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**THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR CHOREOGRAPHY-AKRON ANNOUNCES
THOUGHT PARTNERS FOR ITS LATEST
CREATIVE ADMINISTRATION RESEARCH COHORT**



Pictured (L to R): Conrhonda Baker (photo by Decisive Moment Photography), Vu Le (photo courtesy of Le), Tonya Lockyer (photo by Quinlan Corbett)

AKRON, Ohio (April 10, 2025)—**The National Center for Choreography-Akron (NCCAkron)** announces Thought Partners for the new cohort of its **Creative Administration Research (CAR)** program. Thought Partners are paired with CAR choreographers to investigate administrative practices that support the artist's creative practices. New Thought Partners include **Conrhonda Baker** (Atlanta, GA) working with **Jasmine Hearn** (Houston, TX), **Vu Le** (Seattle, WA) working with **Deneane Richburg** (St Paul, MN), and **Tonya Lockyer** (Suquamish, WA) working with **Amy O'Neal** (Los Angeles, CA/Seattle, WA).

The CAR program launched in 2020 with lead support from the Mellon Foundation. NCCAkron has initiated a sixth cohort for a total of 25 Artist Teams from across the U.S. These teams include the choreographer, Thought Partner, and NCCAkron staff members. Each Artist Team engages in an artist-dedicated Investigative Retreat, with time and space to identify administrative experimentations that support creative practices. Rather than reinforce the one-size-fits-all approach, Creative Administration Research invites Artist Teams to imagine multiple ways forward. Thought Partners provide additional accountability and a sounding board between Investigative Retreats.

"Serving as a Thought Partner in the CAR program has been a deeply meaningful experience—one that reaffirmed my belief that the work of thinking, exploring, and mentally creating for administration is just as critical to a successful artistic practice as rehearsal, technique development, and stretching are to dance-making. The CAR program's national think tank model provides a rare and vital space for artists to step outside of inherited structures and reimagine administrative practices that truly support their creative visions. I'm grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this evolving dialogue that values creative administration as an

essential part of artistic practice," commented Conrhonda E. Baker, Founder and Chief Copy Editor, The Bese Saka.

For a list of all program participants, alumni, and Thought Partners, [click here](#).

NCCAkron continues to share program learnings with the wider performing arts field. [Artists on Creative Administration: A Workbook from the National Center for Choreography](#), a book on creative administration edited by Tonya Lockyer (Suquamish, WA) and published by the University of Akron Press, was released in September 2024. Related virtual and in-person Making Moves book events continue through 2025.

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About NCCAkron

The National Center for Choreography-Akron supports the research and development of new work in dance by exploring the full potential of the creative process. In addition to offering studio and technical residencies to make new work, activities focus on catalyzing dialogue and experimentation; creating proximity among artists and dance thinkers; and aggregating resources around dance making. For more information, visit nccakron.org.

A discrete organization of its own, separate from The University of Akron but with offices based there, the establishment and general operation of NCCAkron are made possible by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

About Thought Partners

Conrhonda E. Baker has a passion for the performing arts grounded in her dance background, sparked by taking after-school classes at a county-wide recreational facility in rural northeast Georgia. Having grown up with limited access to the arts, she understands the importance of exposing children to creative outlets and creating opportunities for artistic expression. She founded The Bese Saka in 2018 as a way to live out her Christian faith by actively intervening and building equity into the process of securing institutional funding support. She believes in holistic trust-based, regenerative, and restorative approaches to grantmaking. Her fundraising, government affairs, and program development experience developed through serving on many grant review panels and through work with South Arts, Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts, Alabama Dance Council, Vulcan Park and Museum, Birmingham Museum of Art, and Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation. She holds a Master of Arts Management from Carnegie Mellon University and a Bachelor of Arts in African American Studies with a minor in Dance Education from The University of Georgia.

Vu Le ("voo lay") writes the blog NonprofitAF.com. He is the former executive director of RVC, a nonprofit in Seattle that promotes social justice by supporting leaders of color, strengthening organizations led by communities of color, and fostering collaboration among diverse communities. Vu is a founding board member of Community-Centric Fundraising, which aims to

ground fundraising practices in racial and economic justice. He has degrees in Psychology and Social Work.

Tonya Lockyer, widely praised as “a key cultural changemaker” (*Seattle Times*), is an award-winning artist and cultural strategist. Her work as a groundbreaking artist, arts leader, and curator has been recognized by the National Endowment for the Arts, Arts International, Princeton University, NPR, The Banff Center, Canada Council, TEDx, and the City of Seattle. As an artist and curator, Lockyer has collaborated with some of the most innovative artistic experimentalists of our time. Lockyer was the founding co-director of the collective VIA, the transformative director of Seattle’s Velocity Dance Center (2011-2018), and the inaugural chair of Seattle’s first arts district. She is an adjunct professor in Arts Leadership (MFA/BA) at Seattle University.