.

Mission. To fulfill our purpose, DSW offers programming that cultivates independent artists' work from ideation to production so that artists can flourish in their chosen artistic movement practice.

Artistic Values. DSW serves artists of any movement discipline whose work resonates with one or more of our artistic values of innovation, artistic rigour, and social impact.

- **Innovation.** We value work that challenges artistic boundaries and is born from taking bold creative risks.
- **Artistic Rigour.** We value work that evidently displays deep embodied and conceptual consideration.
- **Social Impact.** We value work that is socially conscious and is offered from a diversity of perspectives.

Organizational Values. At an organizational level, the values that guide our decision-making are impact, community, and curiosity.

- **Impact.** We develop and deliver programs that are meaningful to our members.

- **Community.** We nurture a safe, inclusive space in which independent dance artists can connect with each other and share a sense of belonging.
- **Curiosity.** We are attentive to the environment around us and remain open to finding creative means of adapting to evolving circumstances in Alberta.

Notes

Founded in 1980, DSW has had a rich, evolving history, and sometimes the language used to describe DSW has lagged behind. The updating statements that we propose in this document are meant to clarify, not drastically change, the stance and direction of the organization. Even so, we wish to further clarify certain points that may raise questions.

Support. In 2018, we became a “support organization” as opposed to a “production company.” Today, we serve independent dance artists by providing programming that supports their creative process from ideation to production. So, while we provide production support and may co-produce dance shows, we no longer present already completed work or work by companies outside of Alberta.

Alberta-wide Scope. Currently, our presence is strongest in Calgary, AB, where we are based, with relationships in Edmonton and Lethbridge. We retain language pointing to a provincial scope to convey our aspirations for serving all of Alberta.

Contemporary Dance. Given the challenges in defining “contemporary dance,” the current need for diversity and inclusion, and artists’ desire for interdisciplinary collaboration, DSW has opted to redefine its aesthetic scope on the basis of artistic values as opposed to disciplinarity.

Independent. An independent artist is an individual or small collective of artists who are not currently receiving operation funding (regular, ongoing, or long-term grants or sponsorships) and whose projects have a budget of less than \$75,000. In short, we serve emerging to established dance artists who are undertaking projects without major institutional support.

Ambitions, Aims, and Actions

Ambition 1

Dancers Studio West is a well-funded organization with increased capacity to serve more independent dance artists with year-round services and opportunities.

Aims

- DSW has diverse revenue streams;
- DSW has the organizational capacity to deliver programs and services that achieve positive impact; and,
- DSW is recognized as a valuable part of the dance ecosystem of Alberta.



Action	Indicator	Approach	Frequency
Attract, retain, increase investment in DSW	Percentage increase in overall funding from philanthropic sources and sponsorships Number of entry-level donors Median gift size Number of funding applications made and success rate	Internal review of fund development efforts Diversify sources of funding	2024 baseline, annually thereafter
Grow donations for annual fund gifts	# entry-level donors Median gift size	Extract data from CRM	Establish baseline, annually thereafter
Seek opportunities to collaborate with value/goal aligned peers to build capacity in the sector	Number of collaborations/partnerships	Outreach to explore possible shared goals/crossover Identify funding opportunities linked to collaboration/partnerships Communicate with other dance-focused organizations via varied communication channels	2024 – identify two to three potential partners and collaborators Annual review of partnerships/collaborations thereafter
Establish DSW human resource priorities resulting from strategic and operational planning	Funding secured for the equivalent of 2 full-time staff	Advocate for sustainable future funding Diversify revenue sources	
Develop and implement an integrated communications plan to consistently tell the story of DSW's core purpose, ambitions, aims and impact	Engagement metrics Others sharing/spreading the story of DSW	Create a multi-platform communications plan; including testimonials.	2024 – develop plan

Ambition 2

DSW is a hub where independent dance artists of diverse forms, practices and lived experiences can build upon their knowledge and flourish in their chosen practices.

Aims

- DSW is diverse, equitable, and inclusive;
- DSW is part of a vibrant network of communities, promoting an increased sense of belonging and well-being; and,
- DSW invests in audience development, enabling independent dance artists to secure their future.

Action	Indicator	Approach	Frequency
Review and scrutinize all DSW policies, practices, procedures and offerings and revise them according to (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Access) EDIA principles	<p>Review and associated revisions complete</p> <p>Increased consultation with staff, board, volunteers and members of the dance community from marginalized and under-represented groups regarding DSW policies, practices and procedures related to EDIA.</p> <p>Increased staff, board, volunteer complement of traditionally marginalized and under-represented groups</p> <p># of independent dance artists from marginalized communities resourced through DSW programs/services</p>	<p>Engage marginalized communities to inform policies and programs</p> <p>Provide support that focuses on the inclusion and retention of a diverse staff, board and base of volunteers</p>	<p>Policy review (per program) every three years.</p> <p>Bi-annual tracking of registration/participation in DSW programs and services by self-identified marginalized artists</p>
Strengthen EDIA professional development for staff, board and volunteers to support a diverse community of independent dance artists	Percentage participation in professional development offerings	Identify professional development opportunities in the areas of unconscious-bias, EDIA training, and anti-oppression training	Baseline 2024; annually thereafter
Host a community of practice, events and conversations	<p>Number of offerings</p> <p>Number of participants</p> <p>Number of webinar downloads</p>	Analytics from website and social channels	Baseline 2024, evaluate need thereafter
<p>Seek to remove barriers, deepen relationships with audiences with whom DSW currently connects and those who we've not yet connected with. Cultivate a larger base of 'tryers'</p> <p>Broaden the range and depth of engagement</p>	<p>First-time and repeat audience attendee metrics</p> <p>Program applications</p> <p>Ticket sales (raw numbers/\$\$) for public performances</p>	<p>Gather data about new communities and potential audiences</p> <p>Add audience demographic and psychographic detail to the CRM* database</p> <p>Develop and implement a practical audience development plan for the suite of programs/services offered by DSW, rather than for each individual program/service.</p>	Baseline, annually thereafter

Ambition 3

DSW is an anchor-point for artists to find a web of valuable community connections

Aims

- DSW has a strong social network in the community of independent dance artists; and,
- DSW anticipates and responds to community needs.

Action	Indicator	Approach	Frequency
Map the health, strength and helpfulness of the collaboration and communication among network members	Growth in scope, depth and cohesion of network Socio-gram** created	Audit the network of independent dance artists to describe the size/structure of the network, roles and communication and interaction patterns among 'network' members Survey network	Begin in 2024; review every three years.
Develop and implement a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and outreach strategy with emphasis on cultivating and engaging new members	# inquiries about membership Dashboard statistics: # of individual and organizational members # new members % members retained % member churn	Identify, evaluate and select a suitable CRM	Use 2023 numbers as a baseline, evaluate annually
Identify the processes and resources that independent dance artists need to survive, adapt and thrive in a dynamic environment and engage members and the broader community to create and deliver programs/services in response to needs	Value audit of program/service offerings	Survey and depth interviews Consultation with programming committee Ongoing conversations with independent dance artists, collaborators, partners, members and knowledge keepers/thought leaders	Tri-annually
Mitigate any overlaps and close program/service gaps for the benefit of the community	Number of new programs/services introduced as funding allows Number of programs merged or discontinued due to overlap	Work with partners/collaborators to identify program/service needs Amalgamate or merge programs deemed to have significant overlap	Baseline 2025

*A Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) is software that merges relevant individual(s)/groups information into a single database.

** A socio-gram is a visual diagram reflecting the proximity to one another, the density and the cohesion of a human network.

Monitoring Impact

To ensure our programs/services are making the desired impact, we will monitor and measure our progress. Below we describe our principles of measurement so we can track and communicate our progress effectively.

Our Principles of Measurement:

Data Minimization. We seek to collect only the most relevant, powerful and important data.

Streamline and Simplify. We will make every effort to streamline and simplify the data we collect so it is reflective of the importance and scale of what is being measured and our ability to measure it.

Mixed Methods. Consideration will be given to as many measurement methods as possible, including community-driven methods.

Measurable Indicators. We will identify and employ data points that demonstrate progress toward achieving the intended impact.

Regular Monitoring. We will monitor progress regularly to identify any challenges and adjust our programs/services accordingly to improve the programs/services and achieve better quality results.

Communicate Impact. We will clearly communicate our impact to stakeholders, including funders, independent dance artists and donors.

Appendices

