2025 Research Report

Dance in the Desert: 2025 Research Report

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"You're a dance company that does research? *Why?*"

This is one of the most-asked questions the staff at *Safos* Dance Theatre receive when speaking about the company's multifaceted dance advocacy and research initiative, *Dance in the Desert: A Gathering of Dancemakers*.

Founded by *Safos* Artistic Executive Director Yvonne Montoya in 2017, Dance in the Desert initially began as a gathering of Latine dancemakers in Arizona, with the goal of uplifting Latine dance artists across genres and backgrounds, connecting dancers across geographies, and centering local expertise. In response to the ever-changing needs of the Arizona dance community, as well as the evolving needs of the dance company that stewards the program, Dance in the Desert shifted, evolved, and even went on hiatus for several years before re-emerging in 2025 as a multi-state, bi-national dance research initiative.

Research is an integral part of the Dance in the Desert initiative. The program is grounded in participatory action research (PAR) methodologies. Since 2018, Dance in the Desert organizers collected data including one-on-one interviews, pre and post gathering surveys, and program debriefs at each convening. Additionally in 2018, Dance in the Desert hosted a series of focus groups with Latine dance artists. Past research informed the content of each year's gathering. The goal was to get a clearer understanding of the specific strengths and challenges of Latine dance artists working in Arizona.

In general, there is a need for more robust research regarding dance artists and communities. While initiatives like Dance Data Project collects and publishes important information regarding the national dance community, the research focuses on the largest 150 U.S.-based ballet and classical companies and the largest 150 U.S.-based contemporary and modern dance companies. These datasets leave important gaps in our understanding of individual artists, smaller dance organizations, and dance communities outside major coastal centers.

Similarly, the National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures (NALAC) published *A Mirror and a Map* using the data from the 2024 National Latinx/é Arts and Culture Survey. The website shares data on Latine arts organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico. However, the data set does not have a specific dance section. Rather, dance exists under the larger umbrella category "performing arts" lumped together with music and theatre. The research component of the Dance in the Desert program seeks to fill these

gaps in dance research.

In 2025, Montoya assembled a team of 10 researchers, community liaisons, and dance administrators. The team conducted 58 interviews with dance artists ages 18 to 75 across New Mexico, Arizona, and the bi-national border towns of Douglas, Arizona, U.S.A. and Agua Prieta, Sonora, México.

The central question we set out to answer was: What does it take for dance artists and communities in the Southwest not simply to survive, but *to thrive*?

Interview collection took place between January and December 2025, with interviews conducted concurrently in Arizona and New Mexico. In New Mexico, interviews began in Albuquerque in January and continued through early December in Southern New Mexico. In Arizona, interviews took place in Douglas in June, followed by Tucson in July and Phoenix in August.

After researchers collected interviews in each state, Research Assistant Imelda Cortez coded the interviews. Because the Arizona interviews concluded first, Cortez coded and analyzed the Arizona interviews before beginning the New Mexico interviews. Preliminary analysis of the Arizona interviews began in Fall 2025. However, the majority of the analysis of data from both states took place in 2026 including, transcript reviews, thematic coding, memo writing, accuracy checks, theme development, and comparative analysis across the Arizona and New Mexico interviews. This timeline reflects the sequential structure of the project: Cortez first coded the Arizona interviews, used initial themes from that analysis to inform the New Mexico interviews, and then reviewed the full body of interviews comparatively across both states.

What follows is a portrait of dancemaking in the Southwest and Borderlands, drawn from the experiences, knowledge, challenges, and aspirations of the artists who sustain these communities.

Arizona



Photo: Baylie MacRae

Dance in the Desert 2025 Research Interviews

I. Executive Summary

In Arizona (AZ), the Dance in the Desert (DITD) team conducted qualitative interviews of past Dance in the Desert gathering attendees. Of the 21 dance artists of the original cohort, the Dance in the Desert team interviewed 17.

This study used a community-informed qualitative approach to learn more about the experiences, strengths, needs, and goals of dance artists and cultural workers in Arizona. The interviews included artists, educators, choreographers, administrators, organizers, and other people connected to dance communities in Arizona. The interviews ask artists what they are experiencing and what they need. The questions focus on the participants' artistic practices, their local dance communities, the challenges they are faced with, the resources they need, and their interest in collaboration and future programming. The intention of the research was to see if past gatherings left a lasting mark on the dance artists who participated and ascertain the need for future gatherings.

The Arizona interviews describe a welcoming, collaborative, and culturally expansive ecosystem that is simultaneously under-resourced. Artists repeatedly identified financial instability, lack of institutional care, limited paid opportunities, insufficient space, and uneven access to professional development as core barriers, alongside geographic gaps that leave border communities and rural areas under-served.

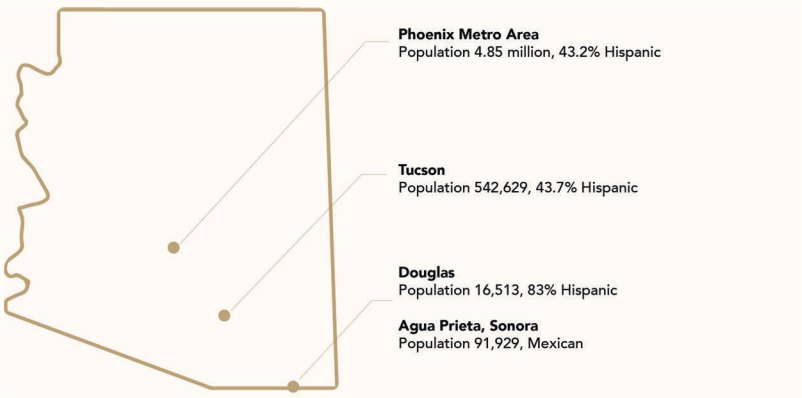
Artists recommend stronger systems of support, not just more events: sustainable funding, mentorship, accessible space, and more intentional cross-regional and interdisciplinary collaboration. Findings reveal deeply vibrant, culturally rooted ecosystems that are simultaneously constrained by chronic underfunding, space scarcity, fragmented infrastructure, and concludes that Dance in the Desert is a model for the regional, relationship-centered support that artists say they need. Limitations are a small sample size.

II. Introduction

This report asks a central question: what does it take for dance artists and communities in the Southwest not simply to survive, but to thrive?

It draws on 17 qualitative interviews conducted in 2025 with artists, educators, administrators, choreographers, organizers, and cultural workers in three communities in Arizona: the Phoenix-Metro Area (pop 4.85 million, 43.2% Hispanic), Tucson (pop 542,629, 43.7% Hispanic), and Douglas, AZ (pop 16,513, 83% Hispanic)/Agua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico (pop. 91,929, Mexican).

Of the original cohort of 21 dance artists, 2 interviews were conducted in Spanish and 15 interviews in English with some Spanglish. The Dance in the Desert Arizona cohort members range in age from 18-64 with dance backgrounds spanning Mexican Folklórico to Flamenco, Breaking to Danza Azteca, Modern to Latin Social Dance, and more. Many cohort members are trained in multiple dance genres, reflecting the breadth and diversity of Arizona's dance community.



III. Methodology

This study used a community-informed qualitative approach to learn more about the experiences, strengths, needs, and goals of dance artists and cultural workers in Arizona. The interviews included artists, educators, choreographers, administrators, organizers, and other people connected to dance in Arizona. The questions focused on participants' artistic practices, their local dance communities, the challenges they faced, the resources they needed, and their interest in collaboration and future programming.

The research was informed by the participatory action research approach used by Dance in the Desert. This approach centers the experiences and knowledge of community members and uses their feedback to help shape future programming. The interviews were intended not only to collect information, but also to understand what different communities were already doing, what they identified as priorities, and how *Safos* and Dance in the Desert might respond in meaningful ways.

In Arizona, the Dance in the Desert team interviewed a purposive sample of former participants to see if past gatherings left a lasting mark on the dance artists who participated. To interview past DITD participants across three communities in Arizona and the U.S./Mexico borderlands, *Safos* contracted two community liaisons. The first community liaison was Ammi Robles, an Agua Prieta-based multidisciplinary artist who worked as a translator at the 2022 DITD gathering. Robles focused on Southern Arizona and the Borderlands regions (Tucson and Douglas/Agua Prieta). The second community liaison was José José Arrieta Cuesta, a dancer based in Los Angeles and a *Safos* Dance Theatre company member with no prior experience with the DITD program. Arrieta Cuesta focused on the Phoenix-metro area. Both Robles and Arrieta Cuesta are self-identified Latine dance artists who are Spanish-English bilingual with a high level of proficiency. Both Arrieta Cuesta and Robles conducted outreach in both Spanish and English. In addition to their work as community liaisons, Robles and Arrieta Cuesta worked as translators on the project. Regarding outreach, each community liaison individually contacted each past participant to schedule an interview. Past participants were contacted via email, text message, phone call, or social media. AZ community liaisons only provided outreach, scheduling of interviews, and translation.

Due to the travel associated with data collection, the research was conducted over a series of three months with interviews taking place in Douglas, AZ in June 2025, Tucson, AZ in July 2025, and the Phoenix-metro area in August 2025. All Arizona interviews were conducted in person by Cortez and each interview lasted approximately one hour. Before each interview, Cortez went over the project consent form with participants prior to participants signing the form. The consent form detailed the

purpose of the study, participant selection criteria, interview procedures, the use and preservation of interview recordings, potential risks and benefits, and confidentiality measures, including the use of pseudonyms in all reports, presentations, and publications. The consent forms also outlined consent to an audio recording of the interview. Participants were told that their interviews would be used to inform research on the impact of gatherings of Dance in the Desert, as well as assess current needs in the dance community. Per the consent form, participants had the opportunity to stop the interview at any time or skip any question. Consent forms were available in Spanish and English. Participants were given a hard copy of their signed consent form for their records. Interviews were documented via a voice recorder and also post-interview field notes recorded by Cortez. Transcriptions of the audio recordings were obtained via the online platform GoTranscript. Spanish to English translations of the interview transcript were completed by the research team, namely community liaisons, all of whom were bilingual.

In Arizona, two interviews were conducted in Spanish with the remaining 15 in English, with some Spanish and Spanglish. Regarding language, all consent forms, interview questions, and outreach materials were available in both Spanish and English. All translations were reviewed by members of the DITD research team. Culturally specific terms and translations were reviewed by various members of the team for accuracy.

Of the 21 dance artists of the original cohort, the Dance in the Desert team interviewed 17. Initially, the DITD research team received responses from 19 of the original 21 participants, however due to ongoing scheduling conflicts, we were unable to interview two of the original participants. Regarding the other two participants who did not participate in the study, one was unreachable on all platforms, and the other was Principal Investigator Yvonne Montoya who was not interviewed due to her role in the project.

For the Arizona interviews, data was coded by Research Assistant Imelda Cortez. Cortez used thematic inductive coding to identify recurring topics, patterns, challenges, goals, and shared experiences across participants. Cortez also wrote memos throughout the process to record emerging ideas, observations, and questions.

Because this is a qualitative study, the findings are presented as recurring patterns and participant experiences rather than statistically representative conclusions. The analysis remains grounded in participants' own words and reflects the range of perspectives shared during the interviews. After coding the interviews, Cortez organized the findings by state and then compared themes across Arizona and New Mexico. This made it possible to identify shared concerns, such as limited funding, insufficient space, geographic isolation, and the need for mentorship and collaboration, while also recognizing differences between communities.

There is a selection bias inherent in the Arizona sample as all Arizona interviewees are past attendees of Dance in the Desert who had a relationship with the program. Therefore, their assessment of DITD may be more favorable than that of artists who were never selected, did not participate, or disengaged from the program.

All names and initials used in this report for AZ dance artists are pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

IV. Dance in the Desert: The Program's Impact on Past Participants in Arizona

The Arizona interviews explored how past participants understood the personal and professional impact of their experiences with Dance in the Desert. Participants described DITD as creating opportunities for artistic growth, professional development, relationship-building, and connection across communities. The findings below highlight the ways participants perceived DITD as influencing their artistic practices, professional networks, and sense of connection to the broader dance community.

a. Personal Impact

Artistic Validation and Professional Possibility

Several participants described DITD as validating or expanding their sense of themselves as artists, particularly by creating space for culturally rooted practices and professional aspiration.

"Dance in the Desert was very impactful for me… it literally changed the trajectory of my career."

"I felt that there was… the idea, I saw it come alive, meaning what Yvonne was trying to do… what does it look like for art to transcend and to live in a place where the political unrest separates it?"

"Dance in the Desert is like water in the desert… it keeps the hope alive—that you can keep growing professionally."

Bridging Geographic and Cultural Isolation

For artists in rural border communities like Douglas and Agua Prieta, DITD served as a vital link to a broader professional network.

"The community in Tucson is quite small and it is rebuilding since the pandemic… graduates from BFA/MFA programs are increasingly staying in Arizona rather than moving to coastal cities."

"There are so many rural regions, even within Arizona and in the northern areas of Sonora… that don't have access to this kind of thing. It's something new and really impactful."



Photo: Dominic AZ Bonuccelli

Sense of Belonging and Community

Participants frequently highlight the emotional resonance of gathering with like-minded artists who share similar cultural and professional aspirations.

"Dance in the Desert gave us the opportunity to… find ourselves inside of those touch points that might have otherwise been a little bit more difficult to make happen."

b. Professional Impact

Skill Development and Professional Development

Participants described gaining specific skills through DITD workshops and artistic exchanges, including teaching strategies, contact technique, memorization, and the ability to work intensively within a

"It really gave us all a place for professional development that is not really offered to us outside of that kind of educational system."

"It helped me overcome my fear of contact technique with others… I learned a lot about structuring a class."

"As a participating dancer, it impacted my ability to memorize as well as my commitment to a dance piece to fully immerse myself in it quickly."

Networking and Collaborative Opportunities

The most frequently cited professional benefit is the creation of lasting connections that lead to future collaborations, job offers, and cross-regional projects.

"The connections… you start meeting other people and then they connect you to other things, to jobs."

"It strengthened what I had already had going with Safos… other opportunities that came up because of your participation with Dance in the Desert."

"A piece that she developed in the second iteration of Dance in the Desert… she ended up presenting that at a festival."

"Had they not had that conversation or just even talked, that opportunity wouldn't have existed. It's just one conversation."

c. Perceived Contributions to the Regional Dance Ecosystem

Bridging Urban-Rural Divides

Participants described DITD as creating connections across Phoenix, Tucson, Douglas, and the border region and as increasing awareness of dance communities outside their own geographic areas.

"It really bridged a lot of relationships… what you might gain through speech can also help maybe just digest a little bit more involving movement."

"Just a reminder for me that there's communities outside of Phoenix and Tempe."

Advocacy and Articulation of Community Needs

The gathering serves as a platform for artists to articulate their needs directly to funders and cultural administrators.

"I really appreciated the degree to which I learned what it is that dancers needed, what the dance community needed, from their perspective, and to see how I might be able to help as I go through life."

"Advocacy would need to be a more intentional part of the professional development work… language to be able to go to larger institutions and point out where they're failing is important."

Participant Voices: Looking Forward

Participants consistently express a desire for DITD to continue and expand, citing its unique role in sustaining the regional dance community.

"I really believe that a program like Dance in the Desert is important for communities, especially for those that don't have access to professional dance or professional dance classes."

"If there was a collaboration effort with New Mexico, we would have very similar landscapes… why not? We have very similar stories."

"I would love to see a program like Dance in the Desert… it's a really good event both for the artists and for the community."

V. Arizona Interview Summary

The Arizona interviews revealed several interconnected themes related to artists' professional goals, the strengths of their dance communities, and the structural challenges that shape their ability to sustain artistic practices. The findings that follow reflect participants' experiences across Phoenix, Tucson, Douglas, and the border region and highlight both the resilience of these communities and the resources artists identify as necessary for their continued growth.

a. Major Themes and Specific Quotes[1]

Theme	Illustrative Quote
Sustaining Artistic Careers	*"Ensuring all artists have resources for a thriving practice"* *"I would ideally need financial support to hire someone to cover my current work responsibilities temporarily, allowing me time to 'ramp up back into [my] artistic practice'"*
Developing New Dance Works	*"My goal is to be able to create more and maybe do a couple of bigger productions and shows and maybe tour."* *"My goal leans towards teaching and choreography/composition, I enjoy imagining things and bringing them to life."*
Teaching and Mentorship	*"I love being a teaching artist… that's where I'm best at… sharing my knowledge of movement to other people."* *"I would like to be a pillar of resources and support, looking up to people like Mary Fitzgerald and Eileen Stanley."* *"I'm training because I want to return to Agua Prieta and teach what I've learned elsewhere."*
Building Community Infrastructure	*"My primary goal is to nourish and expand this economy, so artists do not have to leave Arizona for full-time dance careers."* *"I think I have two artistic goals. One is to grow more as a bi-national artist and bring more to the Douglas community."* *"My mission is to support artists, dancers in general, by helping them have a space to perform."*

Synthesis Statement

The goals expressed across Arizona participants reveal a community that is simultaneously building personal artistic careers and seeking to serve broader communities through teaching, mentorship, and cultural preservation. Whether the aim is touring new choreography, creating sustainable local economies, returning to teach in border communities, or developing formal residency spaces, many participants frame their work as inseparable from the health of the larger dance ecosystem. This dual focus on individual growth and collective infrastructure underscores the relational, community-centered nature of dance practice in the Southwest.

1 The full participant-by-participant table is available in Appendix B.

Strengths and Characteristics of Arizona Dance Communities

Aspect	Participant Insight	Quote
Inter-disciplinary collaboration and social-political engagement	Z.T.	*"The community (Tucson)… supports each other, all different disciplines… very socially engaged and politically engaged."*
Small, rebuilding after pandemic	Z.I.	*"The community in Tucson is quite small and it is rebuilding after the pandemic."*
Retention of university graduates	V.T.I.	*"Graduates from BFA/MFA programs are increasingly staying in Arizona rather than moving to coastal cities."*
Resilience despite gentrification and limited space	I.N	*"The community's resilience, despite barriers like gentrification and finding space, artists continue to show up and do the work.*
'Small-town vibes in a big city'; deep commitment	I.N.A.	*"The community (Phoenix) is tight-knit… everyone knows each other, facilitating work opportunities and support organically."*
Collaborative, resource-sharing ethos	O.T.	*"We're a collaborative effort of people who want to continue to stay in Phoenix and make art and are willing to help each other see it through."*
Welcoming, progressive, inclusive	H.I.	*I would describe my community (Phoenix) as very welcoming, supportive… we are very progressive and inclusive here."*
Inclusion, activism, empathy	Q.O.	*"The dance community I choose to engage with… they're activists… very empathetic and kind, very respectful, intentional, courageous."*
Strong Folklórico tradition, passionate participation	Z.I.	*"Folklórico is deeply rooted… they're always willing to participate… it doesn't matter if you pay them or not.*
Border-location as a unique strength	N.I.	*"The fact that we are from the border… is one of our biggest strengths."*
Emerging openness and visibility	Z.X.	*"The dance community is a bit more open now… I think right now it's actually quite strong."*

Synthesis Statement

Across Arizona, participants describe a dance community defined by its inclusivity, resilience, and deep cultural rootedness. The community's strength lies in its collaborative ethos, where artists across genres and generations share resources and support one another organically, even in the face of gentrification and limited space. Regarding the U.S./Mexico International Border, evidence shows a nuanced finding with some artists viewing the border as both a source of cultural strength and a point of limited access to resources.

Core Challenges and Resource Gaps

Challenge	Participants Highlighting It	Representative Quote
Affordable Rehearsal and Performance Space	Z.T., Z.I., V.T.I., H.I., V.Z.W., W.R., N.I.	*"Gosh, what most people need is, you know, space, like physical space to like studio space."* *"Pero creo que sí se necesitan más espacios. Más apoyo de la ciudad. (Douglas & Agua Prieta).// But I believe that yes they need more spaces. More support from the city."* *"I think what I've heard from dancers is that they need space. Affordable access to space. Flooring is a really big deal. Rehearsal space, I think, is the biggest one. Affordable. And with that comes the tech that is needed for the full production."* *"The Valley, the Phoenix Valley, needs more rehearsal space that's more affordable. "* *"I think probably in all of the communities throughout Arizona dance communities, I think space. And again, I think it's potentially even about shared resources, like sharing dance spaces, I think could be a really positive thing, because I think people have a real challenge paying for space and having space that is good, that has a proper floor, that has, you know, mirrors, enough space, air conditioning, you know, those sorts of things that would make it a safe and accessible space for dancers."* *"I think the common thing for a lot of movement artists in Arizona is space and some like financial support to provide that space. I know that space isn't free for the owner or the managers you know but the prices per hour are getting quite expensive out there. So especially if you're not actually like using them for classes bringing money in you know using a dance studio will get costly because it takes hours upon hours upon hours upon hours to make, make work."*

Synthesis Statement

One of the most frequently identified challenges identified by Arizona artists is the lack of affordable rehearsal and performance space, a barrier cited by participants across roles, genres, and geographies. This infrastructure deficit intersects with financial instability and uneven access to professional development, creating a cycle where even highly skilled artists struggle to sustain their practices locally. The breadth of participants highlighting this single issue signals that space is not a niche concern but a foundational requirement for the entire ecosystem.

VI. Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. The Arizona interview sample consisted of 17 former Dance in the Desert participants and therefore represents the experiences and perspectives of a relatively small and specific group of artists. The findings are not intended to be statistically representative of the broader population of dance artists in Arizona.

Because interviewees were former Dance in the Desert participants, their prior experiences with and relationships to the program may also shape their perspectives, particularly their assessments of DITD's personal and professional impact. Findings related to program impact should therefore be understood as participants' retrospective perceptions rather than causal measures of program effectiveness.

Demographic scope: the study intentionally focused on self-identified Latine/Hispanic/Chicano/Mexican American artists. It therefore describes that population, not Arizona's entire dance ecosystem. Geographic representation was also limited. Participants were primarily connected to Phoenix, Tucson, Douglas, and the border region, leaving large portions of Arizona, particularly northern and western communities, outside the scope of the study. Experiences and resource needs may differ considerably across these communities.

Additionally, three interviews were conducted in Spanish and translated into English. Even with bilingual review, translation can affect nuance.

Finally, the study relies primarily on participants' self-reported experiences and recollections. These accounts provide valuable insight into how artists understand their communities, professional experiences, and participation in DITD, but they do not independently establish the effectiveness of the program or the prevalence of identified challenges across Arizona's broader dance ecosystem.

Future research could expand participation to additional regions of Arizona and include artists who have not participated in Dance in the Desert, providing a broader understanding of the strengths, challenges, and resource needs of dance communities across the state.

VII. Conclusion

The findings from the Southern Arizona cohorts suggest that Dance in the Desert functions as more than an occasional gathering; participants perceive DITD as an important source of connection, professional development, and opportunity, as well as critical infrastructure for community building and cultural preservation in the Southwest. Participants describe it as a transformative experience that has shaped their artistic identities, expanded their professional networks, and provided access to resources and opportunities that participants described as limited or unavailable in their communities. Continued investment in DITD is strongly supported by the first-hand accounts of those whose careers and artistic practices have been directly impacted.

Overall, the Arizona interviews reveal a dance ecosystem shaped by strong artistic commitment, cultural rootedness, collaboration, and community connection, while also facing persistent challenges related to funding, affordable rehearsal and performance space, professional development, and geographic access. Participants described these structural barriers as significant factors affecting their ability to sustain and grow their artistic practices.

Within this broader context, former participants described DITD as an important space for professional development, relationship-building, artistic validation, and connection across communities. Many reported that relationships and experiences developed through DITD continued beyond the gatherings, contributing to subsequent collaborations, professional opportunities, and artistic growth.

Taken together, these findings suggest that strengthening Arizona's dance ecosystem requires attention not only to individual artists and programs, but also to the networks, resources, spaces, and relationships that allow artists and communities to sustain their work over time. Participants' experiences with DITD offer insight into how intentional convening and relationship-building can contribute to that broader ecosystem.

Interview Follow-up Survey Data Analysis

I. Executive Summary

In Arizona, following the completion of an in-person interview, Dance in the Desert artists from Arizona received a thank you email with a link to complete an online survey. Of the 17 Arizona dance artists who participated in the in-person interview, 17 filled out the anonymous survey.

These follow-up surveys are complementary to the interviews and provide insight into how the same participants respond to questions about barriers, access, programming, and future DITD preferences. Follow-up surveys used a mixed-format containing closed-ended and open-ended questions to learn more about the experiences, strengths, needs, and goals of dance artists and cultural workers in Arizona. The questions focused on participants' demographics and preferences for programming for potential future Dance in the Desert gatherings.

The intention of the research was to gather information from the community regarding topics, workshops, themes, and other information for future Dance in the Desert gatherings. Additionally, the research team wanted to provide a platform for dance artists to share additional information anonymously, information that they might not have felt comfortable sharing during an interview. Respondents highlight economic hardship, insufficient physical infrastructure, a desire for culturally resonant programming, the need for professional development and mentorship, equity concerns, geographic gaps, and practical scheduling barriers. Limitations include a small sample size and parameters of using the free non-profit version of Google Forms.

II. Methodology

Following the completion of an in-person interview, Dance in the Desert artists from Arizona and New Mexico were sent a thank you email with a link to complete an online survey. Community liaisons followed up with interviewees, sharing reminders regarding the online survey. Online surveys were administered via Google Forms and were available in both English and Spanish. In Arizona only, past DITD participants received a survey with questions regarding the content and impact of past gatherings. All DITD participants who completed the online surveys received a small online Visa gift card.

Data was coded using two separate types of analysis:

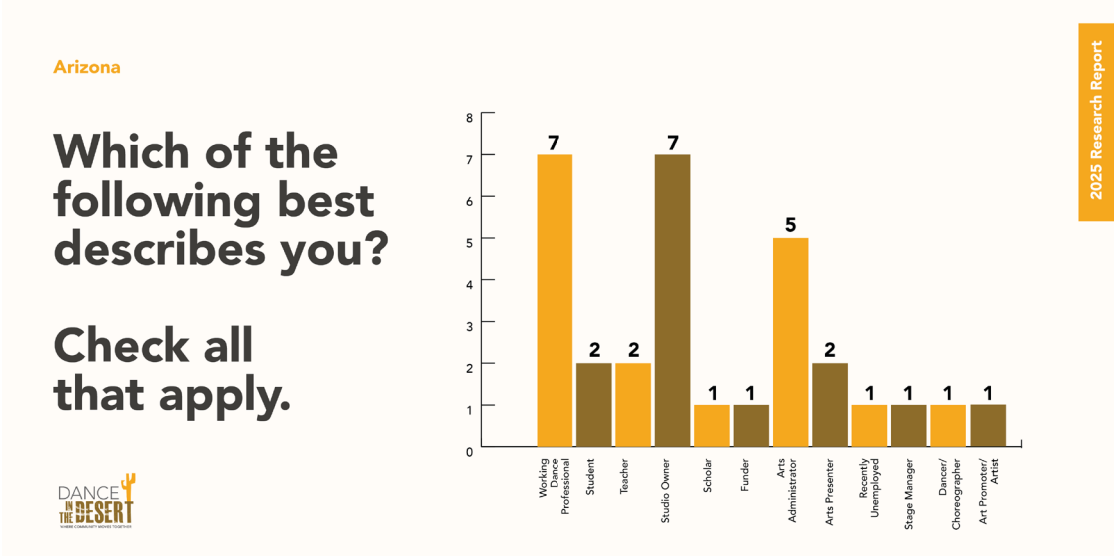
1. Closed-ended survey responses were summarized descriptively using frequencies, percentages, and visualizations generated through Google Forms.
2. Open-ended responses were reviewed using thematic coding to identify recurring topics, concerns, preferences, and experiences.

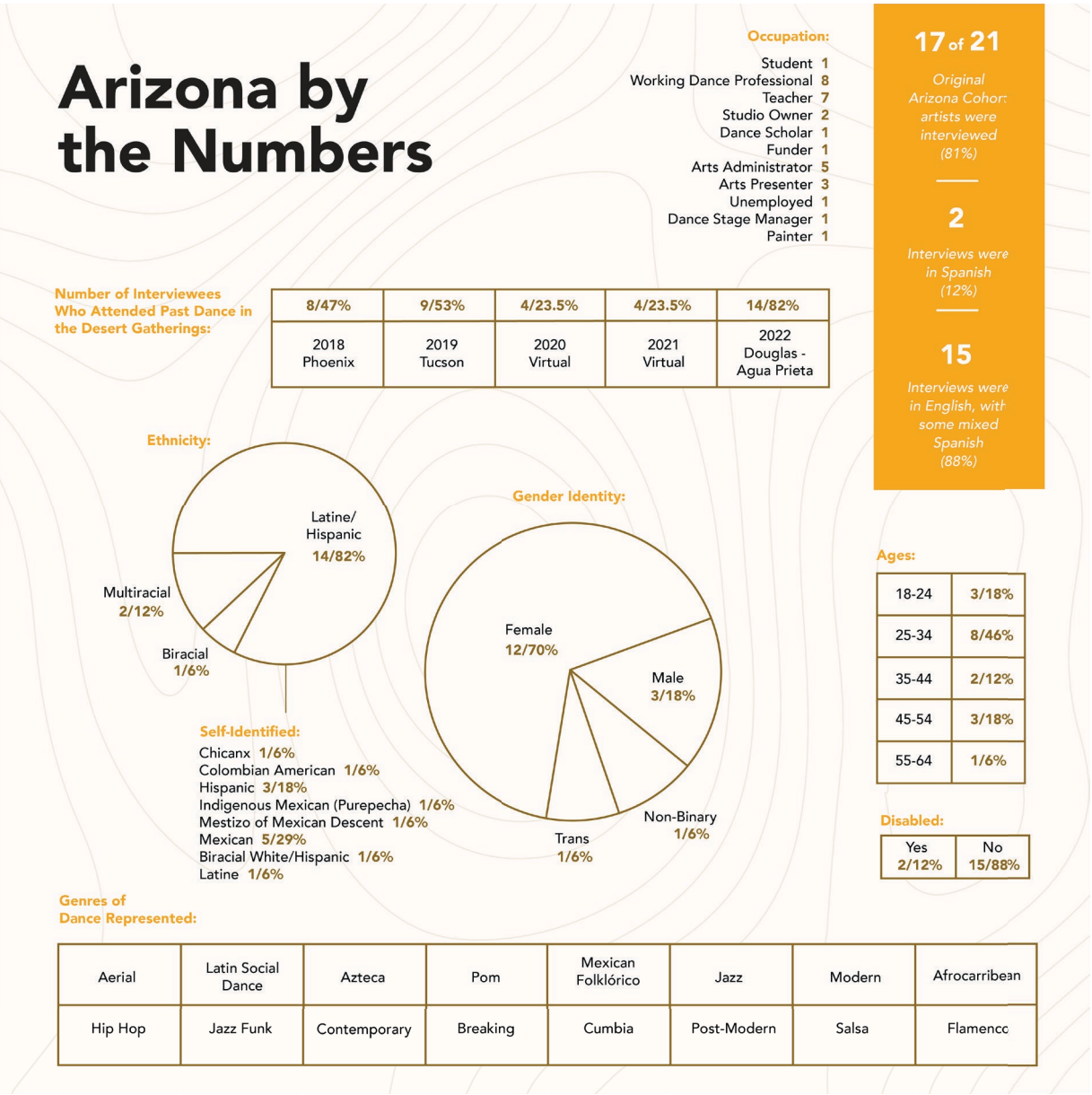
Research Assistant Imelda Cortez used thematic coding to identify recurring topics, patterns, challenges, goals, and shared experiences across participants. All names and initials used in this report for AZ dance artists are pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

III. Survey Findings

Demographics

Dance artists were able to select all that applied to describe their role in the arts, which led to participants selecting more than one category.





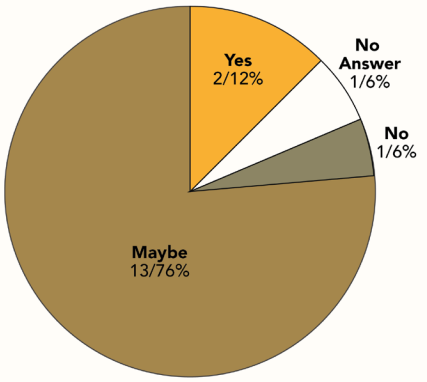
a. Major Themes

Socio-Economic Barriers and Need for Direct Financial Support

- Responses show that funding shortfalls are repeatedly identified as the primary obstacle. For example, "*Apoyo económico* // Economic assistance," "*Falta de inanciamiento y apoyos institucionales* // lack of financing and institutional support, " "Lack of professional instructors," and "Less economic resources to attend Dance in the Desert" are identified as barriers to participation in professional development opportunities. This shows a need for a sliding scale programming for dancers in AZ.

Arizona

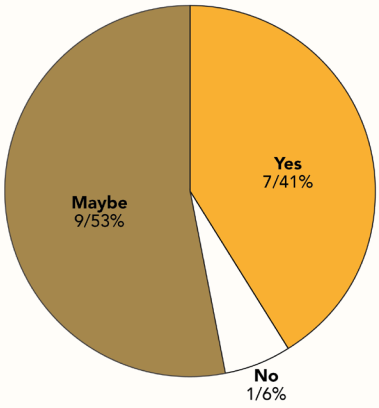
I would be able to pay for my own travel and lodging to attend Dance in the Desert in the future.



2025 Research Report

Arizona

I would miss work and/or classes to attend Dance in the Desert.



2025 Research Report

In this graph, another indicator of financial uncertainty is evident, prompting participants to be unsure about their ability to miss work or school to attend events. This is significant given the already-mentioned financial barriers that dance artists face.

Insufficient Physical Infrastructure and Safe Rehearsal Spaces

- Several respondents noted a scarcity of affordable studios and rehearsal rooms ("dance space for classes," "more safe spaces to dance in," and "access limited to training spaces.")

- Geographic isolation compounds the problem, with specific calls for space in Douglas, Agua Prieta, Tucson, Phoenix, and other border-area towns.

Community-Centric and Culturally Relevant Programming

- The community values diverse dance styles (Contemporary, Hip-Hop, Folklórico, Latin Social Dances, etc.) and stresses that programming should reflect Latine/Hispanic identities and local cultural heritage. For example, respondents identify "*bailes que identifican a la comunidad* // dances that identify with the community," and "*Identidad y territorio* // identity and territory."

- Open-ended responses included calls for greater connection among dancers and for programming that reflects and sustains local cultural traditions.

Professional Development, Mentorship and Business Skills

- Respondents request structured mentorship and career-sustaining resources (grant-writing workshops, tax-prep advice, non-profit vs. LLC guidance).

- Many see themselves as studio owner, and teachers, indicating an existing base of expertise that could be leveraged.

Geographic Equity and Representation beyond Tokenism

- Respondents identify a need for equitable practices in dance programming ("visibility and equity to an area that often gets overlooked in state-wide arts initiatives. Yuma / Southwest Arizona.)"

- There is an expressed need for a deeper understanding of Latine culture and artists in order to move away from the tokenism that remains prevalent in the field. "Latine artists are frequently expected to present folkloric or stereotypical forms of "Latino culture," rather than being supported in creating innovative, contemporary, or cross-disciplinary work that reflects the fullness of their identities." "representation beyond tokenism." "Narrow view of the Latine community and culture (oversimplification by presenters and public of the themes and aesthetics that could possibly come out of Latine dancemakers.)"

Limited Access

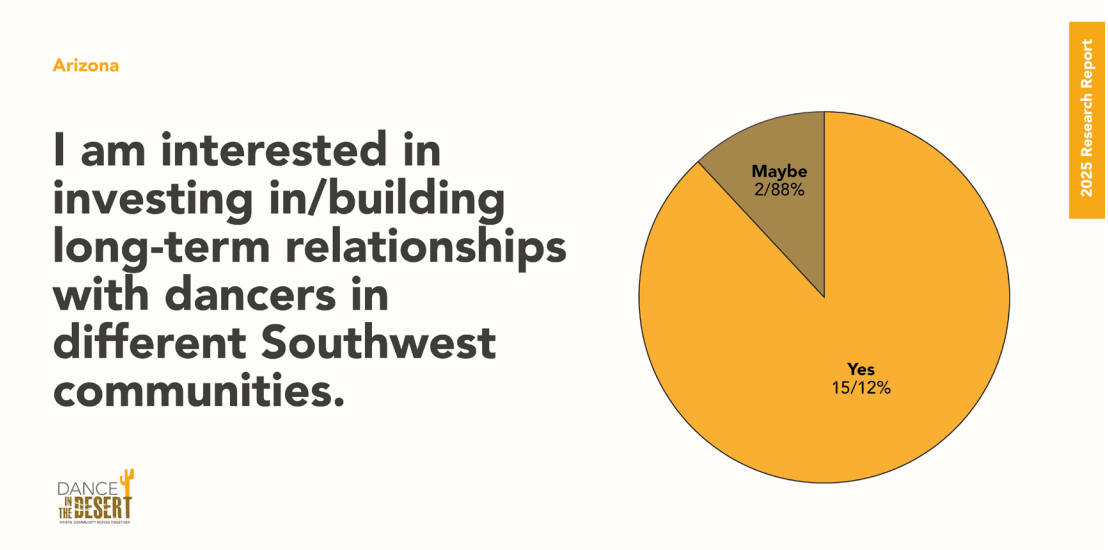
- Respondents identify limitations to access: "Latine artists often face barriers to accessing grants, residencies, and venues." "Limited Access to Funding and Institutional Support."

- There is an expressed call for expanded access to opportunities in dance and the performing arts across the board.

Geographic Gaps and Need for Regional Expansion

- While Phoenix and Tucson are focal points, there is clear demand for outreach to underserved border communities (Douglas, Agua Prieta, Nogales) and rural areas in Arizona, suggesting a regional network rather than a single-city model.

- The graph below showcases a clear excitement and interest in building relationships across borders and states. The top two communities Arizona dance artists are interested in connecting with are the Phoenix-metro area and Tucson. Additional notable mentions include Nogales and Douglas in AZ, Albuquerque, NM and El Paso, TX.



Scheduling Preferences and Practical Accessibility

There is clear demand for weekend timing as summer weekends are repeatedly preferred for workshops and events.

IV. Limitations

The 17 survey respondents were the same 17 people interviewed. Therefore, the survey does not broaden the participant sample. This small sample size is not indicative of the larger community of dance artists in Arizona.

Furthermore, this study only focuses on dancers from three communities in the state with no representation from communities in large swaths of the Western or Northern sections. Additional studies are necessary. Additionally, the Google Form format used for this research only allowed for one bubble for the race/ethnicity category. According to Cortez, this was in part due to the limitations of the version of Google Forms to which the company subscribes. As a result, several participants reached out asking for a more robust way of reporting their multi-ethnic and multiracial identities. This was a limitation in capturing the multifaceted complexity of Latinidad.

V. Conclusion

The Arizona follow-up survey provides additional insight into the experiences and priorities expressed by the 17 former Dance in the Desert participants who also participated in the qualitative interviews. Survey responses reinforce several themes identified through the interviews, including concerns related to financial barriers, access to affordable dance spaces, professional development, geographic access, and opportunities for connection.

The survey also provides more specific information about participants' preferences for future Dance in the Desert programming, including interest in culturally relevant programming, mentorship and professional-development opportunities, regional connection, and scheduling and accessibility considerations. Taken together with the qualitative interviews, these findings can help inform future program planning while also identifying areas that may warrant broader research across Arizona's dance

Recommendations for the Field

The following recommendations are informed by the Arizona interview findings and the follow-up surveys and are directed at foundations, state and local arts agencies, dance presenters, and private philanthropists. While grounded in the experiences of participating artists, several recommendations may also be relevant to other dance communities across the Southwest.

Invest in Sustainable Careers Through Direct and Flexible Funding

Finding: One of the most frequently identified challenges cited by artists is funding and financial instability and the lack of a living wage. The dance economy is not keeping pace with the region's urban growth, forcing artists to work multiple jobs or leave the state for full-time opportunities.

Action: Prioritize multi-year, general operating support for small dance companies and collectives over project-based grants. Increase the availability and award amounts of grants for individual artists. This allows for long-term planning, consistent salaries, and reduces the constant, precarious cycle of project-to-project funding.

Rationale: As choreographer O.T. stated, money is the primary barrier, noting that independent artists struggle to secure competitive grants to cover basic costs like renting theatres and paying collaborators. I.N. articulated the core need for "belief" from funders, which she defines as "value translated through transparent funding pathways" that allow artists to build sustainable careers in Arizona.

Fund Physical Infrastructure: Rehearsal and Performance Spaces

Finding: A critical and recurring bottleneck for artists is the lack of affordable, accessible, and high-quality space. Studio rental costs are rising, gentrification is displacing arts hubs, and there is a scarcity of mid-size performance venues.

Action: Allocate resources to secure or create affordable, safe studios and rehearsal venues in both metropolitan and border-area communities (Phoenix, Tucson, Douglas, Agua Prieta, etc.). Sub access to existing rehearsal and performance spaces, foster shared-use agreements for space, facilitate and/or fund artist-run cooperatives. In the long run, fund capital projects for the acquisition, renovation, or construction of new dance spaces. Alternatively, create dedicated funds to subsidize rent for artists and small companies at existing venues. Support the development of artist-run cooperatives or collectives for space management.

Rationale: Z.I. detailed how her studio's rent quadrupled after a sale, making it untenable. O.T. highlighted the "stark" gap in Phoenix between small 50-seat spaces and large 800-seat theatres, with few affordable mid-size options available for independent choreographers to build an audience. Investments in affordable and accessible space could help address a recurring logistical and financial barrier identified by participants.

Invest in Professional Development and Mentorship

Finding: Beyond creating work, artists identified a need for professional development in administration, production, and business management. They also expressed a strong desire for mentorship from established figures to navigate their careers.

Action: Sponsor grant-writing, non-profit/LLC formation, and tax-prep workshops tailored to dance professionals. Fund programs that offer practical training in grant writing, budgeting, marketing, lighting design, the creation of new work and touring. Support the creation of formal mentorship programs that connect emerging artists with established leaders.

Rationale: O.T. explained the need for mentorship to help mid-career artists transition from creating short festival pieces to "longer bodies of work." W.R. noted that artists require training on business structures (LLC vs. non-profit) and advocacy to build sustainable careers and effectively approach larger institutions. Funding these skills could strengthen artists' professional capacity and contribute to a more sustainable regional dance ecosystem.

Support Community Building and Enable Regional Connection

Finding: Artists identify geographic isolation and the lack of connection with other dance artists as a barrier to their career.

Action: Provide multi-year grants for satellite programs, traveling workshops, and pop-up events in under-served border towns and rural areas. Finance community meals, informal networking gatherings, and dialogue spaces that foster connection and cultural exchange.

Rationale: From the Surveys, "Geographic isolation and lack of visibility. The distance from national arts hubs (NYC, LA) means fewer touring opportunities, less exposure to presenters, and limited networking, which can leave Southwest artists overlooked in the broader dance landscape. "

Develop Programs and Fund Programs With and For Latine Communities

Finding: Artists identify a misunderstanding of Latine communities or assumptions about the styles or aesthetics of Latine dance artists that may impact Latine dance artists career trajectories.

Action: Earmark funding for projects that explicitly address representation beyond tokenism and that are co-designed with Latine/Hispanic communities.

Rationale: Survey responses indicate the top two challenges to dancemaking for Latine dance artists are: "Narrow view of the Latine community and culture (oversimplification by presenters and public of the themes and aesthetics that could possibly come out of Latine dancemakers)," "Cultural stereotyping and misrepresentation," "Representation beyond tokenism," "Cultural expectations and pressure to conform." Latine artists are frequently expected to present folkloric or stereotypical forms of "Latino culture", rather than being supported in creating innovative, contemporary, or cross-disciplinary work that reflects the fullness of their identities."



Photo: Dominic AZ Bonuccelli

Recommendations for Dance in the Desert

These recommendations are informed by the Arizona interview findings and the Follow-Up Surveys and are intended to help the program build on its recognized strengths and address opportunities for growth identified by its participants.

Maintain and Expand the Core Convening Model

Finding: Participants view Dance in the Desert as an essential gathering that provides connection, professional development, and a sense of community that is otherwise absent.

Action: Seek funding to establish a more consistent and predictable schedule for the convenings, such as an annual gathering. Continue to create a space that functions as a "watering hole" for artists from different parts of the state and dance disciplines to network and build relationships.

Rationale: The program plays a role in Arizona's dance ecosystem by creating a "melting pot for networking" and building connections that lead to collaborations. Z.T. suggested an "annual reunion" for alumni and new participants to "come together, compare, maybe workshop some stuff,", reinforcing the desire for continuity.

Deepen Cross-Regional and Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Finding: While Dance in the Desert, the program, successfully connected artists within Arizona, participants saw an opportunity to expand the reach of the program.

Action: Structure future iterations to connect artists of the original cohort with dance artists from other communities in Arizona, New Mexico and other Southwest regions.

Rationale: I.N. proposed "fostering collaboration between artists in New Mexico and artists in Arizona."

Broaden Access and Deepen Inclusivity

Finding: Some participants noted that the program's historical invitation-based model may have unintentionally excluded artists who were not already in established networks. There is also a desire to more deeply engage the region's diverse dance forms.

Action: Implement a hybrid selection process that combines an open call for applications with targeted invitations. This ensures that emerging artists and those outside of core networks have a clear pathway into the program.

Rationale: W.R. stated, "by having more of an open call, I think it would have brought more artists from more spaces". W.L. suggested a proactive approach: "maybe the question is, where should you go?" instead of merely who to invite, encouraging the program to actively engage with different communities on their own terms.

Continue to Offer Professional Development

Finding: Dancers identify a need for continued professional development and dance training.

Action: Continue to offer classes and workshops across the full spectrum of styles identified (Contemporary, Hip-Hop, Folklórico, Latin Social Dances, etc.).

Rationale: Survey responses indicate dancers' value content is rooted in local cultural identity and different dance styles. For example, *Bailes que idenfician a la communidad. //* Dances that identify with the community," and "Technique classes across multiple styles (Modern, Jazz, Ballroom, Flamenco, Contemporary)."

New Mexico



Photo: Baylie MacRae

Dance in the Desert 2025 Research Interviews

I. Executive Summary

In New Mexico (NM), the Dance in the Desert team conducted exploratory qualitative interviews of self-identified Latine, Hispanic, Chicano, and Mexican American dance artists from 8 different communities.

Participants included 41 self-identified Latine dance artists including artists, educators, choreographers, artistic directors, studio owners, and dance educators between the ages of 18-75. The research examined what artists are experiencing and what they identified as needs in their communities.

The questions focused on participants' artistic practices, their local dance communities, the challenges they faced, the resources they needed, and their interest in instate and cross state collaboration. The intention of the research was to ascertain an interest in cross-state gatherings with the original DITD AZ cohort. The research findings identified a community that is vibrant, culturally rooted, and resilient, yet fragile in its material conditions.

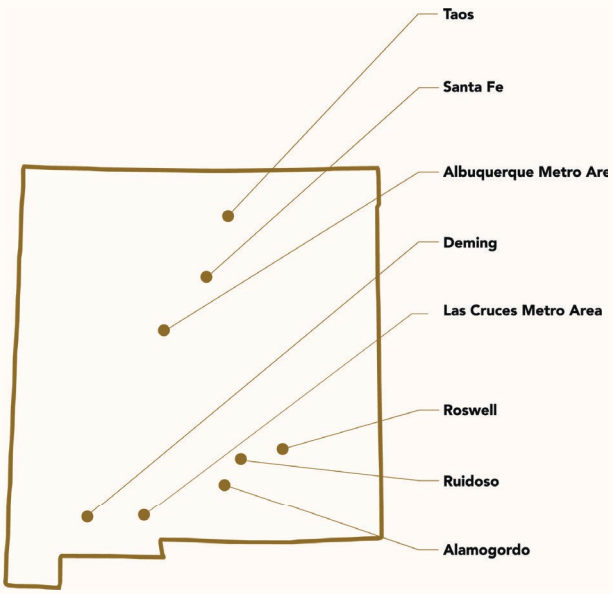
The strongest theme identified was scarcity including financial barriers, a lack of affordable rehearsal and performance spaces, limited mentorship and culturally resonant teaching, and a persistent urban-rural divide that leaves southern and smaller communities feeling overlooked. These findings suggest the community is ready for collaboration, preservation, and growth, calling for shared resources, stronger mentorship pathways, and better documentation of traditional dance narratives.

II. Introduction

This report asks a central question: what does it take for dance artists and communities in the Southwest not simply to survive, but to thrive?

It draws from on 41 qualitative interviews conducted in 2025 with artists, educators, administrators, choreographers, organizers, and cultural workers in eight communities in New Mexico including: Albuquerque Metro Area (pop 562,218, 47.7% Hispanic), Las Cruces Metro Area (pop 224,266, 68.5% Hispanic), Santa Fe (pop 87,508, 49.5% Hispanic), Roswell (pop. 47,638, 60.7% Hispanic), Taos (pop. 6,458, 47.9% Hispanic), Deming (pop. 15,221, 45.8% Hispanic), Alamogordo (pop. 31,307, 32.4% Hispanic), and Ruidoso (pop. 7,699, 29.2% Hispanic).

38 interviews were done in English and 3 were done in Spanish. New Mexico interviewees ranged in age from 18-75, representing styles from Mexican Folklórico to Pom, Breaking to Danza Azteca, Modern to Flamenco, Aerial to the folk dances los Bailes de Salón Nuevo México. Many dancers were trained in multiple genres of dance.



III. Methodology

This study used a community-informed qualitative approach to learn more about the experiences, strengths, needs, and goals of dance artists and cultural workers in New Mexico. The interviews included artists, educators, choreographers, administrators, organizers, and other people connected to dance communities across both states. The questions focused on participants' artistic practices, their local dance communities, the challenges they faced, the resources they needed, and their interest in collaboration and future programming.

The research was informed by the participatory action research approach used by Dance in the Desert. This approach centers the experiences and knowledge of community members and uses their feedback to help shape future programming. The interviews were intended not only to collect information, but also to understand what different communities were already doing, what they identified as priorities, and how *Safos* and Dance in the Desert might respond in meaningful ways.

In 2025, Dance in the Desert expanded into New Mexico conducting 41 exploratory interviews with self-identified Latine dance artists throughout the state. Facilitated by community liaisons, the Dance in the Desert team did in-person interviews with artists from 8 communities throughout the state.

In New Mexico, a state that does not have a history of Dance in the Desert gatherings, there was no previous cohort of dancers to contact for interviews. Rather, the onus was on the research team to reach out and build connections and relationships with self-identified Latine dancers in New Mexico during the research process. Thus, recruitment in New Mexico was purposive/network-based sampling. Inclusion criteria for NM participants was a dance artist over 18 years of age from any genre or style of dance that self-identifies as Latine or any regional variant of the term such as, but not limited to, Hispanic, Chicano, Mexican American, and the like.

The research team had two New Mexico-based community liaisons. Martín Quintanta, an Albuquerque-based dance artist focused on Central and Northern New Mexico and Angel Guanajuato, a dance producer who is originally from Roswell, NM but works state-wide, focused on Southern New Mexico. Both have long-standing roots and connections with dancers in their respective communities. Quintana and Guanajuato are self-identified Latine artists who are various levels of Spanish-English bilingual and both conducted outreach to participants in Spanish and English.

The Dance in the Desert team conducted exploratory interviews in New Mexico over the course of a year, spanning from January - December 2025. New Mexico community liaisons utilized networks, previous relationships, word of mouth, and online research to identify potential interviewees. Community liaisons connected with potential interviewees through a variety of outreach methods, including email—often through cold outreach—social media, phone calls, and text messages. In some cases, members of the research team also visited dance studios in person to make an initial introduction. Recruitment for dance artists in New Mexico was a combination of purposive, network-based, and possibly snowball recruitment. The New Mexico team conducted interviews in the following cities and towns in New Mexico: Albuquerque-Metro area, Las Cruces-Metro area, Santa Fe, Roswell, Taos, Deming, Ruidoso, and Alamogordo. Additionally, two Las Cruces-based dancers were interviewed in El Paso, TX where they attended a conference. Members of the DITD New Mexico

research team also traveled to Socorro, Tularosa, Artesia, Carlsbad, and Española where they either met with dance artists who did not fit the research demographic, or had interviews scheduled but were met with no shows. Additionally, the New Mexico DITD research team was in contact with dance artists from Los Alamos, but did not conduct interviews in this town.

All New Mexico interviews were conducted in person by Principal Investigator Yvonne Montoya and each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes with some ending after 10 minutes and others lasting an hour and a half. Regarding consent, prior to each interview, Montoya went over the project's verbal consent to audio recording with participants. The verbal consent detailed the purpose, selection criteria, procedure, use and preservation of interview recordings, and confidentiality including the use of pseudonyms in any and all reports, presentations and publications. The verbal consent included audio recording of the interview. Verbal consent was given twice, prior to the recording of the interview and again at the beginning of the recording of the interview. Participants were told that their interviews would be used to inform research on the current state of Latine dance artists in New Mexico as well as assess current needs in the dance community. Per verbal consent, participants had the opportunity to stop the interview at any time or skip any question. Verbal consent was available in Spanish and English. Interviews were documented via a voice recorder. Transcriptions of the audio recordings were obtained via the online platform GoTranscript. Spanish to English translations of the interview transcripts were completed by the research team, namely community liaisons, all of whom were bilingual. In New Mexico, 3 interviews were conducted in Spanish with the remaining 38 in English. Regarding language, all verbal consents, interview questions, and outreach materials were available in both Spanish and English. All translations were reviewed by members of the DITD research team. Culturally specific terms and translations were reviewed by various members of the team for accuracy.

Cortez analyzed the interviews in two stages, starting with Arizona and then moving to New Mexico. For the Arizona interviews, Cortez used thematic coding to identify recurring topics, patterns, challenges, goals, and shared experiences across participants. Cortez also wrote memos throughout the Arizona process to record emerging ideas, observations, and questions. The Arizona coding helped establish an initial set of themes that guided Cortez's approach to the New Mexico interviews.

For the New Mexico interviews, Cortez used a two-round thematic coding process. First, listening to the recordings while comparing them with the transcripts to check their accuracy and identify any missing context or discrepancies. During the second round, Cortez reviewed the transcripts to identify recurring themes and important topics across the different communities. This review allowed for a refinement of themes from the first round and identification of additional themes that emerged from

the interviews. Together, these steps helped Cortez stay grounded in participants' own words while also making it possible to compare the experiences of dance communities in Arizona and New Mexico. The Arizona coding helped establish an initial set of themes that guided Cortez's approach to the New Mexico interviews.

After coding the interviews, Cortez organized the findings by state and then compared themes across Arizona and New Mexico. This made it possible to identify shared concerns, such as limited funding, insufficient space, geographic isolation, and the need for mentorship and collaboration, while also recognizing differences between communities. Because this is a qualitative study, the findings are presented as recurring patterns and participant experiences rather than statistically representative conclusions. The analysis remains grounded in participants' own words and reflects the range of perspectives shared during the interviews.

All names and initials used in this report for New Mexico dance artists are pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

IV. New Mexico Interview Findings

The New Mexico interviews portray a dance community that is vibrant, culturally rooted, and resilient, but fragile in its material conditions. Interviewees describe a landscape rich in Folklórico, Flamenco, Hip-Hop, Contemporary, and traditional forms, with a strong sense of place and family-rooted belonging, yet one that remains vulnerable to underfunding and inconsistent infrastructure.

The strongest theme in the New Mexico data is scarcity. Artists describe financial barriers, a lack of affordable and dedicated rehearsal and performance spaces, limited mentorship and culturally resonant teaching, and a persistent urban-rural divide that leaves southern and smaller communities feeling overlooked. Several analyses also note that success is often imagined as something that happens elsewhere, which contributes to fragmentation and discourages long-term investment in local careers.

Data collection for this study focused on larger representation in New Mexico, engaging artists across eight urban and rural centers (including Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Taos, Las Cruces, Roswell, Deming, Alamogordo, and Ruidoso). This contrasts with the Arizona sample, which focused primarily on three Southern Arizona communities.

a. Major Themes

Below are four overarching themes that capture the shared experience of the 41 Latine dance artists interviewed across New Mexico (Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Taos, Las Cruces, Roswell, Deming, Alamogordo, Ruidoso).

Each theme is supported by direct quotes taken verbatim from the interview transcript and followed by a brief, cross-regional analysis.

Funding, Space & Infrastructure – "The Constant Short-fall"

Core idea: Every community, from the largest city to the smallest town, reports chronic under-funding that limits rehearsal and performance venues, housing for visiting artists, and basic operational costs.

Location	Representative Quote
Albuquerque	*"I think the biggest thing is honestly just like money. Money, like, you know, um, yeah, it's, it's just an endless struggle."*
Las Cruces	*"We don't have anywhere we can really perform. We had to perform in El Paso because we weren't able to book any spaces here."*
Santa Fe	*"I expect to see more theatres… we're having a big issue not having enough affordable venues."*
Taos	*"The biggest barrier to bringing more teachers and artists is there's just no real affordable way to house people right now."*
Deming	*"I would say the need, again, is more opportunity for financial support. You know, in regards to grants."*
Roswell	*"Money… the funding is so hard. We cannot survive if it's not fundraisers."*
Alamogordo	*"The lack of resources and funding… makes it hard to organize consistent practice sessions and events."*

Analysis

- The shortage is systemic, not isolated to rural or urban areas.
- It forces artists to self-fund, run constant fundraisers, or abandon projects that require higher production values (lighting, rigging, costumes).
- The scarcity of housing for guest teachers and touring artists creates a feedback loop: without a place to stay, outside expertise cannot be brought in, perpetuating the isolation of local scenes.

Cultural Identity, Heritage Preservation and Storytelling – "Dance as Memory"

Core idea: Artists use dance to articulate and safeguard the multi-layered cultural histories of New Mexico (Mexican-American, Indigenous, Queer, Afro-Latine, etc.), while also pushing those traditions into new, hybrid forms.

Location	Representative Quote
Santa Fe	*"Classical ballet doesn't connect unless you embed local stories… I want to make people feel proud of their roots and identity."*
Taos	*"I want to transcribe Mexican and Peruvian stories into spiritual healing through movement."*
Las Cruces	*"Cultural pride is a strength; we must keep Mexican-American Folklórico alive."*
Roswell	*"Dance saved me from an at-risk life; it's a lifeline that preserves our community's soul."*
Albuquerque	*"We need to honor our own histories, not just repeat Euro-centric canons like the Nutcracker."*
Deming	*"Dance connects us to our ancestors and community; it's a form of therapy that keeps cultural memory alive."*

Analysis

- Preservation is not static – artists are documenting oral histories, archiving choreography, and recording regional dance vocabularies (e.g., "I archive all the stories my grandma tells me.")
- Innovation occurs when traditional forms intersect with contemporary styles (Flamenco-Breaking, Folklórico-Hip-Hop, etc.), creating a "new story" that is both rooted and forward-looking.
- The desire for recognition ("I feel like we're not heard outside of New Mexico") ties cultural expression directly to the need for broader platforms and media coverage.

Collaboration, Connectivity and Geographic Disparities – "Silos vs. Bridges"

Core idea: Artists repeatedly describe a fragmented ecosystem (studio silos, genre divisions, north-south resource gaps) and a strong, collective yearning for structured, state-wide collaboration.

Location	Representative Quote
Albuquerque	*"The community is highly fragmented, with artists often operating in isolated 'silos.'"*
Las Cruces	*"If we can find ways to exchange within dancers, within companies and support each other, that would be amazing."*
Roswell	*"Some dancers… because they go to separate studios, they seem to be enemies. We're all on the same dance-love page."*
Alamogordo	*"The Cross City Cypher showed how a unified event can bring together dancers from El Paso, Albuquerque, and beyond."*
Santa Fe	*"The more we can come together… it creates a domino effect."*
Deming	*"We need sister-state exchanges; a single conference in Albuquerque had more Texans than New Mexicans."*
Ruidoso	*"There's a lack of communication; we need a shared calendar and regular state-wide festivals."*

Analysis

- Participants' accounts suggest that limited resources may contribute to competition and fragmentation among organizations and artists.
- Geographic imbalance: most state-level arts dollars, venues, and professional networks cluster in Albuquerque/Santa Fe, leaving southern towns (Deming, Roswell, Alamogordo) under-served despite high Latine populations.

Education, Mentorship and Equity – "Teaching as the Lifeline"

Core idea: Across the state, artists see themselves primarily as educators/mentors and call for systemic support (paid teaching positions, curriculum integration, adaptive programs) to make dance truly accessible for all ages, bodies, and incomes.

Location	Representative Quote
Las Cruces	*"Dance should be in every school, alongside band, orchestra, choir, theatre."*
Albuquerque	*My role is a 'bastionera' – I draw people into dance, not just perform."*
Roswell	*"If I wasn't teaching here, I definitely wouldn't be dancing at all."*
Deming	*"We need more teachers who culturally relate to this place; otherwise the community loses its voice."*
Santa Fe	*"We have a lot of talent but we need more affordable, inclusive spaces for adults and LGBTQ+ dancers."*
Alamogordo	*"We have to forge our own way, but mentorship from other cities helps us survive."*
Ruidoso	*"Adaptive work is needed – 'anyone can learn one movement, even from a wheelchair.'"*

Analysis

- Mentorship pipelines are informal and often unpaid, leading to burnout, especially among older teachers and women of color.
- Equity gaps: adult classes, adaptive programming, and LGBTQ-affirming spaces are scarce; many artists note that "dance is seen as a children's activity" and that "high tuition excludes low-income families."
- Education as social-emotional health: several artists (Deming, Roswell) describe dance as a therapeutic tool that mitigates trauma and builds resilience, suggesting a compelling case for health-sector funding.

V. Limitations

Limitations of this research is the small sample size. A small sample size is not indicative of the larger community of dance artists in New Mexico.

Other limitations include:

1. It is not only a small sample, but purposive/network-based recruitment means the sample may disproportionately reflect people connected to the community liaisons' networks.
2. Demographic scope: the study intentionally focused on self-identified Latine/Hispanic/Chicano/Mexican American artists. It therefore describes that population, not New Mexico's entire dance ecosystem.
3. Researcher effects: all NM interviews were conducted by the Principal Investigator, whose role and relationship to DITD could influence participants' responses.
4. Translation: three interviews were conducted in Spanish and translated into English. Even with bilingual review, translation can affect nuance.
5. Self-report: findings represent participants' experiences and perceptions rather than independently verified conditions.

Furthermore, this study does not include communities in the Western section of the state. Additional studies are necessary.

VI. Conclusion

The New Mexico interviews reveal a culturally rich and geographically diverse dance ecosystem shaped by strong commitments to artistic practice, cultural preservation, education, and community connection. Across the communities represented in this study, participants also described persistent barriers related to funding, affordable rehearsal and performance space, mentorship, professional opportunities, and geographic access.

While many of these challenges were shared across communities, participants' experiences also reflected differences associated with geography, local infrastructure, and access to professional networks. Artists in smaller and more geographically isolated communities frequently described limited access to resources and opportunities available in larger population centers.

At the same time, participants expressed interest in stronger relationships across communities, greater opportunities for mentorship and knowledge exchange, and programming that recognizes the cultural histories and artistic practices rooted in New Mexico. Taken together, these findings suggest that efforts to strengthen the state's dance ecosystem should consider not only financial and physical resources, but also the relationships, cultural knowledge, and regional connections that sustain artistic communities over time.

Interview Follow-up Survey Data Analysis

I. Executive Summary

In New Mexico, following the completion of an in-person interview, participants received a thank you email with a link to complete an online survey. Of the 41 New Mexican dance artists who participated in the in-person interview, 23 filled out the anonymous survey. This is a response rate of 56%.

A follow-up survey containing closed- and open-ended questions was used to learn more about the experiences, strengths, needs, and goals of dance artists and cultural workers in New Mexico. The questions focused on participants' demographics and interest in potential future Dance in the Desert gatherings in New Mexico.

The intention of the research was to provide a platform for dance artists to share additional information anonymously, information that they might not have felt comfortable sharing during an interview. Survey responses reflected many of the concerns identified in the qualitative interviews, including financial barriers, limited access to space, geographic isolation, and interest in greater connection and collaboration.

II. Methodology

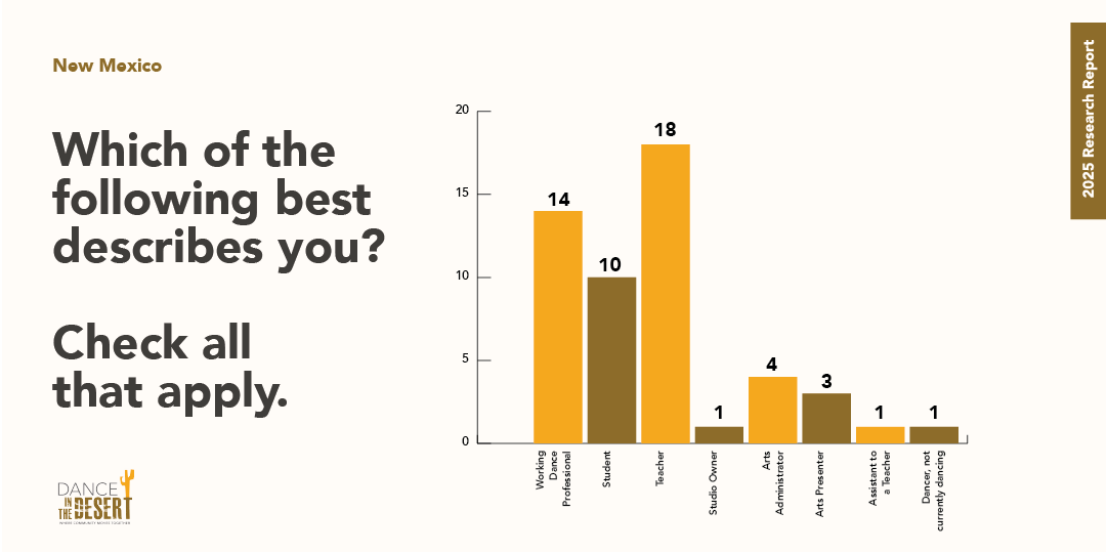
Following the completion of an in-person interview, Dance in the Desert artists from New Mexico received a thank you email with a link to complete an online survey. Community liaisons followed up with interviewees, sharing reminders regarding the online survey. Online surveys were administered via Google Forms and were available in both English and Spanish. All participants who completed the online surveys received a small online Visa gift card. Closed-ended survey responses were summarized using descriptive statistics and visualizations generated through Google Forms. Open-ended responses were reviewed using thematic coding to identify recurring topics, concerns, preferences, and experiences.

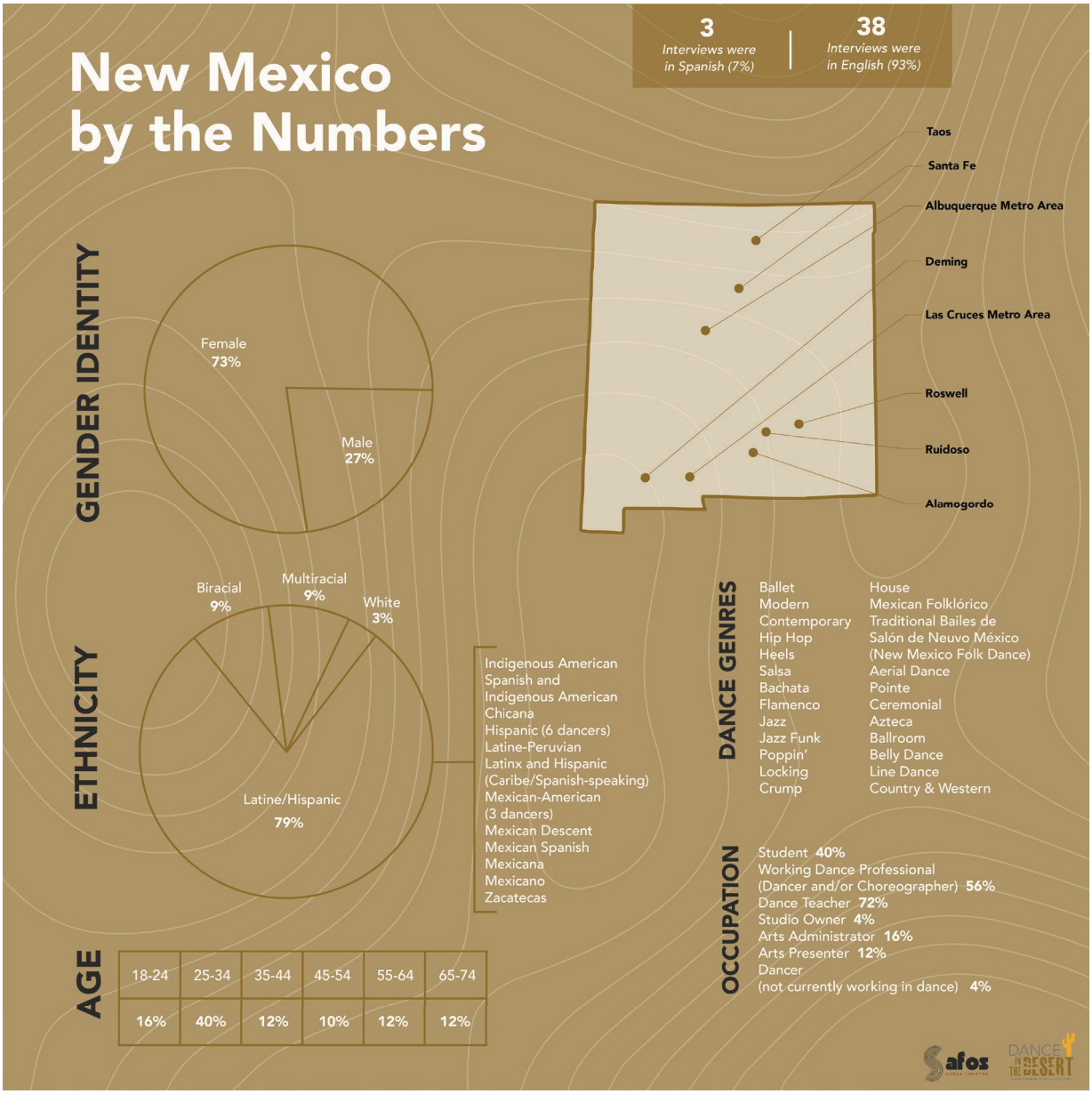
All names and initials used in this report for NM dance artists are pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

III. Survey Findings

Demographics

Dance artists were able to select all that applied to describe their role in the arts, which led to participants selecting more than one category.





Participant Demographics and Professional Roles

- Respondents span a wide age range (18 – 74 yr) and hold diverse educational credentials from high-school diplomas to master's degrees and PhDs.
- The community includes dance professionals, teachers, students, arts presenters, studio owners, and cultural promoters, many of whom hold multiple roles simultaneously.
- Ethnic identity is predominantly Latine/Hispanic, with many respondents also identifying as Mexican, Chicana.

IV. Major Themes

Dance Styles

A rich palette of styles are practiced: Contemporary, Ballet, Jazz, Hip-Hop, Modern, Latin, Ballroom, Lyrical, Mexican Folklórico, Danza Azteca, Flamenco, Salsa, Bachata, Cumbia, los Bailes de Salón de Nuevo México or New Mexican Folk Dance, and other traditional forms.

Lineage and Cultural Preservation

- Many dancers trace their training lineage to family members (parents, aunts/uncles) and to local institutions such as UNM, community studios, and specialized programs (e.g., Keshet Dance, New Mexico School for the Arts).

- One Spanish-language respondent emphasized "*Educación sobre las costumbres y tradiciones representadas a través de la danza*" // Education about the customs and traditions represented through dance" underscoring a strong desire to preserve and teach folkloric traditions.

Core Challenges

- Financial scarcity 60%: "*Falta de recursos financieros* // Lack of financial resources" and "lack of funding" are the most cited barriers. This also includes "Funding to create productions or students lacking the funds to take class."

- Insufficient rehearsal and performance space 46%: "*Espacio donde bailar* // Space to dance" and repeated references to "lack of studio space" and a need for "spaces for dancing."

- Geographic isolation 16%: Respondents in smaller towns (Roswell, Alamogordo, Taos, Las Cruces etc.) note difficulty accessing resources compared with larger hubs. "In my experience, I feel that Southwest dancers and creators aren't taken as seriously as other regions. Companies always want some sort of experience, but unfortunately we do not have opportunities for that here. I always felt like the worst in bigger intensives, having to compete with other artists from the East and West Coast. It is not a well recognized region since this region has such limited regional support and funding."

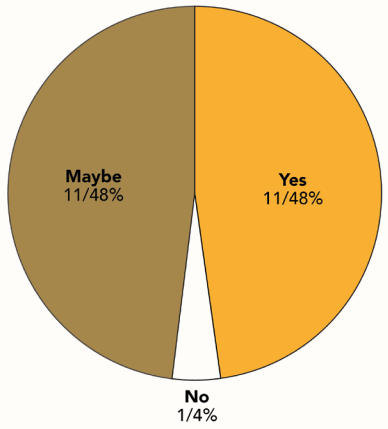
- Discrimination & representation 8%: Some respondents experience tokenistic inclusion and broader discrimination. "I also had a dance instructor who was White and would often tell the dancers to jump 'like Mexican jumping beans' during allegro."

Ability to Participate in in Future Participation and Collaboration

- Teaching, choreography, workshops, and performance are the primary ways respondents are willing to contribute.
- There is strong enthusiasm for cross-cultural exchange, joint workshops, and community-building activities (e.g., "Connecting dance communities together").
- Participants are open to volunteering, providing publicity, and offering modest financial contributions (typically $50-$100).
- Preferred timing for meetings/events: spring weekends, indicating a need to schedule around work and family obligations.
- A Spanish-language NM respondent explicitly supports a DITD-style meeting and is willing to provide volunteer service and travel and logistics assistance.

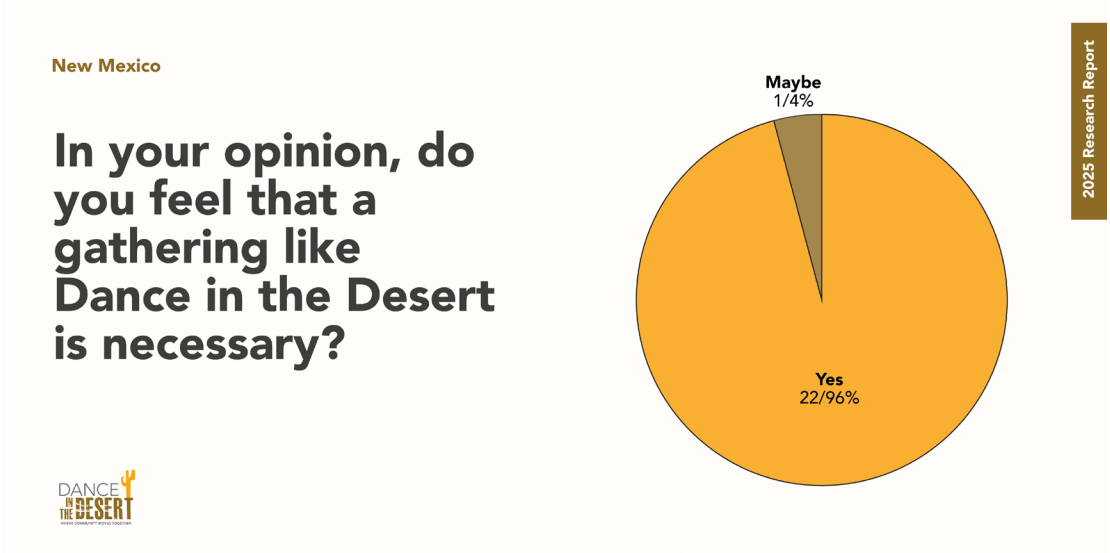
New Mexico

I would be able to pay for my own travel and lodging to attend Dance in the Desert in the future.



2025 Research Report

Responses indicate interest in building relationships across communities in New Mexico and, where reflected in the survey, across state or regional boundaries. The top three communities New Mexico dance artists identified as wanting to create relationships with inside New Mexico were Albuquerque, Santa Fe and Las Cruces.



V. Conclusion

The New Mexico follow-up survey provides additional insight into the experiences, priorities, and programming interests of 23 of the 41, or approximately 56% of artists who participated in the qualitative interviews. Survey responses reflected several concerns also identified through the interviews, including financial barriers, limited access to rehearsal and performance space, geographic disparities, and the need for greater opportunities for connection and professional development.

Respondents also provided information about their artistic roles, dance practices, cultural interests, preferred forms of participation, scheduling considerations, and interest in building relationships with artists and communities across New Mexico and the broader region. These responses offer practical information that can help inform future Dance in the Desert planning and accessibility considerations. When considered alongside the qualitative interviews, the survey findings contribute to a broader understanding of the strengths, challenges, and priorities described by participating New Mexico artists.

It is important to note that survey respondents were already members of the interview sample, so the survey does not broaden the participant pool and that survey respondents may differ from non-respondents, creating potential non-response bias. Thus the findings are not statistically representative of New Mexico's Latine dance artists as the small subgroup numbers mean individual responses should not be generalized. This survey captures participants' self-reported experiences, preferences, and intentions at one point in time. Because the survey represents a small, self-selected subset of the interview sample, the findings should be interpreted as descriptive of these respondents rather than representative of New Mexico's broader dance community.

Recommendations for the Field

The following recommendations are informed by the New Mexico interview findings and the follow-up surveys and are directed at foundations, state and local arts agencies, dance presenters, and private philanthropists. While grounded in the experiences of participating artists, several recommendations may also be relevant to other dance communities across the Southwest.

Geographic Access/Mobile Infrastructure, Specifically for Southern and Smaller, Rural Communities

Action: Fund networking events, community meals, and "dialogue spaces" that foster connections across the diverse New Mexico dance community. Develop a Mobile/Pop-Up Outreach Model, deploy traveling workshops and pop-up performances to reach remote communities (Roswell, Taos, Alamogordo), and to reduce geographic isolation.

Rationale: Traveling workshops or pop-up gatherings have a better opportunity to reach remote communities and reduce geographic isolation. Survey response states, "I think it would be very helpful for the NM Dance community to have the opportunity for the many different sub-communities to connect and collaborate to enhance what already exists." And "Connecting dance communities together. How different communities can support each other and not feel so siloed."

Cultural Preservation and Culturally Rooted Teaching

Action: Integrate dance into K-12 curricula, create state-funded artist-in-residence positions, and offer stipends for community-based teachers that would institutionalize the mentorship role and expand access. Sponsor workshops and curriculum development that focus on the customs and traditions of folkloric, Mexican, and New Mexican folk dance, as highlighted by respondents.

Rationale: New Mexico dance artists demonstrate a grounding in traditional and contemporary dance forms. Uplifting and supporting these forms would be beneficial. Additionally, participants identify a need for education regarding customs and traditions in regards to dance, including "*Educación sobre las costumbres y tradiciones representadas a través de la danza* // Education about the customs and traditions represented through dance," "culturally relevant tech riders," "Cross cultural exchange" as needed.

State-wide Connectivity Across Geographically Dispersed Communities

Action: Provide travel subsidies and logistical support for participants to connect across geography or to share expertise across towns. A neutral convenor could host an annual gathering, rotating host cities, providing shared rehearsal space, and offering joint grant applications. This would convert the "scarcity mindset" into a "collaborative leverage" model.

Rationale: "Travel distance" and "Location and Commuting" are identified by participants as barriers to professional development and community building.

Fund Physical Infrastructure: Rehearsal and Performance Spaces

A critical and recurring bottleneck for artists is the lack of affordable, accessible, and high-quality space. Studio rental costs are rising, gentrification is displacing arts hubs, and there is a scarcity of mid-size performance venues.

Action: Fund the creation or renovation of affordable, safe studio and performance spaces in under-served locales (Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Las Cruces, Roswell, Taos, Alamogordo, etc.) to address the dual challenges of space scarcity and geographic isolation. Fund capital projects for the acquisition, renovation, or construction of new dance spaces. Alternatively, create dedicated funds to subsidize rent for artists and small companies at existing venues. Support the development of artist-run cooperatives or collectives for space management.

Rationale: New Mexico artists highlight scarcity: in Las Cruces, dancers reported having to perform in El Paso because no local venues were available; Santa Fe artists noted a severe lack of affordable theatres; and in Taos, the lack of affordable housing for guest teachers was cited as the biggest barrier to bringing in outside artists.

Recommendations for Dance in the Desert

The following recommendations draw on New Mexico interview findings and the Follow-Up Surveys. They reflect the artists' expressed interests, needs, and perspectives to inform the potential development of future Dance in the Desert programming in New Mexico and cross-state initiatives. These recommendations are intended to help the program build on its recognized strengths and address opportunities for growth identified by its participants.

Design a Culturally Rooted Curriculum

Offer a balanced mix of Contemporary, Hip-Hop, and traditional folkloric classes, ensuring that programming reflects the wide range of styles reported (e.g., Mexican Folklórico, Danza Azteca, Flamenco, and los Bailes de Salón de Nuevo México).

Professional Development

Offer grant-writing, non-profit/LLC formation, and marketing workshops at future gatherings leveraging local cultural promoters as facilitators.

Prioritize Accessibility

Prioritize weekend scheduling to align with participants' scheduling preferences. Provide need-based stipends or sliding-scale tuition that lower the barrier of "lack of funding" reported by participants.

Arizona and New Mexico: Cross-State Findings and Opportunities

I. Arizona and New Mexico Cross State Themes

This report draws on 58 qualitative interviews conducted in 2025 with dance artists, educators, administrators, choreographers, organizers, and cultural workers across Arizona and New Mexico to answer a central question: what does it take for dance communities in the Southwest not simply to survive, but to thrive? The findings provide insight into how relationship-centered initiatives such as Dance in the Desert might respond to artists' expressed interest in greater regional connection, mentorship, and resource-sharing.

II. Arizona and New Mexico Interviews: Qualitative Data

Key Findings

Structural Barriers
Artists across Arizona and New Mexico face chronic underfunding, lack of affordable rehearsal and performance spaces, limited mentorship, and geographic isolation that undermine long-term sustainability.

Cultural Strength
The region hosts vibrant, culturally rooted dance ecosystems that function as education, healing, storytelling, and community-building platforms far beyond the stage.

Regional Opportunity
Dance in the Desert demonstrates a successful model for cross-state collaboration, relationship-building, and infrastructure development, pointing the way toward a unified Southwest dance ecosystem.

Overarching Themes

Funding, Space and Infrastructure ("The Constant Short-Fall")
Every community reports chronic under-funding that limits rehearsal/performance venues, housing for visiting artists, and basic operational costs.

Cultural Identity, Heritage Preservation and Storytelling ("Dance as Memory")
Artists use dance to articulate and safeguard the multi-layered cultural histories of New Mexico while pushing traditions into new, hybrid forms.

Collaboration, Connectivity and Geographic Disparities ("Silos vs. Bridges")
Artists describe a fragmented ecosystem and a strong yearning for structured, state-wide collaboration.

Education, Mentorship and Equity ("Teaching as the Lifeline")
Artists see themselves primarily as educators/mentors and call for systemic support to make dance truly accessible for all ages, bodies, and incomes.

III. Arizona and New Mexico Surveys: Qualitative Data

Based on the survey responses collected across Arizona and New Mexico in 2025, the following analysis identifies the major themes, challenges, and aspirations of the regional dance community.

Systemic Barriers and Resource Scarcity

A dominant theme across both states is the lack of institutional infrastructure and financial support for dancers.

Funding and Economic Resources
Respondents consistently cite limited access to funding and grants as the primary barrier to their work. Many participants expressed a need for "money and space" to sustain their practices, noting that dancers often face a "poverty mentality" or lack of sustainable pay.

Infrastructure and Rehearsal Space
There is a critical shortage of affordable, consistent studio space for rehearsals and classes. This is particularly noted in cities like Phoenix, Tucson, and Albuquerque, where "access to funds and studio space" remains a top concern.

Tokenism and Representation
Many Latine artists report facing "representation beyond tokenism," suggesting that while they are occasionally included, they lack deep institutional support or visibility in mainstream arts ecosystems.

Professional Development and Sustainability

Dancers in the Southwest are seeking specific tools to move beyond hobbyist status and build viable careers outside of coastal hubs like New York City or Los Angeles.

Administrative Training
There is a high demand for workshops on the logistics of the "business" of dance, grant-writing support, and marketing strategies.

Mentorship and Pedagogy
Respondents expressed a desire for mentorship from experienced instructors and workshops focused on "teaching/choreography technique building" and "administrative training."

Sustainability

A recurring question among participants is "how do we build dance careers outside of major coastal ecosystems," emphasizing a need for regional sustainability.

Cross-State and Cross-Border Exchange

Dance in this region is deeply tied to cultural identity, family history, and the unique geography of the Southwest.

Cultural Lineage

Many respondents describe their dance lineage as "rooted in the borderlands" or passed down through family at "salones, weddings," and community programs. Styles such as Mexican Folklórico, Flamenco, Danza Azteca, and Traditional New Mexican Folk Dances like los Bailes de Salón de Nuevo México are central to this identity.

Cross-Border Exchange

There is a strong interest in "cross-cultural exchange" and "joint workshops" that connect different communities across Arizona, New Mexico, and Sonora.

Equity and Social Impact

Participants want to use dance to address "equity and representation," "social impacts of dance in communities," and even to "fight imperial regimes."

Regional Needs and Geographic Gaps

The analysis highlights specific geographic areas where resources are most needed.

Arizona Hubs

While Phoenix and Tucson are central, there is a significant call for more activity and resources in border communities like Douglas, Agua Prieta, and Nogales, as well as suburbs like Mesa.

New Mexico Hubs

In New Mexico, activity is concentrated in Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Las Cruces, but respondents noted a lack of resources in rural or smaller areas like Roswell, Alamogordo, and Taos.

Site-Specific Work

There is an emerging interest in using the "desert landscapes, parks, or community spaces" as performance canvases, moving dance out of traditional theatres and into the local environment.

Desired Activities and Programming

When asked what they want from programs like Dance in the Desert, respondents prioritized:

Master Classes and Jams
High interest in "improv jams," "master classes by Latine choreographers," and workshops in diverse styles ranging from Heels and Hip-Hop to Folklórico and Contemporary.

Networking and Community Meals
Beyond dancing, there is a desire for "informal networking," "community meals," and "dialogue spaces" to discuss the future of dance in the Southwest.

Closing Statement

Looking across both states, the pattern is clear. The talent is undeniable. What is missing is the infrastructure underneath: stable funding, affordable space, lasting mentorship, and the kind of connection that turns scattered communities into a real regional ecosystem. In both Arizona and New Mexico, the findings of this study reveal a shared reality: the Southwest already possesses an extraordinary wealth of artistic talent, cultural knowledge, and community-driven creativity. From Phoenix to Albuquerque, Tucson to Las Cruces, Douglas to Deming, artists are building meaningful work that reflects the histories, identities, struggles, and aspirations of the region. Dance communities across both states are deeply rooted in cultural traditions while also pushing toward experimentation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and new forms that speak to the contemporary Southwest experience.

Across both states, the same structural barriers repeatedly emerged: chronic underfunding, lack of affordable rehearsal and performance spaces, limited mentorship infrastructure, geographic isolation, uneven access to resources, and insufficient long-term investment in artists themselves. While Arizona artists often described a growing but uneven infrastructure centered in urban areas, New Mexico artists emphasized fragmentation, rural isolation, and the ongoing struggle for visibility and resources outside major cultural hubs. Yet despite these differences, both states are ultimately confronting the same question: how can the Southwest build a sustainable regional dance ecosystem that allows artists not only to remain in their communities, but to thrive within them?

The artists interviewed throughout this study are not asking simply for more performances or isolated funding opportunities. They are calling for sustainable ecosystems that allow artists to remain rooted in their communities, build lasting careers, preserve cultural histories, and collaborate across the Southwest in meaningful and enduring ways. The interviews strongly suggest that the answer lies in collaboration rather than competition. Rather than functioning as isolated state ecosystems, the findings demonstrate that the future of dance in the Southwest depends on building stronger regional

relationships that allow artists, educators, organizers, and institutions to share resources, knowledge, and opportunities across state lines. Artists across both states called for stronger mentorship pathways, intergenerational knowledge-sharing, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and regional partnerships that connect dancers beyond city, genre, or institutional boundaries. They envisioned ecosystems where Folklórico artists, Contemporary choreographers, Hip-Hop dancers, Flamenco practitioners, and interdisciplinary creators could work together while remaining rooted in the histories and identities that define the Southwest.

It is within this context that Dance in the Desert emerges as a model for what sustainable regional arts infrastructure could look like. Originally founded in 2018 to connect Latine dance artists across Phoenix, Tucson, and the border community of Douglas/Agua Prieta, DITD has grown into a program that participants consistently describe as a rare space where geographic, economic, and cultural barriers are temporarily lifted. Moving forward, DITD gatherings can be used as a catalytic moment to connect dancers in Arizona and New Mexico holding space to explore the possibilities of more intentional forms of regional collaboration.

Ultimately, this report demonstrates that the foundation for a thriving Southwest dance ecosystem already exists. The artists are here. The communities are here. The cultural knowledge, creativity, and commitment are already deeply present. What is needed now is a sustained infrastructure that matches the depth of that artistic labor. Participants' experiences and perspectives suggest that creating sustained opportunities to gather, collaborate, exchange knowledge, and build relationships across geographic boundaries could strengthen an already vibrant regional dance ecosystem. The next step is not simply maintaining that momentum, but expanding it through deeper partnerships between Arizona and New Mexico that transform isolated efforts into a lasting regional movement for dance in the Southwest.



Photo: Dominic AZ Bonuccelli

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If you would like an in-person presentation of Dance in the Desert data with your community, or for more information, please contact **safosdance@gmail.com**

Safos Dance Theatre

Safos' mission is to create contemporary artistic forms that reflect the common experiences of our diverse community.

Focusing on Latina, Arizona, and Southwest-based dance artists, *Safos* focuses on encouraging innovative movements and embracing the use of aesthetics and art forms unique to the Southwest to represent the cultural diversity of the U.S./Mexico borderlands.

Safos Dance Theatre fulfills our mission by offering programs that support the work of dance artists in Arizona and beyond. *Safos* was created to serve and support Mexican American, Chicana and Latine/x artists in contemporary dance in Tucson, Arizona, and the Southwest. We provide a space for artistic expression and artistic growth.

Safos was founded in 2009 by Yvonne Montoya (Nuevomexicana/Xicana) and Michele Orduña (Tohono O'Odham). This dynamic duo founded the company to provide a space for dance artists with the aim of moving towards racial, ethnic and geographic equality in dance.

Learn more at
www.safosdance.org
@safosdance

Safos
DANCE THEATRE

Appendices



Photo: Dominic AZ Bonuccelli

Appendix A
Community Interest Form

I. Introduction and Methodology

In order to ascertain interest in the Dance in the Desert program from the larger national dance community, the Dance in the Desert research team offered an open community interest form intended to reach dancers beyond the existing DITD cohorts over the course of 9 months in 2025. The link for the general intake form was shared as a link on the *Safos* Dance in the Desert webpage, on social media, that was shared multiple times throughout the year, and in the *Safos* newsletter, where it was also shared multiple times. The survey was available via Google Forms and was accessible in English only.

Because the survey used an open, self-selected convenience sample, the results reflect the views of individuals who chose to participate and may not be representative of the broader national or international dance community. Additionally, participation may have been influenced by respondents' existing familiarity with *Safos* and its programs.

II. Demographic Profile

Age Range	#	%
18-24	3	9.4
25-34	12	37.5
35-44	8	25
45-54	5	15.6
55-64	1	3.125
65-74	1	3.125
75+	1	3.125
No answer	1	3.125

The cohort skews young to mid-career, with 62.5% falling between ages 25 and 44.

Gender

Gender	#	%
Female	22	68.8
Male	9	28.1
Non-Binary	1	3.1

Women overwhelmingly dominate this cohort. The presence of non-binary and male-identifying participants signals some diversity, though gender-inclusive outreach may strengthen future cohorts.

Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	#	%
Latine/Hispanic	12	37.5
White	8	25
Multi-Racial	5	15.6
Black/African American	2	6.3
Native American/ American Indian	1	3.1
Asian/Asian American	1	3.1
Declined to State	3	9.4%

Latine/Hispanic participants form the largest single group, consistent with the program's focus on Southwest dance communities and barrio-centered work. White participants represent the second-largest group, with meaningful multiracial and Black representation.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual Orientation	#	%
Heterosexual	20	62.5
Homosexual/Gay/Lesbian	5	15.6
Queer	3	9.4
Bisexual	3	9.4
Declined to State	1	3.1

37.5% identified as gay/lesbian, queer, or bisexual, indicating that LGBTQ+ respondents were meaningfully represented within the interest-form sample.

Geographic Distribution

Location	#
Phoenix, AZ Metro	8
Tucson, AZ	6
Los Angeles, CA	3
West Coast (CA/WA)	1
Carlsbad, NM	1
Artesia, NM	1
Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico	1
Undisclosed/Other AZ	9

Two-thirds of respondents are Arizona-based, with Phoenix and Tucson forming the core geographic cluster. Los Angeles represents a secondary hub, and the Hermosillo response signals cross-border reach. This geographic concentration supports a regional, Southwest-focused programming model.

Professional Roles and Dance Styles

Role	#
Working Dance Professional/ Teacher	11
Student	7
Student + Working Dance Professional	3
Teacher + Studio Owner	2
Arts Administrator	2
Scholar/Writer/Researcher	1
Business Owner (non-dance)	1
Occupational therapist/ Movement	1
Other/Unclear	4

The majority (34.4%) are working dance professionals who also teach, reflecting a community of practitioners invested in both making and transmitting dance. Students represent the second-largest group, suggesting strong pipeline potential.

Dance Styles Practiced (respondents listed multiple)

Dance Style Practiced	#	%
Contemporary	13	40.6
Modern	8	25
Jazz	8	25
Ballet	6	18.8
Hip Hop/Breaking	5	15.6
Salsa	4	12.5
Flamenco	3	9.4
Improv/Improvisation	3	9.4
Tap	3	9.4
Bachata/Zouk/West Coast Swing	1	3.1
Cumbia	1	3.1
Cultural/Kitchen	1	3.1
Storytelling	1	3.1

Contemporary dominates, but the range is wide. Social and cultural dance forms (Salsa, Bachata, Zouk, Cumbia, cultural/kitchen dance) appear alongside concert dance styles. This breadth supports multi-genre programming.

III. Qualitative Thematic Analysis

The three open-text fields ("Why interested?", "What can you offer?", "What do you need?") were coded into the following themes:

Theme 1
Community Belonging and Connection (mentioned in 81% of responses)

This was the most frequently expressed theme. Participants repeatedly articulate a desire to belong to a network of dancers, meet fellow artists, and feel part of something larger.

Representative quotes:

"I am looking to get connected to dancers"
"I long to dance in a group"
"I love connecting with dance communities"
"I am seeking accessible, intergenerational spaces"
"Latine - Mexican from Sonora because I would love to meet other artists"
"I like the idea of using dance to get closer"
"It's beautiful to share the love of dance"
"To connect to keep the culture alive"
"Connecting artists as much as possible to whatever resources come my way"

The prevalence of this theme indicates that community connection and relationship-building are important motivations among respondents.

Theme 2
Material Needs: Space and Funding (mentioned in 67% and 59% respectively)

The most concrete and urgent needs are rehearsal space and financial support. These two themes are tightly linked in participant responses.

Representative quotes:

"Funding and dance space for classes"
"Always funds, more collaborations"
"More safe spaces to dance in"
"My greatest need is to continue finding [funding]"
"More opportunities to present work, fund"
"A studio"

These responses suggest that space and funding are significant concerns among respondents.

Theme 3
Mentorship and Professional Development (mentioned in ~55%)

Many respondents express a desire for mentorship, either as recipients or as potential mentors.

Representative quotes:

"My greatest need is to continue finding mentorship"
"Teach dance workshops for training purposes"
"My administrative experience [I can offer]"
"Workshops! My administrative experience"
"Professional development"
"Sharing my passion"
"Mentorship, being in community"
"Supporting fellow dancers"

This theme suggests the cohort includes both those seeking guidance and those positioned to provide it.

IV. Cross-Tabulation: Needs by Demographic

Need	18-34	35-54	55+
Space/Studio	7	5	1
Funding	6	4	1
Mentorship	5	3	0
Community/Connection	9	4	1
Artistic Exchange	4	2	0

The table provides a descriptive view of needs by age group. Because subgroup sizes are small and unequal, differences should not be interpreted as population-level patterns.

Appendix B
Selected Participant Quotes Supporting Arizona Findings

Theme	Participant Insight	Quote
Sustaining Artistic Careers: Inter-disciplinary collaboration & social-political engagement	Z.T.	*"The community… supports each other, all different disciplines… very socially engaged and politically engaged."*
Sustaining Artistic Careers: Small, rebuilding after pandemic	Z.I.	*"The community in Tucson is quite small and it is rebuilding the pandemic."*
Sustaining Artistic Careers: Retention of university graduates	V.T.I	*"Graduates from BFA/MFA programs are increasingly staying in Arizona rather than moving to coastal cities."*
Developing New Dance Works: Resilience despite gentrification & limited space	I.N.	*"The community's resilience, despite barriers like gentrification and finding space, artists continue to show up and do the work."*
Sustaining Artistic Careers: 'Small-town vibes in a big city'; deep commitment	I.N.A.	*"The community is tight-knit… everyone knows each other, facilitating work opportunities and support organically."*
Sustaining Artistic Careers: Collaborative, resource-sharing ethos	O.T.	*"We're a collaborative effort of people who want to continue to stay in Phoenix and make art and are willing to help each other see it through."*
Sustaining Artistic Careers : Welcoming, progressive, inclusive	H.I.	*"I would describe my community (Phoenix) as very welcoming, supportive… we are very progressive and inclusive here."*
Sustaining Artistic Careers: Inclusion, activism, empathy	Q.O.	*"The dance community I choose to engage with… they're activists… very empathetic and kind, very respectful, intentional, courageous."*
Teaching and Mentorship: Strong Folklórico tradition, passionate participation	Z.I.	*"Folklórico is deeply rooted… they're always willing to participate… it doesn't matter if you pay them or not."*
Developing New Dance Works: Border-location as a unique strength	N.I.	*"The fact that we are from the border… is one of our biggest strengths."*
Sustaining Artistic Careers: Emerging openness and visibility	Z.X.	*"The dance community is a bit more open now… I think right now it's actually quite strong."*

Appendix C
Recommendations for Using and Sharing the Dance in the Desert Research Findings

This data set can be more than a source of information, it can be a tool for advocacy, relationship-building, and collective action across the dance field. Dance artists can use the findings and recommendations to advocate for their own work, while also helping ensure that the people and institutions who shape the field understand what artists need.

1. Use the data to inform your own practice and decision-making

-Identify the recommendations that most directly relate to your artistic practice, career stage, community, or working conditions.

-Use the data to assess your own needs, goals, and priorities.

-Reference relevant findings when developing organizational or collective plans, project proposals, budgets, writing grant applications, and developing your strategic goals.

-Use the findings to help articulate challenges that may otherwise be difficult to document or communicate.

-Compare your individual experience with the findings. Where your experience aligns with the data, use that alignment to strengthen your case; where it differs, consider what additional context may be important.

2. Share the data with policymakers

-Dance artists can use the data to demonstrate how public policies affect the sustainability of artists and the broader dance ecosystem.

-Share key findings with local, state, and national policymakers and your state representatives.

-Use specific recommendations to advocate for policies that address themes highlighted in the report such as affordable rehearsal space, intergenerational mentorship programs, and pop up art activations in rural communities to name a few.

-Include relevant data in testimony, public comments, advocacy meetings, and policy briefs.

-Connect the findings to issues policymakers already care about, such as workforce development, economic development, education, community well-being, and equitable access to culture.

-Encourage policymakers to engage directly with dance artists when developing or evaluating policies that affect the field.

3. Share the data with funders

Funders can use field-level evidence to reconsider how resources are distributed and what types of support artists need.

-Share key findings with local, state, and national funders, foundations, and arts agencies. Example organizations include: Arts Foundation for Tucson and Southern Arizona, Arizona Commission for the Arts, Arizona Community Foundation, New Mexico Arts, New Mexico Community Foundation, Creative West, the National Association of Latino Arts and Culture, and more.

-Share the findings with individual donors and community partners. Reference the recommendations when applying for funding or participating in funder conversations.

-Ask funders how their programs could respond to the needs identified in the data.

-Encourage funders to consider grants addressing needs identified in the data such as funding for infrastructure (rehearsal space) and multi-year general operating support.

-Use the data collectively with other artists to advocate for funding structures that better reflect the realities of dancemaking.

4. Share the data with presenters and performance venues

Presenters have an important role in determining which artists have opportunities to work and how those opportunities are structured.

-Share relevant findings with presenters, curators, festivals, theatres, and performing arts centers.

-Use the recommendations as a starting point for conversations about access to performance venues and support of local artists.

-Ask presenters to consider how their practices can address barriers identified by the data. (Eg. Can they host a festival featuring local dance artists).

-Bring the findings into contract and partnership conversations when appropriate.

-Encourage presenters to see artists not simply as suppliers of programming, but as partners in developing sustainable and equitable relationships.

5. Share the data with institutions of higher learning

Colleges, universities, conservatories, and other educational institutions help shape the next generation of dance artists and leaders.

-Share findings with dance departments, faculty, administrators, career centers, and arts leadership programs.

-Encourage institutions to incorporate current field conditions into curriculum and professional preparation.

-Use the data to support stronger connections between students and the professional dance field.

-Advocate for education around the multifaceted realities of working as a dance artist in the Southwest.

-Encourage institutions to examine whether their programs are preparing graduates for the realities identified in the data.

-Share recommendations with alumni networks so graduates can continue to engage with field-wide advocacy.

6. Share the data with other dance artists

The greatest impact may come from artists using the information collectively rather than individually.

-Discuss the findings with peers, collaborators, companies, collectives, and artist networks.

-Identify recommendations that could become shared priorities for a community or region.

-Use common language and evidence from the data when advocating together.

-Create opportunities for artists to discuss which recommendations are most urgent and what actions are feasible.

-Avoid treating the data as a definitive description of every artist's experience; use it as a starting point for conversation and organizing.

7. Turn recommendations into action

Artists can move from sharing information to creating specific commitments.

Consider:
What can you change? What resources can you commit?
What will you measure? When will you report back?

Whenever possible, connect the data to a concrete action. For example, if you create a collective in your town or use the data to secure a new funding opportunity.

8. Keep the data in circulation

The usefulness of the data depends on its continued visibility and application.

-Cite the source when using findings publicly.

-Share the data in artist meetings, conferences, workshops, panels, classrooms, and community conversations.

-Include relevant findings in presentations, proposals, advocacy materials, and organizational planning.

-Revisit the recommendations periodically and assess whether conditions have changed.

-Encourage stakeholders to collect additional information and continue measuring progress.

Most importantly, use the data not only to describe the challenges facing the field, **but to make specific, actionable requests** of the people and institutions who have the power and resources to address them.

Appendix D
A Brief History of Dance in the Desert: A Gathering of Dancemakers[2]

The inaugural Dance in the Desert took place in Phoenix, Arizona on April 26-28, 2018. The first gathering brought Latine dance professionals from three communities in Arizona: Tucson, the small border town of Douglas and, Agua Prieta in Sonora, México, and the Phoenix-metro area. In addition to Arizona dance artists, we invited dance leaders, researchers, and administrators from other Latine communities nationwide to join the three-day convening. The first gathering included work-in-progress showings, meetings among dancemakers and arts administrators, and focus groups.

Following the success of the 2018 Dance in the Desert pilot program, *Safos* Dance Theatre and co-organizers hosted a second gathering in Tucson from May 15-19, 2019. This gathering focused on professional development by providing dancemakers and choreographers space to connect with dancers and incubate new work.

Dance in the Desert 2020 was set to take place the first weekend of May in Douglas/Agua Prieta. Due to the pandemic, the gathering was postponed until May 2022. Instead, co-organizers offered a series of free professional development webinars. In 2021, the Dance in the Desert community met virtually in a series of quarterly online Happy Hours where dancers shared resources about upcoming grants, online performances, and calls for artists.

Dance in the Desert returned May 19-22, 2022, in Douglas/Agua Prieta. The gathering featured professional development workshops and eight master classes of various styles from both sides of the border.

After 2022, Dance in the Desert was put on hiatus as the company shifted focus towards the première of its first national touring work. It is important to note that the Dance in the Desert initiative was not meant to be ongoing. Rather, it was meant to be a catalytic moment to inject resources into a community to spark growth and fuel momentum. The goal of Dance in the Desert was to connect geographically isolated dancers with regional and national dance communities while centering local expertise.

2 Dance in the Desert is separate from the similarly titled Las Vegas Dance in the Desert Festival.

In 2025, Montoya assembled a team of 10 researchers, community liaisons, and dance administrators. The team conducted 58 interviews with dance artists ages 18 to 75 across New Mexico, Arizona, and the U.S./Mexico Borderlands. The central question we set out to answer was What does it take for dance artists and communities in the Southwest not simply to survive, but to thrive?

In 2026, the Dance in the Desert team is sharing research findings with the field. Future Dance in the Desert gatherings are planned in Arizona in 2027, in New Mexico in 2028, and a cross-state gathering with Latine dancers from both Arizona and New Mexico gathering in Southern New Mexico in 2027.

Appendix E
Feasibility Analysis of Dance in the Desert Program Recommendations

The Dance in the Desert team and *Safos* Dance Theatre take the recommendations of communities seriously and to heart as community members are key stakeholders in our programs.

Based on the many recommendations for the Dance in the Desert program from the Arizona and New Mexico dance communities, we conducted a feasibility study to determine which, if any, of these recommendations we can incorporate into future programming.

The following is the feasibility based on community recommendations:

Arizona-Specific Recommendations for Dance in the Desert Feasibility Analysis

Recommendation
Maintain and Expand the Core Convening Model

Recommended Action(s)
Establish a more consistent and predictable schedule for the convenings, such as an annual gathering. Continue to create a space that functions as a "watering hole" for artists from different parts of the state and dance disciplines to network and build relationships.

Feasibility
Safos Dance Theatre is a small non-profit dance organization with less than five part-time staff. Given the size of the organization, ongoing fluctuations in arts funding, and realities of the arts ecosystem in Southern Arizona and the Southwest, consistent gatherings are not possible as *Safos* is beholden to grant funding to cover the costs of the convening. Consistent gatherings will only be possible with significant financial investment from the Dance in the Desert community itself in the form of registration fees similar to that of a national conference. Given the financial realities of dance artists working in the Southwest, we do not seek to unnecessarily burden the community an additional expense. It is important to note that the goal of Dance in the Desert was not to become an annual conference. Rather, it was meant to be a catalytic moment to inject resources into a community to spark growth, connection, and fuel momentum.

Furthermore, the Dance in the Desert team hosted quarterly virtual Happy Hours in 2020 and 2021 which were poorly attended leading the team to conclude that smaller, more frequent gatherings were not important to the community at that time. However, if the community is willing to financially invest in the gathering or actively co-organize convenings, additional convenings may be considered.

Recommendation
Deepen Cross-Regional and Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Recommended Action(s)
Structure future iterations to connect artists of the original cohort with dance artists from other communities in Arizona, New Mexico and other Southwest regions.

Feasibility
Safos Dance Theatre can organize and facilitate Arizona and New Mexico cross-state Dance in the Desert gatherings wherein regional issues can be explored. *Safos* will host these gatherings in 2027, 2028, and 2029. However, gatherings beyond this timeframe are uncertain and unlikely.

Recommendation
Broaden Access and Deepen Inclusivity

Recommended Action(s)
Implement a hybrid selection process that combines an open call for applications with targeted invitations. This ensures that emerging artists and those outside of core networks have a clear pathway into the program.

Feasibility
-Regarding selection process, beginning in 2026, the Dance in the Desert team will convene a remote advisory committee with representatives from communities served (including past attendees and interviewees) whose voices will help shape and inform future gatherings and offer guidance and criteria on who should be invited into the cohort and how invitations will be extended. It is important that this is determined by the Dance in the Desert community.

-Additionally, beginning in 2027, key moments of Dance in the Desert gatherings such as master classes, workshops, and artist talks, will be open to the general public allowing for increased access by the larger dance community.

New Mexico-Specific Recommendations for Dance in the Desert Feasibility Analysis

Recommendation
Design a Culturally Rooted Curriculum

Recommended Action(s)
Offer a balanced mix of Contemporary, Hip-Hop, and traditional folkloric dance classes, ensuring that programming reflects the wide range of styles reported (e.g., Mexican and Colombian Folklórico, Flamenco, Latin Social Dances).

Feasibility
Dance in the Desert has a history of offering programming in different styles and genres of dance while centering local expertise. The DITD team can continue to host such classes during gatherings.

Recommendation
Professional Development

Recommended Action(s)
Offer grant-writing, non-profit/LLC formation, and marketing workshops at future gatherings leveraging local cultural promoters as facilitators.

Feasibility
During past gatherings, the Dance in the Desert team hosted multiple professional development workshops. Some of these workshops are available for free on the Arizona Commission on the Arts website. The Dance in the Desert team can continue to host workshops at gatherings.

Recommendation
Prioritize Accessibility

Recommended Action(s)
Prioritize weekend scheduling to align with participants' scheduling preferences. Provide need-based stipends or sliding-scale tuition that lower the barrier of "lack of funding" reported by participants

Feasibility
All Dance in the Desert gatherings are programmed and organized around preferred the time of year, time of month, and time of week as indicated by Dance in the Desert participants in community surveys. Future Dance in the Desert gatherings will be programmed accordingly. It is important to note that the time of year and time of week identified as preferable for Arizona and New Mexico dance artists does not coincide. While we will do our best to navigate this, the Arizona gathering might not directly

reflect the preferences of New Mexico dance artists and vice versa.

For future gatherings, the Dance in the Desert team will offer a suggested donation model as well as offer work exchange opportunities to assist with overcoming economic barriers.

Appendix F
Links to Additional Resources

For additional information on the 2025 Dance in the Desert Research Initiative, please see the following:

Dance in the Desert: Dance and Research in the Southwest by Yvonne Montoya and Imelda Cortez available on the Stance on Dance website: https://stanceondance.com/?s=yvonne+montoya

For analysis of past Dance in the Desert research, see Tellez, Michelle and Montoya, Yvonne. *Dance in the Desert: Latinx Bodies in Movement Beyond Borders.* **Latinx Belonging: Community Building and Resilience in Movement Beyond Borders**. 2022; 212-234. The University of Arizona Press

For more data on the United States Dance community at large, visit Dance Data Project:
https://dancedataproject.com/about-ddp/

For more data on Latine serving arts organizations, visit
A Mirror and a Map:
https://www.mirrorandmap.nalac.org/